

THE INTERSECTION OF CLASS AND RELIGION  
IN VICTORIAN NOVELS OF THE 1850s

İPEK KOTAN YİĞİT

BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

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THE INTERSECTION OF CLASS AND RELIGION  
IN VICTORIAN NOVELS OF THE 1850s

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İpek Kotan Yiğit

Boğaziçi University

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, İpek Kotan Yiğit, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### The Intersection of Class and Religion in Victorian Novels of the 1850s

In my dissertation, I focus on a set of English novels written in the 1850s in order to analyze how the fiction of the 1850s, the mid-Victorian period, engaged with social issues in ways that resembled as well as differed from the social problem novels of the previous decade. Consequently, I contend that in the 1850s, as social, economic, and political problems became less pressing and immediate, and the suffering of the population through hunger, disease and filth diminished in scale, religion reasserted itself as a mediating device in discourses surrounding social problems in the novels of this period. In each chapter, I focus on how specific religious affiliations, present as discursive frameworks in the novels, are a significant yet neglected aspect of the representation of class issues. Each novel is an example of a different religious denomination offering a frame or particular concepts to debate intricate class issues. Each novel has a particular form (gothic, industrial novel, historical novel, and working-class autobiography) which is substantially connected to the specific class issue in the novel. Arguing against the received “loss of faith” narrative in scholarship which, until recently, characterized the culture and literature of the Victorian period as one marked by religious doubt and gradual loss of faith, I demonstrate in reading these novels that tracing the intersections of class and religion yields a greater understanding of how social issues are represented in the novels of the 1850s.

## ÖZET

### 1850'lerin Viktoryen Romanlarında Sınıf ve Dinin Kesişimi

Tezimde 1850'lerde yazılmış bir grup İngiliz romanına odaklanmak suretiyle, Viktoryen dönemin ortasına tekabül eden 1850'lerde romanların toplumsal konuları, geçmiş onyılda sosyal problem romanlarından farklı biçimlerde nasıl işlediğini inceliyorum. 1850'lerde toplumsal, ekonomik ve siyasi problemlerin şiddetinin ve aciliyetinin azalmasının ardından din, dönemin sosyal problem romanlarında bir çözüm çerçevesi olarak tekrardan boy göstermeye başladı. Tezin her bölümünde, romanlarda söylemsel çerçeveler olarak kendini ifade eden dini aidiyetlerin, sınıf meselelerinin romanlarda temsiliyetine dair önemli fakat ihmal edilmiş bir unsur olduğunu belirli romanlar üzerinden tartışıyorum. Her romanın sahip olduğu spesifik biçim (gotik, endüstriyel roman, tarihi roman, işçi sınıfı otobiyografisi gibi) romanda işlenen sınıf meselesine yakından bağlı. Alan literatüründe özellikle 20. yüzyıl boyunca hakim olmuş, Viktoryen edebiyatta dinin önemini ve merkeziliğini göz ardı eden eleştiri akımına itiraz ederek bu romanları okurken din ve sınıfın kesiştiği noktaların izini sürmenin, 1850'lerin romanlarında toplumsal meselelerin nasıl temsil edildiğine dair daha kapsamlı bir kavrayış sunacağımı öne sürüyorum.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: İpek Kotan Yiğit

### DEGREES AWARDED

PhD in English Literature, 2022, Boğaziçi University

M.A in English Literature, 2015, Boğaziçi University

B.A in Western Languages and Literatures, 2010, Boğaziçi University

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Victorian literature, the novel and novel theory, religion and literature, the gothic, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Transcendentalism

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Freelance Translator and Interpreter, 2013 - present

Part-Time Instructor, Department of English Language Education, İstanbul Bilgi University, 2018-2019

BAP Project Assistant, Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Boğaziçi University, 2015 - 2019

Research Assistant, Faculty of Communication, İstanbul Bilgi University, 2010-2015

### CONFERENCES

Presentation of PhD Dissertation, Boğaziçi University Graduate Conference, March 2022

Paper Presentation, “The Representation of the Monstrous Feminine in Lovecraft,” FINFAR Conference, University of Tampere, July 2012

### GRANTS

Fully-funded certificate program in Human Rights University Program, Zoryan Institute, University of Toronto, 2012

### PUBLICATIONS

Kotan, İ. (2015). “Descending into us from we know not whence”: Marilynne Robinson and the Emersonian tradition. Master’s Thesis.

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*To Yiğiter, who really is my better half*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In my dissertation, I argue that in the English novels of the 1850s, class issues came to be represented and discussed within very specific religious frames and discourses. As Chartism ceased to be a major political force by 1848, middle-class novelists continued to engage with the social problems resulting from industrialism. I argue that religious affiliations, topical religious issues, and central religious concepts of different denominations are an organic part of the literary depictions of class politics. In reading these novels, I hold that following the intersections of class and religion yields a greater understanding of how social issues are represented in the novels of the 1850s.

Although in Victorian fiction changes and problems caused by industrialism pervaded all novel forms, ranging from the gothic novel to historical fiction, they naturally concentrated in the social-problem novel. In England during the 1840s, a type of novel known by a variety of names such as the industrial novel, the condition-of-England novel or the social-problem novel came into existence as a response to the various political, economic and social turmoil of the decade. While the effects of unregulated, laissez-faire capitalism were felt throughout society in the framework of an accelerated industrialism it was the working classes, the emergent industrial proletariat in particular, who bore the brunt of such unchecked change. The agitation of the working classes for labor reform and electoral representation was thus both occasioned by, and contributed to the specific upheavals of this time period. Bad harvests and crop failures exacerbated social unrest, and also provided support to the middle-class political agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Such

novels as Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1839) Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) dealt with the various aspects of this time period, both portraying the state of affairs in English society in the 1840s, and offering various solutions to the social problems they observed. Thematically and formally, such novels bear enough resemblance to one another so that even if terms and criteria of inclusion are occasionally contested or problematized, they are often grouped together all the same.

In contrast with the turbulent 1840s, stability and prosperity attended the 1850s. The dissolution of Chartism in England, and of the various revolutionary movements across Europe put an end to organized labor and mass protest at such scale, and various reform bills, such as the several Factory Acts passed throughout the fifties, lifted the living and working conditions of the laboring classes from their abject state of the previous decade. As such, the sense of urgency which attended the efforts of the social-problem novelists throughout the 1840s somewhat diminished during this time; after a period of decline, the genre is often considered to have ended by 1866, when George Eliot's *Felix Holt, The Radical* was published (O'Gorman, 2002, p. 150).

In my dissertation, I focus on a set of novels written in the 1850s in order to analyze how the fiction of the 1850s, the mid-Victorian period, engaged with social issues in ways that resembled as well as differed from the social-problem novels of the previous decade. Consequently, I contend that in the 1850s, as social, economic, and political problems became less pressing and immediate, and the suffering of the population through hunger, disease and filth diminished in scale, religion reasserted itself as a mediating device in discourses surrounding social problems in the novels of this period. In each chapter, I focus on how specific religious affiliations, present

as discursive frameworks in the novels, are a significant yet neglected aspect of the representation of class issues. Each novel is an example of a different religious denomination offering a frame or particular concepts to debate intricate class issues. Each novel has a particular form (gothic, industrial novel, historical novel, and working-class autobiography) which is substantially connected to the specific class issue in the novel.

*Alton Locke*, which was published in 1850, is the earliest example of religious engagement with class politics of the decade. Kingsley imagines the sheer immediacy of revolutionary fervor embodied by Chartism, become thwarted and replaced by the distant promises of Christian Socialism in the concomitant political and religious conversions of his working-class protagonist. In Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette*, the material and spiritual deprivation of Lucy Snowe, a lower-middle class unmarried woman with very limited employment opportunities, is expressed through the vocabulary of a conflict between her Protestant beliefs and Catholic milieu. There is a posited dichotomy between Lucy's Protestant independence of consciousness, the authoritarianism of Catholicism, and the ever-imminent danger of conversion linking these two polarities. In her 1854 novel *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell utilizes the values of her Unitarian faith, such as the importance of reason over emotionality, of education, social cohesion and an emphasis on religion as a way of thinking about this world rather than the afterlife, in order to resolve class conflict with social reconciliation. And finally, in her 1859 novel *Adam Bede*, George Eliot looks back at the beginning of the nineteenth century in order to understand how Methodism, a nonconforming sect which had originally started within the Church of England, was an ally to the class interests of the working classes during that time while the Church of England tended to side with the interests

of the upper classes. Eliot focuses on the religious concepts of confession and absolution and how the formulation of these concepts postulates an interiority that is not always accorded to working-class subjectivity in fiction. In Victorian England, both public and private life was embedded in a religious framework notwithstanding the individual's own beliefs or lack thereof; in such a pre-secular context, religious practices, discourses and experiences permeate and inform all aspects of life since religion itself is the context and the framework of all discourse and meaning. As a result, in all of these novels, class issues are expressed within the framework of a discourse from which religion is inseparable. Arguing against the received "loss of faith" narrative in scholarship which, until recently, characterized the culture and literature of the Victorian period as one marked by religious doubt and gradual loss of faith, I demonstrate in reading these novels that tracing the intersections of class and religion yields a greater understanding of how social issues are represented in the novels of the 1850s. I distinguish my grouping together of these novels within the scope of this work both in a chronological sense, and also in the sense that they engage with their subject matter in ways that are informed by, but different to their 1840s predecessors.

### 1.1 Class and religion in Victorian Studies

In the context of Victorian Studies, it is noted with regard to social class in Britain that to conceive of society as being comprised of classes rather than ranks and orders itself is a phenomenon that emerged only in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution; in other words, it is a modern way of thinking about how society is organized. Historian Asa Briggs (1960) notes that "the concept of social 'class' with all its attendant terminology was a product of the large-scale economic and social

changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (p. 43). Regarding the competing understandings of social hierarchy such as rank versus class, David Cannadine (1998/2000) argues that instead of the discourse of class replacing the discourse of rank entirely, it incorporated elements of its predecessor, which also contributed to the complexity of how social hierarchy was formulated in Victorian England (p. 79). In describing “how powerfully social life [was] constructed by the hierarchy of social class” in Victorian England, and how Victorians failed to make sense of their experiences without its aid, James Eli Adams (2005) argues that although there was an upper-, middle- and lower-class division in the way society was organized, both the terms of inclusion (or exclusion) and means of social mobility were modulated by factors other than the strictly economic, and which “seem[ed] arcane or downright arbitrary – but nonetheless powerful” (pp. 48-49). The incorporation of older elements of social hierarchy into the framework of 19<sup>th</sup>-century social class makes sense in a broader context, as well. An often contested point with regard to class is whether, or to what extent, factors other than the material affect its formation. More classically Marxian accounts argue for a distinctly material framework; for instance, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1848/2011) claim that although all human history is the history of a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed, with the Industrial Revolution this struggle specifically became a power struggle between the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie, and those who only have their own labor power, or the proletariat. However, there are alternative accounts of class theory; and one which particularly relates to the above formulation of overlapping discourses is Weber’s three-component theory of stratification. According to Waters and Waters (2015), social class in Weber’s formulation emerges from the interactions among class, power and

status; and while class has to do with one's relation to the means of production, status is a reflection of the individual's perceived prestige, or honor in society (pp. 12-13). Weber's model thus anticipates Cannadine's argument; elsewhere, Weber (1904/1992) more specifically explores the relationship between social class and religion, such as in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where he demonstrates that what made the bourgeoisie was not merely their accumulation of wealth. Weber argues that certain Protestant doctrines and beliefs, such as the idea of a calling or vocation, as well as the belief that material success was a reflection of having been elected by God, affected how Protestants conceived of their wealth. Whereas in other times and places wealth was seen as something to be hoarded or spent, such beliefs induced Protestants to view their accumulated wealth as capital to be perpetually expanded (pp. 47-78). As such, there is a correspondence between how social class is often contextualized in Victorian Studies and in broader discussions of class theory.

There's a rich body of scholarship from the 1970s onwards that is concerned with the ways in which the practices and ideology of industrialism interacted with class formation and hierarchies. Although these works tend to focus on social-problem fiction, they often formulate the genre in differing and inclusive ways; as such, their arguments are applicable in a wider context, as well. James Richard Simmons, Jr. (2002) offers an introduction to the social-problem novels with a focus on industrial, or factory novels, where he outlines the factory working conditions from early modern England onwards to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and discusses the more obscure beginnings of the genre in the 1830s as much as he focuses on the better-known novels of the 1840s. Earlier during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars such as Louis Cazamian (1903/1973), Arnold Kettle (1958/1963) and Raymond Williams

(1958/1960) contributed to defining the parameters of the genre. In “Industrial Culture and the Victorian Novel,” Joseph Childers (2001) argues that the production and dissemination of goods and information became similar in several ways during the period, and that for the middle and upper classes, novels became a way to learn about industrialism, as well as the working class it produced, in addition to acting as a demarcation line between the working class and the others. Martha Vicinus’ (1974) *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Literature* analyzes working-class literature, such as broadsides and ballads, propaganda literature, Chartist literature and dialect literature of the North. In her work, Vicinus aims to demonstrate that the working classes had quite a robust literary tradition of their own which stood apart from more middle-class forms literature. In *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, where P.J. Keating (1971) looks at the working classes as depicted in Victorian literature, he argues that a proliferation of such literature occurred both in the 1840s, when Chartism and other reform movements created general agitation, and also in the 1880s, when there was widespread debate regarding urban slum conditions and Socialism. And finally, in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867*, Catherine Gallagher (1985) analyzes the novel form between the First and the Second Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, and focusing on a group of social-problem novels, argues that the latent tensions inherent to the realist novel between concepts such as freedom and determinism, private and public, or facts and values became “explicit contradictions” in the framework of these industrial or condition-of-England novels. In addition to the works cited above, among the other scholarly works in this area, some that are either central to the study of the genre, or which have particular bearing on the work at hand, are Sheila M. Smith’s *The Other Nation: The Poor in*

*English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (1980), where she looks at how middle-class novelists have represented the poor in social-problem novels; Joseph Kestner's *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women, 1827-1867* (1985), in which he argues that social-problem novels were written predominantly by women as a way to participate in the public sphere; Kate Flint's *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problems and Social Change* (1987), in which she contextualizes social-problem fiction within a wider body of Victorian writing related to social issues; and Rosemary Bodenheimer's *The Politics of Story in Victorian Fiction* (1988), where she argues that social-problem novels developed specific strategies in order to manage the insoluble social problems they narrated; Mary Poovey, in *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (1995), argues that social-problem novels feminized discourses otherwise embedded in a masculine and public context in a similar fashion to Kestner, while Josephine Guy's *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, The Individual and Communal Life* (1996), argues that the limitations of the social-problems were owing to their social and intellectual contexts, rather than to the individual failings of the novelists; in this, her position is also a response to earlier theorists such as Kettle and Williams, who tended to attribute the limitations to the novelists themselves. Finally, Patrick Brantlinger's *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867* (1977) focuses on a wider "literature of reform," rather than the social-problem novel, in tracing how throughout the 1830 and 1840s up to the 1850s and 1860s, the demand for direct political reform in literature changed and ultimately disappeared. These are a few seminal works among an expansive body of scholarship, which are nonetheless expressive of the wider tendencies and consensuses, as well as sites of contention.

In comparison to class, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century religion was largely absent from literary criticism in general, and from Victorian Studies in particular. This is interesting since religion occupied a fairly central role in Victorian culture. J. Hillis Miller's (1963) influential *Disappearance of God*, in which he reads important literary works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the framework of loss of faith, is emblematic of this perspective which downplays the importance of religion in Victorian culture and literature. This critical and scholarly narrative of Victorian secularization has itself received critical attention. In his "Victorian Literature and the Variety of Religious Forms" (2018), Mark Knight offers a concise account of the "religious turn", briefly in a general sense, and more extensively within the field of Victorian Studies and 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature. Charles LaPorte's "Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization" (2013) similarly contests earlier 20<sup>th</sup>-century narratives regarding Victorian secularization with references to turning points within criticism and literary studies. More extensively, Timothy Larsen has also contested the Victorian secularization narrative and contributed to the religious turn by arguing for the variety and depth of Victorian religious life in a number of books including *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (2004), *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (2006) and *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (2011). *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion* (2016), edited by Mark Knight, offers a variety of perspectives regarding the subject in its Part I, which is titled "The Modern Story of Literature and Religion."

Although there have been studies of religion in Victorian literature throughout the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Margaret Mason's *The Victorian Vision* (1961), Valentine Cunningham's *Everywhere Spoken Against* (1975) and

Robert Lee Wolff's *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977) among others, we really see a resurgence in the field only in the 2000s, with the 2006 publication of Emma Mason and Mark Knight's *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction*, geared towards a general audience of literary scholars and students marking a turning point in the popularization of the subject. Mason (1961) and Wolff (1977) are both early examples of scholarly interest in Victorian religion and literature, although they rather focus on briefly surveying the variety of sects and faith groups and the Victorian religious novels, and don't place an emphasis on the role of religion in literature at large. Joseph Ellis Baker's *The Novel and the Oxford Movement* (1932/1965), looks at the development of Tractarian fiction throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Valentine Cunningham's *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (1975) offers an incisive and discerning account of both the Dissent movement, the various sects of which are often confused with one another, and also of novels in which Dissent is represented. George P. Landow's *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows; Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (1980/2014), analyzes how biblical typology, an ancient hermeneutical tradition, informed Victorian culture and literature. Elisabeth Jay's *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (1979) is a comprehensive account of Evangelicalism and its representation in the Victorian novel, whereas in *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (1986), she represents the variety of faith and doubt in 19<sup>th</sup> century England through an array of contemporary documents. Royal W. Rhodes's *The Lion and the Cross: Early Christianity in Victorian Novels* (1995) looks at how Victorian religious debates and controversies were reformulated in the context of early Christianity in a series of religious novels. Stephen Prickett's *Romanticism and Religion: The*

*Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (1976/2008) discovers in a number of 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers and theologians ranging from Matthew Arnold to F.D. Maurice the formative influence of the two Romantic poets; a connection which becomes particularly relevant with regard to Coleridge and the Broad Church. Prickett's *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (1986/2011) holds that from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Bible and religious language attains a poetic status in the English tradition. Such are some of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century works produced in the field; in "Victorian Literature and the Variety of Religious Forms" (2018), Mark Knight offers quite an extensive survey of the field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, among which are Patrick R. O'Malley's *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance and Victorian Gothic Culture* (2006), where he argues that in the Gothic novel, both Catholicism and sexual difference were represented as fundamentally foreign and inimical to both Britishness and Protestantism; Michael Wheeler, in *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (2006), explores how the enmities and tensions between Protestants and Catholics informed Victorian culture and literature; J. Russell Perkin's *Theology and the Victorian Novel* (2009) offers an overview of religion and theology as it was represented in a variety of canonical 19<sup>th</sup>-century novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Thomas Hardy; Norman Vance's *Bible & Novel: Narrative Authority & the Death of God* (2013) explores whether novels replaced the Bible in the Victorian period in terms of cultural centrality and authority; Ilana Blumberg's *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (2013) formulates morality as represented in Victorian fiction as a confrontation between Christian theology and modern economic theory; Miriam Elizabeth Burstein's *Victorian Reformations: Historical Fiction and Religious Controversy, 1820–1900* (2014) looks at how a

number of religious novelists wrote historical fiction about the Reformation in order to discuss contemporary religious controversies in an argument reminiscent of Rhodes (1995) while Frances Knight's *Victorian Christianity at the Fin de Siècle: The Culture of English Religion in a Decadent Age* (2015) explores how Christianity influenced and interacted with the elements of fin de siècle culture such as the aesthetic movement. These are some representative works in what is now a rapidly expanding and productive field.

My dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship on class and industrialism in Victorian studies by situating these issues into the contexts made possible by the burgeoning field of Victorian religion and literature. In other words, I argue that the emergent understanding of religion as an overarching and organizing force in Victorian literature casts new light on how we relate social issues of the 1840s and '50s to the literature of the period.

## 1.2 Religion in Victorian England

The variety of religious life in Victorian England paralleled the complexities of the class system. According to the religious census of 1851, conducted in England and Wales by the government, out of a population of 17.9 million, about 10 million attended religious services; of this ten million, 5,292,551 attended Church of England services, 4,536,264 attended the other Protestant churches, and 383,630 attended Catholic services (Chadwick, 1966, p. 365). Protestant churches and chapels outside the Church of England covered a wide range of dissenting and nonconformist practices from Methodism to Unitarianism, while similar tendencies were also represented within the Church of England by the Low Church wing. Meanwhile, the High Church party within the Church of England, also known as the Anglo-

Catholics, accorded a higher importance to the Catholic heritage of the Anglican faith and as such, stood closer to Roman Catholicism, with some members of the party even converting to Roman Catholicism in later years. Between the two parties within the Church of England was a more latitudinarian outlook which came to be known as the Broad Church from the 1840s onwards, even though its intellectual sources stretched back further in time. Belonging to these faith groups interacted with and modified the experience of social class in innumerable ways. Roman Catholicism, for instance, was a minority faith, practiced by some of the richest families who had refused to convert during Henry VIII's Reformation, as well as the Irish immigrants who arrived much later, and who constituted the lowest rung of the social ladder. Unitarianism, with its emphasis on rational dissent, was more favored by the newly emerging industrial and urban elites, especially of the Northern manufacturing districts, whereas Methodism, when it first emerged, spread among the lower classes of "the newly industrializing towns whom the complacent clergy of the comparatively stagnant eighteenth-century Church of England largely ignored" (Wolff, 1977, p. 16). Meanwhile, Evangelicalism found support with the wealthy middle classes of London and the South more than anyone else. Examples abound, but it is consistently clear that religion played an important role in defining that part of social class that, while related to it, yet could not be reduced to the economic conditions.

In England, religion had always been a structural part of politics. In 1534, Henry VIII renounced the spiritual authority of the Pope and the Church in Rome because the Pope would not annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon; by an Act of Supremacy passed by the Parliament, Henry VIII was established as the "Supreme Head" of the Church of England, now a separate entity from the Roman Catholic

Church. The Act designated not only Henry but his successors in this capacity.

Although his Catholic daughter and successor Mary I repealed the Act for a brief while, a second Act of Supremacy passed at the start of Elizabeth I's reign reinstated the status of the English monarchs as the heads of the Church of England.

Additionally, first in Henry VIII's reign, and then in Elizabeth I's, the institution of an Oath of Supremacy meant that the prerequisite of taking public or ecclesiastical office was recognizing the monarch of England as the head of the Church, as well.

The doctrinal basis and framework of the Anglican Church was fleshed out to some degree during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, particularly through the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-Nine Articles later incorporated in it, and which regulated the doctrines and the practices of the Church of England. Of note is the fact that the schism was occasioned by political, rather than religious controversy, which meant that although there had been movements in England, such as Lollardy, that disagreed with Roman Catholic doctrines, the reformation of the Church of England was not predicated on such popular sentiment to start with. Rather, doctrinal and practical arrangements made during the reigns of several monarchs consolidated the Church of England into a religio-political entity which exhibited both Protestant and Catholic features, such as centering the authority of the Bible, but also, according a certain degree of importance to Church Tradition (Knight & Mason, 2006, p. 17).

Robert Lee Wolff (1977) notes how "the [Thirty-Nine] Articles represent an effort to strike a balance between what the divines of the sixteenth century felt to be the Roman Catholic overemphasis on the importance of good works, which suggested that one could earn merit and forgiveness (justification) by them, and the Lutheran underemphasis on works, which suggested that faith alone could save" (p. 255). This

duality sometimes took the form of compromise, and at other times of tension and strife within the Church of England.

The representation of more than one sectarian or doctrinal tendency within a state Church had an impact which went beyond determining the specific kind of moral, spiritual, and intellectual influence a vicar had over his congregation in fulfilling his pastoral duties. The multiplicity of doctrines and denominations set the parameters of the framework in which religious, intellectual, and political issues could be publicly debated in a socially acceptable manner.

Despite the doctrinal diversity, the Church of England had a much more directly institutional and official role in shaping policy and politics. This was possible through various Test Acts, which imposed civil disabilities upon non-members of the Church of England by preventing them from taking public office or attending Oxford and Cambridge, and also through seats held by bishops in the House of Lords by virtue of their ecclesiastical offices. Designated as “Lords Spiritual”, bishops of the established Church of England held upwards of 20 seats in the House of Lords in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *Victorian Church*, Owen Chadwick (1966) describes how in 1831 the First Reform Bill, put forward by the Whig parliament and which aimed to replace the representation of the rotten boroughs with newly-established seats for the industrial cities and extend suffrage to property holders, was rejected by the House of Lords when a majority of the bishops voted against it: “Except for [one] ... all the bishops had been nominated under Tory governments ... Two bishops ... voted for the reform bill. The archbishop and twenty of his colleagues voted in the majority. Six bishops abstained ... The government had not expected so wholesale a defection of prelates” (pp. 25-26). The Reform Bill was passed one year later, becoming the First Reform Act, but its 1831 voting is an

illustrative instance of how religious and ecclesiastical power intersected with, and acted on political power. This concrete link is useful in understanding that religion acted as force not only in the context of certain discourses which circulated in the public sphere, but also as a considerable influence on the lawmakers.

Since each chapter of this dissertation is organized through the framework of a specific denomination, some further background regarding these groups is required. What follows is a detailed account of the diverse movements and denominations which existed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England. Many of these movements, strands, and denominations began in reaction to the established Church of England, including those within the Church itself. I will outline the historical emergence and doctrinal characteristics of the High Church, both prior to and during the Oxford Movement, the Low Church and Evangelicalism, the Broad Church, Dissent in general, Unitarianism, and Methodism.

In the Church of England during the Victorian period, two tendencies or parties prevailed, these being the High and the Low Churches, while a third and much more loosely-affiliated group, called Broad Church by others rather than themselves, emerged during the 1850s and fought a confused rearguard action seemingly against lax religious doctrines, but really against disestablishment and in favor of the status quo. The High Church, on the one hand, also known as Anglo-Catholicism, Puseyism, Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement, gained power from the 1830s onwards within the established Church of England. As a movement, it prioritized the Catholic heritage of the Anglican Church, and focused on tradition, ritual, and mystery over the more Protestant aspects of the faith such as Biblical authority, the priesthood of all believers or the role of reason.

During the Victorian period, the meaning of High Church underwent a radical change. Prior to the Oxford Movement of the 1830s, and particularly during the “godless eighteenth century” – as the narrator of *Alton Locke* imagines his High Church interlocutor saying – “high and dry” was an alternative, if slightly derisive, designation for the High Church. “High” carried a dual meaning: the High Churchmen were close and unquestioning adherents of the high theology of Anglicanism, but also, this position was associated with the aristocracy. “Dry” indicated relatively simple and unadorned religious services, as distinguished from the elaborate ritualism of the Roman Catholic Church. In practice, however, the High Church during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries came to be associated with the outward observance of religion as civic duty or tradition, especially by the upper classes, without much regard for its faith-related aspect. It was against this understanding of the established Church that Evangelical Dissent and Methodism gained power and popularity in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, this Evangelical backlash inspired and engendered its counterpart among High Church ranks in time. In the 1830s, a group of Oxford men came together to both defend the established Church against proposed reforms in a more liberal and secular direction, and also to rejuvenate it through a reformulation of its more traditional and Catholic aspects.

A wave of reforms altered the political and religious landscape of England during the 1830s. In 1828, the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed, ending the discrimination against Dissenters in membership of town corporations as well as military and civil service, while the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 did the same for Roman Catholics. The Reform Act of 1832 considerably altered the electoral system, although not to the extent desired by the Chartists. In 1833, the Church

Temporalities Act reorganized the Church of Ireland and reduced the number of its bishoprics, a move against which John Keble preached his famous “National Apostasy” sermon on 14 July 1833. In this sermon, Keble railed not just against the reorganization of the Church of Ireland but also against the reform efforts of the government regarding the established Church, and the appropriation of ecclesiastical power. Keble’s sermon is often considered to mark the beginning of the Oxford Movement. Not long after this event, in September of the same year, John Henry Newman, another Oxford divine, published an anonymous tract underlining the problem of spiritual authority experienced by the established Church in the face of these reform efforts (Jay, 1986, p. 26). More of these tracts followed, from which the adherents of the Oxford Movement received their appellation of “Tractarians”. In Tract 90 (Newman, Pusey, & Keble, 1841/1890), Newman argued that the Thirty-Nine Articles, the doctrinal foundations of the Church of England, were not incompatible with Roman Catholicism and that the Church of England was more Catholic than Protestant in nature.<sup>1</sup> The resulting outrage put an end to these publications. In 1842, Newman retired to a monastic life and, in 1845, converted to Roman Catholicism. Some followed Newman to the Roman Catholic Church, but for many others, the Anglo-Catholicism formulated by the Oxford Movement was a meaningful position in itself. Edward Bouverie Pusey, another prominent figure within the Oxford Movement, was one such. While he never converted to the Church

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Chadwick’s *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (1960) explores the various aspects of the Oxford Movement in the context of the nineteenth century, including its relationship to Catholicism. Peter Benedict Nockles’ *The Oxford Movement In Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (1994) offers an account of the High Church from its eighteenth-century “high and dry” formulation to the revitalized Tractarianism of the 1830s. Simon A. Skinner’s *Tractarians and the ‘Condition of England’: The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (2004) contests the idea that Tractarians were not interested in the social problems of England. For an overview of Tractarian fiction, see “Chapter 2, The High Church and Some Opponents” (pp. 111-200) in Robert Lee Wolff’s *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977).

of Rome, Pusey spoke of the “high estimate” he had of things that set the High Church apart from the other Church parties, such as its focus on the centrality of ritual, tradition and the Church Fathers.

