

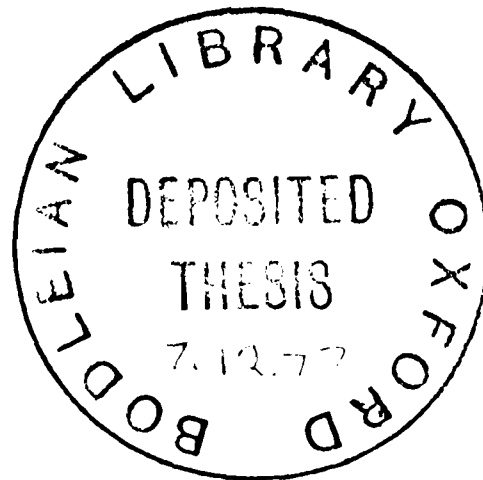
D. PHIL. THESIS

THE UNCHASTE WOMAN IN ENGLISH FICTION,
1835-1880

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ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates the fictional uses of the figure of the unchaste woman over the period of the early feminist movement in order to trace attitudes towards woman as a sexual being and as a person in her own right. The cheap and popular literature of the period has been used both to illuminate accepted conventions, so that the achievement of major novelists can be more clearly understood, and to discover differences in style, moral intent, and emotional content of the fiction consumed by women of various social classes which may be related to class-based differences in feminine role, expectations, and self-image.

The introduction discusses the ethical and political consequences of the elevation of chastity to a place of primary importance among the list of woman's virtues. The double moral standard, it is argued, rests on two presuppositions: first, that woman differs physically from man in having weak or non-existent sexual desires; and secondly, that the property rights in a woman's body are vested in the male who is her husband or father. The unchaste woman becomes, therefore, a definitive anomaly and a focus for the expression of overt or covert ideas about the nature of woman and of her relationship to society, morality, and herself.

The first chapter deals with the mass literature of the early Victorian years. The public for the cheap magazines which became commercially viable at about the time that Queen Victoria ascended the throne was drawn from those who clustered around the boundary between working and middle classes. The failure of the London Pioneer to attain

wide readership suggests that neither salacious fiction, on the one hand, nor the editorial encouragement of female independence, on the other, appealed to a broad audience. The best-selling publications in England in the 1840's and 1850's were the London Journal and the Family Herald. Both were penny weekly magazines intended for a respectable family audience. Both assumed woman's essential purity. Because the fiction is simplistic, two key patterns are easily perceived. Stories in the London Journal depict the whore or seduced girl as a helpless victim of man, society, or the economic system. She is not at fault; she is an object of pity whose miserable end, though inevitable, is to be deplored. In the Family Herald, which was more prudish, the seduction motif is used at one remove: the woman is punished for the sin of pre-marital love rather than that of fornication. The underlying message of these stories is that woman is responsible for her own fate and must look objectively at men so that she can marry and thereby achieve a satisfactory place in the social system.

In the early 1840's moralists and humanitarians became concerned about prostitution. Chapter Two discusses the serious women writers who dealt with the unchaste woman in order to inform female readers about the social problem and to encourage women to help other women. Interest in the woman question during the decade took two forms. One led in the direction of feminism; the other was what contemporaries called the protection of woman question. Basically protectionist writers of novels for the middle class dealt with such topics as the responsibility of mistresses for the moral well-being of their servants. The group of women including Eliza Cook, Eliza Meteyard, Mary Howitt, and Mrs. Gaskell, who wrote for the smaller-circulation cheap periodicals which catered to the more serious among the lower classes, emphasized that it was necessary

for working women to develop the ability to protect themselves and aid their fallen sisters. In Ruth (3 vols. 1853) Mrs. Gaskell expanded for a middle-class public the implications of the tenet, common among writers of her group, that specifically feminine virtues are aroused by motherhood. The focus of the novel is social rather than religious; Ruth not only becomes morally regenerated but also, for the sake of her child, earns her way back to a place in society. She further acquires the individual strength to defy convention by refusing to marry the father of her child. The encounter is of political importance; a married woman had no right to her child and no legal means of protecting it from the influence of an immoral or dishonorable father.

The third chapter explores the variety of sexual attitudes present in the uses of the unchaste woman in the general run of novels written for the middle-class public during the first twenty-five years of Queen Victoria's reign. The variety arises in part from the conflict between the tendency to idealize woman and the trend towards an increasingly realistic observation of contemporary society. In Bulwer-Lytton's Ernest Maltravers (3 vols. 1837) it is evident that the girl who could be seduced has, in heightened form, the qualities of the ideal woman: innocence, helplessness, the desire to serve a man, self-abnegation, and pure natural emotion. Novelists who made use of the growing body of factual and investigative writing on the social evil for realistic or reforming purposes also tended to select those details which emphasized woman's dependence and self-sacrifice. There are in this period very few examples of the woman who is evil because of her sexual activity, though both Dickens and Thackeray considered the sale of a woman into a loveless marriage as equivalent to prostitution. The library romances written by and for women explored female psychology and indicated that women were endangered by

their emotional (if not specifically their sexual) desires. These novels also detail the social realities of woman's world. Neither innocence nor utter helplessness nor self-sacrifice is admired; heroines are taught by their experiences or by the negative example of women who fall that external standards, duty, and work are essential to happiness. George Eliot's Adam Bede (3 vols. 1859) uses many of the patterns of the women's novels. The story is resolved on the portrait of the independent yet maternal Dinah Morris. Hetty is helpless and definitely not ideal. However, she is also physical without deliberate immorality; the actual seduction is mutual. Nor does maternity provide strength for Hetty. She remains, as a woman, a sympathetic character though seriously flawed.

Chapter Four considers the Sensation novels of the 1860's, which introduced female characters guilty of a wide variety of actual or imputed sexual misconduct. The ultimate moral is generally conservative. The wickedness of a villainess is often revealed by the discovery of her sexual misdeeds. The adventuress uses her physical attractions in order to force a man to marry her. Both patterns reveal a fear of woman's sexuality. The sexual woman was seen as de-feminized; she shared other male characteristics such as aggression, ambition, and fine horsemanship. However some Sensation novels, especially those written by women, are sympathetic to the plight of women constrained by their conventional roles, though the heroine must be punished if she resorts to bigamy or adultery in order to escape subjugation. A further ambivalence is revealed in the virtual disappearance of the fair fragile innocent as heroine; Reade, Collins, Ouida, and others invoked legal subterfuges in order to provide heroines who were independent and sexually experienced without being immoral.

The Sensation vogue was associated with changes in publishing

technique and in the composition of the novel-reading public. The shilling-monthly magazine, which was a new phenomenon during the decade, created a demand for serialized novels which would include a peak of excitement in each installment. Both shilling-monthly magazines and paper-covered railway novels were commercial in the sense that they sought readers directly rather than through the intermediacy of the libraries. Hardy and Meredith made use of Sensational conventions to write about unchaste women, but their works were technically and thematically difficult and lacked wide popular appeal.

The fifth chapter discusses the generation of women's novelists for whom the single moral standard became a cause. The unchaste heroine was used as a symbol of woman's oppression by a male-dominated legal system, as an example of social inequity, and as a tool with which to propagandize for the reform of laws relating to the marriage contract, property, and child custody. Mrs. Craik is treated in some detail as an example of a novelist whose use of the figure changed over the course of the decades between 1850 and 1870. Her best works apply the single standard in its broadest form to demonstrate that men and women share the same essential intellectual, moral, and emotional traits.

Chapter Six argues that female purity was increasingly exaggerated and sentimentalized in the novels of the 1870's. Even the prostitute, so long as she had been sufficiently victimized by society, could be morally pure. Novels by Collins and Gissing reveal the power relationship implicit in a love based on man's pity for an outcast woman. The lighter novels read chiefly by women exhibit the key elements of the popular morality based on a romantic ethic which was to prevail until the middle of the twentieth century. Though based on the premise that marriage for love is the aim and goal of every woman, the identification of romantic love

as the important element in marriage is individualizing to the extent that to choose a marriage partner for romantic reasons is to make voluntary disposal of one's own body. The didactic moral of the novels in which middle-class virgins fall with their eyes open because they have been persuaded that love is more important than matrimony places the responsibility for maintaining moral standards in the hands of the woman; it hardens the line between the sexes by assuming that men are natural predators rather than natural protectors. The increasing individualization of women is further indicated in novels which deal with elopement or reverse sexual outlawry (i.e., refusal to cohabit with a husband) without including the maternal imperative: in which women defy their husbands (if only temporarily) in their own right rather than for the good of their children. The novels of Ouida, which were seen by contemporaries as immoral, are explicit renditions of the tendency of the romantic ethic to separate love from sex.

The seventh chapter returns to the penny weekly magazine, which had become, by the 1870's, the reading matter of seamstresses, servants, shop-girls, and working-men's wives. The contents of the Family Herald, the London Journal, and Bow Bells were, to all appearances, virtually unrelated to the lives of the readers. The fiction can be described generically as the aristocratic romance; the writers were bourgeois professionals. The penny magazines are overtly more pure and more male-supremist than the library novels of the same decade. The emotional effect of the stories, however, is often at odds with the message. Heroines are frequently pursued by villainous men with evil sexual intentions; they fight for their integrity; and they emerge triumphant. There are a number of masked divorce stories, in which the heroine has left a dishonorable man or in which she refuses to return to a husband who had earlier deserted

her. Economic self-sufficiency and the self-preserving moral standards provided by information about sexuality and its consequences gave to the working girl's fantasy-persona, the aristocratic heroine, the ability to take charge of her own life.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the literary and moral tendencies observed in the fiction discussed. The technical and stylistic differences between the overtly commercial fiction and the novels which remain read and studied as literature are seen as differences of degree rather than differences of kind. Thematically, highly popular fiction tends to be reassuring and to confirm accepted values. The fiction written for the lower classes became throughout the period overtly more pure. Serious novels generally focus on the interaction of characters with society and afford, therefore, a certain degree of ambiguity; light fiction, for the most part, is interested primarily in the characters and what happens to them. The outstanding characteristic of the fiction read primarily by women--in either the library novel or the penny magazine--is its daydream quality: it is centered on a character with whom the reader will identify; it affords release for the emotional tensions created by woman's situation; and it creates a world which the reader would like to see exist. These tales provide evidence of a change in self-concept within a moral, legal, and social framework which underwent little alteration. Innocence, as an essential feminine quality, was necessarily linked to dependence. The progressive individualization of women and the internalization of moral standards made the preservation of chastity a cause with feminist implications. It was accompanied, however, by an increasing preoccupation with romantic love. The figure of the unchaste woman, in the early years of the period, afforded an opportunity to explore the role of woman in the larger society. The later novelists generally see

social attachment as something to be achieved through a satisfactory relationship with an individual man. In the face of a respectable moral standard, no novelist suggests that a good woman might have an instinctual desire for sexual fulfillment (even concealed as a desire for maternity) which could lead her, for her own sake rather than as a victim of man or of society, to be unchaste.

PREFACE

My examination of a single motif in a wide variety of early and mid-Victorian fiction has two aims. The first is to trace changes in the popular image of woman's nature and woman's role. During the years covered by the study organized feminism had its birth and achieved its initial successes; the crusades for education and employment had borne fruit and nearly all the legal battles except that for the franchise had been won by 1880.

The second aim of the study is to examine the variations in theme, moral intent, and literary style of fiction written for different audiences. The reading public changed in both size and nature between 1835 and 1880. The economic and social factors which influenced the publishing trade did not, in all cases, juxtapose neatly with transitions in the feminist organization of the argument. Thus the time periods covered by successive chapters overlap roughly rather than neatly.

Because of the sheer bulk of the surviving cheap fiction I have had to impose arbitrary limitations. The two chapters dealing with penny periodicals stand at the beginning and end of the discussion; they provide evidence of changes in stereotype, but do not trace the course of that change. I have further confined myself to that fiction which was read by the greatest number of women; I have not discussed the penny-weekly novels which are the subject of Louis James's Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850 (London, 1963) nor the examples of literature by and for the working class which are to be found in local collections of newspapers and ephemera.

Of books written for the middle classes, I have deliberately excluded those Irish novelists--chiefly Carleton, Caddell, and LeFanu--whose work is strongly colored by Catholicism or nationalism, but have included others who may have been Irish by birth but were English by residence, subject, and mode. The study is limited to prose fiction; I have not discussed such extended poetic treatments of the subject as Tennyson's Idylls of the King nor included Elizabeth Barrett Browning's novel in verse, Aurora Leigh (1856).

I should like to express my indebtedness to Martha Vicinus, who first directed my attention to the existence and variety of Victorian fiction not ordinarily studied in college classrooms, to Elaine Showalter for allowing me to see drafts of the chapters on minor novelists from her forthcoming book on the woman writer, and to Ethel LaGalle, who has read my manuscript. My supervisor, P. D. L. Turner, has supplied both necessary practical advice and invaluable sympathy and encouragement. I am grateful for the financial assistance provided by a Fulbright Scholarship and a Danforth Graduate Fellowship for Women.

Some of the material in Chapter One has been used in "Implications of Realism: Four Stories from the London Journal," Studies in Short Fiction, 12 (1975) and in "The Forgotten Woman of the Period: Penny Weekly Family Magazines of the 1840's and 1850's," A Widening Sphere: Women in the Victorian Age, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). An early version of part of the second chapter appeared as "Lost Women: Implications of the Fallen in Works by Forgotten Women Writers of the 1840's," University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies, 1 (1974). Copyright in each case is held by the periodical or press named.

All quotations from novels, unless otherwise noted, are from the first edition in volume form. Citations from books generally available

either in recent editions or in subsequent nineteenth-century one-volume editions are made by chapter (numbered consecutively throughout the book) rather than by volume and page. Nineteenth-century critical notices are assembled in Part I of the Bibliography, under the entry for the novel reviewed, rather than among the secondary sources in Part II.

For minor authors I have supplied brief footnotes summarizing the available biographical, bibliographical, and critical sources. Standard works of reference are abbreviated in these footnotes as follows:

Allibone	S. Austin Allibone, <u>A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors, Living and Deceased</u> , 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1858) and its supplement, ed. J. F. Kirk, 2 vols. (1891).
BMC	The printed catalogue of the British Museum.
Boase	F. Boase, <u>Modern English Biography</u> , 6 vols. (1892-1921; rpt. London: Cass, 1965).
CBEL	<u>The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature</u> , III, 1800-1900, ed. F. W. Bateson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).
DNB	<u>The Dictionary of National Biography</u> and its supplements.
NCBEL	<u>The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature</u> , III, 1800-1900, ed. George Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
Wellesley	<u>The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900</u> , ed. W. E. Houghton, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966-72).

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INTRODUCTION

PURE WOMAN

When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her--as well may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth. Her nature is so exquisitely refined that the slightest flaw becomes a huge defect. Like perfume, it admits of no deterioration, it ceases to exist when it ceases to be sweet. Her soul is an exquisitely precious, a¹ priceless gift, and even more than man's a perilous possession.

The virtue of chastity is enjoined on all by the Scriptures, but the word "virtue" as used in colloquial speech embodies the double standard. A young man--even a Victorian young man--did not lose his virtue by an initiatory tumble in the hay or visit to the brothel, though he might have felt sinful, sullied, or bestial. When applied to a woman, however, "virtue" and "physical chastity" were interchangeable terms.

The expansion of chastity to first--and perhaps only--place among the list of woman's virtues depends on two underlying presumptions: of woman's place and of her special nature.

The concept of woman's place, baldly stated, arises from her role as and in relation to property. A man can ensure perpetuation of his name and his estates to those of his own blood only by absolute possession of a woman's body. Adultery or pre-marital pregnancy might confuse the issue, in the legal sense of the word. Even when there were no titles or land to be inherited, the thrifty Victorians considered it a "natural desire" for "every man to be certain of the paternity of the child he

¹William Cayer Starbuck, A Woman against the World (3 vols. 1864), III, 100.

supports."²

Aside from her role as the channel of property, woman also was property. The father of an unmarried woman could sue her seducer for loss of her services. In marriage she disappeared as a legal entity; a husband owned all she possessed or could earn. He could restrain and chastise her--lock her up, prevent her from seeing her children, and beat her at will--so long as her life were not endangered. Rape was impossible within marriage: by signing the register a woman issued a blanket consent, good at any time and under any circumstances.³ For a woman to control her own body--to dispose of it or authorize its use as she saw fit--interfered with the property rights of her husband or father.

The immediate goal of the earliest feminists was to claim status as persons rather than property. There was less overt disagreement with the other presupposition underlying the stereotype of female purity: woman's special nature. "If the passions of women were ready, strong, and spontaneous," wrote William Rathbone Greg, "in a degree even remotely approaching the form they assume in the coarser sex, there can be little doubt that sexual irregularities would reach a height, of which, at present, we have happily no conception."⁴ Man could, regrettably, be carried away by lust and therefore excused, partially, on grounds of non-premeditation. For woman, whose sexual desires were weak or non-existent, the offense must necessarily be deliberate: a conscious and

²W. E. H. Lecky, The History of European Morals, 3rd ed. (New York, 1884), II, 282.

³The situation remains unchanged in almost all Anglo-Saxon legal jurisdictions.

⁴"Prostitution," Westminster Review, 53 (1850), 457.

knowing choice of evil over good. But although woman's purity was supposed to be natural, it was also so highly valued that prudery kept girls pure by withholding from them some of the basic facts of human existence. They were therefore denied the knowledge necessary to make rational choices. C. Willett Cunningham quotes the advice of a physician on what to tell a girl approaching matrimony: "'Tell her nothing, my dear madam, for if they knew they would not marry.'"⁵

The early Victorian ideal of the Pure Woman was the culmination of a significant social shift which had begun in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century. The definition of woman as naturally pure was a function of class and of time.⁶ The process begun in the 1835-1880 period was to become again women rather than angels.

Legal change alone, as feminists have recently rediscovered, is not necessarily social change. Some propaganda novelists in the Victorian period wrote directly and overtly about the woman question. Nearly all writers additionally reflected, through details of incident, characterization, and outcome, attitudes conditioned by contemporary circumstance.

As one of them said:

As the writer of the leading article picks up his ideas of politics among those which he finds floating about the world . . . so does the novelist find his ideas of conduct. . . . He collects the floating ideas of the world around him as to what is right and wrong in conduct, and reproduces them with his own colouring.⁷

⁵Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (1935; rpt. New York, 1973), p. 214.

⁶The social and moral changes of the pre-Victorian period are discussed in detail in Maurice J. Quinlan, Victorian Prelude (New York, 1941) and Gordon Rattray Taylor, The Angel-Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change (New York, 1974).

⁷Anthony Trollope, "Novel-Reading," Nineteenth Century, 5 (1879), 26.

The situation was complicated in the mid-nineteenth century by the development of audiences, rather than an audience, for literature. Expanding literacy and commercial opportunity encouraged the writing of fiction tailored for specific segments of the reading public. Despite the existence of an apparent moral consensus, standards of behavior and, perhaps more importantly, presumptions governing attitudes towards female chastity differed from class to class. Furthermore, the role of the working woman differed significantly from that of the woman who was linked to society purely through her relationship with the man who was her father or her husband.

In this context, the figure of the unchaste woman serves as a definitive anomaly. The double standard, as the Victorians were fond of saying, was created by nature as much as by society or art. Woman is physically changed by the destruction of her virginity; she is in a situation peculiar to her sex. She is furthermore, by the action of public morality, isolated from the role in family and society by which most women of the period took their definition. Her relationship to the man in the case is a personal relationship, outside the law. She stands alone, pure woman.

Her story therefore almost invariably attracts, even in its simplest forms, a cluster of ideas about woman's role, her nature, and her relationship to man, to society, and to herself. The very terms used to describe her are revealing. She may be the seduced woman, a helpless victim of the superior male; or the fallen woman, capable of sin and responsible for her own destiny; or the emancipated woman, using her body as she pleases for reasons of her own.

Because of the idealization of the pure woman, and because of the public repression which forced overt sexuality to leak out in ugly forms

underneath, it is likely that no Victorian author wandered into the subject accidentally. Each man or woman who allowed indiscretion to commit itself in print must first have been quite sure of his or her own moral stance, must secondly have considered how the audience would react--with horror at the consequences, with tears of pity, with a prurient thrill, with compassion leading to changes in personal behavior, with a questioning of social standards--and then have taken a deep breath to prepare for the plunge.

CHAPTER ONE

WOMAN'S PLACE: PENNY WEEKLY FAMILY MAGAZINES

OF THE 1840'S AND 1850'S

The Victorian novel as we know it was written by, for, and largely about the 60,000 or so families that could afford a guinea for a year's library subscription¹ or a shilling a month to buy a new book as it came out in parts or in a magazine. The fiction accessible to those of less than middle-class income was published in periodicals or parts which appeared weekly rather than monthly and cost a penny, or at most twopence.

The most widely read publications in England in the 1840's and 1850's were the London Journal (1845-1912) and the Family Herald (1842-1939).² They were, significantly, neither cheap reading of the crime-and-passion variety nor women's magazines but family magazines, and in their overwhelming popularity we discover the existence of a group in the process of developing characteristics which we define as Victorian.

Mass literature became a commercial possibility at about the time Queen Victoria ascended the throne. High speed presses and cheaper paper lowered the cost of printing; stereotyping permitted a double or triple press-run with only one setting of type; railways allowed the cultivation

¹See Guinevere L. Griest, Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel (Bloomington, Ind., 1970), p. 79. Dickens' novels in shilling monthly parts generally sold fewer than 50,000 copies.

²Circulation figures throughout are taken, unless otherwise noted, from Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader (Chicago, 1957), Appendix C.

of a national audience. A number of publishers recognized that the same profit could be made by selling a magazine to thirty thousand people at a penny each instead of to three thousand at sixpence³ and that a lot more people could afford to spend a penny than could part with a larger sum. In 1840, seventy-eight magazines costing twopence or less were issued in one week.⁴ By the mid-fifties the Family Herald and the London Journal dominated the market; their combined sale was at least three-quarters of a million copies per week. By way of comparison, the Dickens novel with the greatest number of purchasers at the time of publication was The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41) at 100,000 per part.⁵

The successful formula for mass sales was to provide something for everyone. An issue of the London Journal or the Family Herald contained sixteen quarto-sized pages jammed with fine print. There would be an installment of a serial, a piece of short fiction or a true-life adventure, and a page of answers to correspondents on personal, legal, and medical problems. There was usually some improving article--an essay on history or biography or antiquity--and often a piece on a contemporary social or economic problem (although the penny price could be achieved only by omitting news and overt political commentary so as to avoid the stamp duty). Finally, there were odds and ends of filler material: household hints, recipes, puzzles, riddles, and reports of factual oddities.

The readers of the penny magazines were not, however, the mass in

³The London Journal, 1 (1 Mar. 1845), 16; hereafter LJ.

⁴"Popular Literature of the Day," British and Foreign Review, 10 (1840), 243.

⁵Master Humphrey's Clock, the pseudo-magazine which included The Old Curiosity Shop, was also, not so incidentally, Dickens' only try at weekly rather than monthly parts, but each part cost threepence instead of a penny; see Thomas M. Hatton and Arthur Cleaver, A Bibliography of the Periodical Works of Charles Dickens (London, 1933), p. 163.

the modern sense of the word: between one-quarter and one-third of the population were still illiterate.⁶ The new reading public was drawn primarily from those who clustered around the boundary between working and middle classes. This segment of the population expanded rapidly in the early Victorian years. The traditional components of petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy were augmented by new recruits who were qualified by literacy to fill clerical, technical, and supervisory jobs which had hardly existed a generation earlier. To build rail lines by the hundreds in the late 1840's required thousands of navvies, but it also called for surveyors, instrument makers, bookkeepers, paymasters, deputy supervisors, draftsmen, station masters. When the London Journal carried matrimonial advertisements for a time in the early fifties, the "unhappy bachelors" included a merchant's clerk with £130 a year, a surveyor with £275, a junior in an engineer's office at £100, one in a government office at £350, a merchant with £200, and a clerk who earned only £70 but, at age thirty, was willing to take a wife up to forty. One "gentlemanly" man with 24 shillings a week (the average wage for, say, a cotton spinner or a miner)⁷ was told by the editor that it was too little to marry on.⁸

The audience for the penny magazines was an audience of changing aspirations, expectations, and opportunities. Urbanization--with the 1851 census, more than half of the people in England were, for the first time, living in cities--altered the pattern of social relationships. Family structure had been changed by the removal of production from the home consequent to the industrial revolution: women lost their primary economic

⁶Altick, The English Common Reader, pp. 166-72.

⁷Leone Levi, Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes (London, 1867), pp. 71, 109.

⁸LJ, 13 (7 June 1851), 224.

function and men took on the role of provider.

The penny magazines provided, both intentionally and unintentionally, the commonly-shared information, attitudes, and emotional reactions which, in a mass society, supplant or at least supplement the oral traditions of a face-to-face culture. The readers of the London Journal and the Family Herald actively sought to learn about the values and standards and mechanical details of living in a new milieu. Their letters to the correspondence column reveal their conscious mobility. They want to eradicate the traces of their origin which linger in their grammar and pronunciation. They ask questions about etiquette and general knowledge which would be impossible for anyone with a polite background and more than a rudimentary education. The advertisers urge them to buy text books, life assurance, and fashion magazines; to learn elocution, French, Italian, and music.

The London Journal's matrimonial advertisements can be seen as an attempt to fill a second role which is ordinarily the function of a social group, though there was, apparently, no machinery for actually putting the correspondents in touch with one another. Changing social position isolated individuals. Ambitious men moved educationally and often physically away from their local roots. And if they became, in the process, too respectable to pick up girls in pubs and dance halls, their female counterparts had even fewer resources. Small farmers' daughters, no longer essential to the work of house and dairy, were sent to boarding school; they returned with tastes and culture which could not be satisfied by village boys. In urban areas one of the first impulses of the newly-prosperous was to keep the girls at home and educate them in polite accomplishments at an age when their brothers had already begun apprentice-

ships or business life.⁹ Women of this sort were becoming culture bearers; they looked down on the men they knew. Both men and women were changing their aspirations. The press supplied both information and social contacts--if only imaginative social contacts--which would ordinarily be found in a stable social group.

The third role which the penny magazines played in the consolidation of a mass public was that of creating a shared background and outlook. They provided literally millions of people with emotional experiences which they held in common because they read the same fiction. The effect must have been particularly important for women. Their educations were narrow. They were relatively house-bound; they were not freed from their chores by a staff of servants, nor did they pay month-long visits, nor did they live in the streets and the gin-shop like the non-respectable poor. The vast circulation of the magazines assisted in the formation of a pool of common material for private fantasy.

Can we assume that popular literature, by virtue of its popularity, reflects what the readers want to hear and expresses their own mores? Or did the values purveyed in the penny magazines derive rather from the attempt of editors, authors, and publishers to civilize the masses?

Both papers were business ventures. The publisher of each hired, at the outset, an editor with some following in the working class. James Elimalet ("Shepherd") Smith of the Family Herald had, in 1833, edited Robert Owen's journal The Crisis, though he soon left Owen to promulgate his own "universal religion."¹⁰ The first editor of the London Journal was G. W. M. Reynolds, a Chartist and the author of best-selling penny

⁹William Rathbone Greg, Why Are Women Redundant? (London, 1869), p. 24.

¹⁰William Anderson Smith, 'Shepherd' Smith the Universalist (London, 1892), pp. 102 and passim.

dreadfuls.¹¹ But though the editors wrote the answers to correspondents and formed the general tone of the two magazines, they did not read all of the fiction that they printed. It is difficult to discover what part authors' inbred biases or overt purposes may have played in the moral content of the fiction. Most of the short stories are either anonymous or printed under a pseudonym or a name that is impossible to trace. A few of the serialists can be discovered in biographical references. One, Thomas Miller, came from the class he wrote for: he was a basket-maker by trade. The others were for the most part professional journalists of middle-class backgrounds and Bohemian tastes. Not all professionals, however, could produce what the mass reader demanded. Charles Reade was the only reputable writer of the period to make an acknowledged contribution to one of these two papers. His serial, we are told, "nearly wrecked" the London Journal.¹² Reade was adept at supplying plot and incident, but he failed to create characters with whom the reader could empathize. The successful authors must have been those who had, perhaps instinctively, a sympathy with the popular mind.

For whatever the editors or authors may have tried in an attempt to shape the values of penny magazine readers, the final argument is essentially a financial one. A penny weekly needed to sell in the neighborhood

¹¹George William MacArthur Reynolds (1814-79) is discussed critically at some length in Margaret Dalziel, Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (London, 1957). DNB provides an account of Reynolds' political activity. The listing of titles in CBEL is superseded by the more complete bibliography by E. F. Bleiler appended to the Dover reprint of Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf (New York, 1975).

¹²Robert Louis Stevenson, "Popular Authors," Random Memories and Other Essays in Works, Vailima Ed. (London, 1922), XII, 333. Reade's London Journal serial was subsequently published in three volumes as White Lies (1857) and reissued as The Double Marriage, or White Lies (1868).

of 30,000 copies to meet the fixed expenses.¹³ Many earnest periodicals conducted by reformers like William and Mary Howitt and Mrs. S. C. Hall or by church and pure literature societies imitated the popular format in an attempt to fill the demand for cheap reading with something which was scrupulously wholesome and which had a religious, moral, or economic product to sell. Few of them reached enough buyers to be self-sustaining.¹⁴ The London Journal at one point made an annual profit of over £10,000. The proprietor of the Family Herald left legacies of nearly £50,000 when he died in 1859.¹⁵

In order to more closely define mass-audience tastes, it is instructive to look briefly at a periodical which tried for three years to compete with the leaders, changing its tone and emphasis several times in the process. The first issue of The Penny Satirist and London Pioneer¹⁶ carried the motto "The Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number." It was successor to The Penny Satirist (1837-46), a broadsheet of the sort which had, earlier in the century, provided crudely satiric and often sexual jokes

¹³Accurate figures about the finances of penny magazines are hard to discover. When the Penny Magazine's sales had declined to 40,000 its publisher remarked that the number was "scarcely remunerative"; quoted in Altick, The English Common Reader, p. 335. Six weeks after the Family Herald began publication its editor was guessing that they needed 20,000 weekly to pay; a little over a year later he was saying that "if it could only get up to 100,000, it would be a capital property"; see Smith, 'Shepherd' Smith the Universalist, pp. 221, 230. One contemporary estimate of expenses is discussed in Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850 (London, 1963), pp. 31-32.

¹⁴The pioneering Penny Magazine (1832-45), published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and strictly limited to factual material, attained at one time a circulation of 200,000 copies. It could not survive in competition with the magazines which printed fiction; the year of its demise coincides with that of the London Journal's birth.

¹⁵James, p. 40, for the London Journal figure; information on James Biggs, publisher of the Family Herald, from Boase, Vol. I.

¹⁶Published under various titles from 30 April 1846 to 2 December 1848; cited hereafter as Pioneer.

about the aristocracy and royal family for the entertainment of the lower-class reader. By 1845 the Penny Satirist had lost most of its circulation to the new magazine-style periodicals. The name and format were changed in order to compete. Nevertheless, the first issue began with an ironic, gently anti-royalist "Court Circular," and the broadsheet tradition persisted further to the extent that there was nearly always a story about illicit sex, usually involving the upper classes.

The prurience has an air of smugness; the reader is constantly reminded that it is evil for aristocrats to be so wicked. The attack extends to rich women, who are both condemned and made miserable by their sexual misbehavior.¹⁷ Radical propagandists of the period frequently employed a similar motif to demonstrate the superiority of the working class.¹⁸ The Pioneer's advice column is more sternly puritanical than either the London Journal's or the Family Herald's.

The theme of the poor girl pursued by the wicked aristocrat hammers home the moral. The Sentimental and the Gothic novel remained alive in penny-weekly redactions which substituted slums, sewers, and starvation wages for the outmoded horrors of castle and dungeon.¹⁹ In "The Outcasts of London; or Pauline the Victim of Crime"²⁰ the heroine is a ward of the president of a "Council of Crime" which plans most of the robberies

¹⁷See, for example, Mrs. W. F. Smerdon, "The Unwedded One," Pioneer, 1 (30 Apr. - 14 May 1846), 1-37.

¹⁸See Martha Vicinus, The Industrial Muse (London, 1974), pp 116-17.

¹⁹One of the best is James Malcolm Rymer, The White Slave (weekly parts, 1844-45). A number of others are mentioned in James, Ch. 6, "The Paradox of the Domestic Story."

²⁰Pioneer, 1 (14 Jan. 1847), 593 - 2 (10 June 1847), 115 Both title and content reveal the intent to imitate G. W. M. Reynolds' The Mysteries of London (1844-46), one of the most successful of all the penny-issue novels.

and burglaries in the city. There is minute detail about the criminal world (some of it quite similar to that which Mayhew was soon to publish) and there are flamboyant exposés of the morals of the aristocracy and clergy. When a fashionable minister tries to rape Pauline the images and clichés are straight out of contemporary pornography: ". . . despite her violent struggles and her piercing screams, he placed her beside him on a soft, crimson velvet couch, which stood opposite to a splendid mirror . . ." ²¹ The seed of envy which lay inside this sort of story is only too obvious; despite the repeated diatribes against the aristocracy Pauline is ultimately discovered to be the legitimate heir of a baronet.

"The Outcasts of London" is a fine example of serial construction, with the heroine in peril at the end of virtually every installment, yet while it was running the paper underwent a change in tone. The subtitle became "A Journal of Progression in Science, Literature, and all that tends to Instruct and Amuse the Human Race." Correspondents' criticism forced the editor onto the defensive; it was necessary to write about vice, he insisted, to show how unattractive and unrewarding it was. The tale was not mere sensational invention; it was based on "the confessions of a police officer." ²²

It is hard to see why the proprietors would have given up the "Pauline" sort of tale if it were selling well. They may have discovered that the audience big enough and literate enough to support a penny magazine did not have sufficiently broad tastes. At any rate, the Pioneer began actively to cultivate its readership among women. It printed quieter, more domestic

²¹Pioneer, 1 (11 Mar. 1847), 723.

²²Pioneer, 1 (1 Apr. 1847), 755.

short fiction. The wicked aristocrat became less sensational and more directly admonitory; in "The Father"²³ he appears in disguise and woos a shop-girl to her downfall. The danger is one of sex, rather than class: the moral, surely, is to beware of sweet-talking men, whoever they say they are.

In "Milly L---"²⁴ the heroine is deceived by a bigamous marriage (which preserves a semblance of technical virtue) but not martyred. She realizes that she participated in her own victimization; she had, on family advice, refused the poor man about to emigrate but had accepted the prosperous shoemaker because she was lonely and tired of working. She neither commits suicide nor seeks legal revenge but rather goes to work as a servant so that she can provide for her child; she finds satisfaction and fulfillment in the rare holiday times she is able to spend as a mother.

Apparently the publisher felt that an emphasis on woman's self-sufficiency was promising. In July 1848 the magazine began a series of tales about heroic women from history. The concluding article sums up the argument: the good life for women "does not consist in treating them as idols to be worshipped, or as trinkets to be worn for display. . . . The days of chivalry are gone; but it is our misfortune . . . to retain many of its false rules and objectionable customs." The secret of emancipation for women is to recognize that the creator "in his wisdom, never placed a flower, or a rock, much less a human being, in a position in which it lacked the power to sustain itself."²⁵

²³Pioneer, 3 (29 July 1848), 251-52.

²⁴Pioneer, 2 (18, 25 Nov. 1847), 490 ff. The story was reprinted from Fraser's Magazine, 10 (1846), 395-412; Wellesley traces no author.

²⁵Pioneer, 3 (19 Aug. 1848), 294.

But the time was not yet ripe for an appeal to feminine intellectual and economic independence. In September the magazine added a fashion page in a last attempt to find out what its readers really wanted. The issue of October 21 carried complaints from subscribers in Cheltenham, Lancaster, Bristol, Barnet, and the Isle of Wight about their inability to get the paper from local newsagents, and by the end of the year it was no more.

The Pioneer had tried the range in its search for enough readers to keep it alive. It is impossible to discover to what extent bad management and distribution may have hindered its prosperity, but apparently neither extreme--overt sexuality or incipient feminism--struck a chord with a mass audience. What the really large number of readers wanted to hear fell somewhere in between, in the territory occupied by the London Journal and the Family Herald.

The Family Herald was not only the first true mass publication in England (that is, the first to be composed and printed entirely by machine),²⁶ it was also the earliest cheap magazine to use "family" in its title. Three out of four letters printed in the correspondence column come from women. The serials are usually historical romances with upper-class characters but the week's leading short story is apt to be family centered: children go to the aid of long-estranged sisters or keep the household together through mother's illness or father's business failure. One regular feature is a page of "parlour magic and pastimes."

²⁶Interestingly enough, the illustration of the composing machine which decorated the title of the first number showed it operated by two women: machine composition allowed the replacement of expensive unionized typesetters with cheap female labor. The Family Herald was initially issued on four newspaper-sized pages. This version ran for 22 weeks beginning on 17 Dec. 1842. With the issue for 13 May 1843 the magazine format was adopted and the numeration began again with Vol. I, No. 1.

The editor wrote in the first volume that "great poets, such as Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden, Moore, and others, have written many things which we would not print. The public wink at the faults of great men. . . . A periodical for the public must be more discreet than a bound book."²⁷ The assumption that the Family Herald's readers would be insulted by any departure from propriety strikes down an implicit double standard. In novels and women's magazines of the preceding period, when it was safe to assume that only the middle and upper classes could read, loss of chastity was a disaster for a woman of the reader's own class, but a servant or a shopkeeper's daughter might sometimes reform and marry happily. The Family Herald, however, was written for the shopkeeper's daughter with the assumption that her standards of personal chastity were the same as those of the higher class. There is none of the preaching that we find in tracts or the Servant's Magazine; there are no stories about the horrible fate of women who fall.

The Family Herald did not, however, completely ignore the sexual side of human existence. Its readers could not afford to depend on ignorance as an assurance of innocence. There were dangers and opportunities unknown in classes where the mother had little to do except watch over her daughters and could spare servants to protect them when they went out. One probable reflection of reality in penny magazine fiction is the frequency with which a man approaches a woman alone on the street. She could not afford to be ignorant of his motives. The Family Herald was fairly open in both verse and non-fiction. There is, for example, a chilling reminder of the hazards of job-hunting in an article about a woman who answered an advertisement for a position as lady's companion

²⁷Family Herald, 1 (17 Feb. 1844), 648; hereafter FH.

and received in reply an offer from a man of twenty-five that she "place herself under his protection" in return for "an annual allowance, sufficient to live respectably."²⁸ The correspondence column offers consoling advice to women who have partaken in carefully-worded activities such as to "anticipate the marriage day."²⁹

The Family Herald, then, recognized sexual irregularity but did not print stories about it. On the other hand, neither did it wholly ignore dangerous topics in the manner of the Leisure Hour and other religious magazines intended for the same audience. Family Herald fiction is often purposely deceptive: the heroine, or her mother, appears to be unchaste, but the story fizzles out in misunderstood appearances, concealed marriages, changes of identity, amnesia, stolen parish registers, and so forth. There may be a certain amount of social criticism along the way: the author may show the apparently fallen woman living a true and faithful life for the sake of her child, despite the tribulations heaped on her by society, but all is made right in the end, and we are confirmed in our opinion that woman could not show all of these virtues in the absence of Virtue itself. The Vicar of Wakefield, which was still highly popular, is the most obvious prototype.³⁰

The archetypal story of the truly fallen woman appears in the Family Herald in a poem entitled "The Ruined Maid."³¹ The "lost and ruined maid" lived and died in a "humble cot." Her dying prayer was for

²⁸FH, 1 (28 Oct. 1843), 395.

²⁹FH, 13 (19 May 1855), 44.

³⁰Oliver Goldsmith's novel (1766) was published almost annually in one form or another throughout this period, including an issue in penny numbers about 1836.

³¹by "T. T. L.," FH, 1 (30 Sept. 1843), 330.

the man who ruined her. Her father has gone insane, her mother is "hastening to decay," but the spoiler "gaily sings" round the "festive board/ Where wealth and wine and wit is found." Here, highly compressed, are the essentials of the novels on the subject which had been written by Mrs. Inchbald, Elizabeth Helme, Mrs. Opie, and others of the 1790-1840 period.³² The pattern depends on the presumption that the woman bears ultimate responsibility for her fall; the morality on providing the reader insight into the designs and stratagems of men so that she may resist them.

A remarkable number of stories in the Family Herald tell the same tale but omit the crucial event. A young woman loves a man (usually of a higher class); he promises marriage but later loses interest; she dies of poverty and a broken heart. The sin on which the consequences follow is not the sexual act but the confession of love or even the feeling of love before it has been permissibly released by marriage. In "The Hospital.--A Sketch from Real Life,"³³ Francesca Vitelli, the daughter of a Florentine official, falls in love with the English ambassador and, as she tells us, "concealed not my passion." He goes home promising to return quickly, but soon stops writing. She follows him to England, struggles with poverty as an assistant in an artificial florist's shop, sees him with his fiancée, sickens, and dies in the hospital of which he is one of the governors. This makes possible an agonizing recognition

³²Many of these novels remained current in forms accessible to the class which read cheap fiction. Mrs. Inchbald's Nature and Art [1794] was the first volume of the Romancist and Novelist's Library in 1839; Mrs. Opie's Father and Daughter (1802) and Mrs. Helme's The Farmer of Inglewood Forest (1796) were both reprinted in inexpensive editions in the 1840's. Some were also popular as stage melodramas; T. P. Prest's The Maniac Father is a version of Father and Daughter and G. D. Pitt's Agnes Primrose of Nature and Art.

³³FH, 1 (14 Oct. 1843), 353-55.

scene at the end. Successful martyrdom provides a subversive triumph: women are morally and emotionally finer than men, and men's power can be attacked by bringing them to their knees with guilt and remorse and consciousness of their failings. But the overt purpose of the tale is, in the words of the narrator, to illustrate to young women "the fatal consequences which may accrue from the indulgence of that morbid enthusiasm, which many a young female thoughtlessly revels in."

Some variations make the danger of love more explicit. Emily St. Vincent, heroine of "The Lost One," ³⁴ is courted by Henry Seymour, a captain of dragoons. He asks if she loves him. She responds ("trembling violently"), "'Nay, nay, Seymour! do not press me to make a confession a maiden should not!'" He persists; she admits her love; he kisses her and proposes that they fly. She is, naturally, insulted; he threatens suicide; she reaffirms her love and then faints. "This," says the author, "was the point to which Seymour wished to bring her; his pride was flattered, and he deemed himself master of her soul." We hold our breath. Nothing happens; he revives her and takes her home.

Emily subsequently marries another man. Her reputation (though explicitly not her virtue) is compromised while her husband is abroad; he demands a separation; she goes insane and dies in childbirth. This is all very rapidly sketched. Her chief indiscretion--certainly the chief incident of the story--is her pre-marital admission of love. Once Henry Seymour knows of her feelings he is sure that he can lead her to ruin. Even for the Victorians love had a physical as well as an idealistic sense; surely that is what lies beneath all the talk about love coming only after marriage. The popular magazines do not wholly confirm what we have taken

³⁴by "B. W.," FH, 1 (13 May 1843), 1-4.

as accepted mid-century medical opinion; i.e., that women probably did not have and certainly were not aware of sexual desire until after they had experienced intercourse.³⁵ A woman who loves a man is likely to want to do something about it, and the reader of penny magazines had a degree of opportunity to realize her desires. There is a revealing letter in the London Journal: "ANN wishes to know whether she acts imprudently or not, in visiting a young man whom she loves at his lodgings? We answer, without hesitation, very imprudently . . . it is unwise to thrust temptation in the way."³⁶ We are startled, first of all, that a Victorian woman literate enough to write to a paper would ask the question, and secondly, that the answer is given not in terms of what the neighbors will think but on the basis of physical probabilities.

Thus the numerous sentimental scenes at the bedside of the virtuous young dying of unrequited love, though they may provide a useful outlet for the overwrought feelings of readers whose physical desires are not only frustrated but also unmentionable have, morally, the intent of suppressing those feelings. The editor is constantly advising correspondents not to expect anything special in the way of emotional reaction to

³⁵The opinion which we have taken as universal was disseminated in such works as William Acton, The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs, 4th ed. (London, 1865) and "Prostitution," Westminster Review, 53 (1850), 448-506. The latter reveals the aura of guilt surrounding even legal pleasure: "Women whose position and education have protected them from exciting causes constantly pass through life without ever being cognizant of the prompting of the senses. Happy for them that it is so!" (pp. 456-57). William Rathbone Greg was the author of this article; it is reprinted in Keith Nield, ed., Prostitution in the Victorian Age (Farnborough, 1973). Carl Degler, in "What Ought To Be and What Was: Woman's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," American Historical Review, 79 (1974), 1467-90, demonstrates that there was not so general a consensus as has been thought: mid-century medical opinion was, in fact, divided on the subject of women's sexual desires. Degler argues that Acton et al. wrote proscriptively rather than descriptively.

³⁶LJ, 9 (31 Mar. 1850), 64.

a suitor; he replies to an orphaned governess who had received a proposal from a man forty years her senior that "it is merely a question of expedience, as marriage in general is: it is 'Can I do better--would it be better to accept a home of this kind than to run the risk of having none at all? Women all reason thus, and so do men. The ideal of love is never realized; the heart is never thoroughly satisfied; if it is danger awaits it, for perfect satisfaction is of short duration on this planet."³⁷ The advice seems cold-blooded for a magazine which depended almost entirely on love for the subject matter of the fiction, but it is consistent with the morality of the stories.

A high proportion of the tales in the Family Herald are romantic. Wedding bells provide the suitable ending. But despite the sentiment and the sentimentality there is a note--sometimes overt, more often an undercurrent--of anti-romanticism and feminine individualism. Some of the most sentimental tales serve to counteract the ethos that woman is properly a creature of the emotions. Woman's goal is marriage, which provides her with station, role, duties, and economic security; anything--including emotion--which interferes with attaining that goal is counter-productive; and it is woman's responsibility to provide for her own happiness.

The London Journal was by reputation more "trashy" than the Family Herald,³⁸ a judgment probably based on the front-page woodcuts illustrating the often-violent serials. Reynolds supplied two novels while he was

³⁷FH, 13 (1 Mar. 1856), 699.

³⁸Alvar Ellegård, The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain (Göteborg, 1957); Part II rpt. in Victorian Periodicals Newsletter, No. 13 (1971), 22. See also Altick, The English Common Reader, p. 360.

editor.³⁹ For several years thereafter the leading spot was generally filled by translations of Dumas and Sue.

On the other hand, the instructive side of the periodical was more serious than that of the Family Herald. The London Journal ran a long series entitled "The Influence of Employments on Health" and, in 1848, another filled with practical advice about emigration. Its authors wrote about history and science in full-length articles rather than snippets. It ran a basic French course for several years.

The letters column does not mince words in helping readers to cope with the consequences of sexual misadventure. Correspondents regularly ask how to affiliate an illegitimate child, or if the East India Company will force an officer to support his bastard, or if it is legal to marry again if one's wife has disappeared with another man. A particularly poignant matrimonial notice comes from "P. P. S." who, at age thirty, has "been so unfortunate as to become a mother without being a wife." She declares that if an honest man would take pity on her she "would make him a good wife, an intellectual companion, and even be his domestic servant." The editor responds that "there are numbers of men . . . who, in their conduct, show themselves imbued with the Christian principle that the villany [sic] of another should not be visited on the head of the sufferer. There is hope for her . . . The story of the Magdalen touches more hearts than the Simon Pures of the world are aware of."⁴⁰

The London Journal also printed stories about sexual irregularity. Nearly all have sordid endings, but the woman's grief and misery are

³⁹"The Mysteries of the Inquisition," 1 (19 Apr 1845), 113 - 2 (4 Oct 1845), 58, and "Faust," 2 (4 Oct. 1845), 49 - 3 (18 July 1846), 307.

⁴⁰LJ, 13 (15 Feb. 1851), 384.

intended as a demonstration of other evils rather than as a simple warning against unchaste behavior.

"A Mother's Sin,"⁴¹ for example, is a lurid tale in the first-person narrative style of the purported last dying confessions which were sold at public executions. The mother's sin is pride. After the death of her husband, who had earned £300 a year, she will not consider sending her daughters out to work; she keeps the house and takes in lodgers. One of them promptly seduces the eldest daughter (who is called Beauty). Things go rapidly to the worst. Beauty is transported for theft, her sisters take to the streets, and the mother becomes addicted to gin. The final horror cannot quite be revealed: "I cannot tell you how I led on Beauty's daughter. . . . The child I had destroyed. Ah! murder, murder! there is a crime worse than murder." This would lose its point if we did not know of the demand for child prostitutes in Victorian London. William T. Stead opened the horrified and unbelieving eyes of the middle class to the trade later in the century,⁴² but presumably the readers of the London Journal were expected to take in the implication.

The story is interesting because it adopts the style of the sensational confessions which London Journal readers would have known in their youth to moralize about their current situation. It is quite apparent that a woman unprotected and unprovided for cannot expect to maintain the family's hard-won place in the middle class. The mother learned false values from her social aspiration; she raised her daughters "used to better things" and would not retreat by letting them go out to service. She had a choice, within the system, and she erred.

⁴¹LJ, 9 (31 Mar. 1849), 62.

⁴²"The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," Pall Mall Gazette, 6, 7, 8, and 10 July 1885.

"The Slave of the Needle"⁴³ more directly condemns the system itself. The story is a dramatization of the point which Henry Mayhew had made in the early chapters of his Morning Chronicle series a few months previously:⁴⁴ that the economic conditions of needlewomen's lives almost inevitably led to their taking up prostitution, at least in an amateur way.

These two stories and others like them portray the social and economic causes of unchastity. A more common variety deplores the social consequences. These stories usually begin after the fall; the woman is the victim of man's villainous passions and her miserable end is due not to any flaw in her own character but to a society which bars her from honest employment, intercourse with decent women, and sometimes even from the services of the church, leaving her no recourse but prostitution or suicide.

The stories which make this point range from the sketchiest of narratives, in which the woman is fished dripping from the Thames under the eye of the man who knows he murdered her⁴⁵ to a rather subtle version in which the man who sees the body is led to view the girl's act as part of a chain of circumstances in which no single individual acted with complete free will: the people who failed to help her are as guilty as the man who had abandoned her, and the faults and virtues of all are determined by education and nurture rather than rational choice.⁴⁶ Sometimes the

⁴³by "J. P. H.," in four parts, LJ, 10 (16 Feb. 1850), 378 - 11 (16 Mar. 1850), 28; no part appeared on 9 Mar.

⁴⁴6-23 Nov. 1849.

⁴⁵"Sad Sights from London Bridge," LJ, 2 (25 Oct. 1845), 109-11; reprinted from Ainsworth's Magazine, 8 (1845), 308-16, which identifies Arnheldt Weaver as the author.

⁴⁶"J. P. H.," "All Her Own Fault," LJ, 8 (19 Aug. 1848), 380-81

moral is enforced positively rather than negatively; in "Poor Mary Ann" the victimized girl, though she has become a whore, is rescued by an elderly benefactor and restored to her father, who greets her with open arms.⁴⁷

More crudely sensational stories cast the blame not on society but on a single man; sometimes the villain is even a wronged husband. Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is condensed into six pages in such a manner that it becomes wholly the story of Chillingworth's viciousness in marrying Hester and his subsequent villainy in demanding her obedience so that he can destroy Dimmesdale.⁴⁸ Another tale is about a wife who has had a child while her husband was away at war. He promptly kills the child "as an offering to the evil spirit of vengeance"; the wife follows grief-stricken "to that region 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.'"⁴⁹ The adulterous wife is washed in pity even though we are given no glimpse of the circumstances which might extenuate her fault.

In all of these stories some outside force--the husband, the seducer, the economic system, conventional prudery--destroys the woman's life, but not her soul. She has lost her capability for sin; as a victim she is guiltless before God. To treat woman's fall as a social problem rather than a religious one depends on a view of woman as a weaker vessel who must be protected rather than as an individual who can be criticized for her errors. The overt morality has paradoxically not changed; though the victim has committed no crime she must still be punished by death,

⁴⁷by "J. P. H.," LJ, 8 (4 Nov. 1848), 131-32.

⁴⁸LJ, 14 (14 Aug. 1852), 361-66.

⁴⁹"Kew Church," LJ, 9 (26 May 1849), 184.

barring rare instances in which a benevolent male rescues her. Man may alter events; woman is simply acted upon.

The majority of the London Journal's seduction stories share this motif. There are, however, anomalies. In "The Jilt"⁵⁰ a woman deserts the city slicker who has married her secretly for her money and elopes with an earlier suitor; her friends and relations believe that justice is served even in the absence of morality and cover her tracks so that her lawful husband can not find her. Another woman gives her illegitimate child to a sister to raise, recoups the family fortunes by marrying an aristocrat, and then after his death rectifies all by marrying her lover and recognizing their child.⁵¹ These two stories are deliberately distanced by their technique. "The Jilt" is a miniature pastoral told in humorously archaic language; the other story is a similar reduction in scale of the "silver-fork" novels which were just ceasing to be popular. Neither has an air of earnestness which would lead the reader to accept (or perhaps even to perceive) the moral that there may be human values more important than physical chastity. The more sensational of the death or suicide stories are equally formalized; conventional images (weeping willows in the churchyard, Thames arches at night, a much-read letter folded into an otherwise empty purse) are used to elicit a standard emotional response.

The stories which have a serious moral purpose are, at least on the surface, more realistic. They usually have an urban English setting; the characters do some sort of work for their living; the events are no more improbable than those of most nineteenth-century novels. But though the surface texture may be realistic, the stories depend for their effect

⁵⁰LJ, 8 (4 Nov. 1848), 136.

⁵¹Lionel Fortescue, "The Aunt-Mother and Niece Daughter," LJ, 1 (23 Aug. 1845), 413-14.

on an external narration of event. We are generally told all we need to know about a person when he is first introduced ("a man of exceedingly coarse tastes, repulsive morals, and habits of the vilest profligacy"⁵² is one of my favorites) and never have grounds to change our opinion. The characters are wooden; their motives for behaving as they do are usually unexplained. The heroine conveniently faints at moments of crisis, which saves the trouble of portraying her emotional conflicts. The action is almost wholly external; the characters simply do not think, even in clichés.