Centered on authority and ritual as it was, the High Church was not really suited to represent any but an establishment position with regard to politics; after all, the Oxford Movement was a reaction to, and correction of, the theological disengagement of the old school of the High Church, and not its aristocratic tendencies. An account of this phenomenon is perhaps most readily evident in the novels of the period associated with the movement. In *The Novel and the Oxford Movement*, Joseph Ellis Baker (1965) utilizes William Gresley’s novel *Bernard Leslie* as an illustration of both the differences and continuities between the two incarnations of the High Church:

[In the novel] the narrator says that his father, though a layman, was a very sincere member of the established Church, and had a just abhorrence of the French Revolution. He “threw all his influence to the side of order and Christianity.” But we do not have here the old dry spirit of an upper class arrogantly enjoying the fruits of the earth guaranteed to them by the law, like Thackeray’s old aristocratic dragons. Instead, we are urged to paternal care for the poor, counter-agitation, enthusiasm, an attempt to solve social problems not by a reorganization of society but within the existing frame (to whose support the new school brings the assertion of Divine sanction). (p. 34)

According to Baker (1965), the Oxford Movement allied itself with Toryism and a wide range of conservative principles, or positions, such as a suspicion of democracy, a paternalist attitude towards the lower classes, fear and hatred of socialism and Chartism, “belief in the Divine Right of Kings, and a devotion to the memory of Charles I” (p. 41). Clearly, none of these principles lend themselves very well to anything but the maintenance of the status quo, let alone supporting the emancipation of the working classes, or any reform/progress oriented political outlook.

In at least one aspect, however, the Oxford Movement broke the mold, however incidentally, in terms of the emancipation of the women, a class of people also marked by civil disabilities in Victorian society. This was the establishment of religious sisterhoods for the first time within the Church of England since its foundation. The first of these sisterhoods, or religious communities, the Park Village Community, was opened in 1845 with the support of Pusey and more followed in later years. Although there was widespread societal suspicion of these communities because of their appeal to the young women who were otherwise expected to marry, have children, and follow the socially sanctioned path of life, these institutions provided women with the opportunity to come together in female-only spaces, and carve out a life different from what was expected of them. The reestablishment of Anglo-Catholic female communities kindled concerns and discussions related to women eschewing their social duties, which were often formulated in anti-Catholic terms. These discussions are reflected in the all-female community of *Villette's* boarding school, as well as through the nun figure, as gender and class constitute the framework of the novel's religious issues.

At the other end of the spectrum from the High Church party stood the Low Church, so called because of the relatively little importance it placed on the more ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of worship. The spiritual progenitors of the Low Church worshippers, or the Evangelicals as they were otherwise known, were the Puritans of the seventeenth century who brought a Calvinist interpretation to the Protestant doctrine of total depravity, which holds that all humankind is born dead in sin as a result of the fall and the original sin, and that only God's grace can bring salvation. The Calvinist position held by the Evangelicals claimed that God's grace was irresistible, which is to say, granted only to the elect; whereas the opposing

Arminian position, endorsed by the official Anglican doctrine, held that it was prevenient, which meant that it allowed people to use their free will to embrace or reject salvation. Owen Chadwick (1966) notes that even when Evangelicals disagreed with Calvinist doctrines, “they [still] loved the song of sovereign grace, and respected Calvinist dogmas where they did not share them, and sheathed their daggers when they met Calvinists” (p. 441). Thus distinguished from the mainstream theology of the Church of England, the Low Church party elected to remain among its ranks nonetheless, as opposed to its Dissenting or Nonconformist cousins such as the Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, even if it was much closer to such sects in terms of both doctrine and practice than it was to the other parties within the Established Church.

Remaining within the Church of England was a choice motivated by access to the power and the influence wielded by the Establishment. At the same time, however, ideological preferences also prevailed. “[Evangelicalism’s] friendliness to dissent had edges,” notes Chadwick (1966): “Leading evangelicals were attached to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England. They exalted the prayer book, valued the establishment, resented assaults upon a state church ... Most of them were conservative in politics and wanted the established church to control education” (pp. 441-442). The Evangelicals’ choice to stay within the Church of England bore fruit in that two leaders in particular, among many others produced by the movement, left their mark not only on Evangelicalism but also on English politics. William Wilberforce, the Yorkshire MP, was the first of these; he was “the central figure in that celebrated group of Evangelicals ... whose most famous achievement was the abolition first of the slave trade, and then of all slavery from the British Empire,” notes Ian Bradley in his extensive study on the movement, *The Call to Seriousness:*

*The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (1976/2006, p. 13). Just as Evangelicalism became associated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the abolitionist movement, it became a champion of the various reform movements in the 1830s and '40s. Lord Shaftesbury replaced Wilberforce as the central figure in the movement following his death, and he championed “the cause of the factory workers, and under [his] leadership the Evangelicals considerably extended their philanthropic activities and consolidated their hold within the church” (Bradley, 1976/2006, p. 13). Indeed, the humanitarian and reformist activities of the Evangelicals ranged far and wide, even if they had their own pious agenda in mind as they fought for these political gains. Such efforts were made for mass literacy and the limitation of working hours, not particularly because it was the humane thing to do, but because literacy and leisure time would enable lower-class people to read the Bible and keep the Sabbath.

No matter the rationale behind their activities, the Evangelicals were diligent in the way they reached out to the working classes. A prominent and early figure within the movement, the philanthropist and writer Hannah More popularized the format of the cheap tract, or the broadsheet, with which she intended to “counter the dissemination of atheist and radical views in the aftermath of the French Revolution” (Bradley, 1976/2006, p. 38). Targeting the lower classes in particular, these tracts contained dramatic stories with Evangelical themes like conversion and redemption. Accessible as they were, some level of literacy was still clearly needed to be able to read these and similar tracts; however, the Evangelicals were active on that front. At a time when there were not enough affordable or free schools, the Evangelicals were the ones to set up Sunday schools where many people learned how to read. The urban counterpart of the Sunday school was the “ragged school”, which Evangelicals set up in the “slum areas of large cities” and which “provide[d] simple instruction in

the Bible for those children who were turned away from more genteel day and Sunday schools on account of their filthy appearance and extreme poverty” (p. 43). The establishment of the Young Men’s Christian Association or the Y.M.C.A. in 1846, still active to this day, was another effort on the Evangelicals’ part to provide for and convert the working classes (p. 44). The first president of this association, which originally targeted young men in urban areas, was Lord Shaftesbury; the organization intended to keep these young men away from the various vices that abound urban environments.

The humanitarian and philanthropic efforts of the Evangelicals were not limited to these achievements. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Evangelicals also successfully campaigned for criminal law reform and prison reform, as well as to outlaw the employment of child chimney sweepers. With Shaftesbury’s leadership, they also realized significant factory reforms, which improved the working conditions of the factory workers. These reforms were carried out with a view to improving the moral and spiritual conditions of the workers rather than humanitarian concerns or political justice and equality. Nevertheless, as Bradley (1976/2006) argues, the Evangelicals’ efforts succeeded in “establish[ing] it as the right and duty of the state to interfere in the organization of industry and commerce to protect the interests of the workers”, thus paving the way for the welfare state (p. 131).

As with the other parties within the Church of England, the Evangelicals’ reform activities targeting the working classes took the form of paternalism and rarely, if ever, recognized the agency of the working classes themselves. The Evangelicals were engaged and vigorous in the way they reached out to the working classes, and their activities did overall have some beneficial effect on the masses, even if they were not so successful in converting them. By contrast, Bradley

(1976/2006) discusses how although Evangelicals targeted every walk and class of society, the conversion of the royalty and the aristocracy was particularly important for them. One reason for this was that they thought the conversion of the aristocracy would encourage the lower classes to also do so; expediency was another factor, as the Methodists had concentrated their efforts on the lower classes, the aristocracy remained ripe for conversion (p. 33). They were successful in their efforts, and “by the middle of the nineteenth century there cannot have been more than a hundred or so upper-class families in which one member at least had not been converted to Evangelical Christianity” (p. 33). Evangelicals did indeed accomplish a lot and spread their influence far and wide in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as Bradley argues, between the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 1860 “there was hardly an area of life which they did not touch and affect” (p. 13). After this date, the character of the movement radically changed, and as a result, it lost its influential hold over society, becoming a narrow party. While it ruled, however, Evangelicalism ruled far and wide. <sup>2</sup>

Broad Church, the third significant party within the Church of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is less easy to define compared to the other two, if only because it referred to a much less organized group associated by the similarity of their aims. A significant starting point for this movement was a need to respond to the threat posed by High Criticism. As German Higher Criticism – so called because it prioritized a historical rather than textual, or “lower” approach – became fashionable on the

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<sup>2</sup> D.W. Bebbington’s *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1988) is the definitive study of Evangelicalism in Britain, while Timothy Larsen’s “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (2007) is a good introduction to the subject. Ian Bradley’s *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (1976) is an accessible study of how Evangelicalism affected the life and culture of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Elisabeth Jay’s *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (1979) and more recently, Mark Knight’s *Good Words: Evangelicalism and the Victorian Novel* (2019) are among the works which explore the impact Evangelicalism had on the Victorian novel.

continent in the 1820s and its influence spread to England over the next few decades, the question of Biblical inspiration became a central problem in theology. This mode of scholarship approached the Bible like any other historical document or classical text. Rather than being divinely inspired, parts or the entirety of the Bible, according to the Higher Critics, had been composed or corrupted by people. For the English, this dangerous and heretical tendency was perhaps most succinctly represented by David Friedrich Strauss, whose *Life of Jesus* was published in German in 1835 and an English translation by George Eliot published in 1846 in England. Strauss argued that rather than being factual, the miracles narrated in the Bible were invented by the early proponents of Christianity in order to represent the New Testament as the antitype – or the fulfillment – of the Old Testament, whose types, or truths, prefigured the truth of Christ and his religion. Strauss was not an unbeliever, and he did not gainsay the truth of Christianity as a dogmatic system; however, he did take issue with the historical accuracy of the events of the Bible. Throughout the thirties and the forties, the name of Strauss became something of a bogeyman to the religious establishment in England and Lord Shaftesbury, the prominent Evangelical leader, denounced his book when its English translation was published. The reason why the ideas of Strauss were so anathema to the religious establishment in England was also due to the Evangelical ascendancy within the Church around the time, and the Evangelical emphasis on the Bible as the sole authority in matters of faith and doctrine. There was in Evangelicalism no deference to an ecclesiastical or clerical body, or to a framework of tradition and ritual enough to counterbalance this emphasis on the Bible, which was the Word of God; as such, a threat to status of the Bible as being divinely inspired was a threat to the faith as a whole.

The Broad Church as it stood in the forties and the fifties was, among other things, chiefly a response to such developments in Biblical criticism, as well as in the sciences such as geology and biology, which challenged or contradicted the traditionally held truths of the Bible and Christianity. Rather than ignore or outright denounce as heresy these challenges, the proponents of the Broad Church movement sought to accommodate the points raised into a revised Church doctrine so as to prevent the wholesale collapse of the established religious and social order before the new. The Romantic poet and intellectual Samuel Taylor Coleridge figured as the spiritual and intellectual forerunner of a movement that became influential in how several of the Broad Church proponents formulated their response to the onslaught of Higher Criticism. According to Coleridge, who had returned to the Anglican Church after many forays into various avenues, including the distinctly un-mystical and rationalist Unitarianism, faith was an emotional rather than an intellectual affair where the need and want to believe preceded and grounded all else. It is not difficult to see how this perspective conveniently lends itself to a blanket defense against the textual and historical criticism levelled at the Bible: if the acceptance of its truths is something that happens on the level of emotion rather than the intellect, then it does not greatly matter if some or all parts were changed over time. Wolff writes that “For anyone feeling as Coleridge felt, it no longer matters *what* scholars say about the time of composition of any portion of Scripture. One *feels* that the Bible is inspired, and that feeling withstands any new textual discovery or interpretation” (Wolff, 1977, p. 253). Coleridge’s position on this issue, as well as his formulation of society as an organic whole, with the clergy having a responsibility to guide the people, had a formative influence on how Broad Church figures such as Charles Kingsley, Frederick Denison Maurice and Benjamin Jowett determined their stance against the

coming wave of the new. Much more liberal and accommodating in this regard compared to the rigid Evangelical position, these Cambridge and Oxford divines were nonetheless staunchly in favor of the Establishment and did what they did to help it adapt to the times and withstand the winds of change.

Since it is not as strictly defined a group as the Oxford Movement or Evangelicalism, it is possible to approach the Broad Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from various angles and highlight this or that characteristic as its defining quality. Among these critical approaches has been a tendency to foreground the inclusivity and liberalism of the Broad Church as its central tenet; Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School and educational reformer was another influential forerunner of the Broad Church movement. He argued for the inclusion of as many Christians as possible, including the Dissenters, in the Anglican Church (Wolff, 1977, p. 257). It is important to note, however, that for Arnold such inclusivity meant that a moderate approach to Christianity, as free of dogmas as possible, ought to be adopted by all, not that the Church of England should embrace the extremes of Tractarianism or Evangelicalism. As such, “liberal” as a qualifier clearly has its limits in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscape of faith, and while it might distinguish the Broad Church adherents from the decidedly more dogmatic or rigid High and Low Churchmen, it does not really denote absolute freedom of thought, or faith.

Especially in the context of an issue such as social class and changing social dynamics, the truly relevant and decisive aspect of the Broad Church was the attitude it displayed in the face of change – not just theological or scientific change, but also change in the form of social unrest and the reforms which sought to address the unrest. The High Church, we briefly saw, was reactionary towards the reforms which sought to curb the powers of the Established Church, whereas the Low Church

Evangelicals were staunch reformists themselves, with an eye to bringing the working classes into the fold rather than to emancipating them. The Broad Church response to social change underwent several forms, but at around the late forties and early fifties, Christian Socialism was the name under which it formulated its opinions regarding the issue. F.D. Maurice, who formulated Christian Socialism alongside Charles Kingsley and John Malcolm Ludlow, responded to “the growing social misery of the late forties, anxious to Christianize the socialism then beginning to spread among hungry and discontented English laborers” (Wolff, 1977, p. 268). In line with Coleridge’s ideas on the organic society and the heightened role of the clergy, Maurice – as well as Kingsley, as his novels bore witness – not only attempted to associate and temper socialism with Christianity, but also to evoke a mediaeval sense of society as a universal brotherhood in Christ, rather than as an amalgam of social groups with competing interests. As Maurice formulated it, Christian Socialism argued for the brotherhood of all people, including the working classes, in Christ, in “a fellowship larger, more irrespective of outward distinctions, more democratical, than any which you can create” (as cited in Jay, 1986, p. 63). In Maurice’s memorable phrase, the movement positioned itself against the “unsocial Christians and the unchristian socialists,” which is to say that it saw itself in the role of counteracting the undesirable hold over the working classes of Evangelicalism on the one hand, and of socialism and Chartism on the other (p. 63). Christian Socialism drew the ire of some conservatives; for instance, J. W. Croker, the eminent statesman and contributor to the *Quarterly Review*, savagely attacked Maurice and Kingsley for being “detestable” Communists and revolutionaries (Jones, 2003, p. 178). And yet, the Christian Socialism formulated by Maurice was much better suited to absorb and dampen the revolutionary energy sweeping across the continent and across England

rather than to kindle it (p. 178). His frequent disagreements and eventual falling-out with the much more practically-minded and socialist Ludlow on issues of organization and action also encourage the conclusion that the socialism of the movement, as formulated by Maurice, was nominal more than anything else, and that Christianity prevailed against this nominal socialism.

Although the revolutions of 1848 which swept across Europe did not reach England, Chartism had by then been on the political scene for more than a decade and it threatened the complacency of the establishment. Chartism was a workers' movement established in 1838 which aimed to achieve political reform. Chartists took their name from The People's Charter of 1838, in which they made six demands: adult male suffrage, the secret ballot, equal electoral districts, abolition of property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs and for annual elections. To achieve their ends, the Chartists organized and agitated, and petitioned the government. The movement lost its momentum after the petition of April 1848 was presented to the government to no effect. As such, Chartism "failed" in the immediate sense; at the same time, however, by 1918, all of their demands except for annual elections had been met. At any rate, such discontent and search for reform was prevalent among the English working classes at around the time Maurice came up with Christian Socialism, and yet his emphasis, as we noted, was on Christianity rather than socialism. Maurice removed Ludlow from his post as the editor of the paper, the *Christian Socialist*, in 1851 and so Ludlow was replaced by Thomas Hughes, the author of the famous public school novel *Tom Brown's School Days*, to whom the Victorian iteration of Muscular Christianity is attributed. Shortly after, Maurice took his interests elsewhere and the Christian Socialist movement eventually died out, as the agitation for reform to which it responded had also more or less disappeared in

the fifties. The Muscular Christianity of Hughes is perhaps the final formulation and reinterpretation of the Broad Church ethos, albeit in a much changed form: drawing attention to the fact that Hughes was a student of Thomas Arnold, Elizabeth Jay (1986) adds that “in Hughes’s novel, the inward moral seriousness found in Dr Arnold and his closest pupils is transformed into the ethics of the team spirit and ‘manly virtues’, whilst these men’s anti-dogmatism is misinterpreted as anti-intellectualism” (p. 64). The tendency to anti-intellectualism as a sort of worst practice inherent to the core principles of the group is also present in the Low Church, as Bradley notes (1976/2006, pp. 15-16). In the case of the Broad Church, it was an extension of their anti-dogmatic outlook, whereas the Evangelicals’ anti-intellectualism, when it showed itself, stemmed from an emphasis on theirs being a “religion of the heart”, as opposed to perceived intellectualism and dryness of the Anglican faith in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

As well as these three parties within the Church which vied for dominance, a variety of Protestant practices existed outside of the establishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, commonly referred to as Dissent or Nonconformism. Earlier we mentioned how the religious census of 1851 revealed that the number of Dissenting Protestants who did not attend Church of England services was only some 750,000 short of those who did. Even so, these statistics don’t portray the situation in its totality: “[t]hey omit

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<sup>3</sup> Ted E. Jones’ *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement* (2003) is a comprehensive introduction to the history of the Broad Church, with the obligatory exploration of Coleridge’s influence on the movement. David M. Thompson’s *Cambridge Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Enquiry, Controversy and Truth* (2008) evaluates key aspects of Broad Church doctrine as it emerged in the Cambridge context, and in “The Spirit of Comprehension: Examining the Broad Church Synthesis in England” (2006) Jeremy Morris challenges the idea that Broad Church represented a generic inclusivity without regard for doctrine or theology. Alan Hertz in “The Broad Church Militant and Newman’s Humiliation of Charles Kingsley” (1986) gives an account of the notorious 1864 controversy between Charles Kingsley, a Broad Churchman, and John Henry Newman, a prominent Catholic priest, which was a key event both with regard to the Broad Church, and in the general religious climate of the time, as well.

Unitarians, Quakers, and other smaller sects, and reflect only Methodists (perhaps half the total number of Dissenters), Independents (Congregationalists, rather more than half the remainder), and Baptists (rather less than half the remainder)” (Wolff, 1977, p. 327). The variety of Dissenting Protestant practices may have differed from one another in points of doctrine and practice, but what they had in common was enough to distinguish them from the Established Church. A distinction is often made between old and new Dissent to distinguish between sects, such as Quakers, Baptists, Independents (Congregationalists) and Presbyterians, which date back to at least the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or before, and new Dissent, which began around mid-18<sup>th</sup> century with the Evangelical Revival, and produced Methodism. Unitarianism, an offshoot of Presbyterianism, is also new Dissent as it dates back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, even if it did not have much in common with its contemporary Evangelical sorts of Dissent. <sup>4</sup>

In the broadest sense, Unitarianism denotes the rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and as such, harkens back to as early as the Arianism of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, which was declared to be a heresy at the First Council of Nicaea in 325. During and after the Protestant Reformation in Europe as well, unitarian or non-trinitarian views obtained at various places in Europe at various points in time; however, English Unitarianism as a distinct sect or group is traced back to the foundation of the Essex Street Chapel in 1774, where leading figures with rationalist and Presbyterian backgrounds such as Theophilus Lindsey, Joseph Priestley and Richard Price came together. The Doctrine of the Trinity Act passed in 1813 extended toleration to the Unitarians, whose non-trinitarianism had until that point

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<sup>4</sup> Edited by Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas, *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (2017) is an expansive source in which the variety of Dissenting sects during the nineteenth century are covered in detail.

been blasphemy according to the English law. Unitarianism shared with Presbyterianism, from which it had derived, its middle-class and commercial milieu; where it differed from Presbyterianism was its rejection of Calvinism and its central tenet of predestination. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century rationalist emphasis of Unitarianism was so pronounced as to reject not just the doctrines of Trinity and predestination, but also sin and the afterlife. Dispensing with most doctrines, Unitarianism thus had an inclusive outlook, reminiscent of some aspects of the Broad Church and indeed, some of the leading figures in the Broad Church movement, such as F.D. Maurice, had Unitarian family backgrounds. At the same time, however, the demographic distribution of Unitarians was particularly concentrated in the northern manufacturing districts, and especially among the commercial middle classes who owned factories and employed workers. As such, the Unitarian outlook is modulated by this class belonging, and its approach to the working class and working-class problems is informed by the desire to protect its own class interests. In *Victorian People and Ideas*, Richard Altick (1973) discusses Benjamin Disraeli's solution to England's social problems in the 1840s (the "two nations" problem) in which Disraeli proposes, unsuccessfully, an alliance between the gentry and the working classes against the commercial middle classes, in order to reverse the upper classes' loss of power against the parvenu middle classes (p. 23). The idea of the working classes as a group to be won over in the struggle for social, political and economic control is mirrored in Gaskell's *North and South* as the narrative reconciles middle-class interests to the exigencies of working-class lives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As well as the Unitarianism chapter in Emma Mason and Mark Knight's *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (2006), Leonard Smith's *The Unitarians: A Short History* (2006) is a good introduction to Unitarianism in England and elsewhere. John Seed's "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50" (1982) looks at Unitarianism specifically in the context of the industrial ruling class of manufacturing towns, while in "Gentlemen Dissenters: The Social and Political Meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and

In contrast to the rationalist and middle-class bent of Unitarianism, Methodism distinguished itself by its emphasis on religious fervor and enthusiasm, and its working-class orientation (at least in the beginning). Its origins in the Evangelical Revival of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, which was a reaction to the high-and-dry practices of the Anglican Church during the time – including its bloodless faith and association with the upper classes – Methodism defined itself in opposition to these points of contention. Based on such principles, Methodism (or Wesleyanism, after its founding figures) was formed within the Church of England, but broke ties with it around the turn of the century:

Beginning in the late 1730s, John and Charles Wesley kindled a revival, distinguished by unrestrained emotionalism and concentrating upon the welfare of the individual soul. The Wesleyans' appeal was largely to the working population, which went unserved by a Church traditionally allied with the upper classes, and although they remained nominally inside the Anglican communion, neither they nor most other Anglicans were happy about their presence there. In 1795, a few years after John Wesley's death, they formally seceded and thenceforth constituted the largest and most influential body of Dissenters. (Altick, 1973, pp. 166-167)

Established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Methodism only gained more converts and influence as the 19<sup>th</sup> century went on, and as noted earlier, diversified to a considerable degree among competing sects in its expansion. After all, dissent is the defining quality of the Dissenting faiths; however, as they pertain to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to the narrative of *Adam Bede*, several aspects of Methodism become more relevant.

Among these, as we noted above, is the importance of religious enthusiasm and display of emotion; in connection with this is the fervent lay preaching, particularly

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1780s" (1985) he traces the eighteenth-century origins of Unitarianism as Rational Dissent distinguished itself from, and related to the Establishment. In a similarly historical vein, J. G. McEvoy and J. E. McGuire's "God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent" (1975) offers a theological and philosophical exploration of the beliefs of Joseph Priestley, the founding Unitarian figure. Kathryn Gleadle's *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (1995) looks at the role played by Unitarians in the Women's Rights movement.

in the open air and in fields, which became a trademark of the Methodists, and the employment of women preachers, which was eventually prohibited in 1803. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the worldly prospects of Methodism improved; Cunningham (1975) notes that “perhaps Wesleyanism was the clearest nineteenth-century example of a sect’s embourgeoisement,” and writes of the “later Victorian ‘mahogany age’ of Wesleyanism” (p. 33). However, Methodism had once set out to earnestly extend a hand to the lower classes, and it is this commitment that goes to the heart of how *Adam Bede* instrumentalizes Methodism’s emotional appeal to the laboring poor in formulating an interiority for a working-class subject whose inscrutability for the middle-class reader (and narrator) is made much of.<sup>6</sup>

A variety of other faith groups, including the various sects of Christianity under Protestant Dissent, as well as Roman Catholics coexisted in England during the period alongside the sects, Establishment or otherwise, outlined above; as well as minority groups of other Abrahamic religions such as Judaism and Islam, not to mention the various brands of spiritualism and the occult which proliferated from the second half of the century onwards.<sup>7</sup> Both in the summary offered above, as well as in the discussions presented in the following chapters, the aim is not to be comprehensive regarding religious belief and practice in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England. To focus, among such variety of religious practice, only on a select few is to some extent

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<sup>6</sup> For a very brief introduction, see chapter titled Methodism (pp. 30-36) in Emma Mason and Mark Knight’s *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (2006); *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (1965), edited by Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, is a comprehensive account of the movement beginning from its eighteenth-century origins. Valentine Cunningham’s *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (1975) explores in painstaking detail the impact of the various Dissenting sects, including Methodism, on Victorian life and literature.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief account of how spiritualism and the occult gained prominence particularly towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see section titled “Mysticism versus Religion” (pp. 206-213) in Emma Mason and Mark Knight’s *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (2006). For further reading, see “Victorian Spiritualism — Bibliography” by Andrzej Diniejko on the *Victorian Web* at <https://victorianweb.org/victorian/religion/spiritualism3.html>

dictated by the scope of this work. However, there is also a consistent logic in the way that the dissertation focuses on, and foregrounds certain faith groups, and particularly the encounters and tensions among two pairs of faith groups in each chapter, such as between a dissenting Unitarianism and the Established Church in *North and South*, a general Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism in *Villette*, Methodism and the High Church in *Adam Bede*, and among Christian Socialism, Chartism and the Established Church in *Alton Locke*. A common thread in all four novels that relates them to one another in the same context is the way these narratives, in their engagement with religious and class issues, centralize and problematize the relation of the Establishment to the anti- or non-establishment. Because the intersection with class necessarily foregrounds the aspect of religion that has to do with power and struggle, the focus tends to be on those faith groups which actually hold power, such as the Established Church and its various wings, or those who contend for it, as Unitarianism and Methodism both did. Minority or fringe groups are by their definition not included in this particular struggle in any meaningful sense.

### 1.3 Chapter outlines

Reconciliation is a recurring theme in the 1850s novels, possibly owing to all the religious controversies that prevailed throughout the period. The first chapter of this thesis focuses on Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, where the theme of reconciliation between the social classes is explored and achieved in a less overt, and yet quite consistent Unitarian framework that reflects Gaskell's own religious convictions. Unlike in *Villette* or *Adam Bede*, where Catholicism and Methodism play a part in the plots of these novels, Unitarianism is not represented in *North and*

*South* on the level of plot or character. Instead, a number of Unitarian beliefs, such as the importance of education or the absence of original sin and punishment in the afterlife, organize and eventually resolve the narrative on a thematic level. One of the overarching concerns of the novel is the reconciliation of various social classes, such as the urban working class, industrial middle class, and the gentry of the old order. Conflict among the interests of these various classes is filtered, negotiated and resolved through a Unitarian perspective which, as briefly discussed above, aligned with the interests of the urban and industrial middle class.

My second chapter looks at how the anti-Catholic discourse of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* is essential to the novel's expression of the complexities of class identity. Published in 1853, *Villette* recounts the story of an impoverished, unmarried middle-class woman with no family or wealth. Lucy Snowe's struggle to subsist on her own terms is not broadly representative of the way women were denied the opportunity to create their social status. Lucy's ambiguous and precarious relationship to a middle-class identity informs both the form and content of the narrative's anti-Catholic literary tropes, specifically the conversion plot and ghost nun subplot. Although *Villette* is not typically read or classified as a social-problem novel, I argue that its exploration of what it means to be a single lower-middle class woman without family during a period of social change, in conjunction with its engagement with anti-Catholicism, makes *Villette* an intervention and commentary on the "Redundant Women" issue that became a central topic of public debate when the 1851 census revealed that women outnumbered men in England. A tendency in all of the novels that becomes particularly pronounced in *Villette* is that the material basis of social class is constantly obscured and displaced, while both the problem and

its solution are formulated and sought in the more social or traditional components of the concept.

In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, conflict and exploitation which attend class hierarchies are portrayed as a correlate of religious conflict, or disagreement. However, unlike in *Villette*, the relationship is not constructed at a subtextual or even subconscious level. Rather, there is quite an explicit endeavor throughout the narrative to understand the nature and dimensions of this relationship. The grand dialectical project of *Adam Bede* is the reconciliation of Methodism with Anglicanism, of Low Church with High Church, of Dissent with Establishment, and finally, of working class with bourgeois ideology. Supporting this overarching theme are a number of interlocking dichotomies which resolve or fail to resolve into syntheses. As such, although its approach to the relationship between faith and class is different than that of *Villette*, the same reconciling impulse that leads Brontë to almost marry a Protestant and a Catholic by the end of that novel also runs through *Adam Bede*.

The paternalist approach of *North and South* to class conflict and the working classes within a religious framework is also evident in *Alton Locke*, which forms my fourth and final chapter. In this novel, through the filter of the Christian Socialist movement, which was briefly relevant in the late eighteen-forties as a response to Chartism, Charles Kingsley advocates for the clergy's stewardship of the working classes, and their interests. Considered to be an interesting yet frustrating narrative by many of its critics, *Alton Locke* formulates a backlash against the transforming dynamics of class hierarchy and relations, at first seemingly from a working-class position; however, the confusion of arguments coheres in a reactionary vindication of the clergy (and their patrons) as the keepers of the established order. In *Alton Locke*,

the capacity of religion to organize people and society, and to defend class interests is explored from a variety of angles, and even though the narrative ends on a reactionary note that more or less invalidates the various possibilities it encounters throughout, its exploration of such intersections makes *Alton Locke* a valuable artefact within the context of this work.