The only noteworthy exceptions to this rule occur in some of the stories by the person who signed him (or her) self "J. P. H." or, in one instance, J. Parsons Hall. The economic focus of "The Slave of the Needle" has been mentioned above; the more interesting aspect of the story is its examination of the steps by which a likeable heroine who is neither ignorant, in love, nor utterly destitute loses her grasp of decency and slides into a relationship which she knows to be immoral. Annie Lee (her name is Amy in the first of the four installments) supports her mother by sewing shirts. After Mrs. Lee dies (first warning her daughter specifically about the evil intentions of men) Annie suffers from depression: she is hungry but unable to make herself work, completely without human ties, and not able to afford any pleasures. In this state, says the author, "it only required a sufficiently tempting motive to induce her to plunge into the grave or dishonour."⁵³ Her employer arrives, intending to seduce her under threat of prison (she had pawned some unmade shirts) but when he sees her he takes pity and orders up a meal. Though Annie has always

⁵²"J. P. H.," "The Slave of the Needle," LJ, 10 (2 Mar. 1850), 411.

⁵³Ibid.

been afraid of the man she finds herself, after food, wine, and above all, human sympathy, almost overwhelmed by sexual feelings. J. P. H. makes it explicit that a woman may have such feelings quite independent of love and admiration for the man: in a person of an essentially loving nature, he says, whose outlet for love has been denied, it sometimes happens that "appetites, like ravenous beasts of prey, break the laws imposed by religion and social morality"⁵⁴--a startlingly unique perception for an early Victorian writer. But natural passion does not lead directly to Annie's loss of chastity. The next chapter opens with an abstract discussion of Annie as a type. We learn that she has yielded, but not exactly how or why. The man tires of her; she has lost the slight attachment she once felt for him and so suffers not from heartbreak but from "a nervous dread of approaching evil."⁵⁵ Her fears are justified. She falls ill; hunger drives her into prostitution; she drinks to drown her guilt and is soon dead.

It is a temptation to judge J. P. H. by what he almost did rather than by the story he published. The mother's death, for instance, is tinged with irony; she feels "an ecstasy in goodness--a delicious reward in the treasured-up reminiscences of an unspotted life"⁵⁶ though she is surrounded by unspeakable poverty and, while retaining her sexual virtue, has been economically and legally victimized by a succession of men for the past fifteen years. The old crone who attends her damns men in general and the sweating system in particular. "I hope she cursed the monster before she died;" says this woman, "I do daily, but I want the curse of

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵LJ, 11 (16 Mar. 1850), 28.

⁵⁶LJ, 10 (23 Feb. 1850), 396.

a good heart to blight them.⁵⁷ Is the mother's happy death after a good, meek, suffering life really the ideal, or would curses (and perhaps even action in support of the curses) be more appropriate? The idea is fascinating, as is the consideration of the psychology of sexual attraction which follows, but J. P. H. quickly drops these themes to draw a lurid picture of Annie's descent into the lower depths. Annie does not take any action to get herself into or out of her predicament; she is, finally, only the helpless victim of one man in particular and of society in general.

The one story which this author signed with a full (though untraceable) name, J. Parsons Hall, is the only piece in these volumes of the London Journal which deserves serious consideration as literature. "The Reserved Husband"⁵⁸ is a psychologically perceptive story of a failed marriage. The hero, Gregory Sampson, is a fitter in a locomotive shop, a sober, industrious and intelligent worker. His wife has a smattering of polite accomplishments; she likes to read; she married for a home (expecting love to come afterwards) and though she regrets that Gregory's nature is not more like her own she seems cheerful, content, and an excellent housekeeper.

Their life is the ideal of the skilled working class. Their cottage is filled with solid comfort. Gregory does not go out to the pub. He comes home, eats his meal, sits, smokes, and thinks about his work. His wife makes conversation, as Sarah Ellis would recommend. He remains stolid, silent, and reserved. So she sits over her sewing and spins daydreams out of her only other contact with the outside world--the novels she has been

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸LJ, 9 (19 May 1849), 165-68.

reading.

One day Gregory comes home from work and discovers that she has left. There is a note: "I wanted more than respect from you, and because you could not give me more, I have been miserable for a long time. I had no company but the flowers, and when they died in the winter I was alone."

The neighbors have seen her get into a cab with another man. For the first time in his life Gregory feels a strong emotion--he wants revenge. Then, slowly, he realizes that he has failed in his duty by being merely dutiful. He will not pursue her, but he is resolved that she shall not continue to bear, in her disgrace, the name which was his parents'. After three and a half years of single-minded sacrifice he has saved £350 towards the cost of a divorce. His solicitor then discovers that the wife has died in extreme poverty and offers congratulations on a "fortunate termination to what would have been a very tedious and unpleasant process."

The woman's character is not so fully realized as Gregory's, and her narrative boils down to the barest of stereotypes--she sins, suffers, and dies. What is important is that her sin grows not from physical misery, nor from deception, nor from the deliberate viciousness of the other man. She is a person who needs more than physical well-being or a secure social role. She requires the dignity of human recognition.

The story is presented with a naturalist's detachment. Given the characters of the two people there is no suggestion that any other outcome would have been possible. The moral is not simply that light reading creates unfulfilled expectations in women or that men should be more emotional; the appalling thing is that these characters possess the ideal qualities of their class and sex. Hall attacks not what contemporary

society finds evil but what it accepts as good: that man should be intellectual, hard-working, strong, home-loving, dutiful, and not at the mercy of passion; that woman should complement him by being emotional, sensitive, and artistic; and that the ultimate blessedness for any woman is to have made a good match and to possess the means and ability to create a comfortable sanctuary. The ideal of the Home is questioned, but no solution is proposed.

With this one exception, the fiction dealing with the unchaste woman in England's best-selling periodicals during the first twenty years of Victoria's reign reveals a consistent, if sometimes uneasy, hypocrisy on the part of the publishers. Although the letters they print demonstrate that a woman who has been unchaste often lives long enough to write inquiring what surname her daughter should use on her marriage certificate, the stories demand punishment, suffering, and death.

The London Journal is moral in a broader sense than the merely prudish; many of its stories demonstrate a social concern which is parallel to the development of the social problem novel in the serious literature of the period. But the actual content of such stories is almost always pity for the victims of social injustice rather than an attack on its causes; even in "The Slave of the Needle" little is said about the economic foundation of the sweated labor system, nor does the author follow Mayhew to the extent of mentioning that the recipients of government contracts for uniforms were among the worst offenders. The seduced woman is pitiful because she is powerless. To treat her as a social problem excludes her from the doctrine of self-help which dominates the instructive departments of the London Journal.

The Family Herald, which lacks even the social awareness of the London Journal, seems at first glance to crystallize the reactive prudery

of readers fighting for respectability. Its constant treading around the borders of the subject reveals an obsessive concern with female virtue. Yet the stories which deal with the unchaste woman by analogy--the stories in which her sin is love rather than fornication--do suggest that women are responsible for their own destinies. Security and happiness are in the woman's hands; all men are not ideal and it is up to her to preserve her bargaining counters and her rational judgment untouched by emotional considerations in order to see quite clearly what she is getting into.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

During the 1840's there was a sudden proliferation of books, articles, refuges, and societies dealing with prostitution and related concerns. It seems an odd phenomenon for the opening of the Victorian era until one realizes that the interest was a sign of increased public decency rather than the reverse. Though authors treated the great social evil with sometimes surprising frankness, they did so because they were coming to see the prostitute as a problem rather than an inevitable part of the social order.

The double standard ensured that the social problem was, actually, a problem primarily affecting the sex which was not expected to know of its existence. The women who wrote fiction with a purpose, as a direct contribution to the public discussion of the social evil, inherited from the early nineteenth century evangelical movement a tradition that charity was a natural extension of the feminine role. Woman's function was to serve others and to provide an influence for moral improvement. The traditional mode of woman's charity was personal contact rather than organized philanthropy. Fiction extends the personal; it turns problems into people. Fiction is read, furthermore, by women who would not see an expensive medical treatise or the articles in quarterly reviews which were read chiefly by intellectuals among the upper middle class. Even the daily newspaper was still, until the abolition of the Stamp Tax, expensive enough that it was likely to be read by men at their clubs or

offices instead of taken in at home. Women wrote about the problem of unchastity, therefore, both to inform and to reform. The style and content of their fiction was shaped by the explicit moral and by the audience for whom the moral was intended.

Frances Trollope's Jessie Phillips (monthly parts, 1842-43)¹ is a propaganda novel about a legal problem affecting the one unmarried woman in every thirteen who was, according to the Registrar General, living in such a manner that she was likely to produce illegitimate children.² Prior to the New Poor Law of 1834 the father of a bastard child had to give security to the parish to prevent the child from becoming a burden to it; in practice, this meant that he ordinarily paid the mother for the child's support. Since a woman's statement under oath was all that was required to identify the father the law came to be seen as a vehicle for false accusation and blackmail. So the situation was reversed in the New Poor Law: the woman became solely responsible for the support of her bastard; there was no provision to help her get money from the father; and if she could not maintain the child her only recourse was to go with it into the workhouse.

Jessie Phillips, a servant, has an affair with Frederic Dalton, the squire's son. Pregnant and no longer able to support herself, she discovers the horrors of the New Poor Law "Union" and realizes that her child will be doomed to a life of pauperdom if it is raised inside. For the sake of the child's future, she asks Dalton for money to support

¹Frances Trollope (1780-1836), the mother of Anthony Trollope, received some critical notice in the nineteenth century; sources are listed in NCBEL. A bibliography of her work is included in Michael Sadleir, Trollope, a Commentary (London, 1927). Recent studies have been chiefly biographical; among them is Eileen Bigland, The Indomitable Mrs. Trollope (Philadelphia, 1954).

²The Census of Great Britain in 1851 (London, 1854), p. 41.

it. He refuses. She goes into a shed, gives birth unattended, and faints. When she recovers, the child is nowhere to be found. She is accused of infanticide and imprisoned. Dalton, who has killed the child, falls into a river and drowns. Jessie is tried, found not guilty, and dies of heart failure at the moment the verdict is announced. Both justice and morality are served; all the parties to the act are dead.

Socially, the book is an attack on the New Poor Law's attempt to discourage poverty by punishing the poor. Emotionally, it centers on the special relationship of mother to child. Jessie reveals her most noble qualities when she puts the good of the child before her own pride at never having taken the wages of sin and humbles herself to beg for help; Dalton his most base when he destroys his own offspring in order to prevent possible embarrassment. Jessie knows the sexual facts of life but is innocently oblivious to the social practices of her betters; she expects that when she tells Dalton she is pregnant he will marry her, bring about a reconciliation with his parents, and joyfully welcome his heir. He offers her ten pounds instead, and at that moment she "KNEW that in her heart and soul she was immeasurably his superior." (Ch. 27)³ She would not, she says, "'be the wife of Mr. Frederic Dalton if doing so would make me a crowned queen!'" (Ch. 26) She rejoices that they are not married, so that he will have no claim on the child.

The natural mother had not only the responsibility to provide for her bastard, she had also the right to its custody, even if the father should want it and should be better able to educate and care for it. A mother who begot lawfully did not. The Custody of Infants Act, passed in 1839, bore a misleading name; it awarded only the right for a married

³Quotations are taken from the one-volume edition of 1874.

woman separated from her husband to petition Chancery for an order to see her child "at such times and subject to such regulations as it shall deem convenient."⁴ If the child were an infant--under the age of seven--the court could, if it so decided, order that the mother have temporary custody. A child over the age of seven was the legal property of its father, whether the mother were married, divorced, separated, or even widowed--a mother did not become guardian on her husband's death unless specifically so designated in his will. A father could train or educate his children however he pleased, prevent their mother from seeing them, or even send them away to be raised by his mistress. A father's right to his child was inalienable--he could not even assign custody to his wife.⁵

The Custody of Infants Act owed its passage to Caroline Norton's marital difficulties. She used her influence with members of Parliament and also the not inconsiderable talent of her pen to make public emotional capital of the occasion when she had been bodily ejected from Norton's house while trying to visit a sick child. The Act did not initially solve Caroline Norton's problems; her husband removed the children to Scotland, beyond the reach of Chancery and English law. It provided, however, something which was to be highly significant. With the right to petition Chancery in her own name, the married woman gained a limited legal existence. The first acknowledgment of the rights of woman relative to man was in her capacity as mother.

Mrs. Trollope's novel touched on other emerging feminist issues.

⁴J. J. S. Wharton, An Exposition of the Laws Relating to the Women of England (London, 1853), p. 66.

⁵Erna Reiss, Rights and Duties of Englishwomen (Manchester, 1934), p. 16.

Jessie has enough learning to read poetry and respond with her senses, but she has never been taught to look beneath the surface and see the techniques by which her emotions are stirred. She is able to appreciate but not to understand, which is for Mrs. Trollope a demonstration that one of the so-called feminine virtues--superior emotional sensitivity--is actually a fault, and not an innate fault but one created by inadequate education. During the time that Jessie is carrying on her affair with Dalton she continues to earn her own living. It is necessary to her to feel that they are equals, not buyer and seller.

On the whole, however, the message is confused, and the reason is not hard to find. The novel was published in monthly parts. When the first installments were out Mrs. Trollope began to receive "such a multitude of communications urging various and contradictory modes of treating the subject, that she became fearful of dealing too closely with a theme which might be presented to the judgment under so great a variety of aspects." (Ch. 56) Part publication circumvented the libraries; books were cut into installments so that more buyers could afford them and the profit went to the author and publisher instead of to the library in rental fees. But it had a built-in hazard for the author who listened to the critics and read the sales figures before writing the next installment. Mrs. Trollope had turned to novelizing in her fifties after her husband went bankrupt; she could not afford to alienate too many of her readers.

The climactic incident in Jessie Phillips is a parallel to the legal wrong at the core of the book. In the trial for infanticide as in the responsibility for the support of the child, the woman bears the whole burden for an act initiated by the man. But the emotional content is overwhelmingly piteous; not only is the baby which Jessie anticipated lovingly, despite her shame, killed while she lies unconscious from pain,

but she is persuaded by those who wish to save her soul that she herself must have killed it. Psychologically and physically, if not morally, she is a victim. Mrs. Trollope's problem was that she was writing propaganda for legal change, and the law could not be changed by praising the strength of women but by painting their weakness and arousing the chivalry of male legislators.⁶

The decade's concern about the wrongs of women was made up of two distinct streams, though contemporaries often failed to see the difference. One led in the direction of feminism as we now use the word; the other was what contemporaries called the "protection of woman" question. Protectionism assumes that because women are physically and intellectually the weaker sex they should be given the benefit of laws and institutions designed to compensate for their inherent inferiority. Protectionist thinking in Parliament led to the Mine and Factory Acts of 1842 and 1844. Working conditions in early Victorian industry were deplorable for everyone, but only under the protectionist banner was it palatable for government to interfere with the freedom of capital to make any contract it found possible with laborers.

Specifically carnal protectionism blossomed in a periodical called The Female's Friend.⁷ The first leading article, "Social Claims:

⁶The situation was partly remedied soon after the publication of Jessie Phillips by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1844 and the Bastardy Act of 1845, which provided that if the mother could, within twelve months after the birth of an illegitimate child, produce corroborative evidence as to the identity of the child's father, the justices could order him to pay up to 2s.6d. a week for the child's support. Mrs. Trollope had attacked the corroborative evidence provision in the novel by showing that a gentleman of reasonable intelligence like Frederic Dalton would be careful never to write a note or to be seen with Jessie by anyone who knew his name.

⁷Jan.-Apr. 1846, published by the Associate Institution for Improving and Enforcing the Laws for the Protection of Women.

Considered in Relation to Females," has as its thesis the premise that the majority of "unhappy females" (which is the strongest word the magazine can bring itself to use) are "victims--absolute victims! . . . induced to leave their country homes under the promise of some eligible situation in London; and then, entangled in the fatal snare, without money, without friends, and without any possible means of escape . . . consigned to that horrible doom by which such helpless victims are, humanly speaking, placed beyond the possibility of return."⁸ The magazine's tone is consistently hectic: "the victims of treachery are the most beautiful, most interesting, and most defenceless part of the community; and, therefore . . . the crime is characterized by everything unmanly, cowardly, mean, beastly, deceptive, profane, diabolical, cruel, and deadly."⁹ The evil could be met on two fronts: the first, passing laws to regulate sexual behavior, and the second, educating girls about morality, teaching youths to be the protectors and guardians of women, and keeping a close watch on daughters and servants.

Nelly Armstrong (2 vols. 1853), by Sarah R. Whitehead,¹⁰ is a protectionist novel much in the mood of The Female's Friend. Nelly Armstrong leaves her rural home to go into service in Edinburgh. She loses her job when she is discovered to be pregnant, experiences a number of horrors including the death of her baby, rejects suicide only on the hope of being reunited with the child in heaven, and then is rescued and brought back to her native village by Miss Elliot, the daughter of a former employer.

⁸The Female's Friend, 1 (Jan. 1846), 4.

⁹"Criminality and Impunity," The Female's Friend, 1 (Apr. 1846), p. 84. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰In the absence of any biographical or critical information, it may be worth noting that Whitehead's first published novel was subtitled "The Autobiography of a Scotch Minister's Daughter."

The book makes use of a number of standard conventions. Nelly's unchastity destroys her family: her father dies in a colliery accident caused by his mental distress and her mother goes blind. Nelly soon completes her purification by taking consumption.¹¹ No social rehabilitation is even remotely considered. Nelly lives out her brief life in prayer and isolation. The really very sordid passages in the Edinburgh slums--the greengrocer who accommodates pregnant girls in return for a cut of the money they can expect as wet nurses, the whores with whom Nelly is living when her baby dies--provided an awful warning. The reviewer in the Literary Gazette found it "a book which the young may profitably read for the counsels and warnings which it contains, and from which the heads of families may derive useful hints for the protection and happiness of those under their charge."¹²

Nelly Armstrong is a tract for employers. Nelly's sin is the fault of her mistress in the city, who feels that servants know about morality and that it would be presumptuous to supervise their behavior. That, for Whitehead, is culpable carelessness. Servants were not to be treated like morally independent beings, but to be guided and protected by their betters.¹³

The protection of woman instinct was at its root highly conservative. The redundant women about ^{whom} W. R. Greg worried were not the servants or the maiden aunts with a useful function in the home who "fulfill both

¹¹Spiritual purification in the crucible of physical pain was a device beloved by the Religious Tract Society's publications. One which deals with a fallen woman is "A Brand Plucked out of the Fire: or, an account of Elizabeth Kenning" (London, n.d.).

¹²Literary Gazette, 9 Apr. 1853, p. 353.

¹³The Edinburgh slum scenes and several specific details of moral program seem to be drawn from William Tait, Magdalenism (Edinburgh, 1840).

essentials of a woman's being; they are supported by, and they minister to, men." He was concerned about women who follow an "independent and therefore for their sex an unnatural career . . ." ¹⁴ It is thus not surprising that the earliest of the women authors to recognize that it was the very economic and psychological subservience of women which created their sexual danger were women who wrote not for the middle classes but for working women. They perceived that protection was the road to eternal submission, and that only the truly independent woman could develop the enlightened self-interest which made her able to defend her own honor.

Mary Howitt's Work and Wages; or, Life in Service (pocket-sized volume, [1842]) is one of a series which she had published by Thomas Tegg, who had an unsavory reputation and a network of outlets in lower-class neighborhoods. ¹⁵ Economic self-interest is one of the themes; the heroine, Jane Ford, errs in accepting substandard wages, even from a kind and deserving employer, because she is unable to save money to apprentice her sister or to tide herself over a spell of bad luck.

Towards the end of the book Jane discovers her sister Rachel walking the streets of London with babe in arms. Rachel has tried to give up her "gay" life for the sake of the child and is on the verge of starvation. Jane never doubts her duty; she provides a place for her sister to stay, nurses her while she dies, and finds a foster home for the child. Sisters do go wrong, and the working classes take them in and raise their children.

¹⁴Why Are Women Redundant?, p. 26. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵Mary Howitt (1799-1888) left journals and letters which were edited by her daughter Margaret as Mary Howitt, An Autobiography (2 vols., London, 1889). There are two recent studies, chiefly biographical: Carl Ray Woodring, Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt (Lawrence, Kansas, 1952) and Amice Lee, Laurels and Rosemary: The Life of William and Mary Howitt (London, 1955).

(Howitt had touched on the same theme in an earlier book of the series, Little Coin, Much Care.) But Jane is afraid of middle-class prudery so she conceals the arrangement from her employers. The moral is that concealment is wrong, that to help the fallen is a virtuous and admirable act, and that even enlightened self-interest does not require that one turn away from a sister in trouble.

Eliza Cook's Journal (1849-54) was a weekly magazine with a feminist bias and a price (1½ pence) which appealed to scantily-filled purses. It had a circulation slightly greater than Dickens' Household Words though only a fraction that of the London Journal. In the absence of a correspondence column it is hard to gauge exactly who the readers were, but one has the impression that many may have been, like the editor, mature single women. The magazine depended far less on love stories than the penny weeklies; more typically a blighted or unrequited romance forms the background for a story about a single woman leading a useful life.¹⁶

The columns of Eliza Cook's Journal advocated the Bloomer, a property act for married women, and other reforms. But Cook's feminism stopped short of suffrage when she discovered that the speakers at the American Women's Rights Convention in 1853 had called for the overthrow of the government by force with the cry that "every step of human progress has been made through blood." That was going too far: "Women possess no power indeed! . . . Who form the characters and mold the opinions of

¹⁶Eliza Cook (1818-1889) was able to use her poetry as Dickens did his fiction to attract readers to her periodical. Her verse was compared to Thomas Hood's; "She did not," John Ingram wrote, "attempt to please poets or philosophers--her audience was the people"; see "Eliza Cook," The Poets and the Poetry of the Century, ed. Alfred H. Miles (London, [1905-07]), VIII, 269. She is in DNB and CBEL; Poems, Second Series (London, 1845) has a short biographical preface. There is a striking portrait of Eliza Cook, Lady Blessington and Caroline Norton in Reynolds's Miscellany, 1 (1847), 233.

men? . . . Yes! they who hold the leading-strings of children are the veritable rulers of the world."¹⁷

Most stories about the unchaste woman in Eliza Cook's Journal focus on the importance of the child as a motive for the mother's reform and a reason for society to welcome her back. "The Solitary Child,"¹⁸ an unacknowledged re-telling of "A Child of Sorrow," published in Hood's Magazine,¹⁹ demonstrates Cook's emphasis on the practical help given by women to other women. The details of the incident are the same in both versions: a woman discovers that the ragged little girl who lurks around her house staring in the windows is her servant's illegitimate child. In Hood's Magazine the story is abstractly told; in Eliza Cook's Journal there is a first-person narrator with a familiar tone, the characters are given names, and the action is revealed through dialogue. The Hood's Magazine story had closed on an emotional note:

Think of the misery of this poor child, driven, from the mere instinct of longing for its parent, to the staid demeanour of age, while the other merry little ones were sporting around it. Think of what she must have suffered, as she gazed, day after day, at the frowning door . . . Think of the suffering mother, dreading to lose, with her place and character, the means of supporting her hapless, prematurely old infant.----
Oh, man, man, thou hast much to answer for!

The version in Eliza Cook's Journal, on the other hand, emphasizes the supportiveness of the employer who arranges for the servant to have some free time to spend with her child:

Some would have thought they were doing a service to the cause of public virtue by turning this servant out of their house, and perhaps throwing her back upon vice. My aunt's philosophy, or rather let us call it her practical religion, was, to secure the

¹⁷"Women's Rights Convention," Eliza Cook's Journal, 10 (19 Nov. 1853), 63.

¹⁸Eliza Cook's Journal, 5 (25 Aug. 1851), 415-16.

¹⁹₁ (1844), 170-71.

woman's preservation from evil by retaining her in a course of honest industry, and by fortifying her virtuous resolves.

Another Eliza Cook's Journal story, Eliza Meteyard's "Lucy Dean; the Noble Needlewoman,"²⁰ was, like the London Journal's "The Slave of the Needle," printed in immediate response to the Mayhew series in the Morning Chronicle. The contrast between sentimental protectionism and active sisterhood as a response to woman's economic and sexual woes could not be more clear.

Lucy Dean is in deep poverty at the opening of the story. The only person who gives her any aid is a downtrodden workhouse servant employed by the sweater's family who steals some food for her. Going to pawn her last possession, Lucy hears that a woman named Mary Austen has written a pamphlet on female emigration. Lucy visits her and is referred to a job which will allow her to save money towards her passage. Lucy has a younger sister, Nelly, who has "gone wrong"--and not solely from need, which would be forgivable, but because she had trusted a man and been deluded by him, which Meteyard finds more culpable. But, as Mary Austen says, "if we, as women despair of helping our sister women, what can men do? No! it is only through labour--honest self-help, that those standing can raise the fallen."²¹

Lucy gets to Australia, taking Nelly's baby with her, and becomes domestic manager for a large community of men. She brings order to their living arrangements and cooks them decent meals, thus improving their health and spirits, and persuades them to tax themselves for a year in order to bring over a shipload of women to marry.

Meanwhile, Mary Austen bodily prevents Nelly from committing

²⁰Eliza Cook's Journal, 2 (16 Mar. - 20 Apr. 1850), 312-395.

²¹Eliza Cook's Journal, 2 (23 Mar. 1850), 331.

suicide and discovers that she had fallen not so much from love of the man as from the belief that if he did marry her she would be able to assist her destitute family. "Woman's failings," says Mary, "spring too often from her nobler self, her weakness from her generosity."²² Because Meteyard believes in altruism Nelly need not suffer long. After a year of penance she is off to Australia to marry the man who had loved her before she ran away with the rich man's son, and who has already started building a house and teaching Nelly's daughter to call him "father."

Lucy has also received a proposal. She insists that the marriage be postponed until she has toured Australia in aid of her plan and returned to London to bring back the first shipload of women. An elderly philanthropist says to Lucy and Mary: "Now God bless you both, great women--many have united man and woman into one; let me, upon this, my dying bed, do what is wiser--unite woman and woman together--and tell them, that in unity, Divine work lies for them to do."²³

Meteyard has chosen her characters deliberately: Lucy, Nelly, the gentlewoman Mary Austen, the workhouse servant, and the illiterate Irishwoman who saves Nelly's baby by nursing it demonstrate that the common interests of women cut across the conventional barriers of class and respectability. Meteyard is looking for an image of woman that is strong and yet wholly feminine. Woman's peculiar virtues are not merely

²²Eliza Cook's Journal, 2 (6 Apr. 1850), 361-62.

²³Eliza Cook's Journal, 2 (20 Apr. 1850), 395. Mary Austen was probably inspired by Caroline Chisholm, who had been, since the 1840's, encouraging emigration as the alternative to starvation wages for women. Her Family Colonization Loan Society was organized on cooperative principles. One of its purposes was to provide chaperonage on shipboard so that unprotected women would not be at the mercy of sailors. Dickens' somewhat less favorable view of Chisholm and her efforts is embodied in the character of Mrs. Jellyby in Bleak House (1852-53).

compensations for lack of intelligence nor are they pseudo-virtues socially inculcated to keep her in subordination. They are positive traits separate from the competitive world inhabited by men. Meteyard praises altruism, cooperation, mercy, compassion--and sensible attention to people's physical needs. Chastity is less important than the ultimate virtue of preserving life and making it pleasant to live.

Meteyard also contributed to Howitt's Journal, a short-lived attempt by William and Mary Howitt to provide serious economic discussion and non-escapist fiction for the working classes. Her stories are essentially temporal tracts; her characters reap an earthly reward for conversion to intelligent behavior.²⁴ Environmental determinism is wholly reversible; when conditions are changed people will and do improve. Though she believed in "social and industrial communities" and was asked to head an Owenite settlement in the United States²⁵ she had little patience with theoretical visionaries. Idealism was for her a male trait; her sympathies were with the women of the period who founded the professions like nursing and social work.

"The Worm Towards the Sun"²⁶ opens with a nice demonstration of the

²⁴Eliza Meteyard (1816-79) is just slipping out of literary history; she is mentioned in CBEL as the biographer of Josiah Wedgwood but is not in NCBEL. Biographical information is in DNB, in the preface to her Industrial and Household Tales (London, 1872), and in memoirs of her various acquaintances. There is no critical study or complete bibliography. She turned her pen to anything that would bring in money: prize essay competitions, childrens' books, travel sketches, and articles for periodicals ranging from The Reliquary to The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor. From mid-1846 she supplied regular pieces on social reform to Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper; Jerrold gave her the pseudonym "Silverpen" under which much of her later work appeared. She was one of the group involved with the English Woman's Journal and the friend who looked into her literary affairs after she died was William Woodall, the M. P. at the head of the Woman Suffrage faction in the House of Commons.

²⁵Meteyard, Industrial and Household Tales, p. xi.

²⁶Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine, 5 (1847), 172-85.

difference between the sexes. A girl, whose name turns out to be Magdalen, is about to commit suicide when she is interrupted by a man who clutches her dress and gives her a lecture on immorality, and in particular on the extreme impropriety of killing herself on the Sabbath. An authoress named Miss Fogg steps in, feels in her pocket to see if she has enough money for a cab, and takes the girl home with her. Magdalen, who admits that she has been "frail," swiftly becomes a helpful companion. A sailor for whom Miss Fogg has translated letters wants to marry Magdalen, but she has compunctions about bringing shame on him--until he falls ill and needs her help. Then, more equal, they marry and raise a large family.

Almost without exception in the fiction of the 1840's the unchaste girl is of a lower social class than the man in the case. Meteyard's article on the protection of woman question points out that the sex difference is in itself a class difference; the law might conceivably "protect" women, but a more equal distribution of wealth and education would allow them to look after themselves.²⁷

The story written to illuminate this message is "The Angel of the Unfortunate."²⁸ A baby girl abandoned in the doorway of a Paris hospital grows up to be an anatomist and pursues a career of moral rescue and

²⁷"Comments on Mr. Spooner's Bill," Howitt's Journal, 1 (19 June 1847), 339-41. Mr. Spooner introduced his bill for the suppression of trading in seduction and prostitution and for the better protection of females on 30 Mar. 1847 by saying that "there existed in the metropolis an association which counted amongst its members, its council, and its vice-presidents and presidents, some of the highest and noblest in the land--" At that point Mr. Berkeley rose to call the attention of the Speaker to the presence of strangers in the galleries; see Hansard, 193 (30 Mar. 1847), col. 617-18. Further discussion was conducted behind closed doors; the details are unpublished. Mr. Hume registered the objection that "the hon. Member had done much injury by directing the attention of people towards [the subject] when they might never otherwise have heard of it"; see Hansard, 194 (13 May 1847), col. 788. The bill was ultimately withdrawn.

²⁸Howitt's Journal, 2 (18, 25 Sept. 1847), 186-99.

sanitary reform among the whores of the city. Unlike the foundling heroines of popular novels and penny dreadfuls she does not turn out to be the bastard of a Duke or a baby for whom a counterfeit heiress was substituted in the cradle. Her origin is never traced. She is simply a woman--any woman--who is detached from a conventional family role and educated in the company of men. Meteyard includes a romance to keep the readers happy but the man is faceless and, in fact, usually out of town regaining his health. Sisterhood is once more the theme; even unregenerate whores are shown helping the needy. In a lengthy footnote Meteyard tries to amalgamate the two strains of her argument. "Evil government" should be eradicated to eliminate the "vicious social condition" that allows hunger and ignorance to drive lower-class girls to prostitution. But woman's more particular role is to ease the lot of the people who will continue to suffer until the revolution comes.

Meteyard had conducted research in police and prison reports. She realized that the typical whore was not the sentimental stereotype deluded and seduced by a man and cast out by her irate parents, but was more apt to be a girl whose parents (if she had any) had urged her into a profession which looked attractive because of the wretched wages paid for other female labor.²⁹ Meteyard never used such a woman as a heroine; she may have been cowed by the reception of her first novel, which was roundly damned because it dealt with matter unfit for a lady's pen.³⁰ On the other hand, despite her belief in the power of the environment in forming character, she is not willing, as were the authors who dealt

²⁹Meteyard's paper on juvenile crime, which won second place in an essay competition, is incorporated in Henry Worsley, Juvenile Depravity (London, 1849).

³⁰"Struggles for Fame, by Eliza Meteyard," Literary Gazette, 25 Oct. 1845, p. 704.

with similar themes in the London Journal, to excuse the woman entirely and weep great tears over her fate. Meteyard believes that, no matter how extenuating the circumstances, the woman who falls is responsible for her predicament. The unchaste women in her stories have committed a crime and are forced to recognize it as such, but it is a crime of less magnitude than, say, neglect of children or intentional cruelty. Those who fall differ from other women chiefly in the ability to exercise common sense.

The only story of this genre (i.e., written by a woman for women with the direct intention to do good) which has survived the restrictions of its time, audience, and immediate moral is Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell's Ruth (3 vols. 1853). Mrs. Gaskell's literary origins have the same ambience as those of the figures we have been considering. Her first published stories appeared in Howitt's Journal, one of them in the same issue as Eliza Meteyard's "Comments on Mr. Spooner's Bill."³¹ She and Meteyard spent the evening with the Howitts on Christmas Day, 1850. (Everyone told ghost stories.)³² When Eliza Cook first planned her magazine she asked Mrs. Gaskell to become a contributor.³³ William Howitt was the agent who placed Mary Barton (2 vols. 1848) with its publishers.

With that novel Mrs. Gaskell moved away from the Howitt-Cook school

³¹"Life in Manchester: Libbie Marsh's Three Eras," by "Cotton Mather Mills, Esq.," Howitt's Journal, 1 (5-19 June 1847), 310-47.

³²Margaret Howitt, ed., Mary Howitt, An Autobiography (London, 1889), II, 65-66.

³³Ross D. Waller, ed., Letters Addressed to Mrs. Gaskell by Celebrated Contemporaries Now in the Possession of the John Rylands Library (Manchester, 1935), pp. 48-49. Mrs. Gaskell apparently did not, however, provide any fiction for Eliza Cook's Journal.

of temporal tract into the social problem novel per se. Ruth considers the same issues--woman's virtue, motherhood, social regeneration--but the pace and scope of the realistic novel strip the ethical problems of their deceptive simplicity. Ruth's is therefore a far more significant victory, for she achieves her regeneration not in isolation, and not by changing society, but within society.

The immediate aim of the book was to make readers think about their unexamined assumption that loss of chastity was so fatal a contaminant that the wrongdoer must be utterly excluded from the company of decent folk so as not to spread the contagion. "I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in," Mrs. Gaskell wrote, "if only I have made people talk & discuss the subject a little more than they did."³⁴ Unexamined opinions are necessarily superficial, and, on the most superficial level, conventional social opinions are the villains of the novel. "Respectability" is the immediate cause of Ruth's fall: the dressmaker to whom Ruth is apprenticed keeps up the character of her establishment by dismissing Ruth for walking alone with a young man. The direct consequence of loss of reputation is loss of chastity (rather than vice versa); Bellingham rises to the occasion and offers Ruth his protection.

Mr. Bradshaw later personifies conventional morality. He is horrified that his daughters have been "exposed to corruption," though he himself had been so impressed with Ruth's refinement that he had proposed she be their governess. He does not want to examine his stand either in light of Ruth's own character or of the Reverend Benson's allusions to Jesus and Mary Magdalen. The Bible is not a guide to daily life: "The world has decided how such women are to be treated; and you may

³⁴The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 226.

depend upon it, there is so much practical wisdom in the world, that its way of acting is right in the long-run . . . '" (Ch. 27) Mr. Bradshaw is clearly meant to be an unpleasant character, with his harshness to his own children, his ostentatious generosity, his tasteless house, and his overbearing manner.

Because of conventional opinion, Benson and his sister Faith pretend that Ruth is a widow. In the parallel instance of Richard Bradshaw's forgery, it is argued that the world's censure hardens the criminal, and that therefore his best chance for rehabilitation lies in forgiveness and the opportunity to start again with an unimpaired reputation. Yet to perpetrate a lie is wrong. Benson suffers for it. If the lie was justified because it was required by the state of society there is only one logical conclusion: society should be changed so that lies are unnecessary.

Logic is not, however, the novelist's most effective tool. In the scene in which Ruth's pregnancy is discovered Mrs. Gaskell substitutes for one conventional reaction another of greater emotional power. Faith Benson sees the child as a punishment: a badge of sin. Benson counters, logically, that sin is sin and is a matter between Ruth and God which has nothing to do with the publication of its existence in the form of a baby. For Ruth, however, the child is a blessing: "'Oh my God, I thank thee! Oh! I will be so good!'" (Ch. 11)³⁵ At that moment Ruth ceases to be a child and becomes a woman. Motherhood motivates her religious redemption, provides both means and desire for social regeneration, and elucidates woman's special virtues.

The simplistic value of the child as a motive for repentance was

³⁵The editions of the novel for which Mrs. Gaskell corrected proof do not supply capital letters for pronouns referring to the deity. The chapter titles are also posthumous additions.

common among writers whose eyes were fixed on the other world; Nelly Armstrong avoids suicide so that she may be reunited with her child in heaven. Mrs. Gaskell's own Lizzie Leigh³⁶ reforms for the same reason. But in this more fully-created world the relationship of the temporal and the spiritual is richer.

Critics objected to the extent of Ruth's innocence at the opening of the story. Both the Literary Gazette and the Spectator complained that it was unrealistic for a girl who had been even three months in a milliners' shop to be totally ignorant of the facts of life.³⁷ Others believed that Mrs. Gaskell had herself been misled by social convention, and that, morally, a life-time of sorrow was too great a price to pay for a fault so thoroughly exonerated by the circumstances the author had created.³⁸

Ruth's innocence, however, has both a practical and a theological function, each with a social moral. Mrs. Gaskell, like Mrs. Trollope, echoes the sentiment that Mary Wollstonecraft had expressed in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: "many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are . . . ruined before they know the difference between virtue and vice."³⁹ Mrs. Gaskell tries to make Ruth's innocence believable by demonstrating that she is as ignorant of the ordinary mechanics of living as of sexual mores; she is, for example,

³⁶See below.

³⁷Literary Gazette, 22 Jan. 1853, pp. 79-80; Spectator, 15 Jan. 1853, pp. 61-62.

³⁸See G. H. Lewes, "Ruth and Villette," Westminster Review, NS 3 (1853), 474-91 and W. R. Greg, "False Morality of Lady Novelists," National Review, 8 (1859), 144-76.

³⁹Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, ed. Charles W. Hagelman, Jr. (New York, 1967), p. 119.

perplexed about paying for the cup of tea she has had at an inn. The kind of innocence in which the middle class tried to keep its daughters made them unfit to exist without protection. In a world in which a girl of fifteen can be left to her own resources she must not be kept a child.

And if innocence is not practical, neither is it desirable. One must attain the knowledge of good and evil before one is capable of making a choice for good. The theological question, wholly avoided by contemporary reviewers, is that of the fortunate fall. Ruth is a faintly Wordsworthian child in the opening chapters; she lives in a dreamy, indistinct haphazardness, vaguely responsive to feelings of pleasure and highly influenced by an appreciation of natural beauty. Ruth's innocence is so profound that she is, even after her fall, for a time quite happy; there is no natural revulsion when chastity is lost nor any immediate moral or psychological repercussion. Social reaction opens her eyes; a child refuses to let her kiss his baby sister because he had heard his mother say that Ruth was a "bad, naughty girl!" (Ch. 6) Once Ruth is aware of her guilt, distress follows (in sequent, if not consequent order); Bellingham falls ill and his mother comes to his rescue, leaving Ruth abandoned in a holiday town in Wales.

Her first reaction on being admitted to the knowledge of evil is an overwhelming desire to return to a state of childish innocence. That being impossible, her second is to rush to the opposite extreme and complete her self-destruction. But because God/nature gives her good for evil--gives her the child as a result of her sin--she develops the desire and the capability to choose good.

Ruth is never degraded by her sin. After beginning to educate herself for the sake of teaching Leonard, and after living in the Bensons'

household, she becomes mentally and socially as well as morally a better person: "six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal." (Ch. 19) Both psychologically--for the sake of the realism of the novel--and theologically, for Mrs. Gaskell, conversion does not come in an instant. At first, Ruth allows herself to be saved, placing herself under Benson's protection. It is not until much later, after Ruth has been for years a student, a mother, and a governess for the Bradshaw girls, that we realize how important her initial pliability was in order to provide the contrast for the strong and wholly womanly woman that even such as she can become.

The pretense of widowed motherhood is a social parallel to childhood's moral innocence; it may be necessary for a time but it should not endure. Long after Ruth's religious redemption is complete she suffers her social fall: her sin is made known to the world. Again she rises stronger than before. It is her social rehabilitation, not her religious penance, which is accomplished by her heroic nursing. After the epidemic, her son Leonard was able to walk "erect in the streets of Ecclestone, where 'Many arose and called her blessed.'" (Ch. 33)

If the lie had not been found out, if Ruth had remained merely a governess, her life would not have meant so much to so many. In Mrs. Gaskell's view, as in Eliza Meteyard's, the special virtue of feminine nature is that woman is called out of herself by her consideration for others, especially for the weak, the helpless, and the suffering. Ruth had shown that virtue in her most fallen state: her headlong rush towards suicide had been halted by Benson's cry of pain.

The practical, caring virtue is at the core of the difference

between the sexes. Man considers the verities, woman the humanities.

When the lie is out, Benson says:

"I did very wrong in making that false statement at first."

"No! I am sure you did not," said Miss Faith. "Ruth has had some years of peace, in which to grow stronger and wiser, so that she can bear her shame now in a way she never could have done at first."

"All the same it was wrong in me to do what I did."

"I did it too, as much or more than you. And I don't think it wrong. I'm certain it was quite right, and I would do just the same again."

"Perhaps it has not done you the harm it has done me."

"Nonsense! Thurstan. Don't be morbid. I'm sure you are as good--and better than ever you were."

"No, I am not. I have got what you call morbid, just in consequence of the sophistry by which I persuaded myself that wrong could be right. I torment myself. I have lost my clear instincts of conscience. . . . Oh, Faith! it is such a relief to have the truth known, that I am afraid I have not been sufficiently sympathising with Ruth."

"Poor Ruth!" said Miss Benson. "But at any rate our telling a lie has been the saving of her. There is no fear of her going wrong now."

(Ch. 27)

They are both right, of course, which is why social attitudes must be changed. Yet the sexual difference stands out. In this scene, Benson is thinking of abstract morality and himself, while Faith considers practical results and the other person, Ruth.

The feminine virtues are developed through motherhood. The mother of a nursing infant must, of necessity, place her body at the service of another and learn to sense needs which cannot be communicated verbally. Furthermore, the child is a tie to human society and to the future. Ruth fears exposure only for its effect on Leonard and seeks practical social rehabilitation primarily so that he may escape the debility of being branded by his mother's sin.

And finally, in the climactic scene of the book, the good of the child gives Ruth the courage to rise above society. Her refusal to marry Bellingham (now called Donne) is wholly her own action, taken without

advice, without consultation, and in contravention of social expectations. Some, even, among the most sympathetic reviewers thought that it was wrong:

Is he not the father? . . . Has she such complete dominion over Leonard that she dares, of her own choice, deprive him of his father? . . .

We do not deny that Ruth's rejection of Mr. Donne is natural, and we acknowledge it just. We doubt whether it be Christian, whether, in God's eye, she be not his wife, and forbidden to turn from him when he turns to her; whether, in fact, her refusal of him be not simply the sign that she has not self-sacrifice enough in her to devote her life to the man who has wronged her . . .⁴⁰

But Ruth knows that there are worse things for a child than illegitimacy. "If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the one ^{fact} that it would bring Leonard into contact with you," she says, "that would be enough." (Ch. 24)

Caroline Norton's troubles were again in the newspapers in the summer of 1853. Contemporary readers were fully aware that Leonard was over seven and that Ruth, if married, could not have protected him from the influence of an immoral father. Ruth as a single woman can fulfil the function of motherhood in a way which would have been impossible were she married. Ruth, as a mother, has strength to rise above society's expectations and has the desire, for her son's sake, to compel society's respect.

The feminine virtues developed through motherhood lead Ruth to

⁴⁰"Ruth: A Novel," North British Review, 19 (1853), 163. Mrs. Gaskell called the review "delicious" and asked "Who the deuce could have written it? It is so truly religious, it makes me swear with delight. I think it is one of the Christian Socialists, but I can't make out which." (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 222) Wellesley identifies the author as J. M. Ludlow, barrister, Christian Socialist, and known to Mrs. Gaskell (at least by name) as a co-founder with Kingsley, Maurice, and others of a cooperative tailors' shop; see The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 90. Other reviewers worried about the same point. The writer in Prospective Review thinks Ruth's decision is allowable, but finds it necessary to devote a lengthy legalistic argument to the support of his opinion; see Prospective Review, 9 (1853), 244-45.

take up nursing, and especially at first the nursing of the poor and downtrodden who need her most.⁴¹ And finally, the same womanly virtue leads her to nurse Bellingham/Donne: "'I don't think I should love him, if he were well and happy--but you said he was ill--and alone--how can I help caring for him?'" (Ch. 34) It may be true, as J. M. Ludlow suggested in his review, that Mrs. Gaskell found it necessary to end the book sadly so that no still-innocent girl would be moved by Ruth's ultimate holiness to a desire to emulate her,⁴² but she very clearly makes the death not a penitent suffering but a heroic expression of the height of woman's nature, brought about not by her sin but by the nobility of her virtue.

Because a good deal of evidence survives about the work of a major novelist, it is possible to see in Ruth some of the interrelationships of literature and society. The book had its origins in both personal experience and contemporary perception of the social evil, and it was intended to affect social opinion.

Esther, in Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, Mary Barton (1848), was a conventional whore on a downward path, though she retained enough human decency to take steps to prevent her niece Mary from repeating her own error. Late in the following year, Mrs. Gaskell became interested in a young prostitute who wanted to reform. She wrote to Charles Dickens for advice about helping the girl to emigrate, turning to him not as an author

⁴¹It must be remembered that the novel was written before the Crimea had made nursing a respectable occupation, though Mrs. Gaskell had been for some time acquainted with the Nightingale family. Florence Nightingale admired Ruth and particularly approved that Mrs. Gaskell "had not made Ruth start at once as a hospital nurse, but arrive at it after much other nursing that came first"; quoted in A. W. Ward's introduction to Ruth and Other Tales (London, 1906), p. xv.

⁴²North British Review, 19 (1853), 162.

but because of his association with Urania Cottage, established in 1847 by Angela Burdett-Coutts as a refuge which would teach fallen women household skills and send them out to the colonies.⁴³ Dickens sent Mrs. Gaskell the advice she wanted and soon thereafter asked her for a contribution for the periodical he was about to start. She responded with "Lizzie Leigh," which became the leading story in the first issue of Household Words on March 30, 1850.⁴⁴

"Lizzie Leigh" tells of a rural mother's search through the streets of Manchester for her daughter who has gone wrong. The daughter, Lizzie, is discovered through her child, who is being cared for by a young woman named Susan. The child falls downstairs and dies; Lizzie is moved to strive for redemption so that she may rejoin the child in heaven. She goes to live in a secluded cottage, where "every sound of sorrow in the whole upland is heard . . . every call of suffering or of sickness for help is listened to, by a sad, gentle-looking woman who rarely smiles . . . but who comes out of her seclusion whenever there's a shadow in any household. Many hearts bless Lizzie Leigh."⁴⁵

The focus of the story is on the search; Lizzie's redemption occupies only the last few paragraphs. But two of the key ideas of Ruth are there: that religious redemption comes through the child and social rehabilitation through a life of feminine service to others. Nathaniel Hawthorne used similar motifs in The Scarlet Letter; Mrs. Gaskell probably read Hawthorne's novel at about the time she began writing Ruth⁴⁶ but the presence of

⁴³The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, pp. 98-100.

⁴⁴Household Words, 1 (30 Mar. - 13 Apr. 1850), 2-65.

⁴⁵Household Words, 1 (13 Apr. 1850), p. 65.

⁴⁶She was having The Scarlet Letter bound on 14 Jan. 1851 (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 142) and by March 25th of the same year was talking

the same themes in the story of "Lizzie Leigh"--who, in a further parallel, lives like Hester in a lonely cottage on the edge of the wild--makes it a case of coincidental reinforcement rather than direct influence. "Lizzie Leigh" was in Dickens' hands by the fourteenth of March, 1850, and The Scarlet Letter was published in Boston on the sixteenth of the same month.

Dickens paid Mrs. Gaskell twenty pounds for "Lizzie Leigh" and though her husband "composedly buttoned it up in his pocket" he did promise that she could have some of the money to use in the cause that had inspired the story.⁴⁷ Mrs. Gaskell provided an outfit for her sewing girl, visited her in prison, and arranged for the master of the Ragged School to accompany her to London to board a ship for the Cape. Her personal observation convinced her that Pasley, though she had voluntarily entered a refuge and repeatedly expressed a desire to reform, needed to have "as free and unbranded a character as she can"⁴⁸ and also, in the meantime, actual physical protection from bad companions. Like Ruth at the outset of the novel, she absolutely required child-like supervision.

The religious and social writers whose work preceded or was contemporary with Mrs. Gaskell's had made use of the ideas that girls often fell in ignorance and that the child could be a motive to reform. The Westminster Review article on prostitution, which appeared in 1850 when Mrs. Gaskell was planning Ruth, and which she might be expected to have seen inasmuch as it included a long quotation from Mary Barton, dwells

over Ruth with her friends; see John G. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention (Fontwell, Sussex, 1970), p. 160.

⁴⁷The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 113. Six years later Mrs. Gaskell signed the first petition to Parliament in favor of a Married Woman's Property Act.

⁴⁸The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 99.

on the irony of calling a seduced girl honest only if she is foolish enough to marry the man who has proved his villainy by taking advantage of her; it could well have contributed to the scene in which Ruth rejects Bellingham.⁴⁹ There is little, then, in Ruth that is new or unique--except for the emphasis and focus which gave the book its total effect. Mrs. Gaskell devoted a whole novel to the unchaste woman as heroine and showed that she could become heroic. She emphasized that motherhood aids social as well as religious redemption, that the unchaste woman does not differ essentially from the woman who has not sinned except in the strength developed through taking personal responsibility for the consequences of her sin, and that woman can, by the exercise of womanly virtues, compel society to respect her.

Mrs. Gaskell's book was not primarily a warning to young girls.⁵⁰ Nor was it intended as a comfort to the fallen, though Charlotte Brontë seems to have assumed so when she wrote that it might "restore hope and energy to many who thought they had forfeited their right to both."⁵¹ Mrs. Gaskell knew enough about the economics of publishing and the facts of life among the outcast not to expect that the book would fall into their hands.⁵² She wrote for the ordinary, middle class, feminine

⁴⁹Parallels between the article by W. R. Greg in Westminster Review, 53 (1850), 448-506 and Mrs. Gaskell's novel are discussed in Aina Rubenius, The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works (Upsala, 1950), pp. 207 ff.

⁵⁰She did not allow her own daughters to see it, though she intended to read it with the eldest, then eighteen, "some quiet time or other." (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 221.)

⁵¹Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857; rpt. London, 1970), p. 358.

⁵²Eliza Cook's Journal praised the book in a review which proceeded--for nearly eight columns--to retell the story in short declarative sentences, but even this simplified version was not primarily intended for the fallen, for the moral enunciated in the closing paragraph was that the book teaches "charity for sinners . . . love for truth . . . respect for

novel reading public, and for them she felt impelled to make the adjustments that reviewers objected to as unrealistic. Ruth did not, like the actual sewing girl Pasley, spend a period as a prostitute; she was kept the sort of untainted unchaste who appealed to the emotions.

The immediate responses to the book were, for Mrs. Gaskell, extremely painful:

in several instances I have forbidden people to write, for their expressions of disapproval (although I have known that the feeling would exist in them,) would be very painful and stinging at the time. "An unfit subject for fiction" is the thing to say about it . . .⁵³ "Deep regret" is what my friends here . . . feel and express.

The personal reactions were no doubt colored by Mrs. Gaskell's public role as the wife of a clergyman. Two men in Rev. Gaskell's congregation burned one volume of the book and another forbade his wife to read it.⁵⁴ Reviewers, by and large, were not nearly so hard on the book as Mrs. Gaskell's friends. Only Sharpe's London Magazine (edited in that year by Mrs. S. C. Hall) registered an outright objection on purely moral grounds. That review virtually made Mrs. Gaskell's point for her by demanding that novelists be hypocrites; the reviewer defends Mr. Bradshaw for upholding stringent moral standards and criticizes Benson for allowing Ruth to come in contact with young girls, and yet says it is a fault for the book to end so sadly: fallen women can be saved and become the mothers of happy families, even when their fault is known. The novelist, however, must remain silent about that reality; the function of fiction is to embody a world which confirms the mores society has agreed to enforce rather

suffering . . . and honour to those who pass through it patiently and humbly"; see Eliza Cook's Journal, 8 (26 Feb. 1853), 230.

⁵³The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 220.

⁵⁴The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 223.

than the reality the author perceives.⁵⁵

Ruth pierced both literary and moral superficialities. One journal that disliked Mrs. Gaskell's novel called Nelly Armstrong, a few months later, "the best book that we have read in some time."⁵⁶ Nelly Armstrong was a terrible warning of a traditional sort; there are scenes in it far more sordid than any in Ruth and for that very reason more acceptable. The reviewer does not like to look beneath clichés. Mrs. Gaskell, he says, "should remember that there are times when her characters should be left at the doors of the chambers into which they enter to commune with their hearts and be still."⁵⁷ He has put his finger on the importance of the novel in literary history--its perceptive portrayal of Ruth's conflicting emotions and thoughts--and he dislikes it therefore.

The longer, more considered reviews in the quarterlies were far more sympathetic. It is important to note that the book was reviewed in nearly every major periodical, and at great length. Ruth was read and discussed and continued to be so. Mudie's did not ban it, though another library, Bell's, found it "unfit for family reading."⁵⁸ It was reprinted.⁵⁹ Celebrated contemporaries who were not personally acquainted with Mrs. Gaskell were moved to send her letters of praise. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote from Italy "I am grateful to you as a woman for having so treated such a subject."⁶⁰

⁵⁵Sharpe's London Magazine, NS 2 (1853), 125-26.

⁵⁶Literary Gazette, 9 Apr. 1853, p. 352.

⁵⁷Literary Gazette, 22 Jan. 1853, p. 80.

⁵⁸The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 223.

⁵⁹The edition of 1867 is identified as the eighth.

⁶⁰Waller, p. 42.

Ruth evidently set people thinking in a way that previous books on the subject had not. Blanche Smith sent a copy of it to her fiancé, Arthur Hugh Clough, who was at the time living in Massachusetts, with, apparently, a challenging list of questions, for he concluded his answer by saying "I am rather sorry you have read it--I think it must have dwelt on your mind--I hope it's all gone away."⁶¹ Mrs. Stanley, wife of the Bishop of Norwich, reported to Mrs. Gaskell that the young men she knew found it "the most virtue-stirring book they ever read."⁶²

The most striking reaction is in a memoir by Josephine Butler:

A book was published at that time by Mrs. Gaskell and was much discussed. This led to expressions of judgment which seemed to me false--fatally false. . . . A pure woman, it was reiterated, should be absolutely ignorant of a certain class of evils in the world, albeit those evils bore with murderous cruelty on other women. One young man seriously declared that he would not allow his own mother to read such a book as that under discussion. ⁶³ Silence was thought to be the great duty on all such subjects.

Shortly thereafter Josephine Butler took into her house as a servant a young woman who had served a sentence in Newgate for infanticide, the first of many such that she was to aid, first as individuals and later as a class.

Certainly Ruth was only one factor setting in motion Josephine Butler's work among prostitutes. She had already been thinking about the victimization of women. Mrs. Gaskell's book pointed the finger at society, and the social response distressed Josephine Butler more than the book itself, revealing, as it did, the sexist basis of the protectionist impulse. The sentimentalization of the "woman's kingdom"--the moral

⁶¹The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. Frederick Ludwig Mulhauser (Oxford, 1957), II, 418.

⁶²Ward, p. xv.

⁶³Josephine E. Butler; An Autobiographical Memoir, ed. George W. and Lucy A. Johnson (Bristol, 1909), p. 31.

power of motherhood in forming the thoughts and characters of men--
is revealed as cant when a young man sets himself up as judge of what
his mother may be allowed to know.

CHAPTER THREE

SEXUAL ATTITUDES IN THE MIDDLE-CLASS NOVEL, 1835-1860

Even among the great bulk of ordinary novels for middle-class readers, silence was not entirely the rule. The unchaste woman is often glimpsed merely in passing, in a starkly conventional pose intended to illuminate the other convention, from which she departs. And yet both external observation and internal self-examination called attention to facts which were difficult to fit into the accepted view of woman's nature. Matrons did have, in some cases, thoughts of which their sons were not aware. The varied and often contradictory uses of the figure in the library novel may be understood in the light of three interacting factors--moral intent, the trend toward realism, and the idealization of women.

The growth of libraries as independent commercial institutions assembled enough individuals of common tastes and interests to provide for the middle class the force of patronage which had formerly been the prerogative of the wealthy and leisured. The most influential, Mudie's Select Library, began lending books in 1842 at a charge of a guinea for a year's subscription with the privilege of borrowing one volume at a time. Mudie soon moved into an enormous domed hall in New Oxford Street, established branches in Birmingham and Manchester, made arrangements to supply other provincial libraries, and began to ship waterproof boxes to three continents.¹

¹Griest, pp. 15-26.

He bought books by the gross.² And he efficiently refused to waste shelf space on those that failed to circulate; to be remaindered by Mudie's was a great blow to the writer's ego--and also to the price he might expect his publisher to offer for a subsequent book. Novelists who depended on the profession for a living had to take care not to offend the moral values of their patrons: "Novels of objectionable character," the Mudie's catalogue promised, "are almost invariably excluded."

And yet under middle-class patronage the novel became increasingly realistic. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, already enormously popular for his historical and fashionable novels, judged the temper of the audience with his usual accuracy when he announced in the preface to his book for 1837--the first year of Queen Victoria's reign--that it was "a Novel of the present day . . . not dedicated to the narrative of extraordinary events--nor the elucidation of the characters of great men. . . . [the hero] is a man with the weaknesses derived from humanity . . . I have taken much of my tale and many of my characters from real life."³ The trend was observable in other arts: one thinks of the genre paintings with their exact recreation of domestic interiors, and of the changes in theatrical style about 1850, which Allardyce Nicoll traces to the practical-mindedness of the middle class which was then beginning to go to plays.⁴

Both realistic exploration and moral intent allowed--virtually demanded--some consideration of woman's unchastity. Whether in a major or (more

²In 1859, for example, he had 2500 copies each of Adam Bede and Dinah Mulock's A Life for a Life; see Richard D. Altick, "The Literature of an Imminent Democracy," in 1859--Entering an Age of Crisis, ed. Philip Appleman, William A. Madden, and Michael Wolfe (Bloomington, 1959), p. 217.

³"A Word to the Reader," Ernest Maltravers (3 vols. 1837).

⁴Allardyce Nicoll, "Drama," in Early Victorian England, ed. G. M. Young (London, 1934), II, 279-80.

often) a minor role, the sexual outlaw appears in a variety of guises: the whore, the mistress, the adulteress, and the woman practically or legally divorced, as well as the fallen or seduced innocent. Whenever she appeared, and with whatever overt purpose, she provided a vehicle for the expression of underlying sexual attitudes.

Ernest Maltravers (3 vols. 1837) provides a useful opening survey.⁵ The heroine is Alice Darvil, born and bred in poverty and about to be sold into prostitution by her father. She runs away and casts herself on Ernest, a travelling student who had been benighted in their hut on the moor. After a time they are separated. In the continuation, Alice; or, the Mysteries (3 vols. 1838), they are finally reunited and marry.

Even in Lytton's own definition, the books are hardly realistic. The range of characters extends both above and below ordinary middle-class life. Nor do the more spectacular events actually grow from the characters' flaws. It is true that Alice is unable to find Ernest, after they have been parted, because Ernest has cautiously omitted to tell her his real name, but the actual separation is brought about by Lytton's introduction of a band of robbers to kidnap Alice. The suspense of the sequel--the reader's fear that Maltravers will incestuously marry his own daughter--is possible only because the author deliberately withholds the information that Alice's child has died and that the girl who calls her "mother" is actually her step-daughter, banker Templeton's child from an earlier marriage. The device might have worked had the story been told through

⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1802-73) was still considered a rival to Dickens in popularity in the early years of the twentieth century; see Lewis Melville, Victorian Novelists (London, 1906), p. 4. Nineteenth-century sources are in CBEL. There has been no major critical study during the past fifty years. Some of the novels are considered in Matthew Whiting Rosa, The Silver-Fork School (New York, 1936). Michael Sadleir, Bulwer: A Panorama (London, 1931) is biographical.

a narrator who might reasonably be unaware of a family secret, but it seems merely cheating in the hands of an omniscient author purporting to give a straightforward account of the events of two lives.

When Henry Crabb Robinson finished reading Ernest Maltravers on 15 Nov. 1837 (he went early to his club, the Athenaeum, in order to finish it) he jotted in his diary that "the whole charm of the novel lies in the character of Alice."⁶ The book is, in fact, about the ideal woman. At its opening Alice Darvil is utterly ignorant and therefore also utterly innocent. She has never heard of God but has an instinctive notion of right and wrong.⁷ The conception, if romantic, is derived from eighteenth-century sentimentalism. Instinctive feeling is a mark of woman's superiority to man: "There is sentiment in all women, and sentiment gives delicacy to thought, and tact to manner. But sentiment with men is generally acquired, an offspring of the intellectual quality, not, as with the other sex, of the moral." (Bk. 1, Ch. 5)

Maltravers moulds Alice into the perfect Victorian helpmeet: a woman who adores him with the full force of natural first-awakened love, who learns all her thoughts and ideas and tastes from him, knows how to arrange his books, plays only music of his composing, and so forth. Maltravers has, however, the male "human weakness"--sexual desire. He plans to master his temptation by sending Alice away for further education; she feels rejected and faints; and his feelings for the now utterly prostrate and helpless female overcome him.

They spend the next day wandering hand in hand through the garden.

⁶Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1938), II, 541.

⁷Lytton bolsters his realism with a footnote in Bk. 1, Ch. 4 quoting from a magistrates' examination of an ignorant country girl published in the Examiner in 1835.

Lytton has upended the myth: the female partner has neither knowledge nor guilt. Eve's curse becomes therefore a blessing:

Where, from pure and confiding love, that first false step has been taken, many a woman has been saved, in after-life, from a thousand temptations. . . . Though man loves the sex, woman loves only the individual; and the more she loves him, the more cold she is to the species.

(Bk. 4, Ch. 2)

At the moment of greatest peril the natural consequence of Alice's sexuality provides the ultimate bulwark of chastity. Lytton's language combines the clinical and the mystic:

But now, the embryo had quickened into being--it moved--it appealed to her--a thing unseen, unknown; but still it was a living creature appealing to a mother! . . . Solemn was the trust committed to her--the life of another--the child of the Adored. It was a summer night--she sate on a rude stone, the city on one side with its lights and lamps;--the whitened fields beyond, with the moon and the stars above: and above she raised her streaming eyes, and she thought that God, the Protector, smiled upon her from the face of the sweet skies.

(Bk. 4, Ch. 2)

Lytton hangs neatly between the two halves of early nineteenth-century thought and art; despite the romantic insistence on natural perfection, Alice is schooled by life. She was perfect as a girl in her state of innocence; she is admirable as a woman because of her experience. She grows strong because she is "no longer to be protected, but to protect" (Bk. 4, Ch. 4); she is transformed from ideal virgin to ideal mother.⁸

The elements of the ideal in Alice's character are thrown into relief by Maltravers' subsequent adventures. He travels from Alice, the natural woman, to an unhappy French wife representing the social woman, and then on to the intellectual woman, Florence Lascelles, who is failing

⁸ Rather astonishingly, Alice maintains her purity; the marriage to Templeton, we discover late in the second novel, was a marriage in name only.

from a nameless disease brought about, apparently, by stifled ambition. When Maltravers suggests that she may find "that noblest of all ambitions--the ambition women only feel,--the ambition for another" (Bk. 8, Ch. 1) she denies that she will ever love. She has not yet met a man to whom she feels inferior, subordination of the woman to the man being a necessary condition to love. Although she becomes more womanly under the spell of the truly superior Maltravers,

he regarded her through the eyes of the intellect, not those of the passions--he thought not of her as a woman--her very talents, her very grandeur of idea and power of purpose . . . diverted his imagination from dwelling on her beauty. He looked on her as something apart from her sex--a glorious creature spoilt by being a woman. He once told her so, laughingly, and Florence considered it a compliment. Poor Florence, her scorn of her sex avenged her sex, and robbed her of her proper destiny!

(Bk. 8, Ch. 2)

Only when she is lying helpless on her death-bed does it dawn on Maltravers that she might be loveable.

The resolution of the second novel illuminates concretely the paradox of the feminine ideal. Maltravers is on his knees to Alice; he has proposed marriage and she has refused on grounds of her inferior station and her "guilt." He implies that the power is all in her hands; since she has a financial competence and a peaceful life she would naturally be reluctant to take a lord and master. This is the key which unlocks the true woman:"'If I could--I, so untutored, so unworthy--if I could comfort you in a single care!'" (Bk. 11, Ch. 8) Alice stands on a pedestal of superiority and the minute she believes she can serve Maltravers--woman's natural and proper function being service--she capitulates.

The sentimentally romantic conception of Alice's pristine ignorance resolves the other inherent paradox. Pure woman--natural woman--could be awakened to innocent natural sexuality. Social woman could not. Lytton's Pygmalion dream of the ideal woman is shaped by nature, her

husband, and motherhood. Religion, society, and education are notably absent, as is the exercise of any free will on the part of Alice.

Although Lytton attaches a paragraph of moralizing to justify the happy ending, the book is not at all a social problem novel. It belongs essentially to the sentimental school; Alice is a model of perfection whose loss of chastity is explained away, and Maltravers, who is also forgiven, is in the tradition of the reformed rake. Given man's perception of the differences between the nature and role of the two sexes, the seduced woman could be the ideal woman.

The first quality of her ideality was the absolute sexual ignorance which made her seduction possible. The second was the lingering romantic conception that woman's emotionality put her in closer touch with the source of the good and the true. James Anthony Froude's The Nemesis of Faith (1849)--the proclamation of religious doubt which forced Froude's resignation as a Fellow of Exeter--contains a portrait of sexual difference hardly more complex than Lytton's.⁹ The woman is of "unpracticed intellect" and is "too natural" for self-examination.¹⁰ Furthermore, woman, unlike man, can be completely subsumed by another. In The Nemesis of Faith "even love which should never be does not lose its nobleness" because in it woman experiences utter forgetfulness of self. Rational man, however, "can give his entire soul to an idea, not to a woman." (p. 184)

The seduction of the innocent provides also an ideal assurance of the balance of power between the sexes. Woman is seducable because

⁹James Anthony Froude (1818-94), historian, friend of Thomas Carlyle, and editor of Fraser's Magazine from 1860 to 1874, wrote only one other work of fiction, Shadows of the Clouds (1847).

¹⁰p. 225. Quotations are taken from the 2nd ed. (1849; rpt. Farnborough, Hants., 1969).

when she loves "no sacrifice is too great for her."¹¹ As Sarah Mary Ellis had said in another context, "There is a principle in woman's love, that renders it impossible for her to be satisfied without actually doing something for the object of her regard."¹² The poor deluded country girl in Alfred Butler's Elphinstone (3 vols. 1841)

felt in herself all the love, the willing self-sacrifice, and more than the dependence of a wife; and considered it a life-lasting duty, by all cheerful attention, by all obedience, by all uncomplaining endurance of her own possible sufferings, and willing participation in his, to prove the perfectness of her love.
(II, 159)

Marriage and the middle-class woman were hedged about by lawyers, contracts, settlements, and ceremonies. With a girl who had cut herself off from ordinary society and from her family, a man could unquestionably maintain a position of absolute power and dominance.

The idealization of women's innocence; the conviction that women--even in marriage--submitted to sexual advances only in a spirit of sacrifice and abnegation; and the admiration for the natural all reveal the uneasiness which men felt in the recognition of their own sexual impulses. Augustus Mayhew explained Captain Crosier's pursuit of Bertha the work-house girl:

He lost his boldness and dash when he had to converse with a young lady whose mamma was present. To Bertha he could rattle out protestations and love speeches by the hour. To his partners in the dance he could only stammer a few commonplace replies. If he did not enjoy himself he accused them of being the cause, while the truth really was that when he was bold it was only because he felt a contempt for the woman to whom he was talking, and the moment respect was enforced from him he became stagnant and insipid.¹³

¹¹James Anthony Froude, "The Lieutenant's Daughter," in Shadows of the Clouds (1847), p. 262.

¹²Sarah Mary Ellis, The Women of England (London, 1839), p. 16.

¹³Paved with Gold (1858), p. 264. Augustus Mayhew (1826-75) is in DNB and CBEL. No critical sources are listed. Augustus was the seventh and youngest of the brothers Mayhew; he wrote novels (some jointly with Henry) and farces and edited The Comic Almanac from 1845 to 1853.

The division of the physical from the spiritual and their identification, respectively, as the lower and higher elements of human nature took its emotional toll. Impotence with the mother figure and degradation of the whore follow in natural consequence; the man with a divided nature needs two women.

The hero of Thomas Miller's Godfrey Malvern (monthly parts, 1842-43)¹⁴ sends his wife Emma home to the country to have her baby and, in her absence, takes up with Maria, who is single, Bohemian, and "bold and daring in her love."¹⁵ She is both more intelligent and more exciting (physically, we infer) than his wife. Malvern dreams of being a Moham-
medan: "Could he, as a man, desert Maria? Could he, as a husband, again look in the face of his own fond Emma?" (p. 237) Plot, the double standard, and the disapproval of sexuality come to his rescue; Maria dies in childbirth so that he can return to Emma (he never confesses, so as not to ruin the peace of her sanctified maternity), inherit an estate, and enter Parliament. Miller feels some doubt about the double standard; the poor, he says, would take in the erring woman and cast out her betrayer. But Maria's death and Malvern's success are necessary in order to provide the confirmation of Emma's superior value.

Men could not admire sexual woman without placing some positive value

¹⁴Thomas Miller (1807-74) was a basket-maker whose poems caught the attention of an aristocratic patron. He straddled the worlds of cheap and respectable literature; he wrote for Chambers' Edinburgh Journal and the London Journal and was the author who took up G. W. M. Reynolds' Mysteries of London for the third series. In the respectable line, he produced children's books, rural sketches, and annuals filled with simple cheerful poems. He is in DNB, listed briefly in NCBEL as a poet, and discussed in James, Fiction for the Working Man.

¹⁵p. 235. The edition from which quotations are taken has a single sequence of page numbers running through two volumes dated 1842 and 1843; it appears to be made up of bound parts.

on their own sexuality. Though the categorical division of women into the pure and the impure is hedged with some doubt, the balance generally swings down in favor of the asexual woman. The hero's attraction to Margaret, in Wilkie Collins' Basil (3 vols. 1852)¹⁶ is wholly physical, at least in the first instance: he sees her on an omnibus and follows her home. Margaret proves a villainess. Her foil is Clara, the woman in whom men "could put as perfect faith and trust, as if we were children," who offers a respite from the world such as that found in "little rural shrines shut up from society." (Ch. 5) There can be no question of sexual attraction. Clara is Basil's sister, she is surrounded with maternal imagery, and she is, furthermore, a portrait of Collins' brother Charles.¹⁷ The New Quarterly Review, which otherwise found little to praise in Basil, was charmed by the transmogrification of brotherly love: "The character of Clara is exquisitely delineated: it is true to life and cannot fail to charm every reader."¹⁸

The overtly moral uses of the figure of the unchaste woman are based on the universal application of a middle-class standard of sexual purity. Basil criticizes the social hypocrisy which looks on the keeping

¹⁶Wilkie Collins (1824-89) has recently been re-elevated to nearly major status, as indicated by the publication of Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage, ed. Norman Page (London, 1974) and of William H. Marshall, Wilkie Collins (New York, 1970), the first full-length critical study not in a biographical context. The latter book includes a bibliography of uncollected pieces and an annotated listing of secondary sources. The biography by Kenneth Robinson, Wilkie Collins (New York, 1952), provides the scholarly detective-work needed to elucidate Collins' personal life. There is a chapter on Collins in Althea Hayter, Opium and the Romantic Imagination (Berkeley, 1968).

¹⁷See Nuel Pharr Davis, The Life of Wilkie Collins (Urbana, 1956), p. 29. Charles Collins (who later became the husband of Dickens' daughter Kate) made use of the ingenuous-sister persona to write "Some Wild Ideas," Household Words, 19 (30 Apr. 1859), 505-10.

¹⁸New Quarterly Review, 2 (1853), 96.

of a mistress as less degrading than *déclassé* marriage. Other attacks on the upper classes are not greatly different from stories with the same motive in the London Pioneer. William Harrison Ainsworth's Old Saint Paul's (1841)¹⁹ uses the old sentimental-Gothic plot of the chased chaste, with poor harrassed Amabel dead of plague almost as soon as she has succumbed to the Earl. Frederick Chichester's Two Generations (2 vols. 1851) castigates aristocrats, the French, and the Roman Catholic Church because they do not recognize the moral superiority of women.²⁰ The hero, disillusioned by the discovery of his mother's adultery, is drifting towards "Deism, Rationalism, socialism, and Misanthropy" (II, 70) until rescued by an Englishwoman who provides "a helping hand to guide him into the right path, a pure mind that should convince him of his error . . ." (II, 70-71). Violet; or the Danseuse (2 vols. 1836),²¹ like Two Generations, implies a sense of moral progress. The men-about-town have not changed, but the chorus girls now come from families with

¹⁹First published in the Sunday Times, Jan.-Dec. 1841; also in twelve monthly parts and in three volumes during the same year. William Harrison Ainsworth (1835-82) is in CBEL and DNB. Bibliographical information is included in the standard biography, S. M. Ellis, William Harrison Ainsworth and His Friends (2 vols., London, 1911). There is one recent critical-biographical study: George J. Worth, William Harrison Ainsworth (New York, 1972).

²⁰Frederick Richard Chichester (1827-53) was an Eton-educated aristocrat with aesthetic leanings and a social conscience. He was son of the Marquess of Donegall and bore the courtesy title of Earl of Belfast; see Burke's Peerage, DNB, and the obituary in Gentleman's Magazine, NS 39 (1853), 428. His book Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century (1852) grew out of a course of lectures to a Belfast working men's association. The BMC assigns to him a number of novels written "by Lord B*****" and published at regular intervals through 1866, thirteen years after his death. Masters and Workmen (3 vols. 1851) and Wealth and Labour (3 vols. 1853) could, on the evidence of subject and date, be Chichester's work.

²¹Attributed in the Bodleian Library Catalogue to Marianne Dora, Lady Malet (d. 1891). She is listed in Burke's Peerage as the wife of Sir Alexander Malet, K. C. B. (1800-86). No other literary work has been traced.

bourgeois standards, and ultimately both aristocrat and danseuse are destroyed by their sexual misconduct.

Social problem novelists, in the broader sense, assumed that sexual purity was equally natural and desirable among women of the lower classes; if women were degraded, society was at fault. Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke (2 vols. 1850)²² was yet another work which made use of Mayhew's revelations about the garment trade.²³ Since the novel was written to criticize the economic system, the fallen women whom Kingsley introduces are purely economic victims, driven to the streets by want (especially the want of their babies or ailing mothers). The solution is therefore painlessly simple: when whores are given a chance to work in a cooperative needlework concern, sharing the profits, they become as decent as anyone else.

The simplistic symbolic value of the unchaste woman as a vehicle of social criticism depends on a virtually universal acceptance, expressed by novelists as the voice of middle-class society, of a stringent moral code. Yet the age of realism in the novel was also the age of factualism in the social sciences. Victorian morality, in the light of observations made by the Victorians themselves, seems often to be a fiction balanced on an illusion. The sexual tension engendered by repressive morality

²²Charles Kingsley (1819-75) is the subject of two recent biographies: Susan Chitty, The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley (London, 1974), and Brenda Collins, Charles Kingsley: The Lion of Eversley (London, 1975).

²³Kingsley wrote to a London friend in Dec., 1849, "Borrow or buy the 'Morning Chronicle' articles, and send me them, and I will reimburse you; at least send me the Tailor one by return of post"; see Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life, ed. Frances Eliza Kingsley (London, 1877), I, 224. John L. Bradley's introduction to Selections from London Labour and the London Poor by Henry Mayhew (Oxford, 1965) discusses passages in which Kingsley is directly indebted to Mayhew; see pp. xxxvi-xxxviii.

was certainly one of the factors leading to investigation of the prostitution also thus created. Gladstone confessed to his diary that his interest in rescue work was a symptom of

a principal besetting sin, impurity: that impurity which has its seat mainly in the mind: which for some time past I have defined in my prayers as 'dangerous curiosity & filthiness of spirit'; an activity of the intellect on impure subjects, covering itself with the plea of innocent and useful ends.²⁴

Yet the moral seriousness cannot be doubted. Investigations, whether by Parliamentary committee, journalist, or medical man, were undertaken in order to cure. The illusion on which the fiction was balanced, however, concerned the nature of women. For both the novelist and the social scientist, the perception of reality was colored by preconceived ideals. The studies of the social evil published in the 1840's and 1850's emphasized different facts, depending on whether the motives of the author were chiefly religious, sanitary, or protectionist. Even more revealing is the difference between what became--through the work of social scientists and sanitary reformers--public knowledge, and the use made of that material by novelists.²⁵

²⁴The Gladstone Diaries, ed. M. R. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew (Oxford, 1974), IV, 51. The passage was written in October, 1845, and attached to the diary entry for 19 July 1848, when the subject was again on Gladstone's mind.

²⁵Generalizations in the ensuing discussion are drawn from a reading of: William Acton, Prostitution (London, 1857); Dinah M. Craik, A Woman's Thoughts about Women (London, 1858); W. R. Greg, "Prostitution," Westminster Review, 53 (1850), 448-506; C. E. Lester, The Glory and the Shame of England (2 vols., New York, 1841); Archdeacon Manning, "Penitents and Saints," Christian Remembrancer, 17 (1849), 1-17; Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, IV (1861-62; rpt. New York, 1968); William Tait, Magdalenism (Edinburgh, 1840); James Beard Talbot, The Miseries of Prostitution (London, 1844); "The Great Social Evil," Times, 24 Feb 1858, p. 12; Edward W. Thomas, Twenty-Five Years Labour among the Friendless and Fallen (London, 1879); James Charles Whitehorn, The Social Evil Practically Considered (London, 1858); Henry Worsley, Juvenile Depravity (London, 1849); and the periodicals The Female's Friend (1846) and The Magdalen's Friend and Female Homes' Intelligencer (1860-64).

In her external circumstances, Bulwer's Alice is actually a fairly accurate representative of the stratum from which, according to the social investigators, most prostitutes came: born in the criminal class, impoverished, and absolutely ignorant of any ideas about good and evil. But such characters, seen in any real dimension, are virtually absent from the novel of the period; Dickens' Nancy is almost the only example.²⁶

Similarly, the first Public Health report stated, and the writers on the social evil immediately repeated, that the housing conditions of the poor, which forced children and adults of both sexes to share the same room and often the same bed, forbade the development of notions of privacy, chastity, and the sanctity of human procreation.²⁷ But even the novelist who knew these facts found them hardly fit for the middle-class reader to contemplate. Henry Mayhew's brother Augustus, who had done some of the interviewing and reporting for London Labour and the London Poor, wrote Paved With Gold (1858) in part to correct some of the romantic evasions of Oliver Twist; Mayhew's foundling hero is thoroughly defiled by the pitch of his workhouse and street life, though his blood-lines are as good as Oliver's. Yet Augustus Mayhew is silent about the sexual consequences of the mixed lodging houses in which his characters shelter; his secondary plot is a sentimental comedy using the stock devices of attempted seduction, impregnable virtue, fake registry-office wedding, and last-minute fortuitous rescue. Charles Kingsley, who was certainly in a position to know about established rural

²⁶ Oliver Twist (Bentley's Miscellany, 1837-39; 3 vols. 1838) in fact preceded most of the factual investigations of prostitution.

²⁷ Edwin Chadwick, Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (1842; rpt. Edinburgh, 1965), pp 190-94.

modes of courtship (which depended, as Acton put it, on a notion that it was unthrifty to marry a woman who had not provided proof of fertility)²⁸ funnels the facts through his moral viewpoint in Yeast (Fraser's Magazine, 1848; 1 vol. 1851), when he represents the parties "sneaking into church, looking all over as if they were ashamed of it." (Ch 4)

The amorality which lay below the vision line of the religious and social ideal of the middle class was only slightly touched by either factualists or novelists because their own conception of woman's nature could hardly comprehend it. Though they mention the criminal or parasitical classes as the chief source of prostitutes, almost all social reformers list "low wages" as the primary cause of prostitution. The phraseology implies a woman who wants to support herself honestly and is prevented by the economic organization of society from doing so.

After the economic cause, according to the factualists, the second most powerful factor contributing to the making of a whore was a cluster of character traits which were feminine but not particularly admirable: vanity, love of dress, natural levity, desire for excitement or luxury. Even according to contemporaries, outright seduction of an unknowing girl by a man who made promises or played tricks ranked last among the causes recruiting to the prostitute's profession. Judging only by the novels of the period, one would place it first. That relationship, and that alone, expressed the acceptable image of women and the power relationship between the sexes.

Novelists kept silence, and social reformers nearly so, on the possibility that some women became prostitutes because they enjoyed sexual intercourse. They also ignored those who entered the profession clear-

²⁸ Acton, Prostitution, p. 71.

sightedly for its practical advantages. The whore who wrote to the Times on 24 Feb. 1858 explained both:

I was a fine, robust, healthy girl, 13 years of age. I had larked with boys my own age. . . . For some time I had trembled and coquetted on the verge of a strong curiosity, and a natural desire, and without a particle of affection, scarce²⁹ a partiality, I lost--what? not my virtue, for I hever had any.

It did not take her long to discover that what she enjoyed had an economic value which enabled her to rise above her miserable surroundings. She was pleased that she had been able to "bring out" her sisters so that one was kept by a nobleman and another by an Army officer. Munby's diary provides a glimpse of a servant who took up prostitution voluntarily because of the relative freedom and profit it afforded, and in three years saved enough money to retire as proprietor of a respectable coffeehouse.³⁰ These attitudes, however, were almost undiscussable because they violated contemporary understanding of the nature of woman.

Turning from the causes of unchastity to the consequences, the blinders affixed by social and moral bias are even more evident. Almost all of the factual writing on the subject presented as inevitable the brief downward career of any woman who experienced sex outside of marriage: a relatively brief time, perhaps, as a mistress, then the streets, drink, and death. Yet even those who wrote it must have known, to an extent, that it was not true; factory reports and the annual summaries of the various Magdalen institutions made it obvious that the problem was not one of sex but of dependency. Farm and mine and factory girls, who had a trade in their own hands, could and did raise illegitimate children. Women who depended directly on the middle class for their livelihood--

²⁹"The Great Social Evil," Times, 24 Feb. 1858, p. 12.

³⁰Derek Hudson, Munby, Man of Two Worlds (London, 1972), pp 40-41.

i.e., domestic servants--lost their jobs with their reputations, and had to go on the streets. In Manchester, where one birth in twelve was illegitimate, the whores admitted to penitentiaries came overwhelmingly from the ranks of domestic service³¹--but almost no one deduced, therefrom, that factory girls were more moral than servants.

William Acton's Prostitution, Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities, published in 1857, specifically and statistically contradicted the myth that all seduced women turn whore and that all whores soon die. In 1840, he says, only fifty-six women in London committed suicide, and there was no reason to believe that even half were prostitutes. In the years covered by his investigation an average of only twenty-eight London women per year died of venereal disease. Even adding in consumption, typhoid, and septic childbirth, he cannot make the statistics on death account for the number of whores who disappear every year. Since those arrested are continually young, where do the rest go? They return to ordinary life; they amalgamate with the population. Acton's motive was sanitary: he believed it important to ameliorate the lot of the prostitute because she would become the mother of Englishmen of the next generation.³²

A corollary of the proposition that the whore's life was short was that it was unhappy--another stereotype with a high moral value. Investigators found it easy to bring up supporting evidence, particularly those who got most of their information from women in prisons and reformatories. But Bracebridge Hemyng, who did the interviews with prostitutes for the London Labour series, found it a "delusion that the life of a

³¹E. Royston Pike, Human Documents of the Industrial Revolution in Britain (London, 1966), p. 297.

³²Acton, Prostitution, pp. 58-73.

prostitute is as revolting to herself, as it appears to the moralist."³³
 Acton discovered many women who cheerfully accepted the profession as
 a way of life.³⁴

The shocking possibility of amalgamation through marriage with
 someone other than the seducer occurs in the novel only in the case of
 girls of the lowest class. (Dickens' Martha, in David Copperfield
[monthly parts, 1849-50], for example, marries a laborer, though it is
 out of the question for Ham to marry Emily.) It was not, in reality,
 a class-restricted phenomenon. Hemyng gives several examples of loose
 women who made good marriages.³⁵ According to G. H. Lewes' diary for
 1 Jan. 1873, Anthony Trollope's son, Harry, wanted "to marry a woman of
 the town."³⁶ The madame in Froude's "The Lieutenant's Daughter" explains
 in coldly practical terms:

"you gentlemen are so kind as to patronize us,--our trade would
 not be good for much else. We do the thing respectably enough,
 and it's the demand that makes the trade. . . .

If our girls are sharp, they can do very well. Coronets have
 been made out of our house."

(pp. 232-33)

Almost no one, however, had a chance to read Froude's story; the greater
 part of the edition is said to have been bought up and destroyed by the
 author's father.

In large cities even the protected could hardly fail to be aware of
 streetwalkers actively, seductively, even aggressively soliciting business.
 The social reformers revealed their idea of the basic feminine nature by
 viewing what they could see on the streets as a consequence, rather than

³³Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, IV, 212.

³⁴Acton, Prostitution, pp. 135-36.

³⁵Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, IV, 251.

³⁶The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (London, 1954),
 V, 357.

a cause, of the trade. The whore was a threat because man had made her so: "Woman, waylaid, tempted, deceived, becomes in turn the terrible avenger of her sex. Armed with a power which is all but irresistible" she revenges her homelessness by destroying homes.³⁷

But the actively destructive perverted woman did not play any significant role in the novel until the 1860's. In the 1840's and 1850's the few rare examples of the "seduced man" story--the story in which the sexually knowing woman is a force for evil--almost immediately turn around and explain away the woman's guilt. Caleb Stukely, in Samuel Phillips' novel of that title (3 vols. 1844),³⁸ proposes to the "cousin" whom one of his Cambridge friends is keeping in a country cottage. After the entanglement is explained he feels forced to take her on as his own mistress. Many of the book's passages read as if they were deliberate inversions of the typical seduction plot, but poor pitiful Emma, we discover, had actually no part in Caleb's downfall, which was arranged by her villainous protector, in whose power she is. And besides, she is the victim of a hereditary tendency towards drunkenness (of which she soon dies); her father, from whom she inherits the trait, was a clergyman who made the whole family's life miserable.

The novel of the period which tried most deliberately to reflect

³⁷William Tuckniss in Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, IV, xxxix. Similar ideas are expressed in Talbot, p. 44, in "Juvenile Depravity," Hogg's Weekly Instructor, NS 2 (1849), 251, and in Thomas, p. 122.

³⁸Samuel Phillips (1814-1854) was of Jewish origin and the son of a tradesman. He attended Cambridge intending to read for holy orders but had to leave after a single term due to his father's death. He wrote for the Times and the Literary Gazette; Caleb Stukely was his only novel. It is perhaps only accidental that another fictional character with the same surname appears in Henry Stukely; or, the Effects of Dissipation (1794), written by William Helme, the husband of Elizabeth Helme of The Farmer of Inglewood Forest, though Phillips, as a novelist, does seem at home in the pastoral-sentimental school of the Helmes.

the reality brought to public knowledge by the social scientists and still to present the woman as actor rather than victim was Out of the Depths (1859) by Henry Gladwyn Jebb.³⁹ The book was intended to deal frankly and constructively with the social problem; Alexander Macmillan's conversation before it was published led a friend to praise Macmillan's "judicious boldness" in bringing it out.⁴⁰

Jebb tells a fairly convincing tale. The heroine, Mary Smith, is pregnant by a gentleman who visited the house where she was a servant. Though her baby is born dead, though her parents do not turn her from the door, and though she is still able to find work (albeit as a farm servant rather than a lady's maid), Mary is uncomfortable in the village where everyone knows her. She goes to Oxford to work with two young dressmakers, who are generous, sisterly, and--as she discovers--no better than they ought to be. Mary voluntarily adopts their mode of life: she goes out with men for pleasure, for extra finery, and for the sense of power it gives her, rather than because she is in want. She learns a great deal, some of it worth learning, from the various educated men whose mistress she is. Even after her status has begun to fall, and after she has begun to have religious regrets, she will have nothing to do with the clergyman who tries to rescue her; she likes the excitement of the life she leads.

Both the source and motive of Jebb's realism are apparent. The story is narrated as Mary's memoirs, in the manner of an extended tract, so that her reformed voice is always there to comment on how sinful it was to have

³⁹Henry Gladwyn Jebb (1826-98) was ordained upon graduation from Cambridge in 1852 and served as curate and rector in several rural parishes. In 1878 he inherited a landed estate and thereafter lived as a country gentleman. Out of the Depths (published anonymously) is apparently his only literary work. There is an obituary in The Eagle, 20 (1898), 338-39.

⁴⁰Hudson, Munby, p. 22.

enjoyed the trip to Paris or the quiet dinners discussing Shakespeare with the barrister. Mary's redemption comes also in the tract manner; she experiences a religious conversion while reading the Bible at the death-bed of a fellow prostitute. She returns to needlework until her past reputation finds her out, at which point she turns to the clergyman for help.

The flaws of the tract obtrude at this point; Mary spends a period of reformation devoted primarily to earnest religious discussion. Jebb's optimism also creates difficulties; everyone in the book is good with the exception of one or two over-fastidious women, which makes it rather hard to explain the presence of so much distress in the world. There is also a problem about the question of the fortunate fall:

"you would never have been so much in earnest about religion; perhaps you might never have been really converted to God at all, if you had not been as you were formerly. Providence works in a way incomprehensible to us, and oftentimes great and good ends are brought about out of what appears to be a chaos of evil. It is a matter we cannot penetrate into; for to speculate much upon it would seem to make God the Author of evil, which He cannot be."

(pp. 353-54)

The message of the book required Mary's social rehabilitation. The clergyman establishes her ultimately as a village schoolmistress. A widower with children, even knowing of her past, persuades her to become his wife. That far--despite Acton--Jebb cannot go; Mary dies of fever just before the wedding.

The Evangelical origins of the form not only allow the narration of events and attitudes which would not be permissible without the continual moral comment, they also serve to keep Mary firmly at the center of the tale. It is essential for Jebb's religious message that the individual be actor rather than victim. Even Mary's first sexual experience was not, at least in her own moralizing look backwards at it, a seduction. Jebb

quite carefully exculpates the man; he had, indeed, sent for Mary to come and be married when he learned that she was pregnant, but had died of fever before she could arrive. Mary's willingness to take the blame for her fall rests on assumptions about differences between the sexes and between the classes. The man would not have been tempted had it not been for her immodesty--for her lack of the reserve which protects girls of the middle classes. Furthermore, woman's blame is greater because her physical desires are weaker; it is up to her to keep her head and draw the line.

Mary's defenses are lowered, however, by an additional sin. "I was conscious even then, and I am still more vividly conscious now, that together with the pleasure of being loved, was mingled strongly, exultation at the prospect which opened before me, of being raised out of the station in life from which I sprang by birth." (p. 41) Though the criminal classes supplied the greatest number of streetwalkers, it had been noted that the mistresses kept by young men of the middle class were generally the daughters of upwardly-mobile tradesmen and artisans⁴¹ or, in a village, the brightest and the best of the laborers' daughters.⁴² Mary confesses that

I chose to believe myself of a finer nature than my born equals, and I determined to rise out of that class if I could, and never mix with them more. One thing confirmed me in this presumptuous opinion; and this was, that among the few young women I knew, not one of them had the same thoughts or aspirations as I had; they read, some of them, the same books, but did not extract the same ideas from them, and I considered that they were low and common in comparison with me.

(p. 21)

The moral afterglance provides the tag: "Thus I despised my class, and

⁴¹See Greg, Why Are Women Redundant?, p. 24 and Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, IV, pp. 216-17.

⁴²Craik, A Woman's Thoughts about Women, p. 260.

God, to punish me, suffered me to fall far below the meanest of those I thought such scorn of." (pp. 21-22) In the year of Samuel Smiles' Self-Help it was no longer obligatory even among conservatives to find it improper for a bright village boy or mechanic to gain ideas from books and hope to rise in the world. Unfortunately, woman could rise above her station only by marriage.

Jebb's argument, then, is based on woman's duty to be submissive; Mary's sin is the sin of forwardness. He brings the theme neatly full circle at the end. The reformed Mary Smith, pressed by her widowed suitor, feels that the single life and constant prayer are the route to redemption. The clergyman insists--speaking, surely, for the author--that Mary's regard for her own soul is selfish. A man loves her, and though she does not love him her duty is to bring him happiness.

Jebb's book was far too frank for the prudish. The Athenaeum thought that to attempt to enlist the sympathy of women for their "fallen sisters" was immoral: "The best, the only help a woman can give to the social problem is by keeping herself pure, and clear of all approach to evil."⁴³ Even The Magdalen's Friend--a periodical devoted to rescue work--criticized the "minuteness of detail . . . which we cannot think necessary or advisable."⁴⁴ The conflict between realistic writing and a moral society seems therefore insoluble, at least insofar as a novelist might directly touch the social evil. The problem, essentially, was that of placing an ideal woman in a real world.

The central political question, whether expressed through the

⁴³Athenaeum, 20 Aug. 1859, p. 240.

⁴⁴The Magdalen's Friend and Female Homes' Intelligencer, 2 (1862), 30. The Westminster Review, 72 (1859), 168, on the other hand, attacked Jebb for idealizing the prostitute with the portrait of the refined, high-souled Mary Smith.

romantic seducée, who could be man's ideal, or the uneasy collision between real fact and moral interpretation of the fact in the use of the prostitute as character, rests on the relationship between men and women. A dependent woman had, one way or another, to make her living ~~from~~ men. The male novelist, examining his male characters, recognizes--if only covertly--the sexual urge. He idealizes the natural woman and desires the romantic; yet rationally and socially he distrusts natural abandon. "'A man can't marry a woman he has seduced,'" says the gentleman in "The Lieutenant's Daughter." "'If they are weak and foolish enough to let you persuade them, why, as the old hag said, they are sure to let someone else by-and-bye.'" (p. 246) And yet how could a chaperoned middle-class woman actually be awakened to love? The immediate answer is superficially cynical: "Show me a man with proportionable means--say three thousand per annum--who would doubt any girl's loving him?"⁴⁵ For both Dickens and Thackeray woman's sale into a loveless marriage was a sort of prostitution--an exchange of sex for money.

In Dombey and Son (monthly parts, 1846-48), women within a social system dominated by mercantilism are simply one more object of trade. Dickens works out the parallel plots of Alice Marwood and Edith Dombey in neat symmetry, down to the tidy detail of their cousinship across the bar sinister. Motherhood is perverted by the cash nexus; each girl has been raised and trained for sale. The only difference is that Edith is sold within marriage and Alice without.

And yet the double standard is thoroughly operative. Dickens expects his women to be more noble and more passive than his men. Alice

⁴⁵Henry John Lester, Struggles in Falling (1858), p. 132. Only this title is entered under Lester's name in BMC; no other information has been discovered.

regrets exacting revenge by betraying Carker; her death, after her repentance, is happy. Dombey repents that he was an unnatural father, but even after he is reformed through his child's love he does not admit his guilt relative to Edith. Edith, so far as the plot is concerned, is actually the force for good--Florence's passive goodness has no effect on Dombey until he has been brought low by financial disaster and the shock of Edith's desertion. Edith feels at least a qualified penitence: "when I thought so much of all the causes that had made me what I was, I needed to have allowed more for the causes that had made him what he was. I will try, then, to forgive him his share of the blame." (Ch. 61)⁴⁶ Yet Dickens has no commensurate reward in store for her.

Dickens intended initially to make Edith obviously an adulteress, and as a necessary consequence, to kill her. He departed from the stereotyped plot when a critic's suggestion made him aware of further possibilities:

Note from Jeffrey this morning, who won't believe (positively refuses) that Edith is Carker's mistress. What do you think of a kind of inverted Maid's Tragedy, and a tremendous scene of her undeceiving Carker, and giving him to know that she never meant that?⁴⁷

The idea gave focus to the events which had already been created. Having bought a wife, Dombey expects to have bought the whole ideal of wifedom. But Edith will not complete the act of prostitution. She will act as hostess, ornament, and housekeeper; she would like to mother his child. But she will neither make a show of deference nor provide the real thing. "If I loved you to devotion, could I do more than render up my whole will

⁴⁶Quotations are taken from Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, ed Alan Horsman (Oxford, 1947).

⁴⁷Letter written 21 Dec. 1847, while at work on the fifteenth part (Ch. 46-48); quoted in John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (London, 1872-74), Bk. 6, Ch. 2.

and being to you, as you have just demanded?" she asks. (Ch. 40) Edith seeks routes of accommodation within the contract which has been entered. Her love for Florence leads her once to suggest a path within which she and Dombey might eventually find some tenderness or affection. His personal will to command forbids it. Her misery and desire for self-respect make her dare to suggest a separation. Dombey in his social character reacts with amazement. And so she makes her illegal escape. To have eloped with Carker in the conventional sense, to have fallen with him because of physical attraction, would have been weakness. Edith Dombey has the strength to escape from society by making herself an outcaste on her own terms, using Carker merely as a device:

"I have thrown my fame and good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me--resolved to know that it attaches falsely--that you know it too--and that he does not, never can, and never shall. I'll die, and make no sign. For this, I am here alone with you, at the dead of night. For this, I have met you here, in a false name, as your wife. For this, I have been seen here by those men, and left here.

(Ch. 54)

She has used the weapons of society to reclaim herself; she will not be an object for any man. The pitiable death-bed is no longer obligatory; no longer, indeed, suitable. Once Edith acts, she is not a victim, either of man or of mercantilism. Dickens can admire her only from a distance.

Dombey and Son and Vanity Fair were both written and published in monthly parts during the period occupied by the first ground-swell of active feminism in England; both concluded their nineteen-month run in 1848. Both depicted socially conventional marriage as equivalent to sale into prostitution. Dickens created a woman with the strength to escape but did not like her; he resolved the novel emotionally outside of society on the ideal of loving, nurture-oriented Florence. Thackeray presented no ideal characters--no heroes--and suggested thereby that all

idealization is in itself illusion.

There are some interesting, though perhaps only coincidental, similarities between Thackeray's novel and a book written a few years previously which also attempted to criticize society through its ideals and particularly through the feminine characteristics it chose to admire. In Alfred Butler's Elphinstone (3 vols. 1841)⁴⁸ the hero makes his way through apprenticeships to an apothecary, an ironmonger, and a lawyer, learning thereby quackery, mercantilism, and lawmongering; seduces a girl, abandons her to a brothel, and lets her die in prison where his treachery has sent her. The girl's name is Amelia. She is blind, trusting, loving, innocent, helpless, and totally self-sacrificing; even when dying of consumption she devotes the proceeds of her trade on the streets to paying a lawyer for the hero's release from prison. The sentimental emotionalism of her death partly obscures Butler's cynicism about the value of her sacrifice, though it is clear that he intends the hero's education in self-interest, treachery, and dishonor to fittingly prepare him for his destiny--a seat in Parliament.

Thackeray's strokes are softer and yet more cutting because he avoids the extremes. Amelia and Becky, like Godfrey Malvern's wife and mistress, split between them the qualities which men desire. But they are not--even in physical appearance--the dark and the light, and neither, significantly, is liked by other women. Amelia is loved by men because "weakness . . . was her principal charm:--a kind of sweet submission and softness, which seemed to appeal to each man she met for his sympathy and protection." (Ch. 38)⁴⁹ Becky is strong, independent, and managing;

⁴⁸Alfred Butler, Esq., is listed in BMC as the author of novels written in 1841, 1842, and 1844. No further information has been located.

⁴⁹Citations from William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair, ed. Joseph Warren Beach (New York, 1950).

she did make Rawdon Crawley happy, at least in the first years--she paid his debts, provided his entertainment, and made him feel that he was somebody if only because he possessed her. Amelia's weakness is about as satisfying as cotton candy; George is taking advantage before they are six weeks married and faithful Dobbin, at the end, is more interested in his daughter and his History of the Punjab than in the woman he had so longed to look after.

And yet some of the reviewers and some of Thackeray's correspondents were misled into the apprehension that Amelia was intended to be the ideal woman and that Thackeray had botched it somehow by making her so little attractive.⁵⁰ Amelia is deliberately constructed to reveal how flimsy the feminine ideal is in a world of real people. She is a romantic fiction who can cope only with romantic fictions. Becky is a realist who understands what people want to believe and uses their stereotypes for her own ends. Even after the catastrophe Sir Pitt very nearly accepts her tale of helpless victimization.

Thackeray also turns his realist's eye on the clichés of motherhood. Amelia's mother-love is the same as her husband-love; she spoils, indulges, and sacrifices for her son until she has created a replica of his selfish, proud, careless father to lord it over her and tread on other women. Becky's aversion to nurturing says nothing good about her own character, but ironically produces a better son.

In holding the various socially accepted ideals up to the light of reason, Thackeray deliberately forces readers to examine fictions--either

⁵⁰See, for example, Spectator, 22 July 1848, pp. 709-10 and Fraser's Magazine, 38 (1848), 320-33. Thackeray wrote to Robert Bell, author of the Fraser's review, "If I had made Amelia a higher order of woman, there would have been no vanity in Dobbins falling in love with her"; The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), II, 423.

social or literary--in contrast to the reality which their own observation knows to exist. He invites the reader to be as rational as himself:

it has been the wish of the present writer, all through this story, deferentially to submit to the fashion at present prevailing, and only to hint at the existence of wickedness in a light, easy, and agreeable manner, so that nobody's fine feelings may be offended. I defy any one to say that our Becky, who has certainly some vices, has not been presented to the public in a perfectly genteel and inoffensive manner. In describing this siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above the water?

(Ch. 66)

Decorum in literature reflects the social conventions of the period: in any age some things are not talked about. Thackeray is constantly poking at the edges of decorum. What one talks about depends upon whom one is talking to; in Pendennis the ladies order their daughters out of the room in order to gossip about Pen's indiscretions, and the authorial presence in Vanity Fair remarks that when he was an "interesting child" of an age to be sent to the drawing room with the ladies after dinner the conversation was largely medical.

His overt moral standards, on the other hand, are quite strict. He has no great plea for the poor pitiful victimized woman because he would have women know better. Clara Newcome⁵¹ has every conceivable motive for her elopement, down to the physical brutality of her husband. But her miserable position relative to society (even after the divorce) is not a criticism of the double standard. Clara acquiesced in her sale in matrimony. She had a prior attachment. She knew that Barnes Newcome had abandoned his factory girl and their children. Ethel, by contrast, uses the single standard to defend her own flirtations by counter-attacking Lord Kew's wild oats, and though the immediate consequence is regret,

⁵¹The Newcomes (monthly parts, 1853-55).

she is finally rewarded with the man she ought to marry.

Thackeray the moralist insists that good men have the same standards as good women. His review of Ernest Maltravers criticized Lytton for allowing his hero--who is intended to be a hero--to seduce Alice: "He cannot see that the hero into whose mouth he places . . . his eternal whine about what he calls the good and the beautiful, is a fellow as mean and paltry as can be imagined" whose "boasted love of mankind . . . reduces itself to a very coarse love of womankind."⁵² The important thing about Thackeray's own coming-of-age novel is that the seduction does not take place; Pendennis is a man, he is tempted, and he makes a studied effort to overcome the temptation.⁵³

The question of decorum is, as has been indicated, a question of audience; married women talk about obstetrical difficulties with other married women, men about sexual conquests with like-minded men. The novels written by women for an audience imagined as consisting chiefly of other women treat the subject of female unchastity in a manner which differs in several important respects from the novels heretofore considered. Women writers were perpetually criticized for their inability to create male characters. Their minute observation of domestic relationships and of their own personal emotional states revealed, however, in some cases, things about women that either idealization or decorum prevented men from saying.

Mrs. Anne Marsh's⁵⁴ The Admiral's Daughter stands opposite Bulwer-

⁵²"Our Batch of Novels for Christmas, 1837," Fraser's Magazine, 17 (1838), 86-87.

⁵³The History of Pendennis (monthly parts, 1853-55).

⁵⁴Anne Marsh (1791-1874) was one of the most popular library novelists for nearly a quarter of a century; Mudie's carried eighteen

Lytton's Ernest Maltravers-Alice as a widely-read work about an unchaste woman at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign.⁵⁵ Mrs. Marsh is almost diametrically opposed to Lytton. Her rural paradise is disciplined and neo-Classical rather than wild and romantic, and she is suspicious of the sentiments simply because they are so strong. It is the man who loves his bride almost to insanity; the heroine, Inez Thornhaugh, is more reasonable: "She did not suppose that even the sedulous affection of Captain Vivian could preserve her from her due share of . . . sorrows . . . She expected . . . much happiness in his society--but ecstasies were out of her head." (Ch. 2)⁵⁶

Married, and a good mother, Inez begins to read and think, partly from a desire to direct the minds of her children; she matures; mentally she outgrows Vivian, who is a bluff sailor and little more. The other man is Vivian's old friend Laurence Hervey (tall, pale, brooding), who had disliked Inez as a girl but finds her enchanting in the role of mother. Inez is betrayed by the compassion and innocence which idealization identifies as the best qualities of a woman's nature:

Ignorant of life--its snares, its dangers--heedless and confident in herself, she never surmised the possibility of her own frailty--or that evil could lurk where the high-souled, gifted Laurence was concerned--she was imprudent, unreflecting, unschooled, compassionate, and generous--he the slave of a passion the more intense, as it was the very first that ever had mastered him. Shall we follow, step by step, the advances of guilt? . . . Shall we betray all the miserable weakness of human nature under

of her titles in 1861. CBEL lists her works but no secondary sources.

⁵⁵To be exact, it antedates the reign somewhat; it was published in Two Old Men's Tales (2 vols. 1834) but it remained in print and in demand. There was a new three-volume edition for the library trade in 1843 and the novel was included in two major reprint series: Bentley's Standard Novels (1844) and the Parlour Library (1850).

⁵⁶Quotations are taken from the Parlour Library edition of 1850.

temptation? Suffice it to say, the consequences were such as those who venture to walk in forbidden paths, relying on their own strength, ought to anticipate. *****

(Ch. 6)

In Bulwer-Lytton's Alice, a natural woman survived because of her motherhood and her innocence. The same qualities in Inez make her both tempting and temptable, but damn rather than forgive, because she is not isolated from the world but placed in the social and religious context in which novel-readers lived their own lives. Even the most ideal innate characteristics are socially dangerous:

If crime were only attributable to human nature under its grosser and more degraded forms; temptation would lose all power over the amiable, the high-souled, and the refined,--but alas! it is not so.

There are vices and crimes to which the very possession of such qualities . . . adds force to temptation.

(Ch. 6)

Therefore duty and religion are essential: "the purest and the wisest have need of some more authoritative guide than their own frail hearts, in the hour of danger." (Ch. 16)

The women's novels have a tendency to emphasize external standards: duty, religion, wider social and familial ties; a woman's life does not and should not revolve simply around a single man. And secondly, the heroines created by the women writers often experience what is referred to as "strong emotion" or "powerful feeling" or even "passion"; they are overwhelmed by these feelings as men may be by physical desire. They do not simply yield to men in order to make the men happy, out of a spirit of self-sacrifice.

The recognition that women did have sexual desires often created insoluble conflicts. The mother in Geraldine Jewsbury's The Half-Sisters

(2 vols. 1848)⁵⁷ has prepared her daughter for a conventional middle-class marriage:

" . . . however hot love may be at first, all that goes off fast enough, and it makes no difference at the end of six months whether you married for love or not, provided always you have chosen prudently, and have a respectable, steady, sensible man for your husband; whatever men may be before marriage, they all fall out of love pretty soon afterwards; it is to your children you must look, and not to your husband; for if you expect him to be in love with you, and make much of you, the sooner you get rid of that idea the better; it is a silly romantic notion only found in novels."