These four novels of the 1850s show the various ways in which the relationship between social class and religion was formulated and conceptualized within the literary discourses of the period. In some works, like *Villette*, displacement and substitution characterize the way religion is related to social class; in others, such as *Alton Locke*, an instrumental relationship is posited. The narratives debate whether, or to what extent, certain alliances and affinities between social classes and religious affiliations inhere in the nature of these entities themselves, or are socially constructed.

Against such a background and within such a framework as outlined above, the following chapters focus on four novels from the 1850s. These are mainstream or literary novels, in the sense that although they engage with issues of religion and class, they do not belong to the more specialized (and obscure) subgenres such as the Victorian religious novel<sup>8</sup>, or the Chartist novel.<sup>9</sup> This distinction pertains both to

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<sup>8</sup> The Victorian religious novel was a genre in which religious propaganda and controversy among competing sects, reflecting the topical concerns of its day, played a central role; as such, the genre had much in common with tracts and pamphlets produced by religious societies in that the chief objective was to persuade, and to consolidate dogma. Writers with such diverse backgrounds as Hannah Moore (an Evangelical) and Charlotte Yonge (High Church Tractarian) wrote novels to vindicate their beliefs. Margaret Maison's *The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel* (1961) and Robert Lee Wolff's *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977) both present a survey of these novels. Eun Young Koh's PhD dissertation *The Victorian Religious Novel: Conversion, Confession, and the Marriage Plot* (2011) also looks at the Victorian religious novel with a view to both placing it in its cultural context, and tracing its connections to other genres.

<sup>9</sup> During the 1830s and 1840s, workers participating in the mass democratic movement of Chartism produced, in addition to the political writings published in their periodicals and newspapers, thousands of poems and works of fiction. Centered around radical, working-class sensibilities, Chartist literature challenged the political and aesthetic norms of middle-class literature. For an introduction to the genre, Ian Haywood's "The Literature of Chartism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture* (2014) is a good place to begin. Haywood's *Chartist Fiction, Volume 1* (1999) collects two

their reception today, as well as to their original composition and reception; although definitions and perceptions of literariness are amenable to change, enough criteria exist to distinguish these novels from the directly propagandistic nature of the above subgenres.

There are also a variety of ways in which connecting threads exist between these novels and chapters. Exploring these connections, common themes and points of comparison further establishes the subject matter as a coherent whole. For instance, of the four novels considered, while three are canonical novels which are still widely read today, *Alton Locke* is a non-canonical novel which rarely attracts the attention of those who don't have a specific interest in social-problem novels, which brings up the question of what it is about *Alton Locke*, that is not the case with the other three, that makes it objectionable to modern readers. Perhaps on a related note, we observe that three of the novels are written by female authors, with female protagonists, while *Alton Locke* alone has a male protagonist, and is written by a male author. Although all four novels share a 19<sup>th</sup>-century temporality, they exhibit a wide range of settings from the rural *Adam Bede* to the Northern-urban *North and South*, the London-urban *Alton Locke* and the foreign/European *Villette*, a variety which interacts with and modifies the way in which these novels formulate their discourses on religion and social issues. On taking the side of the establishment or striking an anti-establishment position, although all of the novels speak from

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important, longer radical narratives from the 1840s and '50s, Thomas Doubleday's *The Political Pilgrim's Progress* (1839) and Thomas Martin Wheeler's *Sunshine and Shadow* (1849-50). Also by Haywood is *The Literature of Struggle: An Anthology of Chartist Fiction* (1995), in which further Chartist fiction is collected. Margaret A. Loose in "Chartist Revolutionary Strategy in Thomas Wheeler's *Sunshine and Shadow*" (2013) analyzes this important work of Chartist fiction, and compares its depiction of the workers' struggle to the middle-class portrayals of the working classes in industrial fiction by authors such as Gaskell, Dickens, and so on. Mike Sanders' *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (2009) is an exploration of Chartist poetry, and in *An Underground History of Early Victorian Fiction: Chartism, Radical Print Culture, and the Social Problem Novel* (2017), Gregory Vargo offers an interesting account of how canonical, middle-class literature interacted with working-class literature.

different religious positions, they all have in common the tendency, often through blurring the line between what is and what ought to be, of challenging the notion of what the establishment really is, rather than taking it as a given that it simply is. Similarly, while social mobility is an important theme in all four novels, they all approach it from different angles: in *Villette*, the risk of downward social mobility for Lucy is foregrounded while in *North and South*, Margaret achieves upward social mobility through marriage; and while in *Adam Bede*, Hetty is ruined by the promise of upward social mobility, Alton dies without having truly achieved it in *Alton Locke*. There are further notions like hunger, obedience to authority-hierarchy and individual independence, suffering, religious guardians' ability to respond to lower-class lives, reconciliation of dissenting denominations with Anglican Church, as well as similarities and dissimilarities of the formal conventions of the novelistic subgenres that invite discussion and exploration of these novels as a relevant and coherent unity.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNITARIANISM AND SOCIAL RECONCILIATION IN *NORTH AND SOUTH*

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), the romance between former Anglican minister's daughter Margaret Hale and the industrialist Mr. Thornton is set against the backdrop of industrialism and class struggle in a manufacturing town in Northern England. In this chapter I show three specific ways in which Gaskell frames several concepts from Unitarianism, a Dissenting faith particularly popular among the industrial middle-classes, as answers to the pressing problems of industrialism. Through the marriage plot of Margaret and Thornton, the narrative seeks to answer who is qualified and legitimate to be the new ruling class, and formulates the social responsibilities, political rights, and limits of the new industrialist bourgeoisie. Unitarianism serves as a suitable framework with regard to this validation process, as it is specifically engaged with the religious legitimization of philanthropy and social reform. In the industrial plot of the political clash and eventual friendship between Thornton and union leader Higgins, Gaskell attempts to envision how social relationships can be forged between the two emergent and severely conflicting classes, that is, the industrialist middle class and the working class. The novel offers truthfulness and individual conscience, key Unitarian values, as the foundation of mutual respect between the two men and by implication, the two classes. The third topic I address in this chapter is the pressing issue of responding to and managing working-class discontent and uprisings. This vehement political issue of the mid-century is also addressed in a Unitarian framework, specifically through the Unitarian toleration of other faiths, especially the evangelical faiths based on

passion. I argue that Unitarian notion of toleration serves as a model for middle-class toleration of the passionate, frenzied working-class resistance.

In terms of genre, *North and South* is an industrial novel, a form identified by Raymond Williams (1958/1960) in *Culture and Society 1780-1850*, alongside a number of novels from the 1840s and '50s, such as Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848); Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845) and Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850). In providing a conceptual framework for these novels, two other names in addition to Williams are particularly noteworthy in 20<sup>th</sup> literary criticism: the French literary scholar Louis Cazamian (1903) with his *Le Roman Social en Angleterre* was among the first to group these and similar novels together as social novels. Arnold Kettle (1958), in his chapter "The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel" in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Dickens to Hardy*, also places them together with reference to Thomas Carlyle's discussion of the "Condition-of-England question" in his 1839 pamphlet, *Chartism*; tracing the prehistory of these social problem novels in the works of Godwin, Bulwer-Lytton and others, Kettle nevertheless situates them firmly in their specific sociohistorical context. Williams (1958/1960) similarly argues that as well as depicting life in this turbulent period of a changing England, these novels "also illustrate certain common assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken" (p. 95). The industrial novels were written in response to the social, political, and economic crises that England experienced throughout the 1840s as a result of industrialism, from poverty and inequality experienced by the new industrial working classes to their demands for better conditions and rights. Although Chartism, the working-class movement that fought for political reforms and representation, went into decline after 1848, novelists continued to respond to the

political issues raised by the Chartist movement in its aftermath. Serialized throughout the autumn of 1854 until January 1855 in Dickens's magazine, *Household Words*, *North and South* was perhaps a more meditated response to the tumult of the 1840s compared to the immediacy of Gaskell's first novel *Mary Barton*, which, similarly situated in the industrial setting of Manchester, was published in 1848, the last year in which Chartism appeared to be a genuine threat to the established order.

*North and South*'s protagonist is Margaret Hale, the daughter of an Anglican clergyman living in the South of England who relocates to the industrial North with her family after her father resigns from the Church due to religious differences. There in the Northern town of Milton, for the first time in her life Margaret witnesses the new reality of an industrializing England: she sees the mill-owners and the millworkers, the struggle between the two new classes as well as the dire living conditions of the workers. Overcoming her initial prejudice toward this mode of living, so different from what she is used to as a Southerner, she becomes acquainted with the issues troubling the lives transformed by industrialism, and through Margaret's encounters with a variety of people and the dialogues she engages in with them, the narrative attempts to imagine solutions for some of these issues.

A considerable amount of scholarship on *North and South* focuses on the topics of social reform, philanthropy, gender and their intersections. A relatively unexplored aspect of the novel, by comparison, is the extent to which Unitarianism underpins and informs the narrative's treatment of these issues. A Dissenting faith that rose to prominence especially among the bourgeois families of the industrial and commercial North beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Unitarianism resembled Presbyterianism in its compatibility with the values of the capitalist middle class. A

liberal, worldly, and secularizing faith from the beginning, its values and principles are at times indistinguishable from what we would recognize today as liberal or humanist concepts. However, the important role of Unitarianism not just in Elizabeth Gaskell's life, but also in the political life and the social fabric of Manchester, the real-life counterpart of the novel's Milton, necessitates a renewed look at a novel such as *North and South*. Unitarians were a "leading middle-class grouping" in Manchester during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, claims John Seed (1982), in his study of the Unitarian influence in Manchester, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50" (p. 2). Seed draws attention to how the congregation of Cross Street Chapel, the Unitarian Chapel where Elizabeth Gaskell's husband William (1862) ministered, was "made up of the politically strategic strata of small capitalists, commercial servants and craftsmen," as well as "the managing elite of the chapel," who "were more exalted" (p. 4). Seed observes the influence of Unitarianism everywhere in Manchester, but especially in its cultural institutions.

A small market town prior to the Industrial Revolution, Manchester began its expansion in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and rose to prominence in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an industrial center. It became the center of the cotton industry, which completely transformed Manchester. "Cotton made modern Manchester," Asa Briggs (1963/1968) notes in *Victorian Cities*; "It created a small class of wealthy men – they were perhaps the first to think of themselves as a 'class' – and a large class of 'working men' who were often doomed to severe suffering" (p. 88). This new way in which social groups (now referred to as "classes" for the first time) related to each other shaped even the physical reality of Manchester: in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels (2009) describes how,

“by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working-people’s quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class” (p. 57). This segregation of the classes, and the abject conditions in which the working class lived, was the other side of the story in which Manchester was a leading, exemplar city of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in all its modern, industrial glory. Indeed, in *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, Patrick Joyce (2003) argues that even though Paris is often considered to be the capital of 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernity, Manchester also has a claim to “a peculiar sort of centrality,” one that is based on “production and distribution” (p. 154). Manchester’s centrality is peculiar because as the blueprint for all urban industrialism to come, it set the terms by which it would later be evaluated. Since its industry was both unprecedented and so integral to its identity, labor relations and related disputes also played a large part in the discourse over Manchester. In “Labour Disputes and the City: Manchester and Milton-Northern,” Tomoko Kanda (2010) traces how in her Manchester novels, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, Gaskell utilized not only incidents from real life in industrial towns, as covered by “articles and reports in print,” but also material from contemporary social problem novels, and elements of the “factory paternalism” discourse prevalent during the period (p. 47). Apart from occasional critical interventions asking to reconsider the novel’s contextual framework, *North and South* is still read and interpreted in very much the same terms, as an account and critique of class and labor relations in an industrial city.

*North and South* has been criticized for its sustained emphasis on social reconciliation over more radical resolutions, especially by Marxist critics such as Raymond Williams and Arnold Kettle who, as discussed above, were influential in the recognition of industrial, or social problem novels as a genre. Williams

(1958/1960) found fault with how in industrial novels, including *North and South*, “[s]ympathy was transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal” (p. 118). Arnold Kettle (1958/1963) writes that “[i]n her political and social ideas ... Mrs Gaskell was a fence-sitter,” and that “intellectually, she is far less adventurous, far less radical than Disraeli” (pp. 178-179). In *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton (2006) draws attention to how, during the prosperity of the 1850s the working classes became “politically incorporated” to the established order, and remarks in a footnote on the same page that *North and South* marks this “historical mutation” in ideology whereas *Mary Barton* represents an earlier moment in time (p. 111). The comparison to *Mary Barton* is significant, and not an isolated instance since the more immediate focus of that earlier novel on the plight of the working classes is often contrasted – sometimes favorably – to the middle-class point of view found in *North and South*, despite both novels’ broader engagement with problems caused by industrialism. Although working-class characters such as the trade unionist Nicholas Higgins, his daughter Bessy or neighbor John Boucher are also provided space and perspective in the narrative, the focal character of Margaret is middle class herself and ultimately, it is this middle-class perspective which dominates *North and South*. Raymond Williams also identifies a genuine “structure of feeling” in *Mary Barton* where the everyday experience of the working classes is concerned, although he finds that Gaskell is not able to sustain it until the end of the narrative.

Other critics have accounted for the centrality of the bourgeois perspective by focusing on its significance within the Victorian culture. Catherine Gallagher (1985) makes a somewhat similar argument to the above criticisms. Positing the issue with social-problem novels as a matter of “contradiction” rather than “failure,” Gallagher goes on to argue that irreconcilable contradictions between concepts such as the

private and public spheres, or facts and values, inherent in the cultural and intellectual life of the period as a result of industrialism, manifested themselves in the social problem novels of the period, including *North and South*. Joseph W. Childers (2001) similarly argues for a connection between industrialism and knowledge; claiming that both industrialism and the novel “looked to the other for models of effecting and controlling as well as understanding change” (p. 78). Social problem novels played a dual role in class relations, both separating the middle classes from the working classes and serving as a bridge crossing the gap between the two, according to Childers (p. 79). In *The Case against Trade Unions in Early Victorian Fiction*, Patrick Brantlinger (1969) focuses on a more specific aspect of class relations in the Victorian novel: the middle-class fear and hatred of working-class labor activities – specifically of strikes and trade unionism. Noting historical events, such as the Glasgow cotton spinners’ strike of 1837, during the course of which violence towards the strike-breakers resulted in a death as influential in the formation of both the middle-class and novelistic antipathy towards trade unions, Brantlinger draws attention to “the extent to which such incidents as the Glasgow strike hurt the image of trade unionism” in Elizabeth Gaskell’s portrayal of trade unionism in both *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, while also observing that she is more sympathetic than most writers towards such activities (p. 38). These, as well as many other works of criticism, rightfully center and foreground the class relations – class struggle aspect of *North and South* in their critical approach, whether in the context of philanthropy or gender and feminism. Class struggle is not restricted to the relationship between the middle and working classes, either; as David Thiele (2007) argues in “‘That There Brutus’: Elite Culture and Knowledge Diffusion in the Industrial Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell,” the internecine struggle for control among

the two “wings” of Manchester’s Unitarian middle class, the intellectual/clerical status elites and the owners of the means of production, found itself represented in *North and South*.

Although Elizabeth Gaskell’s Unitarianism is mentioned in discussions of her personal and intellectual background, or in providing a context to the various sociopolitical dimensions of her novels such as class conflict or philanthropy, a direct and sustained engagement with the representation of the Unitarian faith in *North and South* is by and large absent from scholarship. An acknowledgement of the novel’s engagement with Unitarianism would complement rather than invalidate the above perspectives, however, and it would not contest the centrality of class in the narrative. Further, it would provide a much needed context for the narrative choices otherwise unfairly attributed to lack of courage, vision, or intellectual capacity in the author. Elizabeth Gaskell’s centering of social reconciliation in *North and South* is a conscious narrative choice dictated by her Unitarian worldview and convictions, that also aligns for the large part with a Victorian middle-class way of understanding social hierarchy. Before embarking on an exploration of Unitarian concepts in Gaskell’s novel, it is important to note that although Unitarian values permeated and underpinned her fiction, almost no character in her novels, including *North and South*, is clearly identified as a Unitarian; neither is Unitarianism mentioned by name. As John Chapple notes in “Unitarian Dissent,” Gaskell was “Unitarian in a deeper sense,” and “she laid bare social and moral evils and yet showed that reconciliation and redemption could spring out of human suffering” (p. 175). Instead of being identified with specific characters, Unitarianism informs the interactions and exchanges between Gaskell’s characters as well as the construction of her plots and

themes in a broader sense. This flexibility will become clearer as we look at relevant sections from the novel.

Unitarianism, a branch of Dissent, first established itself as a distinctly organized group in England in 1774, when clergyman Theophilus Lindsey left the Anglican Church and established the Essex Street Chapel alongside Joseph Priestley. In the broad sense of anti-Trinitarianism, Unitarian ideas were adopted in various places in Europe at various points in history, especially following the Protestant Reformation. Similarly, the ideas of dissenting figures from across the continent such as Michael Servetus and Fausto Sozzini were influential in the formation of a variety of Unitarian movements, the common denominator of which was their rejection of the doctrine of Trinity. In fact, in this broadest meaning of the term, even the early Christian heresy of Arianism, which rejected the identity of Jesus Christ and God the Father, is a kind of Unitarianism, although in this case the more commonly used term is non-trinitarianism. The term “Unitarian” itself was in English usage as far back as the second half of the seventeenth century, with reference to various groups, such as the Polish Brethren or Socinians (followers of Sozzini).

The English Unitarianism within which Elizabeth Gaskell is situated is a decidedly more well-defined group than this loose association of anti-Trinitarian doctrines. Although it owes a great deal to such precedents in terms of theology and doctrine, English Unitarianism is wholly understandable only within the context of English Dissent, and more broadly, the religious and ecclesiastical divisions of England. As Mark Knight and Emma Mason (2006) note, Unitarianism distinguished itself from Methodism on the one hand, and old Dissent, most remarkably Presbyterianism on the other hand, as it emerged in the English context (p. 52). Compared to Methodism, with its emphasis on religious enthusiasm and its

orientation during its early period toward the poor, Unitarianism underlined a more rational and intellectual approach to Christianity, and accordingly, spread among the urban and/or commercial middle classes rather than the rural poor. It shared the same class identification with Presbyterianism. Indeed, Knight and Mason claim that it “was founded on a liberal capitalist politics that encouraged a faith compatible with genteel professionalism rather than unworldly devotion,” which is very similar to their formulation of Presbyterianism at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as “a ‘tasteful’ faith sanitized ... for a chic, urban and bourgeois middle class” (p. 52). The break, or rather shift, that definitively distinguished Unitarianism from Presbyterianism was its rejection of Calvinism. Despite its generally tolerant and latitudinarian acceptance of other faiths, the Calvinist doctrines of the original sin and predestination were unacceptable to Unitarianism. These, then, are some of the ways in which Unitarianism in England gradually came to distinguish itself from adjacent faith groups.

Unitarianism lends itself most easily to such formulations that are primarily based on how it is distinguished from other religious groups, rather than of itself as a distinct body of faith. This is partly accounted by the fact that it came into existence within the context of England’s vibrant and at the time relatively tolerant religious life, where it defined itself against many other sects that vied for followers and influence. But also, Unitarianism as a faith was mostly defined in terms of the Christian beliefs and doctrines that it rejected. Its anti-Trinitarianism, for instance, from which it derived its name, was one such position. For Joseph Priestley, an influential figure within early English Unitarianism, the doctrine of the Trinity was harmful and wrong “because it had emerged, not from the scriptures, but from the spiritual philosophy of Plato” (Knight & Mason, 2006, p. 56). Writing in the middle

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Unitarian clergyman and theologian George Ellis would criticize the inadequate nomenclature “Unitarianism”, which was first used by detractors of the movement, as was the case for Methodism among others. Ellis provides several reasons for his objection, such as the representation of the entire faith with “a definition of one of the doctrinal tenets of the other [*non-Unitarian*] party” (Ellis, 1857, p. x). As a result, Ellis writes, the faith of the Unitarians was represented “as simply a negative system” by their opponents and gradually, themselves (p. xi). While such interventions by Unitarians did exist, however, it is not entirely unfair to represent Unitarianism through the doctrines it rejected. Even stated in positive terms, after all, a number of its defining features are in fact inversions of Calvinistic and other doctrines it rejects. For instance, “Unitarians believed that God is merciful in nature,” and also that, related to this first claim, “no sinner is damned to everlasting punishment after death” (Wheeler, 1992, p. 26-27). As such, Unitarians rejected the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, since God cannot be merciful and cast some into everlasting hell and damnation at the same time. Even its intellectualism and disregard for metaphysics, for some time attractive to Coleridge, were later defined as a deficiency by the Romantic poet – an “emotionally paralysing,” “hollow and without meaning,” and “secular[ly] cool” movement (Knight & Mason, 2006, p. 59).

Three years after Elizabeth Gaskell was born, The Doctrine of the Trinity Act, informally known as the Unitarian Relief Act, was passed in 1813, granting toleration for anti-Trinitarianism and Unitarian worship. Gaskell herself was born into a Unitarian family; her father was a Unitarian minister who later resigned, and her mother’s side was also Unitarian. She married a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell, in 1832, and lived in Manchester where her husband was the minister at a

Unitarian chapel. All her life, then, she was surrounded by Unitarians and Unitarianism; daughter and wife of a minister, Unitarianism played an important role not just in her life, but also in her intellectual and creative output.

It is possible to explore the influence of Unitarianism on *North and South*'s central theme of social reconciliation through three important threads in the narrative corresponding to three principles of Unitarianism as it was practiced in England during the 1840s and 1850s. These are the novel's investment in the reconciliation and integration of the two competing ruling classes; the importance it places on truthfulness and the individual conscience, and its tolerance towards other beliefs.

### 2.1 Social reconciliation and the marriage plot

In tracing the correspondences between Unitarianism and the novel's theme of social reconciliation, first of all it is important to observe that novel is very invested in the integration of the two contending ruling classes – the old gentry and the new industrial middle class, and that this integration is developed through Margaret's encounter with the town of Milton and her eventual marriage to the industrialist Thornton. Although more critical interest in general has been bestowed on the relations between the middle and working classes in *North and South*, this is nonetheless an important element of the narrative and moreover, a distinctly Unitarian one. This integration is a Unitarian interest, less related to points of principle or doctrine but closely connected to social reality. The new ruling class emerging from the industrial towns of the North and the Midlands, among whose ranks Unitarians were well-represented, demanded access to the social capital and prestige of the upper classes of the pre-industrial, feudal English society, as well as inclusion among their ranks. Even though Thornton continuously expresses his

disdain for these classes throughout the novel, his responses to Margaret's charm and manners belie his desire to be in her world. Although Thornton is not represented as a Unitarian by the narrative, the inclusion of the industrialist middle class, as embodied by him in *North and South*, to the establishment is a Unitarian interest. As such, the marriage plot in the novel is also an argument for Unitarian integration in the Establishment. And as will become clear towards the end of this section, this integration was a social reality during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Initially disdainful of the new bourgeois culture and dismissive of the gradations and distinctions it contains, Margaret eventually comes to appreciate this new breed; in turn, something of her well-bred gentility is imparted to the Milton millocracy. The reconciliation of the old gentry and the new ruling class, signified by the marriage of Margaret to the manufacturer and industrialist John Thornton, is not quite the unification of "the two nations" as first formulated by Benjamin Disraeli in *Sybil*. In fact, although in *North and South* Gaskell spends considerable energy and space on working out the relationship between the working classes and their middle-class employers, the novel culminates in the reconciliation of the two distinctly non-working classes, as represented by the union of Margaret and Thornton, rather than ending with the amelioration of relations between the working classes and the industrial middle classes, as represented by the friendship of Higgins and Thornton.

In discussing the transformation of the language used to talk about social groups in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England," Asa Briggs (1960) notes how the term "class" replaces other, pre-modern designations such as "rank," "order" or "degree" during this period (p. 43). The change in language "reflected a basic change not only in men's ways of viewing society, but in society itself," Briggs writes, referring to the

Industrial Revolution and its totally transformative effect on society and social relations as a whole (p. 44). And although the new terminology was readily accepted by most people, conservatives resisted it because of the new social order it implied; while both “middle classes” and “working classes” were claimed willingly by their owners, out of class consciousness and even pride, the phrase “higher classes” was taken up by the upper classes only as a last resort following the French Revolution, when their class position and power was no longer uncontested (pp. 51-52). Well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conservatives and defenders of the old order resorted to the outdated formulations of “rank” and “station”, despite the ubiquity of class discourse, as a statement of their political position.

This clash between the old and the new terminologies is also evident in *North and South*, mostly in the confrontation between Margaret Hale and the culture of the industrial North where she is transplanted. Initially in the narrative, Margaret represents a particular albeit outdated understanding of class. Daughter of an ex-clergyman of the Church of England and descending from the gentry on her mother’s side, Margaret is first introduced into the narrative while living in the London townhouse of her Aunt Shaw in quite a lavish lifestyle, as a companion to her cousin Edith. As soon as Edith gets married, Margaret returns to live with her parents in the bucolic southern village of Helstone. Although in this initial chapters of the novel her characteristic sensibility and reasonableness is contrasted to her cousin Edith’s frivolity, her father’s timidity and her mother’s querulousness, a new dimension is introduced to her character once she and her family relocate to the Northern mill town of Milton. Unfamiliar with the social fabric of this manufacturing town, Margaret tries and fails to interpret the people around her. In fact, her misinterpretation begins even before she leaves Helstone; in answer to her mother’s

suggestion that they visit a family living on the other side of the parish, Margaret says:

Are those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton?  
Oh! I am glad we don't visit them. I don't like shoppy people. I think we are far better off, knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence. (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 19)

In this instance, her disdain for the arriviste “shoppy people” who made their fortunes in trade rather than inheritance is modified by her sympathy for the cottagers and labourers, a distinction which at the same time ensures that she is not indiscriminately supercilious toward the lower classes. It is rather the social mobility to which Margaret objects. Overall, Margaret’s understanding of social divisions is distinctly pre-modern; in answer to her mother’s criticism that she “must not be so fastidious,” she answers that she is not: “I like all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions, as they call them” (p. 19). It is evident that she does not think of society in terms of class relations as regulated by labor or economy. Her notions are reflective of the three orders of the medieval society: the nobles, the clergy and the peasants. There are those who do manual labor – the people working the land; those who fight – the soldiers and the sailors; and the three learned professions, divinity, law and medicine, who constitute a sort of clergy among themselves. Her insufficient knowledge of social divisions and groups extends to her inability to distinguish tradespeople, such as butchers and bakers, from manufacturers. When she is corrected on this point, told that coach-builders are quite different from butchers and bakers, she replies that it does not really matter, especially since she prefers walking to riding in coaches (p. 19). She is similarly dismissive toward the manufacturers of Milton whom she has not yet met, and believes that “classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman” would be wasted on such people (p. 39).

Margaret's realization of the new social reality gradually sets in once she is in Milton. At first, she is overwhelmed by the different, free and familiar manner in which factory workers conduct themselves in their daily lives and around her, but she adapts relatively easily to this new situation. It might be that from her standpoint, laborers are laborers, whether they work the land or the machines. Her adjustment to the ruling class of this town, the industrial middle class, however, is fraught with difficulty and resistance on her part. Culturally conservative, she clings to her pre-modern markers of social distinctions and refuses to recognize Thornton as her equal, relegating him to some in-between category between herself and the working class by insisting on designating him as a "tradesman". Her ambivalence is evident, for instance, from her claim that "he is not quite a gentleman, but that was hardly to be expected," in describing her first impression of him to her mother (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 64). However, Margaret also agrees with her father when he says that Thornton is "neither vulgar, or common," and she argues that he could hardly afford to be so, seeing as he is such a "great tradesman" (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 64-65). She shrugs off her father's warning that Milton manufacturers are different from tradesmen, and she persists in this attitude in the first half of the novel.

The complicating factor regarding Margaret's claim to social superiority, since she clearly perceives herself as superior to the industrial middle classes, is that it is not very straightforward or self-evident. Having lived with the rich and urbane family of her Aunt Shaw since she was ten years old, Margaret has received the education and the cultural refinement of an aristocratic woman. However, Margaret herself is not a member of the aristocracy but rather of the gentry, and that in a tenuous way, too. Richard Altick (1973) defines the gentry as being "just below the aristocracy, sharing many of its privileges and sympathies and often connected with

it by birth or marriage” (p. 25). With the exception of the Low Church, ministers of the Anglican Church often shared a social milieu with the upper classes, as, for instance, is the case for Mr Irwine in *Adam Bede*. Despite the common social milieu, however, an Anglican minister is not himself a member of the aristocracy or the gentry by default. In fact, after his resignation from his position in the Church, Mr Hale becomes an employee of Thornton, making Margaret’s already-tenuous identification with the upper classes even more complicated and unstable. However, instead of placing her protagonist in a governess plot, as with Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, who suffers from a similar class indeterminacy, Gaskell presents Margaret as the educated upper middle-class observer of her society, and the moral compass for an emerging ruling class. While initially Margaret is defensive of an older system of rank in which she herself doesn’t inhabit the topmost position, but defends the privileges of those who do, her understanding of social hierarchy and organization becomes more flexible and accommodating through her encounter with the new social classes of the manufacturing North.

Margaret’s complicated social status in the novel, and her similarly complicated response to the social status of others early on, is a reflection of the unstable ways in which social class and status were formulated in English society in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps also in a broader context, too. In *Class in Britain*, historian David Cannadine offers an alternative understanding of social class during this period. Instead of a progression from an understanding of society as composed of hierarchical ranks or orders to society as composed of two (upper-lower) or three (upper, middle and lower) classes, argues Cannadine(2000),

it now seems clear that throughout the years from the 1780s to the 1870s, British society was envisaged by contemporaries in essentially the same ways that it had been during the century before. All three models remained in being, with hierarchy still the preferred version. They retained their own

specific vocabularies, but the languages of ranks and (especially) of class became increasingly common to all three. (p. 79)

Essentially, Cannadine describes a time period when competing ways of thinking about social distinctions proliferated rather than cancelling one another out, and borrowed the vocabulary of each other. This model of competitive cross-fertilization adds a further dimension to the struggle for the control of meaning that takes place between Margaret and Thornton as regards social status.