"Then must I neither love my husband, nor any one else?" replied Alice, disconsolately.

"Of course you must; don't I tell you it is your duty to love him, but in a sober, rational way . . . This life was given you to do your duty in, of course, there is no difficulty in seeing that; to fill up your time with useful employments. . . . what have you to look forward to, I should like to know, but marrying some honest, respectable man, who will support you decently in the sphere in which you were born. . . ."

"But why must I marry at all?" said Alice.

"For what else do women come into the world," replied her mother, "but to be good wives? Poor profitless, forlorn creatures they are, when they live single and get to be old . . . Depend upon it, Alice, if a young woman is lucky enough to be married to a steady, respectable young man, it is the best thing that can happen to her; and then she is something in the world."

(I, 68-69)

And then, after the marriage has settled into dullness, another man sweeps Alice off her feet. She longs for the "times, before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge, when she was calm, happy, ignorant of passion . . ." (II, 124) Women do feel something which a less decorous age would call physical desire: "A strong emotion--a real feeling of any kind, is a truth; no matter whether it be compatible or not with received

⁵⁷Geraldine Endors Jewsbury (1812-80) is in CBEL and DNB. She read manuscripts for both Bentley and Hurst and Blackett; she reviewed for the Athenaeum for nearly thirty years beginning in 1849. A selection of her letters to Jane Welsh Carlyle was edited by Mrs. Alexander Ireland (London, 1892). Susanne Howe's Geraldine Jewsbury, Her Life and Errors (London, 1935) is chiefly biographical. Jewsbury's decisions on manuscripts are discussed in Griest, Mudie's Circulating Library and in Jeanne Rosenmayer Fahnestock, "Geraldine Jewsbury: The Power of the Publisher's Reader," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 28 (1973), 253-72.

maxims of right and wrong." (II, 125)

The events and the message are not greatly different from those in the Family Herald stories on the sin of love outside matrimony, though the psychological detail is somewhat more convincing. Alice's husband comes in at the moment she is about to elope and she falls down in a fit of hysteria which ultimately kills her. The husband feels remorse. Alice's error was not to have trusted him:

"I could have sympathised with your temptation . . . I would have won back your heart with such love as would have won you. . . . Why did you not lean on me in your helplessness? It is not your fault that you were tempted, and I should only have loved you more for your peril; dear child, I do not blame you now."
(II, 137)

The suggestion that Alice is to be treated as a helpless child should have appeared ironic. Jewsbury had intended to contrast the lives of two half-sisters; the stronger, Bianca, had earlier refused a proposition from the same lover in order to pursue a career on the stage, and Bianca's story provided a vehicle for lectures on the fitness of ambition for talented women, on women's rights, on education for girls, and so forth. But Bianca's strength is rewarded by marriage to a really superior man--one with a title, to boot. The negation of message by plot is less a conscious pandering to social convention than an indication of the confusion and frustration of a woman of the period who recognized in herself qualities with which novelists did not generally deal, and yet believed in social law and duty. Jewsbury poured herself out to Jane Carlyle on women of the future, but she could find no solution for herself; she kept house for her brother and indulged in secret romantic passions for a series of male acquaintances.⁵⁸

⁵⁸The Half-Sisters was dedicated to Jane Carlyle who, according to the DNB (X, 821) would have accepted the dedication "but for the fear of offending her husband." The man to whom Alice is married has

The strongest voice of woman's passion expressed by a novelist of the period belonged to a writer whose most memorable heroine found happiness by overcoming temptation. Mrs. Oliphant wrote, retrospectively, of Charlotte Brontë that

There is but one strain of intense sentiment in these books-- the desire of a lonely creature longing for its mate . . . which intensifies the sensations of solitude, and the vagrancy of the heart, into a force of passion with which perhaps no woman, either before or since, has expressed that yearning of the woman towards the man which formed part of the primeval curse, and which indeed has produced the greater part of all distinctively feminine distresses.⁵⁹

In concrete sexual terms, nothing actually happens in Jane Eyre (3 vols. 1847). Yet Jane did two very shocking things. First, she loved Rochester, and told him so without being asked. The presence of the mad wife in the attic and the resident bastard to whom Jane is governess imply the sexual aspect of Rochester's attractiveness. Fannie Ratchford's study of the Brontë juvenilia makes clear how much physical passion and immoral love existed in Gondal and Angria. In Charlotte Brontë's very first love story, written at the age of fourteen, there is an entrancing first wife, with qualities not unlike Bertha Mason's, who captures the hero against his will.⁶⁰ The same hero--the Duke of Zamorna, whose essential attractiveness is Rochester's--subsequently has his way with virtually every woman he meets. Despite what middle-class virgins were not supposed to know or feel, Brontë had to impose moral standards on her semi-private fantasy life in order to write about English characters

little time for his wife but will not allow her to pay visits or do lady-like work among the poor because he wants her to ^{be} available whenever he needs her.

⁵⁹"The Literature of the Last Fifty Years," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 141 (1887), 757.

⁶⁰Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, The Brontë's Web of Childhood (New York, 1941), p. 204.

and landscape.

In a late Angria story there is a heroine who overcomes temptation because of "her respect for public opinion and her terror of failing the few persons who knew and trusted her."⁶¹ But Jane Eyre does not have a public in whose eyes she will lose reputation or a family to fail; her non-complicity is based only and wholly on self-respect. She resists Rochester as an independent individual.

Jane Eyre's individualism was actually more revolutionary than her passion. Most women novelists felt, like Mrs. Marsh, that passion was too strong for women to cope with unaided. Their women, furthermore, were not allowed to live for themselves. The most telling penalty dealt out to the adulteress was frequently the disasters which her loss of reputation brought upon her children, as, for example, in Lady Charlotte Bury's The Divorced (2 vols. 1837)⁶² or Mrs. Grey's Sybil Lennard (3 vols. 1846).⁶³

Lady Bury's book is a fashionable novel of the sort which had been enormously popular during the twenties and thirties. The ones written in the Victorian era revert to the Maria Edgeworth tradition: the burden of the tale is the value of doing the work proper to one's station. Sybil Lennard is one of many examples of what might be called the anti-silver

⁶¹Ratchford, p. 212.

⁶²Lady Charlotte Bury (1775-1861), daughter of the Duke of Argyll and lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Wales (later Queen Caroline), is in CBEL and DNB and discussed in Rosa, The Silver Fork School.

⁶³Elizabeth Caroline Grey (1789-1869) does not appear in any major biographical or bibliographical reference. There is a brief account in Montague Summers, A Gothic Bibliography (1941; rpt. New York, 1964), pp. 52-53. She was editress for Edward Lloyd, the penny-novel publisher, and wrote books for him and also for the London Journal as well as three-volume novels for the library trade.

fork pattern. The heroine has a simple, protected childhood. She moves into the fashionable world either in search of a mate or with her husband immediately after marriage. The second volume allows the reader the pleasure of the silver fork novel: balls, descriptions of dresses, witty chatter. The reader can enjoy it with a clear conscience because she knows punishment is looming: the fashionable life leads the heroine into, or up to the gates of, disaster, after which she discovers that duty, work, and self-sacrifice are after all the road to happiness.

The values of class and sex enter into the concept of work proper to one's station. The woman who allows her whole being to be absorbed in a single man has little recourse. In Lady Malet's Violet (2 vols. 1836) the opera dancer commits suicide when her protector ceases to love her. The message might be legal: only matrimony can defend women against the changeableness of men's affections. But there is, additionally, a psychological dimension; Violet has failed because her only purpose and justification was to be loved. In Caroline Norton's Woman's Reward,⁶⁴ Anne Morrison refuses the settlement which the gentleman offers after boredom sets in. She returns to the stage. "'There is no real disgrace in my profession,'" she says, "'... it is far, far more honourable than being the pensioned mistress of a man who has deserted me.'" (II, 49) She ultimately marries the manager of her theatre and has a child.

The modified silver fork novels often have, as Norton's novel had, a double or treble heroine. The middle-class virgin is never unchaste, though the married woman, who has already broken the sexual barrier, may sometimes elope. If she does, her elopement is the consequence of passion, and is punished. But for girls of the lower classes a variety of outcomes

⁶⁴one of two novellas published in The Wife and Woman's Reward (3 vols. 1835)

is possible. The women novelists examined both motive and reaction and discovered a number of mitigating circumstances. Anne Morrison survived because she was willing to take responsibility for herself. Mrs. Crowe⁶⁵ details a rather large gallery of unchaste women. There are two in The Adventures of Susan Hopley (3 vols. 1841).⁶⁶ One, Julia, is the victim of poverty and distress. She has a heart of gold; she shelters Susan on the latter's arrival, penniless, in London, saying, "There was a night in my life when if some charitable soul had done as much for me, I mightn't be the miserable wretch I am now." (I, 114) Julia's succoring heart and her love of her child permit her to live on usefully and respectably after she has been set up in a haberdashery shop.

The other, Mabel, had been taken abroad under false pretenses and literally sold to a Duke. But there is a difference: Mabel had not been in want; she had run away from a place as a servant because she wanted a more exciting life, and had agreed to a proposal from a confidence trickster that she pretend to be his niece in order to play for an advantageous alliance. Because her motives were impure she is not allowed to retain her worldly station; she goes off to a convent as a boarder. Even so, it is not to a life of suffering, service, and repentance but to one of scholarship and reflection:

"There were all the elements of virtue in her . . . alloyed by ignorance and ill-directed ambition. Born in another station,

⁶⁵Catherine Crowe (?1800-76) is in DNB; NCBEL lists a selection of contemporary reviews. Adeline Sergeant wrote the notice of her work in Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign (London, 1897).

⁶⁶Despite the servant heroine, the novel was written for the middle class; when the scene moves to France whole pages of dialogue are given in French. Edward Lloyd's penny serial Susan Hopley [sic] (1842), perhaps written by T. P. Prest, and the stage version by George Didbin Pitt based on it bore little relation to Mrs. Crowe's novel except the title; see Summers, p. 518, and Sadleir, II, 101.

and rationally educated, she would have been a noble creature;
and she is a noble creature now, in spite of her errors."
(III, 270-71)

In Men and Women or Manorial Rights (3 vols. 1844) the servant Jessie, who is warm, blowsy, subject to occasional good impulses, and knows full well the scoundrel will not marry her, survives, though she winds up in prison as accomplice to a robbery. The girl who is technically less guilty is more severely punished. She is an innkeeper's daughter educated to be a governess. The novels and poetry which she tries to write are products "of her misdirected reading and of a rather weak mind." (III, 117) In addition "she had a susceptible heart and warm affections, and she was therefore exactly calculated to become the prey of licentiousness, and the victim of her own feelings and imagination." (III, 117-18) Innocence does not save her; the price of her romantic foolishness is death.

Mabel of Susan Hopley, Jessie of Men and Women, and Lady Glenlyon, the adulteress of Mrs. Crowe's Linny Lockwood (2 vols. 1854) are interesting also because they are motivated by competition and a desire for pre-eminence, qualities which men can put to work in business but which women can exercise only in attracting love. They are quite obviously frustrated by the limitations of woman's role, but neither they nor Mrs. Crowe imagine any other outlet for their ambitions. Their creator disapproves of the havoc the wreak in the lives of others, yet her portrait of them is not without sympathy and understanding.

Holme Lee's Maude Talbot (3 vols. 1854)⁶⁷ has a triple plot, dealing

⁶⁷ Harriet Parr (1828-1900) wrote some thirty novels as Holme Lee as well as three books which she considered serious enough to be published under her own name; of the latter The Life and Death of Jeanne d'Arc (2 vols. 1866) indicates her interest in women's history. According to DNB, Dickens was an early admirer of her work. CBEL provides a list of titles but no critical references.

with three levels of society and intended--as is made clear as much by authorial comment as by the plot--to suggest a union of feeling among women of all classes. Holme Lee hopes to make girls whose minds are wrapped up in love share, through perception of their own emotions, an empathy with women of every station.

She idealizes the feudal responsibilities of the old aristocrat in order to make the social duties of the middle class similarly attractive. The title character has her volume of silver-fork pleasures, turns down the offer of a self-made man because he has no ancient blood, realizes she has lost the only man she could have loved, and settles down to her vocation of patronage and education among the poor.

The woman who actually falls is from the lower class. She is not deluded; she says "I shall not be happy; but it must have come to this at last: we are too young to put up with starvation." (III, 43) Her sister Nellie despairs when left alone. Importantly, it is not the lack of someone to depend on but the lack of dependents which is crushing; Nellie has "nobody to work for, nobody to tend, nobody to love." (III, 45) The sinner ultimately dies, comforted by religion, and yet coolly judged: not a victim but someone who had made a regrettable--though understandable--choice: "On one side, there is a love--temporary luxury--sufficient food; on the other, labour and semi-starvation." (III, 52) Holme Lee suggests that since women are essentially the same, regardless of class or of "purity," and that since woman's primary duty and desire is to serve, the obvious outlet for those who have no familial ties is the service of fellow women.

One novel which uses the modified silver fork pattern is the third of the marriage novels for 1848, Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (3 vols. 1848). Helen Huntingdon (also known as Mrs. Graham) is,

like Edith Dombey, a sexual outlaw in reverse, a woman who reclaims her own person by escaping from the religious and legal obligation of a married woman to submit to her husband's rule and desire. Edith's error was to marry for money. Helen's, however, was to have married for love, despite her aunt's clear-headed advice about Arthur Huntingdon's character.

Arthur's failure to provide the love she expected, as revealed in his repeated misbehavior with other women, would not justify Helen's flight; that misery she deserved and should suffer through. She leaves when she realizes that he is teaching their son to drink and swear. Brontë carries the logic of the Custody of Infants Act one step further: when the natural and moral duty of a mother comes into conflict with the legal duty of a wife, woman is right to break the law.

Woman's right to her own person, even if gained only through her maternal function, is associated with other equalizing ideas. Morally, Brontë is in favor of a single standard--a temperate one, which would allow both sons and daughters to profit by the experience of others, so that a girl would not be sent "into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path" and a boy would know enough to "refuse the evil and choose the good" without first conducting experiments in profligacy and temptation to discover how awful they are. (Ch. 3) And economically: having left her husband, Helen earns her living by painting. It is important to her to pay back even the debts she owes to her brother, who might be thought to be her natural protector. If it is degrading for a man to be a parasite, it is equally so for a woman:

"I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy, when I know that I am paying my own way honestly, and that what little I possess is legitimately all my own . . . "

(Ch. 44)

Helen is rewarded, ultimately, with Arthur's death, so that she can

marry the working gentleman-farmer who is worthy of her. She returns briefly to nurse Huntingdon when he is dying, not from any lingering love but because he is alone and ill and needs the sort of tending--physical and spiritual--which only she can provide. Woman has a duty towards the weak, but this duty cannot be adequately fulfilled if she is herself weakly dependent and subject only to legal and social authority as guides to action.⁶⁸

In all of these woman's novels the woman who falls, though she may be viewed with understanding, is not idealized. Utter innocence is neither necessary nor good in even a young girl, because without at least a minimum of worldly knowledge she is unable to make the choices which will allow her to live within the social system. Women do have strong emotions, though it is a possible reflection of the conception that specifically sexual desires are aroused only after sexual experience that the middle-class virgin never falls. But women are not valued chiefly for their natural emotionality; the woman novelist seeks to educate the reader about emotions so that she may subdue them by reason. Self-sacrifice does not enter into the list of mitigating causes; women should have sense enough to know that a man who demands that sort of sacrifice is not worth it.

This is not to suggest that these novelists wrote with deliberate feminist intent, nor even that they were particularly accurate psychologists: they often had difficulty meshing their conception, or observation, or intuitive sense of woman's character with the outcome which they felt was demanded by the plot or by the moral views with which they agreed. (Jewsbury's books are a particularly painful example of this problem.)

⁶⁸The book was written before Ruth, and Mrs. Gaskell would almost certainly have read it.

And yet, as a group, they seem to be struggling--sometimes from a rational viewpoint, sometimes from a religious--against the prevailing notion that man is a creature of the intellect and woman of the affections. Nowhere in these books do we find a woman whose chief value is her softness, her emotionality, her childish innocence.

The awkward construction, the purple writing, and the sometimes extraordinary aptness of the poetic justice distributed at the end of the lesser novels may be in part an indication that they were written out of a deep need for self-justification or personal expression, rather than with a conscious social viewpoint. The Admiral's Daughter, we recall, was Mrs. Marsh's first book. In it she suggested that a woman's best qualities--her intellectual growth, her emotional sensitivity, her maternally-inspired concern for the needs of others--could lead to disaster. In later books the heroine learned her duty early and saved others from disaster instead of experiencing it herself. Mrs. Marsh had, as a critic said, taken to "making books rather than to telling stories, and has perceptibly had the printing-press and certain editorial censors before her."⁶⁹ The phenomenon occurs frequently among the minor female novelists: a first book of considerable power and promise is followed by a succession of pot-boilers which lose for the author any claim to a place in literary history. It may be that these authors had in them one good autobiographical novel, or a vein of long-standing and well-developed fantasy rising out of their personal emotional responses which, once mined, left little from which to create other viable worlds. The first book tends to be written in isolation; there have not yet been suggestions by editors, responses from readers, criticism by the literary

⁶⁹Margaret Oliphant, "Modern Novelists--Great and Small," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 77 (1855), 556.

world; so that the first novel is more of a personal vision and less a reflection of the overt standards of society. When the first book proves very popular, it may provide a clue that the personal vision of one woman reveals thoughts and feelings shared by others, even though they differ from what the male financial and publishing world tells women they ought to think and feel.

The conflicting images which expressed the not-always-compatible social and emotional perceptions of what woman should be are evident in the first thoroughly middle-class woman's magazine, The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, begun in 1852 by S. O. Beeton. The overt focus is almost reactionary; woman should find her true vocation (and a means to share in the work-ethic) by recreating the ideal of an earlier and simpler time, when even middle-class wives had labored to create what the family ate and wore and had therefore earned a recognized place in the social economy. The stories, however, though they tend to feature heroines from the reader's own class, are not in the mood of the domestic novel with its delineation of the ordinary doings of daily life, nor are they particularly prudish. Charlotte Brontë's influence hovers strongly over both plot and emotion. The family is fragmented; heroines are orphaned or mysteriously placed in schools and act out the Jane Eyre fantasy of isolation, oppression, and ultimate strength through action.

The stories in the Family Herald often preached the necessity of a woman's looking out for her own interest. Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine fiction assumes that she will do so. The heroine is given credit for intelligence, common sense, and a self-concept which makes her less at the mercy of outside forces--including men. Concealed marriage, for instance, is a fairly constant device, but it often turns out well: the

heroine has enough sense to figure out when it is safe to flaunt convention.

When the woman does actually fall she is transformed swiftly into a mother. It sometimes seems more of a reward than a punishment. In "Grace Rushton"⁷⁰ the heroine escapes childless from a sham marriage and then takes charge of her betrayer's two orphaned daughters. Motherhood is her forte; she pays not at all for the folly of trusting him but rather experiences family life through "the merciful direction of an all-wise Providence."

The featured serial for 1857 was The Scarlet Letter. According to one biography of the magazine's editor:

Hawthorne's work had hitherto been placed among the books forbidden in most families to "the young person." Beeton disagreed with this view, and made up his mind that the readers of The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine were sufficiently "emancipated" to read the book with understanding and sympathy. The subsequent rapid increase in the magazine's circulation would seem to have justified his judgment.⁷¹

This smacks a little of smug approval by a post-Victorian. In fact, Beeton had something more to go on than a desire to "emancipate" his readers. The serial for the preceding year had also featured an unchaste heroine, and apparently fathers did not burn the magazine nor husbands forbid it. (Perhaps the secret is that they never opened its covers at all.) At any rate, women did not stop buying it, but the reverse--the effect on the circulation must have been such that Beeton knew it would be a good bet to follow immediately with another story on the same theme.⁷²

⁷⁰by Meggie May, Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, 5 (1857), 334-38.

⁷¹H. Montgomery Hyde, Mr. and Mrs. Beeton (London, 1951), p. 49.

⁷²Particularly one that he could get without cost. The text follows that of the early English pirate editions, without the Customs House preface. At one point the editor inserted a maxim which is indicative of the magazine's moral view; one installment ends in the middle of the chapter about

The novel which preceded The Scarlet Letter was The Path of Roses, written by Beeton himself.⁷³ The plot hinges on the confusion arising from the placement of Charlotte Wierdon's illegitimate child with a baby farmer; the material is used to explore the relative effect of heredity, environment, and experience in the formation of character. The theme and treatment are both in the mood of George Eliot: one's actions are irrevocable, both in the events they set in train and in their effect on one's character. Charlotte and the man with whom her passion allowed her to fall meet, many years later, at the bedside of their dead daughter, but there is no recrimination: "They looked at each other in an agony of silence; and there they stood, plainly at the other end of their path of roses." (p. 334)

Despite the intricacy of the plot there is a mood in the novel quite different from that encountered in the penny magazines or even in the general run of library novels. Pain, remorse, and the loss of family role punish Charlotte Wierdon sufficiently; she does not face death from starvation or even social outlawry. Both she and her lover come from the middling ranks or ordinary life. They sin equally. Their punishment is mental, not physical; they live on in the village, quietly going about their daily business, until they die of old age.

George Eliot's Adam Bede (3 vols.) was published in 1859. The difference between Alice Darvil and Hetty Sorrel, in popular, realistic novels of 1837 and 1859, is striking, complex, and profound. The intent,

Pearl and is followed, beneath a solid rule, by "Children increase the cares of life, but they mitigate the remembrance of death"; see Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, 6 (1857), 72.

⁷³ Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, 5 (1866-67), 5-334.

the mode, and the skill of the two authors account, no doubt, for the most significant literary differences. But there had also intervened twenty-two years of public discussion of the social sexual problem, twenty-two years of greater or lesser consideration of the role of women in society, and twenty-two years of popular fiction.

Cecil Beeton's novel suggests that even in the non-intellectual atmosphere of the Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine there had been a toning down of the atmosphere of romantic contrast, a subduing of direct and immediate moral consequence. A sinning woman need not be flagrantly bad, nor a mistaken heroine utterly excused and restored to perfection, to retain the reader's interest and sympathy. We must remember that George Eliot was, in her own time, a highly popular novelist. The original three-volume edition of 2090 copies of Adam Bede was sold within two months. Mudie alone eventually took 2050 copies.⁷⁴ She was also a reader of popular novels, though to an extent not from choice; she reviewed current fiction for the Westminster Review from 1852 to 1857. Despite Eliot's assertion that the germ of Adam Bede was anecdote told by her preacher aunt which became the prison interview between Dinah and Hetty⁷⁵ we cannot help remembering the similar culminating scene in Mrs. Trollope's Jessie Phillips. Eliot knew and admired many of the figures whose novels have been discussed. She had reviewed The Nemesis of Faith for the Coventry Herald;⁷⁶ she had been strongly impressed

⁷⁴See The George Eliot Letters, III, 33 and Altick, "The Literature of an Imminent Democracy," p. 217. By the end of the first year 16,000 copies had been sold; see David Carroll, ed., George Eliot: the Critical Heritage (New York, 1971), p. 9. Publishers expected a typical library novel to sell around 600 copies; see Royal A. Gettmann, A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers (Cambridge, 1960), p. 126.

⁷⁵The George Eliot Letters, II, 502-03.

⁷⁶The George Eliot Letters, I, 279.

by Shadows of the Clouds⁷⁷ and sympathetic to Ruth though she found Mrs. Gaskell "misled by a love of sharp contrasts--of 'dramatic' effects . . . not contented with the subdued coloring, the half tints, of real life."⁷⁸ And though one presumes that her use of the names Hester and Arthur D--- was accidental, she had read The Scarlet Letter and found it "one of the two most indigenous and masterly productions in American literature."⁷⁹

George Eliot tells, on the surface, a story indistinguishable from a dozen others: Hetty is a simple country girl; she sins with a man who is socially her better and whom she ought to know will never marry her; she suffers; she ultimately dies. Hetty is an object, enmeshed and contained by society and by natural consequences; her one desperate attempt at independent action is futile. Arthur is--at least physically and legally--relatively unscathed. The book has, like so many novels of the period, a dual heroine. Dinah Morris begins where the heroines of Holme Lee and other of the anti-silver fork women's novelists end, with a masculine independence of action and economic self-sufficiency feminized by a mission of caring and service to others. And though she loves Adam unsought and unasked she is virtually asexual; it is Dinah who is seen at the end in the maternal role, legitimized and sanctified by the children who surround her.

We have been considering the novels of the 1835-60 period in the light of two sorts of realism: the public or verifiable realism measured or interpreted in comparison to the facts brought forth by those who considered illicit sex as a social problem, and the private or individual realism

⁷⁷The George Eliot Letters, I, 280.

⁷⁸The George Eliot Letters, II, 86.

⁷⁹"Belles Lettres," Westminster Review, NS 9 (1856), 297.

of the women novelists who rendered emotional states as they perceived them. George Eliot had the benefit of both traditions. She differed from the women's novelists in the careful and believable reproduction of emotional states which were not her own. Neither Arthur Donnithorne nor Hetty Sorrel is a persona; Eliot's exploration of their motivation is neither self-indulgent nor expressly moral. Because of her psychological perception, she is able to use the public facts more accurately than the idealists and to interpret the defects of innocence more profoundly than the moralists.

Eliot dealt, as neither Bulwer-Lytton nor Mrs. Marsh was able to do, with real human weakness. The book does not preach to the Hetties of the world that they ought to know better or to men that natural perfection can be found only in women ignorant of society. Yet it is not a failing in either Adam or Arthur to love Hetty. Her beauty is "that of kittens, or very small downy ducks . . . or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief;" the sort of beauty, Eliot says, "which seems made to turn the heads, not only of men but of all intelligent mammals, even of women. . . . a beauty with which you can never be angry." (Ch. 7)

There is nothing evil in Hetty. She is, like the whore who wrote to the Times, like the majority of the girls whose path to prostitution Mayhew summarizes--like, presumably, young things in general--fonder of admiration than of work, trembling before the mystery of urges within her body, narcissistically pleased by the look of her face framed by the old lace scarf and the gilt and glass earrings. She is not in any literal sense innocent: she is a farm girl; she goes to church; she has an outspoken and righteous aunt--she certainly knows both the physical facts of sex and the moral teachings which apply. And yet she never makes the

connection between this practical or verbal knowledge and her own situation. Hetty is virtually incapable of abstract thinking. Her mental life is one of reverie and fantasy; she recalls moments with Arthur, she admires herself and remembers admiration of herself, she dreams of the simple luxuries within the scope of her imagination.

There is no evil in her thoughts, hardly even any content to her fantasies; Eliot says that because she had never read a novel she could not find a shape for her expectations. (Ch. 13) She possesses an innocent natural sexuality, an inherent taste for cleanliness and pretty things (Lytton, perhaps, would call it innate sensitivity). On a purely bodily level, there is no difference between the desires of Hetty and of Arthur; both--in a world which emphasizes the absence of society--are moved by natural sensuality and a wish to give pleasure to themselves and to each other.

Sexuality in itself does not damn Hetty. We hardly censure her fall; we hardly even blame her, later, when she agrees to marry Adam, for we have perceived that "love" is also among the things Hetty is incapable of, and she might be able to do her duty by becoming the willing possession of a man who desires her. The reason that we do not disapprove of Hetty, or see her as a figure in a morality, is that Eliot has convinced us she has no choice. Some human beings are not capable of the life which fiction had, until Eliot, ordinarily portrayed. "A sense predominates," said Caroline Norton in her review of the book, "of the utter inferiority of poor Hetty's nature . . . it is rather as for some pet animal tortured and crushed, than for a conscious suffering woman, that our pity dwells on the end."⁸⁰ The images continually attached to

⁸⁰Edinburgh Review, 110 (1859), 240.

Hetty are images drawn from the animal world. When Adam and Arthur quarrel over her they consider her merely as an object; it never occurs to either of them to consult her wishes or ask her opinion. "She's all but a child," says Adam, "as any man with a conscience in him ought to feel bound to take care on." (Ch. 28)

The young, in an ideal world, learn from experience. Hetty is almost alone among the unchaste women of mid-century fiction in that maternity does not bring her to maturity. Eliot's handling of the infanticide is unique. The subject itself was daring for a novel; only Mrs. Trollope had dwelt on it at length, and Jessie Phillips was an innocent victim of appearances, who had already made painful decisions in the maturity brought about by her care for the yet-unborn child.⁸¹ But Hetty has barely even an animal's feeling for her young. She is not capable of accepting maturity or maternity. She longs "to go back again" (Ch. 45) and return to her childhood, her home, her protection. One is never even sure that she understands her sin or her religion; she confesses under direction in hope that God will take away the present pain.⁸²

Eliot removes much of the heavy mystique surrounding the story of

⁸¹The problem was discussed in the press. The proselytizing journals believed that the man should be held equally guilty of murder; see "The Prevalence of Infanticide," The Magdalen's Friend, 2 (1862), 33-40. In Kingsley's Yeast the seducer who reads in the Times of his victim's sentencing promptly commits suicide. Thomas Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs" (first published in Hood's Magazine for May, 1844) was based on a newspaper account, but the published version alters the story of murder-attempted suicide to simple suicide and omits the reference to the child which had appeared in a working draft: "Poor child of sin, to throw it therein/ Seemed sending it to Heaven"; see Selected Poems of Thomas Hood, ed. John Clubbe (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 392-93.

⁸²Robert Colby, in "Miss Evans, Miss Mulock, and Hetty Sorrel," English Language Notes, 2 (1965), 206-11, points out a number of correspondences between the chapter entitled "Lost Women" in Dinah Craik's A Woman's Thoughts about Women (1858) and George Eliot's treatment of Hetty Sorrel. Craik said that infanticide resulted from "an intolerable dread of shame . . . blunting every natural instinct."

the unchaste. The portrait of Hetty's incapability--whether or not we call it innocence--is so convincing that the infanticide is absolutely essential to the story; without it the reader would, like some of the reviewers who objected to Ruth, simply forgive Hetty; her unchastity does not damn her. The scene following the childbirth reveals that innocence is a condition of immature dependency. Even with the infanticide, however, the reprieve also is necessary. Hetty's judicial death would have the effect, morally and emotionally, of placing the entire blame on the organization of society, as in the case of Ruth.

Adam Bede was George Eliot's first full-scale work. The book and the author met with swift and nearly universal critical acclaim. "Persons who only read one novel a year," said the Saturday Review, ". . . may venture to make their selection, and read Adam Bede."⁸³ The Times notice began: "There can be no mistake about Adam Bede. It is a first-rate novel, and its author takes rank at once among the masters of the art."⁸⁴ The quality most praised was the sense of reality conveyed by the story and the characters, as though the reader "had made acquaintance with real human beings: the story is not a story, but a true account of a place and people who have really lived."⁸⁵ The author

does not conceal or palliate the weaknesses of humanity; there is no attempt to paint rural life as an Arcadia of innocence; we have Hetty's silly vanity, and young Donnithorne's weakness of principle, and Lisbeth's petulance, all truthfully set before us . . . yet we part from all of them at last with an honest sympathy . . .⁸⁶

In particular the conception of Hetty's character was praised; Dickens

⁸³Saturday Review, 26 Feb. 1859, p. 250.

⁸⁴Times, 12 Apr. 1859, p. 5.

⁸⁵Geraldine Jewsbury in Athenaeum, 26 Feb. 1859, p. 284.

⁸⁶W. Lucas Collins in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 85 (1859), 504.

found it "so extraordinarily subtle and true, that I laid the book down fifty times, to shut my eyes and think about it."⁸⁷

The reality disclosed in Hetty was admitted even by the few moralists who felt it painful to have such reality introduced into the middle-class home:

Of course, every one knows that every sin under heaven is committed freely in agricultural villages . . . But that is no reason why a picture of village character and village humour should be made so painful as it is by the introduction⁸⁸ into the foreground of the startling horrors of rustic reality.

The reality that "every one knows" was the reality which had become known in two decades of public discussion of the social problem. Most readers were awed by the discovery that reality need not be distorted by idealism:

The effect of this character upon the reader is unprecedented and anomalous. Take her from first to last: her apathy on hearing of the death of Adam's father; her want of all affection for the children and for her home; her delight in the earrings per se, not with any relation to their giver; her cold-blooded determination to marry Adam after the desertion of Arthur; her utter want of mere motherly instinct in the manner of the murder of her child. Is there any one trait that we can help loathing? Her lack of imagination, of conscience, of religion; her intense selfishness, her impassivity, all so forcibly detailed--can we find a single redeeming point in her? Not one; and yet we do not loathe Hetty, but read of this poor forlorn creature with tears in our eyes, pitying her from our souls. . . . Her moral barrenness is so hopeless that she seems to be relieved of human responsibility. She has no notion⁸⁹ of right and wrong, only the instinct of comfort and pleasure.

Such was the reality of the unchaste woman delineated by the most objective of the social reformers; the presentation of such a woman without eliciting shock or horror or excuses was George Eliot's accomplishment. There is, of course, a moral distance in the portrait; Hetty is not, either in her physical circumstances or (presumably) her intellectual and social

⁸⁷The Letters of George Eliot, III, 115.

⁸⁸Saturday Review, 26 Feb. 1859, pp. 250-51.

⁸⁹Sharpe's London Magazine, 15 (1859), 274.

character, a figure like the typical novel-reader. There is, in the novel, an ideal woman to emulate. And the only enunciated moral statement is protectionist: "God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery." (Ch. 37)

Looking back over the novels about the unchaste woman written between 1835 and 1860 we see, with few exceptions, a field littered with broken bodies; the survivors (including, in typically ironic manner, Becky Sharpe) are on their knees to God. The special limitations of woman's role decreed for her particular problems--problems wholly due to her sex. The male co-sinner might, for religious or moral purposes, be punished for his sin, but society did not demand it. For women, the social consequences of unchastity were generally viewed as an inevitable and necessary purgatory. Woman lived in a world restricted by social relationships; man was judged and had possibilities as an individual. The attitudes towards human sexuality were all colored by official repression. Some male novelists romanticize natural emotions; the ideal woman could be she whose nature was not inhibited. More commonly, however, female sexuality was a sign of something wrong; the woman a victim of male desire or social inequity or (more rarely) personal ambition inappropriate to subordinate woman. Many female novelists recognize women's desires but try to control them so that women can achieve a social role not wholly linked to one man. All of the portraits are measured against a notion of what woman should be.

CHAPTER FOUR

SENSATION, SEX, AND THE 1860'S

The literary phenomenon of the eighteen-sixties was the Sensation novel.¹ Sensationalism meant excitement, secrets, surprises, suspense; it meant strong emotion aroused by strong scenes, violent death by murder, train, fire, and poisons ranging from chloroform to nightshade; and it meant continual shocks provided by violating decorum. One critic in 1863 complained that eight of the twenty-four recent novels which he was reviewing dealt in whole or in part with bigamy,² and his selection did not even include such entries by leading novelists as Charles Reade's Griffith Gaunt (Argosy, 1865-66; 3 vols. 1866) or William Makepeace Thackeray's Phillip (Cornhill, 1861-62; 3 vols. 1862). One can hardly open a novel written at the height of the vogue without discovering a woman unchaste in fact, in reputation, or by desire, whether with intent, by accident, or through a technicality.

Of course the decade had no monopoly on the sort of light literature which depends on exciting incident, strong emotion, and characters who vary from the stereotype only in the particular perversion supplied as an outlet for their villainy. The Gothic, the Newgate, and the penny dreadful had preceded the Sensation; the detectives, the spies, the cinema,

¹The term was first used in September, 1861, in the Sixpenny Magazine, according to Kathleen Tillotson, "The Lighter Reading of the Eighteen Sixties," preface to Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (Boston, 1969), p. xii.

²H. L. Mansel, "Sensation Novels," Quarterly Review, 113 (1863), 490.

and television were to follow. The difference in the sixties is the serious critical attention given to the sort of novel which we have for the past hundred years considered a sub-species: fiction, not literature. Sensation novels were reviewed in respectable quarterlies and denounced from the pulpit. The second generation of Victorian writers began under their influence: George Meredith's Rhoda Fleming and Thomas Hardy's Desperate Remedies are both treatments of the unchaste woman written in the shadow of Sensationalism.

With such a mass of portraits of the unchaste placed before the public eye, and such a supply of causes, motives, and consequences for her actions there is--even in the restoration of justice at the end--a remaining substratum of ambiguity. That, in itself, is significant. The extension of the possibilities provided by the novelist for the woman of less than immaculate purity is both a reflection of and a reaction to changes in the role of woman in society.

One of the most striking features of the Sensation novels of the 1860's, as a body, is the centrality of the female characters. The form requires a villain to move the plot, and an astonishing number of the villains are, in the words of an 1866 review, "beautiful women of elegant figure and golden locks, whose fascinating exterior only hides a subtle brain and a pitiless heart."³ Justice punishes the villainess; her strength is demonstrated, feared, and crushed. Often the revelation of her sexual immorality provides the clinching demonstration of her viciousness.

Other centrally placed female characters are, however, neither chaste, victimized, nor anathematized. Adeline Sergeant explained the

³"Recent Novels: Their Moral and Religious Teaching," London Quarterly, 27 (1866), 104.

popularity of East Lynne in terms of a "reaction against inane and impossible goodness" as the only suitable characteristic for a heroine.⁴ The really interesting women--the women to whom a whole novel's adventures might be devoted--are women with sexual experience. The variety of subterfuges undertaken in order to provide heroines who had both the freedom of action supplied only by marriage and the purity required for an ultimate union with the hero reflect the strain imposed by the limitations of the feminine role.

The typical novel of the 1860's was a novel of contemporary life. "Proximity," as one reviewer said, is "one great element of sensation. It is necessary to be near a mine to be blown up by its explosion."⁵ The deliberate contemporaneity encourages the reflection of changes in social standards and modes of behavior as perceived at the moment they were taking place.

A good deal of the sexual frankness is conservative--or even reactionary--in effect. Divorce, for example, was now possible for the middle class, but Sensation novelists do not make use of it as a solution to their characters' problems; they rather protest that the law is incapable of dividing two people who have literally been merged into one. Even the woman victimized by a fake wedding is hardly free to marry while her despoiler still lives.

Middle class virgins are unchaste in Sensation novels, as they had not been in earlier popular fiction. Changing social patterns provided new opportunities. Girls attend Eights Week at Oxford and the system of chaperonage breaks down; they walk across the fields unaccompanied to

⁴"Mrs. Crowe, Mrs. Archer Clive, Mrs. Henry Wood," Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign (London, 1897), p. 181.

⁵Mansel, p. 488.

pay a call and find only the young man of the house at home. Most significantly, they ride--an occupation in which the company of a suitably mature chaperone is particularly difficult to obtain. The woman riding with only a groom to protect her provides a variety of new plot opportunities: she can, like Bella in Annie Thomas' On Guard (3 vols. 1865), get lost and have to spend the night on her own in an inn twenty-seven miles from home,⁶ or she may, even more scandalously, elope with the groom himself, like Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Aurora Floyd.⁷

Plot opportunities aside, the figure of the woman riding is a clear case of a conservative reaction to a new social phenomenon. When a woman is first presented to us in a riding habit--or even more dangerously, on the hunting field--we can be virtually certain that trouble and impropriety will follow. Bella (in On Guard) and Kate Gaunt (of Reade's Griffith Gaunt) manage to avoid unchastity but not dishonor;

⁶Annie Thomas (1838-1918) took up writing to support herself after her father, a coastguardsman, died in 1856. She produced more than sixty novels, many of which were reprinted in multiple editions. There is no listing in DNB or CBEL. In 1867 she married Pender Cudlip, curate of Yealmpton, and, according to Albert Johannsen, "shocked her neighbors by horseback riding and fox hunting, which, while considered perfectly correct for a clergyman, was not deemed proper for a curate's wife"; see The House of Beadle and Adams (Norman, Okla., 1950), II, 268.

⁷Aurora Floyd (Temple Bar, 1862-63; 3 vols. 1863). Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1837-1915) was the undisputed regent of Sensation novelists; DNB regrets that her later and better work was dismissed out of hand because of the overwhelming reputation of Lady Audley's Secret. There is a partly autobiographical memoir in Braddon's contribution to J. K. Jerome's My First Book (London, 1894), some bibliographical information in Summers' "The 'Black Band' Scandal" (Times Literary Supplement, 17 Feb. 1945, p. 84), a brief critical discussion in E. A. Bennet's Fame and Fiction (London, 1901), and a chapter of sanitized biographical data in the autobiography of Braddon's son William B. Maxwell, Time Gathered (London, 1937). The essay in Sadleir's Things Past (London, 1944) is the fullest treatment to date.

Adelaide in Ravenshoe⁸ and Caroline Eversfield in Passages in the Life of a Fast Young Lady (3 vols. 1862)⁹ both marry, but not soon enough after their elopements for the county ladies to visit them.

One cause of the reaction is evident from the first description of Aurora Floyd: "At six years of age she rejected a doll and asked for a rocking-horse." (I, 33) For the riding heroine to survive to a satisfactory end she must suffer enough weakness, illness, and consciousness of wrongdoing to adopt a softer, feminine role. (We know, in On Guard, that Bella will be saved when she compassionately lets the fox live.)¹⁰

Besides the reaction against woman's assumption of a masculine role, there is also a specific contemporary phenomenon to account for the aura of impropriety attached to the horsewoman: the "pretty horse-breakers" of Rotten Row. At the beginning of the 1860's the English demi-mondaine appeared publicly in the Park, in letters to the Times, in alluring portraits in newsagents' shops, and, indeed, in Sir Edwin Landseer's Royal Academy picture for 1861, of which Skittles was the subject. Towards the middle of the decade there was a series of two-shilling yellowbacks purporting to tell the life stories of the most notorious women about the town. Though they imitated the format of the railway novel they were not carried by Smith's bookstalls nor, of course, by Mudie's, but they were available elsewhere--curiously, more easily

⁸by Henry Kingsley (Macmillan's 1861-62; 3 vols. 1862).

⁹by Mrs. Grey, author of Sybil Lennard; see p. 101 above.

¹⁰The sporting novelist Robert Smith Surtees also disapproved, though on slightly different grounds; his targets were feminine women who joined the fox-hunt for romantic reasons and thereby interfered with masculine pleasures. See Ch. 15, "The Hunting Woman," in Frederick Watson, Robert Smith Surtees: A Critical Study (London, 1933).

in the provinces.¹¹ The books pretend half-heartedly to be journalistic exposés. The parties in St. John's Wood which break up suddenly when a division is called in the House are described in pornographically opulent terms but there are no scenes of actual sexual encounter, and even these books usually come down on the side of conventional roles, sometimes with amusing suddenness. The Soiled Dove ends with a melodramatic tableau of Laura frozen to death in the snow after the sound of hymns sung in the street has kept her from murdering the "Honorable" who ruined her. Anonyma finally marries the man who rouses her respect so much that she will not let him have even a kiss until she has proved that she can reform.¹²

The most common type of sinful, sexual, evil woman represented in Sensation novels is the adventuress. The whole race are Becky Sharpe's children: women who pursue money, position, power, and security by the socially acceptable route of marriage. The adventuress marries without love and therefore submits to sex without love. Even though the submission takes place within marriage the evil of the adventuress's sexual nature often reveals itself in her subsequent adultery or the revelation that she was not chaste at marriage.

Bracebridge Hemyng's Held in Thrall (yellowback, [1869]) is typical of the cheap railway books which reduce the story to its overt message

¹¹Athenaeum, 22 Oct. 1864, p. 523.

¹²Anonyma or Fair but Frail (1864); The Soiled Dove: A Biography of a Fast Young Lady Familiarly Known as "The Kitten" (1865). Other titles include Skittles, Incognita, The Beautiful Demon, Love Frolics of a Young Scamp, "Left Her Home", and Fanny White. The series was originally published by George Vickers and reissued about 1884 by C. H. Clark. All were anonymous; the authorship has been attributed to W. Stephens Hayward, E. L. Blanchard, Bracebridge Hemyng, and others. Sadleir feels that Hemyng, who wrote the section on prostitution in London for Mayhew and also produced a great number of cheap railway novels before he turned to stories for boys' magazines, was probably responsible for at least the earlier books of the series; see Nineteenth Century Fiction, II, 8.

by leaving out such subtleties as psychology. By the second page we have learned that Mona Seafield is a governess who would willingly sell her soul to the devil in order "to raise herself above the necessity of working . . . and to compel others to render her the homage due to rank and wealth." After failing to attract the heir to the neighboring estate she persuades an old poacher to compel his submissive wife to "remember" switching the babies she had nursed, blackmails the newly-elevated pseudo-heir into marrying her, makes sure of her settlement, and elopes with a Captain who deserts her to sink "from one depth of degradation to another." (p. 149)¹³

In thoughtful hands the figure is more complex and reveals the conflict between the work-ethic on the one hand and a distrust of ambition on the other. The adventuress admits her goal, which, in these novels, heroes generally do not. Even if it is admirable for a man to work hard he is not deliberately seeking riches and power--the money is an accidental by-product and the seat in Parliament a gracious recognition of an effort which is in itself virtuous. The conflict is further complicated by the realization that woman's state is anomalous: she can "work" to the highest levels of social or financial power only by putting her person (as opposed to her hands and brain) in trade. It is significant that the character whose name is Magdalen in Wilkie Collins' No Name (All the Year Round, 1862-63; 3 vol. 1862) is not the unmarried mother of Vanstone's children but the daughter who cold-bloodedly contrives to recapture the inheritance lost through her illegitimacy by committing matrimony with the heir-at-law.

¹³Bracebridge Hemyng (d. 1901; birth date listed variously as 1829, 1841, etc.) was a prolific writer whose biography and bibliography--both--are elusive and incomplete. Johanssen, II, 138-39, provides some biographical references. Louis James discusses the Jack Harkaway stories in "Tom Brown's Imperialist Sons," Victorian Studies, 18 (1973), 89-99.

The treatment of the adventuress also reveals an underlying fear of woman's sexual attractiveness once she has decided to use her body for what it is worth and has taken on the role of aggressor. She can succeed because she violates the understood conventions. Men are not used to supplying restraint; they can therefore be ruined by seductive females. William Winwood Reade's Liberty Hall, Oxon. (3 vols. 1860)¹⁴ has a whole phalanx of man-trapping women, from the three shop-girl sisters in Woodstock whose father earns a living by threatening undergraduates with breach-of-promise suits or exposure to the proctors to the ladies at a county ball who place bets with each other about which men they will be able to capture by the end of the evening. Lucy (another woman who rides to the hounds) loses her virginity without any sense of shame except that associated with a clear calculation of its value:

"I have lost a woman's chief treasure, and I have lost it like a fool, I have lost it for nothing, I have lost it for itself. Itself, ha! ha! what a prize, for so great a stake--Ah, if we young girls knew but when we know, it is too late . . . all is lost, lost, lost!"

She drooped her head, and she thought. Then her eyes flashed: a proud smile curled upon her lips.

"Lost for others, not for me! I have still a stern will, a strong brain: I have still resolution to conquer, and cunning to hide. I have been a child, I have fallen; I will be a woman, and I will rise. But I must forget that I have a heart, that heart which has so nearly lost me all."¹⁵

Men were threatened by riding women, by ambitious women, by women who used sexuality for their own ends. The most reactionary novelists Sensationally exaggerated the masculine-serving qualities of the old

¹⁴William Winwood Reade (1838-75), the nephew of Charles Reade, did not succeed as a novelist. DNB describes him as a naturalist and traveller. The Martyrdom of Man (1872), a controversial and much-reprinted religious book, is discussed in Daniel P. King, "The Most Readable Book," Baker Street Journal, 25 (1975), 77-79.

¹⁵elipses in the original. The Saturday Review called Liberty Hall, Oxon. "the filthiest book that has been issued by a respectable English publisher during the lifetime of the present generation"; see 21 Jan. 1860, p. 84.

ideal. James McGrigor Allan objects, in Nobly False (2 vols. 1863),¹⁶ that:

the woman who can unite in herself, the graces and charms peculiar to her sex, with sufficient intellectual power to comprehend and sympathise with a superior man, and with sufficient moral worth to sacrifice self, and make her life subservient to that of the man she adores--is extremely rare, and can hardly be ever met with in Society!

The tone of society and modern female education are fatal to the gentleness, yielding disposition, and disregard of self, which are absolutely essential to a woman who wishes to be the companion of a man of thought. The women to be met with in ball-rooms, are all educated to Queen it through life . . .

(II, 76-77)

The novel's hero finds, fortunately for himself, Miriam, a self-taught ferryman's daughter, who is not only willing to live with him sans matrimony so that he can keep a promise made to his dying mother, but who also drinks lye in compromising circumstances so that he will hate her and marry a social equal for his own good. Allan's introduction tells us that Miriam embodies the womanly ideal which had obsessed him for years: the woman who is unchaste not as a victim but as an embodiment of "the unfathomed depths of woman's capacity of suffering and self-negation for a man she loves." (I, v-vi) We are not surprised to discover that among Allan's later works is Woman Suffrage Wrong in Principle and Practice (1890).

The plot which introduces the widest variety of sexual scandal is also, though more ambiguously, conservative. It is one of the stand-bys of English fiction: the discovery of rightful inheritance. The sexual incident usually takes place off-stage. Illegitimate children--often in the best of families--have been concealed under polite fictions or farmed out to foster parents. Babies have been switched for motives pure

¹⁶T. C. Newby published several novels by James McGrigor Allan in the 1860's. No biographical or critical information has been discovered.

or impure. The sexual adventure in the past generation was evil because it confused the social fabric and introduced the uncertainty consequent to not knowing who people really are. The ultimate outcome is conservative; the rightful heir is at last recognized.

The ambiguous strain within this conservatism is that it tends towards the confirmation of middle-class values by giving them the sanction of aristocratic "legitimacy." The plot frequently provides moral elevation for the socially inferior girl at the expense of her betters. The legitimate child who ultimately inherits is the offspring of an early *mésalliance* of a social climber or a younger son who, when he comes into the property, manages to persuade the milliner or farmer's daughter or nurserymaid who had valiantly held out for the church and the ring that the ceremony was invalid because he had signed the register with a false name, or that the license was not in order or the clergyman in orders, so that he can bigamously marry the woman who will bring him an aristocratic connection to go with his money or money to go with his encumbered estate.¹⁷ Thackeray's Henry Esmond (3 vols. 1852) is a good example of the pattern, though the plot is so ubiquitous in the sixties it can hardly be said to have a source. The delayed inheritance provides both a reward for the hard-working heir and a magical symbol of gentility to confirm his virtue and that of his mother.

The wicked seducers who deliberately ruin girls for the temporary gratification of sensual pleasure are almost invariably aristocrats who add to seduction the other sins of idleness--gaming, racing, ruinous

¹⁷A girl did not have to be particularly naïve to be so persuaded. One section of the Consecration of Churchyards Act of 1867 had the purpose, in the words of the title of a pamphlet written in support of it, of "affirming the validity of certain marriages supposed to have been doubtful on account of the position of the communion table being changed."

debt. The Sensation novelists do not leave us to perceive the villainy ironically through the contrast between the suffering of the innocent victim and the prosperity of the man; they are more apt to punish him directly and thus reveal a moral world more rigorous than that of the novels of previous decades. We are meant to infer that society approves of the moral rigor. The gamekeeper in Normantown (1862)¹⁸ murders his daughter's seducer and is sentenced to only one year's imprisonment. The aristocratic despoiler in The Soiled Dove commits suicide. The girls in novels of this sort are young, poor, uneducated, innocent and pitiable and, sometimes, therefore survive. In Jessie's Expiation (3 vols. 1867) by Oswald Boyle¹⁹ the poor victimized girl is forced by her titled seducer to marry a man who is going through a spell of lunacy; she (being a true woman) grows to love him "because he is miserable" (III, 246) and they are received kindly by the novel's admirable people, a young middle-class couple who have made a love-match on slender means and have to work hard. But the wicked Lord Rendover poetically drowns at the very spot where he had first kidnapped Jessie.

Mrs. Henry Wood's East Lynne (Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, 1859-61; 3 vols. 1861)²⁰ is the most famous of the Sensational bourgeois

¹⁸By A. J. Barrowcliffe, who is identified in CBEL as Albert Mott, author of three novels published between 1859 and 1862. No further information has been found.

¹⁹Sadleir identifies Oswald Boyle as presumably Alfred Austin, since he bought a copy of Jessie's Expiation from Austin's collection of his own works; see Nineteenth Century Fiction, I, 12. Alfred Austin (1835-1913) was Poet Laureate from 1896 until his death and is in CBEL, DNB, etc.

²⁰Mrs. Henry Wood (1814-87) is in DNB and CBEL. Her son, Charles W. Wood, produced a highly laudatory biography, Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood (London, 1894). Adeline Sergeant wrote the article in Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign. There are critical discussions in Malcolm Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers (1934; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y., 1966) and Jeanne B. Elliot, "A Lady to the End: The Case of Isabel Vane," Victorian Studies, 19 (1976), 329-44.

moralities about sex and unearned money.²¹ The curse of both looms over the opening words: "In an easy-chair of the spacious and handsome library of his town house sat William, Earl of Mount Severn. His hair was grey, the smoothness of his expansive brow was defaced by premature wrinkles, and his once attractive face bore the pale, unmistakable look of dissipation." (Ch. 1) William Vane had been an industrious, steady, legal student until three unexpected deaths gave him a title and sixty thousand a year on which to ruin himself. Meantime he went to Gretna Green with the woman he loved. Because of the elopement there was no settlement; because of the title there was waste and indolence. When the Earl dies his daughter Isabel is penniless and homeless. She marries Mr. Carlyle, who had bought Mount Severn's home (East Lynne) from the proceeds of his work as a country lawyer, who continues to work even though he is a man of property, and whose worth is recognized by election to Parliament. Isabel falls prey to idleness (Carlyle's sister lives with them and manages the household), jealousy (because her husband keeps necessary business secrets from her), and physical proximity to a man who stirs her blood. Her punishment is instantaneous:

Never had she experienced a moment's calm or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home. She had taken a blind leap in a moment of wild passion; when, instead of the garden of roses it had been her persuader's pleasure to promise her, (but which, in truth, she had barely glanced at, for that had not been her moving motive), she had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror from which there was never more any escape . . . a lively remorse, a never-dying anguish, took possession of her soul for ever. O reader, believe me! Lady--wife--mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake! Whatever trials may be the lot

²¹The book was rejected by Smith and Elder and Chapman and Hall. George Meredith, the reader for the latter, called it "foul"; see Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Books (London, 1935), p. 325. By the end of the century it had sold almost half a million copies and had been translated, according to Mrs. Wood's son, "into every known tongue, including Parsee and Hindustanee"; see Charles W. Wood, p. 248.

of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, resolve to bear them; fall down on your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death.

(Ch. 10)²²

The effectiveness of the second half of the novel is due to Mrs. Wood's skill in managing emotional effects so that even the reader who agrees with every word of the moral homily remains interested in and sympathetic towards Isabel. Her flaws (chief of which was to have married a man whom she respected but did not love) are clearly shown in the first half of the book. The act is her own, freely taken. In the second part, Mrs. Wood puts much more emphasis on Levison's villainy--he refuses to marry Isabel so as to make their child legitimate; he is shown to be a practiced seducer and, ultimately, a murderer--so that Isabel comes to seem more of a victim. Her most noble quality--her love for her children--provides both the vehicle for her punishment and the opportunity for purification through suffering.

That punishment is most harrowing which involves the loss of that which is most valued. A generation earlier the heaviest burden on the unchaste woman had been the sense of sin (the fear that her soul was unfit for heaven), the physical threats of poverty and further degradation into prostitution, and the loss of place in society. What Isabel suffers is loss of place in the family. Disfigured in a railway accident which kills her bastard child and leads Carlyle to think that she is dead, she returns to East Lynne as governess. She sees her husband happy with his second

²²Punctuation is taken from the first edition, II, 107-08. The cheap editions tend to be more liberal with exclamation points and italics.

wife. She must provide a governess's cool attention rather than a mother's passionate embraces for her children. Daily and hourly she lives with the awareness of what she has lost.²³

The reader at all times knows a good deal more than Isabel about what is really going on, realizes that Levison is a villain, knows that her jealousy is grounded on a misconception, and thus never doubts that Isabel is acting wrongly. But the analysis of her character and of the marital relationship leads to sympathy, not pity. Isabel is conscious of her utter dependence on Carlyle. She stands to him as child to parent; she is afraid to ask questions because he might laugh at her for not understanding what is obvious to him; she is constantly on her good behavior. She is protected, cherished, and not allowed to grow up. She is hurt when his attention lessens once the honeymoon year is over; he has a business to attend to but the business of woman's life, so far as she can see it, is to maintain an ideal relationship with a man. She feels inferior: if she were a better woman, somehow, he would love her more.

The husband and the marriage bond are the focus of her feelings of inferiority. Her elopement is, if only momentarily, an act of revenge; like Edith Dombey, she uses the weapon which is most effective in the battle between the sexes. Isabel's crime and punishment demonstrate the extent to which social restrictions shape woman's nature. The role traps Isabel; she has no independent goal but can only leave vengefully in the

²³Margaret Maison, in "Adulteresses in Agony," The Listener, 14 Jan. 1961, p. 134, points out that the divorce law was essential to the story. Carlyle is morally protected because he thinks Isabel is dead, but if he had not divorced her first his marriage with Barbara would be invalid. Divorce provided a legal barrier against any hope the adulteress might have of returning to her family.

company of another man.²⁴

Characters like Isabel retain sympathy, in part, because of the underlying sense that there is a grain of truth in their objection to their role. Elfrida in Florence Marryat's Love's Conflict (3 vols. 1865)²⁵ is shy and timid and afraid that her husband will not love her unless she makes a door-mat of herself. She stops short of elopement, but her admission that she was attracted to another man who treated her decently causes her husband to demand a separation; unchastity of the heart is enough for him.

Thus even while the moralist looks with horror at unchaste behavior and uses its consequences to punish aggressive women, there is an uncomfortable realization that continued oppression will lead to acts of rebellion. Lucy of Liberty Hall, Oxon. marries the man she had her eye on despite her loss of virginity and is miserable because he overpowers her in every quarrel by raking up the past which he had discovered in the wedding bed, but the narrator's tone carries a grain of ambiguity: "When a girl, she was bound by those chains to which women submit, because they

²⁴The review by Samuel Lucas in the Times for 25 Jan. 1862, p. 6, is a study in qualified enthusiasm by a man who--like many another reader with a sense of literary standards--loved the book and felt that he ought not to: "It would, perhaps, be invidious to say that, in our opinion, East Lynne . . . is the best novel of the season," he begins, and goes on to point out the fortuitous and unexplained villainy of Levison and the large role of coincidence in keeping the plot afloat. And yet, he admits, "as regards its satisfaction of the indispensable requirement which is the rude test of the merits of any work of fiction . . . East Lynne is found by all its readers to be highly entertaining."

²⁵Florence Marryat (1838-99) was the daughter of Capt. Frederick Marryat, author of Midshipman Easy, etc. She had two marriages to military officers, eight children, and a brief career as an actress; she edited London Society from 1872 to 1876 and wrote ninety novels. Biographical information is in DNB and Helen C. Black, Notable Women Authors of the Day (London, 1893). In the Bodleian (and perhaps other libraries) some of her books are catalogued under her two married names: Mrs. Ross Church and Mrs. Francis Lean.

are slaves. This girl attempted to break her bonds, and she has suffered." (III, 362) A slender thread of sympathy glints momentarily even in the portrait of the most devious of the adventuresses, the slight, childish, golden-haired Lady Audley who, in the interval between being in terror of a thunderstorm and coming home with a skirt full of wild-flowers, has shoved her lawful husband down a well in order to preserve her bigamous marriage.²⁶ The reader had earlier seen her in her bare governess's room after Sir Michael Audley has proposed, saying to herself: "No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations" (Ch. 1) Elaine Showalter suggests that Lady Audley is allowed to end her life in a madhouse rather than on a gallows because both Braddon and the reader have, in many ways, identified with her.²⁷

Only through marriage could a woman change her social position. In William Starbuck's A Woman against the World (3 vols. 1864)²⁸ "Pretty Sally" is a cheeky, vain farm laborer's daughter who lives in a cottage with two rooms and eight people. Even though she has already had a baby she sets her cap at the doting old Squire: "she would live to triumph over her enemies; those who sneered should yet be made to curtsy in her presence. Not mere vulgar ambition animated her mind, but the wild feverish longing to obtain a woman's victory." (I, 274) She gains financial

²⁶Lady Audley's Secret, by Mary Elizabeth Braddon; serialized in Robin Goodfellow (6 July - 28 Sept. 1861, unfinished) and in Sixpenny Magazine from March, 1862; published in three volumes by Tinsley on 1 Oct. 1862 with eight further three-volume editions by early 1863. The profits enabled Tinsley to build a villa which he graciously named Audley Lodge.

²⁷"Desperate Remedies: Sensation Novels of the 1860's," Victorian Newsletter, No. 49 (1976), p. 4.

²⁸Published anonymously. No information about William Gayer Starbuck has been found except for a listing of titles in Allibone.

security and social place, but ultimately achieves a crucial realization:

To be lost in the light of a true man's love was once her dream. Hers had been a sad awakening. All other affections save that of and for her children had been in her experience a delusion, and she began to think that a woman's destiny is not necessarily dependent for its fulfilment on possessing a greater or less amount of marital . . . love.

(III, 353)

Starbuck hedges Sally's sexual guilt by disclosing that there had been a secret and supposedly invalid wedding with the baby's father and, for the sake of his readers' romantic expectations, gives her a happy marriage after all (though only in a footnote to the end of the book) with the village schoolmaster who had put up the money for a communal farm by means of which degraded farm workers are transformed into clean, enlightened citizens. Starbuck's book is an attack on the persistence of "this ridiculous notion of caste . . . in spite of the evidence afforded by almost every town and village, that the secret of the change that transmutes the boor naturally into the gentleman accidentally, is education." (II, 256) The Sensational story of Sally and her bigamous entanglements may simply be sauce to keep the reader interested, but it has the force of adding sex to the other accidents of birth which unjustly limit human aspirations and achievements.

The novels we have been considering emphasize the social sources of woman's unchastity, but few are problem novels in which woman is a victim of society. Rather, the problem is that women use their bodies for social ends; they try to dispose of their own persons in their own best interests. There is very little consideration of physical passion. Rhoda Broughton's Not Wisely but Too Well (Dublin University Magazine, 1865-66; 3 vols. 1867) was shocking not because the heroine fell but because she wanted to, continuously, in a series of climactic scenes of encounter and

renunciation repeated for three volumes.²⁹ The first version of the novel, published serially in Dublin University Magazine (of which Broughton's uncle, Sheridan LeFanu, was editor) was not accepted by any English publisher, even on LeFanu's recommendation, until it had been heavily revised. The nature of the crucial revision is intriguing. In the three-volume edition Dare Stamer is fatally injured on the way to a ball and Kate Chester sits solicitously by his deathbed trying to provide religious comfort. She then joins a charitable sisterhood. In the first-published version he gets to the ball, takes her out in the garden, offers her a final choice between chastity and life, and shoots her--dead. Why is this more shocking? Perhaps because violent martyrdom in defense of her virginity would make Kate a saint, and she had already been too passionate to be fitted for heaven without a period of quiet penance. But there is also a social consideration. The penultimate confrontation between the two, which is nearly the same in both versions, better exemplifies the Victorian sensibility about woman's role. In that encounter Kate had refused to yield for the good of Stamer's soul; she loved him too well to let him damn himself. For the final sacrifice to take place in defense of Kate's own soul admits of a sort of selfishness which could not be, for a woman, admirable.

The book was perhaps also shocking in part simply because of its religious emphasis. It seems to imply that only the fear of God keeps women chaste; that without religion Kate would listen to the animal

²⁹Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920) is in CBEL and DNB; she is discussed biographically in Helen C. Black's Notable Women Authors of the Day and critically in E. A. Bennet's Fame and Fiction. Michael Sadleir's essay "Rhoda Broughton's Secret," Times Literary Supplement, 30 Nov. 1940, p. 604 includes a critical re-evaluation and a speculative biographical interpretation of the themes of the early novels. Professor Richard Tobias of the University of Pittsburgh is currently at work on a biography.

promptings of her body. Most of the Sensation novels are developed within a worldly frame of reference. Women commit human errors and are punished by human consequences: loss of caste, inability to bear children, unhappy marriage. The death penalty was no longer inevitable. Nor was it necessary for earthly punishment to be so severe that sexual error became the one central fact of woman's existence. The heroic scale is diminished; women remain women even with imperfections.

By far the most common punishment is the loss of opportunity to fill woman's most natural and ideal role. Only rarely does an unchaste woman have Ruth's motives and opportunity to rise. It is almost as if the link between intercourse and pregnancy had been broken. Motherhood, like inheritance, is a mystic reward reserved for the virtuous. Aurora Floyd has no children until her unintentional bigamy is relieved by the death of her first husband; the child that Griffith Gaunt got bigamously on Mercy Vint dies so that she can marry Sir George Neville and have nine that are healthy and sound. The Fast Young Lady's son is born dead. Elfrida Treherne's child is deformed because of the passion she felt for her husband's cousin while carrying it. Adelaide, in Ravenshoe (Macmillan's, 1861-62; 3 vols. 1862),³⁰ who had become Lord Welter's mistress in order to force him to marry her, breaks her back in a fall while hunting and grows softened, beloved, and sterile.³¹

Motherhood has a simple symbolic value rather than a moral or

³⁰by Henry Kingsley (1830-76), younger brother of Charles Kingsley. He is in CBEL and DNB; Angela Thirkell wrote an informal summary of his life and the plots of his books in two articles in Nineteenth Century Fiction, 5 (1950-51); and there is one recent book: William H. Scheurele, The Neglected Brother: A Study of Henry Kingsley (Tallahassee, Fla., 1971).

³¹Note also that Rosamond Lydgate's ill-fated horseback ride in Middlemarch (4 vols. 1871-72) is an act of defiance towards her husband which leads to miscarriage and apparently consequent sterility.

psychological influence on woman's character. Good women have children and the bad reject them. Lady Audley has left her legitimate child with her drunken father; Lucy of Liberty Hall, Oxon. gives her illegitimate one to its father because she has "had enough" of "the brat." (III, 202) The hero of Land at Last (Temple Bar, 1865-66; 3 vols. 1866)³² makes a daringly unconventional marriage to a woman whom he rescues from the streets, and the reader knows for certain that it was a wrong step when she refuses to nurse their child.

The image of the good mother retained value as a standard for the good woman. But one of the most striking features of the novel of the 1860's is the virtual disappearance of the sentimental novel's innocent heroine. The lengthy pursuit of a nearly helpless girl by a vicious man is one sensational plot conspicuous by its absence. The fair fragile virtuous innocent, when she remains, is reduced to the role of ingénue, waiting quietly in the drawing room to marry the hero when he is free of all those interesting entanglements. The Sensation novel depended on action, and there was not much that an admirable, matrimonially negotiable middle-class virgin could do; the code of chaperonage required that even

³²The novel was published under the name of Edmund Yates (1831-94), the journalist, novelist, and man-about town who introduced the gossip column to respectable papers. He was editor of Town Talk (1858), Temple Bar (1860-67), Tinsley's Magazine (1867-69), The World (which he founded in 1874), and Time (1879-84). He is in CBEL and DNB and mentioned anecdotally in the memoirs and letters of many authors of the period (his expulsion from membership in the Garrick Club led to an exchange of correspondence between Dickens and Thackeray) but there has been no study of either the man or his work. William Tinsley, in Random Recollections of an Old Publisher (London, 1900), I, 143, says that the major part of Land at Last was written by Frances Sarah Hoey (1830-98) who was, according to Boase, the daughter and widow of Irish gentlemen when, in 1858, she married Cashel Hoey, a barrister, sometime editor of The Nation and sub-editor of the Dublin Review from 1865 to 1879. Her bibliography is not assembled in any reference; she apparently wrote under other names besides her own and Yates's. She received a civil list pension of £50 after Hoey's death.

in her own house an unmarried woman under thirty could not remain alone with an unrelated man unless a married gentlewoman or mature servant was present.³³ A married woman had freedom of movement, affairs to direct, and servants to order around. She might have a settled income at her disposal. And she also had, like lower-class girls, an aura of sexual knowledge. George Treherne (in Marryat's Love's Conflict) has a picture of the girl he wants to marry, "a pure half-celestial being, refined and delicate in the extreme, with a mind cultivated and attuned to be the companion of his own. He had not thought of her as very beautiful so much as very pure in mind and body . . ." (I, 78) The woman he falls in love with is his cousin William's pregnant wife, Elfrida.

Marriage gave women freedom of action; motherhood, as in novels of previous decades, allowed them to exhibit acceptable strength. The husband, however, had to be removed from the scene so that the woman could develop and demonstrate her self-sufficiency--and so that she could play a romantic role. Even the ingénue was sometimes married; in Ouida's Under Two Flags (3 vols. 1867)³⁴ the woman whom the hero eventually marries is introduced first as a child and then at the end of the book as a rich virgin widow--her husband having died before the wedding night, leaving her plenty of money, a changed name, and the status with which to roam around North Africa. Both Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade (as well as many lesser novelists) used the complications of Scots,

³³ Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles (Totowa, N. J., 1973), p. 50.

³⁴ Marie Louise de la Ramée (1839-1908) is the name used by DNB and CBEL and by Ouida herself during later life; she was baptised Maria Louisa Ramé. Recent studies include a chapter in Elwin's Victorian Wallflowers and a biography by Eileen Bigland, Ouida, the Passionate Victorian (London, 1950). Monica Stirling discusses the novels at some length, though primarily in a biographical context, in The Fine and the Wicked: The Life and Times of Ouida (New York, 1958).

Irish, medieval, civil, and foreign marriage ceremonies to provide heroines with sexual experience. A husband's bigamy was often simply a device for supplying a woman who was "neither maid, wife, nor widow."³⁵ The resort to legal technicality reveals a certain slipperiness of moral standards; the moralist uses crime in order to show that it does not pay, but the Sensationalist has a tendency to reveal that it was not actually crime.

There may have been an element of intentional and cold-blooded prevarication on the part of some of the Sensation novelists in order to make their own conceptions of woman's possibilities acceptable to the mid-Victorian audience and publishers. The leading female practitioners could hardly be expected to sympathize with retiring helpless women even if society said they ought. Most of them wrote for a living because they had incompetent or incapable men (either husbands or fathers) dangling somewhere in the background. Some, in addition, had their own secrets to conceal. Florence Marryat was separated from her husband. The five children of Mary Braddon and John Maxwell were born before 1874, when the death of Maxwell's first wife (who had been for some years in a mental home) allowed them to marry. Both of the leading male Sensationalists had semi-public unorthodox private lives; Reade kept house for twenty-five years with an actress, Mrs. Seymour,³⁶ and Wilkie Collins lived for the latter half of his life with Caroline Graves, the original

³⁵Reade, Griffith Gaunt, Ch. 43.

³⁶Charles Reade (1814-84) continues to receive some critical attention. Wayne Burns, Charles Reade: A Study in Victorian Authorship (New York, 1961) is an extensive study of biography and text with a psychological orientation. Judging from Reade's character as interpreted by Burns, the relationship with Mrs. Seymour could have been physically innocent. Reade did, however, have an early alliance with a fisher girl, and his will acknowledged her child.

Woman in White, though in the meantime Martha Rudd bore him three children.³⁷

The fascination with woman's strength touches in some cases on the scene which dominates the pornography of the period. Most of the riding women carry a whip; Anonyma brings it down across the face of a gentleman who looks rudely at her in the park; Lucy of Liberty Hall, Oxon. is said to have horse-whipped a man; Aurora Floyd beats a stableboy for kicking her dog. Charles Reade was so obsessed by strong-armed women that his most recent biographer has explained nearly the whole canon as a sado-masochistic fantasy resulting from the suppression of Oedipal love. The pattern was evident even to contemporaries:

Mr. Reade's repertoire is limited. He has one brilliant, splendid woman, full of noble instincts, of passion and generosity . . . and he has another simple, tender, wise, feminine creature who is the rival, the conqueror, the defender . . . and between these two he³⁸ has a fancy for placing a very weak, sometimes contemptible, man.

Sexuality, for Reade, is subsumed in the maternal function. In The Cloister and the Hearth (4 vols. 1861) Margaret is pregnant and socially compromised following a mediievally binding betrothal of which she has no proof. With both a child and a senile father dependent on her she practices medicine until the law catches up with her and forbids it. When her betrothed reappears--having become a priest in the belief that Margaret was dead--she stage-manages a "miracle" to scare him out of his hermit's cell and convince him that it is his duty to relieve misery in the parish. She becomes his housekeeper and district visitor and promises that she will see to it he keeps his vow of celibacy even if living with her and their son should tempt him to resume the marriage.

³⁷Robinson, 128-36.

³⁸"Charles Reade's Novels," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 106 (1869), 490.

The woman who was attached to an ordinary social role--who was totally dependent on a husband or father--was of little use to the Sensation novelist. The striking thing about Reade's Margaret is the absolute reversal: she not only cares for her child (which is natural) and for her husband (which is only an exaggeration of the physical services and moral supremacy which fall to the woman's kingdom) but for her father as well. Her practical abilities are held up for admiration. The forgiven unchaste girl of the novels of the thirties and forties was always in some measure a victim; when the male novelist (like Bulwer-Lytton or Froude) found in her qualities to admire those qualities derived from her submissiveness, her naturalness, her innocence, her quality of being somehow pre-social--uncorrupted by society. She was an ideal child. Collins and Reade, on the other hand, portrayed the ideal mother, who chose not to be a victim, and whose strength lay in her social skills. The men are unworldly; the women can cope. They manipulate society rather than abjuring it.

Collins' No Name (All the Year Round, 1862-63; 3 vols. 1862) hurries through the illegal connection of the elder Vanstones retrospectively in the opening chapters. "Mrs. Vanstone" is, even at forty-four, more interesting and more refined than either of her daughters. She had, a generation earlier, chosen to save Vanstone from ruin; he had been drifting into a life of hopelessness and dissipation after pensioning off the adventuress who had "led him on, with merciless cunning" (Ch. 13) into matrimony. The second Mrs. Vanstone has used woman's superior capacity for social maneuvering in a good end:

she set herself from the first, to accomplish the one foremost purpose of so living with him, in the world's eye, as never to raise the suspicion that she was not his lawful wife. The women are few indeed, who cannot resolve firmly, scheme patiently, and act promptly, where the dearest interests of their lives are

concerned. . . . she took all the needful precautions, in those early days, which her husband's less ready capacity had not the art to devise--precautions to which they were largely indebted for the preservation of their secret in later times.

(Ch. 13)

One other feature of the Sensation novel of the eighteen-sixties had also a tendency to weaken the ethereal image of womanhood. In the search for ever greater and greater emotional effects, novelists touched on taboos for the sake of the response which they generated. There was a run on scenes of women nursing their infants. Birth became a physical process and not merely a spiritual one; morning sickness and post-partum weakness were used as plot devices; new fathers emerged shaken and restored to moral rectitude by the realization of what their wives had gone through in the birth chamber. Things which were known but could not be talked about were dealt with by innuendo; the abortion den in Armada (Cornhill, 1864-66; 2 vols. 1866) might have been shielded from all but the very knowing by Collins' description of it as "a house rightly described as filled with wicked secrets, and people rightly represented as in danger of feeling the grasp of the law" because they are "skilled in criminal concealment" (Bk. 4, Ch. 4) but many novelists counted on readers' ability to gauge the suitable date of a marriage by counting off nine months backwards. W. W. Reade described Lucy, who had made a sudden trip to France and had been gone more than a year, on her wedding day: "Her face was pale but beautiful; her arms were white, and finely molded; her bosom displayed more embonpoint than is usually found in young unmarried women."³⁹ Blood features as well as sex; accidents are gory; heroines (even virtuous ones) die laboring for breath and coughing up blood; poison-takers have their stomachs pumped; and the final reconciliation in Griffith Gaunt is

³⁹Liberty Hall, Oxon., III, 205.

underlined when Griffith supplies a transfusion for Kate after a difficult childbirth.

Novelists had evidence of public interest in such material. One secondary effect of the Divorce Act of 1857 was the report of divorce court proceedings in the press. Though careful families probably did not consider newspapers fit reading for unmarried girls there was also Cecil Beeton's The Queen, a sixpenny weekly women's journal first issued in September, 1861, which offered fashion and needlework, extensive reports of Royal doings, and, almost every week, a long story about a railway or steamship disaster and a column of criminal news headed "The Black Book":

A Mr. John Grayson Farquhar, of Grange-road, Smallheath, shot, on the evening of Thursday week, a girl of 20, named Elizabeth Brooks, who had been living under his roof as housekeeper, and had borne him a child, which is dead . . .

A respectable young woman, at Littleborough, near Rochdale, having incurred public disgrace by concealing the birth of a child (which was found dead), the brother went out and hanged himself, and the reputed father of the child has done the same.⁴⁰

The novelist was sometimes witty in pointing up the difference between what people liked to read about and the brittle surface of prudery, as in Henry Kingsley's pointed use of "Br--ch-s" in a novel explicit about bastardy, seduction, and the death-throes of a whore.⁴¹ Editors were constantly imposing standards of taste. Florence Marryat removed a good deal of the caressing from Love's Conflict at Geraldine Jewsbury's insistence.⁴² Charles Dickens' eye was caught by the phrase in No Name which was morally most questionable. Chapter 13 of the three-volume edition says that "The accident of their father having been married, when he first

⁴⁰The Queen, 7 Sept. 1861, p. 11.

⁴¹Ravenshoe, Ch. 66.

⁴²The text of the first edition shows that Jewsbury's suggestions quoted in Fahnestock, p. 262, have been carried out.

met with their mother, has made them the outcasts of the whole social community." A reviewer protested that "we have often heard an illegal connexion and its result euphemistically designated as a 'misfortune;' but this is the first time, as far as we are aware, in which a lawful marriage has been denominated an 'accident.'"⁴³ The objectionable phrase does not appear in the installment of the novel which Dickens printed in All the Year Round on 10 May 1862.

The two versions of Not Wisely but Too Well reveal some details of the standard of propriety in the sixties. Many of the corrections come under the heading of good taste. In the earlier version Dare describes his last meeting with his legal wife thus:

"I could have split laughing if I had not felt so inclined to be sick. I thought she'd never have done slobbering over me; and I can tell you, Kate, it is a serious thing to have a great female six feet six hanging all her weight round your neck. Such a strapper she is, Kitty!"⁴⁴

For book publication the passage was altered to:

"I should have died laughing if I had been spectator instead of sufferer. I thought she would never have ended the enacting of the Prodigal Son over me. Six fatted calves would not have been too many to slay in honour of my return. Such a giantess as she is, too, Kitty!"

(II, 16-17)

The heroine is made more refined--she says "O, nonsense"⁴⁵ instead of "Oh bother"⁴⁶--and the niceties of physical propriety are observed: at one point in the original Dare catches Kate by the arm,⁴⁷ while in the novel

⁴³Mansel, p. 496.

⁴⁴Dublin University Magazine, 66 (1865), 505.

⁴⁵I, 156.

⁴⁶Dublin University Magazine, 66 (1865), 266.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 264.

it is by the hand.⁴⁸ In the course of the revision Broughton added paragraphs of overt moralizing intended to assure readers that she is not "defending the girl" nor trying to present Dare as fine or attractive. (I, 273)

In doing so she violates the original conception of the book. The removal of physiological detail has the effect of forcing Broughton to deny what she had imagined her heroine to be experiencing, as, for example, in this passage. (The phrases underlined appeared only in the first published version)

. . . and he wrapped his arms around her as she stood before him, tighter, tighter, till they were like fetters of iron binding her; and the strain that fulfilled all the wild longing, the burning dreams of weeks, was quite painful; and he bent down his head from his stately height to her small uplifted face, nearer, nearer, till their lips met . . .⁴⁹

Many similar emendations indicate that a good deal of what came out of the head of a rural clergyman's twenty-two year old daughter was not, in the eyes of a London publisher, fit to be read. The Times found even the revised version "unreal and repulsive."⁵⁰ Yet the book was highly successful, which suggests that Broughton's imagination found a responsive chord among readers. Not Wisely but Too Well was published anonymously, and it was said that the Rev. Broughton strictly forbade his daughter Rhoda to read it.⁵¹ In point of fact, Rev. Broughton died in 1863, before the novel was printed, which is regrettable for the sake of truth but makes the telling of the story even more significant, because it reveals something of the subversive spirit in which women looked at men and men's opinion

⁴⁸I, 146.

⁴⁹I, 247; Dublin University Magazine, 66 (1865), 415.

⁵⁰25 Dec. 1867, p. 4.

⁵¹Cruse, p. 332.

of what they ought to know and feel.

Few of these novels of the eighteen-sixties have any claim to literary survival save as a reflection of the interests of a decade. Changes in mode of publication and in the composition of the reading audience not wholly understood at the time explain why the phenomenon of Sensationalism received serious critical attention of the sort not now given to comparable sorts of entertainment.

The important innovation in publishing, which coincided almost exactly with the beginning of the decade, was the shilling monthly magazine. The older monthlies had been restricted by their price (2s6d, or even 3s6d in the case of the New Monthly Magazine) chiefly to the gentry and the upper reaches of the middle class. They considered their public to be the educated, the cultured, the influential; most had a recognizable political bias supported by articles on economics and public policy. Even Bentley's Miscellany, which was founded in 1837 on the strength of its editor's Oliver Twist and passed from Dickens' hands into Ainsworth's, printed only one serialized novel at a time. Throughout the fifties none of the monthly magazines had a circulation of more than six or eight thousand copies per issue.

Around 1860 paper prices dropped sharply and, as in the case of the explosion of penny magazines two decades earlier, a number of publishers saw the potential for profit in larger sales of a cheaper article. Cornhill began in 1860 with an astonishing circulation of 120,000. That figure was a fluke of novelty and the lack of competition, but by late in the decade Argosy, Belgravia, Cornhill, Macmillan's, St. James, St. Paul's and Temple Bar were all selling something in the neighborhood of 20,000

copies an issue.⁵²

Financially, the audience must largely have overlapped with the library audience; the people who could afford a shilling a month for a magazine could also spend a guinea a year for a subscription to Mudie's. The difference is that the choice of which magazine to purchase gave them a more immediate influence over what was published. The two writers whose Sensation novels had been the smash hits of the first years of the decade soon had their own magazines: Braddon founded Belgravia in 1866 and Mrs. Wood took over Argosy in 1867. Magazine serialization had a tremendous impact on book sales, due to the practice of issuing the three-volume edition shortly before the end of the periodical run. No Name concluded in All the Year Round on 17 Jan. 1863. When the book was published complete in an edition of four thousand on 31 Dec. 1862, only four hundred copies were left at the end of the day.⁵³

The shilling monthly colored the style and content of the novelist's craft. The number of competing magazines created a great demand for novels. The serial form encouraged the accumulation of incident (rather than the leisurely development of character) and the inclusion of a peak of excitement in each installment. (It was the pace, rather than the subject matter, of Adam Bede which made Blackwood decide to publish it in volumes rather than, as he had first intended, in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.) The dramatic withholding of secrets kept the reader buying until the last issue. And the audience which made its influence on style, topic, and moral standards directly felt by what it chose to purchase was no longer simply the educated reading class.

⁵²Ellegård, p. 18.

⁵³Robinson, pp. 168-69.

The vastly expanded magazine-purchasing audience was composed of those who had lacked either the half-a-crown or the serious interest to take in one of the older periodicals. Both factors were operative. The lighter format told on the sales of the established monthlies; Blackwood's circulation declined steadily throughout the sixties, and Bentley's first tried running more fiction and then merged with the shilling Temple Bar in 1868. But there were also many, especially in the lower to middling ranks of the commercial and administrative middle class, who had been priced out of the market at half-a-crown.

We do not need to go so far as the Quarterly Review article which found the penny novel of the forties and fifties to be "the original germ . . . to which all varieties of sensational literature may be referred"⁵⁴ to realize that the new novel-buying public was made up in part of those who might twenty years earlier have been readers of penny weekly magazines.⁵⁵ The story of an apparently false marriage made valid by the discovery of the truth, the "have your cake and eat it too" morality which exposes the misdeeds of the aristocracy and yet awards a title to the heroine at the end, and the paradoxical combination of frankness with family-centered morality are all prominent in the Family Herald or the London Journal. Indeed, even the dramatic method reminds us of the popularity of puzzles as a parlor pastime among the readers of penny magazines; with any author less skillful than Wilkie Collins the reader generally gets to the solution long before the characters do. In the sixties there is evidence of some direct overlap in audiences. Lady Audley's Secret was

⁵⁴Mansel, pp. 505-06.

⁵⁵According to H. J. Hanham, The Reformed Electoral System in Great Britain (London, 1968), p. 12, three-fifths of those who could be described as middle class in 1880 had entered the class since 1840.

"second serialized" in the London Journal in 1863⁵⁶ and was successful enough to be followed by another story of Braddon's.⁵⁷ A few years later a Family Herald reader wrote to inquire who Ouida really was.⁵⁸ In 1868 Reade re-issued in hard covers the novel he had written for the London Journal eleven years earlier; he re-titled it The Double Marriage to emphasize the bigamy theme.⁵⁹

Until the eighteen-sixties it had been possible to assume that literature which succeeded widely with the novel-reading audience was probably worth reading. If literature of the Sensational type ceased to occupy critical attention by the end of the decade it was not because it had disappeared but because "best-seller" was on the way to becoming a pejorative term. By the end of the following decade the future poet laureate, Alfred Austin (who had, we recall, tried his hand at a Sensation novel, at least assuming that Sadleir's attribution of Jessie's Expiation is correct) was telling the public that "High Art" was impossible in a democracy, because commercial success lay "in the hands of a clever, pushing, semi-educated middle-class."⁶⁰ George Eliot was the last English novelist to enjoy both immediate popular success and lasting critical praise. After the eighteen-sixties writers and critics alike began to assume that the majority were Philistines.

⁵⁶LJ, 37 (21 Mar. 1863) - 38 (15 Aug. 1863).

⁵⁷"The Outcasts," expressly written for the London Journal and commencing on 12 Sept. 1863, p. 161. Braddon also wrote for Reynolds's Miscellany and for other cheap magazines.

⁵⁸FH, 31 (6 Sept. 1873), 300.

⁵⁹Many Sensation novels were translated immediately to the other mass form and were successful as melodramas. Both Collins and Reade conceived some books with the stage initially in mind.

⁶⁰"Art and Democracy," Cornhill, 40 (1879), 231.

Moralists looked at Sensation literature and found it a symptom of rot at the core of society. But others defended the vogue. "Perhaps it may be the very thoughtfulness of the age," wrote "E. B." in Mrs. Wood's Argosy, that drives people to fiction "to seek relaxation."⁶¹ Escape reading provides a clue about what is being escaped from; it reflects a mirror-image of the tone of the times. When life has become, by and large, dull, literature can supply the thrills; the emotionalism of fiction may relieve the strain of a conventional life and provide satisfactions which real life lacks.

At the turn of the nineteenth century the sensational form of literature was the Gothic, which was similar to the novel of the sixties in its aristocratic cast of characters, use of suspense to elicit terror, introduction of perversion and abnormality and detailed horror, and the importance of the inheritance theme. There are, however, two key differences: the absence of the supernatural--which played so strong a role in the Gothic novel--and the disappearance of the vapid, vapoury, helpless heroine.

The Gothic novel brought in the supernatural in reaction to the age of reason; it suggested that there were forces abroad in the world which could not be comprehended. The domesticated or urbanized Gothic tale of the 1840's used the real terrors of city life as a substitute for the imagined terrors of haunted castle and ruined monastery. J. M. Rymer's The White Slave (weekly numbers, 1844) has a poor girl pursued through number after number by a villainous Colonel. The additional terror--as well as the social comment--is supplied by the poor law, mistaken charitable ladies, needlework contractors, pompously respectable

⁶¹"The Sensation Novel," Argosy, 18 (1874), 142.

employers whose sons take liberties on the back stairs, and wretched prison conditions. Here, as indeed in much of Dickens, the very geography of the city is as frightening as the subterranean passages of a medieval castle.

W. H. Ainsworth's Old Saint Paul's (1841) is an interesting transition-piece.⁶² Ainsworth uses the standard Gothic plot of the chased chaste as a string to hold together pictures of urban horrors magnified by fire and plague. Amabel is an innocent victim, but the grocer's apprentice who had tried for month after month to save her is knighted for his role in halting the fire and marries a heiress.

The Gothic novel luxuriates in helplessness as an escape from rationalism and responsibility. In Ainsworth, in 1841, the heroine is still helpless, but the hero is an incarnation of initiative and self-help. By the 1860's helplessness, even of women, had apparently lost its attraction. The Sensation novel provided escape from the increased complexities of urban economic and social life which limited the individual's scope of action and from a decade colored by lack of certainty: by scientific questions about man's central role in the universe, by religious doubt. The Sensation novel exorcised helplessness by ascribing evil to the actions of a single villain and defeating that villain. The events which are beyond the characters' control grow not from social or supernatural forces but from deliberate human actions: wills, death-bed promises, secrets, intrigues. Detective skill and rational process and playing the

⁶²Ainsworth is significant in the history of escape literature. Old Saint Paul's was the first novel to be serialized in an English newspaper (the Sunday Times paid £1000 for rights). During Ainsworth's tenure as editor of Colburn's New Monthly Magazine his discoveries included both Ouida and Mrs. Henry Wood.

game by the rules restore order at the end. The Gothic novel put the irrational in literature; the Sensational took it out again. It was a heroic literature for an age which had secret doubts about the individual's controlling role in the scheme of things.

George Meredith has been called the first "highbrow novelist."⁶³ His "plain story" about an unchaste woman is anything but plain; his hero and villain are one and the same; social conventions and rigid morality are to blame but there is no alternative good to praise; and the interpretation of Dahlia's purification through suffering is open to doubt.

Rhoda Fleming (3 vols.) was published in 1865, five years after Meredith had become a reader for Chapman and Hall. In it he abandoned the highly individual style and restricted social milieu of his earlier books for what seems in part a deliberate attempt to put to use his newly-acquired knowledge of the business relationship of a publishing house to its customers and in part a serious, individualized reflection on the sort of manuscript he had been reading by the gross. Virtually every element of character and situation might be duplicated in any number of novels of the early eighteen-sixties: the farmer's daughter drawn to the city by the search for excitement, the son of a baronet-banker who abandons her for reasons of class and family, the widowed adventuress over whom two duels have been fought, the bigamist who ships his wife off to America to marry for money, the misappropriated funds and intercepted letters.

Meredith was not, however, a Sensationalist in method. Many of the most gripping scenes (Robert's beating, his attack on Algy, the climactic moments of Dahlia's wedding to Sedgett) take place off-stage.

⁶³L. T. Hergenhan, "The Reception of George Meredith's Early Novels," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 19 (1964), 214.

Some questions are never answered. The method of incomplete narration and shifting viewpoint is used, of course, by Wilkie Collins (or, for that matter, by Mrs. Crowe a generation earlier) but in Meredith's book no detective comes along to pick up the loose ends. J. C. Jeaffreson's review in the Athenaeum voiced the most common contemporary objection; the story, he says, goes "slipping through the reader's fingers."⁶⁴ Meredith had said in Chapter 12 that the British public "will bear anything, so long as villainy is punished." The mass public will not, however, bear figuring out for themselves who the villains are and whether they have been punished or not.

Most of the characters are rigidly in the grip of class-based codes which see sexual acts solely in terms of social role. Edward abandons Dahlia because he would have to forego society if he had a lower-class wife, though his friends would forgive "the lesser sin of his deceiving and ruining the girl." (Ch. 8) Public appearance and social prejudice are equally binding for Dahlia's family; her father puts his farm on the market because--with the assumption that a man is responsible for his daughter's behavior--he can no longer hold his head up before the neighbors. Rhoda's part in the crucifixion of her sister reveals an absolute confusion between purity and respectability. Rhoda refuses to believe that Dahlia has done anything wrong. To see her sister married will vindicate her faith in Dahlia's innocence; marriage is, for Rhoda, a proof of chastity rather than a substitute for it.

Each marriage in the book is, in some measure, a token of woman's surrender. The final movement of the story is the humbling of the strong woman. Rhoda is caught between the horns of duty and desire, the same

⁶⁴Athenaeum, 14 Oct. 1865, p. 495.

dilemma in which she had impaled her sister's heart in the name of duty. Rhoda had exulted, once, that "she, alone of women, was free from that wretched mesh called love." (Ch. 42) But faced with the promise to marry Algy--made in order to mitigate the consequences of her own action--and the realization that she loves Robert she is "weary of thinking and acting on her own responsibility and would gladly have abandoned her will." "I am not fit to be my own mistress," she tells Robert. (Ch 43)

Dahlia herself is seen almost entirely by indirection, and it is difficult to know what to make of her. Meredith insists that she is not to be seen in light of the "foul sentimentalism" of "soiled purity . . . lost innocence, the brand of shame." (Ch. 30) She refuses victimization by taking responsibility for her own person: "she had voluntarily stripped her spirit bare of evasion, and seen herself for what she was; pleading no excuse." (Ch. 30) She abdicates consideration of social role; she does not mind what people will say of her; she drinks poison rather than go with the "husband" who has been arranged for her. The original edition of 1865 closes with Edward's puzzled realization that the purified woman--the woman who is above society and sensuality--has escaped Eve's curse and is independent of man. Does the perfectly pure woman indeed have no heart? Is Dahlia something more or something less than human once she is "purified" of desire and emotion?

65

Thomas Hardy's Desperate Remedies (3 vols. 1871) is often considered an embarrassing beginner's piece to be explained away as a use of

⁶⁵The cliché rendering of Dahlia's sanctification--that her soul "shone in her eyes and in her work, a lamp to her little neighbourhood"--and the moral of her final words ("Help poor girls.") were not added to the novel until Meredith revised it for the Collected Edition of 1886

Sensational material in order to secure publication. Hardy had begun as a social critic; Macmillan wrote in 1869 in rejecting The Poor Man and the Lady that "your pictures of character among Londoners, and especially the upper classes, are sharp, clear, incisive, and in many respects true" but, he feared, in many respects comparable to the sort of thing printed in Reynolds's Miscellany.⁶⁶ Chapman and Hall were willing to publish but recommended against it; their reader, George Meredith, advised the aspiring novelist to forget about social reform and "attempt a novel with a purely artistic purpose, giving it a more complicated 'plot.'"⁶⁷

And so he did. At first reading Hardy's use of the Sensation materials appears simply bungled. The changes of identity and secrets of the past are obvious; any reader of sixties novels knows what it means when an unmarried girl suddenly makes a long trip to the Continent for her health and looks as suspiciously on death certificates as on marriage lines. Hardy seems, in comparison to Collins, plodding and self-conscious in dropping the clues, as when the otherwise characterless housekeeper carefully folds a hair left on a pillow into a scrap of paper so that it will be available, ten chapters later, for comparison. Yet the method itself--arriving at a rational explanation for every detail, and using every detail to build the final situation--comes, in Hardy's hands, to imply cosmic interdependence. The characters' fortunes depend not on individual efforts, nor on virtue, nor villainy, nor even on some dark and malignant fate but on half-chance events which arise from the intersection with other lives. One story's hero, the author muses, is the walk-on in the story of another life. Trains are delayed not by accident

⁶⁶William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy (Oxford, 1938), 353-54.

⁶⁷Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (London, 1928), p. 82.

but because it is Christmas and everyone is travelling; concealments arise from motives no darker than self-consciousness. The ultimate effect is an expression of the very sense of helplessness that the popular Sensationalists had exorcised. Hardy's late novels are hardly less sensational in event than Desperate Remedies but the complaint ceased to be made, not only because the vogue for the term had passed but because, as Darwin, Marx, and Freud seeped into intellectual consciousness the sense of helplessness took on a philosophical dimension.

Hardy elaborates stock Sensational conventions. Miss Aldclyffe has displaced her maternal emotion onto Cytheria, the daughter of the man she had loved but had not married because she knew he would hate her when he discovered she was not a virgin. The situation is conventional, but the scene in which Miss Aldclyffe comes to Cytheria's bed, tries to turn her against all men, and pleads for her love extends Charles Reade's blurring of the distinction between maternal and sexual love into uncharted territory.

Chastity is not terribly high on Hardy's list of virtues. Anne Seaway is perhaps a conventional whore with a heart of gold: "Many of these women who own to no moral code show considerable magnanimity when they see people in trouble. To act right simply because it is one's duty is proper; but a good action which is the result of no law of reflection shines more than any." (Ch. 19) But duty, indeed, is the problem, because duty implies some one or some thing more important than the individual. When Cytheria discovers immediately after her wedding to Manston that it is Edward she loves, her brother speaks for society:

"Many a woman has gone to ruin herself . . . and brought those who love her into disgrace, by acting on such impulses as possess you now. I have a reputation to lose as well as you . . . Besides, your duty to society, and those about you, requires that you should live with (at any rate) all the appearance of a good wife, and try to love your

husband."

"Yes--my duty to society," she murmured. "But ah, Owen, it is difficult to adjust our outer and inner life with perfect honesty to all! Though it may be right to care more for the benefit of the many than for the indulgence of your own single self, when you consider that the many, and duty to them, only exist to you through your own existence, what can be said? . . . perhaps, far in time to come, when I am dead . . . they will pause just for an instant, and give a sigh to me, and think 'Poor girl,' believing they do great justice to my memory by this. But they will never, never realize that it was my single opportunity of existence, as well as of doing my duty, which they are regarding . . ."

(Ch. 13)

The whole basis of the thematic movement has changed. There can be no sin, suffering, purification, and redemption for the unchaste woman because there is no final reward, no eternal scale. Miss Aldclyffe is neither a tragic victim nor a wicked adventuress nor a purified heroine. She made a mistake, was sorry, and tried to rectify it, but good motives are not enough; her maternal love leads to further sorrow. "Pity me-- O pity me" she says to Cytheria towards the end. "To die unloved is more than I can bear!" (Ch. 21) In a universe stumbling towards darkness human love takes on great importance, not as a cement for the family-based social order but as a temporary shelter against loneliness and doubt.

Neither Hardy's novel nor Meredith's was widely enough read at the time of publication to enter into the mass consciousness in any direct fashion; Desperate Remedies was remaindered by Smith's library after three months on the shelves and Rhoda Fleming was the most sparsely and unfavorably reviewed of all of Meredith's novels.⁶³ Though they grew from the same time and class conditioned consciousness and made use of the same plot material as the more ephemeral Sensation novels, Rhoda Fleming and Desperate Remedies offered problems rather than solutions. Neither book is about the unchaste woman so much as about the human condition.

⁶⁸L. T. Hergenhan, "Meredith's Attempts to Win Popularity: Contemporary Reaction," Studies in English Literature, 4 (1964), 638.

In the Sensation novel proper, the introduction of woman's unchastity is, in a great many instances, simply a violation of decorum for the sake of an emotional effect. The interesting moral issues are seldom followed to their conclusion; often they seem no more than the accidental insertions of an intelligent author writing at speed. In very broad terms, however, popular Sensation novels react conservatively to changing mores. The woman who is, like a man, sexual is apt to be bad because she is also financially ambitious or desirous of power or in other ways masculinized. The attacks are mitigated, however, by a recognition of the economic dependence and social subordination that follow from woman's conventional role and by a realization that propriety is not necessarily the same thing as chastity. When--as in Collins and Reade--the strong woman is admired, it is because she has the power, mother-like, to intervene between man and a sometimes undesirable world.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WOMAN PROBLEM

In 1857 Parliament opened to the middle class a privilege formerly reserved for the very rich and, in so doing, debated and codified what had previously been merely social (as opposed to legal) practice--the double moral standard. In the words of the Lord Chancellor:

A wife might, without any loss of caste, and possibly with reference to the interests of her children, or even of her husband, condone an act of adultery on the part of the husband; but a husband could not condone a similar act on the part of a wife. No one would venture to suggest that a husband could possibly do so . . .¹

A husband could obtain a divorce on grounds of a single act of adultery, but a wife only in cases of habitual and repeated adultery compounded by cruelty, incest, or other gross acts. The effect was analagous to that of the Reform Act of 1832 which, in opening the franchise to much of the middle class, had for the first time specifically inserted the word "male" in front of the description of those persons qualified to vote.

The actual social and legal position of the middle-class woman did no undergo any change in the middle decades of the nineteenth century but there was a significant alteration of her status relative to the men in her life. The middle-class man had moved up into the ruling class and left his woman behind. At the same time, her economic role--her participation in necessary labor--was diminishing almost to the vanishing point. The largest increase in the number of servants employed was among the specialists (i.e., cook, housekeeper, nurserymaid) who took on the duties

¹Oliver Ross McGregor, Divorce in England (London, 1957), p 20.

that the middle-class woman had formerly performed herself.²

The share of the national income going to the middle class rose; the standard of living inflated. Families set up carriages instead of walking or using cabs. Self-made men wanted a gentleman's education for their sons; the number and population of public schools grew enormously. Wine began to accompany meals.³ The new middle class was primarily urban: the city provided the opportunity to share--either by subscription or in public places--the professional music and private theatricals, the sports facilities, libraries, and art collections which had formerly been the preserve of aristocrats who could afford to enjoy them privately.

As the distance between upper and middle classes narrowed, as middle-class men left the subordinate class and entered the ruling, the gulf between men and women widened. Even among the upper class, the more diverse representation in Parliament had encroached on the tendency for the nation's business to be conducted at evening soirées and country house-parties, where women had listened and sometimes taken part. Society (in the capital S sense of the word) was losing its political function and becoming purely social.⁴

As Eliza Meteyard had observed many years earlier, power was in the hands of those who had money and education. Though middle-class women had begun to seek both, the gains were not in hand until the end of the decade: Girton College was founded in 1869 and the long-delayed and still-inadequate first version of the Married Women's Property Act passed in 1870. Meanwhile the woman who was sensitive to the world around her

²Geoffrey Best, Mid-Victorian Britain (London, 1971), table p 88.

³J.A. and Olive Banks, Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England (New York, 1964), pp. 71-80.

⁴Davidoff, p. 95.

had begun to perceive other circumstances--besides personal poverty--which gave her more in common with women of lower classes than with men of her own. It was held as a truism of charitable work that class distinctions among women were abolished when they worked together in the "rescue of the helpless and friendless, from sin and misery."⁵

The socially conservative forces and the idolators of women's purity had labored hard to keep women from knowing about prostitution and seduction and the victimization of girls. Many believed that it was not advisable, even in charitable work, for "pure-minded women to put themselves in the way of such a knowledge of evil as must be learnt in dealing with the fallen members of their sex."⁶ The mature or married urban woman, by 1860, could hardly avoid knowing something. The horsebreakers were in the park, the divorce scandals were in the papers, and there had been two decades of public discussion and problem novels. And women were taking an active part in rescue work. As one of them wrote in The Magdalen's Friend, "It is a woman's mission--a woman's hand in its gentle tenderness can alone reach those whom men have taught to distrust them."⁷

Conservatives continued to object. The Athenaeum review of the Anonyma series blamed the declining standard of public decorum--which made possible the open publication of nearly-obscene books--on the women who had made the unmentionable mentionable by discussing rescue work with one another.⁸ The damage, however, had already been done. As women began to pay serious attention to the problems of prostitution and seduction, they

⁵"The English Gentlewoman," Alexandra Magazine, 1 (1864), 85.

⁶"Female Penitentiaries," Quarterly Review, 83 (1848), 375-76.

⁷The Magdalen's Friend, 1 (1860), 93.

⁸Athenaeum, 22 Oct. 1864, p. 523.

discovered an appalling thing: it was their sons, their brothers, their husbands or husbands' friends who were the clients of prostitutes.⁹

The Times series on the social evil in 1858 identified the rising economic expectations which led to late marriage as the feeding-bed of prostitution. The unstated assumption behind that theory was that if men in their twenties did not have wives they would require illicit sexual outlets. By 1860 the Medical Times and Gazette was criticizing midnight meetings and refuges on the grounds of an "unanswerable" objection: since the supply of whores will always equal the demand, the act of "'snatching a brand from the fire,' is most assuredly followed by the precipitation of another brand into it."¹⁰ The Divorce Act codified the double standard; the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 gave sanction to the idea that men's physical nature required the sacrifice of a certain number of women to meet their needs.

Josephine Butler subsequently suggested in an address to the Ladies National Association for Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts that if it was indeed necessary for soldiers to have whores, the whores should be fairly conscripted so that women of all classes could participate equally in the service of keeping the nation's army healthy. The title of her speech was "An Equal Moral Standard for Men and Women." Just at the moment that the double standard was codified, the single standard began, in women's novels and in their public organizations, to be a cause.

Although woman was legally and economically subordinate, the recompense, in mid-century terms, was her moral superiority. Woman was not only

⁹See, for example, Josephine E. Butler, On the Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes (London, 1870) and "Fast Life and High Life," Saturday Review, 19 Aug. 1865, pp. 231-33.

¹⁰Medical Times and Gazette, 18 Feb. 1860, p. 170.

innately more pure, more sensitive, and more religious but, as queen of the hearth, her share of the realm lay in the preservation and promotion of finer things, which depended on personal influence rather than legislation or economic intervention. The single moral standard represented an effort to make the woman's kingdom real.

The propaganda novels of the 1840's had explored the social, economic, and legal context of woman's fall. Those of the 1860's are, for the most part, more simplistic. The cause of woman's fall is not poverty, innocence, lack of protection, love of finery, or repressive respectability; it is rather men. This over-simplification has several effects. First, it identifies man as an enemy--not as a chivalrous, superior, intelligent, benevolent natural protector. Second, since men are imperfect they must be changed. Thus, most importantly, these novels proclaim that women, in unison, have the power to protect both themselves and lower-class girls by demanding that the men they marry, the men they meet socially, and the men to whom they give their daughters be as pure as the women who read the novels and make the decisions. Women could not change the law but they could, through their social power, alter accepted mores.

The single moral standard, then, is the keynote of the social problem novels of the 1860's. As in the case of their predecessors, some were little more than tracts. Hidden Depths (2 vols. 1866) is a handbook of the practical and theoretical problems of a woman who takes up rescue work; the author, Felicia Skene, had experience in the field and had written a pamphlet entitled Penitentiaries and Reformatories (1865).¹¹

¹¹Felicia Skene (1821-99) was the daughter of a barrister. She organized the nursing service during a cholera epidemic in Oxford in 1854, was Florence Nightingale's agent for recruiting and approving nurses for the Crimea, and was one of the first lady visitors to prisoners appointed by the Home Office. She edited the Churchman's Companion from 1862 to 1880. Biographical information is in DNB; E. C. Rickards, Felicia

The heroine of Hidden Depths, Ernestine Courtenay, wants at first only to offer refuge to one local girl. Very few men, she discovers, are willing to help her; even the Rector feels polluted by the sight of poor Annie. Miss Courtenay must break barriers of propriety, overcome her own instinctive shrinking from evil, and bear criticism from her acquaintances. As she pursues her way she comes to savor the little unconventionalities, as when, after a long conversation with a prison chaplain, she smiles suddenly at the thought of what her aunt would say about speaking with a man to whom she had not been introduced.

Ernestine is rudely awakened to the realities of the class issue. Why will Brooks, the lodgekeeper, not take back his penitent daughter-- why will he turn her from his door to a worse life? Because his other children would

"suffer the loss of their home and their livelihood . . . if I brought a fallen woman into this house, be she twenty times my daughter."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed Ernestine. "Who could have the right to prevent you doing as you like in your own house, and with your own child?"

"Those to whom the house belongs, and whose money buys my children's bread," said Brook.

(p. 84)¹²

My Lord and Lady have let it be known to Brook that they will not tolerate his daughter's presence, for fear of the contamination she might spread, and yet at that very moment the man who ruined Brook's elder

Skene of Oxford (London, 1902); and her own memoir, "Some Episodes in a Long Life," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 159 (1896), 828-50.

¹²At the time of Stead's disclosures about the white slave trade in the Pall Mall Gazette, a Member of Parliament, W. Shepherd Allen, chanced across Hidden Depths in a seaside library and bought the copyright in order to bring out a cheap edition (London, 1886) of which 28,000 were sold in a short time and further thousands given away to societies for promoting the welfare of young women. Passages in this chapter are quoted from the 1886 edition.

daughter is staying with them and courting their niece.

Devout old ladies, who were extremely rigid as to the morals of their servants, watched in a flutter of anticipation the attentions of Colonel Courtenay to their unmarried daughters . . . whilst worthy gentleman [sic] who spoke loudly at county meetings on pauper dissoluteness, eagerly invited him down to their country houses, and were delighted to see their sons in close fellowship with this fine, dashing officer.