Initially, Margaret and Thornton disagree on the industrialists' position and power. With regard to the employers', or masters' duties and responsibilities towards their laborers, they represent diametrically opposed approaches; while Margaret believes that the masters should share with their men their reasons for conducting business in a particular way, Thornton disagrees with her and says, "Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure, or your economy in the use of your own money? We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it" (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 117). And conversely, while Margaret believes that the masters' responsibility towards their men necessitates them to keep in contact with them, and advise them outside of the work environment as well as inside the factories, Thornton thinks that this would be a breach of their independence and freedom:

'the masters would be trenching on the independence of their hands, in a way that I, for one, should not feel justified in doing, if we interfered too much with the life they lead out of the mills'. (p. 121)

The clash between their perspectives is representative of the incompatibility between an older understanding of society as an organic whole, with the upper ranks bearing both privileges and responsibilities towards their inferiors; versus a newer perspective in which, while their respective positions are not necessarily so immutable, conflict and struggle among the classes occupy a prominent place. The

romance and marriage plot of Margaret and Thornton is a reconciliation of the better aspects of both these perspectives, in that “the stewardship of the upper classes” narrative is transformed into a contemporary discourse of social reform and philanthropy that is suitable to relations between employers and laborers, while the judgmental outlook of the Establishment perspective regarding the new industrial bourgeoisie is transformed into acceptance, thus letting go of its snobbishness.

Firstly, then, there is in the reconciliation narrative a change regarding how the industrial middle classes are perceived. Discussions of manliness versus gentlemanliness, or the novel’s search for a new hegemonic masculinity, serve to transform Thornton into an object of desire for Margaret. This enables her to transfer her libidinal attachment from her clergyman father and soldier-sailor brother towards the industrialist Thornton. As their contending definitions of social hierarchy and worth come into conflict with each other, Margaret first begins to doubt her rigid conceptions of rank and class when Thornton compels her to see that from his perspective, any worthwhile social status for a man would depend on action and performance rather than on an inherent and static essence. While attending a dinner at Thornton’s house with his industrialist colleagues as guests, Margaret realizes that she admires “their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time which none of them should live to see” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 164). Her appreciative feeling for these men, directed towards them for what they do in spite of who they are, confuses Margaret. Although their “sense of power” is “rather rampant in its display, and savour[s] of boasting,” their defiance of “the old limits of possibility” somehow counterbalances their gaucheness and faux-pas in Margaret’s itemization of these attributes side by side (p. 163). The company of Thornton’s

colleagues thus makes Margaret question what is admirable and even desirable in a man.

In *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness*, Herbert Sussman (2012) notes that valued attributes of masculinity and manliness changed during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ancient or medieval conceptions of masculine worth, based on “duties of public service” or “martial valor,” were replaced with the concept of “economic man”:

Manliness as service to the common good in war and in peace was replaced by an ethos grounded not in community but in individual self-interest motivated by rational calculation of economic gain. For both the owners of the factories and its workers, manliness was performed through working hard, making money, and accumulating the commodities so easily produced by the machine. (p. 81)

In some ways, this is a description of manliness as embodied by the colleagues of Thornton and distinct from Margaret’s nebulously idealized “gentleman”. However, in line with the novel’s aim of promoting social integration and also with Cannadine’s claim that the categories of social status themselves are never uncontested and stable, the narrative immediately complicates this straightforward formulation of the industrialist, or the “economic man”. This complication is present both in Margaret’s ambiguous response to the dinner guests, and in Thornton’s distinction between what it means to be a man, as opposed to a gentleman.

Following the dinner, during a private conversation Margaret questions Thornton regarding one of his fellow industrialists – “He cannot be a gentleman – can he?” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 164). In answer to her, Thornton offers a comparison between the concepts of “man” and “gentleman” from his perspective to Margaret:

I take it that ‘gentleman’ is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as ‘a man,’ we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself,—to life—to time—

to eternity. A cast-away lonely as Robinson Crusoe—a prisoner immured in a dungeon for life—nay, even a saint in Patmos, has his endurance, his strength, his faith, best described by being spoken of as ‘a man’. (p. 164)

This is an interesting response on Thornton’s part for a variety of reasons. To begin with, he is far from valorizing the industrial middle classes over a declining gentry. Rather than contrast a gentleman and an industrialist – an upper-class man and a middle-class man – Thornton instead recognizes Margaret’s preoccupation with the concept of gentlemanliness and offers a deconstruction of this idea. First, he claims that a gentleman is only ever so with relation to society, whereas a man is always resolutely himself. This is an argumentative sleight of hand, because as indicated by the context in which this conversation takes place, the natural and constant “man” he offers in contrast to the socially determined “gentleman” is in fact an idealization of himself and his fellows, or middle-class men. Through displacing the identity of a middle-class industrialist onto an ahistorical “man”, Thornton is able to subtly discredit the gentleman as unmanly. In doing so, he notably doesn’t utilize the discourse of the “economic man” as discussed by Sussman above; that is to say, he doesn’t tell Margaret that his theoretical (middle-class) man is superior to an idle, upper-class gentleman because he is productive, and so on. Instead, he offers an inverted, or specifically manufactured portrait of the “non-gentlemanly” man in order to win over Margaret: much like how aristocratic identity is designated as a birthright based on the inherent and inherited quality of honor – “an idea of status derived from the personal possession ... of honor” – Thornton’s concept of “man”, as an alternative to “gentleman,” is based on virtues such as endurance, faith or strength (McKeon, 1987, p. 131). Elsewhere, for instance, in talking to Mr. Bell, he describes himself in decidedly different terms; identifying with his “Teutonic” forebears, he says, “we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and

exertion” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 334). Although at first his position appears to be more fixed in comparison to Margaret’s complicated and unstable social status, then, in fact Thornton’s status, too, is located in the same social context where the meaning of such concepts is constantly contested and redefined.

These constant shifts and re-positionings are very central in the construction and resolution of the novel’s overarching theme, social reconciliation. In “Working-Class Masculinity and the Victorian Novel,” Chris Louttit (2015) argues that from a certain standpoint, “the novel is about the discussion and social interaction between the working people and the manufacturing class. This structure and spirit of ‘dialogue’ and discussion is certainly pertinent in understanding constructions of masculinity in the text,” and adds: “in dialogic spirit, the novel introduces manliness as a topic that is debated in more abstract terms by several of its characters” (p. 40). As noted above, critical attention on *North and South* preponderantly focuses on the aspect of the relationships between the middle class and the working class; however, Louttit’s argument is in fact also an apt description of the way class is negotiated between Margaret and Thornton. It is formulated and recalibrated in response to the position of the other, until at the end of the novel, the two characters find themselves sharing common ground enough to marry.

The symbolic or social value of the “gentleman,” or of the aristocracy, would eventually take much more than the arguments of fictional industrialists to exorcise.

Asa Briggs (1963/1968) writes,

[t]he role of deference even in an industrial society was stressed, and the idea of a ‘gentleman’, one of the most powerful of mid-Victorian ideas but an extremely complicated one both to define and to disentangle, was scrutinized by novelists as much as by pamphleteers. (p. 69)

*North and South*’s extensive engagement with the concept, then, is not out of the ordinary; in establishing social reconciliation, the novel would also have to find a

place for the gentry. Through a series of displacements and inversions, bringing the ideas of innate versus acquired or performed status in conflict with each other, Gaskell establishes the grounds on which the old gentry and the new industrialists might be reconciled.

Historically, the specifically Unitarian context of the marriage plot is discussed by John Seed in “Gentlemen Dissenters: The Social and Political Meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s.” Seed (1985) argues that as rational Dissent – a designation for Unitarianism and affiliated sects – distinguished itself from older and more ascetic forms of Dissent in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it became more and more part of the established order:

the boundaries between dissent and the anglican church were weakened as wealthier rational dissenters sent their sons to Cambridge university, mixed socially with anglicans and even, sometimes, married into establishment families . . . Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was always a steady leakage of unitarian families as wealth loosened their insertion within the social circles of urban dissent. (p. 315)

As discussed above, this historical account of how Unitarianism was reconciled, if only partially, with the established order, is not a straightforward parallel of how a union is negotiated between Margaret and Thornton in *North and South*. Rather, it is the idea of social integration and reconciliation itself, so important in distinguishing Unitarianism from the historically more removed and distinct sects in Dissent, that gives a Unitarian bent to Gaskell’s treatment of social reconciliation.

Secondly, the marriage plot represents the ascendancy of the Unitarian values of social reform and philanthropy through Thornton’s implementation of such practices. The this-worldliness of Unitarianism, as well as its origins in the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, made it favor a specific kind of philanthropy and reform. In order to facilitate social integration and bring social classes together on

the same plane, Unitarians depended on “intellectual ‘self-improvement’ via hard discipline,” argues John Seed:

The primary means by which the Unitarians strove to ‘diffuse’ (a key word in the liberal lexicon) their rationalizing influence as a denomination was by interminable intellectual debate – courses of public lectures, study groups, theological polemics, chapel libraries – and via a national society for distributing Unitarian publications (founded in 1791). (Seed, 1982, p. 12)

In Seed’s account, Unitarianism’s strategy of reforming the working classes through knowledge, and knowledge only results in limited success, and devolves into a different discourse in the 1830s, where now the working class, instead of being a repository of knowledge, is seen as the object of knowledge; a problematic bit of information waiting to be resolved (p. 13). A contrast to Unitarianism’s focus on knowledge and information as a reform strategy from among the other sects during this period would be Evangelicalism, which “appealed wholeheartedly and unashamedly to the emotions” (Bradley, 2006, p. 15). Anti-intellectual even, the Evangelical spirit was the opposite of Unitarianism’s middle-class liberalism; among their extensive reform activities, the domestic war on vice and missionary activities abroad best reflect how Evangelicals felt about letting people decide for themselves. And although Gaskell’s personal practice of Unitarianism is sometimes read as being closer to its later incarnation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when under James Martineau’s influence Unitarianism took on devotional and emotive qualities, nevertheless there is an element of the old Unitarian emphasis on knowledge in how she formulates reforms and philanthropy as a way to facilitate social reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, the idea is so changed in her engagement with it to also constitute a subtle challenge to this particular emphasis of Unitarianism.

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Wheeler (1992), in “Elizabeth Gaskell and Unitarianism”, talks about how she disliked both sermons and public debates, preferring the aesthetic and devotional side of faith.

In the narrative, there are several references to Mr. Hale lecturing to working-class men, in a setting similar to the Mechanics Institutes and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which were at one time regarded as ideal vehicles of the “diffusion” of knowledge (Seed, 1982, p. 12). However, the portrayal of Mr. Hale’s lectures is both incidental, and not wholly favorable:

He had chosen Ecclesiastical Architecture as his subject, rather more in accordance with his own taste and knowledge than as falling in with the character of the place or the desire for particular kinds of information among those to whom he was to lecture. And the institution itself, being in debt, was only too glad to get a gratis course from an educated and accomplished man like Mr. Hale, let the subject be what it might. (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 141)

The irrelevance of the subject with regards to the lives of the working-class men to whom the lecture is addressed, combined with the institution’s willingness to overlook the content of the lecture as long as form is observed and activities are held, doesn’t speak of a particularly high regard for such institutions on the part of the narrative. However, *North and South* offers an alternative community of “knowing” in the form of Thornton’s “supper club”: feeling that the working classes are undernourished after witnessing a meal scene at Higgins’s house, Thornton devises a canteen or a supper club for his workers at the factory, where they can come together and eat. Thornton initially distances himself from the men, not wanting to intrude on their privacy, but eventually, the men reach out to him and invite him to dinner on the days his favorite meal is served. When his landlord Mr. Bell conversationally says to him, “I should think you were rather a restraint on your hosts’ conversation. They can’t abuse the masters while you’re there,” Thornton is not pessimistic about the future of his relationship with the men:

“Well! hitherto we’ve steered clear of all vexed questions. But if any of the old disputes came up again, I would certainly speak out my mind next hot-pot day. But you are hardly acquainted with our Darkshire fellows, for all you’re a Darkshire man yourself. They have such a sense of humour, and such a racy

mode of expression! I am getting really to know some of them now, and they talk pretty freely before me.” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 362)

It is important that the supper club takes on an importance not only as a place where men eat, but also as where they know and become known to their employer, and vice versa. The sense of familiarity offered by the social practice of eating makes the workers feel free to talk to and in front of Thornton, as opposed to the constraints that might be imposed by a more rigid or institutional setting. Although the inadequacy of proposing and highlighting a solution such as the supper club instead of all the required reforms has been critically noted with regards to the narrative, it is the kind of human relationship fostered by this environment, and the kind of knowledge that is encouraged, that the novel seeks to promote rather than the specific form of this enterprise itself. The comparison and contrast between this club and the cultural institutions of Manchester Unitarians, perhaps not immediately evident to modern readers, would be more recognizable to Gaskell’s contemporary audience.

In exploring the ways in which the novels of 1847-48, as well as those that came after, distinguished themselves from their predecessors, Raymond Williams formulates the concept of “knowable community” in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. Williams (1970) argues that although in the past the novel was a knowable community, that is to say, “part of a traditional method ... that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways,” this changed with the Industrial Revolution (pp. 14). As the meaning of community, and the possibility of knowing others in this community changed in the framework of the socioeconomic transformations that society went through, so the novels of the period reflected a rekindled interest in the concept. Similar or complementary ideas have also been formulated by other critics in this

regard; for instance, in “The aesthetics of the Victorian novel: form, subjectivity, ideology,” Linda M. Shires (2001) writes that “[t]he main subject matter of the Victorian novel is the relation between self and society” (p. 61). The model of community proposed by Gaskell in *North and South*, in the shape of a supper club for working men, is perhaps better understood in this particular context, and also as a specifically novelistic response to the institutional forms of knowledge diffusion offered by Unitarianism. On the one hand, Gaskell attempts to capture the prelapsarian totality and knowability of community, and by extension, society with the supper club; on the other hand, she contests a utilitarian and pragmatic understanding of both knowledge and community, as outlined in John Seed’s account of Unitarian cultural institutions. Although the many instances of paternalism and the importance accorded to individual relationships over broader regulatory systems in the narrative are at times criticized, there is nevertheless this specific framework to consider – Gaskell’s old-fashioned emphases were not reactionary, or perhaps not simply reactionary, but also a response and challenge to how the Unitarianism of her period connected the ideas of reform, philanthropy, knowledge, and community.

The integration of the industrial middle classes into respectable society on the one hand, and the propagation of Unitarian forms of social reform and philanthropy on the other hand are thus achieved through the marriage plot. Critical responses to the marriage of Margaret and Thornton indicate that in the reader’s encounter with it, the symbolic importance of the union almost instantly supersedes the event in itself.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In “Romancing Manchester: Class, Gender, and the Conflicting Genres of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*,” Nils Claussøn (2007) even discusses this overdetermination and says that in spite of other, symbolically-charged readings, a reader would “find that the conventions of the domestic romance more than adequate to account for the romance plot of the novel. The social and political conflicts that Gaskell raises and tries to resolve are presented almost entirely through the plot and character conventions of the romance” (p. 3). Claussøn is correct in noting that it is impossible to come at the ending of *North and South* without the mediating presence of critical overdetermination. To note just a few examples, Dorice Williams Elliott (1994) argues that “By contrast to (...) rejected models of marriage, all grounded in the separation of men’s and women’s spheres, the relationship of Margaret

Taken as a whole, they indicate how the ending is almost universally read as representative of social reconciliation. The recognition of the Unitarian element in this critical consensus of social reconciliation complements the various aspects already identified and recognized by relevant scholarship.

## 2.2 Truthfulness and the individual conscience

In its engagement with the concept of social reconciliation, a particular importance is also accorded by the narrative to being truthful, and to the individual conscience; specifically, the novel posits that the two concepts are the two sides of the same coin in a Unitarian context.<sup>12</sup> To begin with, the chain of events relocating Margaret and her family to Milton are set off by her father, Mr. Hale's decision to resign from the Church of England on moral grounds – he tells his daughter that he cannot accept the authority of the Church anymore (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 34-35). In “Mr Hale's Doubts in North and South,” Angus Easson argues that based on a series of textual evidence, such as Mr. Hale's opposition to “the State's right to prescribe a man's belief or to control his conscience,” and the texts he refers to in order to draw support to his arguments, Mr. Hale is speaking from a Unitarian position even though this is

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and Thornton follows the formula that *North and South* gives for class harmony: familiarity with the other's language leads to understanding, which leads to affection and cooperation” (p. 48). While she interprets the marriage as a reformulation the Victorian concepts of the domestic and private spheres, to be joined in the new concept of the social sphere, in “Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South”,” Pamela Corpron Parker (1997) similarly argues that Gaskell strove to demonstrate that “the concerns of the industry and the home are interconnected and of vital interest to both men and masters, rich and poor, men and women” (p. 330). For David Thiele (2007), it is the middle class itself that is being consolidated through this union: “*North and South* eroticizes a particular vision of elite-led middle-class consolidation and knowledge diffusion. "Mr. Thornton was in habits of authority himself," but as he becomes a good member of the Hale Athenaeum, the well-rounded Margaret “seem[s] to assume some kind of rule over him” (63; ch.7)” (p. 281).

<sup>12</sup> In “Gaskells as Unitarians,” R.K. Webb (1988) writes: “[orthodox] Dissenters liked to insist that the Bible only was the religion of Protestants and loudly proclaimed the principle of private judgment, while rejecting any interpretation at variance with their own. Unitarians, on the other hand, had repeatedly stressed the importance of pursuing truth, wherever it might lead; indeed, Priestley was prepared to see Christianity itself fall before the tide of enquiry at some distantly future time” (p. 148).

not openly acknowledged by the narrative (p. 34). Moreover, such a conversion would be no small matter for the Victorian reading public; in writing that Dickens' distaste for this particular section as "clearly show[s] him shying away from doctrinal controversy," Easson underlines the magnitude of Mr. Hale's act (p. 30). And although in the later parts of the narrative Mr. Hale's resignation and its theological or even philosophical implications don't attain the centrality they appear to assume in the beginning, they nevertheless introduce the issues of truthfulness and the individual conscience, both of which are crucial to the development of the novel's central theme, social reconciliation.

In fact, the nature of the relationship between these two concepts, truth or truthfulness and the individual conscience (or private judgment), analyzed throughout the novel, is first brought into question at this point, in the exchange between Margaret and Mr. Hale. Seeing that Margaret is devastated by the news of his resignation, Mr. Hale compares himself to "the early martyrs" to assuage her sadness, and urges her to think of their suffering. Margaret refuses to accept this comparison: "But, father ... the early martyrs suffered for the truth, while you – oh! dear, dear papa!" To this, Mr. Hale replies that he "suffer[s] for conscience' sake," and he "must do what [his] conscience bids" (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 35). The dialogue is elliptical on both sides, so, for instance, it is not exactly specified – but easily predicted – what Margaret thinks her father is suffering for, if not for the truth. She almost accuses her father of laboring under a delusion or a falsehood, but since this part is inferred rather than openly spoken, Mr. Hale's reply is similarly indirect. When he tells Margaret that he is following his conscience, is he refuting her claim that he has strayed from the truth, or is he modifying it? Or to put it another way, are we to understand that truth and the individual conscience are the same thing, or not?

From the perspective of Margaret at this point, a steadfast churchwoman, they are apparently not; however, this conviction of hers is challenged and transformed through the course of the narrative. From a Unitarian perspective, they are evidently identical; as William Gaskell says in a sermon dated 1862, for instance, it is those who, “with brave outspoken sincerity denounce what they believe to be wrong and maintain what they hold to be right, that ever most effectually move and reform the world” (Gaskell, 1862, p. 6-7). He does not refer to a third point of reference, such as the church or even the Bible, as regulating or negotiating the individual’s conviction of truth, and truth itself. However, Margaret’s identification with the Established church means that this immediate correspondence is initially not available to her; instead, she seeks an outside point of reference.

The central plot problematizing and then removing Margaret’s distinction between the concepts of truth and the individual conscience is, of course, her attempt to cover up her meeting with her fugitive brother Frederick by lying to Thornton and its aftermath. Accompanying Frederick to the train station against her better instincts, Margaret is spotted by Thornton, as well as other people. Frederick gets involved in an altercation just before getting away, and Margaret is identified in the process; following the death of Frederick’s attacker, Thornton finds himself in a position where he, as a magistrate, has to question Margaret regarding the incident. When Margaret refuses to explain Frederick’s identity to him, for fear that he would get caught before leaving England and be hanged as a traitor, Thornton becomes convinced that Margaret is involved in an illicit affair. Although he shields her from the justice system, being thus lowered in his esteem becomes too much to bear for Margaret, who, prior to this incident, is not aware that she placed any importance on Thornton’s opinion regarding herself.

Although Margaret believes at first that she can rely on her conscience in order to keep her brother safe and suspend her commitment to truth and truthfulness for a while for this purpose, she soon discovers that it is impossible to hold these two conflicting convictions simultaneously. However, the narrative utilizes several other, more incidental threads revolving around this tension before finally resolving Margaret's dilemma. The reconciliation of the unionist worker Nicholas Higgins to his boss, Thornton, is achieved through Higgins's truthfulness, despite the other, negative traits he may possess from the middle-class perspective of the novel. Higgins' truthfulness is particularly established in the context of his unionist activities. As Brantlinger (1969) claims "the humanitarian perspective shared by [the] early Victorian writers ... did not include much sympathy for trade unions and strikes" (p. 37). Perceived in association with violent mobs, tyranny or an inability to understand political economy, unions and their members were particularly disliked by the middle class. Therefore, Higgins' inscription as a unionist is a handicap against which he eventually distinguishes himself. Brantlinger notes how, despite his affiliation with the union, Higgins often truthfully recognizes its failures and evils: he sympathizes with the destitute Boucher against the Union's inadequate compensation wages and doesn't argue against Thornton's "law of wages," even though this argument undermines his unionist position (pp. 44-46). The middle-class perspective of *North and South* makes itself particularly felt in this process of designating Higgins as a truthful man through gradually undermining his convictions on class inequality and conflict, and awarding him with truthfulness in return.

At any rate, Higgins is a self-professed atheist or "infidel" in the early parts of the narrative, and he lashes out against Margaret's religious consolation in the one instance when she is visiting his house. As such, it would be fair to say that in his

commitment to the truth, Higgins is not motivated by institutional or exterior restraints. In the absence of such a framework or basis, Higgins's truthfulness must come from an interior place, or, in other words, his individual, private conscience. It is this truthfulness, according to the narrative, that mends Higgins's falling-out with his employer, and restores him to employment. Thornton proceeds to

collecting evidence as to the truth of Higgins's story, the nature of his character, the tenor of his life. He tried not to be, but was convinced that all that Higgins had said was true. And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, the simple generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct. (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 325)

Urged by a desire to verify Higgins's story, Thornton is at first convinced, and then moved to act in a way he would not normally have done by its truth. His truthfulness, then, ultimately serves Higgins even though he acts the way he does as a matter of private judgment rather than imposed necessity.

The same dynamic is repeated, more or less along the same lines, in Frederick's mutiny subplot, as well. Margaret's brother Frederick rebels against the authority of his cruel captain out of his personal conviction that loyalty to truth and justice trumps loyalty to authority. And although he suffers immensely as a result of this act – his name is not cleared in England, and as he runs the risk of being hanged if he returns, he is condemned to a life on the Continent, away from his family. In addition to the clear conscience he enjoys as a result of not blindly having obeyed authority, he is financially rewarded – by Providence, or circumstance – in the course of his life in Spain. Married to Dolores, a girl from a rich family, "Frederick's worldly position was raised by this marriage on to as high a level as they could desire. Barbour and Co. was one of the most extensive Spanish houses, and into it he was received as a junior partner" (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 344). Like Higgins, then,

only on a much grander scale, Frederick's prospects are visibly and concretely improved by his refusal to distinguish between truth and his individual conscience.

The importance of truth and of the individual conscience are broadly Protestant values, stemming in no small part from the anti-establishment and anti-institutionalist tendencies of the Protestant faith of which Unitarianism is a branch. To properly locate the above examples in their specifically Unitarian context, we must pay closer attention to how, in both instances, they somehow align truth-telling and truthfulness not just with social integration, but also with material welfare. In this context, truthfulness and following one's own conscience are not abstract values, theoretically or theologically good for the soul in the grand scheme of things; they are immediately and evidently beneficial to the individual. Generally speaking, worldliness and the goods of "this world" are not very favorably represented in any strictly religious context, even in the case of Unitarianism. However, the discourse over prayer, for instance, is a more suitable place to trace references to the gratification of such wishes. In *Beliefs of a Unitarian*, Alfred Hall (1962) formulates this correspondence in the context of answered prayers. "Ask and it shall be given you.' Is this an exaggeration? No; God answers every true prayer, but the prayer must be the right one," (p. 97). Praying, in turn, is portrayed as an effort to establish an accurate correspondence between an inner conviction and an outside truth:

If I long for health, the prayer I must offer is obedience to the physical laws of the universe. If I want a good crop of wheat, the prayer I must offer is the careful and industrious tilling of the ground. (p. 98)

Hall's formulation of the two components of a successful, or answered prayer is similar to how *North and South* evaluates the relationship between truth and conscience, or private judgment in its Unitarian context.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Priestley (1783), one of the founders of English Unitarianism, offers the fragment from a prayer as suitable for Unitarians in his "Forms of Prayers and Other Offices For the Use of Unitarian

This distinctly mercantile and practical understanding of truthfulness, evocative of cost-benefit analyses in its efficiency, is arguably the distinctly Unitarian aspect of *North and South*'s portrayal of truth and conscience. Deriving on the one hand from the ironclad determinism of inescapable (but rational and benevolent) cause-and-effect formulated as "necessarianism" by the Unitarian founder Joseph Priestley, and no doubt borrowing and subverting elements from the otherwise repudiated Calvinism's beliefs on the elect on the other hand, Elizabeth Gaskell's theorization is thus eminently Unitarian, and provides a middle-class perspective on why truthfulness and reliance on one's conscience is good.<sup>14 15</sup> Through fostering fellow-feeling and material welfare, they facilitate social reconciliation instead of a struggle among competing interests.

Both the Higgins and Frederick subplots, in their analysis of the value and use of truthfulness, ultimately highlight and support the more central plot concerning Margaret and Thornton. As discussed above, Margaret initially disagrees with Mr. Hale on the matter of his resignation, and doubts whether her father following his own conscience is the same as his adherence to the truth. As such, Mr. Hale's resignation, in addition to being instrumentalized as a plot device to remove the family to Milton, also foreshadows Margaret's great trial later in the novel. As R.K. Webb (1988) notes:

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Societies": "... as thou hast ordained us to belong to this world, as well as to expect another, and hast framed us so that we cannot but be sensibly affected with our good and bad state here below; of thee, therefore, it becomes us to beg, with submission to thy providence, the security and continuance of the good things which we already enjoy, and the encrease of them, if that be truly good and needful" (p. 99).

<sup>14</sup> In "God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent," J. G. McEvoy and J. E. McGuire (1975) offer a comprehensive overview of Priestley's thought: "his entire intellectual system rests on theological foundations, the central concepts of which are determinism, necessity, causation, and materialism. Rational dissent shows how these concepts are compatible with Scripture, which contains nothing either paradoxical or "contrary to all natural appearances." Priestley's interpretation of these concepts constitutes a distinctive philosophy of nature, which supports his attitude toward religious doctrines such as mortalism and anti-trinitarianism" (p. 326).

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of whether English Unitarianism truly emerged out of Presbyterianism and Calvinism, see "Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?" by Russell E. Richey (1973).

Mr. Hale's bold action upon his doubts sets a standard of fidelity to truth from which Margaret falls away in the aftermath of the accidental encounters at Outwood station: it is almost as though Margaret Hale ... were the clergyman's daughter envisioned by Harriet Martineau, who had to learn the importance of fidelity to truth. (pp. 163-164)

Despite the overall portrayal of Mr. Hale as a hesitant and timid person, generally lacking in resolve, the narrative does accord him this one virtue of behaving on the strength of his convictions. And conversely, although Margaret is the protagonist, and is generally portrayed as a virtuous and commendable person, her inability to recognize how truthfulness and the individual conscience overlap, as well as being inextricably tied to material and social welfare, causes her a great deal of anguish and almost costs her Thornton.

Margaret's mistake, she eventually comes to realize, is believing that she can meaningfully distinguish between truthfulness and her own conscience, and suspend truth by relying on her private judgment, instead of trusting that through God, both concepts are in fact identical.<sup>16</sup> This fact is brought home to her when she finds out that her lie was unnecessary, since Frederick had already left the country at that point:

How faithless she had been! ... If she had but dared to bravely tell the truth as regarded herself, defying them to find out what she refused to tell concerning another, how light of heart would she now have felt! Not humbled before God, as having failed in trust towards Him; not degraded and abased in Mr Thornton's sight. (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 285)

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, in *The Rationale of Religious Inquiry*, James Martineau (1836) elaborates on the correspondence, not always noticed, between inner and transcendental truths: "It is obvious that a truth which is announced from heaven in one age, may be discovered by man in another. A truth is a real and actual relation of things, subsisting somewhere, either in the ideas within us, or in the objects without us, and capable therefore of making itself clear to us by evidence either demonstrative or moral. We may not yet have advanced to the point of view from which it opens upon us; but a progressive knowledge must bring us to it; and we shall then see that which hitherto was sustained by authority, resting on its natural support; we shall behold it, indeed, in the same light in which it has all along appeared to the superior Intelligence who tendered it to our belief." (p. 12)

It strikes her as further bewildering that she thinks of God's and Thornton's opinion of her in the same breath, but from a narrative as well as theological point of view, it is certainly not surprising.