(p. 13)

The double moral standard is not only a double sexual standard (one for women and one for men) but also a double class standard (one for the rich, another for the rest). Society behaves as if the wealthy male belonged to a race apart, not only fortunate in worldly position but also exempt from professed religious beliefs. Would it be conceivable for a decent woman to allow herself to marry a man, to love him and be subject to his protection and guidance, if she really believed that his soul were consigned to eternal damnation?

The book dwells on the misery and death of victimized girls in order to emphasize the heinousness of the male fault which society views so lightly. Though the story is about rescue work, the portrayal of too many successful cases or too many happily redeemed death-beds would mitigate the crime which man commits. Even for repentant girls, the strongest hope which Skene holds out is a "might":

The girl had fearfully erred, but she had been the tempted, not the tempter . . . For her, at least, it might be that there remained a refuge in the Infinite compassion, which still, through the long vista of centuries, echoes in our ears those tenderest words, "Neither do I condemn thee." But for him, the educated gentleman, the clever, clear-sighted man of the day, what excuse could be found in heaven or in earth? . . . the experienced man, with every advantage of position and education, who knowingly, wilfully, has chosen vice for his pleasure, and the ruin of an imperishable soul for his amusement . . .

(p. 57)

The language and italics are reminiscent of The Female's Friend, but Skene is not writing a protectionist appeal for chivalry or legislation. Her message, repeated with grim single-mindedness from the beginning

of the book to the end, is that women can make it stop, if women will simply use their social power and refuse to meet or invite to their homes any man suspected of licentious behavior.

There is a similar, though more secular, earnestness in the work of Eliza Meteyard, whose tract-like productions for the serious cheap periodicals were discussed in the second chapter. She also published books for the library trade. In The Lady Herbert's Gentlewomen (3 vols. 1862)¹³ Rhoda, a charity-girl servant, loves a farmer, Samuel Clayton. He marries a woman with "expectations" and Rhoda, who is pregnant, tries to seek refuge with an elderly cousin who slams the door in her face. Instead of turning to suicide or prostitution, she takes herself in hand and goes to work at salt-making in Cheshire until the baby is born. Then she returns to her former neighborhood where, with the help of a sympathetic gentlewoman, she finds a home with a farm laborer and his wife. After the baby is weaned they foster it while Rhoda goes out to service. Clayton's wife dies. Rhoda at first refuses to marry the man who had done her wrong, but ultimately his love for their child makes an upright man of him and she changes her mind.

Meteyard's pedagogic method is directed towards three ends. First, though Rhoda is virtually raped she is not a helpless victim; she is physically strong and capable of self-support. Second, because Meteyard knew that a book in three volumes would be read by middle-class women, she emphasizes the practical message for employers: an unwed mother may well be the best and most faithful servant because her child's life depends on her effort. Finally, there is an even-handed application of

¹³The Lady Herbert's Gentlewomen is a collection of earlier short pieces set in a narrative frame. The story here discussed is the newly-written frame tale, which occupies perhaps one-third of the pages in the book.

the single standard. If men and women are subject to the same moral code, they are also subject to the same influences. In this book the father, not the mother, suffers, repents, and learns to live well for the sake of the child.

Tracts aside, it is less easy in this decade than in the forties to draw a clear line between social problem novels and the general run of popular reading. The protest novels of the earlier generation appealed to the reader's sense of charity and compassionate interest in poor girls. The fallen woman of the 1860's is more likely to be someone with whom the reader will identify. Because she is a reader-surrogate her morality may be technically maintained by using the legal quibbles made familiar by the Sensationalists. She becomes an emotional focus for everywoman's sense of oppression, victimization, and powerlessness.

Caroline Norton's Lost and Saved (3 vols. 1863) is one of these victimization novels.¹⁴ The heroine, Beatrice Brooke, is fooled by a false marriage. Her baby is born prematurely and is defective. She struggles along washing old lace for a living. Titled women take advantage of her. Her father has a stroke before she can seek a reconciliation. The baby dies. At last poetic justice provides for her a man who has also

¹⁴Caroline Elizabeth Norton (1808-77) has attracted attention chiefly for biographical, rather than literary reasons. Alice Acland's Caroline Norton (London, 1948) includes some critical discussion. The article in Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign is by Mrs. Alexander. Caroline Norton was the grand-daughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, married George Norton in 1827, and provided a good share of the family income by writing for and editing annuals and fashion magazines. In 1836 Norton sued the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, for criminal conversation with Lady Norton (the necessary first step towards obtaining a Parliamentary divorce). The suit ended in acquittal but the rupture between the Nortons was permanent; much of Mrs. Norton's time for the next twenty years was occupied with battles to gain access to her children and to retain for her own use the income she derived from writing. The events of another scandal involving her with members of the cabinet were used by George Meredith, thinly disguised, in Diana of the Crossways (3 vols. 1885).

suffered--his wife (now dead) having eloped with another man. She does not feel free to marry so long as Traherne is alive. By a fortunate accident he drinks some poison prepared by one of his accomplices in intrigue, so Beatrice can be installed in an Italian palace as wife of a Marquis.

The story, even if it were competently fleshed out, is faintly embarrassing. No one, we feel, could be quite so dumb, quite so blameless, quite so thoroughly victimized. And the flesh is not even entirely competent. The scenes of high life--of flirtations conducted by handkerchief signals flashed at the grille of the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons--have a certain fascination; we feel the authority of someone who has been there. The home life of the middle class, on the other hand, is idealized to the point of idiocy. Some of the characters undergo startling and inexplicable changes in personality as the exigencies of the plot demand. The blocks of homily on the evils of society and the position of women loom like hurdles on an obstacle course.

Contemporary reviewers, however, did not blast the weakness of style so much as the attack on the double standard. "If any attempt were made to enforce male chastity by the same standards as are and can be applied to women," wrote Cornhill, "the social penalties . . . would be defied by so large and powerful a minority, that the system could not be supported. Men are too strong to be held by such bonds."¹⁵ Reviewers complained also that Beatrice omitted the most logical step: she failed to throw herself on her father's protection so that he could sue the seducer for abduction.

The holes in the fabric of the plot interfere with our perception that the conflict is imagined as one between law on the one hand and justice

¹⁵Fitzjames Stephens, "Anti-Respectability," Cornhill, 8 (1863), 290. See also "Novels with a Purpose," Westminster Review, 26 (1864), 42-45.

on the other. The title page of Caroline Norton's English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854) bears an expanded epigram:

It was a saying of Jeremy Bentham's that, "if the Poor had more Justice, they would need less of Charity:"--if women had more Justice, they would have no need of appeals to sympathy.

Mrs. Norton insisted in a letter to the Times that Beatrice did not go to the law because she believed herself to be a married woman.¹⁶ Legally, therefore, she no longer existed; the courts could not afford her any relief.

It is quite clear that the emotional content of the novel grows directly from Mrs. Norton's own experiences with men and the law. The fantasy-projection overtones of the book are inescapable; the frequent scenes of others (sometimes total strangers) admiring, praising, and talking about the heroine have their counterpart in everyone's self-confirmatory reveries. Mrs. Norton raises martyrdom to an ethical cult. Incident after incident reveals a direct correlation between the depth of suffering and the height of goodness. Among characters of the higher class the few who are passably humane are homely, physically handicapped, or socially suspect. A man may sometimes pass muster but because women suffer more their possibilities for goodness are largely enhanced.

The sisterhood of wronged women knows no class barrier. When Beatrice leaves her lodging at night in search of a doctor for her convulsive baby she is surrounded and mocked by a crew of tipsy revellers. A whore comes to her aid. And at the end of the book the union of the downtrodden is extended--in the telling of some sailors' tales otherwise wholly gratuitous--to include men of the laboring classes as well. An ethical line is drawn: on the one side are those who make the laws; on

¹⁶Times, 18 June 1863, p. 8.

the other side their victims.¹⁷

Another of the principal supports of the double standard was, according to Josephine Butler, built into the condition of Victorian middle-class living: men and women simply did not know each other very well.¹⁸ Their lives became more and more separate during the fifties and sixties. It was the beginning of the age of the railway suburb and the long commute. As public schools replaced local grammar schools for the education of middle-class boys, a girl was less likely even to have brothers at home. The outdoor mixed pastimes--tennis, ~~archery~~, skating--had not yet arrived. Man's business life was supposed to be incomprehensible to woman and hers--of needlework, drawing, and dressing--beneath his notice. By the time they made a conventionally late marriage their habits and thoughts were formed along totally different lines. Thus it may not be surprising that the fullest explication of the single moral standard appears in books which few men would deign to read: in the library novels of the prolific popular perennials.

The White House by the Sea (2 vols. 1857) was the first novel of Matilda Betham-Edwards, who became a great favorite both at Mudie's and in cheap reprints.¹⁹ The heroine is fresh, unspoiled, and active. In

¹⁷At the height of the Uncle Tom's Cabin mania Mrs. Norton had sought to enlist supporters for her battle to control her own earnings with a pamphlet making her case parallel to that of a Mr. Sam Norris, a slave in Kentucky, who had been working as a free laborer in order to pay his master on a contract to buy freedom, only to have the contract rescinded on the grounds that a slave (a non-person) could make no contracts and that whatever he earned belonged to his master in any case; see English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1854), pp. 18-20.

¹⁸Josephine E. Butler, Social Purity (London, [1880], pp. 10-11.

¹⁹Matilda Betham-Edwards (1837-1919) is in DNB and included in Helen Black's Notable Women Authors of the Day. CBEL mentions only her books for children. A biographical sketch by Sarah Grand is prefaced to Betham-Edwards' Mid-Victorian Memories (1919). The only criticism of her fiction is in brief contemporary reviews. Betham-Edwards spent the winter of 1867

the opening scene she rescues a party of gentlefolks whose pleasure boat is in trouble. When her father dies she takes up governessing without a qualm. She earns the highest praise: "'you have the stuff in you to make a MAN! and very rare material that is now-a-days . . . You can perceive, but, what is a far rarer faculty, you can reason.'" (p. 173)²⁰

A gentleman woos her; she thinks she is in love, but then she overhears him say "Love her? oh no. But is there not a triumph in winning love, even when you have none to give in return?" (p. 178)

Socially, this sort of thing is hardly even a misdemeanor, but in a single-standard moral scheme poetic justice must be done--he trifles with another girl, elopes with a third, and then, miserable and repentant, enlists and dies.

The book's admirable man is socially outcast because he has violated the double standard--he has actually married the servant girl whom he had ruined in their youth. The wife is not very happy; she has discovered that love does not erase her lack of intellect and her inability to manage the house. But they have loved, and when she dies she looks forward to heaven and he is in grief. Mr. Stirling has reaped his wild oats and made them into the staff of life--morally right, though socially wrong. He is therefore ultimately worthy of the heroine's love.

Another library favorite who began her career in this period was

in Algiers with Mme. Bodichon and crops up from time to time in the letters and memoirs of other feminist leaders. She signed the first petition for the enfranchisement of women and also attended, as she put it, a "sitting of the International, presided over by Dr. Karl Marx." (Mid-Victorian Memories, p. 49) In later years she became a passive opponent of suffrage; she retired to a cottage at Hastings where sometimes, when both were very old, Henry James came to tea.

²⁰Quotations are taken from the New Edition of 1864, in Smith and Elder's Shilling Series of Standard Authors.

Mrs. Houstoun.²¹ Her first novel, Recommended to Mercy (3 vols. 1862), puzzled the reviewers.²² The heroine lived with a man, devoted herself to his concerns, refused to marry him, and never wholly lost either her self-respect or her position in the world. The novel did not hew to the conventions of Sensational fiction nor did it exhibit sufficient moral pain to categorize it as a social problem novel. Nevertheless, it sold a great many copies.²³

The heroine, Helen Langton, is a tomboyish girl who, lacking proper guidance, meets Capt. Thornleigh at unsuitable times and places and discovers that, though her virtue is intact, her reputation is gone. So she goes with him to India, where she is happily useful as a nurse among soldiers' sick wives and enjoys a private superiority to the girls who succumb to mercenary marriages: "'I at least have not sold myself,'" she says. (I, 118)

Thornleigh marries and then separates from his wife. Helen returns

²¹Matilda Charlotte Houstoun (b. 1820) was alive when Helen Black's sketch of her appeared in Ladies Pictorial, 24 Jan. 1891, p. 122, but had died by the time it was reprinted in Notable Women Authors of the Day (1893). Some autobiographical information is supplied in A Woman's Memories of World-Known Men (2 vols. 1883). She is not in CBEL nor is there any critical study. Mrs. Houstoun was, like Caroline Norton, a survivor from the more open intellectual and social life available to women of the post-Regency upper class. Her father was Edward Jessé, a distinguished naturalist and courtier. Her first husband died young; her second was Capt. Houstoun, son of a baronet. After a year touring the world on their yacht the couple settled on a hundred-square-mile estate in the west of Ireland where, out of sheer unmitigated boredom, Mrs. Houstoun began to write.

²²See the Times, 3 Sept. 1862, p. 5, and "Novels with a Purpose," Westminster Review, 26 (1864), 44-45.

²³Mrs. Houstoun was unable to find a publisher for Recommended to Mercy; finally, on W. H. Ainsworth's advice, she had it printed herself. There was a fourth edition in 1863 and in 1869 Tinsley bought the rights in order to include it in his two-shilling series.

to him. He dies not long afterwards, leaving her a fortune. With money at her disposal and with her beauty still intact Helen makes a place in a society which includes some other women of tarnished reputation and, in addition, "persons of rare genius but of reserved habits, who (thawed by the genial warmth of Helen's manner, and the unobtrusive brightness of her conversation) had been drawn from their books and their retirement to join her magic circle." (II, 182) This use of the Anonyma material without the Anonyma taint scandalized reviewers; they did not know how to deal with it outside of yellow boards.

The book's structure founders at this point. The plot digresses into an effort to discover whether Thornleigh's son is legitimate (a trial for bigamy, the pursuit of witnesses into the Australian outback, etc.). Meanwhile, Helen is at work among the fallen, which leads to the interjection of a number of whores' tales of madness and sickness (perhaps intended as a moral balance to Helen's own survival) and to the interpolation of long passages of instructive dialogue with an interested doctor about the causes of prostitution, the need for housing reform, and so on.

Work is the keystone of Helen's program for the improvement of society. Girls should be raised to some useful occupation; apprenticed, she suggests specifically, to the lighter among the trades at present followed by men. They would then "'not only have a better chance of tiding over the dangerous time of stormy youth, but they would also have (in the future exercise of their own trades) a something wherewith to eke out the earnings of their husbands.'" (II, 317) Providing women with remunerative trades had long been recommended as a means of preventing them from being thrown for subsistence into the oldest profession. Mrs. Houstoun, however, has in mind not only controlling the supply of

prostitutes but also forestalling demand. She believes that the weakness of married women drives husbands to other pastures. Girls have no object except "'to find some man able and willing to support them by the labour of his head or hands. And what do they bring to help the house-keeping? And ought they to wonder that the husband, wearied by their idleness and improvidence, grows irritated by the encumbrance that has been thrown upon him?'" (II, 316)

If women were willing and able to take responsibility for themselves there would be no social problem. Helen Langton considers the marriage ceremony "one of the most absurd inventions ever inflicted on human beings by mortal men." (I, 91) A woman has no business to swear to honor and obey a man "who may turn out a dishonourable wretch, or a monster of tyranny and oppression." (I, 92) Helen withdraws from her social life eventually; at the close of the novel she is devoting her time to the care of her crippled brother and to helping prostitutes. Yet the book lacks a whole set of clichés which we have come to expect in stories of the unchaste woman. There is no yearning for the old home, no sense of the disgrace she has brought to her family, no sentimental tie to place or aching for innocence. Helen neither bears children nor grieves that she cannot bear children--the subject of maternity simply never comes up. She spends no nights filled with conflict over choices to be made or not made. She has no confidante and very few private thoughts. Mrs. Houstoun leaves her heroine alive and at least moderately content and avoids telling the reader to abhor it all or pity it all. By implication, Helen Langton is free to conduct her own life.

Mrs. Eiloart's Meg (3 vols. 1868) is another provocative first novel

which was reviewed unfavorably²⁴ because it did not cleave to accepted clichés of morals and taste, rather than for its equally obvious faults of style and construction.²⁵ In Meg we find finally the ignorant, amoral slum girl who never appeared in the realistic novels of the 1840's, despite her prominence in the writing of the social scientists. Meg has a baby and loves the baby's father

Joe!--her dear, kind, brave, handsome Joe--Joe who had never given her a rough word, or struck her a blow, but when he had taken a little too much--Joe the father of her child, and--no, not her husband; but the wedding-ring and the priest's blessing were not considered indispensable in Swamp Town, where Meg and Joe were dwelling. They might have lived together to the end of their days without feeling the necessity of either. Joe's mother and father were elderly folks, and well-to-do in their way, but they had always considered themselves sufficiently married without ever having entered a church or a registrar's office for the purpose; and why should Meg and Joe be more sensitive on such points than their elders? In truth, they had never thought of it; and had they done so, it is doubtful whether the elder ladies, Meg's mother as well as Joe's, would not have scouted the idea as a piece of needless extravagance, and advised the young couple to spend their money in a more sensible manner.

(I, 2-3)

After Joe and the baby die, Meg becomes an artists' model. George Ensdel, a gentleman dilettante aesthete with an urge to play Pygmalion, sets her up in a pretty house in Kentish Town. Meg does not love Ensdel but she likes him well enough, and it seems to her a fairly satisfactory way of life. Her awakening comes, as had Ruth's, when a baby is snatched away from her proffered kiss.

Meg awakens, however, not to religion but to "womanhood . . . outraged, desecrated womanhood . . . resenting the wrongs and degradation which it

²⁴Athenaeum, 2 May 1868, pp. 622-23.

²⁵Elizabeth Eiloart (1830- ?) is mentioned only in Frances Hayes, Women of the Day (London, 1885), in the 1891 supplement to Allibone, and in brief reviews at the time of publication of her novels. Her son Ernest, a barrister, wrote a pamphlet entitled The Laws Relating to Women (London, 1878).

had suffered." (II, 287) The sin had been done by the gentleman father who abandoned Meg and her mother to the slum and the gentleman lover who bought her body with a house in Kentish town when he knew that it was wrong.

Meg leaves her lover and goes to the country to support herself at lace-making. A sweet young girl, even knowing of her past, is kind to her. The Sensational cliché looms: the girl is her younger half-sister and Meg is actually legitimate and the heiress--and so Meg kills herself in order that her sister will not be ruined, as she has been, by bastardy and poverty. The Athenaeum reviewer was appalled because Mrs. Eiloart treated a suicide like a saint, giving her even the epitaph "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." But there is no place for Meg in the society presented in the book; all of her options have been cut off and the only control she retains is the ability to choose between life and death. She does it for the sake of a sister.

These novels are neither problem novels with a single, well-defined moral nor Sensation novels with a controlling dramatic secret, though they bear elements of both. The women who began to write novels in the 1860's built also on the tradition of Anne Brontë and Holme Lee. Themes which had previously been undercurrents came to provide the motive power for plots. The matter of the story becomes woman herself, rather than woman's tribulations; the plot advances by the heroine's actions rather than her reactions. The single-standard viewpoint does not apply only to sexual behavior. It has three primary strands. One is woman's ability to support herself. A second theme, frequently though not inevitably a concomitant of the first, is the heroine's willingness to make judgments for herself without referring either to male guidance or to social convention. And

finally, women's novelists began to depict the emotional desires of women--the analogue to the sexual desires of men--without opprobrium.

The 1840's concern with the great social evil as a matter for serious discussion and the subject matter for fiction found its fullest expression in a single-aim work by a recognized novelist. Ruth both extended and consolidated the permissible moral feeling on the subject. Ruth was an innocent victimized girl; motherhood shaped her womanly character; and the social ramifications of the problem of unchastity were the matter of prime importance. The more diffuse tenor of the next generation is best seen not in a single novel but in an accretion of details contained in the work of a novelist whose career spanned the mid-century decades, revealing how the themes of the new problem and lesser popular novelists could accumulate, by the end of the sixties, in openly feminist and perhaps even subversive books.

Dinah Craik²⁶ was, like Caroline Norton, in many ways more interesting than her heroines. She was an outsider unconnected with the established church and without a recognizable place in society. Her father, Thomas Mulock, was an independent and highly dramatic preacher. He was also a man, as Mrs. Oliphant put it, "whose profession of extreme Evangelical religiousness was not carried out by his practice"²⁷--at the very least

²⁶Dinah Marie Mulock Craik (1826-87) is listed in DNB and CBEL and mentioned briefly in most standard histories of nineteenth-century literature. Elaine Showalter's "Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment: A Case Study in Victorian Female Authorship," Feminist Studies, 2 (1975), 5-23, is an excellent discussion. Prior to the publication of Showalter's article there had been no biographical or critical study of Craik except for contemporary reviews, obituaries, and Harriet Parr's "appreciation" in Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign. The best source of biographical information is Aleya Lyell Reade, The Mellards and their Descendants (London, 1915).

²⁷"Mrs. Craik," Macmillan's Magazine, 57 (1887), 82.

financially unreliable and, by thoroughly veiled implication, perhaps a philanderer. By the age of eighteen Dinah was trying to support herself and provide some regular education for her younger brothers by literary hack-work. She supplied weekly poems and other pieces for Chambers's Journal and contributed to fashion magazines and pictorial annuals. Her early novels were written under extreme financial pressure and represented, not surprisingly, a sampling of the sort of thing which had a proven sale: a boys' school story (Cola Monti, 1849), a large-cast family saga of the sort just coming in on the tide of Mary Howitt's translations of Frederika Bremer (The Head of the Family, 1852), a novel with a small, unattractive, independent, triumphant heroine in the Jane Eyre pattern (Olive, 1850).

Almost all of these books include a woman who stands outside the moral pale. The Head of the Family (3 vols. 1852) depends on the conventional plot of the deluded victim: two different girls are lured into false marriage with the same man. The very doubling of the figure--much as it strains our credulity--provides a comment on the stereotype, for the differing reactions of the girls reveal that the consequences of seduction-under-deceit are not wholly inevitable but depend rather on the character and sociology of the woman involved.

The first of the figures, Rachel Armstrong, is as natural as Bulwer's Alice; she is a farmer's daughter who at seventeen begins to educate herself to deserve the man with whom she is united in an irregular Scots marriage. The excess of natural emotion centered on one man, which Bulwer had found so noble, becomes crippling when the man rejects her. Her personality is wholly developed in reference to his; her life has meaning only in his recognition of her. By the end of the book she is incurably mad.

The second injured victim is a gently-bred middle-class girl with a supportive guardian, some shreds of a mind of her own, and most importantly,

a role--she has borne a child. As a mother she is more than happy to be rid of the man once she has discovered what a cad he is; she learns with bliss that "'It is only over his lawful children that a father has any right.'" (Ch. 37)

The villain finally dies; the second "wife" is freed for a perfectly untainted marriage with her guardian, who had loved her all along. Though the man's death serves the single moral standard there is not, probably, any judgment on the relative guilt of the two women in Mrs. Craik's causing one to be happily married and the other hopelessly insane, but rather a remark on the original strength of their personalities. The sort of woman who educates herself only for marriage and has a sense of worth only in her relationship to a man is, by implication, not a complete woman.

In Olive (3 vols. 1850) the unchaste woman makes only the briefest of appearances. Her significance is thematic; she is a counterpoise to a woman at the other extreme and their extremes define the golden mean down which the heroine treads. One woman loved too wildly to love legally; the other married without any love at all. Of the two, the second was far more destructive.

Similarly, in John Halifax, Gentleman (3 vols 1856) the adulterous Lady Caroline Brithwood reappears at intervals in order to demonstrate (1) the decline of the effete aristocracy and (2) the socially independent virtue of the self-made John Halifax and of the lady who becomes a woman by marrying him. When Lady Caroline, whose husband had, early in the book, refused to shake hands with a mere tanner's apprentice, is by the end old, painted, half-mad, and jeered at on the streets, the former apprentice's wife, Ursula Halifax, takes her home to nurse her.

The narrator of John Halifax, Gentleman is a crippled man, of whom

an early reviewer complained that "it is difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Fletcher will fall hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard is it to remember that Phineas is of the male sex."²⁸ Phineas is not symptomatic simply of an inability to create male characters (the failing of which nearly all nineteenth-century female novelists were accused). Mrs. Craik shows no awareness of physical sexuality; love, in either sex, is described in terms of admiration, mental affinity, affection, mutual protectiveness. Many of Mrs. Craik's most admired characters--both male and female--are essentially asexual; Olive, for example, is marked by a slight deformity which she believes will keep her from marrying and which therefore

gave her freedom in her own. Brought into contact with the world, she scarce felt like a young and timid girl, but as a being--isolated, yet strong in her isolation; who mingles, and must mingle, among men, not as a woman, but as one who, like themselves, pursues her own calling, has her own spirit's aims; and can therefore step aside for no vain fear, nor sink beneath any idle shame.

(Ch. 21)²⁹

It seems entirely possible that Mrs. Craik really does not recognize any difference between the sexes except that women are physically less strong; otherwise men and women have the same aims, the same drives, and the same fashion of loving.

John Halifax, Gentleman gave Mrs. Craik an established reputation and a degree of financial security. She had passed her thirtieth year. She began to write a series of articles about the position of women for Chambers' Journal (a periodical which found most of its audience in the

²⁸R. H. Hutton, "Novels by the Authoress of 'John Halifax,'" North British Review, 29 (1858), 475.

²⁹The text is given as in the first edition, II, 58; later editions vary somewhat in wording and punctuation, both from the first edition and between one another.

upwardly mobile, serious-minded portion of the artisan-lower middle class). The series was reprinted in 1858 as A Woman's Thoughts about Women.

In the chapter entitled "Lost Women" Mrs. Craik asks her readers to imagine that they have lost their innocence and to feel what punishment that knowledge alone would be; such an exercise, bridging whatever social or economic or class distinctions might separate her readers from the fallen, should be "enough to make a chaste woman's first feeling towards an unchaste that of unqualified, unmitigated pity." Yet she is severely critical of novels which sentimentalize the fallen heroine into a "paragon of injured simplicity." These books, she feels, make the heroine so helpless and simple that it is as wrong to blame her as to "scold a child for tumbling into an open well." No purpose is served in considering a woman as nothing more than a child, nor in showing her placed by society in a position of utter helplessness:

Given a chance, the smallest chance, and a woman's redemption lies in her own hands . . . No human power could have degraded her against her will; no human power can keep her in degradation unless by her will.

Robert Colby has written on the similarities between this essay and George Eliot's treatment of Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede, which appeared the following year.³⁰ Mrs. Craik's name was frequently paired with Eliot's during these years in a context which implies "good literature" as opposed to the other sort.³¹ Eliot bristled at the comparison: "Miss Mulock--

³⁰See above, p. 116.

³¹See, for example, "American Female Novelists," National Quarterly Review, 2 (1860), p. 33: "'Sensation stories' are now all the rage . . . Nine out of every ten (nay, we may say ninety-nine out of every hundred) persons prefer the stories of Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., to the noble productions of Miss Mulock and George Elliott [sic];" or Henry Kingsley's 1873 letter complaining about his reviews, quoted in Stewart M. Ellis, Henry Kingsley (London, 1931), p. 189: "I know perfectly well that if I was to write a

a writer who is read only by novel readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture. A very excellent woman she is, I believe--but we belong to an entirely different order of writers."³² (Lewes, however, wrote to G. L. Craik in 1872, "It is but 'fair' that you should admire my wife as I am a very old admirer of yours.")³³ More to the point is Mrs. Craik's criticism of George Eliot, which appeared in Macmillan's Magazine in April 1861. As a work of art, she says, The Mill on the Floss "is as perfect as the novel can well be made" but--and for Mrs. Craik it is by far the more important question--"what good will it do? [ask] whether it will lighten any burdened heart, help any perplexed spirit, comfort the sorrowful, succor the tempted, or bring back the erring into the way of peace; and what is the answer? Silence." George Eliot's novel, according to Mrs. Craik, is based on a "perilous doctrine . . . the doctrine of overpowering circumstances" and ends fortuitously and unnecessarily with "death, welcomed as the solution of all difficulties, the escape from pain." Maggie is, for all her vividness, a selfish and futile character; she should have learned--the novelist should have helped her to learn--to endure and to help others.³⁴

There could hardly be a more succinct credo than "what good will it do?" Mrs. Craik's aim as a novelist was to portray ideal lives to be imitated and to provide comfort for those in need. Her evangelical background, though never presented as doctrine, suffuses her work. For Mrs. Craik the single moral standard represented absolute equality: all souls,

book as good as John Halifax or The Mill on the Floss I should not have fair play."

³²The George Eliot Letters, III, 302.

³³The George Eliot Letters, V, 353.

³⁴"To Novelists--and a Novelist," Macmillan's Magazine, 3 (1861), 441-48.

no matter what physical form their outward bodies wore, stood singly in the same relationship to God. Fully private, conscience-governed morality often led to an individualism which necessarily defied social conventions. To make such traits attractive, Mrs. Craik frequently depicted society coming around to admiration of the person who had defied it--John Halifax, for example, is ultimately urged by his neighbors to stand for Parliament. Mrs. Craik had little use for the "happy deathbed" school of tract or fiction; her moral universe was primarily social and humanistic.

A Life for a Life (3 vols. 1859) is Mrs. Craik's widest and most serious application of the single standard. It has been argued with some cogency that Mrs. Gaskell's religious commitment required her to depict Ruth as sinning unknowingly: that Mrs. Gaskell could not imagine forgiveness for an intentional transgression against divine law.³⁵ A Life for a Life, with equally firm religious tenor, has as hero a man guilty of homicide and, in tidy counterpoint, the parallel tale of a woman living in sin. Both suffer and are, through their own efforts, redeemed. The book is governed by an assumption of the equality of souls and additionally by a narrower single standard which applies to a guilty man many of the conventions typical of writing about the unchaste woman.

Max Urquhart, the hero, has in his youth killed a man in the course of a quarrel. He is virtually a seduced innocent: the man, his social and financial superior, had offered him a ride, taunted him, misled him, and finally jokingly attempted to abandon him along a forsaken by-way. In the first edition of the book Urquhart was morally guiltless:

Now, you see how it was. I murdered him. He must have died easily--instantaneously; he never moaned nor stirred once; but for

³⁵Margaret Ganz, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict (New York, 1969), pp. 110-11.

all of that, it was murder.

Not with intent, God knows. So little idea had I he was dead, that I shook him as he lay, told him to "get up and fight it out:" oh, my God!--my God!

(II, 297)

The Athenaeum review³⁶ objected (just as Mrs. Craik had objected in the case of sentimentalized unchaste heroines) to the extreme punishment visited on such an unintentional act. In subsequent editions she returned to the original conception of the novel, which she had altered because she was afraid the public would not bear it.³⁷ Legally, still, Urquhart's crime might be interpreted as murder in the second degree rather than the first, but it was not an accident:

Now you see how it was. I killed him; I meant to kill him, or at least to injure him. But only at the instant, God knows! and out of that blind fury which for the time being is utterly reckless of consequences. He must have died easily . . .

(Revised ed., p. 239)

In consequence of his sense of guilt, Urquhart, like many a fictional sorrowing woman, devotes his life to service of the sick, first in the Crimea and then as a prison doctor. As in the case of Ruth, the social repercussions provide the meat of the plot. Gossip makes his position untenable, and rather than tell a direct lie about his past he turns himself in to the police. He had been socially acceptable so long as the crime was hidden; once he has made restitution by serving out the prison sentence he can find neither job nor friends. We are made to feel it an act of rejection of English society rather than a flight from it when, at the end of the book, Urquhart and his bride set forth for Canada.

The parallel plot of the fallen woman is not so fully developed, but the intent to relate the two is inescapable. Lydia Cartwright, a

³⁶Athenaeum, 6 Aug. 1859, pp. 173-74.

³⁷See the preface to the Revised Edition (1860), pp. iii-iv.

servant, has been seduced by Francis Charteris. Penelope, to whom Charteris is engaged, discovers the suburban love-nest and calls off the match. So startling is the single moral standard in action that Charteris barely understands it; even Penelope's clergyman father says that half the world would consider Charteris not disgraced. But on absolute grounds his sin is far greater than Max Urquhart's, first because he does not repent and second, because he has failed to make that restitution which is possible. Penelope says,

"tell Doctor Urquhart he was innocent comparatively . . . He only killed Harry's body, but those who deceive us are the death of one's soul. . . . There are those who are worse than murderers, for they destroy both body and soul."

(Ch. 30)

Lydia's own case is wholly comparable to Urquhart's. Once all is known she is virtually forced out of the parish; the minister wants to forbid her from church and sacrament so that she will not corrupt others. The heroine helps her train as a schoolmistress to female prisoners. The single standard is carried to its logical conclusion. Charteris is imprisoned for debt and taking opium, but the child, whom he visits sometimes, is fond of him. Paternity engenders strength. He says to the child "'You are not a bit ashamed of me; and, by God!'" (it was more a vow than an oath), 'I'll never be ashamed of you.'" (Ch. 34) He makes his restitution, marries Lydia, and sets foot on the road to reform.

The book is stylistically complex and even innovative--it is told in the form of overlapping diaries kept by Urquhart and the woman he marries--and unified by a rationally conceived and carefully delineated conception of the nearly identical physical and moral and emotional qualities of women and men. In the following decade Mrs. Craik's fiction became narrower in scope: more limitedly domestic and more closely tuned to specifically female concerns and, ultimately, women's issues. A Life

for a Life was the last of her novels to be seriously treated by major reviews; in subsequent years a new book of Mrs. Craik's generally became a springboard for a discussion of the woman writer or of women's reading.

(It was also, whether coincidentally or not, at this period that she began to lead a conventional woman's life. She was married in 1865 at the age of thirty-nine to George Lillie Craik.³⁸ They adopted an abandoned infant from the parish workhouse in 1869.)

A Brave Lady (Macmillan's 1869-70; 3 vols. 1870) is a piece of propaganda for the Married Woman's Property Act, then once more under debate. It picks up the issue of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall; the heroine is on the point of making an illegal and (socially, at least) immoral escape from a husband who might still be hard to divorce: he is too weak, lax and thoughtless to be really bad and what she fears is his insidious moral effect on the children. She works out a plan for supporting her family before she discovers that the children are not hers and the money which she earns belongs to her husband. She further prepares to whisk the children out of the country in order to evade the law but then realizes that her husband has the symptoms of a degenerative disease and is growing so helpless, both physically and morally, that her very superiority forbids her to take a selfish interest in her own life; she has a duty as a woman to protect the weak. The conclusion of the book is terrible in its irony. The heroine behaves with social propriety and she earns a social reward; she inherits a large fortune and all of the children, for whose good she had intended to make the "wrong" choice, die. At least four of the deaths are a direct consequence of the wealth they have inherited.

³⁸the younger, nephew of the man who wrote The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties, Illustrated by Female Examples (1847).

The issue of duty towards the weak muddies the book as a piece of propaganda, as does Mrs. Craik's evangelical admiration of a martyr. Martyrdom does, however, constitute a subversive attack on the principle of deference to superiors. The heroine, we are told, makes her plan to take the children to France "with a caution and foresight worthy of one of those righteous conspirators against unrighteous authority, who, according as they succeed or fail, are termed in history patriots or traitors." (Ch. 12)

The direct authorial moral is an outright contradiction of law and public morality as embodied in the Divorce Act: "If a woman has to choose between husband and children, save the children!" (Ch. 11) The book departs from Mrs. Craik's usual technique of embodying the ideal in successful action. Yet it is a first tenet among propagandists that the reader must feel dissatisfied by a story's ending, so that the remaining emotional tension will be carried over into an effort to change society.

Hannah (St. Paul's, 1870-71; 2 vols. 1872) is another book with a specific legal target: the Act of Parliament of 1835 which had, for the purpose of determining the degrees of consanguinity within which marriage was prohibited, placed in-laws on the same footing as blood relations, thereby preventing a widower from marrying his deceased wife's sister. The act struck particularly hard at the poor: a woman's unmarried sister was often the only available caretaker for her motherless children. If she moved into the widower's crowded home to take up her duties as mother and housekeeper she was often, in the course of nature, virtually forced by the law to live in sin.³⁹

³⁹The question comes up with some regularity in the correspondence columns of the London Journal; see, for example, LJ, 39 (30 Jan. 1864), p. 80: "Marriage with a deceased wife's sister . . . is not legal in any part of the United Kingdom. . . . The offspring of such a marriage would,

Mrs. Craik set her story at a level of society with which the novel reader would more naturally identify, though she provides a parallel case involving the working class. The heroine is a single, self-sufficient, self-supporting governess of thirty, who is aware only of "one great want in her nature--the need to be a mother to somebody or something." (Ch. 1) She quite naturally answers her clergyman brother-in-law's call to take over the nurture of the infant whose birth has resulted in its mother's death, though she has some doubts about the wisdom of giving up her financial independence and ability to make provision for her old age.

The slow growth of Hannah's relationship to Mr. Rivers, the brother-in-law, is minutely portrayed, as is, after the recognition takes place, the constant physical and emotional strain of occupying the same house: the moodiness, depression, blushing, repression, coldness. The crisis is forced through the sub-plot involving the nursery-maid, Grace Dixon, who has gone through a church marriage (in another parish, where they are not known) with her dead sister's husband. The man subsequently takes to drink and, after Grace has borne him a child, marries someone else, which he can do legally since the church ceremony, though performed in good faith, is technically invalid. Rivers insists that Grace be turned out of the house; it is impossible for a clergyman to keep a disgraced unmarried mother as a servant. Hannah argues for Grace:

"Not disgraced; only unfortunate. She is a very good girl indeed. She protests solemnly that she had not an idea that in marrying James Dixon she was doing wrong."

"How you women do hold to your point!" said Mr. Rivers in great irritation, almost agitation. "But she has done wrong. She has broken the law. In the eyes of the law she is nothing more nor less than a poor seduced girl, mother of a bastard child."

(Ch. 5)

therefore, be illegitimate; and, as such marriages are common, the persons contracting them should take extreme care that all testamentary and other dispositions of property should be skilfully prepared, so as to ensure their children the provision intended for them."

Now, Hannah is a heroine. She is in every way Mrs. Craik's version of the ideal woman--strong, self-sufficient, yet exquisitely maternal. She anatomizes her position religiously. If love for Mr. Rivers is in itself--even without any physical expression--a sin, she will somehow root it out rather than pray for forgiveness: she trusts that her mind and will are stronger than her emotion. But her conscience is individualist; despite the articles of the Church of England, of which Hannah is a faithful communicant, she cannot be convinced that her love is wrong. The law of the land is even easier to question. Before 1835 such marriages were legal; one of the neighborhood's respected gentry, in fact, married his sister-in-law in 1834. "Then," Hannah remarks ingenuously, "what was right one year was wrong the next? That is, to my weak womanly nature, a very extraordinary form of justice." (Ch. 5) And further, she asks, if James Dixon's "marriage with Grace was unlawful, why cannot he be prosecuted for that, as for bigamy or similar offenses? Either it was a crime or it was not." (Ch. 5) Mrs. Craik musters other arguments on Hannah's side: England is the only civilized country which has such a law; there is a growing sentiment in Parliament to change it.

Hannah does not violate her own individual moral code but in the eyes of society, of the Church of England, and of English law, she is unchaste. She and Rivers move to France. "To break your country's laws, however unjust they may be, and then to expect its protection, is like disobeying one's father. We must do it--if compelled by his unjust exactions--but we ought to quit his house first." (Ch. 16) Thus the typically Victorian analogy between family and social order is pursued to its logical end and the concept of hierarchy is either abandoned.

The strength and the subversiveness of this story lie in the deliberateness of the social message. Grace Dixon is a far more miserable person

than Hannah because she was deluded; she thought that what she did was legal and, because men are dishonorable, she suffered. Hannah's eyes are open; she trusts no other judgment than her own. Mrs. Craik rewards her with a gloriously happy life. Neither the class nor the sex of legislators or bishops puts them above woman's question. The viewpoint is both firmly evangelical and also, perhaps, more revolutionary than she realized, for once the dam of legal, social, and religious sanction for individual action is breached in the case of this one law, there are other laws to doubt.

"It seems a lost labour," one review of Recommended to Mercy had said, "to analyze evils from which we can see no way of escape."⁴⁰ The sexual outcast had emotional value for the women novelists of the sixties as a symbolic ultimate victim, thoroughly used and abused by male callousness and a male-oriented social and legal structure. There was no doubt an emotional release in the self-pitying tears with which women read Lost and Saved or Meg or A Brave Lady, as there was in East Lynne and Not Wisely but Too Well and some other of the Sensation novels. But the novelists who used the figure of the unchaste woman to deal with the larger problem were not willing simply to wallow in that from which there was no escape.

They did not, however, often violate overt moral sensibilities. The single-standard novelists did not face the question of woman's physical desire; they tried, rather, to deny the force of sexual appetite in men. They perceived that the requirement of moral purity as a special virtue pertaining only to woman was a part of the concept of woman's special nature which kept her separate and unequal. They also realized that to

⁴⁰Times, 3 Sept. 1862, p. 5.

exempt men from the requirement of chastity was, inevitably, to victimize some women: middle-class wives and daughters were to be protected from the male's brute nature at the expense of others who were also women. If there is one single strain which runs through all of the novels considered in this chapter, it is the depiction of women of all social classes as identical in emotion, desire, and moral sensibility. There is little of the patronizing spirit of Sarah Whitehead; mistress and servant could well read most of these novels of the sixties together without being unduly conscious of the distance between them. Again and again, it is the women who help each other.⁴¹

The single-standard novels also, as a rule, prefer marriage with the seducer as the best solution to the woes of the seduced, thus contradicting the theme of independence voiced by Jessie Phillips and Ruth and the married women who struggle to escape from impure men. However, the marriage always takes place on the woman's terms. It is reached, generally, through the action of the first principle of feminine morality: the good of the child. The man adopts a woman's value-system, comes to love his child, and places its welfare ahead of the social handicap for himself of *déclassé* marriage. The solution additionally provides a happy ending rather than a holy death for the fallen woman.

The issue of chastity is of overwhelming importance only so long as

⁴¹The didactic novelists who wrote, as Mary Howitt had done, deliberately for girls of the lower classes emphasize self-sufficiency to an even greater extent; in Mrs. Sewell's Patience Hart's First Experience in Service (1862) the cook and the maids provide help for one of their number who has had a baby and bring her back to the path of virtue without consulting the mistress at all. Mary Sewell (1797-1884), wife of a shopkeeper, began to write moral verses and tales for the young at the age of sixty. Her daughter Anna Sewell (1820-78) was the author of Black Beauty (1877). Mary Sewell's literary production is nowhere discussed; DNB refers to one biographical source: Mrs. Bayley, Life and Letters of Mrs. Sewell (1889).

woman is no more than object for man. For woman to become independent of her sexuality required that she hold some place in society in her own right:

You can excommunicate a woman by simply refusing to associate with her, for the pleasure which her society gives is the only reason why you do associate with her; she stands in no other relation to the world than the social one. But this is not the case with men. A man is a politician, a country gentleman, a banker, a merchant, a tradesman, an artist, an author, a doctor, or fifty other things, and in this capacity he has something to give to a certain number of his fellow-creatures, which they cannot get without considerable inconvenience elsewhere. . . . No doubt if the extreme views of women's rights, which are advocated by some eminent persons, were ever to prevail; if women were ever to cease to be dependent upon men for support and protection; if they came to sustain public relations and characters, if they had professions, and sat in Parliament, and became merchants and landowners, they would acquire by that very fact as much liberty as to their morals, as men enjoy at present.⁴²

The single-standard novelists reversed the issue; they did not seek moral liberty for themselves but rather moral purity for men. Yet they did see that only economic independence allowed a woman to make sexual choices--including the choice of whether or not to marry. Sexual pleasure, like all pleasures, is a luxury item: the subsistence issues had to come first.

⁴²Stephen, 290-91.

CHAPTER SIX

LOVE AND MORALS: THE NOVEL, 1870-1880

The decade preceding 1880 was one of flux and transition. The trends in economic organization, governmental function, and social philosophy have been clarified by historical perspective: by 1880 the industrial revolution was complete and Britain had become a modern nation. In literature, the sense of an old world passing was perceived by those who watched it happen. All of the major early Victorian authors were gone by 1880; Collins and Reade, who survived, had already published their best work.¹ In the generation which replaced them there was an ever-widening gap between the significant literary achievements and the books people actually read.

The popular styles of the sixties persisted, but both the Sensation novels and the women's novels of the seventies seem less muscular than their predecessors. There was no runaway best-seller to match East Lynne or Lady Audley's Secret. The books which were in demand at the libraries seem more and more to have been written by and for women.² If one subject

¹Charles Dickens died in 1870 and George Eliot in 1880; Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Brontës were already dead. A number of other very popular writers died during the decade: Bulwer-Lytton and Le Fanu in 1873, Charles Kingsley in 1875, his brother a year later; Mrs. Marsh in 1874, Mrs. Crowe in 1876, and Geraldine Jewsbury in 1880; and, at yet another level, G. W. M. Reynolds in 1879.

²By the mid-eighties more novels were published annually than any other sort of book. Works on religious subjects still led the list in 1870, although most either were subsidized or were collections of sermons published by subscriptions from among a clergyman's congregation; see R. C. K. Ensor, England, 1870-1914 (Oxford, 1936), p. 159. Forty per cent of the novels published by Bentley in the seventies and eighties were

does dominate the literature of the decade, that subject is love: love not as a simple romantic given, leading inevitably to marriage, but love explored in its complexities--the sources of it, the choices determined by it, the power relationships involved in it, the morality of its management.

Love became, perhaps, less abstract. Purity, however, became more so. In the novels of the seventies the unchaste woman virtually disappears--at least as a character whose life and soul are at issue. In her place are incarnations of victimized purity, a few improbably chaste elopements, and an occasional didactic tale about practical morality in the face of that love which is no longer inextricably mixed with marriage. The new woman--the woman who makes a sexual choice and abides by it for reasons of her own--may be just beyond the horizon, but her shadow is not yet clearly visible.

Anthony Trollope's The Vicar of Bullhampton (monthly parts, 1869-70; 3 vols. 1870) is an anomaly; it deals seriously and realistically with the problem of restoring a fallen woman to a place in the society from whence she had come and in doing so accepts her without purification or sentimentalization. The book was, he said,

written chiefly with the object of exciting not only pity but sympathy for a fallen woman, and of raising a feeling of forgiveness for such in the minds of other women. I could not venture to make this female the heroine of my story. To have made her a heroine at all would have been directly opposed to my purpose. It was necessary therefore that she should be a second-rate personage in the tale;--but it was with reference to her life that the tale was written, and the hero and heroine with their belongings are all subordinate.³

Trollope had a dual didactic purpose; he wished to warn girls as well as

written by women, as compared to twenty per cent in the thirties and forties; see Gettman, p. 249.

³Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (London, 1950), pp. 329-30.

to encourage the sympathies of society. Neither purpose, he felt, could be served by exaggeration. Carry Brattle shut out from the warmth and affection of those she loves is, he believes, a more effective warning than a Carry Brattle thrust into degradation, disease, and death. And to depict the fallen woman rising purified and ennobled from the ashes of her experience might possibly encourage at least an emotional sympathy for her, but it did not realistically accord with the facts of ordinary human life and it was, in addition, morally dangerous:

To write in fiction of one so fallen as the noblest of her sex, as one to be rewarded because of her weakness, as one whose life is happy, bright, and glorious, is certainly to allure to vice and misery. But it may perhaps be possible that if the matter be handled with truth to life, some girl, who would have been thoughtless, may be made thoughtful, or some parent's heart may be softened.⁴

Trollope sought deliberately to lower the emotional temperature of the subject matter. By omitting to show or even to recount the actual circumstances of Carry's fall he avoids giving her the excuses of overpowering love or self-sacrifice or ignorance or delusion. The Vicar tries to diminish the importance society attaches to one among the list of all sins: "'Think how easy it is for a poor girl to fall . . . How small is the sin, and how terrible the punishment! Your friends, Mr. Brattle, have forgiven you worse sins than ever she has committed.'" (Ch. 27) Carry is not allowed a religious conversion or a convenient death; both, Trollope felt, contributed to sentimentalization of the stereotype and to evasion of the reality. The cliché made things too easy; as Carry's ironmonger brother-in-law says, while refusing to give her a place to live, "'I don't know whether almost the best thing for 'em isn't to die--of course after they have repented.'" (Ch. 46)

⁴Anthony Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton, World's Classics Edition (1924; rpt. London, 1963), vi-vii. Quotations throughout are taken from this edition.

Trollope also gently deflates the tendency towards exaggeration and sentimentalization in the figure of the rescuer. The Vicar

would build little castles in the air on her behalf, in which her life should be anything but one of sackcloth and ashes. He would find for her some loving husband, who should know and should have forgiven the sin which had hardly been a sin, and she should be a loving wife with loving children. Perhaps, too, he would add to this, as he built his castles, the sweet smiles of affectionate gratitude with which he himself would be received when he visited her happy hearth. But he knew that these were castles in the air . . .

(Ch. 40)

Carry Brattle's story, then, is deliberately placed in a subdued secular world, in which people's mundane concerns and ordinary social relationships make up the substance of their lives. The rejection of Carry by the members of her family is not to be construed as an attack on society. The farmer brother and the ironmonger brother-in-law are, no doubt, selfish; they are thinking more about the disgrace to the family and the taint to their own social reputes than about what good may be done for their sister. But, as the Vicar's wife points out, their reaction is universal among members of their class and, since most people's behavior is conditioned more by the desire for the love and approval of their immediate associates than by religious or moral considerations, it serves a useful purpose; it "'keeps women from going astray.'" (Ch. 39)

In the mundane secular world, moreover, the most intimate social relationships are necessarily colored by the feelings which people have for one another. Brattle's own intractability is neither hypocritical nor hard-hearted. He feels a deep, nearly inarticulate pain because the daughter he loved has gone wrong.

Carry is restored to her home; her father, finally, accepts her again as one of the family. Even the Vicar realizes that it was practical hardship and desire for affection, rather than spiritual regeneration, that

led Carry to renounce her life of sin. She is not sanctified; she does not become a light to her neighborhood; no husband comes. And though Brattle treats her as a daughter once more "the shame of the sin was always on him" as it will always be on Carry. The final solution is satisfactory enough to avoid making Carry a martyr but depressing enough to discourage any girl from wishing to emulate her.

The other significant difference between Trollope's novel and every other treatment of the figure of the unchaste woman in the sixties and seventies is that Carry is part of a family. The novel is conservative in the most exact sense. Carry is re-integrated to the role suitable for an unmarried woman--dependent on her father, guided in her behavior by the love and tenderness of her mother. For other novelists the unchaste woman was perforce the independent woman, detached by that one act from her conventional role, relationships, and status.

The sentimentalization and idealization against which Trollope felt it necessary to provide an antidote were to get worse, rather than better. The recognition of immorality during the sixties preceded a hardening of moral lines during the seventies. Parliament established licensing hours and forbade prostitutes to enter public houses. The popular nightspots--Evan's, Surrey Gardens, the Argyle--closed down.⁵ The revelations by the Purity Campaigners about the traps laid to entice girls into prostitution led to an increase in chaperonage and protectionism.⁶ And there was a reactionary idealization of the purity of all women--including unchaste women.

Charles Reade's A Terrible Temptation (Cassell's Magazine, 1871; 3

⁵Cyril Alston Pearl, The Girl with the Swansdown Seat (London, 1955), pp. 169-71.

⁶See Michael Pearson, The Age of Consent (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 134.

vols. 1871) was both the last full-blooded example of the more lenient morality of the Sensational school and a harbinger of things to come. The novel portrayed a courtesan, an unwed mother, and an icily pure heroine who nevertheless may or may not have been tempted through love of her husband to commit an act of adultery in order to provide him with a badly-needed heir. Reade's recourse to letters and articles to publicly defend himself and his novel could conceivably be seen as the opening shot in the battle against the "tyranny of the young person" which was to erupt in the 1880's. Yet the grounds of the defense and the consequence of the battle seem more accurately to indicate a triumph of public reaction to the license of the 1860's.

Reade had been prepared for trouble from the start; he had noted on 30 Oct. 1870, when he had only just begun A Terrible Temptation that the book was "rather smart, I think, but also rather loose. I fear it will offend the mothers of families."⁷ He defended himself, as Hardy and Moore were later to do, on the grounds of realism, bolstered by his own habit of factual verification through clippings and notebooks and note-cards and cross-files and indexes (which is eulogized in the book with his self-indulgent introduction of himself as the novelist Rolfe). The plot twist of A Terrible Temptation was derived from the report of a recent trial, and the character of Rhoda Somerset was, as he gleefully pointed out in response to the Times review which said such things ought not to be written about,

not invented by me, but copied from a master hand. It was you who first introduced her, ponies and all, to the public, on the 3d day of July, 1862, in an admirable letter, headed "Anonyma." On another occasion you discussed the whole subject, day after day, in leaders and a vast correspondence, so that for one lady who knows about the demi-monde from my pages, twenty know a great deal more from

⁷Burns, p. 288.

yours. . . . You did your duty to the public in 1862, as you had often done it before, and were true to your own invaluable maxim, "Facts must be faced."⁸

But Reade, unlike the naturalists, was not content to let the facts speak for themselves. He further defended himself on the grounds of moral intent:

Whatever warmth I have shown is in the scenes of virtuous love; in the Somerset's scenes I am cold and sarcastic. Up to the period of her repentance how to I treat this character? Do I whitewash the hussy, or make her a well-bred, delicate-minded woman, as your refined and immoral writers would? I present her illiterate, coarse, vain, with good impulses, a bad temper, and a Billingsgate tongue. In close contrast to this unattractive photograph I am careful to place my portrait of an English virgin, drawn in the sweetest colours my rude art can command, that every honest reader may see on which side my sympathies lie, and be attracted to virtue by the road of comparison.⁹

Whatever Rhoda Somerset may lack in refinement, however, is compensated for by her other womanly qualities--compassion, altruism, religious sentiment, and (most particularly) warmth--and by the way in which she exercises these virtues independent of either social necessity or personal self-interest. She is, even at the beginning of the book, a whore with a heart of gold. The "housekeeper" and "servants" in her London love-nest are actually her mother and siblings. Despite her mercenary maneuverings and her foul tongue

"she had her good points after all. If any creature was ill, she'd sit up all night and nurse them; and she used to go to church on Sundays, and come back with the sting out of her; only then she would preach to a fellow, and bore him. She is awfully fond of preaching. Her dream is to jump on a first-rate hunter, and ride across country, and preach to the villagers."

(Ch. 2)

Sir Charles Bassett, the book's hero, is Rhoda's protector when the story opens; he offers her a settlement so that he can marry the pure English virgin, Arabella, a woman who delights to obey and whose very frame

⁸Charles Reade, "Facts Must Be Faced," Times, 31 Aug. 1871, p. 4.

⁹Ibid.

"breathed womanly subservience." (Ch. 1) Rhoda's temper erupts in a scene which Reade intended to show how false and unattractive she could be. Immediately thereafter she nurses Sir Charles through an epileptic attack and its aftermath (which we are given to understand is the price he has paid for his career of debauchery), enters a series of disguises and falsehoods which serve to patch things up so that Bassett can marry Arabella after all, provides the evidence necessary for him to win a law-suit that threatens his estate, and, at the end of the novel, uses her capacity as preacher to resolve a family feud so that the pair of idyllic young lovers who have grown up in the meantime can marry. The coarseness of her character as a horsebreaker is undercut by the good motives behind her actions; the potential ridicule of the former kept-woman as a religious crank forestalled by the fortunate results of her intervention in a potentially dangerous situation.

Rhoda is a version of the courtesan heroines of the Anonyma and Skittles yellowbacks. Her coarseness implies sensuality. She is fully independent; she is able to dominate even the men who keep her because she is so attractive that she can pick and choose among admirers. Reade thought--or at least said he thought--that the idealized portrait of the chaste, subservient, loving wife would gain by the contrast. But even allowing for the technical problem of making virtue interesting, Arabella is not terribly attractive. She is so moral that dishonesty--even when necessary to save life--torments her nearly to the point of madness. Her rejection of the "heir"--the servant's illegitimate child she has pretended is born to her in order to relieve Sir Charles from the insanity consequent to his obsessive desire for a son--when she has a child of her own is particularly unappealing. Rhoda Somerset seems far more feminine than the cold angelic wife who is wholly preoccupied by her husband and one of her

children. The convention of the whore with the heart of gold implies that the enjoyment of sexual pleasure is one symptom of an excess of human impulses. Rhoda is not pure, but she is good, and she does a great deal of good from no motive but the goodness of her heart.

The public objection to the novel discouraged Reade from any further treatment of similar material. The commercial value of his books was sufficiently damaged that the American publisher Osgood reduced the figure he was willing to offer for Reade's next work.¹⁰ Reade bowed to the public mood; in offering A Simpleton to Blackwood he not only promised to submit "a distinct statement of the sexual incidents to follow, their nature, and their treatment" but to excise any lines which Blackwood would be pained to publish.¹¹

Wilkie Collins' first novel of the seventies initially depicted, as did Reade's, a woman who had voluntarily surrendered her chastity without thereby losing all other virtues. Anne Silvester of Man and Wife (Cassell's Magazine, 1870; 3 vols. 1870) had succumbed to physical attraction:

She had seen him . . . the hero of the river-race, the first and foremost man in a trial of strength and skill which had roused the interest of a nation; the idol of the popular worship and the popular applause. . . . A woman in an atmosphere of red-hot enthusiasm, witnesses the apotheosis of Physical Strength. Is it reasonable--is it just--to expect her to ask herself, in cold blood, What (morally and intellectually) is all this worth?--and that, when the man . . . notices her, is presented to her, finds her to his taste, and singles her out from the rest? No. While humanity is humanity, the woman is not utterly without excuse.

(Ch. 4)

Anne, furthermore, is active and intelligent enough not to submit weakly to the consequences of her folly. She can no longer understand

¹⁰Burns, p. 289. Beadle and Adams's Saturday Journal--a publication much on the order of the London Journal--remarked that A Terrible Temptation was "too grossly indecent, in all its aspects, for any decent publication. . . . Alas for Charles Reade!"; quoted in Johannsen, I, 194.

¹¹Burns, 291.

her temporary infatuation but, because she is pregnant, insists that Geoffrey Delamayn provide a name for the child by entering an irregular Scots marriage. The ceremony will be secret; Anne will go away afterwards and support the child herself. She arranges the plan and forces Delamayn to agree; she acts with consideration, forethought, and great persuasive power.

Collins, however, was writing a novel with a purpose.¹² The book is bolstered by a documentary appendix in the manner of Charles Reade, relating the facts of the story to page references in The Report of the Royal Commissioners on the Laws of Marriage (London, 1868). Once the situation has been established so that the machinery of legal moves and counter-moves can provide the sequence of events and of emotional effects, Anne's own role in creating the initial difficulty fades from sight. Criticism of the legal and moral inequities of marriage as a civil contract requires the suffering of an innocent victim. Anne is the most admirable sort of woman because she suffers voluntarily. After the child has been born dead she no longer wants to be recognized as Delamayn's wife; she goes to court with her evidence only in order to prove the legality of the marriage of her foster-sister, Blanche, to the man who had acted as go-between in the Delamayn affair, and whom Delamayn claims thereby became Anne's actual husband. The suffering which Anne ironically experiences by becoming an honest woman and marrying the man with whom she had fallen is not even referred to as a purification for her initial sin of unchastity; it is simply the consequence of victimization by an

¹² Man and Wife was not, strictly speaking, the first of his problem novels, but it is the earliest of the series in which the issue dominates the plot.

evil man and an evil law.¹³ Ultimately Delamayn dies in an attempt to murder Anne and she marries the middle-aged, plain-spoken Scots lawyer who is the book's most attractive character. By this time it has long been forgotten that Anne had lost her virtue voluntarily, under the influence of physical passion, before marriage. Instead she is, as a woman, a heroine of the virtue of self-sacrifice; she rises triumphantly even above her victimization by accepting the role of victim voluntarily for the good of others.

As the seventies progressed Collins moved further and further in the direction of absolute division of characters into the good and the bad on the basis of whether or not they were conventionally acceptable members of society. The trait is allied to the tendency of Dickens or Mrs. Norton to divide society into the victims and the victimizers; it is not, however, necessarily related to the common evangelical formula, so often demonstrated in tracts and in books with strong religious purpose, that suffering purifies. Rather, for Collins, suffering is more nearly an indication that one is already pure.¹⁴ The whore, then, was a focus of romantic purity. A woman became a whore because she was a victim of society; because society is evil she must therefore embody all virtues.

Mercy Merrick, of The New Magdalen (Temple Bar, 1872-73; 2 vols 1873) is the illegitimate child of a gentleman and an actress, left to support herself selling matches at the age of ten, raped while fainting

¹³Collins found it convenient to ignore the less-useful clause of Scots marriage law; either party could, in Scotland, be granted a divorce on the grounds of wilful desertion.

¹⁴Althea Hayter suggests that Collins' sympathy for the "pariahs of human society"--the physically handicapped as well as the socially outcast--was related to his drug addiction; the trait, she points out, was shared by fellow-addicts DeQuincey, Poe, Baudelaire, and Crabbe; see Opium and the Romantic Imagination (Berkeley, Calif., 1968), pp. 268-69.

from starvation, drifting thereafter hopelessly into prostitution, imprisoned for a theft she had not committed, guided from prison into a refuge and thence, reformed, into a dispiriting life as a domestic servant, in which role she loses job after job either because the other servants refuse to stay in the same house or because the young men of the family try to take advantage of her. Her grammar and her purity are, however, both miraculously intact; at the opening of the book Mercy is nursing at the front lines of the Franco-Prussian war, heroic, compassionate, and with "an innate nobility in the carriage of . . . [her] head, an innate grandeur in the gaze of her large grey eyes . . . " (Ch. 1)

Not only is Mercy an ex-prostitute and a convicted felon, she builds her new life on a lie and an imposture. There is also present at the medical station an orphaned young lady, Grace Roseberry, who is travelling to England to become companion to Lady Janet Roy, a distant connection whom she has never met. Grace is apparently killed in the German bombardment; Mercy takes her clothes, her letter of introduction, and her place at Lady Janet's. She also leaves the wounded French soldiers in German hands without accompanying them to their prison camp, and she later becomes engaged to a man she does not love. She demonstrates her heroic nobility at last in an act of self-sacrifice--that is, she does confess her imposture when the real Grace Roseberry reappears.

It will not do to think too deeply about the moral message thereby communicated. The book's interest lies wholly in the fascination of Mercy Merrick as a character; its effect depends largely on superficialities. The New Magdalen was initially conceived as a play; though the serialization in Temple Bar was almost completed before the opening night at the Olympic

Theatre¹⁵ the dramatic version of each act was written out before the narrative version.¹⁶ Visual effects take the place of interior development in explaining character. In the opening passage Mercy and Grace tell their stories to each other in the half-darkness of the medical station under fire and when Grace, at the end, turns away rather than take Mercy's hand we know at once that she, despite her good name, gentle blood, and unquestioned sexual virtue, is the mean-spirited and vindictive one of the two. So much has been accomplished by the simple expedient of placing Mercy before us in a Red Cross uniform.

The conclusion of the book is managed through a pair of equally dramatic set-pieces. The first shows self-effacement triumphant: Lady Janet Roy makes a trip to a refuge, in person, in order to plead with one of its inmates to become the wife of her nephew. A recollection of the social message makes the second climax necessary. Only married ladies come to the post-nuptial ball which Lady Janet gives--they are overjoyed to be worthy of her hospitality, but will not risk tainting their unmarried daughters. Mercy and her husband leave England in disgust:

So closes my connection with my own country. While I have Mercy by my side, I face the unknown future, certain of carrying my happiness with me, go where I may. We shall find five hundred adventurers like ourselves when we join the emigrant ship, for whom their native land has no occupation, and no home. Gentlemen of the Statistical Department, add two more to the number of social failures produced by England in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and seventy-one-- Julian Gray and Mercy Merrick.

(Epilogue, IV)¹⁷

¹⁵The serial ran in Temple Bar from Oct. 1872 to July 1873; the play opened at the Olympic on 19 May 1873; the novel was published in two volumes during the first week in June.

¹⁶Davis, p. 271.

¹⁷Collins' novel also suffered from prudish reaction. Charles Mudie asked Bentley to alter the title; Collins refused; and due to Mudie's unusually small order the two-volume edition barely realized a profit; see Davis, p. 274.

Swinburne, writing twenty years later, found Collins much to blame for "that line of sentimental fiction which provokes from weary humanity the bitter cry of the long-suffering novel-reader: When will the last reformed harlot vanish into space in the arms of the last clerical skeptic . . . "¹⁸ If Collins did not originate the genre, he embodied, in *Mercy Merrick*, the purest outlines of the stereotype. The ironic tone of Julian Gray's epilogue recapitulates the appeal of the romantic outcast: in a black-and-white sketch of contemporary life, those rejected by a conventionality defined as black must necessarily be pure white.

In both *The New Magdalen* and the lesser novels which made use of variations on the stereotype of the pure victim, however, the love story generally takes precedence over the explicit or implied social criticism. The nature of the attraction between the man and woman involved is therefore worth examining. The woman who has only herself to depend on may be forward, resourceful, and strong; she may be attractive for these characteristics because it is understood that the odds are terribly weighted against her: she cannot possibly do anything which is as wrong as that which society has done to her. But she is not ultimately defined by her strength, as is Ruth; she is always, by definition, an underdog. The man who is attracted to her can, by choice, identify himself with the outcast role and therefore partake of the purity which it imparts. He can, at the same time, safely admire and love the woman because she is not perfect; he need not be afraid of her.

If there is an element of voluntary social renunciation in man's selection of an outcast woman as love-object, there is also a strong

¹⁸"Wilkie Collins," in *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (London, 1894), p. 123.

element of pity. All of the interesting women of Collins' The Fallen Leaves (The World, 1879; 3 vols. 1879) are sad because of past victimization. The most interesting of all is Sally, the whore, so impoverished of background that she is morally, physically, and intellectually stunted. The very core of femininity, Collins would have us believe, is seen in its purest state when social conventionalities are stripped away; he says of the streetwalkers who keep an eye out for Sally that:

All that is most unselfish, all that is most divinely compassionate and self-sacrificing in a woman's nature, was as beautiful and undefiled as ever in these women--the outcasts of the hard highway!

(Bk. 6, Ch. 1)

The hero, Amelius, who has been raised in an idealistic commune in America, partakes of these feminine virtues when he rescues Sally. He also enjoys the experiment of playing Pygmalion. Collins is at least partly aware of the unsavoriness of idealizing the savior-saved relationship. There is some truth in Sally's remark to Amelius, "'I'm afraid you'll get tired of me. There's nothing about me to make you pity me now.'" (Bk. 8, Ch. 7) The distastefulness of the implication--that men can love only those women whom they pity, rather than those whom they admire--is mitigated partly by Collins' own awareness of it and further by his admittedly very cautious indication of the physical element in the attraction of men to women and women to men. Both Mellicent and Mrs. Farnaby had been victimized because they had loved. The perfect English virgin Regina will never have a past because she has no emotion. She obeys her father's wishes implicitly, never doubting that he is always right. Regina is a puppet of propriety--and Collins is sympathetic rather than satiric. There is nothing calculating in her obedience to the minutiae of social duty; she is thereby saved from the dangerous necessity of emotion or choice. Her real terror of the world is ultimately rather

touching.

Sally, therefore, has one more attraction. She is not only pitiable, she is also--because of her past, presumably--uninhibited. She loves Amelius; she shows her love; she initiates kisses. The prostitute was the one woman about whom it was possible to think sexual thoughts; if victimization made her pure she could be an object of both pity and desire.

George Gissing's personal life and his first novel demonstrate the consequences of the stereotype. Workers in the Dawn (3 vols. 1880) makes clear the danger of seeing in one victimized woman a symbol of all the social wrongs a good-hearted man yearns to correct and explores, as well, the element of pity in love. Gissing wrote from personal experience; he had been expelled from Owens College, Manchester, in 1876 after being caught stealing money in order to help a young prostitute whom he subsequently married.¹⁹

In the novel the idealistic hero, Arthur Golding, is torn between the democratic strivings of the working class, of which he is economically a part, and the aesthetic ambitions of the genius which identifies him as naturally superior to his class (as he is, indeed, superior by birth). In this dilemma, Carrie functions as a symbolic object: she represents all the wrongs of the socially oppressed. Gissing hints at Carrie's sexuality only to deny that it forms any part of Arthur's interest; he is attracted to her because

though her beauty was of a somewhat sensual type, and her features betrayed no special intelligence or good-humour . . . There was . . . a fixed paleness upon the girl's face, and now and then a look of suffering which excited his compassion.

(II, 267)

¹⁹Adrian Poole, Gissing in Context (London, 1975), pp. 5-6. Nell Harrison died in squalor in 1888, by which time she and Gissing had been separated for some years.

When Carrie's aunt drives her away from the house because she is pregnant and when she explains the situation to Arthur in a note which reveals how fearfully imperfect her schooling has been, Arthur takes both as further signs of her goodness; he sobs, indeed, in pity. Carrie's baby dies in the snow when she has no place to go on Christmas Day. How could she not be a saint?

As soon as Arthur begins to pay for Carrie's lodging the nature of a love based on the ability to rescue becomes apparent. Even before their marriage Arthur is pained to realize that Carrie sometimes disregards his wishes; it seems to him that "she ought to do as he desired, if from mere gratitude alone." (II, 340) In marriage he is to be the father, the tutor, the guide; he plans "to guard, to foster, to cherish . . . to lead into higher paths than her feet had yet known, to develop, in short, into the ideal woman that his imagination had for years loved to depict." (III, 2)

Carrie is to embody Arthur's aspirations for the whole working class and at the same time to become the Galatea of his own creation. But Carrie, as he soon realizes, is something other than unshaped clay for a master hand. Her fondness for drink and her dislike of reading, writing, and self-improvement are characteristics of the working class in general and also unmalleable grit for the sculptor; they explain both the frustration of those who seek to elevate the working class by stimulating a desire for better things and the defeat of a lover who has failed to perceive the actual woman beneath his own idealized projection.

The love born in pity can continue to exist only through Arthur's exercise of superiority:

He asked himself what their marriage would become if he once despaired of raising Carrie to his own level. He would lose all that had rendered it most delightful to him, that precious sense of the

performance of a lofty task which seemed necessary to his existence. If it were to degenerate into a mere vulgar connection, subsisting mainly upon sensual emotions, he felt that it would hang upon him like a crushing weight, a veritable degrading weight of fetters.

(III, 17)

Carrie perceives that Arthur has no real affection for her as a person. He is so ambitious for her improvement (and fearful of her real nature) that he will not allow her to visit or talk to any of her own friends; they are too "low" for her now. She is at first devious, because she does not like to displease him. Finally he attempts to regain power by a direct threat: "'Do you mean to obey me,'" he asks "'or must I look for other lodgings?'" But because Carrie is quite willing to return to prostitution the threat has no effect. "'Oh, I'm sure I don't want to drive you away,'" she answers. "'If you're tired of having me with you, I can look for a room for myself. That's very easily done.'" (III, 76)

Carrie's ability to move back and forth from mistress to mantle hand to streetwalker, as inclination and opportunity move her, her pragmatism, independence and sensuality, her vulgarity and limited intelligence, no doubt reflect Gissing's observation of the kind of woman he married; his perception of the paternalism and the idealism which Arthur misinterprets as love comment on his own naïveté at the age of twenty. The Helen Norman plot may be intended to suggest that real love is possible only between equals. The complications of that plot, however--that Arthur already has a wife, and that Helen is dying of tuberculosis--also suggest, whether deliberately or not, that unattainability is one of the preconditions of love.

The whore, for Collins and Gissing, is a symbol of a socially oppressed class. For women's problem novelists, unchastity functioned as an individualizing act. By voluntarily violating or appearing to violate

the moral code a woman could deliberately free herself from oppressions imposed by class and custom. A woman could retain her integrity by forsaking her social role. The heroine of Mrs. Eiloart's Woman's Wrong (3 vols. 1872) is married at sixteen to a man who makes a toy of her: "a chattel, who existed solely for his pleasure . . . She would not rebel, and she went on suffering quietly, wondering if this was all that life was meant for, and if every home was as cheerless as her own." (I, 252) After he dies she learns that he has left a will naming his mother as sole guardian of their child. Since there has been a vestry fire in the church where they had been privately married she voluntarily accepts the "harlot's brand" (II, 64); by proclaiming herself to have been a mistress rather than a wife she makes the child illegitimate and therefore her own and successfully raises him by herself. Among the women who help her is one who has recently been reading Ruth.

In the forties and fifties feminist energies had concentrated on the economic and professional goals which were important to women who were through necessity independent and self-supporting. The interest in the legal and property rights of the married woman and ultimately in the question of suffrage indicated a concern for the woman as individual, regardless of her family situation. "If to meet the views and demands of men be the true basis of the training and education of women," commented the Westminster Review in 1879, "then women are logically justifiable in allowing themselves to be put to such uses as men may determine; and thus far in the history of the race, prostitution has been one of these uses."²⁰

A number of novels about the individuality of women within marriage culminate in elopement as a device for reclaiming freedom of action. The

²⁰"The Relations of the Sexes," Westminster Review, NS 60 (1879), 327.

physical chastity of the heroine is generally preserved; she elopes in the manner of Edith Dombey rather than that of Isabel Vane. The situations which precede the crisis identify two sources of marital difficulties. The first is that the man has not ever seen the woman as an individual; he has fallen in love with an ideal. The second is inherent in the legal and social definition of the roles of husband and wife.

The two problems are often presented in conjunction. In Lilian's Penance (3 vols. 1873), by Mrs. Houstoun, Lilian marries a Col. Arundel, who worships women for their purity, fragility and weakness, and who therefore looks down on Lilian while protecting her. Because he has married an image the real woman--who is sometimes willful, inconsistent, and unreasonably emotional--disappoints him. He stands for Parliament and fills his time with public life. The breaking point is reached with a direct order from man to wife; Arundel tells Lilian, before a witness, to "be silent, and learn to know your duty--the duty of obedience and submission." (II, 273)

These novels are interesting because they do consider--though in purified and romanticized form--the possibility of dissolution of marriage. The chaste elopement is a substitute for the divorce lawyer²¹ and, in the ~~the~~ majority of cases, the husband responds to the woman's assertion of her individuality by falling in love with her again as a person. Male authority and female rebelliousness are crystallized in a virtually obligatory scene: the man gives an order; the woman refuses to obey. The husband's stance is almost always paternal. "You will obey," he says in effect, "or you will leave my house." The situation demonstrates that

²¹ By leaving with another man and registering with him at a hotel, the woman provides grounds on which her husband may seek a divorce. By not taking off her clothes in the hotel room, she preserves her private integrity.

woman in marriage is, if not a prostitute, at any rate a wage-slave; she must obey the man who supports her or he will withdraw his support. The actual whore, like Reade's Rhoda Somerset or Gissing's Carrie Mitchell, is inaccessible to the threat because she is willing to sell her body elsewhere. The respectable heroines generally have relatives to go to or money of their own to fall back on; the novelists focus on the issue of spiritual independence by choosing to ignore the economic bondage.

Lady Glencora, of Trollope's Can You Forgive Her? (monthly parts, 1864-65; 2 vols. 1864) is the prototypical heroine of the genre. The Palliser marriage is in difficulty because of the stereotypically different natures of the man and the woman: Glencora is emotional; Palliser is rational. Glencora uses her head when she decides not to elope; Palliser uses his heart when he gives up his Cabinet post; and the sexual adjustment of the pair is symbolized by the appearance, at long last, of an infant.

The other plot of Can You Forgive Her? developed a second matter of significance: the element of choice in a woman's matrimonial decision. Alice Vavasor fears that she will lose her freedom if she marries the man she loves, though she realizes also that she will lose her self-respect if she marries the man she does not love. Marriage involved the surrender of body, property, and legal rights. The romantic conception of love was a symbolic correlative for the total surrender required by marriage. "And when I read your, oh how welcome letter," said Helen Norman to Arthur Golding in Workers in the Dawn,

"it was as though I had renounced self-guidance for ever. I was weaker than water, in both mind and body. Scarcely had I strength to write you the reply. My whole being seemed at once concentrated in one desire--to fall before your feet and call you my master. Can you understand this entire abnegation of self, this passion to annihilate one's being in that of another?"

(III, 267-68)

The more didactic women's novelists continued to write, in the tradition of Mrs. Marsh, about the dangers of love. They were in a more difficult position than she, however, because they did approve of the sentiment. The novels of Mrs. Marsh and her generation were anti-romantic; married women were sometimes overcome by passion (which had derogatory physical overtones) and their punishment was intended to teach women to overcome their emotional weakness with the aid of external religious and moral guidance. In the novels of the seventies middle-class women--sometimes unmarried--step over the boundary deliberately. Presented with insuperable barriers to marriage they decide, for one good reason or another, to live unmarried with their lovers. They are virtuous and noble women, purified by compassion, self-sacrifice, and a desire to serve the man they love. The title of one example, A Fallen Angel (3 vols. 1878; author unknown) aptly delineates the stereotype.

The novelists do not emphasize moral guilt so much as practical consequence. Without questioning the operative equation of love and surrender, they point out that marriage provides social and legal formalization of the terms of surrender. The ethics and arguments of these novels of the eighteen-seventies were repeated in popular fiction and women's magazine stories (and subsequently girls' magazine stories) for the next eighty years. The man uses the language of idealism to demand a proof of love:

"There is only one true marriage, Mildred--where two people, loving each other with fervent, impulsive passion as we do, swear to be true to the end of their lives. . . . I dream . . . that I know a woman who can care for someone beyond herself. . . . She does not barter--my wealth for your name--my beauty for your money. . . . She gives herself as a free gift, there is no limit to her generous trust."²²

²² A Fallen Angel, I, 274-75.

But love in an isolated cottage does not endure in the way that marriage must. The more generous novelists use the honeymoon analogy: to marry is to become part of the social fabric, and those who have by their own action cut themselves off from ordinary companionship with family and friends both suffer when the initial passionate love begins to fade. All imply that men are incapable of matching woman's constancy and sacrifice:

"I have seen the two faces a man turns at different periods to the woman he worships--to the same woman when she worships him back, even to boredom. There is no persistent devotion without law, no enduring tie unless it be knotted by necessity."²³

These novels place the responsibility for moral standards entirely in women's hands. "'Men will always follow a woman if she will allow them,'" says a character in Florence Maryatt's A Harvest of Wild Cats (3 vols. 1877). "'It is her part to keep them at a distance.'" (III, 210) All the elements of the folk morality which prevailed until at least the nineteen-fifties were thus present. And within that morality was implied an essential division between the sexes. Woman's love is defined as the desire to serve; man's as the desire to possess.

The conservatism of the period, the censorship of the libraries, and, indeed, the complexity of social relationship required by the good realistic novel made it difficult to deal with sensitive issues in any but the most simplistic terms. One of the most popular female novelists of the period, however, wrote about almost nothing other than the related topics of love and illicit sex. The change in tone of Ouida's novels from the mid-sixties to the beginning of the eighties illuminates some of the cross-currents of a transitional decade.

Ouida's first stories were published by William Harrison Ainsworth

²³Anna C. Steele, Broken Toys (3 vols. 1872), III, 293-94. Anna C Steele wrote four novels between 1867 and 1877. No further information has been discovered.

in Bentley's Miscellany.²⁴ Her novels of the sixties were in the Sensation school insofar as they generally contained some dark secret and were at least tenuously in touch with contemporary life in England. Ouida's England, however, was bounded by the London headquarters of the Brigade of Guards, the haunts of the demi-monde, and an occasional shooting-box in the country. The double standard reigned supreme; how despicable of the wicked Lucy Davis of Held in Bondage (Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, 1861-62; 3 vols. 1863) to revenge herself by changing her name and appearance so that Granville de Vigne, the boast of whose race was that "the men had been brave and the women chaste"²⁵ soils his name by marrying his former mistress. Ouida's aristocratic Guardsmen of the sixties ideally sow their wild oats and enjoy their sensuous pleasures until reaching the age of at least thirty-five, and then marry a virgin child who will adore them like a spaniel.

The whores and adulteresses of her Sensation novels do not always end badly; sometimes they are simply forgotten as the story moves on. What does become obvious is Ouida's utter contempt for any woman--be she the Duke's wife wearing his heirloom jewels or his discarded mistress perishing in rags in the gutter--who has sold her body for anything short of a willingness to be utterly dominated by a superior being.

Ouida was a professed and sometimes vocal anti-feminist. She opposed suffrage. In marriage, she said, "the influence of the woman is constantly injurious and belittling to the intelligence of the man."²⁶ But, as the

²⁴The first was "Dashwood's Drag; or the Derby and What Came of It," Bentley's Miscellany, 45 (1859), 335 ff.

²⁵Vincent E. H. Murray, "Ouida's Novels," Contemporary Review, 22 (1873), 932-33.

²⁶"Ouida," Times, 27 Jan. 1908, p. 7.

last remark partly reveals, what it came down to was that she found most of the women she knew narrow and empty-minded, and preferred the company of men. In the Langham Hotel days of the mid-sixties she luxuriated in all-male dinner parties (the explorer Richard Burton, the Times military correspondent, sporting-life novelists, an assortment of Majors and Colonels and Guardsmen) with her mother as the only other woman present in order to ensure respectability. After the meal she would bring out the cigars and invite her guests to talk as if she were not there.²⁷

A taste for Ouida was a taste for the scandalous (though Mudie's did not reject any of her books); her works were thought to be "unhealthy."²⁸ Towards the end of the sixties she abandoned the pseudo-realistic stories of contemporary time and the English aristocracy for a mode which allowed her to confront sexual issues more directly because of the distance provided by a more patent unreality. The settings became Continental, the time indeterminate, the characters lost their surnames and were often known by a nickname or an appellative (i.e., The Other). In this murky world it became clear that what Ouida disliked about women was the characteristics they took on from their role in society, and that despite her apparent approval of the self-gratifying sensuality of young aristocrats, she viewed sexuality itself as an animal trait.

In Ouida's typical novel of the seventies²⁹ the hero is a demi-god

²⁷ Tinsley, I, 85, and Stirling, p. 2.

²⁸ Murray castigates the novels chiefly on moral grounds. "Ella," in "Ouida," Victoria Magazine, 28 (1877), 368-72, is concerned about the author's anti-Christian tendencies. "Ouida's Novels," Westminster Review, 49 (1876) 360-86, admires the "freedom from prejudice, social or religious" but finds the novelist artistically awkward. A poll of the readers of the American Literary News in 1882 named Ouida and Zola at the top of a list of "authors having the worst influence"; see Frank L. Mott, A History of American Magazines (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), II, 252.

²⁹ Tricotrin (3 vols. 1869) is actually the first of the series. Incidentally--but probably not coincidentally--Ouida herself abandoned

of aristocratic blood, democratic sentiments and high aesthetic accomplishments, who has voluntarily renounced his station for a roving Bohemian life among "the poeple" (who, however, universally recognize and defer to his superiority). The villainess is a social woman who has sold herself (legally or illegally) for status, wealth, or luxury. And the heroine is a bastard, waif, foundling, or embarrassing encumbrance to a married woman of the world; she has been raised in isolation by an elderly peasant and is simple, natural, unconventional, and therefore good.

The quality defined as love is the mystic ability of the soul to worship something finer than itself. Social woman is too tainted by selfishness ever to love. A man can never find something superior to himself in a mere woman and therefore his love can only be satisfied by attachment to a heroic ideal or a high art or an abstraction like "the people." But the simple natural women can sometimes be satisfied by love because men are, for them, suitable divinities.

Within this framework sex may or may not happen; a woman can sometimes sell her body without involving her soul. But since the ability to love in this mystic, self-forgetful fashion is the noblest of human characteristics, the thesis that only women were capable of human love quickly led Ouida into paradoxical situations.

In Folle-Farine (3 vols. 1871) the waif discovers the artist, Arslàn, dying of hunger and steals food to save him. The scene has overtones of birth-imagery and of references to Eve; Folle-Farine gives life to the man but knows instinctively that she must conceal her role because men are ashamed to be indebted to women. And, indeed, when she sells

England for Italy in 1871. It was also at this time that she first made women friends, among them a titled Englishwoman who was paying the husband from whom she was separated £1500 a year for the right of keeping her two daughters with her; see Stirling, pp. 87-88.

some gypsy spangles which had been her father's in order to buy him colors with which to paint he is angry and humiliated; "'It is for the man'" he says, "'to give to the woman.'" (Bk. 5, Ch. 3)

The scene is magnified at the end of the book. Folle-Farine sells her body to a lascivious prince to give Arslàn not only life but also immortality--he is dying of starvation and his landlord is going to burn all his masterpieces for fuel if the rent is not paid. The tempter, Prince Sartorian, reeks suspiciously of brimstone:

"You would die for that man's single sake,--so you say; and yet it is not him whom you love. It is yourself. If this passion of yours were great and pure, as you say, would you pause? Could you ask yourself twice if what you think your shame would not grow noble and pure beyond all honour, being embraced for his sake? . . . to save him by sacrifice that he shall never acknowledge; to reach a heroism which he shall ever regard as a cowardice; to live and see him pass you by in cold contempt, while in your heart you shut your secret, and know that you have given him his soul's desire."
(Bk. 6, Ch.8)

She yields. "It seemed to her . . . that for a thing so worthless and loveless and despised as she to suffer deadliest shame to save a life so great as his was, after all, a fate more noble than she could have hoped."
(Bk. 6, Ch. 8) Is this merely a conventional illustration of feminine self-sacrifice? By escalating the stakes--by requiring us to see that woman's degradation is responsible for the man's immortality; by allowing Folle-Farine to act with full knowledge while Arslàn accepts, without examining, that which woman gives him--Ouida manages to imply the exact opposite of what she overtly says.

In Ariadne (3 vols. 1877) the orphan girl is herself an artist, and after becoming the mistress of the poet she loves her talent turns to greatness: "What is it that Love does to a woman?--without it she only sleeps; with it, alone, she lives." (II, 232) She calmly accepts the blame when the lover, Hilarion, eventually leaves her; "'He was weary of

me. It was my fault: not his.'" (III, 98) It is no longer certain, however, whether it is man's actual superiority or his inferior human sensitivity which prevents him from loving a woman. Ouida had, from the beginning of this series of novels, a distinct tendency towards a masochistic explanation of the greatest devotion. "'I never loved her; no!'" explains Hilarion, "'One must be hurt to love; she never hurt me.'" (III, 138)

Ariadn , who has been hurt, gains thereby

a great tenderness, which had been lacking before; suffering and love had brought to her that sympathy which before had been wanting. She had been pure and truthful, and never unkind; but she had been hard as the marble on which she wrought. Now no kind of pain was alien to her; the woe of others was sacred to her . . .
(III, 106)

The quality of her art grows along with her capacity for human sympathy; her eternal masterpiece is a statue of Hilarion looking sadly at a dead bird which he has crushed. Despite her physical sin her purity is immutable. In the words of Hilarion:

"I may have ruined her as you and the world call ruin; but, as I live, I swear I left her soul unsullied. Coarse words would have cancered one's tongue, spoken to her! . . . I forsook her, you would say. Because of that; can you not understand? She was a constant shame to me!"

(III, 129)

Thus is the double standard of Ouida's earlier works resolved. Men, says Hilarion, "'are happiest with light and venal women because we are not ashamed to be with them the mere beasts that nature made us.'" (III, 137) For a woman the question is resolved on the grounds of individual integrity; she is chaste so long as she has given herself, but polluted if she has been bought.

At the end of the seventies Ouida left her never-never land of the fantasy novels (though retaining most of its characters) and wrote the most shocking book of all--Moths (3 vols. 1880)--in which a woman left

her husband, allowed him to divorce her, and lived happily ever after with the man she loved.³⁰

Because Moths was a novel with a purpose,³¹ and the first in England to show a divorced woman utterly happy, the circumstances against the marriage are weighted hopelessly from the start. Vere Herbert accepts the profligate Russian Prince Zouroff (another man whose shoes hardly even pretend to conceal his cloven hooves) only because she believes that otherwise he will publicly expose the dishonor of her socialite mother Lady Dolly. Marriage to such a man--and especially its physical side--is disgusting to Vere from the start: "the rapacity of an ignoble passion let loose and called 'marriage' tore down all her childish ignorance and threw it to the winds, destroyed her self-respect and laughed at her, trampled on all her modest shame, and ridiculed her innocence." (II, 6) Despite Zouroff's constant affairs, his public appearances in her presence with mistresses on his arm, and finally his physical brutality, she does not think of taking action:

She was still of the old fashion, and a faithless wife was to her a wanton. Marriage might be loveless, and joyless, and soulless, and outrage all that it brought; but its bond had been taken, and its obligations accepted; no sin of others could set her free.
(II, 186)

Ultimately, after nearly two volumes of persecution, her faithfulness begins to appear silly; they are, in effect, separated--she living on one of his estates in Poland doing good to the peasants while he amuses himself

³⁰ Moths was the most popular of Ouida's books; see Bigland, Ouida, p. 152. It was also one of the novels read and referred to by the independent women of the next two decades; see Cruse, pp. 350-51.

³¹ The idea for the plot, according to Stirling, p. 133, originated in Ouida's disgust at the society that flocked around the singer Mario and his mistress in their own house but refused to invite the woman to visit in return.

in Paris--and he writes that he will not oppose her if she sues for divorce. But her resolve holds until she learns that Zouroff has shot the singer Corrèze, whom she has loved (or rather, perhaps, worshipped) since girlhood, in a duel which arose when Zouroff publicly and mendaciously blackened her honor and Corrèze defended it. At that point she draws off her wedding ring and stamps it underfoot, flies alone (driving a sleigh unaided from Russian Poland to Paris in midwinter) to nurse Corrèze, and allows Zouroff to divorce her.

The extent to which the circumstances are weighted is, to a modern reader, ridiculous--though, in fact, the novel is not really bad reading: Ouida's acid-pen descriptions of high society are often amusing, where the pseudo-simple mysticism of most of her seventies novels is simply tedious. Vere endures, and endures, and endures, and, as one of the other characters says to her, "'The wrong has been done to you. You have done none.'" (III, 50) Ultimately the sacrifice must stop:

There is a time in all patience when it becomes weakness; a time in all endurance when it becomes cowardice; then with great natures patience breaks and becomes force, endurance rises, and charges into action.

(III, 375-76)

There are two significant differences between this novel and its predecessors. First, there is no child to consider; Vere's babies all died soon after birth. She separates from her husband in her own right, not simply in her capacity as a mother with a higher duty to her child.

And secondly, she dissolves her marriage because she loves another. Separation, on a Polish estate, with a chapel to attend and peasants to do good for would, for most of the woman problem novelists, have provided a satisfactory self-fulfillment. Vere breaks free of her marriage because--however tormented and provoked she has been, and though Corrèze has constantly been presented as St. Raphael while the Prince is unmistakably the

prince of darkness--she loves another man. And with him, in the seclusion of an Alpine valley, she prospers.

Ouida's novels are simply the most extreme expression of a tendency shared by most of the novels we have been examining: the divorce of sex from love. Virtually every unchaste heroine who is a heroine is essentially pure. She has either been victimized by society or has sacrificed herself deliberately to a man because of a noble feminine desire to save him from debauchery and ruin. With the one exception of Wilkie Collins' Anne Silvester none has been carried away by the strength of her own passion nor by ignorance of the end to which unprotected involvement with a man may lead her. And even in Collins' book, though Anne's physical attraction to the handsome athlete is presented as natural, the subsidiary theme is an attack on physicality and athleticism as brutish and degrading; Collins' apparent sympathy, then, serves further to divide real love from physical attraction.

Furthermore, with the exception of Trollope's Vicar of Bullhampton, the novels of the eighteen-seventies which introduce the unchaste woman are essentially love stories. The focus of the interest is the relationship of one woman to one man rather than an examination of woman's place in a wider society. It is not, of course, necessary to write about sex to write great novels. But the two factors in combination--the restriction of woman's interest and ambition to the single matter of her relationship with a husband or lover, and the avoidance of mentioning that physical or even maternal desires had anything to do with woman's approach to such a relationship--led to an extreme limitation of scope which, in part, accounts for the triviality of most of these novels.

Yet the world of most middle-class novel readers was similarly limited. To consider that falling in love and the management of love affairs contained

an element of choice rather than one of star-crossed inevitability or economic and social determinism was, in a small way, a recognition of female individuality. A Temple Bar reviewer remarked of the novels of another popular female author of the period:

Miss Broughton's typical heroine is of a sort neither common nor uncommon, but, we suspect, growing more common every day . . . It is an age of women's rights and the emancipation of a sex supposed to have been long-enthralled; and freedom in one direction, entailing freedom in another, is pretty certain to encourage it most of all in the direction of love and sentiment. If women are to do pretty much as men do, it follows that they are to do pretty much what they please, instead of, as heretofore, doing pretty much what other people please. . . . In a word, they will take their hearts and lives into their own hands, instead of leaving them, in their maidenly years, as a precious deposit in the hands of their parents and guardians.³²

The process of individualization, in the seventies, was extremely tentative. Popular novelists believed, as did the Temple Bar critic, that women were primarily interested in love and sentiment; they rewarded woman's independence only to the degree in which it helped to bring about a happier matrimonial relationship. The socialization of all women into a single stereotyped role of femininity was harmful, in the eyes of these novelists, primarily because it interfered with the ability of a man to love a particular individual.

The Queen magazine in 1873 observed that there was very little "friendship existing between men and women; underneath the conventional surface of politeness is a deep undercurrent of enmity."³³ The morality of the romantic novel hardens the line between the sexes. It gives woman responsibility for her own happiness, while at the same time defining happiness as a loving marriage. And more importantly, it confirms the

³²"The Novels of Miss Broughton," Temple Bar, 41 (1874), 205.

³³Quoted in Cunningham, p. 208.

assumption underlying the double standard. Women must be responsible for preserving the moral code because men want chiefly to use them. So long as woman can be fulfilled only by making accomodation with a beast who wants her but does not see her, her position is trying indeed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NEW HEROINE: PENNY WEEKLY MAGAZINES OF THE 1870'S

By the 1870's the penny weekly family magazine had become both more and less of a mass literature, depending on the sense in which the term is used. No single magazine had a circulation as large as that of the London Journal in the middle fifties, nor did they, all together, reach so great a proportion of the now vastly expanded literate public.¹ The upwardly mobile engineers and merchants' clerks and junior civil servants who had placed matrimonial notices in the London Journal in the fifties had been largely replaced by soldiers, seamen, and widowers in search of a mature woman trained in domestic service to "accept the position of wife and mother now vacant"² in their homes. The Family Herald continued to advise that a man should not think of marrying on less than £150 a year³ but the Family Herald was nevertheless the favorite reading of the women of Flora Thompson's Lark Rise, who raised their children on a farm

¹According to the Registrar General's figures, 67.3% of adult males and 51.1% of adult females were literate in 1841. By 1871 the figures had risen to 80.0% for males and 73.2% for females; see Altick, The English Common Reader, p. 171. Even more striking is the increase in literacy at the lowest level: of those sentenced to prison in the years 1836-45, over 90% were illiterate. In 1870 only 33.8% of convicted criminals could not read; see Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 130.

²LJ, 50 (1 Sept. 1869), 144.

³FH, 31 (3 May 1873), p. 12. The figure was widely accepted as the minimum which would provide a standard of white-collar respectability. The Union Bank threatened to fire any clerk who married before his annual salary reached £150, on the grounds that attempting to maintain a family on a lesser sum would provide too great a temptation to dishonesty; see LJ, 53 (25 Mar. 1873), 181.

laborer's standard wage of ten shillings a week.⁴

Many among the old family magazine audience must now have been reading the shilling monthly magazines and the paper-covered novels of the Railway Library and the various cheap reprint series. The serious and ambitious among the artisan class were the chief patrons of the public libraries beginning to be established in large midland cities. For the newly literate who were barely literate there were half-penny magazines such as John Dicks' Every Week (first published in 1869) which printed short stories and short jokes in short sentences. But the real competition for a mass audience came from the penny newspaper, made possible by the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855. Though the daily paper was not common in poorer homes until the end of the century, the News of the World, the Weekly Times, Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper, and Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper provided for the working man's Sunday, which was the day on which he had time to read.⁵

The penny weekly magazines still called themselves family magazines, but they had become women's magazines. The London Journal began in 1868 to give away a monthly "Ladies supplement" which contained engravings of dress and descriptions of current fashions or, sometimes, a complete folded paper pattern. There was a hand-colored fashion plate bimonthly for a penny extra. Instead of one serial at a time, as in the forties and fifties, there were now installments of four, chiefly romantic, at least half of them written by women. The Family Herald began to make use of the novelette, a single story tailored in length to occupy the whole of the

⁴Flora Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 59, 94, and passim.

⁵John Harrison, "Cheap Literature Past and Present," Companion to the British Almanack (1873), p. 68.

sixteen-page format. In the early seventies the novelettes were given away with the Christmas number and with a special "Seaside Number" in the summertime; by 1877 they were published as supplemental numbers, for an additional penny, on the first and third Monday of every month.

As the character of the readership altered the penny magazines became more mass-produced, more superficial, and less related to the actual lives of their readers. The space devoted to serious and educational matter shrank to make space for the fiction. Instead of articles on working conditions and public health there are paragraphs on "Life's Boons" or "Character and Reputation." The London Journal's fashion plate is emblematic of the second-hand commercialism. The editor remarked that "though we may describe rich and expensive toilettes worn by distinguished ladies, it will be easily understood that the same taste may be evinced in make and in combination of colour with cheap and plain materials"⁶ but he did not hire someone who could actually provide directions for achieving fashionable dress at low cost; he simply reproduced an engraving intended for a different clientele.

The commercial slickness is most striking in the important new competitor, Bow Bells (1862-97). Its regular back-page feature was a piece of sheet music--sometimes a song for family singing, but equally often an etude or a simplified theme from a Beethoven sonata. There was an illustrated series of fashionable out-of-door pastimes for ladies: archery, rowing, skating, lawn tennis. And there was an extensive section of fashion notes, needlework designs, crochet patterns, illustrations of hair-styles, and cutting diagrams for the latest modes. Bow Bells probably was bought by the young, modern, urban-suburban, white-collar, piano-in-

⁶LJ, 47 (1 May 1868), 10.

the-parlor readers whom the contents seem to imagine.⁷ But Bow Bells was also read in Lark Rise, and the correspondents in a typical half-year include a servant wanting to know what wages she may claim when her employer's household has been broken up by death, a man asking if the tools of his trade may be distrained for rent, a mother inquiring about the terms of an apprenticeship for her son, and several would-be telegraph messengers and steamship stewards. An aspiring naval cadet is told that he would have to pass a severe examination and that "from the style of your letter we can see that you would have no chance of getting successfully through such an ordeal."⁸

One aspect of the mass-produced slickness was a lack of real contact with the readers. Much of the "correspondence" in Bow Bells is made up of items from almanacs and household receipt books addressed to look like the response to a question. Hopeful amateurs are regularly warned not to send stories: "We have no openings for contributors." (The London Journal and the Family Herald at least offered to look at manuscripts, though they would not guarantee the return of those which were not publishable.) The cost of paper and the price of printing continued to fall; the penny magazines had more money available to pay authors. Bow Bells in 1871 had works by W. H. Ainsworth, Edmund Yates, G. A. Sala, Mrs. Crowe, Tom Hood, and Bracebridge Hemyng. But professionals of that calibre did not take the work seriously. Mary Braddon wrote to Bulwer-Lytton that she did "an immense deal of work which nobody ever hears of" for penny journals: "It is the most piratical stuff and would make your hair stand on end

⁷In the middle seventies there was a monthly supplement of fashion plates, piano music, patterns, and needlework booklets which was offered at ninepence, a higher price than the firmly middle-class Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine or The Queen.

⁸Bow Bells, 14 (24 May 1871), p. 419.

if you were to see it."⁹ George Sala explained that he had been able to manage a long holiday at Monte Carlo because John Dicks, publisher of Bow Bells, had a villa not far away. "Mr. Dicks' appetite for novelettes was insatiable; and whenever I wanted cash I had only to scribble for a few hours; take the copy over to Mentone; and receive from the hands of my friendly publisher a crisp ten-pound note and two louis and a half in gold."¹⁰

Bow Bells sometimes had a one-page advertising supplement: patent medicine, hair renewers, the Excelsior Family Sewing Machine, Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup which, at three halfpence a bottle, produced in infants a "natural quiet sleep." But there is an important distinction between these magazines and the middle-class women's magazines of the following decade (the Ladies Pictorial, begun in 1880, was the first of the breed) which were wholly commercial in the sense that the advertising revenue paid the publishing costs and even the food and fashion pages were largely devoted to puffery.¹¹ The penny weekly magazines carried very little advertising (perhaps in itself a tacit admission that their readers were not major consumers); the expenses and the profit came from the pennies that women paid for a product they wanted to buy. And the staple which attracted the audience--even in the case of Bow Bells--was fiction.

The fiction that was written by bourgeois professionals because servants, shop-girls, seamstresses, and working-men's wives wanted to read it was primarily the aristocratic romance, which directly transported the

⁹Quoted in Sadleir, Things Past, p. 77.

¹⁰George A. Sala, The Life and Adventures of George Augustus Sala (London, 1895), II, 367.

¹¹See Evelyn March-Phillips, "Women's Newspapers," Fortnightly Review, NS 56 (1894), 661-70.

reader, through the medium of a pure, virtuous heroine with whom she could identify, into a world of luxurious furnishings, fancy balls, and elaborate toilettes. The means of transportation was either a love match between a poor girl and a titled man or, as in the Sensation novels of the sixties, the revelation that the true heiress had been mislaid in the lower classes through vice, villainy, or accident. But where the Sensation novel had tended to use the device at least in part as a reward for hard work, the romances of the penny magazines emphasized the pure magic of the translation.

Literary critics have had little to say about the aristocratic romance. When it is mentioned in a broad survey of popular culture it is seen, at very best, as a silly waste of time. The tone can be far more ominous:

It is hardly surprising that there should exist in the impressionable minds of the masses an aversion more or less deep to the upper classes. If one of their own order, man or woman, appears in the pages of these unwholesome prints, it is only as a paragon of virtue, who is probably ruined, or at any rate wronged, by that incarnation of evil, the sensuous aristocrat, standing six feet, with his dark eyes, heavy moustache, pearl-like teeth, and black hair. Throughout the story the keynote struck is highborn scoundrelism. . . . the influence exercised over the feminine reader, often unenlightened by any close contact with the classes whom the novelist pretends to portray, crystallizes into an irremovable dislike of the upper strata of society.¹²

The middle-class professionals who churned out these tales no doubt felt that they tapped an easy source of emotional identification by using the old conventions of the broadsheet and the penny serial. The journalist hero of Bracebridge Hemyng's railway novel The Man of the Period [1872] describes his pot-boiling excursion into penny magazine fiction as a tale in which he will "show up a bloated and tyrannical aristocracy, and elevate

¹²Edward G. Salmon, "What the Working Classes Read," Nineteenth Century, 20 (1886), 112-13. Among the advertisers in this number of Nineteenth Century is a firm supplying "preserved provisions for yachts."

the character of the poor but honest artisan and the hard-working but virtuous seamstress, though sorely tempted by the seductive wiles of the wicked Earl." (p. 108) Hemyng was himself also a writer for the penny press, and may well have been cynically describing his own productions.

But the socially divisive content of the tales is superficial. The aristocratic romance was a purely conventional form, generally contemporary in setting but wholly removed from actual social conditions in England. Many of them, indeed, were written by American women who had, like Louisa May Alcott, started spinning out romances about Ethylwina and the Duke of Dunsmere while still in their middle teens.¹³ The aristocratic romance takes place in a private world where persecution, villainy, oppression and revenge are indulged on a personal basis, rather than in a class world. There are no wicked industrialists; there are a fair number of self-made men who are benevolent employers. The sins of the aristocrats are the same sins attributed to them in bourgeois novels: idleness, luxury, gambling, pleasure-seeking--wasting time and money. They are personal faults which can be corrected without touching the system.

With the combination of these two qualities--a fantasy fiction unrelated to real life, and a patronizing fiction written by professionals with their own ideas about what was suitable for servant-girls to read--it is not surprising that there are no stories which deal directly with the unchaste woman as a social issue and few that show vice as even momentarily attractive. The rare stories that do present unhallowed sex are generally masked by great distance; lust and brutality may possibly rear their ugly heads in ancient Rome or a Turkish harem. At that remove

¹³ Most or all of the London Journal serials by May Agnes Fleming and Harriet Lewis were reprinted from the New York Weekly. Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth was popular enough in England that the London Journal paid her for advance sheets; see Helen Waite Papashvily, All the Happy Endings (New York, 1956), p. 130.

sin need not negate virtue; in "The Fallen Vestal"¹⁴ the priestess who has been deluded by a soldier's claim that he was a god heroically returns to be put to death and thus save Rome from defeat by the Carthaginians.

For the most part, however, the fiction of the penny magazines is quite thoroughly sanitized. Moralists feared that the purity itself was a greater danger than a more realistic treatment of the same material; that the predominant fiction of the shop girl marrying a baronet in disguise rendered the readers easy prey to "any 'fashionably attired' scamp" who came their way.¹⁵ Ernest Brent dealt with the charge in a serial in the London Journal,¹⁶ through the character of an attractive nursemaid:

Her hope of one day marrying a gentleman was not entirely the result of reading or vanity. She had been reared in a poor neighbourhood, her friends the daughters of poor women, her examples the wives of poor men. She knew to its bitterest extremity what poverty meant, the workhouse roof, the parish doctor, bread when bought or when begged meted out with a sparing hand, that fought with a full heart, while the wistful eye looked round in vain for the one face less hungry than the rest. To be a poor man's wife as she had seen it in Lock's-fields was to have a husband whose work was never certain, and who was sometimes drunk and brutal. It meant a troop of ill-fed children, a scraping up of cinders, an eking out of pitiful shillings, and a constant dread of the broker's man.

"And would not anything," she had often said to herself, "be better than such a life as that?"¹⁷

Brent's story is unique for its direct approach. Emma's motives are understandable, if not laudable; her sufferings as a gentleman's discarded mistress are not extreme; and she ultimately marries an industrious

¹⁴Bow Bells, 28 (1878), 510-11. The month and day of issue are omitted from numbers of Bow Bells in some years.

¹⁵Thomas Wright, Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes (London, 1867), p. 192.

¹⁶"The World's Wayside," LJ, 57 (22 Mar. 1873), 177 - 58 (9 Aug. 1873), 84.

¹⁷LJ, 57 (10 May 1873), 289.

artisan-engineer who had loved her^{all} along. A number of short stories-- which are, as in the earlier period, often more nearly "realistic" and more directly moral--make the point at one remove: the poor girl is flirting with a gentleman but realizes his lack of true worth soon enough to free herself. The story is most amusing when it is physical cowardice that reveals the duplicity of the aristocrat; when he leaves her stranded on a rock because he can swim only well enough to save himself, or seizes the one available rope to escape alone from a burning building, so that the fisherman or blacksmith who has been wooing her unrequited can dash to rescue and receive the reward.

The other remarkable thing about Ernest Brent's treatment of Emma (who is, it must be noted, a minor character in the serial) is the lack of emotionalism surrounding her fall and its consequences and the matter-of-fact resolution of her story in marriage. "'We cannot talk to each other as if those five years had never been,'" says her husband-to-be, "'but we can forget them and begin again. . . . When you are my wife you are my wife, and there's an end of everything else.'" ¹⁸ The talk of purity and irrevocable loss are notably absent.

As middle-class rescue workers came to know the people among whom they worked better during the seventies, they discovered that the daughters of even the respectable poor were generally

warned not to get into trouble and advised to be steady, not because to fall is wrong, and a sin against herself and society, but because there are practical inconveniences which may follow such an act . . . It is not often possible to appeal to the knowledge of the sorrow it has caused their parents . . . To tell them that they have lost what ought to be to a woman her most precious possession is to appeal to instincts unknown to them. ¹⁹

¹⁸ LJ, 57 (28 June 1873), 411.

¹⁹ Mary Jeune, "Helping the Fallen," Fortnightly Review, 44 (1885), 673.