As discussed above, in the Unitarian framework of the novel, truthfulness and reliance on the individual conscience are both identical, and immediately benefit their practitioners. The connection of this idea to middle-class capitalism is not only established through a rigorous pragmatism, either; the emphasis on the individual conscience, or private judgment, as opposed to reliance on an outside frame of reference, is also very much linked to the distaste of the new industrialist bourgeoisie, as represented by Thornton, towards governmental regulation. Nowhere else in the novel is this connection driven home more clearly, perhaps, than when Margaret, in the aftermath of her lie, remembers how she told Thornton "in the early days of their acquaintance" that trade is objectionable, because it is inherently deceitful and incompatible with the truth: "it too often led to the deceit of passing off inferior for superior goods, in the one branch, of assuming credit for wealth and resources not possessed, in the other" (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 302). Thornton corrects her by remarking that "in the great scheme of commerce, all dishonourable ways of acting [are] sure to prove injurious in the long run," or, in other words, the free market regulates itself (p. 302). A little late, Margaret realizes that Thornton was right all along; furthermore, his theory of self-correction applies not just to commerce, but to interpersonal conduct, as well. As such, she is won over to the idea that there is a seamless interface between truthfulness as a theological/ethical value and as a practical, worldly asset.

Gaskell complicates the narrative by rendering Thornton almost insolvent and making him rely on Margaret's unexpected inheritance for the continuation of his

commercial affairs, so it becomes the case that both parties benefit from the social reconciliation afforded to them through the eventual restoration of truth: Margaret is elevated to the status of both a married woman and a member of the capitalist middle class, and Thornton's class status is restored. In Gaskell's treatment of the central tenet of truth in Unitarianism, this "imperative of candour, in the double sense of speaking out about truth and speaking with utter frankness" is paired with an atavistically Calvinist belief in the manifestation of grace, whereby the elect are marked by material wealth on earth (Webb, 1988, p. 163). Even though the doctrine of predestination is entirely abolished in Unitarianism, this reflexive line reasoning appears to have survived, transformed and democratized as it is, in Gaskell's Unitarian outlook.

### 2.3 Tolerance as a Unitarian value

In *North and South*, tolerance is presented a religious value to be extended towards other beliefs; but at the same time, it is also representative of the "model behavior" that the new industrial middle classes ought to exercise against their employees in terms of class and labor relationships. As noted earlier, Unitarian toleration of other religious perspectives, especially the ones based on passion, serves as a model for middle-class toleration and management of working-class discontent.

Historically in the Unitarian context, tolerance is traced back to the origins of the movement in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when "it was common for a Dissenter to remain within his or her 'old' nonconformist congregation while also attending a Unitarian meeting house," and later on, people "uncertain about their faith, such as Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Hemans, found it an accommodating and tolerant branch of latitudinarianism" (Knight & Mason, 2006, 54). The Trinity Act,

according to which the rejection of the doctrine of Trinity was a capital offence, remained in force from 1648 to 1813. Although it was abolished around the time Gaskell was born, the semi-clandestine quality and the sense of persecution it must have imparted to the early communities likely expanded their sense of the importance of tolerance in practice, on top of its theoretical underpinnings, and so this understanding of tolerance survived into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The tolerance displayed by various characters in Gaskell's novels is not readily identified as specifically Unitarian by readers or critics, as she sets up this quality as a generally Christian principle, and it is even likely to be perceived as a secular-humanist value by contemporary readers due to its apparent generality. Further complicating the issue is the fact that as discussed above, Unitarianism is present as an ethos in Gaskell's novels, rather than in the form of Unitarian characters. Even Mr. Hale is only putatively Unitarian; more importantly, the diffusion and distribution of Unitarian values in the novel as the development of plot and themes necessitate it means that characters take on Unitarian qualities or positions situationally rather than permanently. A churchwoman in her opposition to her father's resignation, Margaret nevertheless espouses Unitarian values in her responses to Bessy; in debating categories of social distinction and their justification, Thornton strikes a Unitarian note in contrast with Margaret's reflexive social conservatism. Therefore, the novel's Unitarian ethos makes itself present within specific relationships and moments.

There is an important parallel between Gaskell's tolerance of political challenges against the ruling class ideology and the challenges posed by religious Dissent. As Valentine Cunningham (1975) argues in his *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel*, with the exception of George Eliot, popular and

respectable Victorian novelists were generally intolerant ‘towards Dissent – that is, anything that remained outside of the Anglican Church – and ridiculed Dissenters in their novels whenever such characters showed up (p. 9). Charles Dickens is perhaps the eminent writer in this category, but the intolerance as well as general ignorance regarding Dissent, through which fundamental distinctions between sects were confused or overlooked, was a central component of the Victorian novel and the other side of the coin as regards its liberalism (pp. 8-9). Gaskell’s sympathetic and rounded characterization of Dissenters, both generally and as individuals, stands out the more vividly for this reason.

One aspect of the Unitarian tolerance is portrayed in Margaret’s interactions with Higgins’ ailing daughter Bessy, who also works in the cotton mills and supplies Margaret with an uneducated and nonpoliticized worker’s perspective of industrialism. A Methodist, Bessy’s faith is of the prophetic, even apocalyptic kind; naturally unsatisfied by the conditions of her squalid life, she looks forward to the afterlife in which she will be rewarded for her suffering. She tells Margaret that she is “weary and tired o’ Milton, and longing to get away to the land o’ Beulah,” and when Margaret questions whether she wants to die, Bessy answers that if Margaret had led the sort of life she herself had, she would have “been glad enough when th’ doctor said he feared thou’d never see another winter” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 89). Bessy’s sickness, which gives her a tenuous hold on this life, is caused by her working in the mills; as such, she is directly victimized by industrialism and the kind of class inequality it fosters. This social context informs Bessy’s Methodism in two ways. One of these is her equation of Methodism’s message of salvation with a promise of future abundance that would redeem her present deprivation. She imagines this abundance in material terms; more specifically, as access to

commodities. Her father, an unbeliever, disparages her faith with its “visions of cities with goulden gates and precious stones,” while Bessy herself, on seeing Margaret’s outfit for Thornton dinner, “touch[es] her articles with a childish admiration of their fineness of texture,” and says, “I never knew why folk in the Bible cared for soft raiment afore” (pp. 90, 100). Precious metals and luxurious fabrics – these are the materials of Bessy’s otherworldly imaginings, and there is a tragic irony inherent in this situation, since Bessy’s lung disease is caused by “fluff,” or the dust-like particles of cotton that are found in cotton mills without proper ventilation.

The other, complementary side of Bessy’s faith is her fixation on the apocalyptic parts of the Bible, and particularly the Book of Revelations. In one sense, it is complementary because as she says herself, Bessy needs recourse to the language of Revelations to counter the dullness and insufficiency of her everyday life in Milton. “Many’s the time I’ve repeated the verses in the seventh chapter to myself, just for the sound. It’s as good as an organ, and as different from every day, too,” she tells Margaret (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 138). Just as the Bible’s framing of the promise of the afterlife in terms of material comforts appeals to Bessy, especially since she is so deprived of them on this earth, so does the aesthetic value and meaning she derives from the language and the stories of the Bible counterbalance the sense of meaninglessness and futility she experiences in the course of her everyday life as an invalid and a former mill worker. The apocalyptic message of the Revelations, promising an end to the current order in exchange for “a new heaven and a new earth,” appeals to her for the same reason; on the losing end of class struggle configured as a zero-sum game, her only hope is the complete reversal of this state of affairs. She makes her awareness of this situation explicit when she invokes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke to

Margaret by saying to her, “But if yo’ ask me to cool yo’r tongue wi’ th’ tip of my finger, I’ll come across the great gulf to yo’ just for th’ thought o’ what yo’ve been to me here,” referring to how, in the afterlife, the rich man was not allowed to be offered comfort by Lazarus, but saying that she, Bessy, would make an exception for Margaret and help her (p. 150). Although Bessy’s religious response to her own suffering in the context of industrialism can be read as lack of political consciousness, it is in fact the religious counterpart of more radical political responses like Chartism. Bessy rejects the social reform efforts of the ruling middle class by referring to the parable of Lazarus.

Reconciliatory and willing to make an exception for Margaret’s sake in this instance, her inability to stand the injustices of the world boils over at an earlier point in the narrative when she considers the possibility that her father is right, and there is no afterlife:

And I think, if this should be th’ end of all, and if all I’ve been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i’ this dree place, wi’ them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o’ quiet—and wi’ the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o’ the clear air yo’ speak on—and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and o’ all my troubles—I think if this life is th’ end, and there’s no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes—yo’ wench, yo’!” said she, sitting up, and clutching violently, almost fiercely, at Margaret’s hand, “I could go mad, and kill yo, I could.” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 101)

This instance, where Bessy finally and openly articulates the connection between her material conditions and her spiritual longings, is a momentary point of rupture in the narrative; through it, the contained but potent class hatred that drives the practice of Methodism among the working classes peeks out – but it does so only to be immediately patched up by both Margaret and Bessy, by invoking their “Father in Heaven” (p. 101). After this moment, class hatred is only ever obliquely presented in the narrative, as it was up to this point; however, the inclusion of this outburst is very

significant all the same. It is significant by merit of its presence, for one thing; for another, although it is patched up or put aside, it is not negated either by Margaret or the narrative. Bessy's outburst makes itself known, and thereafter occupies a place in the novel; Bessy is not ridiculed, not scolded nor deprived of her dignity for having it, nor for saying anything she does as a working-class Methodist woman. This tolerance, or capacity to withstand without feeling the need to caricaturize or villainize working-class anger, that *North and South* is capable of extending toward such socially marginalized characters and their practices is in line with the broadmindedness that Unitarianism espoused in theory and practice. Margaret's calm and understanding response to Bessy's violent words is not only a philanthropist middle-class visitor's compassion for a working-class woman but also an example of the Unitarian acceptance of different forms of faith, even diametrically opposite forms.

Of course, this is not to say that the novel's pervading Unitarian ethos approves of Bessy's Methodism, or alternately, Higgins's atheism. In the framework of this confrontation, Margaret is the mouthpiece of authorial position; as such, her urgings and consolations directed towards Bessy are meant to be taken as the novel's ultimate position on these matters. Furthermore, although Unitarianism is accommodating towards the presence of other religious practices, the clarity and intellectuality which attracted Coleridge to it in the first place, and the coldness which drove him away later on are obviously far removed from Methodism's fervor and zeal. There is, therefore, an implicit and subtle tone of understood superiority framing Margaret's relative position to Bessy in the matter of religion. For instance, Bessy's yearning towards death is contrasted to Margaret, who "[shrinks] from death herself, with all the clinging to life so natural to the young and healthy" (Gaskell,

1854/2008, p. 89). In the same vein, Margaret urges Bessy to focus on her reason rather than her passions by saying to her, “Don’t dwell so much on the prophecies, but read the clearer parts of the Bible” (p. 137). And finally, Margaret’s displaced retort to Bessy’s great outburst regarding justice in the afterlife comes when Margaret tells her that although people’s circumstances outwardly differ, their private suffering, known only to God and themselves, is the same (p. 137). The retort comes late, in another visit, as if to give space to Bessy’s position to remain on the table for a while, but it comes nonetheless. Kindly and respectfully portrayed though it is, the reader is given to understand that Bessy’s Methodism is not preferable to the novel’s unnamed but pervading Unitarianism.

If the overdetermination of Bessy’s Methodism, whereby ultimately everything is predicated on the reversal and exchange of one bad thing on earth for another good thing in the afterlife, and so on *ad infinitum*, makes it unpalatable to, if tolerated by, the Unitarian sensibilities of *North and South*, the absence of cause and effect implied by Higgins’s atheism is the reason why it is tolerated for a while by the narrative, but ultimately transformed to something more resembling religion, in a cautiously optimistic sense. Early in the novel, Higgins says to Margaret, “I believe what I see, and no more” (Gaskell, 1854/2008, p. 91). He opposes religion because to him, it means wasting time and energy on things we cannot know about while “leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand” (p. 91). Union activities and politics are, for him, a replacement for religion – this parallel is made explicit by Mr. Hale when he says, “your Union in itself would be beautiful, glorious—it would be Christianity itself—if it were but for an end which affected the good of all, instead of that of merely one class as opposed to another” (p. 233). However, the deaths of Bessy and Boucher, as well as Margaret’s intercessions –

“The dead stand between yo’ and every angry word o’ mine,” Higgins says to her, in acknowledgement of what she did and meant for Bessy – change Higgins, and transform his belief that there is no evidence of religion, or any order imposed by religion, in the world (p. 233). The senselessness of the suffering, for him, is replaced by an understanding that there is cause and effect in the world, no matter how bleak its implications might be. He argues that the cruelty of the first generation of industrialists necessitated the formation of unions, and continues: “Not this generation maybe, but their fathers. Their fathers ground our fathers to the very dust; ground us to powder! ... I reckon I’ve heerd my mother read out a text, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and th’ chidren’s teeth are set on edge.’ Its so wi’ them” (p. 232-233). It is not only the Biblical reference which constitutes a subtle turning point for Higgins but also the acknowledgment of a determined order, of cause and effect, which is so central to the Unitarian understanding of the world with its origins in 18<sup>th</sup>-century thought. From this point onwards, whatever urges and redirects Higgins towards some version of religion of Christianity is always along the lines of this concept of determination, of connection and generation. For instance, the orphaned children of Boucher whom he looks after sing Methodist hymns; although he is more proud of their singing than interested in content of what they are saying, Margaret nevertheless finds Higgins to be “oddly and unconsciously led to take an interest in the sacred things which he had formerly scouted” (p. 346). Similarly, he accepts her late father’s Bible as a gift from Margaret, making clear that it is the human connection which makes it valuable for him: “If it were the deuce’s own scribble, and yo’ axed me to read in it for yo’r sake and the oud gentleman’s, I’d do it” (p. 370). Although Higgins is never reformed to the point of reverence, it is obvious that through a sense of connection and meaning, he is saved from the worst of his

atheism. At the same time, it is significant that he is saved through his connections to individuals he knows, rather than as part of the aggregate of a Union, since the priority of individual relations over class or group relations in facilitating social reconciliation is also a motif that is repeated in the narrative, and as such, consistent with how the other points regarding Unitarianism are developed.

Elizabeth Gaskell's engagement with Unitarian values in *North and South* is not necessarily uncomplicated or prescriptive. Although it operates within a broadly Unitarian framework of value and meaning, the narrative also explores the limits of their application or validity. Significantly, it ends at a point where Unitarian principles are being implemented with regard to factory reform, but the outcomes are still on the horizon. Attesting to Gaskell's distaste for engagement with theoretical and religious issues, Michael Wheeler (1992) notes how she "described herself as a 'sermon hater' and ... disliked doctrinal controversy," and speculates that she "probably read few if any of the learned theological books" present in the Gaskell household (p. 28). However, Gaskell's in-depth exploration of Unitarian values such as truthfulness or tolerance, as well as her response to the forms of knowing and community at one time advocated by Manchester Unitarians in *North and South* show that Gaskell did conceive of Unitarianism as a value system operating within society and which sought to order social life, as much as it represented a distinct faith group.

CHAPTER 3  
ANTI-CATHOLICISM AND MIDDLE CLASS PRECARITY IN  
*VILLETTE*

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* has attracted some degree of attention for its anti-Catholicism since its publication in 1853 to the modern day. At times called a "semi-autobiographical" novel based on Charlotte Brontë's experiences in Belgium in 1842-44 as a student and teacher at a *pensionnat* (boarding school), this aspect of the novel was picked up by many of its twentieth-century critics. However, *Villette* also belongs to a genre of Victorian fiction commonly referred to as the anti-Catholic novel. The degree of *Villette*'s animus towards Catholicism in proportion to prevailing attitudes at the time is debatable. It was seen as needlessly excessive in a contemporary review by Brontë's friend Harriet Martineau, who wrote that she did not see the moral or artistic necessity of such an attack, "occurring as it does at a time when catholics and protestants hate each other quite sufficiently; and in a mode which will not affect conversion" (as cited in Bloom & Sparks, 2008, p. 104). Since then, critical engagement with the anti-Catholic elements in *Villette* has often sought to account for their presence in Brontë's work through some combination or other of autobiographical fact and individual psychology. However, in these efforts to relate and explain, certain formal aspects of the narrative's anti-Catholicism are overlooked. One such aspect, I argue, is the connection between the theme of anti-Catholicism and the precarity of middle-class identity in the novel.<sup>17</sup> This connection

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<sup>17</sup> In "Fables of Rebellion: Anti-Catholicism and the Structure of *Villette*," Rosemary Clark-Beattie (1986) observes how *Villette*'s contrasting of the Catholic culture and environment of Labassecour, a fictionalized Belgium, to Protestant England shows that "Protestantism and Catholicism resemble each other not only in that each is a form of social power, but also in that each places similar restrictions on female behavior" (pp. 829-830). Although Clark-Beattie correctly identifies the anti-Catholic theme of *Villette* as being a form of sociopolitical response to social structures rather than a

between anti-Catholicism and middle-class identity is developed mainly through the narrative's engagement with two distinct yet interrelated themes or tropes: its employment of the Gothic and the theme of deprivation and hunger. The narrator and protagonist Lucy Snowe leaves England and her unfulfilling life there to seek employment in the fictional Catholic country of Labassecour on the Continent. However, her English conceptions of class and religion follow her there even though they prevented her happiness in the past. The two main intersection points of class and religion discussed in this chapter are the class implications of the ghost nun plot, and how Brontë has transformed hunger and deprivation into evocative metaphors for the religious and class-related problems of Lucy Snowe.

### 3.1 Anti-Catholicism and the gothic

The emergence of the English Gothic novel as a distinctly recognizable genre in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is often read as a reaction to the political turmoil that led up to and culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. In *Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution*, Ronald Paulson (1981) writes:

I do not think there is any doubt that the popularity of Gothic fiction in the 1790s and well into the nineteenth century was due in part to the widespread anxieties and fears in Europe aroused by the turmoil in France finding a kind of sublimation or catharsis in tales of darkness, confusion, blood, and horror. (p. 536)

There is an interplay between the historical and the psychological in Paulson's explanation that is attendant upon much of the literature that seeks to explain how Gothic fiction functions, in that critics have generally interpreted the emergence and popularity of the Gothic form as a psychological reaction to a historical event. Victor Sage (1988) highlights this duality by referring to the French surrealist André

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purely theological posture, she centers her analysis around terms such as individualism and femininity, downplaying the importance of class.

Breton's explanation of the Gothic: Breton writes of a "direct connection [made] between the essentially random activity of the individual subconscious and the determining pressure of the political culture," an explanation which "proved influential in modern views of the subject" (pp. xi-xii). Sage attributes a number of failures and shortcomings to this mode of interpretation, such as reductionism and ahistoricism; the point most germane to the issue at hand here rises, however, when he asks, "Why does the [Gothic or horror] genre survive . . . as a demonstrably recurrent strain in nineteenth-century fiction long after the French Revolution?" (p. xii). This is a very relevant question; not only because its answer would account for the presence of Gothic elements in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, a mid-Victorian product of the prosperous and calm 1850s, but also because of the way it formulates the persistence of Gothic using a specific vocabulary. Referring to this genre as a "recurrent strain" puts to mind something like a virus or a meme, able to survive through both transformation and attaching itself to other beings. Similarly, in *Villette*, the Gothic is not the predominating genre by far; instead, various Gothic tropes and literary techniques<sup>18</sup> occasionally emerge and then disappear in the wider framework of an ostensibly overarching psychological realism. Gothic narrative conventions and literary techniques thus survive in *Villette* through adapting and subjugating themselves to their wider realist context; the political correlative of this function has likewise shifted from the French Revolution and the reactionary horror it invoked to something more contemporary.

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880*, Diane Long Hoeveler (2014) lists a number of literary techniques as being representative of Gothic fiction: "'type-scenes', aporia, analepsis, paranoia and intense suspense, multiple and overlapping narratives and characters, abrupt dénouements, doubled and flat characters, propagandizing via moralizing, and a privileging of melodramatic morality" (p. 5). It is interesting to observe how at least some of these features are represented or overturned in Lucy Snowe's narrative in *Villette*.

Anti-Catholicism has always been a more or less constant feature of the English Gothic tradition, and it suffuses Charlotte Brontë's Gothic-inflected novel, as well. Although it is part of a longstanding English tradition, however, there is, at the same time, a historically and politically circumscribed context to *Villette*'s anti-Catholic discourse. As Diana Peschier (2005) notes in *Nineteenth Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë*:

[a]nti-Catholicism, although part of the English cultural inheritance from the time of the Reformation, was especially prominent in the nineteenth century for historical reasons and much anti-Papist propaganda that was prevalent in the eighteenth century re-emerged in a slightly different form at this time. (pp. 1-2)

Popular anti-Catholic sentiment in Victorian England is generally attributed to a number of sociopolitical factors that were relevant from the late eighteenth century onwards. Referring to the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1790 and popular reaction to the 1800 Irish Act of Union, Diane Long Hoeveler (2014) writes, "there was strong if not hysterical sentiment along the lower and middling classes against any attempt to loosen the restrictions on Catholic emancipation every step of the way" (p. 3). From the beginning of the century to its middle, such a trend of popular, if not effectual (in the sense of overturning the tide of change) reactionism colors this period's anti-Catholicism. For instance, D.G. Paz (1992), in *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* suggests that Irish immigration and anti-Irish prejudice played a central role especially in mid-century anti-Catholicism (p. 49). According to Micael Clarke (2011), "Irish immigration swelled the population of Catholics in England from 284,000 in 1847 to 758,000 in 1851" (p. 972). In *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Susan M. Griffin (2004) likewise notes the influence of anti-Irish feeling not only in England but also in the United States. Griffin goes on to add that in itself, this was not the entire reason behind the period's anti-Catholicism

and that there were other causes, as well: “legislative changes in Britain, starting with the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1800 . . . , a series of sensational British legal cases . . . and actions on the part of the Catholic Church, [such as] the reinstatement of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain” (p. 4). Social change, then, in the form of both Irish immigration and legal emancipation, engendered this reactionary popular attitude, as did the perceived aggression of the Catholic Church. Published by Pope Pius IX in 1851, the papal bull re-establishing Roman Catholic hierarchy in England was popularly dubbed by the British public as “the Papal Aggression”. These were some of the notable events of the mid-Victorian period which gave form to its particular articulation of anti-Catholicism; among such other instances Micael Clarke (2011) includes “Prime Minister Robert Peel’s proposal to triple and make permanent the annual British government subsidy to Maynooth, Ireland’s leading Roman Catholic seminar,” as well as how, in 1852, “a mob attacked a Roman Catholic procession in Stockport, and the result was a Royal Proclamation that public processions of men wearing clerical gowns and carrying objects of worship threatened the peace and would henceforward be illegal” (p. 972). Furthermore, transformations and upheavals within the Church of England itself stoked Protestant anxieties. From the 1830s onwards, considerable portions of the High Church underwent a drastic transformation; formerly known as the “high and dry” church with reference to its avoidance of ritualism and any extensive engagement with doctrines, adherents of the Oxford Movement and Tractarianism brought a ritualist and traditionalist interpretation to the High Church under the influence of Roman Catholicism.

However, a closer look at these instances reveals that popular reactions to the supposed incursion of Catholicism in England are less than strictly theological or

doctrinal. Indeed, there seems to be a distinctly nationalist and at times xenophobic element to how Catholicism is identified with the Irish or the Continental other and treated as a foreign, un-English presence. Peschier (2005) notes how “to the English Protestant the faith of the Irish was simply an extension of their nationality” (p. 2). In *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, E.R. Norman (1968/2002) draws attention to this particular aspect of Victorian anti-Catholicism when he writes that

[i]n addition to superstition and moral corruption, the Protestant tradition also distrusted the political claims of the Church of Rome. Bound by a ‘double allegiance’, to Pope and Crown, Catholics were imagined to be potential – and sometimes (as in Ireland) even actual – subversives of the Protestant Constitution. (p. 15)

The political and religious aspects of Victorian anti-Catholicism, however, are inseparable not only because the Catholic Church is a politico-religious entity, but also because the same is true for the Church of England. Not just a religion but *the* civic religion, Anglican Protestantism’s beliefs about responsibilities, obligations, the individual and society had a bearing on how English society formulated these concepts in a secular or everyday framework, as well. Victor Sage (1988) elucidates this point by arguing that “the penetration of Protestant theology into every aspect of English culture since the [Protestant] Settlement [of 1688] acts as a most intimate, and at the same time a most objective, conditioning factor in both popular belief and literary culture” (p. xiii). Sage thus sees the Protestant tradition as informing popular belief and literature at the same time; however, the relationship between these two concepts themselves must also be taken into consideration. In accounting for how and why Gothic fiction interacted with and incorporated anti-Catholicism – even defined itself against it, we might say – in this particular moment in time, Hoeveler (2014) offers the following explanation:

[I]n order to modernize and secularize, the British Protestant imaginary needed an ‘other’ against which it could define itself as a culture and a nation

with distinct boundaries. In Gothic literature, a reactionary, demonized and feudal Catholicism is created in order to stand in opposition to the modern Protestant individual, who then alternately combats and flirts with this uncanny double in a series of cultural productions that we recognize as Gothic novels. (p. 3)

This political function of the Gothic as described by Hoeveler – nation-building through an encounter with the Other – is such a valuable insight, not only because it is a comprehensive explanation of Gothic literature, but also because it offers a blueprint in analyzing the presence of the Gothic in literature at large by highlighting the fact that the political and the religious often intersect and merge into one another.

Hoeveler's observation becomes particularly germane when analyzed next to a body of scholarship which is focused on the autobiographical aspects of the novel's anti-Catholicism. In much of the critical literature on Charlotte Brontë and religion, there is at least some degree of effort to account for Brontë's attitude toward faith and religious issues and as a result of this search for an underlying reason, a tendency to vagueness or wavering between the autobiographical fact and the literary product is sometimes felt in such accounts. Charlotte Brontë's dislike of particular sects or beliefs, such as Catholicism or Evangelicalism reflected in her fiction is attributed to a number of autobiographical factors ranging from her minister father's exact theological position to the unpleasant experiences she had in an Evangelical boarding house as a young girl. In other scholarly works, Brontë's fiction is ultimately absolved of such direct influences. Thus, for instance, Marianne Thormahlen (1999) argues in *The Brontës and Religion* that "[i]t is often hard to draw a line of demarcation between autobiography and fiction as regards [the anti-Catholic stance] of *Villette*" and goes on to draw evidence from the text on the one hand and Charlotte Brontë's life on the other hand in order to build her argument that *Villette* might be anti-Catholic, but not inordinately so (p. 30). In Tom Winnifrith's *The Brontës and*

*Their Background: Romance and Reality*, a similar effort to account for the anti-Catholicism of *Villette* (as well as Charlotte Brontë's other novels) is made through a mixture of autobiographical fact and psychological conjecture. So Winnifrith (1973) argues that the reason Charlotte Brontë isn't as hostile towards Methodism as she is to Catholicism might be "partly explained through Charlotte's links through her father with the Evangelical Low Church," and also that behind her anti-Catholicism is perhaps "her dislike of the elaborate ritual mingled with a secret hankering after it" (p. 49). And yet, ultimately, the correlation of all these facts and conjecture to her fiction is left uncertain, on account of her uncommon genius:

[It is not] wholly fair to Charlotte Brontë to consider her novels merely by an objective appraisal of the views expressed in them. To do so is to leave out of account the force of what Matthew Arnold, a perceptive though hostile critic, has called the 'hunger, rebellion and rage,' which raises Charlotte Brontë out of the ruck of English novelists. (p. 74)

At the same time, it is not fair either to be dismissive of such criticism; after all, there is a reasonable context and limit to what can be done in the effort to relate autobiographical facts to the literary product, and psychological assumptions are very difficult to entirely avoid in the course of such work.

A more fruitful approach in this regard might be to inquire not into the exact nature of this correspondence between the anti-Catholic discourse in *Villette* and the author's real-life experience, but rather to look at the function of anti-Catholicism in the narrative. Here, Hoeveler's insight that the Gothic, as a literary genre, depends on the expression of the political through the religious, or vice versa – insofar as the two are distinguishable in any given context - becomes relevant.

### 3.2 The ghost nun, loneliness and belonging

The most easily recognizable Gothic narrative convention in *Villette* is the ghost nun, whose story the protagonist Lucy Snowe first hears as a school legend in the boarding school. As reported by Lucy, this story is a veritable catalogue of clichés found in Gothic literature:

There went a tradition that Madame Beck's house had in old days been a convent. That in years gone by—how long gone by I cannot tell, but I think some centuries—before the city had over-spread this quarter, and when it was tilled ground and avenue, and such deep and leafy seclusion as ought to embosom a religious house—that something had happened on this site which, rousing fear and inflicting horror, had left to the place the inheritance of a ghost-story. A vague tale went of a black and white nun, sometimes, on some night or nights of the year, seen in some part of this vicinage. The ghost must have been built out some ages ago, for there were houses all round now . . . The legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, imprisoning deep beneath that ground, on whose surface grass grew and flowers bloomed, the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive for some sin against her vow. Her shadow it was that tremblers had feared, through long generations after her poor frame was dust; her black robe and white veil that, for timid eyes, moonlight and shade had mocked, as they fluctuated in the night-wind through the garden-thicket. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 106)

Lucy's disbelieving account of the Gothic nun, in referring to her as something that "must have been built out," highlights the quality of assemblage evident in this passage. In its medieval setting of a convent with cruel monks, victimized young women, sexual transgression and murder, this passage is clearly evocative of earlier examples of Gothic fiction. In discussing how "the highly and ambivalently sexualized figure of the Gothic nun haunted and intrigued the European imaginary," Hoeveler (2014) lays bare the essential setting and cast which is reproduced in countless Gothic tales: "Gothic convents were presided over by perverse abbesses and lecherous monks . . . These menacing convents became one of the most pervasive *loci classici* in the Gothic canon, full of dark hallways, dank underground cells and sexually repressed or perverse women" (p. 52). All of these elements are

present in the legend as it is narrated by Lucy, even the live burial, Hoeveler attests, is a trope found in Matthew Lewis's famous 1796 Gothic novel *The Monk* as well as "in dozens of lesser-known Gothic novels and chapbooks" (p. 52). The dry tone in which the Gothic elements of the legend are counted off, one after the other, by the narrator Lucy seems to imply both an awareness on Brontë's part that she herself is very much aware of this existing body of literature, with its stock characters and tropes, and also accentuate Lucy's Protestantism, which makes her immune against such Catholic superstition. At the same time, however, the narration of Lucy's subsequent three encounters with the Gothic nun are devoid of this skeptical and removed tone. Lucy sees the nun for the first time when she hides in the attic to read a letter sent by Bretton Graham, with whom she is in unrequited love. The second time is when she attempts to bury his letters under the pear tree, and final encounter is during a walk with M. Paul in the garden. All three instances mark critical moments in Lucy's life. Even if the protagonist sounds skeptical of the ghost nun story, the story continues to signal issues significance in her life.