The advice columns of the penny magazines, though they made a gesture towards the ideal and sentimental considerations, also emphasized the practical:

Women forfeit so much and gain so little by the loss of purity, that we almost take the part of women generally, who, much more than men, blame those of their sex who fall. Perfect purity is the one virtue in woman, like courage in man, without which she might as well cease to exist; yet we find she-fools ready to throw themselves away on any libidinous rascal who asks them. And then come the consequences. In this case we have twelve years' secrecy, fear, want of peace, soiled reputation, trouble, and anguish; and now the truth must come out. EDITH must confess either before or after marriage. The first will be the better, even though it risks the loss of the bridegroom.²⁰ He may not be desirous of so advanced and lively a step-daughter.

There is a hard-headed realism in this answer, compared to a reply in the same magazine twenty years earlier in which a woman who had admitted to one false step--which had neither compromised her reputation nor left her with child--was told to give up any thought of matrimony and seek comfort in "sacred, moral, and benevolent duties."²¹

For a working girl to go safely about her business on city streets or into service in a gentleman's house, she had, necessarily, to be aware of the physical facts of life:

. . . we have no right to blame her, if chaste personally, because she is not pure-minded; pure-minded in the sense in which the term is ordinarily used she cannot be. But as all the relationships of life to her are an open book, she is not influenced by the sense of mystery, and the feeling of curiosity which exists in the minds of many innocent, well brought-up women. Thus, while she may be deprived of the freshness and delicacy of an ignorant woman, she does not run the same danger of falling.²²

In the romance, by definition, the ultimate focus of interest is sexual: the relationship between one man and one woman. Because these

²⁰FH, 39 (28 Aug. 1877), 268.

²¹FH, 13 (19 May 1855), 44.

²²Jeune, "Helping the Fallen," pp. 672-73.

stories rest on a substratum of assumed knowledge, the inference that a man's overtures to a woman are physically sexual takes on the character of an unstated assumption rather than that of a subject to be avoided. A respectable moral standard, in which the heroine will remain pure because of internalized restraints, is granted, but the physical threat is present.

The chief difference between this fiction and the reading of the middle class--even including the Sensation novel--is the overwhelmingly physical nature of the action. A direct physical conflict between two individuals is more immediate, more exciting, easier to invent and easier to comprehend than a conflict conducted on a social or intellectual plane. And the most striking difference between the penny magazine fiction of the 1870's and the stories in the same journals thirty years previously is the extent to which the heroines take part in the physical adventures. Heroines are seen going down over cliffs on ropes to rescue the victims of shipwreck, lurking in the woods in boys' clothes with a pistol handy to save the Earl from an attack from a poacher, working as agent for a private detective, leading a double life as a Duke's daughter and the wife of an Italian patriot. They seldom faint except from serious loss of blood. And they are subject, in story after story, to chase, imprisonment, and physical attempts on their virtue.

They fight, however, and more importantly, they succeed. The heroine of Pierce Egan's "Ever My Queen"²³ is imprisoned "as securely as if

²³LJ, 57 (15 Feb. 1873), 97 - 58 (5 July 1873), 4. Pierce Egan (1814-80), son of the sporting journalist of the same name, is one of the few writers of cheap fiction represented in DNB and known to have earned a steady respectable income for the whole of his working life. He wrote penny-weekly novels, did both stories and graphics for the Illustrated London News, contributed to Reynolds' Miscellany, and had a serial running in the London Journal, except for brief intervals, between 1857 and the year of his death. There are appreciative mentions

incarcerated in a dungeon hewn out of the solid rock a hundred feet down in the bosom of a lake" but she remains resolute:

"My life, at least, I have more power over than he," she muttered, between her set teeth, "and I will trust it to the mercy of heaven a thousand times sooner than he shall control it to my shame and my misery."²⁴

It is interesting that the word used is "control." Perhaps it was simply a part of the euphemism. Yet the direct physical confrontation is easily seen as struggle for control, and the woman's physical yielding an act of surrender. In the course of the battle, heroines discovered that men were not, after all, superior beings. When a man in one Family Herald story²⁵ asks the poor girl who has always loved him if she will elope now that he has grown rich by marrying someone else, she "awoke to her position, and realized to its fullest extent the disgrace which he wished to bring upon her; and in the awakening the ideal she had worshipped fell from its pedestal. . . . she saw the man, not as she had imagined him, but as he was, selfish, calculating, mercenary, untrue--not only to her but to his wife."²⁶

The aristocratic romance operates from the same emotional ground as the middle-class women's novels of the sixties: the heroine is threatened, persecuted, and ultimately vindicated. The difference is that in the penny magazines both the threat and the resolution are primarily physical. One girl meets her partner in flirtation at cliff-side and hears his confession that he is married. When he follows with a proposition that

of Egan in Robert Louis Stevenson's "Popular Authors" and in "Penny Novels," Macmillan's Magazine, 14 (1866), 96-105.

²⁴LJ, 57 (3 May 1873), 283.

²⁵Percy Lockhart, "Sibyl," FH, 35 (19 June - 17 July 1875), 113-85.

²⁶FH, 35 (3 July 1875), 155.

she elope, she embraces him--and takes him with her over the edge:

The sea washed up its victims, their hair spangled with the glittering ocean sand, and twined with clinging seaweed, her arms still clasping his neck as when they had fallen from the cliff.

And her face was ineffably calm; but his was stamped with the horror and dread of an unsought death.²⁷

That particular story may possibly be intended as a warning against casual boarding-house flirtations, yet the final impression is certainly one of female triumph. The overt moral, in this fiction, is often at odds with the emotional effect. The adumbrated version of the East Lynne plot, with a happy ending brought about by the woman's strength, was as popular in the penny magazines as in the library novels of the seventies. In "Could He Forgive?"²⁸ for example, a young bride is romantically tempted away from her middle-aged husband:

A cry for help seemed perpetually on her lips--help against the man by her side; but it was ever silenced by the small inner voice whispering, "Too late, too late! The step forward is inevitable; the step back impossible. You cannot meet your injured husband now!"

Yet once free, her resolve was firm. This man, who by crafty means had led her into this, should never be aught to her.

A broken axle-tree and a crowded inn preserve her virtue long enough so that she can prove her love and save her husband's life by flinging herself on the tempter's duelling pistol. The difference, once more, between this story and, say, Lilian's Penance,²⁹ is that "Could He Forgive?" emphasizes the physical confrontation following the elopement rather than the social and psychological tensions which lead up to it.

The dramatic climax in which a woman uses her body to protect her

²⁷"Zoe's Flirtation," Bow Bells, 18 (1873), 42-43.

²⁸Bow Bells, 29 (1879), 41-43.

²⁹by Mrs. Houstoun (3 vols. 1873); see p. 214 above.

husband's crops up in a number of stories.³⁰ It serves the moral purpose of punishing the wife through physical suffering for her indulgence in flirtation or her refusal to obey her husband's orders. Emotionally, however, it reveals the woman as savior of her husband's life through physical strength and courage, and she generally survives to collect his debt of gratitude.

The identification of courage as a desirable female attribute is indicative of the movement towards a single standard for judging the qualities of both men and women. Less is made of the intellectual quality in these stories of physical action; even in the detective stories the solution is generally reached by accident rather than ratiocination. Still, it is frequently the heroine who falls through the rotted floorboard and finds the missing will, and she does at least have sense enough to realize its significance.

It is assumed that able-bodied women, even if genteel, will support themselves; "'No, no, Aunt Julia,'" one hears frequently, "'I am young and strong and of age, too . . . there is less discredit in earning one's livelihood than in living at the expense of others.'"³¹ Even more significant is the popularity of the actress as heroine; she has become as important as the governess as a surrogate for the reader, representing the working woman within the world of the rich and powerful. Realistically, of course, the actress is more likely to come from the reader's own class than the governess. The reader would also have a more direct appreciation of the glamour of the stage or music hall than of country-house life. But the two characters have a deeper significance in terms of woman's

³⁰ Charles Reade had used it in Griffith Gaunt (3 vols. 1866).

³¹ "Minna's Sacrifice," Bow Bells, 29 (1879), 222.

status. The governess is a dependent. The actress is an individual. She negates the traditional "womanly" qualities: she is assertive; she makes a display of herself; she is ambitious. She succeeds on her own talent--and if she succeeds, she can earn more money, through her own efforts, than in any other legal occupation open to women. Even the governess heroines are more likely to be daily governesses (who give lessons, take their wages, and go home to their own private lives) than the cloistered innocents of the earlier fiction.

Women take a more central role in achieving their desires. In the simplest formula love story, in which a boy and girl want to get married but there are obstacles in the way, the surmounting of the obstacles had been, in the tales of the 1840's, the man's role. In the 1870's it is sometimes the woman who finds the clues to clear her lover from a false embezzlement charge or paints a picture that sells for enough to pay off his father's debts.

It is assumed without discussion that women have an equal right to fall in love. There is little criticism of the poor girl who wastes away from unrequited affection; the onus is on the man: "He had been laughed at by his gay comrades for returning to a humble cottage girl, and he had listened to them. In fact, he had not loved as she had done . . . but when he saw her stretched on the bed of death his heart smote him."³² Particularly in the Family Herald there are a great number of stories in which girls nearly ruin their lives by not letting a man know how they feel about him. Sometimes the authors are criticizing coyness or false modesty, but often it seems that men are so shy and incompetent in emotional matters that women have to take the initiative.

³²"Too Late," Bow Bells, 14 (1 Mar. 1871), 136.

There is, however, a faintly hypocritical distinction between what a woman can do and what she can be seen to do or known to have done. The girl who paints the picture to pay off the debts does it secretly; the man does not know about it until she puts the money in his hands and nobody else ever learns who did that painting that was the hit of the exhibition. A woman who inherits a fortune continues teaching while she arranges for her executors to offer the living attached to her property to the poor curate whom she loves, so that he will be in a position to propose without knowing that she is rich.³³ Superficially, the situation is pleasantly romantic; emotionally, it is subversive. Paying lip service and only lip service to the fiction of male superiority reveals that it is a fiction. Women do things secretly which men can later be privately grateful for. In "The Colonel's Second Wife"³⁴ one is meant to believe that the Colonel's second wife is carrying on an affair. In reality she is helping her step-daughter to accomplish a runaway marriage. The Colonel, who had regretted but felt bound by his promise to give his daughter's hand to a man subsequently revealed to be a roué and a fortune-hunter, realizes but cannot publicly recognize how fortunate he is to have a clever and subtle wife.

The expressed editorial position of all three magazines on the position of women and the role of the family was conservative, traditional, and patriarchal. The London Journal series on "Whom to Marry, When to Marry and How to be Married"³⁵ advised that a man should never marry a woman of higher social position because he "must always feel the inferiority

³³Markham Howard, "Whereunto Is Money Good?" FH, 31 (3 May 1873), 8-11.

³⁴by "E. W. P.," Bow Bells, 22 (10 Mar. 1875), 221.

³⁵LJ, 53 (4 Feb. - 6 May 1871), 69-285.

and eat the bitter 'bread of dependence';³⁶ the husband should ideally be eight to ten years older so that the wife would lean on his maturity.³⁷

Bow Bells favored a less frivolous education for girls on the grounds that men could not reach their full potential if women were not able to appreciate and admire their achievements.³⁸ One correspondent to the Family Herald wrote that his Calvinist wife refused to go to other church services with him. The editor responded: "A disobedient wife . . . cannot be a true Christian; it is a contradiction in terms."³⁹

The readers did not necessarily agree; the correspondence page of the Family Herald throughout the decade echoes with the controversy--a one-sided controversy, since the readers' letters are not printed: the arguments on the other side must be inferred from the editor's refutations.

The person who says that woman excels man simply tells what one must call--there is no other name for it--a lie, and a very patent lie. As we repeat for the tenth time, women, who are universally more educated than men, and more generally educated than men as cooks and musicians, always play a poor second or third fiddle as cook or musician. We need hardly say that when man enters into competition with woman as tailor or seamster he entirely beats her. No woman can make a riding-habit like a tailor. It is no fault of hers and no virtue in him. A horse of sixteen hands--with equal spirit--must beat the horse of twelve hands high, just as a sixty-inch bicycle, equally well ridden, must exceed in speed one of fifty inches diameter. You cannot argue against arithmetic or mathematics. One must not quarrel with demonstrable facts.⁴⁰

The Family Herald fought against each step by women into previously male occupations as destructive of femininity and dangerous to the concept of the family as the basic unit of society. Women clerks on railways, in

³⁶LJ, 53 (11 Feb. 1871), 85.

³⁷LJ, 53 (18 Mar. 1871), 165.

³⁸"The Education of Women," Bow Bells, 14 (24 May 1871), 419.

³⁹FH, 31 (6 Sept. 1873), 300.

⁴⁰"The Woman's War--the Case for Woman Stated," FH, 37 (16 Sept. 1876), 317.

telegraph offices, and in the Civil Service, said the Family Herald, become assertive and competitive; they can no longer claim "to be the porcelain clay of human nature, or indeed any finer or more delicate than man."⁴¹ The woman who "puddles and paddles in physic, trade, commerce, penny-a-lining" will, by her competition, cheapen man's work and take bread from the mouths of his wife and children.⁴²

Yet the stories, as we have seen, quite often showed women fully able to support themselves and making heroic use of their assertive qualities. The relationship of woman's sexual role to her economic role is apparent in the new handling of one of the classic situations of penny-magazine fiction: the woman with a child to support but no husband visible. The examples from the 1840's had invariably been, like The Vicar of Wakefield, pseudo-seduction stories, resolved by an explanation of the misleading appearances and a consequent reunion and establishment of a family. In the 1870's there are stories in all three magazines in which the secret ultimately revealed is that the woman has separated from a husband because he is vicious or drunken or dishonest, or in which the man who had deserted comes back after the heroine has struggled through to some means of supporting herself and the child and she tells him to go away again and take his pernicious influence with him. The author approves of the heroine's decision and often arranges for the husband to die fairly soon so that the woman will be legally free for a second marriage. In other words, these are masked divorce stories, rather than masked seduction stories.

The real divorce story is rare, and like the real seduction stories in the London Journal of the earlier period, criticizes society by making

⁴¹"The Courtesies of Life," FH, 39 (9 June 1877), 93.

⁴²"Correspondence," FH, 31 (3 May 1873), 12.

the woman an innocent victim whose tragic end is deplored. In "Juliana"⁴³ the heroine commits suicide because her true love's family refuses to accept her as a prospective wife, though the divorce was no fault of her own; her first husband was a count from an eastern European country with a law allowing him to "put her aside" without cause. The pseudo-divorce stories avoid the courts and arrange the issues so as to preserve the moral niceties but show the woman as victor.

These stories differ from the propaganda stories on the same subject written by Mrs. Craik, Mrs. Eiloart, and other middle-class novelists in the degree of successful independence shown by the heroine and in not verbalizing the issues. The issues, however, remain the same. The first is the maternal imperative: the good of the children is more important than the legal duty of cohabitation with a husband. In one Family Herald example a woman calling herself Mrs. Elton, who has a delicate son, is separated from a drunken forger who had married her for her money, and even after it is discovered that she is not a widow the good people among the gentry continue to visit her; that is, society is seen to approve of her action.⁴⁴ She plans to re-marry, having read of her husband's death in a newspaper. He reappears--he had staged a false death in order to avoid a felony charge--and volunteers to remain dead in exchange for half of her income. She must then struggle to preserve her integrity in the face of her love for the man to whom she is engaged. He argues that since her first husband is legally dead their marriage will be valid. She, very unwillingly, yields:

"remember for your life, that this is your doing, and that you

⁴³Bow Bells, 14 (1-22 Feb. 1871), 37-106.

⁴⁴"M. L. P.," "Fettered, Yet Free," FH, 40 (3 Nov. - 8 Dec 1877), 1-89.

forced me to agree to it. . . . Remember you left me only one course to pursue, and it is for your sake that I am going to take this step."⁴⁵

Her maternal role, however, gives her strength to reverse her decision; she is afraid that she and her son will not ultimately go to heaven together if she marries bigamously, and so hides where the lover cannot find her until it has been proved that her husband is dead after all; the blackmailer, whom she had seen only at night, was his brother.⁴⁶

In the penny magazines, however, the husband's desertion is more commonly at the root of the situation than is the wife's deliberate separation from him. When he drifts back it seems simply to be accepted as a matter of common sense that it is more reasonable to provide him with enough money to drink himself to death--so long as he lives somewhere else--than to put up with him. The legal power of the husband over the wife's income is not so much of an issue as in the middle-class propaganda novel. The Married Woman's Property Act was important to women whose income derived from property. A woman separated from her husband had, thanks to Caroline Norton, been in control of her own earnings since the Divorce Act of 1857. The clause most important to understanding the ease with which the women in these stories buy off their husbands is that which provided that a deserted wife could, at any time after her husband had absented himself, apply to a magistrate for an order to protect her earnings against the claims of her husband or his creditors, whether or not she went through the process of obtaining a separation order. Thus, for a

⁴⁵FH, 40 (24 Nov. 1877), 59.

⁴⁶In a very similar story, "Pomps and Vanities," Bow Bells, 22 (1875), 97-379, the heroine frightens the blackmailing twin away by pulling a pistol on him, and subsequently inherits a large estate in time to become the benefactor of her second husband, who had just gone bankrupt.

dozen years, the working class woman--who was not likely to undertake the legal expense of obtaining a separation--had been nonetheless secure in the knowledge that her income, once her husband had deserted, was her own.

The ultimate subversion, however, is not directly related to legal or social change but is the inevitable consequence of the romantic premise of the fiction itself. Love is the only essential ingredient in marriage; matches made on any other basis are constantly doomed to failure. Love is understood as a mystic personal attraction; characters in story after story conceal their wealth, position, or accomplishments in order to be loved "for themselves." The premise is individualistic: love removes the social barriers of class, familial duty, and so forth. But if love is the only essential ingredient in the making of a marriage, the inevitable corollary is that the marriage ceases to exist when love no longer exists.

In the main plot of Ernest Brent's "The World's Wayside" Kate, a doctor's daughter, has been parted by shipwreck from her husband. She becomes an opera singer to support their son. The moment of recognition arrives. "Edward Musgrave had changed . . . she would not have admired him now. His feeble elegance of physique, and gentle, irresolute manner, were not points she cared for in a man."⁴⁷ He has remarried, very quickly, a delicately-nurtured lady. Kate, in effect, gives herself a divorce by promising not to produce her marriage-lines:

"If your father were dead, and you were free to-morrow, I would not give up my profession and my friends to be your wife and the Countess of Greyburn. The man I loved was Edward Musgrave, the poor secretary to a parvenu judge. With the Viscount Linvern--the aristocrat who married a lady of his own proud race--I have nothing to do. If it were not too late, I would urge you to have our marriage set aside,

⁴⁷LJ, 57 (26 Apr. 1873), 258.

for I am tired of the invisible bondage in which it holds me; but I have pledged my word to keep our secret, and I will.⁴⁸

We cannot know whether some authors in the penny-weekly magazines wrote with a deliberately subversive intent, or if they were simply carried away by the demands of creating exciting event and piquant situation. Superficially, the life portrayed in most of the fiction has little to do with the lives of the readers. It may not be only the increasingly mass-produced character of the penny magazines which accounts for the loss of interest in social issues. Real wages began to rise dramatically in the early seventies.⁴⁹ The enfranchisement of town workers in the Second Reform Bill (1867) and the consequent legalization of trade unions decreased class tensions. Even in agricultural areas there were fewer women and children doing field work.⁵⁰ The working class did finally seem to be cashing in on the fruits of industrialization. The London Journal in 1869 offered its own version of the girl of the period--the sewing-machine girl--and sang the praises of the machine which had liberated her:

it has reduced the hours of labour, and vigorously attacked the most cruel of white slavery--cheap needlework--it has raised the rate of wages and introduced to active employment some of the most attractive workgirls, both as to appearance and conduct, to be found in the kingdom.⁵¹

The absurd conventions of the aristocratic romance provided a set of characters and situations which were actually less foreign to the working woman than were those depicted in the domestic novels of the middle class. Money and social position gave to the Duke's daughter--at

⁴⁸LJ, 57 (24 May 1873), 322.

⁴⁹John Burnett, A History of the Cost of Living (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 256.

⁵⁰Best, p. 108.

⁵¹"Girls of the Period: The Sewing-Machine Girl," LJ, 49 (1 Feb. 1869), 77.

least in the novelist's imagination--a freedom of action unknown to the genteel governess or the cloistered daughter of the family.

The assumption that women are not only generally inferior to men but also that a happy marriage demands the visible superiority of husband to wife can be maintained in the middle-class novel; the men have public school or university educations and the girls merely accomplishments. Working girls and tradesmen's daughters often had better--or at least longer--schooling than their brothers. Though the penny magazine editors preach male dominance, the fiction continually shows women exercising secret power. And it provides a model for the superior-woman inferior-man relationship in the many stories in which an heiress marries a self-made man and brings to him her culture and refinement.

The girl with a sense of her economic self-sufficiency was prepared to take a less dependent role in marriage. When the sewing-machine girl in the London Journal sketch makes a choice between her suitors--chief among whom are a carpenter and a clerk--one of the points in the carpenter's favor is that he has saved enough money to buy her a sewing machine of her own. She is prepared to take some role in the partnership other than sexual object. Bow Bells editorialized that

Every worthy young man should be made to feel that he may honourably offer his heart and his hand to any woman, whenever he is able, with her assistance, to provide a home with the necessaries of life and ordinary comforts; and every young woman should be taught to regard it as neither derogatory to her character or social position to accept such an offer, and to help provide a home.⁵²

Finally, in the romance, as in the working class, economically independent girls were free to court unsupervised:

Parents in humble life do not hunt up sweethearts for their daughters--that business the girls have to do for themselves, and little objection is made to their "walking out" with young men, provided the

⁵²"False Ideas of Married Life," Bow Bells, 22 (17 Mar. 1875), 245.

latter are sober and respectable. This liberty, so shocking to Belgravian notions of etiquette and propriety, is not taken in stinted quantity by our English workgirls. The consequence is, that they may have several sweethearts before the last comes and carries off the prize Considering how loose the sentiments of the young men of the period are where woman is concerned, it is a matter for exultation that the great majority of workgirls carry to the altar pure hands and honest hearts.⁵³

Purity could be maintained only by knowledge; the single working girl had not only to draw the line in time to restrain the kisses and cuddles of her suitor, but also to cope with a world in which--as in her fiction--all sorts of traps were laid.⁵⁴ The middle class girl might be chaste by default: ignorance kept her from recognizing the promptings of her own emotions, and chaperones protected her from predatory males on the streets or in the drawing room. The heroine of the aristocratic romance, like the respectable working girl, maintained her purity by choice:

"Do my daughters know the dangers of life? Why, of course they do. How else could they go harmlessly about their business? How else could I be easy about them? What liberty do they have? Why, whatever they please to take. I brought them up as well as I knew how, and when the time came for them to go out and earn their own living, I told them exactly what I know myself, and then I trusted them. . . . You see . . . our girls when they earn good money, as mine do, set a pretty high value on themselves."⁵⁵

The individualized woman--self-supporting and responsible for her own moral choices--is, finally, a person. She is no longer in a subordinate position in a fixed social order, but exists in a contract society regulated by choice and ability. The ideals of penny magazine fiction of the

⁵³"Girls of the Period," LJ, 49 (1 Feb. 1869), 77.

⁵⁴The evidence presented by Josephine Butler, by the Purity campaigners, and by William Stead may well exaggerate the frequency and deviousness of the devices used to lure new recruits into prostitution. Most urban girls were apparently able to survive, but the Girls Friendly Society found it essential to send someone to meet any member who travelled into London so that she would not be waylaid; see Pearson, p. 134 and passim.

⁵⁵Working-class mother quoted by Mrs. Crackenthorpe in "The Revolt of the Daughters," The Nineteenth Century, 35 (1894), 426.

1870's were those of the dominant middle class extended to women; the working girl and her fantasy-persona, the aristocratic heroine, had the independence that bourgeois society still denied to its own girls.

The preservation of chastity, in this context, is equivalent to the preservation of personal integrity. The respectable moral standard is also that of the society as a whole; neither sensuality nor excessively romantic emotionality are present within the spectrum of admirable traits contributing to individual self-realization. The heroines are heroines, not victims; their strength, rather than their weakness, makes them admirable. Chastity is not viewed primarily as an economic asset, essential in that it may be bartered through matrimony for support and social position. The direct sexual proposition, delivered from man to woman, is either overtly or symbolically a move for power in the battle between the sexes.

The clarity of this message is diluted, however, by the prevailing romantic ethic. The penny magazines provided escape reading; the world into which working women and working-men's wives escaped was one which provided money, adventure, and love. The final goal for the heroine was not so much the perfect marriage as the perfect man. She was, for him, prepared to give up her individuality; in order to fit, ultimately, into a prescribed social role the romantic heroine was willing to pretend to an inferiority which the events of the story may have demonstrated she did not actually possess. The basic conflict between personal integrity and social ideal was neither recognized nor resolved by the writers of penny romance.

CONCLUSION

THE END OF INNOCENCE

Literature may be written with philosophical intent, in order to explore the nature of man, the ethics of individual and social interaction, and the ends and purposes of human existence. Literature also entertains: it amuses, provides vicarious participation, emotional satisfaction, and simple distraction.

Prose fiction is essentially story telling. As such, its roots are in common speech: in the anecdote, the joke, and the oral history involved in recounting and sharing personal experiences in conversation. Prose fiction is, therefore, the most accessible form of printed literature. The extended prose fiction in the form of the novel which became a distinctive genre in England in the early eighteenth century was, from the first, primarily a commercial form, requiring that a substantial investment be made by a publisher in expectation of the profit to be realized from the sale of the book.¹

The existence of a public sufficiently large for its tastes in reading matter to be deliberately catered to for commercial rewards is a function of literacy, purchasing power, leisure, and a desire to read as a leisure activity. Other forms of entertainment (specifically music hall and organized sport) and other sorts of reading (i.e., the penny newspaper) affected the social and sexual composition of the audience

¹See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley, 1957), pp 53-56 for the relationship of booksellers to the novel in the early eighteenth century.

for prose fiction during the latter third of the nineteenth century. The other three qualities--literacy, purchasing power, and leisure--were, however, present in increasing amounts for a widening segment of the population throughout the century.

Commercial publishers responded to these changes. Fiction in the shilling monthly magazines of the eighteen-sixties shared many characteristics of style and moral content with that of the penny-weekly magazines of a generation earlier. As the work-day shortened and as it required less individual effort to seek out literacy, so that literacy among the working class was no longer a skill developed primarily by the intelligent and ambitious, the fiction in cheap periodicals became easier to read, more restricted in vocabulary, less complex in sentence style, and, on the whole, more simplistic and immediate in thought and emotion.

Commercialism is a relative term. The proportion of persons amongst the total population who find pleasure and entertainment in fiction which is challenging, which demands thought, and which reveals new and complex ways of looking at human experience has probably remained more or less stable. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, those whose intelligence and education predisposed them to take a certain kind of pleasure in literature became, though their absolute number may have remained constant, a relatively insignificant portion of the total available audience from whom publishers sought to make a profit.

The differences in literary technique between that fiction which we might call serious (either because it was praised by high culture at the time or because it has endured) and that which we might (either because of its overtly commercial form or its contemporary or subsequent reputation) call light or popular are not easy to summarize; one must qualify even the most obvious generalizations. Light fiction is not generally

marked by highly developed symbolism or complex patterns of imagery, nor does it ordinarily afford numerous layers of interpretation. Stereotyped characters, however, are symbols of a sort, and the didactic message of many of the moralizing tales in the cheap periodicals depends on a primitive allegorical structure.

Popular writing generally follows well-established conventions; deliberate experimentation with form and structure is more typical of the writer who is consciously exploring new modes of perceiving and communicating experience. Mrs. Crowe's The Adventures of Susan Hopley (3 vols. 1841), however, which Mrs. Gaskell said was a novel to "interest one in certain states of mind in which one is too lazy for thought or any high feeling, and only up to being a bit occupied by scenes passed before you without much connexion, like those unrolling views we show children,"² made use of carefully controlled viewpoints in order to provide suspense, and subsequent detective writers, most notably Wilkie Collins, polished the technical experiment until it became both a conventional form and an approach to the question of reality.

The traditional distinction between the novel of plot and the novel of character does not serve as a dividing line between the light and the serious novel. Critics have generally assigned the higher value to novels of character, in which events both contribute to and are shaped by the elements of an individual personality. We have particularly despised that literature which depends chiefly on accident, coincidence, and fortuitous dramatic circumstance for its events and their effects. It has been suggested, however, in relation to the mid-nineteenth century stage melodrama, that accident, coincidence, and victimization by impinging events

²Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, p. 60.

may accurately reflect the manner in which reality is perceived by those of the working class who are aware (consciously or unconsciously) of their minimal role in influencing the social and economic system or, indeed, the events of their own daily lives.³

Critics have generally shown a preference for the "round" character, who grows or changes over the course of the novel. Among the books we have been considering, the character of Ruth grows and develops; the character of Hetty Sorrel does not. The central woman character in most of the more didactic novels experiences crucial change; the events of the novel are constructed in order to teach her a lesson. The heroine of many romances--both among library novels and in the penny magazines--influences events around her to an extent generally perceived as unlikely, unrealistic, and wish-fulfilling.

The deliberate construction of a plot and the arrangement of events so as to reveal the interaction of characters with society is typical of most of the novels which have been received into the canon of major Victorian literature: the works by Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Meredith, Trollope. Yet the construction of scene and event with conscious deliberation about what emotional effect that scene would have on the reader is as typical of these novels as it is of the gaudier examples of the Sensational school. In only the most general terms, then, can it be said that popular fiction tends, more than serious fiction, to depend on narration of physical event and on the deliberate evocation of emotional response.

There is, however, an important distinction between two large categories of fiction--which might more accurately be called reader responses

³Suggested in conversation by Martha Vicinus.

to fiction--which is in part congruent with the division between novels of plot and novels of character. The novel with a constructed, inevitable, and consequential plot is artistically complete; the novel which depends for its appeal on the reader's interest in the central character is often open-ended: it allows the reader to participate imaginatively by inventing other incidents or spinning the tale out beyond the final pages of the book. This dividing line cuts across the established rankings of the literary canon in another direction. The novel which depends on the dramatic method, including the more tightly-plotted examples of the Sensation school, is, like the highly-constructed novel in which each event is intimately related to the psychology of the characters, finished when the events of the novel are brought to an end.

It is commonplace to call light reading "escape reading." If the serious writer, and the serious reader when he is in a serious mood, seeks through his fiction to explore, to record, and to understand human experience, the other use of fiction is to evade life as it is lived and to find in imaginative works those satisfactions which are lacking in real experience. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to a friend:

It appears to me that you cultivate scorn for the novel-readers, or else have no comprehension for them, dividing them into classes of Godwin-readers, Fielding-readers, Richardson-readers, James-readers, and so forth. You have no sympathy for persons who, when they were children, beset everybody in the house, from the proprietor to the second housemaid, to 'tell them a story;' and retain so much of their childhood--green as grass--as that love of stories. . . . Oh, that love for story-telling! It may be foolish, to be sure; it leads one into waste of time and strong excitements, to be sure; still, how pleasant it is! How full of enchantment and dream-time gladnesses! What a pleasant accompaniment to one's lonely coffee-cup in the morning or evening, to hold a little volume in the left hand and read softly along how Lindoro saw Monimia over the hedge, and what he said to her! After breakfast we have other matters to do--grave 'business-matters,' poems to write upon Eden, or essays on Carlyle, or literature in various shapes to be employed seriously on. But everybody must attend to a certain proportion of practical affairs of life, and Lindoro and Monimia bring us ours. And then, if Monimia

behaves pretty well, what rational satisfaction we have in settling her at the end of the book. No woman who speculates and practises 'on her own account' has half the satisfaction in securing an establishment that we have with our Monimias, nor should have, let it be said boldly.⁴

The serious realistic novelist attempts to create characters who are peculiar or unique individuals. They may or may not be persons whom the reader recognizes and feels comfortable with. The outstanding--one might even say the essential--quality of light fiction popular with women is the presence of characters with whom the reader will identify. This fiction encourages reader participation, particularly if it is published in installments, so that one lives with and thinks about the characters over a period of months or even years. It both resembles and feeds individual daydreams.

Daydream is a partly conscious or mostly conscious mental storytelling which is indulged in for the sake of pleasure. Daydream is pleasurable because it provides satisfaction for needs which are not met--which often cannot be met--in the circumstances of ordinary life. Daydream also allows for the indulgence of emotions which cannot be expressed openly because of decorum or of social pressure.

Daydream is in itself a synthetic or literary activity. Forbidden feelings can be pleasurably indulged because they are not directly expressed: the literary faculty has found analogues or substitutes which are in the realm of the permissible, or at least the privately permissible. But the literary ability of ordinary individuals is not great. As George Eliot said of Hetty Sorrel, "Hetty had never read a novel; how then could she find a shape for her expectations?" (Ch. 13) Those of us with non-creative minds often ignore or fail to recognize emotional promptings which we have

⁴Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning addressed to Richard Hengist Horne (London, 1877), I, 216-18.

not seen expressed in fiction.

The light fiction read primarily by women (or the fiction read by women and girls as light reading, because Jane Eyre is certainly one of the most important and enduring works of the genre) bears in its form and technique a number of correspondences with the private life of reverie or fantasy. First, and most importantly, the story is centered on a single character with whom the reader is able to identify. For that reason she must not be too peculiar or too individual or suffer from faults other than the venial faults which readers are willing to recognize in themselves; a reader can pity Hetty Sorrel but can never, after the moment among the chips and turf, happily pretend that she is Hetty Sorrel. Secondly, the book is constructed chiefly of scenes--incidents with high emotional content--and the plot material necessary to move from scene to scene is inconclusively imagined and rapidly narrated. The emotional content is crucial: important scenes are repeated, either by re-telling or by the presentation of a succession of closely analagous situations, so that the same emotions may be frequently indulged.

Daydream allows the dreamer to control the world, to put into it a hero who is not a man as she knows or fears men to be but who has those qualities she would like to find in an ideal lover, and to impose her desires on the physical circumstances of life. The fiction published for the light reading of the lower class seems, unduly to the uninvolved reader, to emphasize the material satisfactions of the desired world. The misplaced heiress, working behind the shop-counter with her small feet, small hands, and tastes more refined than those of her associates, expresses the need to be special or individual even while oppressed by meaningless, unrewarding, and seemingly inescapable labor. Thomas Wright complained that the aristocratic romance created in its readers a "discontented and

and hankering spirit."⁵ One might with equal cogency argue that it provided escape from a sense of discontent which, on any rational grounds, is perfectly justifiable.

The fiction for the lower class is, on the whole, confirming, reassuring, and optimistic. The heroines struggle, impose control on their world, succeed, and are rewarded. The pathetic ending is more typical of the women's novels read by the middle class. The discontent in these novels is not so intimately tied to material circumstances nor are the threats posed by males and by social conditions so often simple and direct. The tears elicited by the death of a woman who has done her best and still failed to achieve her reward provide release for emotional tensions which arise from a more radical and yet less definable sense of dissatisfaction with the way of the world.

In both penny fiction and library novel, heroines by the seventies are notable for their active management of the physical and emotional affairs of their lives. The heroines of the middle-class novels have a somewhat greater tendency to suffer for the acts of their independence. In both sorts of novel, the preferred happy ending is a marriage with a man who is supportive, sensitive, and not domineering.

Since escape fiction allows the creation of the world that the author or reader would like to see exist, there is a danger implicit in reading actual social change into the content of the stories and the behavior allowed the heroine. The strengthening of the persona supplied for the daydreamer in the fiction which she chose to read may indicate, at best, nothing more than an impulse for social change; a desire to see herself and her role in the world in terms of greater importance.

⁵Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes, p 192.

The social proscription against female unchastity was a reality at most if not all levels of society. During the central decades of the nineteenth century, moral standards appear to have become more uniform and all-inclusive. The only statistical measure of morality available is the figure on illegitimate births, which is approximate at best because the registering of births was not regularized throughout the country until the mid-sixties and because the assessment and recording of illegitimacy invites inaccuracy at any time. There was, however, a slow but steady decline in the proportion of all births reported as illegitimate from 7% in 1845 (the earliest year in the period for which figures are available) to 4.9% in 1880.⁶ Bourgeois as well as cheap fiction criticized profligacy as one of the despicable qualities of the aristocracy. The fiction written for the consumption of the least literate among the reading public became steadily more pure throughout the century.

The one quality which seems most clearly to reflect a line of demarcation between the novels which remain read and those which have passed into oblivion is ambiguity. Vanity Fair, Adam Bede, Rhoda Fleming, Desperate Remedies, and Workers in the Dawn are novels which leave questions unresolved or unresolvable; Ruth and Dombey and Son, while presenting a more clear ethical and moral argument, imply an almost irreconcilable difference between individual good and social actuality. In none of these novels does the figure of the unchaste woman have a single simple moral value; in each chastity is only one element of the total feminine character.

The simple, realistic resolution of the story of Carry Brattle in Trollope's The Vicar of Bullhampton has an air of finality about it. Within the limits imposed by the moral standards of realistically observed society,

⁶Calculation based on tables in B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1962), p. 29.

Trollope virtually exhausted as subject matter the tale of the restoration of the unchaste girl to social place. The story could not be told again directly and realistically until there were different moral values to be explored.

The figure most conspicuously missing from the literature of these forty-five years--at whatever level, for whatever audience--is the woman who loves and uses her body to express her love by her own choice. That particular lack, however, is only peripherally sex-linked. In the context of the period between 1835 and 1880, sexual indulgence for the sake of pleasure alone was not morally or philosophically acceptable, at least in theory, for either men or women. And so long as it was generally believed that male sexual desire (stigmatized as animal need or brute nature) was stronger than that of women, sexual intercourse could only be seen as something imposed by man on woman.

There also existed, throughout the period, the virtually inescapable danger of physical consequences for the woman which was not shared by the male participant.⁷ So long as the only really dependable means of contraception, whether within marriage or without, was continence, chastity was a moral cause with feminist implications. To submit to sexual intercourse was to serve man. To choose to preserve chastity not as a moral imperative, not because of natural purity and disgust, and not because of duty and religious strictures but out of an awareness of self-interest and a reckoning of practical consequences was to alter the nature of sexual politics.

⁷The contraceptive knowledge which circulated underground was inaccurate and undependable; vinegar on a sponge was a chancy spermicide, at best, and the identification of fertile and safe periods which followed Raciborski's discovery of ovulation in 1845 was exactly the reverse of that now accepted by medical science. (Women were thought to conceive immediately before and after menstruation, rather than in mid-cycle.) The condom was used as a preventative for disease rather than as a mode of contraception; it was, additionally, a device accessible to and controlled by men, not women.

For a woman to make that choice consciously and rationally required the end of innocence. One can only arrive impressionistically at the judgment that the quality of innocence (as opposed to the quality of chastity) did suffer from declining fortunes through the period under discussion. Women were taught, as a necessary part of their education, to dissemble; the implication underlying virtually all of the guides to the education and training of girls and the conduct of maidens, wives, and mothers, from Hannah More's to Sarah Ellis's and beyond, was that females must subdue their own interests, deny their own feelings, and ignore their own desires so as to fall in with men's moods, meet their needs, and appear to possess those qualities which careful study told them men desired. Many a knowing girl must have found it diplomatic to pretend to an innocence she did not possess. Ella Hepworth Dixon, daughter of the long-time editor of Athenaeum and herself a contributor to periodicals, tells an amusing story in her memoirs:

I recollect one evening at a big ball, gliding round the room with a youth who not only danced exquisitely, but took the trouble to make conversation. "By-the-bye," said he, "have you read the 'Town and Country Tale' in this week's World?" and added, hastily, "no, I don't think it's quite the kind of story you ought to read." For a moment I hesitated, and then, being a young person of discretion, I remained silent. Why spoil my evening? I had written the obnoxious story myself. It would be meat for babes to-day, but young gentlemen, in the last of the 'eighties, were dreadfully particular about the literature their girl contemporaries read.

Innocence, unlike chastity, is necessarily linked to dependence. To preserve innocence required keeping a girl in complete ignorance of the physical nature of relations between the sexes, of the desires and practices of men, and therefore of the meaning of much of what went on around her. To preserve ignorance required continuous supervision and the limitation of the physical environment.

⁸Ella Hepworth Dixon, "As I Knew Them" (London, 1930), p. 31.

A married woman--who did not wear her wedding ring in her nose nor dress in a fashion significantly different than her single contemporaries--could drive, call, shop, and otherwise brave the world without chaperonage in part because she had acquired physical awareness and was prepared to flee from danger. But, in addition, she had already attained the goal which innocence was designed to further. A single woman (at least to judge by the novels written for the middle class) might exhibit some interest in worldly affairs and take an independent role in charitable activity at the age of twenty-five, on the assumption that by that age her value on the marriage-market was pretty well gone.

One of the repeated objections made to novels which presented any realistic portrait of the unchaste woman hinged on the destructive education provided by such books:

We may trust the experience of all ages, the consent of all fathers and mothers who have watched carefully over daughters, the reflections of all critics of human life, that female purity absolutely demands a certain degree and kind of ignorance. The tender bloom of innocence, which, once gone, can never be replaced, is brushed away at once if a girl is permitted to fasten her imagination on the feelings and motives which induce a fallen woman to exchange one liaison for another. We think that there is a most dangerous tendency in these days of inconsiderate philanthropy to overturn the barriers of ignorant innocence under the plausible pretext of a pious care for the erring.⁹

By the sixties and seventies, novelists generally wrote as if innocence had died since they were young. Ouida, who had certainly done her part to further its demise, recognized that its essential value was linked to the matrimonial market:

Those who are little children now will have little left to learn when they reach womanhood. . . . When they are women they will at least never have Eve's excuse for sin; they will know everything that any tempter could tell them. Perhaps their knowledge may prove their safeguard, perhaps not; perhaps without its bloom the

⁹Review of Out of the Depths, Saturday Review, 4 June 1859, p 637.

fruit to men's taste may seem prematurely withered. Another ten years will tell.¹⁰

Innocence was of value because it was to men's taste; it was a quality inseparable from dependence. For a husband to have the power and duty to initiate a woman into one of the essential secrets of life further increased the psychological--one might almost say pathological--inferiority which the marriage contract imposed on women. To gain, from novels if not from other sources, her own knowledge on the subjects of sexuality, prostitution, and seduction gave to a woman information with which she could make decisions as rational as decisions involving love can ever be and, politically, revealed how men had used women to their own advantage.

Broader social, legal, and economic changes were necessary before woman could be thoroughly a person in her own right. Many of these changes were linked, if only peripherally, to notions about sexuality as well as to concepts of the feminine role.

Economic independence, for example, required not only the availability of work which women were qualified, prepared and allowed to do and from which they could earn a living wage, but also that social mores change so that it was possible for a woman to take a job without feeling that she and her family were thereby disgraced. For women of the middle class, throughout the period, economic self-sufficiency could be gained only at the sacrifice of gentility. The social proscription against ladies working rested on the assumption that girls were fair, fragile, and helpless and that social status for men depended on the ability to maintain one's women in conspicuous and decorative leisure. It rested also on the assumption that hardly any relations other than sexual relations were possible

¹⁰Moths, Ch. 7.

between such different species as the male and the female. Girls of the working class had always faced the necessity of supporting themselves until, and frequently after, marriage. But when reformers of the thirties and forties began to examine conditions in the factories they objected, strongly, that the unfettered mixing of men and women in the same place of employment led to sexual promiscuity and terrible immorality. They seldom stopped to inquire whether--assuming that the immorality was so great as they believed--it resulted from the mixing of men and women at work or from the different moral standards and attitudes towards pleasure and chastity which existed in any case among those who came to work in factories.

Social movements, it is thought, generally filter down from above. The movement for economic self-sufficiency, however, spread from the poor to the lower middle class and then upwards; it was a matter of ladies becoming women. The transformation of the Civil Service and the enormous demands of the Post Office (which had found, early, that girls were "more teachable, more attentive, and quicker-eyed" than men as telegraph clerks)¹¹ created clean, quiet work which demanded a certain level of education. Not until after the First World War was it accepted as a matter of course that a girl from a thoroughly middle-class family would, after completing her education, work at least until she were married. The example, however, had been set by the clerks and office workers of the lower middle class, who had demonstrated that men and women could mix at work without unfortunate sexual consequences. Economic liberation and the end of innocence went hand-in-hand insofar as it was necessary for girls to have internalized, rather than protected, moral standards in order to move freely in the world.

¹¹Lee Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work (Hamden, Conn., 1973), p. 165.

Even if she possesses economic independence, however, for any except the most exceptional woman--the woman with a cause, an extraordinary ambition, or a fulfilling career--the other essentials of happiness depend on affection, sexual fulfillment, and maternity: the realization of instinctual needs which, so long as a respectable moral system obtained, could be achieved only in matrimony.

The concept that the family, rather than the individual, was the basic unit of society, was expressed also in the political fabric. Legally, one of the original objections to woman suffrage was that "the franchise does not attach to the person of the individual citizen, but to the property and stake in the country which he possesses,"¹² and that therefore since the husband possessed his wife's property, he enjoyed the political power which went with it. That logic was partially supported by the granting to single, property-owning women, in the Municipal Corporations Act of 1869, of the right to vote and be elected for offices such as churchwarden and overseer.¹³ The married woman's right to participate in public affairs, however, disappeared with her property; the version of the Married Woman's Property Act passed in 1870 secured to a wife her earnings, small sums of money which came to her by will or deed, and the rent and profit on any real estate she might inherit, but left the property itself, which carried with it a stake in the country, in the hands of her husband.

The legal basis for the political logic disappeared during the following decade. The Married Woman's Property Act of 1882 secured to a married woman, as separate property, everything which she had at marriage

¹²C. N. Cresswell, Woman: Her Legal Rights and Social Duties (1869), p. 27.

¹³The Education Act of 1870 added the school board, and three women were elected to the first London school boards in November 1870.

or acquired thereafter by any means. In 1884 the property qualification for the franchise was virtually eliminated with the extension of the ballot to most working men. When the legal argument was no longer tenable, the social and sentimental justifications of subordination were all that remained, and the emotional campaign for and against woman's suffrage was born.

In political terms, from 1869 onwards, a woman could to a limited extent be a person--an individual in her own right--so long as she chose to be so by not marrying. The property laws, the Custody of Infants Act, and the provisions for separation and maintenance included in the 1857 Divorce Act and the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act provided a limited recognition that woman was, even within marriage, an individual with interests which might be separate from those of her husband. The institutionalized form of relations between the sexes was, however, intimately related to the concept of feminine subordination. The Westminster Review pointed out in 1879:

. . . the prevailing view in all countries, among all classes of people (including women themselves) . . . is expressed in these few words:--"He was made for God and she for him," which may be paraphrased as follows:--Man was made for the best possible development of his varied faculties, for the achievement of the highest work within his power, and for the achievement of the greatest good; woman to assist him in the accomplishment of these objects, thereby realising also her own greatest good--all of which is expressed in the single phrase, a subordinate position. In accordance with this view girls are almost universally trained with the object of making them acceptable to men, rather than as individuals responsible to society and to themselves for the best development of their individual powers; in other words, they are¹⁴ educated with reference to their probable future relations with men.

The woman problem, in the 1840's and 1850's, was seen primarily as the surplus or unprotected woman problem. Better education and the opportunity to enter a wider range of trades and professions were required

¹⁴"The Relations of the Sexes," Westminster Review, NS 60 (1879), 314-15.

so that the woman who failed to marry might live decently; the right to seek custody of infants and to retain her own property and income were necessary to the woman whose marriage had failed to provide adequate protection. The very nature of these concerns both reflected and reinforced the assumption that the normal, expected, and natural fulfillment of women was achieved through matrimony and motherhood. Even Mary Wollstonecraft, the ancestress of feminist expression in England, had argued at bottom that women needed to be better educated and more self-reliant so that they would be better mothers.

It was, then, an important alteration in consciousness to see, in the woman who had achieved maternity, a further potential to be developed in relation to her individual self, rather than relative to her "natural" familial and reproductive role. The Fortnightly Review's 1872 article on birth control, besides introducing the Malthusian and economic arguments against large families, pointed out that the burden placed on the fruitful wife was not merely physical:

The unnecessary multiplication of children . . . tends to arrest the education of the married woman at its most critical stage, and, by absorbing her whole attention, renders her incapable of fulfilling duties for which she might be otherwise fit . . .

. . . the deterioration which the woman undergoes . . . is far greater than that of the man. . . . for whereas the enlarged sense of responsibility which an increasing family creates may act on the father as a spur to greater exertion, the concentration of the mother's whole being on the details of the domestic drama grows and must grow with each new birth, until at last her daily life becomes one theatre of trivialities, the curtain of which is never allowed to drop.¹⁵

The Fortnightly Review did not speak for the general public; it was an advanced magazine, which later printed the chapters of Tess of the d'Urbervilles that were suppressed by The Graphic.¹⁶ Though the figures

¹⁵Montague Cookson, "The Morality of Married Life," Fortnightly Review, 18 (1872), 399.

¹⁶See Richard Purdy in Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, ed. Scott Ellledge (New York, 1965), pp. 365-66.

on the birth rate among the middle classes in the 1870's suggest that contraception was more practiced than talked about, it is likely that the decision to limit family size was made usually for economic reasons rather than to further the personal development of the wife.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the suggestion that woman, even in her ideal role as mother, need not and should not be wholly absorbed by her sexual and reproductive function was a further step towards individualization.

The suggestions raised by the marriage debate, then, extended themselves to all women rather than to the anomalous, necessarily independent woman. Novelists from 1860 until the end of the century dealt with the specific legal inequities and also with the psychological difficulties inevitable in maintaining the legal and social fiction that in matrimony two persons are merged into one. The most serious authors tended to be quietly pessimistic; marriage was at worst destructive and at best a matter of compromise and stifling of individual potential.¹⁸

The novels, however, which deal with the unchaste woman, reveal the counter-side of the movement towards progressive individualization. The women in the anti-romantic popular novels of the thirties and forties are tied to the larger social system through external values: through religion, duty, and socially respectable work (i.e., work for dependents, for family members, or for charity). It is in this context that we find Ruth, in 1853, the only unchaste heroine, amongst all those examined, who

¹⁷See Banks, Feminism and Family Planning, especially Ch. 6. The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine responded to the neo-Malthusian discussion of the 1870's with an article on "The Glory of Motherhood" which asked, as if the alternatives were mutually exclusive, "What are the privileges of possession of the franchise or of admission to the professions to the privileges of motherhood?"; see 23 (1877), 121.

¹⁸Jenni Calder, Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction (New York, 1976) discusses this topic in depth with an emphasis on books by Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot, Meredith, and Gissing.

achieves social integration wholly in her own right, without the intermediacy of a male attachment, though through the action of maternal values. Unchastity, for the women novelists of this period, was either the result of innocence (whose value they, therefore, questioned) or was an individual selfishness symptomizing a vicious tendency to forget society and children and wider duty under the influence of personal desire. And for some male novelists unchastity had romantic value in that it expressed the ultimate femininity: self-abnegation, total yielding, and the absolute suppression of individuality.

The women in the romantic novels of the seventies are individualized; they retain control of their bodies for personal ends. But at the same time the focus of social attachment has been transferred to the tie with a male. The didactic tales about the foolishness of women who permit love without matrimony and the daydream creations of an improved social order found in the stories of the woman who takes unilateral action to alter the basis of her marriage (or who, in the concealed divorce stories of the penny magazines, actually sheds one husband to find a better one) all lead towards a relationship with society to be attained through individual attachment to one man, rather than through a more extended network of social and religious duties and affiliations. The romantic vision is neatly symbolized in the work of Wilkie Collins, as well, in the closing image of Julian Gray sailing with Mercy Merrick away from the society which had victimized her.

With the end of innocence it became scarcely possible for a woman to surrender control of her life and her body to a man unless overwhelmed by a mystic, metaphysical love. The romantic ethic provided a pseudo-solution for the problem of woman's control of her own destiny; individual adjustment between one man and one woman, made possible by his love for her as

a person in her own right, allowed the establishment of a union which would privately adjust the inequities of the marriage bond.

The novels of the period exhibit a changing self-concept for women within a moral, legal, and social system which, though it may be questioned, is never seriously denied. Not until the nineties were novels written in which women sought to realize their desires for affection and maternity without subjecting themselves to the legal and social restrictions of the matrimonial contract; not until very recently has fiction allowed them to do so without paying extreme consequences. There may, however, be hints of the desire in fantasies structured so as to be made acceptable. Virtually the only old maids of Victorian fiction who are happy and fulfilled have nephews, nieces, or wards to raise. The discarded wife of Mrs. Crowe's Linny Lockwood (2 vols. 1853) achieves a very satisfactory role, in her widowhood, through carrying out the pledge made to her husband's mistress that she will take his child as her own.

The climax of Linny Lockwood, in which Linny assists at the birth of her husband's bastard and forges, in the pain of the birth chamber, a highly emotional sisterhood with the man's other victim, represents a strain which runs intermittently beneath the portraits of the unchaste woman throughout the period. The sisterhood of women, as victims of men and as upholders of alternate values, is openly expressed in the stories of Eliza Meteyard, Mary Howitt, Felicia Skene, and Mrs. Eiloart; it is idealized as an essential feminine characteristic even more fundamental than chastity in some of the sentimental depictions of whores. Yet this feeling, while providing an implicit emotional content, does not lead any writer of the period to the proposal of alternatives under which women would really be free, sexually and socially as well as economically.

"It is a certainty," wrote G. R. Drysdale in Elements of Social

Science, one of the underground classics of the century,¹⁹ "in the case of woman as of all others, that she who is dependent for the main essentials of her existence, for food and for love, upon others, cannot expect to have a free, a dignified, or a happy lot. She may chance to attain it, but she is always at the mercy of external circumstances. The charity which supports woman, may be gilded over by the name of love; but it is charity still; and no class of beings who depend on this can look for a happy lot."²⁰

The writers of the early feminist period were aware of the problems and explored the tensions of sexual politics; they may have raised consciousness; but they proposed no adequate solutions. If innocence, either as an ideal or as an actual fact, was destroyed by the fiction of the period, no writer--either serious or blatantly commercial--knew what to do with the knowledge which replaced it.

¹⁹The book, subtitled Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion, and badly printed on cheap paper, was first published in 1854. A fourteenth edition appeared in 1876. Obviously a great many people bought and read it, perhaps primarily for the contraceptive advice which it provided. It is, however, impossible to discover who these readers were.

²⁰G. R. Drysdale, Elements of Social Science, 14th ed., rev. (London, 1876), p. 404.

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