This figure of the Gothic nun and her subplot has understandably drawn a steady degree of critical attention in discussions of *Villette* from very early on. In this respect, critical reception seems to have undergone a shift from regarding the Gothic nun as a superfluous, Romantic remnant in an otherwise realist novel earlier in the century towards interpreting it within a framework of psychoanalytic feminism from the 1970s onwards. Critic Lewis E. Gates, writing in 1900, condemns the Gothic nun's subplot as a "mere picturesque hoax" and claims that "[the nun's] repeated introduction illustrates the weakness for sensationalism in plots that Charlotte Brontë could never quite rid herself of" (as cited in Bloom & Sparks, 2008, p. 110). In a 1957 introduction to a new edition of *Villette*, Margaret Lane discusses the novel's

Gothic elements in terms of “flaws” and writes of them, “[they are] the common currency of fiction a hundred years ago, [which] stand out so unpleasingly only because the rest of *Villette* is immeasurably above such poor contrivances” (as cited in Warhol, 1996, p. 874). E.D.H. Johnson (1966) appears to have formulated one of the first appreciative interpretations of the Gothic nun in 1966; although he thinks that this sensationalist subplot is an ineptly handled “artistic lapse” in terms of realism, he justifies its inclusion as “a device for marking the successive stages by which Lucy Snowe moves toward self-realization and the eventual reconciliation of conflicting elements in her being” (pp. 325-326). From then onwards, the favorable aspects of Johnson’s criticism appear to have won out in terms of general tendencies; although, for instance, Terry Eagleton (2005) sees the Gothic nun as just another instance of *Villette*’s formal problem, namely a “disabling duality,” and dismisses it because “the absurd nun turns out to be a mere cover for schoolgirl flirtation,” overall there is a shift to feminist – psychoanalytical readings in which the nun becomes almost indispensable in understanding the psyche of the protagonist, Lucy Snowe (p. 90).

Feminist and psychoanalytic criticism has engaged with the Gothic nun subplot particularly in relation to themes of repression, femininity and repressed sexuality. To instantiate, for Gilbert and Gubar (2000) in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, “[t]he apparition embodies [Lucy’s] anxiety not only about the imagination and passion, but about her very right to exist” (p. 425). Similarly, Christina Crosby (1984) argues that the nun is a gothic convention used by Charlotte Brontë to dramatize Lucy’s “sentimental education,” and that “[t]o come into her own, Lucy must learn to uncover hidden and discomfiting truths, a process complicated by her neurotic tendencies towards withdrawal and projection,” among other complicating

factors (p. 701). To begin with, this particular turn to feminist – psychoanalytical criticism has undoubtedly opened up previously unconsidered pathways in reading *Villette*; perhaps most importantly, it salvaged the novel's Gothic elements and instead of casting them aside as incongruous or superfluous, reframed them as indispensable in understanding the narrative in its totality. As such, any analysis of *Villette* in which the Gothic is considered is indebted to the feminist critical tradition in making it a worthy object of analysis in the first place. However, in setting itself up against the earlier critical tendency to privilege *Villette*'s realism over its Gothicism, the feminist – psychoanalytical mode of interpretation tends to get caught in the same binary opposition from time to time, and privilege the elements of Gothic over its realism. Patricia E. Johnson (1990) draws attention to a general tendency in Brontë criticism, occasioned in no small degree by the split or double nature of Charlotte Brontë's narratives themselves, in the following remarks:

The relationship between the two sides in Brontë's narratives and the critical tendency to privilege one side over the other are perennial interpretive problems in Brontë criticism. Certainly, the doubleness of her narratives is a problem that critics have been drawn to over and over again . . . The temptation, in other words, is to praise one side of the narrative as truth and to discard the other as cover story or, less favorably, undiscarded hindrance to truth. (p. 618)

Johnson's observation is not limited to the conflicting readings of realist versus Gothic elements in *Villette*; she notes that a "temptation" to split the novel's constituent elements into two, and to privilege one half over the other, is present across the board. More specifically, Robyn R. Warhol (1996) observes the same thing happening in a feminist – psychoanalytical context: she argues that this kind of

reading depends on a thematics of repression, and necessarily privileges the subversively Gothic "repressed" elements over the more conventionally acceptable realist elements of the text. The psychoanalytic approach implicitly sets up a hierarchy of genre, which simply reverses the conventional evaluation of realism as superior to romance. (p. 868)

This mirror-image replication of the critical biases that riddled the earlier tradition favoring realism is one problem with the feminist – psychoanalytical approach.

There is a cultural bias evident in accepting the nun as a symbol of oppression, deprivation, or suffering that is on par with the novel's own anti-Catholic assumptions. In other words, there is a critical failure to distance oneself adequately from the object of criticism. Some of the deepest and most entrenched Protestant and anti-Catholic values and assumptions underpinning *Villette* are reproduced on the level of criticism, albeit in a seemingly different framework. Within the anti-Catholic worldview of *Villette*, a nun is naturally a figure to be interpreted in terms of oppression and repression, since her position as a woman in a convent is an affront to the anti-institutional and anti-clerical sensibilities of Protestantism. This prejudice against convent life is readily found in, and most likely inherited from the repository of Gothic fiction, as noted above. In discussing the Victorian “anxieties about and fascination with nuns,” especially in the context of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, J. Russell Perkin (2009) states in *Theology and the Victorian Novel* that “[a]ppealing to the powerful anti-Roman Catholic sentiment in England, the Gothic tradition frequently linked members of religious orders with sexual intrigue and violence” (p. 67). In a broader context, the Anglican Protestant – liberal culture in which both the English Gothic tradition and Charlotte Brontë are situated is the direct forebear of the secular, humanist and liberal culture that prevailed in the Anglophone academia in the twentieth century. It is true that the sometimes blatantly anti-Catholic tone of *Villette* is nowhere near matched in modern criticism; indeed, Harriet Martineau’s disapproving review, quoted above, seems to imply that even for mid-Victorian intellectual sensibilities, it was perhaps out of place in a work of proper literary

fiction. At the same time, the underlying assumption in *Villette*, that a nun is naturally and obviously an oppressed victim of institutional tyranny, is reproduced in the framework of the feminist – psychoanalytical approach. An example of this reading is Crosby’s otherwise astute and incisive reading of the text:

The nun has been established as the correlative of Lucy’s neurotic inner self, a symbol of the repression and burial of women and their sexual desires. Strong parallels have been drawn between them which make Lucy a Protestant version of the Catholic nun: both are buried within the walls of the convent-school, and Lucy leads a kind of death-in-life, suffering under self-imposed and socially enforced vows of poverty and chastity, her passionate self hidden under somber grey clothes of Quaker plainness. (Crosby, 1984, p. 704)

Crosby’s reading displays the surprising tendency of a considerable body of criticism on *Villette* to take the novel at its word with regard to value judgments concerning Catholicism, perhaps under the appearance of evaluating the narrative on its own terms. The anti-Catholic bias in *Villette* which underpinned the assumption that the nun is a figure of oppression and suffering is absent, at least explicitly, in criticism; however, the assumption itself is preserved. This is all the more surprising to encounter in the case of a novel such as *Villette*, where a not insignificant amount of scholarship looks at how Lucy Snowe might be an unreliable narrator.<sup>19</sup> All the same, the Gothic nun constitutes an ideological blindspot in the critical interpretation of *Villette*. In *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785-1829*, Maria Purves (2009) makes a similar claim for how critics handle the representation of the nun in Gothic novels in general, and writes that “[c]ritics predominantly look at the Gothic nun from an ahistorical feminist position, rather than seeking to understand what she represented to contemporary readers” (p. 125). Purves further argues that

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<sup>19</sup> In one of the endnotes to “Double Gender, Double Genre in Jane Eyre and Villette,” Robyn R. Warhol (1996) writes that “Lucy Snowe’s narratorial evasiveness has been the subject of interesting debate among feminist critics,” and offers examples (p. 873).

unlike the Gothic heroine who is constantly confined, the Gothic nun is a character who has found a space in which she can transcend the physical struggle . . . This space is not just architectural – her cell, the convent chapel, the convent gardens – but also spiritual. It is a devotional space, a spiritual space, in which she can gather and reclaim herself. (p. 127)

Although it would be difficult to argue that the Gothic nun in *Villette* stands for such expansive and emancipatory qualities as these in contrast to the “heroine”, Lucy Snowe, Purves does have a point in that the attribution of negative qualities to the nun, or seeing her as the dark half of the protagonist, should not be an automatic assumption.

In addition to the lasting influence of the Gothic imaginary and the anti-Catholic biases present in the culture of Victorian England, there is a more specific context that may have informed the depiction of the Gothic nun in *Villette*. As the Oxford Movement and its attendant Anglo-Catholicism gained momentum throughout the 1830s and ‘40s, there was a rising demand for the re-establishment of religious communities, including sisterhoods, in England. Perkin offers a brief background of these developments as follows:

In 1829 [Poet laureate] Robert Southey made an explicit and influential plea for religious orders. Among many literary treatments of the subject, Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (1843) contrasted the meaningful and organized life of a medieval religious community with the social fragmentation of life in Victorian England. Against this background, the first Anglican religious community since the Reformation, the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, was founded in London in 1845. Such communities were extremely controversial, in part because they were similar to Roman Catholic institutions, in part because they allowed women to leave home and act independently. (Perkin, 2009, p. 67)

As Perkin notes, the popular reaction engendered in the Protestant public by the establishment of such communities is not just because of the animus against Catholicism, but also because they were perceived as a challenge or threat to the existing social order. In critical perceptions of the nun as discussed above, this historical reality attached to the figure of the nun is an element that tends to get

overlooked. In *Nuns: A History of Convent Life*, Sylvia Evangelisti (2007) discusses this opportunity of “a perfectly acceptable social identity outside marriage” offered by the convent life, and writes: “[The nuns] became part of an all-female group organized like a spiritual family while escaping family duties, motherhood, the possible dangers associated with childbearing, the uncertainties of widowhood, and—not least—marital authority” (p. 4). Although Evangelisti notes that her formulation of the convent as a female community is relevant to Catholic Europe, the idea of convent life as an alternative to the prevailing social order is present in discussions of nineteenth-century English religious communities, as well. Peschier (2005) argues that

[m]any single women regarded the convent as a plausible alternative lifestyle. Such an alternative necessarily challenged the Victorian patriarchal emphasis on the family as the core of society. This meant that convent-living tended to become ideologically constructed as ‘unnatural’. To deny a woman her ‘natural’ destiny of wife and mother was deemed a terrible offence. (p. 70)

The nun, or the sister, exists outside of both the family, and the class system in which society came to be understood from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>20</sup> An interstitial figure perhaps even in the scheme of the medieval estate theory which divided society into the clergy (“those who pray”), the nobility (“those who fight”) and the peasantry (everyone else), since nuns are not ordained clergy but rather take part in the religious life, the nun is all the more out of place in a nineteenth-century setting, whether she is in Victorian England or in the worldly and bourgeois Labassecour of *Villette*.

Issues of class ambiguity, belonging, and social ties are significant aspects of nuns. These issues are not only Catholic references but also the central emotional

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<sup>20</sup> In the chapter on *North and South*, there is a discussion of how society came to be understood through the lens of the class system as opposed to the old hierarchies (of estates, ranks or stations) from the late eighteenth century onwards.

issues of the novel's protagonist, who is deprived of family connections and subsequently a stable middle-class status. Lucy introduces herself as a quasi-orphan, who has lived with her godmother Mrs. Bretton until the age of fourteen, but she withholds much of the information related to her own family, and the reasons for being abandoned by them:

In the autumn of the year —— I was staying at Bretton; my godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence. I believe she then plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 5-6)

It is unclear why Lucy has no parents or siblings; it is unclear who the “kinsfolk” in question are; and even the nature of the misfortune that befalls these people is not revealed by her at any point in the narrative. There is a possibility that financial troubles might be the case. Later on, Lucy notes that “the handsome property of which [Mrs. Bretton] was left guardian for her son, and which had been chiefly invested in some joint-stock undertaking, had melted, it was said, to a fraction of its original amount” through speculations, but she never clarifies the point with regard to her own relatives (p. 35). At any rate, Lucy, who has no family or relatives to depend on, loses the relationship she has with her godmother's family as well and is left entirely without any social connections. In glossing over the pain she experiences during these lonely years, she invites the reader to instead imagine her as a boat making her leisurely way through life, with

the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? (p. 35)

It is a cryptic, curious remark – although the analogy is between the “great many women and girls” and the boat, and is likely meant to denote how they are expected

to pass through their lives conforming to a pre-established pattern, the image of the steersman complicates the simile. Although the Gothic nun of the *pensionnat* is yet to make her first appearance, this figure on the boat, in a posture of religious ecstasy – eyes closed, looking upward, “buried” in a “long prayer,” foreshadows the issues of faith as well as the central trouble of Lucy’s life, which is that her life has not turned out the way it is supposed to be, like the lives of those “great many women and girls” (p. 35).

Like the nun, Lucy is different from other women whom she might have otherwise resembled in her social standing if she had familial connections. In *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall describe the importance of family ties and the precarious status of middle-class women without such connections.

[it is often overlooked how during this period] so many women's 'life chances' were dominated by their relationship to others within the family and kin network. Womanly skills - cooking, sewing, child care - have been consistently conceived as generalised, almost natural, attributes of femininity, although having to be taught to girls by adult women. The widespread availability of such skills meant that it was almost impossible to close ranks and create scarcity. Even contemporaries recognised that governesses were a depressed and despised group for the same reason that needlewomen were a distressed class: as every woman could read, write and sew a little, every uneducated woman who was destitute became a seamstress and every educated - or half educated - woman became a governess. (Davidoff & Hall, 2019, li)

Davidoff and Hall thus underline how any chance middle-class women had at thriving, or even surviving – having “life chances” – was dependent on their family and relatives; since women’s labor was perceived as being both non-scarce and unqualified, the reward, both material and otherwise, of such labor could hardly be fulfilling. This dilemma is a central preoccupation of *Villette*; one critic notes how *Villette* “is Brontë’s unique creation of the history of a Victorian working woman’s

life, one of the first such delineated in English fiction” and expands on this point by listing how the narrative contains

Lucy's careful enumeration of the jobs open to genteel women - lady's companion, nursemaid, seamstress, governess, teacher; her inability to admit her own ambition early on; her gratitude at being paid after Miss Marchmont's death; her turn to an old family servant for advice; her desperate decision to emigrate to the Continent; her embarrassment at the ambiguity of her class status; finally and most important, her presentation of all the jobs available to women as sex-segregated and her recognition that there are no career paths for women as there are for men.

(Johnson, 1990, p. 619)

Limited as her prospects are with such circumscribing factors, Lucy is also constrained by a wish to be independent, and not to be beholden to anyone. This wish for independence and self-reliance might be seen as a personality trait, or even as a Protestant trait in the foreign and Catholic context of Labassecour, and it certainly is perceived as such by Lucy herself; or it might be read as a middle-class reflex, or fear, of having to depend on others. When she is offered a position as a governess by the father of her childhood friend, Polly – or Paulina –, Lucy paradoxically argues that she would rather be a menial servant than a companion:

Mr. Home himself offered me a handsome sum—thrice my present salary—if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined. I think I should have declined had I been poorer than I was, and with scantier fund of resource, more stunted narrowness of future prospect. I had not that vocation. I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence. Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 298)

Thus professing her distaste for that uncertain post of a “private governess” or a “companion”, Lucy hastens to add that she is “no bright lady’s shadow,” a statement

which strikes at the heart of the real issue. Menial labor is acceptable to Lucy Snowe whereas being a governess or paid companion is not, because while it would be obvious, to herself if not to anyone else, that she is not working class even if she scrubbed toilets, it would not be so easy to assure herself of her middle-class status if she were continually in the presence of an actually and currently genteel woman, a “bright lady”. Being a servant provides space for romantic detachment in a way that the ambiguous position of the companion does not, a fact Lucy might have gathered from her earlier experience as a carer for the late Miss Marchmont. In *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*, Gerry Holloway (2005) notes that paid work, including jobs such as governessing or being a lady’s companion, “would involve a loss of status because the woman would be working for money,” and elaborates: “[paid work] signified a double failure, first on the part of the woman to find a husband and second, a failure on the part of her family to provide for her and allow her to remain a leisured but respectable lady” (p. 37). With no immediate family to care about her, it seems that the entire burden of this double failure is shouldered by Lucy – prior to her emigration to Villette, Lucy encounters a former school friend and observes: “Different as were in our social positions now, this [woman] and I had been school-fellows, when I was a girl of ten and she a young lady of sixteen; and I remembered her, good-looking, but dull, in a lower class than mine” (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 44). The upward mobility of this friend, now the mistress of a nursemaid or a governess herself, has been facilitated by her marriage. As Lucy remarks, “[w]ifehood and maternity [has] changed her” (p. 44). Their social positions have shifted because this woman is married whereas Lucy is single and dependent.

Like many middle-class women without family or wealth, Lucy finds herself in a vicious cycle that renders social mobility impossible. She is unable to maintain

social relationships with people of her class, such as the one she might have had with Polly and her father, because of her ambiguous class status and being deprived of these relationships hinders her from reestablishing herself as a middle-class woman. Because of this vicious cycle, she is forever falling through the cracks of society, not dramatically, but mundanely and unnoticed, merely because she does not belong. Earlier it was argued that this ambiguous class status and the attendant failure to fit in, and not the state of being sexually repressed, was the connection between her and the Gothic nun figure, who, like Lucy, occupies a liminal space in – or at the border of – society. The narrative attests to this parallel by framing the three appearances of the Gothic nun, as well as her two subsequent exorcisms, in a very specific context where which social mobility and romance/marriage are very much interconnected.

The Gothic nun appears to Lucy three times: once when she is reading a letter from Dr. John in the attic, once right after she has buried his letters underneath a pear-tree in the alley, and once final time in the alley as she is having a conversation with M. Paul. In all of these instances, Lucy is – or believes that she is – at a crossroads with regard to a romantic relationship. In reading Dr. John's letter, she experiences a moment "full, pure and perfect," and adds: "it deeply blessed me" (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 244). However, her bliss is undercut when the Gothic nun makes an appearance and scares Lucy very much. The dry and detached tone Lucy employed in first narrating the legend of the nun is replaced by a creeping note of uncertainty as she writes, "I was left secretly and sadly to wonder, in my own mind, whether that strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it was only the child of malady, and I of that malady the prey" (p. 252). Later, having been disappointed in her expectations of a relationship with Dr. John, she decides to bury the letters as if "to bury a grief" (p. 296). Just before the

nun appears, Lucy is thinking about her lonely path in life: “If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters—to leave an encampment where food and forage failed,” she says, on the disappearance of the chance she believed she had at a shared life (p. 296). And finally, the nun appears shortly after M. Paul makes an impassioned appeal to Lucy about how their path in life must be one and the same. He says to her, “we are alike—there is affinity between us. Do you see it, Mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? . . . Yes, you were born under my star! Tremble! for where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle; knottings and catchings occur—sudden breaks leave damage in the web” (p. 367). Even though the first two sightings accompany a desired marriage opportunity and the final one a rather threatening one, both marriage choices foreground Lucy’s fraught and despondent search for identity.

The nun thus attends Lucy’s romance or marriage plot in all its crucial turns. Marriage to either Dr. John or M. Paul would have restored Lucy to a more unambiguously middle-class position. As Gerry Holloway notes with reference to a newspaper article published in the 1850s, marriage in itself was seen as a bona fide profession for the middle-class woman, and as such, her training prepared her for this career (Holloway, 2005, p. 35). However, such a reinstatement is not to be the case for Lucy Snowe, and the liminal figure of the nun marks this, with an anti-Catholic sensibility borrowed from the Gothic tradition. In these encounters, it is always a “black and white” nun that appears, a detail that Lucy the narrator doesn’t ever fail to relate. Although these are the colors of a nun’s habit, the insistence on marking the monochrome nature of the nun’s appearance, as if she were an engraved illustration lifted from the popular novels or chapbooks mentioned above, implies an

acknowledgement of this inherently anti-Catholic frame of reference. In discussing some conventions of the early English Gothic, Victor Sage (1988) notes that “Ann Radcliffe’s novels are full of discarded clothes, some of them bloodstained, and this image of appearance and reality is a rich one for the Protestant reader. The monk is essentially in disguise” (p. 33). Such stress on the nun’s habit, as on the monk’s robes, is therefore bound to have a certain significance in this context. Thus, among all its other functions, the figure of the nun is also a warning sign that says: things here are not as they appear to be, and Lucy’s expectations are going to be overturned.

The Gothic nun, of course, is debunked, or “exorcised,” before the narrative is concluded. This is done not once but twice; first, in a bathetic revelation, it turns out that Count de Hamal, suitor to Ginevra Fanshawe, who is an English student at Madame Beck’s *pensionnat*, infiltrated the building wearing a nun’s habit in order to meet incognito with his lover. Again, the nun marks a romance plot – but since it is not related to Lucy, this romance between the Catholic Count and the unscrupulous Ginevra is allowed to flourish and conclude in marriage. On one occasion, Ginevra says to Lucy, “I have quite forgotten my religion; they call me a Protestant, you know, but really I am not sure whether I am one or not: I don’t well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism,” (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 54). Different as she is from Lucy, who is constantly aware of her foreign Protestantism in a Catholic country, Ginevra’s plot is nevertheless a ficelle for Lucy’s flirtation with conversion to Catholicism through a romance with M. Paul. At any rate, this initial revelation serves more to resolve the Gothic subplot and fold it into the realist conventions of the narrative than anything else.

The appearances of the ghost nun coincide with critical moments in Lucy’s marriage plot, but unlike the psychoanalytic and feminist critics, I interpret the ghost

nun figure as Lucy's barely repressed anger against a society that abandoned her and deprived her of a chance to attain a solid middle-class identity either through marriage or dignified employment. In fact, this Gothic element is revealed to have one more layer. While the ghost was Ginevra's lover and not a nun at all, Lucy learns that M. Paul used to be engaged and that his fiancée entered a convent after their engagement was broken. The ghost nun subplot eventually reveals the existence of a long-dead fiancée on M. Paul's part; a young woman named Justine Marie whose family prohibited her from marrying the young M. Paul because once the son of a rich man – a banker – himself, M. Paul's father suffers financial ruin and dies, “[leaving] behind him only debts and destitution” (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 392). Too timid to disobey her family and unwilling to marry another man, Justine Marie enters a convent and becomes a nun, dying not too soon after. Although it is implied that the young Justine Marie Saver, whom Lucy sees a few times in the company of Madame Beck, is likely the illegitimate daughter of M. Paul and his late fiancée, this is not openly acknowledged by the narrative. In any event, Justine Marie's family too goes bankrupt some years after her death, at which point her father dies and M. Paul takes it upon himself to support both the man's widow and mother. At the time of Lucy's hearing this story from Pere Silas, Justine Marie's grandmother Madame Walravens, the intimidating and witchlike “Malevola” of Lucy's narrative, is still alive and her upkeep is a considerable strain on M. Paul's finances. Overall, it is a doomed love story foregrounded in an explicitly “bourgeois”, or middle-class context; the matters of marriage and finances are inextricably bound up with each other in the realm of the free market and enterprise. As well as being M. Paul's former lover, Justine Marie resembles Lucy in the ruin suffered by her family. M. Paul is undecided whether his Justine Marie is the nun haunting the school, and to

Lucy he asks, “You did not, nor will you fancy . . . that a saint in heaven perturbs herself with rivalries of earth? Protestants are rarely superstitious; these morbid fancies will not beset *you*?” (p. 408). Lucy does not outright deny the possibility.

### 3.3 Hunger and spiritual deprivation

Deprivation of a solid middle-class status, attained through professional employment or marriage, is not the only form of deprivation that *Villette* takes up. Metaphorical hunger of the emotionally deprived characters is often represented with literal hunger in Brontë novels. Literal and metaphorical images of hunger, food, and various forms of malnutrition abound this novel too. Hunger, which was a central social problem of the urban and industrial poor intersects with metaphorical hunger of emotionally and spiritually deprived characters in *Villette* as well. What is specific to this novel is the ways in which hunger is also used as a metaphor for the different types of spiritual deprivation suffered by Catholics and Protestants. Hunger and food tropes constitute a second significant point of intersection for the religious and class-based identity issues. The 1850s in England was a time of general prosperity, where “[t]he economic troubles of the preceding generation vanished almost as if by magic,” Asa Briggs (1954/1970) writes, and contrasts this peace to “the sharp conflicts of the 1840s, when contemporaries talked openly of class war and imminent revolution” (p. 9-10). Underlying and contributing to the political turmoil of the ‘40s in England were a number of historical events. Among these is the New Poor Law, or the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, which mandated that the poor had to go into workhouses in order to receive support; living conditions in these workhouses were dismal, with food scarcity and ill-treatment of the residents common occurrences. Another contributing factor was the grain scarcity exacerbated by the protective Corn Laws,

which were eventually repealed in 1846 to permit the import of foreign grain and reduce the price of food. A potato blight swept through Europe from 1845 onwards, with particularly dire results in Ireland, where the Great Famine unfolded to catastrophic results. All of these contributed to widespread scarcity, hunger and starvation throughout Britain during this decade, also commonly referred to as the “hungry forties”. Moreover, the fact that Ireland suffered disproportionately from the potato blight as a direct result of British colonialism and exploitation underlines how class relations – in this case, between the landowners and their tenants – were a determining factor in the experience of this widespread deprivation.

Situating the Brontë sisters in their historical context and contrasting them with contemporaries such as Charles Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell, Raymond

Williams writes:

The world we need to remember if we are to see these connections of the 1840s is the world of Blake: a world of desire and hunger, of rebellion and pallid convention: the terms of desire and fulfilment and the terms of oppression and deprivation profoundly connected in a single dimension of experience. . . . [A]n intensity of desire is as much a response, a deciding response, to the human crisis of that time as the more obviously recognisable political radicalism. (Williams, 1970, p. 60-61)

Although Williams sees the Brontës as falling short of Blake’s standards in their ability to bring together the personal and the political in that “single dimension of experience” and thus express it in their art, he nevertheless attributes a great deal of success to their attempts (p. 60). Particularly noteworthy is the way, reminiscent of Matthew Arnold’s disgruntled labeling of *Villette* as a book full of “hunger, rebellion, and rage,” in which Williams highlights hunger, deprivation, oppression and rebellion as the particular qualities which enable Brontë to formulate the personal and the political in conjunction with each other (Bloom & Sparks, 2008, p. 105). Williams’s insight is very helpful in understanding how the persistent feeling

of deprivation expressed by the narrator Lucy in *Villette*, seemingly personal, interior and psychological, is in fact closely related to her displaced class anxiety and resentment, which eventually coalesces with an anti-Catholic discourse condemning the sensuousness and excess of Catholicism.

Carol Ohmann argues that a “paradigm” of deprivation is a constant in all of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, and that it is

all the more keenly felt and resented because it goes hand in hand with a lively apprehension of its opposite. With the idea of deprivation, rendered as poverty or insignificance or constraint (even bondage) or misery goes the idea of fulfillment, as riches or glory or freedom or ecstasy. (Ohmann, 1977, p. 757)

Ohmann is correct in indicating that the real power of theme is derived from the contrast it constantly evokes. It is a similar process to that which Rosemary Clark-Beattie (1986) notes as being at work in the narrative when she claims, “[o]ne of the most common rhetorical figures in *Villette* is the negating of a metaphor that continues to exercise semantic power” (p. 845). To exemplify she quotes the line, “No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect,” and indeed, the narrative abounds with such instances; not necessarily of metaphors, but of concepts, ideas or states expressed only through their negation or denial, as, for instance, when Lucy says, “I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination” (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 12). As with this rhetorical device, or the interplay between the Gothic and realism, whose exact nature, as shown above, has been the subject of much debate, so too the theme of deprivation finds its full expression in a framework of contrasting dualities.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Lucy Snowe the narrator does possess a “discursive” streak of mind.

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<sup>21</sup> In “Charlotte Brontë’s Belgian Essays: The Discourse of Empowerment”, Sue Lonoff (1989) writes of Charlotte Brontë that “[h]er modes of thought and work were dialogic,” and continues: “Her essays, poems, and fiction make extensive use of utterance: exchanges between characters, reports of conversations, and, perhaps most typically, a self conversing with itself, questioning and weighing,

The vocabulary of food, hunger, and fullness functions as a kind of coded language in the narrative, and yet one with more ambivalent than stable meaning. The semi-parasitic relationship that Ginevra Fanshawe has with Lucy is one avenue in which this ambivalence is explored. Ginevra is portrayed by Lucy as a superficial and yet not inherently malicious young woman; even though in one instance she says to Lucy,

I am the daughter of a gentleman of family, and though my father is not rich, I have expectations from an uncle . . . I suppose you are nobody's daughter, since you took care of little children when you first came to Villette: you have no relations. (Brontë, 1853/2008, pp. 145-146)

Lucy attributes honesty and immaturity rather than ill-will to this statement.

However, one thing Ginevra cannot be accused of is naivete or lack of worldliness, and this hierarchical description of their relationship is evidently accurate. The combination of wry detachment and resentment displayed by Lucy in her treatment and portrayal of Ginevra is informed by her own class position, which is an embattled gentility, or an uncertain and insecure middle-class status against the breezy self-assurance of Ginevra as to her social standing, her relations and finances. The parasitic aspect of the two women's relationship is introduced by the narrator in describing at length how they share their food, or rather, how Lucy gives half of hers to Ginevra for she "ha[s] an excellent appetite, like any other healthy school-girl, for the morning pistolets or rolls" (p. 233). Ginevra, Lucy reports, has an appetite, especially for sweet things, whereas Lucy has no hunger; in saying this she is ostensibly talking about a particular morning in question, but the statement stands as a general declaration of attitude on Lucy's part, as well (p. 234). Two interesting

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proposing resolutions, but rarely shutting doors in providing them. (Witness the conclusion of *Villette*)" (p. 389).

things in particular emerge from this passage; one is the way Lucy would have no one but Ginevra eat her food:

I don't know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel . . . I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk: so it was, however and she knew it; and therefore, while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 234)

It is difficult not to read into this supposedly arbitrary preference for the sole English girl in the *pensionnat* that “colonialist impulse” which, for Rosemary Beattie-Clarke (1986), is a constituent element of *Villette* (p. 825). “Like many of her contemporaries, Lucy escapes her insignificance within English society by fleeing to a setting where her adherence to the mores of the very culture she has fled sets her apart, in her own mind, as superior,” Beattie-Clarke argues (p. 825). The dynamics of the relationship between Ginevra and Lucy attest to this conformity; free to reinvent herself in terms outside of the rigid English class system, Lucy prefers to spend time with the one person in the school who can say to her, “you are nobody’s daughter,” and relegate herself to that role of the “bright lady’s shadow” despite her professed desire to evade such a position. The same dynamics are repeated in her adult relationship with the “heiress,” Polly; condescending and resentful towards her in turns, if only inwardly, yet Lucy cannot bring herself to end her relationship with Polly, even if it hurts her to see Polly together with Dr. John. Beattie-Clarke writes that “[w]hat [Lucy] resents . . . is not the system which oppresses her, but the fact that she has been assigned a role within that system so inappropriate either to her needs or to her deserts” (p. 826). Resentful of, and anxious about her precarious middle-class identity, Lucy’s answer to the problem is not to break out of the constraining system but to remain in the orbit of those who are securely middle-class

in an English way. One of the ways she expresses her reaction to this dilemma is through particular modulations of her vocabulary of food.

The other particularly noteworthy element that stands out in the passage on Lucy and Ginevra's food-based relationship, and which is developed throughout the novel, is Lucy's aversion to sweets. In *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, Anna Krugovoy Silver claims that "Lucy's emaciation symbolizes the lovelessness of her emotionally repressed life, while her simultaneous longing for food, particularly sweet food, attests to her need for affection" (Silver, 2002, p. 101). However, it would be a misrepresentation to say that Lucy has a straightforward longing for sweet food. To begin with, Lucy's distaste with sweets is brought up several times to contrast herself favorably with Ginevra. "At all ordinary diet and plain beverage she would pout; but she fed on creams and ices like a humming-bird on honey-paste: sweet wine was her element, and sweet cake her daily bread," Lucy writes of the frivolous and demanding Ginevra (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 142). The full meaning of this portrayal emerges a few pages later when Ginevra asks Lucy how she finds her lover, Count de Hamal, a man whom Lucy despises – in answer to her, Lucy says that she likes him "as [she] like[s] sweets, and jams, and comfits, and conservatory flowers" (p. 147). Although the meaning of this backhanded statement is lost on Ginevra, it is clear that Lucy doesn't like to think of herself as a person who likes sweet food. Therefore, when further in the narrative she describes her need for the letters of Dr. John using food metaphors, this self-declared distaste for sweet food inevitably colors the narration. At the first, hopeful stage, Dr. John's letters to Lucy appear to her as real food with nutritious value:

I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearly eulogized awhile ago—which, indeed, at first melts on the lips with an

unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end, our souls full surely loathe; longing deliriously for natural and earth-grown food, wildly praying Heaven's Spirits to reclaim their own spirit-dew and essence—an aliment divine, but for mortals deadly. It was neither sweet hail nor small coriander-seed—neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild, savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 239)

Described in an ecstatic, Biblical language, the solid and nourishing quality of Dr. John's words – “morsel,” “natural and earth-grown,” – are expounded at length by Lucy in an extended conceit comparing them to meat, in contrast with those sweet things which are only very briefly fulfilling. However, as their one-sided romance sours in the course of the narrative, Lucy comes to think of Dr. John's letters as “a bubble—but a sweet bubble—of real honey-dew” (p. 244). The solidity of the hunter's meat is replaced by the empty “bubble” of honey, and in time, Lucy realizes that the sweetness she perceives in Dr. John has nothing to do with herself:

it was the honey of his temper; it was the balm of his mellow mood; he imparted it, as the ripe fruit rewards with sweetness the rifling bee; he diffused it about him, as sweet plants shed their perfume. Does the nectarine love either the bee or bird it feeds? Is the sweetbriar enamoured of the air?. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 362)

The negative associations of sweet food for Lucy are highlighted once again in her realization of the Narcissus-like, self-oriented nature of Dr. John's sweetness. In this, he is linked to the self-regard of Ginevra who, looking at herself in the mirror, makes Lucy think: “[I] let her self-love have its *feast* and triumph: curious to see how much it could *swallow*—whether it was possible it could *feed to satiety*” (p. 145; emphasis added). The self-satisfaction of both characters is further linked by their association with a cloying, unpleasant sweetness in Lucy's unique lexicon of food and satiety.

Sweetness thus comes to be associated with Lucy's exclusion from the self-satisfied world of the English middle-class and once this textual association is formulated, the vocabulary of sweet – yet unwholesome – food is used to launch an

attack on the Catholic Church, another establishment she perceives to be standing in the way of her happiness and good fortune in life. Early in the novel, the groundwork of this dynamic is laid out in broader terms as Lucy comes to associate Catholicism with excess and materialism, in opposition to her ascetic Protestantism. Surveying the students of the boarding school, she comes to believe that the microcosm offered by this “strange, frolicsome, noisy little world” is a good representative of

Catholicism at large:

Great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers: a subtle essence of Romanism pervaded every arrangement: large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint . . . every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. “Eat, drink, and live!” she says. “Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me.” (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 127)

This portrayal of the Catholic Church as maliciously invested in the physical welfare of “her” children is paralleled by two other images of corpulent and neglectful femininity, or even maternity, in the narrative. One of these is the image of England as Britannia, “a red, random beldame” handing out sugar-plums to the more boisterous of her children in order to shut them up, which Lucy conjures in order to write a *devoir* on the idea of Human Justice. The is the painting of Cleopatra, whose corpulence is quite unsavory in Lucy’s view: “She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher’s meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh” (p. 199-200). Although Cleopatra isn’t identified as a mother as such, her physical excess earns the kind of particular scorn from Lucy that she usually reserves for Catholicism. Lucy’s disdain for how the Catholic Church seems to care for the bodies of its flock stems from a conviction on her part that material welfare hides a spiritual scarcity. “[T]here was a hollowness within, and a flourish

around the 'Holy Church'," she observes, echoing the same sentiment (p. 396). In one of the more interesting turns taken by the narrative, however, M. Paul turns this visual metaphor around to wield it against Lucy's ascetic Protestantism. "It is your religion – your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what unblessed panoply," he tells Lucy (p. 417). From Lucy's perspective, this is a very provocative image because on the one hand, it distinguishes her belief from Catholicism by underlining its self-reliance. However, it also equates Protestantism with Lucy's unfavorable portrayal of the Catholic Church as a hollow entity with its usage of the imagery of clothing on the other hand. A panoply is a full suit of armor, helmet and weapons included, very much like the one that haunts the castle in *The Castle of Otranto*, the first English Gothic novel. This seemingly not very important moment in the narrative, on surface yet another exchange between Lucy and M. Paul on the benefits of their respective religions, is one of those points at which the seemingly coherent anti-Catholic discourse of the text, patched together from the medievalism of Gothic literature and the vocabulary of nineteenth-century English xenophobia, is ruptured in order to reveal that all these images, seemingly weaponized against Catholicism, are in fact grounded in nothing in particular, and might at any moment be seized to be used against the very same ideological standpoint from which they originated. Clarke-Beattie (1986), too, speaks of "the shifts and breaks in the symbolic framework of the novel," and instantiates her point by referring to how "Lucy's projection of the oppressor's role onto the Catholic Church collapses in the face of the contradictions it was created to heal" (p. 829). Although the narrative accounts for such discontinuities through its techniques, such as a tendency towards ellipsis, these shifts and breaks become visible through

tracing the evolution of those metaphors used in the development of particular themes; such as deprivation, in this case.

The early depiction of the Catholic Church as a spiritually negligent mother, interested only in the bodily welfare of her children, is further developed with reference to Lucy's equation of sweet foods with false satiety. In order to persuade her of the merits of Catholicism, M. Paul gives Lucy a pamphlet extolling the softer side of the Catholic Church, as opposed to its militant aspect. However, Lucy remains unmoved:

The voice of that sly little book was a honeyed voice; its accents were all unction and balm. . . . This meek volume was not addressed to the hardened and worldly; it was not even strong meat for the strong: it was milk for babes: the mild effluence of a mother's love towards her tenderest and her youngest . . . [its words] were flavoured with about the same seasoning of excitation to fanaticism. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 413)

The same opposition between real food (meat, bread and so on) versus and cloying sweetness ("sweet nothings," literally, in the case of both Dr. John's letters and the pamphlet) is here worked into the specifics of Lucy's reaction against the Catholic Church. In this instance, the previous assumption "food equals bad" is narrowed down to a more specific, "sweet food is bad" logic. Milk and honey, mild effluence: the Church is not just a mother, but the mother of a very young child, it seems. Lucy rejects nurture with suspicion and disdain, as many people who have been deprived of love in their childhood do. Although Krugovoy Silver reads into this ambivalent approach towards sweets the Victorian tendency to associate "sugary, rich, and sensual food" with sexuality, there is a more specific attribution of motherhood at work in this passage.

It is impossible to ignore the minute yet highly pertinent references to the Irish famine through which the theme of deprivation and hunger is brought to bear on the novel's anti-Catholic discourse. In the autobiographical context of the novel,

there is of course the fact that the Brontë family has Irish roots, with which they had an uneasy relationship. In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, Terry Eagleton (1996) relates how, in one case of public disagreement with Branwell Brontë, Charlotte's brother, the people of their native Haworth were quick to remember those roots:

The local populace demonstrated their displeasure by burning Branwell in effigy, a potato in one hand and a herring in the other. The Brontës may have effaced their Irish origin, but the good people of Haworth evidently kept it well in mind. (Eagleton, 1996, p. 2)

There is more to Irishness in *Villette* than the author's autobiographical circumstances, however. It is not an obviously Irish novel, as Julie Donovan (2014) notes, and yet the colonial relationship between England and Ireland informs its articulation of anti-Catholicism as class discourse (p. 227). As noted in the beginning of this chapter, the heavy influx of Irish immigration to England in the first half of the nineteenth century was among the factors which gave the anti-Catholic discourse of this era its specific dimensions and as a result, Irishness often became conflated with Catholicism. When Lucy first arrives in Villette and makes her way to Madame Beck's pensionnat in order to apply for a job, she finds an interloper occupying her intended place. This person is none other than Mrs. Sweeny, a drunken Irishwoman pretending to be English:

It seems she had introduced herself to her present employer as an English lady in reduced circumstances: a native, indeed, of Middlesex, professing to speak the English tongue with the purest metropolitan accent ... I need hardly explain to the reader that this lady was in effect a native of Ireland; her station I do not pretend to fix: she boldly declared that she had "had the bringing-up of the son and daughter of a marquis." I think myself, she might possibly have been a hanger-on, nurse, fosterer, or washerwoman, in some Irish family: she spoke a smothered tongue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections. (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 70)

Identifying this pretender through her Irish brogue and manners, Lucy immediately displaces her. Although Lucy's position as a respectable member of society is never firmly recognized in England, here in this foreign place, her Englishness is

immediately recognized when compared to this figure in inner colonialism.

Noteworthy, too, is the item which persuades Madame Beck to hire Mrs. Sweeny in the first place, in addition to her recited resumé: this is a “majestic drapery ... *a real Indian shawl*—“un véritable cachemire,” as Madame Beck said, with unmixed reverence and amaze” (p. 70). Thus, ironically, the spoils of the empire have helped Mrs. Sweeny earn her bread for a while, but when the genuine owner of the enterprise arrives, she is cast out without a second thought. This brief affair sets out the terms with which the Irish dimension of the narrative will play out: there seems to be room for only one privileged class in the novel’s imagination of the class identity crisis. Despite her disenfranchised position, Lucy is able to win a class conflict against her Irish interloper. Instead of recognizing the affinities between the two lower-class women, the novel replaces Mrs. Sweeney with a veritable middle-class woman. In highlighting “*Villette*’s preoccupations with starvation and nourishment,” Donovan (2014) argues that “we can consider [them] in the light of Ireland’s cataclysmic famine of 1845. The famine and its victims were public knowledge in Britain, and must have particularly affected the Brontë family, which had its roots in a country being laid waste; indeed, Winifred Gérin writes that collections were made in Haworth church for famine victims” (p. 225).

There was an unmistakably political aspect to the Irish Famine because the problem was exacerbated through the negligence and inefficiency of the English ruling class – this was no natural disaster. In Lucy’s portrayal of Human Justice as a personified figure in her composition *devoir*, the British Empire is depicted as a negligent mother. In this personification, Donovan (2014) argues, “Lucy conflates two female figures traditionally associated with Britain and Ireland, Britannia and Hibernia” (p. 225). Britannia lounges about in her chaotic household without a care

for the “swarm of children, sick and quarrelsome, crawl[ing] round her feet, and yell[ing] in her ears appeals for notice, sympathy, cure, redress.” The only time she takes notice of her children is if they are “strong, lively, and violent,” in which case they are appeased with a “a liberal shower of sugar-plums” from her pocket (Brontë, 1853/2008, p. 402). Lucy’s resentment of a social system, where only the most aggressive can prosper, reveling in their unjust deserts while the meek are left starving, is first formulated into this coded language of food, and then wielded against the Catholic Church as an act of displaced class resentment.

As evinced through the analysis of these two interconnected elements, the Gothic and the theme of deprivation, the anti-Catholicism of *Villette* is indeed a sociopolitical response to social structures rather than a religious or doctrinal one. The historical context of both the nun’s portrayal, and the depiction of deprivation and hunger further underline the specific social context of Lucy Snowe’s plight. In light of both “the hungry forties,” and the reopening of female religious establishments during the same decade, these two elements situate the narrative and its concerns in a decidedly more defined context than commonly thought. As such, the novel is not broadly representative of the way women are shortchanged by modern society; rather, *Villette* is an exploration of Lucy’s ambiguous relationship to a middle-class identity, and the expression of this dynamic specifically informs both the form and content of the narrative’s anti-Catholicism.

## CHAPTER 4

### TIME PRESENT AND TIME PAST: SYMPATHY, TRANSFORMATION AND METHODISM IN *ADAM BEDE*

In *Adam Bede* (1859), George Eliot fictionalizes the story of an infanticide in the countryside at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century against a backdrop of class hierarchies and religious disagreements. Hetty Sorrel, a beautiful and vain dairymaid with an eye to social climbing, is seduced by the young squire, Arthur Donnithorne. Abandoned by Donnithorne, Hetty gives birth to his child on her own, and the child dies. On trial for the serious crime of infanticide, the counsels of the local Anglican priest, Mr Irwine, fail to reach Hetty; however, her cousin the Methodist preacher Dinah eventually succeeds in reaching out to Hetty, and securing a confession from her. Thus, one of the points raised by the narrative is that a Dissenting faith such as Methodism is able to speak to a lower-class person such as Hetty, whereas the Church of England's sympathies, represented as they are by her minister Mr Irwine, cannot successfully extend beyond its own, the gentry, despite his earnest engagement with his pastoral vocation and his traditionally benevolent relations with his congregation. The contrast is particularly meaningful in the context of the turn of the century. The ineffective and removed high-and-dry church of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Evangelical revivals of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century are fictionalized as competing religious traditions, whose ability to foster sympathy in the ministers and emotion in the rural working-class are central to both the philosophical issues of morality and the social issues of ministering to the needs of the working class. In this chapter I show how the literary technique of free indirect discourse and George Eliot's emphasis on the essential role of sympathy in morality become interconnected in the religious issue of Hetty's confession. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss how the novel uses historical

fiction form to point to a historical dialectic relationship between the Established Anglican Church, late eighteenth-century Methodism, and early nineteenth-century Evangelical Anglicanism, as they are represented by Mr Irwine, Dinah Morris, and Mr Ryde respectively . I argue that instead of advocating for the incipient religious movements as champions for the rural working class, Eliot makes the case that each new movement exists in a state of flux through its historical course.

Methodism, as it occurred within the Evangelical revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (and as it carried on in the 19<sup>th</sup>) was a particularly “diversified” sect, and further splintered into many groups as time went on (Cunningham, 1975, p. 28). However, one common feature that distinguished it from the others was the importance it laid on being a “religion of the heart”; or a faith based on emotion rather than the intellect. The distinction served to delineate Methodism as separate not just from the Church of England – from which, as a Dissenting faith, it differed on the issue of ultimate authority – but also from other Dissenting sects which might have a more rationalistic, or less emotionalist bent. Being a religion of the heart meant that the emotional experience of faith – as might be evinced by being overtaken by strong feelings in camp meetings and chapel services, for instance – superseded intellectual engagement with dogmas and doctrines. This is a generalization, but a useful one nonetheless in highlighting that aspect of Methodism which distinguished it from its contemporary faith groups, established or otherwise.

In *Adam Bede* we see an interesting intersection between this emotional appeal of Methodism, and the critically established idea that fostering sympathy with the aim of cultivating morality is central to George Eliot’s fiction. For Eliot, morality is cultivated by sympathizing with other human beings and understanding what it is like to be them, to think and feel the things they do – “fellow-feeling”, as she

sometimes calls it. In a letter, she writes: “My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy” (as cited in Anger, 2006, p. 80). In terms of its characters, one of the most intriguing aspects of *Adam Bede* is the utter lack of sympathy which surrounds Hetty Sorrel for most of the narrative. Likened to a variety of mute beings or inanimate objects by those around her, such as a pebble by her aunt and a puppy by Mr Irwine, it is difficult also for the reader to conceive of Hetty as a fully-fledged person, since her consciousness and motivations are not made clear, and are even in dubious existence, for most of the narrative. Likewise, James Eli Adams (1991) writes that her “persistent silence through most of the novel reflects her utter incapacity for sympathetic participation in the world around her. Adam's range of expression may be limited, but Hetty's mute egoism is a powerful emblem of her isolation from other human beings,” so that she is as incapable of extending sympathy as she is of encouraging it in others (p. 230). However, her cousin and Methodist lay preacher Dinah ultimately succeeds in both bringing out the fellow-feeling in Hetty, and in winning the people's sympathy and forgiveness for her, when she gets Hetty to acknowledge and confess to the killing of her infant. Dinah's insistence to reach out to Hetty, her willingness to spend time with Hetty in her jail cell even when she doesn't speak, and her repeated appeals to Hetty's emotions rather than her reason bear fruit in the end. Dinah's success as a Methodist, her fervent and unreserved appeal to the hearts of the people around her is contrasted to the way in which Anglican priest Mr Irwine fails not only Arthur but also Hetty when he refuses to get too drawn into their relationship out of a sense of decency, and confines himself to handing out reasonable advice to Arthur. The narrative also judges the efficiency of

the aristocratic High Church – as it was in 1799, prior to the reforms of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s – compared to that of Methodism in actually being able to help the people, and finds that it fails, its sympathies laying squarely with the landed gentry and not with the lower classes. The portrayal in the narrative of this encounter between the two sects and their class alliances is straightforward at times, so the narrator may speak of the former sincerity of Methodism, and compare it to Anglican practice while directly addressing the reader. However, and more importantly, the novel formally sustains and develops the encounter between the two faith groups by means of a narrative technique that is indispensable to George Eliot’s psychological realism, which is free indirect discourse. By means of this technique, the advantage of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Methodism in being able to speak to, matter for, and empower the lower classes is embodied in the narrative, as the distance between the narration and the narrated subjects is blurred in a way that is very similar to how Methodist preaching – and its eliciting of confession and conversion – seeks to remove the boundary between the faith as an institution, and the individual who possesses it.

#### 4.1 Confession and the narrative

To begin with, let us briefly define and discuss what is meant by “free indirect discourse”. A narratology term, free indirect discourse refers to the way in which fictional characters’ consciousness is represented as being incorporated into the narrative discourse of the text itself without being clearly signaled by such introductory remarks as “she thought,” or by quotation marks. Also referred to as free indirect speech/style, narrated monologue, or *discours indirect libre* in French, free indirect discourse in a broader sense has existed for much of the history of

literature.<sup>22</sup> In English, the most important study regarding the subject is arguably Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, where she argues that free indirect discourse, or "narrated monologue," derives its particular potency and appeal from the indetermination it imposes:

the narrated monologue is at once a more complex and a more flexible technique for rendering consciousness than the rival techniques. Both its dubious attribution of language to the figural mind, and its fusion of narratorial and figural language charge it with ambiguity, give it a quality of now-you-see-it, now-you-don't that exerts a special fascination. (Cohn, 1978, p. 107).<sup>23</sup>

The power of blurring and overcoming boundaries possessed by free indirect discourse, which Cohn describes here and elsewhere in the text, already anticipates Dinah's Methodist appeal to Hetty and others with its emphasis on flexibility, which makes it more successful than its "rivals," as well as the success it attains in drawing out Hetty's confession at last, as if "suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation" (p. 103). Discussing the uses of free indirect discourse as well as other narrative techniques more specifically in George Eliot's fiction, Monika Fludernik (2013) draws attention to how Eliot uses them to involve the reader and evoke her sympathy: by the "transgression of ontological boundaries" through narrative gestures such as addressing the reader and imputing to her opinions and expectations, Eliot achieves "an enhancement of

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<sup>22</sup> In *The Handbook of Narratology*, Brian McHale (2009) offers the following genealogy: "FID, though already present in ancient Greek and Latin literature and in biblical narrative, would not be identified until the last decades of the 19th century. Pervasive in the 19th-century novel, from Austen to Flaubert, Zola, James and beyond (Pascal 1977), FID did not attain the threshold of visibility until, arguably, the 1857 trial of *Madame Bovary*, which hinged on whether certain free indirect expressions of indecent and anti-social sentiments were attributable to the author (LaCapra 1982; Toolan 2006). In any case, French and German Romance philologists identified this "new" form around the turn of the nineteenth century, calling it *erlebte Rede*, *verschleierte Rede*, or *style indirect libre* (Tobler 1887; Kalepky 1899, 1913; Bally 1912; Lorck 1914; Lerch 1914; Lips 1926)" (p. 436).

<sup>23</sup> In "Free Indirect Discourse" in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Rosemarie Bodenheimer (2018) refers to Cohn's work as "[t]he founding literary study of FID in English," and suggests a few particular readings that supplement Cohn's: Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds* (2004), *Social Mind in the Novel* (2010) and David Herman's introductory chapter (pp. 1-40) in the volume edited by himself, *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (2011).

sympathetic affect. Reader address and the employment of metalepsis are traditionally believed to produce a breaking of aesthetic illusion; here, in fact, they serve the opposite function of deepening the reader's involvement in the fiction rather than disrupting immersion" (p. 22).

In *Adam Bede*, the effect of free indirect discourse described here, that of "enhancing sympathetic affect," is twofold; on one level, the narrator consorts to using it throughout the narrative in reporting the thoughts and feelings of the characters, and Fludernik exemplifies this practice by several instances from the novel among many. In one such passage, Arthur is trying to persuade himself that he did no wrong in his behavior regarding Hetty:

If there was something in his conduct that Poyser wouldn't have liked if he had known it, why, no man's conduct will bear too close an inspection; and Poyser was not likely to know it; and, after all, what had he done? Gone a little too far, perhaps, in flirtation, but another man in his place would have acted much worse; and no harm would come—no harm should come, for the next time he was alone with Hetty, he would explain to her that she must not think seriously of him or of what had passed. (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 240)

Although it becomes immediately clear that anticipation of such a smooth resolution is not realistic, and more importantly, not honorable, the immediacy to his interiority afforded by free indirect discourse evokes a sympathy on behalf of the reader for the character; it doesn't make him likeable, but it does make him understandable. The outer imperceptibility of the transition from the narrative's discourse, to which we as readers will have already lent our credibility and goodwill at this point in the novel, to Arthur's discourse imputes to the latter these sentiments invoked by the former. This is the first, and more obvious way in which free indirect discourse functions in *Adam Bede*, much as it does elsewhere in George Eliot's fiction. Such instances of moral weakness are central to the novel's religious concern with ministering to the rural working class. Arthur ignores the social responsibility that comes with his class

status and relies on his class privilege to protect himself. Sympathy facilitated by the use of free indirect discourse towards Arthur's moral, religious, and social failure in this instance lays the foundation for the novel's central and graver social objective to forge a sympathetic moral perspective toward infanticide as a lower-class social problem.

The intersection of religious and class identity is not unique to *Adam Bede*. In discussing the intellectual background of the Victorian novel, John Kucich (2011) argues that Victorian appeals to "religious values" that were "stripped of their theological and institutional moorings ... were often fused with non-religious discourses of social or moral ordering" (p. 215). Kucich's argument is partially based on the Victorian loss-of-faith or secularization narrative, even if he is ambivalent about its extent or parameters:

Although religious doubt is a common theme of histories of the Victorian period, it has, perhaps, been overstated. Church attendance held steady over the course of the century, and there were a number of lively, public exchanges within religious circles that led to popular reforms of the Established Church. Still, religious doubt was both widespread and vocal in a way it had not previously been in England, and it was particularly pronounced among the intellectual classes. (p. 213)

Having stated his qualms about the validity of his assumptions about the wider framework, Kucich makes a similar argument to that of Catherine Gallagher's regarding various discourses circulating and informing one another in the context of English society in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution:

[in the Victorian era] religious rhetoric was often used to represent certain social groups as spiritual communities - whether to argue that downtrodden groups deserved political recognition, or to advocate that powerful classes be given yet more authority. The religious values that working-class advocates like Gaskell or Kingsley associated with the poor, for instance, helped to affirm radical politics; but Trollope was able to marshal such rhetoric in his affirmation of the class of British "gentlemen." (p. 215)

As such, religious issues allowed writers to advocate for working-class issues. In *Adam Bede*, the narrative's employment of the free indirect discourse provides it with an extra dimension, in that by attempting to represent working-class interiority in its own right, rather than as an extension or reflection of middle-class sensibilities, the "advocacy" for the working classes recognizes the possibility of their agency.

The second and more implicit way in which free indirect discourse is embedded in *Adam Bede* is in the speech acts of one of its characters, Dinah Morris. In her preaching as a Methodist, a common rhetorical technique used by Dinah is the *a priori* attribution of her own feelings, or those she wants them to have, to her audience in order to induce those feelings in the audience. By removing such framing statements as "perhaps you feel/think", or "you must feel/think", Dinah seeks to conjure a state in which they always already are of accord with her. More will be said regarding this aspect of Dinah's preaching, which directly appeals to the emotions, further below in discussing Eliot's formulation of sympathy as a moral value, as well as Methodism; however, as an example let us look at the first time we hear Dinah preaching. "Why, you and me, dear friends, are poor . . . We are just the sort of people that want to hear good news . . . We know very well we are altogether in the hands of God" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 23). The immediacy of Dinah's emotional preaching is presented in stark contrast to Mr Irwine's manner at the pulpit and with his parishioners; in once instance, Adam says to the narrator, "Mr Irwine didn't go into [deep spiritual things]—he preached short moral sermons, and that was all" (p. 165). Elsewhere, the narrator observes a series of qualities which pertain to Mr Irwine's fulfilment of his pastoral duties:

He really had no very lofty aims, no theological enthusiasm: if I were closely questioned, I should be obliged to confess that he felt no serious alarms about

the souls of his parishioners, and would have thought it a mere loss of time to talk in a doctrinal and awakening manner to old “Feyther Taft,” or even to Chad Cranage the blacksmith. If he had been in the habit of speaking theoretically, he would perhaps have said that the only healthy form religion could take in such minds was that of certain dim but strong emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties. (p. 63)

Although we are not given an instance of Mr Irwine preaching to his parishioners, we therefore know from these reports, as well as his circumspect behavior in advising to Arthur about his dealings with Hetty, that he perceives of his pastoral duty in ways that are quite diametrically opposed to those of Dinah, and his different understanding necessarily informs the form of his speech, as well. It is difficult to imagine Dinah, with her eagerness and enthusiasm, thinking it “a mere loss of time” to talk to anyone, nor failing to have “very lofty aims”. With the partial use of free indirect discourse, the narrative positions Mr Irwine as another character with moral and social failings, instead of an authoritative moral guide. The fact that the narrator uses free indirect discourse rather begrudgingly elicits less sympathy for him than the earlier passage did for Arthur.

Scholars have extensively written about how central sympathy is to her moral philosophy; a concept which is closely interrelated to the function of free indirect discourse and its deployment in the narrative. As the earlier quote regarding Eliot’s identification of moral progress with sympathy attests, the two concepts are very closely connected to each other in this context. In “George Eliot and Philosophy,” Suzy Anger (2006) writes that Eliot’s “thought on morality is crucial to all her work, which repeatedly takes up questions about right action, responsibility, and how one should live one’s life” (p. 79). She also remarks on the direct line which connects this indispensable morality to sympathy as she notes, “Eliot’s fundamental moral principle is that the capacity for sympathy is a necessary condition for a moral agent,

since morality grows from the ability to imagine another's state of mind" (p. 80). The desirability of this centrality has been subject to change throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In "The Reception of George Eliot," James Eli Adams offers a brief history of Eliot criticism from her time to today, and notes the shifts which have attended critical perception regarding Eliot. Although she rose to fame and was celebrated for the precision of her realist technique, which was often compared to visual arts in its supposed fidelity to real life, in the later part of her career and immediately after death, Eliot was first praised and then condemned for the sympathy she sought to evoke with this realism, and the morality she in turn wished to bring out with the sympathy:

[Although] much more sympathetic [than some detractors,] Henry James passed a similar verdict to more damning effect. In his review of the *Life*, he argued that Eliot viewed the novel as "not primarily a picture of life, capable of deriving a high value from its form, but a moralized fable, the last word of a philosophy endeavouring to teach by example." The priority attached to moral reflection, he continued, entails "that she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; that her figures and situations are evolved, as the phrase is, from her moral consciousness, and are only indirectly the product of observations. They are deeply studied and elaborately justified, but they are not seen in the irresponsible plastic way" (Carroll 497–98)

This is at once the culmination of Victorian response to George Eliot and a harbinger of modernist aesthetics. (Adams, 2013, p. 227)

Eliot's engagement with philosophy is not limited to ethics; as Anger briefly encapsulates in her overview, epistemology is also a lens through which to consider Eliot's work vis-à-vis her engagement with issues of knowledge and knowability, and her interest in Spinoza in fact corresponds to both of these branches of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, the epistemological aspect is complementary to her moral

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<sup>24</sup> In "George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions" in *A Companion to George Eliot*, Isobel (2013) Armstrong relates how Eliot undertook to translate Spinoza's *Ethics*, and how the translation work occupied such a central position in her life in the years leading up to the composition of *Adam Bede*: "The *Ethics* was a formative text. It does not merely supplement what we know of Eliot's response to the affects through the classical idea of sympathy, but provides a new perspective on her writing. Spinoza helps us thematize elements of her work, but the account of the affects derived from him is

project in *Adam Bede* and elsewhere, since knowledge of the others is a requirement for sympathizing with them, according to her own formulation. Likewise, her extensive treatment of the dichotomy between determinism and free will, as well as her commitment to realism, concerns which are philosophical at the root, are all traceable back to how she formulated the role and function of her fiction (Anger, 2006, pp. 82-87).

Biographical attention to Eliot, and in particular to her intellectual life, has meant that we are also well-informed about her extensive engagement with intellectual figures such as Spinoza, Strauss and Feuerbach, primarily through translating their works. Eliot's engagement with these philosophers and theologians, particularly with Strauss and Feuerbach, has been the main axis through which she is contextualized within the loss-of-faith or Victorian secularization narrative, which we discussed in the Introduction.<sup>25</sup> Both Strauss and Feuerbach sought to show that religion, rather than being sacred or transcendental, was a human institution. In *Victorian Church*, Chadwick (1966) notes the importance of Strauss by writing, "Modern divinity dates from the *Life of Jesus* published in 1835 by David Friedrich Strauss of Tübingen" (p. 530). Part, or rather progenitor of German Higher Criticism, Strauss held that Bible was a historical document rather than divine revelation whereas Feuerbach, in *Essence of Christianity*, similarly argued that Christianity and its rituals were expressive of the realities of human beings and their nature rather than being derived from any sacred source. Both works were translated into English

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important not simply at the thematic level but as a structural and organizing principle of the novels. From 1847 to 1856 when the translation was completed, nearly ten years, Spinoza was on her mind. In the almost two years it took to complete the translation, she was saturated in Spinoza's thought. Her journal records a virtually daily discipline of translation" (p. 295).

<sup>25</sup> For instance, in "George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy", Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (1985) begins by acknowledging the centrality of sympathy as a concept and guiding principle in Eliot's fiction, and then goes on to write, "A glance at Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* will help to suggest the psychic conditions for sympathy ... [Feuerbach's] view of other human beings radically changes an individual's relation to others from what it was in a Christian framework" (pp. 24-25).

from German by George Eliot, which further contributes to the tendency to contextualize her fiction within the theological and philosophical parameters determined, to some extent, by them. Discussions of Eliot's "religious humanism" or "Victorian humanism" do not fail to bring up these figures, and religion *qua* Christianity has therefore tended to be perceived as secondary in importance to this modulated morality, derived from but not connected to Christianity.<sup>2627</sup> Eliot's own background, with her childhood conversion to Evangelicalism and later abandonment of it, as well as her polemical attack on Evangelical preacher John Cumming, published in 1885, has also colored her image as a strident apostate, and in *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, Avrom Fleishman disputes even the extent of the early-life piety attributed to her:

She was a devoted reader of the Bible and of commentaries upon it, but was skeptical of the more far-fetched interpretations and applications to contemporary church practices. In all, the ascription to her of the epithet "Evangelical" reflects the mentality and taste of present-day commentators rather than those of her time. Upon her astonishingly abrupt de-conversion, she passed from a normal, not a fanatic, believer to apostacy. (Fleishman, 2010, p. 23)

Not quite Christian in the traditional sense and not secular in our contemporary use of the word, religion is seen as a specter haunting Eliot's fiction in the guise of something else – philosophy, perhaps, or more specifically, morality. In attesting to

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<sup>26</sup> There are exceptions such as U. C Knoepflmacher's *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel* (1965) and *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (1968); more recently, as with the rest of the field of Victorian Studies, studies focusing on the religious aspects of Eliot's work have proliferated, and include Ilana M. Blumberg's *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (2013) and "Sympathy or Religion? George Eliot and Christian Conversion" (2019), Marilyn Orr's *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* (2018) and Cristina Richieri Griffin's "George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, And Secularism" (2017).

<sup>27</sup> There is also a wider sense that Christian values are represented in Victorian fiction in terms of morality, rather than as being strictly Christian, as John Kucich (2001) argues: "Victorian fiction was a deeply moralistic genre, and the moral principles it espoused - self-sacrifice, humility, honesty - were clearly Christian in origin. But the secularization of religious values and principles went far beyond the level of thematics. The providential love plots of Dickens, Thackeray, and the early Trollope, for instance, all implicitly suggest a bedrock faith in the power of Christian love - though they are divorced from religious orthodoxies or institutions of any kind, and not always self-evidently about religious values." (p. 216)

this perceived exchange, Suzy Anger (2006) quotes Nietzsche as saying, in an aphorism titled “George Eliot”, “In England one must rehabilitate oneself after every little emancipation from theology by showing in a veritably awe-inspiring manner what a moral fanatic one is” (p. 92). Although Nietzsche’s dismissiveness towards Eliot is representative of the reaction against the Victorians of their immediate successors, and such dismissiveness towards the Victorians has not been critically relevant for some time, the equivalency he establishes between religion – “theology” – and morality for George Eliot is an implicit assumption in a lot of modern Eliot criticism. It is as if there is an interchangeability between these two concepts, and so there is no need to pay in-depth critical attention to religion in her works when morality and ethics is already covered.

In especially earlier scholarship and criticism that deal directly with religion and Christianity, rather than their Feuerbachian or Straussian iterations in *Adam Bede*, a common critical tendency is that often, critics take their preference towards a particular character to be indicative of the novel’s preference for the very same character, as well as the position supposedly represented by the character. In an article titled “Preachers and the Schemes of Nature in *Adam Bede*”, for instance, at first Christopher Herbert (1975) aptly identifies the narrative and structural pairing that exists between Dinah and Mr Irwine, the Methodist preacher and the Anglican clergyman, and correctly identifies that this correspondence is a significant element within the novel (p. 413). However, he then goes on to give an account of Dinah in a wholly unsympathetic light, and further, assumes that this is what the novel also does: “Although Dinah’s nature seems at odds with her harsh theology, one can detect in her the signs of a certain corruption” (p. 416). Herbert ignores the complexity of the novel’s approach to the historical relationship of High Church and

Methodism as he identifies Mr Irwine as “capable of true moral heroism,” and also writes that “he is walking proof that tolerant, sweet-blooded Christianity is far indeed from bankruptcy” (p. 418). In discussing the critical reception of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, we saw that the anti-Catholic elements of the narrative were downplayed or misinterpreted as a result of the ideological bias of the critics; similarly here, the blatant – and yet apparently self-unconscious – favoritism directed towards Mr Irwine, a character whose lack of moral courage arguably enables the tragic turn that the plot takes, is arguably a result of ideological bias; only this time, rather than a confrontation between Catholicism and Protestantism, these critics side with the Established Church against dissenting Protestantism. Even when such a bias is not readily evident, the correlation between in-depth characterization and authorial preference is ever the subject of debate. Martin J. Svaglic (1954) wonders how George Eliot can offer such an “incomparable tribute to zealous Methodism” through her portrayal of Dinah Morris when her skepticism of, and distaste for Methodists have been noted on other occasions (p. 146). And while it may appear disproportionate to focus on what is merely a rhetorical question, the fact remains that such assumptions deeply misinterpret the essential way in which George Eliot formulates the ethos of her fiction. As discussed above, the basis of morality for Eliot is a capacity for sympathizing with others – not just with some people, who are like us, but with all people, including those who are deeply unlike us; hers is a Levinasian position whereby ethics are constituted through one’s encounter with alterity and as such, reading preference into her characters is misguided.

The centrality of confession in the novel’s depiction of working-class character Hetty is the religious counterpart to the centrality of free indirect discourse in establishing a moral perspective towards social issues. Eliot’s writerly deployment

of the free indirect discourse to represent class dynamics is paralleled by the religious use of confession to represent the effectiveness of different religious practices. We observe this particularly in the way that the narrative concentrates and expands on the aftermath of Hetty's crime, in her trial and imprisonment, rather than the act of infanticide itself, as this places the emphasis on the possibility of her redemption, rather than on just the gravity of her act. Seduced and then abandoned by the young squire Arthur Donnithorne, Hetty sets out to find her lover where he's been posted; she gives birth while away from home and abandons her baby to die. She is caught and identified in due time, and there is no doubt as to what she did. Despite this, the narrative places a great deal of importance on whether she will confess or not. The significance of Hetty's confession transcends its legal and narratological stakes. It becomes a site of comparison between the two religious figures of the novel and their capability to help the needy – if it is Mr Irwine who condemns Hetty to her crime by not stepping in and getting Arthur to confess when he should have, then it is certainly Dinah who saves Hetty by getting her to admit to her crime and ask for forgiveness. One of the most significant ways in which Dinah's behavior is contrasted to that of Mr Irwine is the tenacity she displays in the face of what is unquestionably a very difficult situation. Dinah is unflinching in both the way she is able to handle silence without trying to fill it in with inane comments, and also in the way she is able to say the things that need to be said, no matter how difficult they are. She does not urge Hetty to speak, and is willing to endure an extended silence; as the narrator muses: “we are over-hasty to speak – as if God did not manifest himself by our silent feeling, and make his love felt through ours” (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 402). Similarly, Dinah asks the difficult questions, and says the unpleasant things: she asks Hetty if she knows that she is going to be hanged soon, trying to make her confront the reality

of her situation, and she asks Hetty to cast away her sin so that she may be forgiven by God. In this, Dinah is like Adam even though theologically Adam stands closer to Mr Irwine's position, being a traditional man. Like Dinah, Adam does not flinch away from an uncomfortable truth, as a particular encounter between him and Mr Irwine makes clear: "the next words were hard to speak [for Adam]," the narrator informs us. "But when he went on, he lifted up his head and looked straight at Mr Irwine. He would do the thing he had resolved to do, without flinching" (p. 364). Dinah behaves in the same manner in her pursuit of truth, and her efforts eventually bring Hetty to confess for the first time – Hetty gives a somewhat rambling account of how she abandoned her baby to its death. Dinah thus successfully finds her way into Hetty's consciousness as well as conscience, deploying her sympathy as well as her "narratorial" powers in the process.<sup>28</sup>

However, the meaning of the confession scene is as ambiguous as it is complicated. To begin with, it does not seem to prompt inner transformation in Hetty, as she still wants to distance herself from her crime, and is still afraid of death. Dinah's zeal and enthusiasm – she beseeches both Hetty and God for a considerable amount of time – succeeds in getting Hetty to acknowledge her crime, and her sin. However, it is not very clear how invested Hetty truly is in her confession, and what it means for her. She is haunted by the sound of her baby's crying, and asks Dinah whether "God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now [that she's] told everything" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 408). It appears more as if for Hetty, being

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<sup>28</sup> The episode in the prison house is important not just because it is the core from which the rest of the novel sprang, although that is part of it. In a journal entry recounting how she wrote *Adam Bede*, George Eliot remarks that initially, inspired by the real-life account of her Methodist preacher aunt getting a woman convicted of murdering her child to confess in her prison cell, she conceived it as part of the series of novellas which constituted *Scenes of Clerical Life* when her partner George Lewes suggested "that the scene in the prison would make a fine element in a story" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 482). Later, she decided to make this story into a full-length novel rather than a short novella, but retained her starting point, as her journal attests: "the scene in the prison [was] of course the climax towards which I worked" (p. 484).

forgiven by God is a lesser version of being pardoned her life instead of it being the other way around. Earlier in her prison cell, when Dinah informs her that “whether we live or die, we are in the presence of God,” Hetty answers by saying “I wouldn’t mind if they’d let me live;” a little later, she confesses, but there is little in her confession that actually acknowledges the wrongness of what she has done (p. 403). Secondly, the confession scene in this chapter is practically identical to an earlier scene of Dinah’s first failed attempt to elicit a confession from Hetty. The narrative does not explain what exactly prompted the confession in the second attempt - we can say Hetty is more afraid because she is caught and put in jail, which would undermine the religious meaning of the confession. In the earlier scene, Dinah talks to Hetty about the troubles she might face in life as everyone does, believing that she is finally getting through to Hetty, and then it is revealed that she has misread the situation, and Hetty is both confused and bothered by Dinah’s intensity rather than touched by it. “Hetty sat quite still; she felt no response within herself to Dinah’s anxious affection, but Dinah’s words, uttered with solemn pathetic distinctness, affected her with a chill fear” (p. 145). Dinah misinterprets Hetty’s reaction as “the stirring of a divine impulse,” and is rudely disillusioned when Hetty pushes her away and says: “Don’t talk to me so, Dinah. Why do you come to frighten me? I’ve never done anything to you. Why can’t you let me be?” (p. 146). This earlier passage is unambiguous in its depiction of Hetty’s indifference to and incomprehension of Dinah’s meaning, whereas in the later instance in the prison, Hetty apparently repents. However, the two chapters have so much in common with regards to ambience as well as the way their events are structured that it is difficult not to read significance into this doubling. In both chapters, the two women meet in a darkened room at dusk, just as the light is failing – in the first, it’s Hetty’s bedroom and in the

second it's her prison cell. In both cases Dinah's pleading is first met with indifference and then crying on Hetty's part. Even Dinah's physical appearance as she enters the prison is described in a vocabulary very evocative of the one used in the earlier chapter; there, she is likened to a "lovely corpse" and a "ghost," in the later chapter, we are told that her "sweet pale face" is "like a white flower," an arguably less morbid wording which nonetheless retains the effect of otherworldliness and incorporeality generated by the earlier instances (pp. 144, 146, 400). Overall, there is an unmistakable symmetry between the two chapters right until the crucial moment, that of Hetty's redemption hanging on the balance; and although it is Dinah's conviction as well as a fair number of readers and critics that ultimately Hetty is genuinely repentant in the prison confession scene, there isn't much divergence from the earlier instance to warrant such a conclusion.

Here, Dinah's Wesleyan Methodism, and the attendant belief that people can, and must, change and be redeemed through faith, comes up against the realism of the narrative, which is not just broadly outlined in Chapter 17, but also discussed in fragments throughout. What this high Victorian realism entails is not just accuracy of historical detail but also a psychological realism which posits that characters in a novel think and behave according to their psychology, or who they are, rather than at the dictate of the plot and its demands. Described by Josie Billington (2015) as "George Eliot's involuntary insistence that an inner human content must determine external form," this approach would require there to be some kind of inner transformation within Hetty to accompany Dinah's intervention in order to make this scene credible – otherwise, the worldview of the novel is not reducible to that of Dinah, and genuine instantaneous conversion or redemption is not realistic in such a context unless it is supported by evidence that something has changed in Hetty

(Scenes intro xxvi). The overall jarring effect of Hetty's confession foregrounds a passage that might otherwise have been merely dramatic or even melodramatic. As such, the reader is forced to pause and think what confession as a concept really means.

In *A History of Christianity*, Owen Chadwick (2005) notes that in its historical origins, confession used to be a much more public affair than it later became in Christianity (p. 158). Originated by the Celts, confession was brought to the continent by travelling Irish monks. This practice eventually became the Sacrament of Penance and initially, confessions were performed in front of crowds of people. It became a private interchange between the confessor and the penitent over time. Nevertheless, while confession as a practice has its place in many strands of Protestantism, at the same time its fundamental principle runs somewhat counter to the Established Church. After all, confessing one's sins to someone in order to be absolved is not very in line with the liberal ethos of the individual conscience, and of being responsible for one's own actions before God. In *Victorian Church*, however, Chadwick (1966) notes that confession is not inherently un-Protestant:

In the history of Protestantism the practice of confession was less rare than was sometimes supposed. The prayer book made provision for it in agonies of conscience or of sickness. Its use had never quite died out among English Protestants, and was difficult to distinguish from private consultation of a godly pastor. (p. 503)

Much is made of the essentially anti-Protestant quality of this particular sacrament in the anti-Catholic discourse of the nineteenth century, as evinced by *Villette*, among other nineteenth-century novels; however, in the case of *Adam Bede* it also serves to distinguish between the Established Church and Dissent. Dinah's attempts to get Hetty to confess matter, regardless of whether Hetty is mentally or spiritual invested in the act, precisely because the act sets Dinah apart from Mr Irwine and his

unwillingness to pry. It is historical marker – of doctrinal position as well as its practical application. A more secular interpretation of the confession scene is offered by Laura C. Berry (2003), who argues that the emphasis placed on the verbal act of confession corresponds to a shift in epistemology that took place at the turn of the eighteenth century: the institutionalization of medicine as a branch of knowledge meant that in determining infanticide in cases of child deaths, getting the mother to confess became less important as surgeons sought to prove that they could determine the facts of the situation by looking at the body alone (p. 198). Thus, stripped of its actual weight, the act of confession retains a more symbolic function instead. Berry offers a Foucauldian reading by claiming that in Hetty's case, "bringing the experience of the body into language," confession disciplines bodily acts and desires (p. 209). As such, Hetty's confession is more speech act than expressive utterance, intended to transform the speaker at the moment it is performed. In this light, the act of confession is required, despite all its apparent meaninglessness to Hetty, in order to draw her back into the symbolic order of the novel, or rather, back among the flock. Just as she takes a breath in her incessant praying, after having urged God, "Melt the heart, unseal the closed lips: make her cry with her whole soul, 'Father, I have sinned' ... " Hetty responds, "Dinah ... I will speak ... I will tell ... I won't hide it any more". More importantly, however, the act of confession, as it is ministered by Dinah, brings Hetty within the sympathetic order of Eliot's novel by incorporating her within Dinah's narrative. From a feminist perspective, trauma theory also accounts for Hetty's behavior, in that reentering the symbolic order and creating a coherent narrative of a traumatizing experience are the signs of healing from trauma.

The centrality of the confession scene thus owes much to how it also functions, as we noted in our earlier discussion of free indirect discourse, in a parallel

way to how Eliot's narration, in *Adam Bede* and elsewhere, is structured. Josie Billington (2015) notes that the act of confession is a precursor to the sort of free indirect discourse Eliot developed in her novels. In this mode of narration, the third person narrator is not wholly exterior to the characters. Instead, he is someone who "conscientiously inhabits the otherwise hidden complex processes within them" (p. xxvii). The parallel between the relationship of the narrator to the other characters and that of the confessor to the penitent becomes yet more evident when the critic observes that the intention in both cases is to reveal "the essential register of reality, [which is] not available under ordinary life conditions" (p. xxvii). The apotheosis of Dinah's capability as a preacher and confessor, too, is likewise realized in extracting from Hetty under such extraordinary circumstances her confession of what really happened.

The episode is important because parallel to Hetty's predicament, which comes to a climax specifically in this chapter, an underlying tension between the individual/psychological and the social/sociological that the novel negotiates throughout is also tested in its limits. Hetty is a mystery, a question mark in the novel insofar as the narrative deliberately and consistently presents her as lacking in interiority. In trying to resolve the problem constituted by her, however, the narrative sustains or fluctuates between two explanations: Hetty as lacking in interiority as a result of her social conditions, and Hetty as lacking interiority as an individual idiosyncrasy. This is not a question that is absolutely answered by the narrative one way or the other, and it is a mystery why one person can develop interiority while another one in similar circumstances does not. This complicates the meaning of the practice of confession, as well. The novel presents a historical dialectic instead of championing a specific denomination; and similarly, even if it presents a young

Methodist preacher as successful in gaining access to the inner life of a working-class character, it also creates a lot of ambiguity and gaps regarding the working-class interiority, which destabilizes the meaning of confession.

On the one hand, the novel offers an individual and psychological explanation for Hetty's character and behavior. This is perhaps the most significant function of the Dinah-Hetty pairing in the novel, in that the many similarities between the two young women serve to highlight and problematize the ways in which they are different. For example, in separate instances it is said of both Dinah and Hetty that their hearts are like a pebble, but the same simile means very different things for each of these women. Of Hetty, her aunt Mrs Poyser observes that she has an almost psychopathic indifference to the wellbeing of the children she herself helped to bring up, and says, "It's my belief her heart's as hard as a pebble" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 141). The very same word is used earlier by Dinah to describe herself, although understandably, she utilizes the simile to mean a very different thing; she tells Mr Irwine that she likes to "sit silent all day long with the thought of God overflowing [her] soul – as the pebbles lie bathed in the Willow Brook" (p. 82). The vehicle is the same in both instances, yet the meaning is opposite: the same vehicle is used to connote both connection to, and interaction with the external world as well as the absence of such connection and interaction. In answering his wife, Mr Poyser counters her argument and claims that Hetty may yet change, saying, "Them young girls are like th' unripe grain; they'll make good meal by-and-by, but they're squashy as yet" (p. 141). Again, his choice of vehicle for the simile, rather than his point, is interesting because Dinah too is likened to grain by Adam a few chapters earlier – he says that Dinah is "made out o' stuff with a finer grain than most o' the women," so that the same pastoral or agricultural image is evoked to put Dinah on a pedestal

above other women whereas for Hetty, it is used to excuse her bad behavior, which is considered to be typical of girls her age (p. 111). The apex of this mirroring is Chapter 15, "The Two Bed-Chambers". Discussed at some length above as itself the precursor to, and a doubling of Chapter 45, "In the Prison," this chapter contains within itself extensive comparison and contrast of the two women, presented in a very visual manner. The two women are placed in two adjoining bedrooms, separated by one wall, and throughout the chapter, as their very different nightly routines are described, the effect is very reminiscent of the modern cinematic representation where the audience witnesses the actions of more than one character in different places at the same time on a divided screen. In both cases, the point of the visual and architectural similarity, or symmetry, is to foreground the differences. As Hetty dresses herself up in fake jewelry and scraps of fabric, fantasizing about being a rich man's wife and leaving her previous life behind with everyone in it, Dinah looks out at the fields and thinks at length about all the people who need her, and what she can do for them. "Dinah's imagination and sympathy acted and reacted habitually, each heightening the other," the narrator says, in evident contrast to Hetty's self-involved imagination which would have her cut off from her family and community (p. 143). "There are some plants that have hardly any roots," he observes, "you may tear them from their native nook of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flower-pot, and they blossom none the worse" (p. 140). This is Hetty, unencumbered by any connections she might have to anything or anyone outside of herself, and it is not coincidental that all of the images used to describe her, of which the above examples are just a few, are taken from nature. Pebbles, plants, peaches and so on; it is in the nature of inanimate beings to be the way they are, it is a givenness. From the outside, Hetty and Dinah might belong to

approximately the same social group; both are orphans, belonging to the same social class, same age group, even the same family and yet individually, they are very different people.

With that being said, Hetty's interiority problem is simultaneously also presented as the result of sociological as well as a psychological conditions. According to this second account, Hetty's predicament, rather than being hers alone, is a condition shared by many. Earlier in the narrative, prior to Hetty's abortive attempt to drown herself in a pool, the narrator observes that:

Religious doctrines had taken no hold on Hetty's mind: she was one of those numerous people who have had godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday, and yet, for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, have never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling. You would misunderstand her thoughts during these wretched days, if you imagined that they were influenced either by religious fears or religious hopes. (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 344)

Reminiscent of Mr Irwine's expectation, quoted above, that religion for the lower classes ought to be a "dim and strong emotion" encouraging them to obey their familial and neighborly duties in strictly the sense that it is a dim emotion indeed, the religious feeling imputed to Hetty here is also said to be shared by other, "numerous people". At the same time, however, there is in Hetty some sort of tragic extremity regarding the way she represents such a lack of interiority – both consciousness and conscience – *par excellence*. To reiterate a point made earlier, there is rather little to show that Hetty has changed much from this position after Dinah's intervention, or that her confession is accompanied by a spiritual awakening. In her appearance she is changed, so much so that when Adam sees her, he believes that she is another person, with only the eyes resembling those of the old Hetty (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 412). Otherwise, she appears to be echoing the things Dinah told her. Throughout the narrative, there is a general sense that Hetty is extremely superficial and selfish; as

Adams (1991) writes, “[t]he inability to articulate one's most profound feelings and thoughts may be an obstacle to heightened consciousness - as Eliot would obviously have it in the case of Hetty Sorrel,” and this is reflected in the vague and confused way she relates to religious ideas and concepts (p. 228). This dearth of interiority in her is contrasted to both Dinah and Adam, both of whom are portrayed in the novel in quite non-physical ways, albeit differently: Dinah is all faith and heart whereas Adam is all reason and principles.

Hetty is “one of those numerous people” who have failed to assimilate the religion that was taught to them. More specifically, however, the narrator states that it is religious doctrines rather than religion itself which have failed to affect Hetty and people like her. This choice of words is not a coincidence, especially in the context of *Adam Bede*, where the tensions between an understanding and practice of religion as institution and tradition, and religion as a personal conviction occupy such an important place. The issue of how religion should be taught the people by the clergy is quite a central issue in the novel.

#### 4.2 The church, the chapel and the lower classes

In this second section, we will look at how the depictions of Dinah’s Methodism, the Established Church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as its reformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as represented by Mr Ryde, are presented as possible contenders for the problems opened up in the confession topic.

The historical representation of Methodism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the novel constitutes an important contextualization for the depiction of this contention. One of the points which the narrative keeps returning to with regard to Methodism is that Methodism changed very much in the intervening sixty years since 1799, when

the novel's events take place, to 1859, when it was published. Originally founded in the 1730s by John Wesley as a movement within the Church of England aiming to reform it, Methodism broke away from the Anglican church in 1795. Although there were Calvinist-Methodists among the group, including some leaders such as Whitefield, most Methodists including Wesley subscribed to Arminianism, which rejected the Calvinist belief in predestination, and taught instead that salvation through Christ is available for all. Among other notable features of Methodism in its early incarnation, sometimes referred to as Primitive Methodism, was the emphasis it placed on enthusiasm and passionate feeling:

Wesley learned the technique of open-air preaching, or 'mass evangelism', from George Whitefield, and the two men were both aware of enthusiasm's power to create an abnormally highly charged atmosphere in which converts would fall to the ground crying out their feelings of faith. (Knight & Mason, 2006, p. 30)

Although leading figures of the movement, such as Wesley and Whitefield, were ordained Anglican priests, Wesley approved of lay preachers, arguing that "all believers had the right to preach" and also that "Methodist leaders should be licensed in accordance with the 1689 Act of Toleration; that is, without ordination or institutionalized theological training" (p. 31). This is not to say that Wesley was a radical in his politics at any point in his life; only that his active concerns brought him in clash with the lethargy of the Established Church as it stood in the eighteenth century. Regarding Wesley's (and Methodism's) ideological position, E.P.

Thompson makes the following observation in *The Making of the English Working Class*:

If some sect of Old Dissent had set the pace of the evangelical revival - instead of John Wesley - then nineteenth-century Nonconformity might have assumed a more intellectual and democratic form. But it was Wesley - High Tory in politics, sacerdotal in his approach to organization - who first reached 'Christ's poor'. (Thompson, 1963/1980, p. 40)

Finding Wesley and his movement lacking in intellectuality and democracy, Thompson nonetheless recognizes him as a force which transformed the religious scene of eighteenth-century England, and also notes that the movement concerned itself with the poor.

In Eliot's treatment of Methodism in *Adam Bede*, the portrayal of this earlier incarnation is often accompanied by comments on the latter-day decline of the movement. Early in the narrative, following the chapter on Dinah's open-air preaching, the narrator contrasts what he represents as a humble, sincere and working-class faith in the past with the cynical state of Methodism in his own day:

[T]he picture we are apt to make of Methodism in our imagination is not an amphitheatre of green hills, or the deep shade of broad-leaved sycamores, where a crowd of rough men and weary-hearted women drank in a faith which was a rudimentary culture, which linked their thoughts with the past, lifted their imagination above the sordid details of their own narrow lives, and suffused their souls with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence, sweet as summer to the houseless needy. It is too possible that to some of my readers, Methodism may mean nothing more than low-pitched gables up dingy streets, sleek grocers, sponging preachers, and hypocritical jargon. (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 35)

Here, the contrast is achieved on several levels. Firstly, the current state of Methodism is depicted as a grimy, urban affair ("dingy streets"), which is a far cry from the prelapsarian qualities attributed to the old and decidedly rural strain of Methodism. The selflessness of those able to think about things other than "their own narrow lives" are contrasted to the "sleekness" and "sponging" of current practitioners, and the early "rudimentariness" has evolved into hypocrisy. What used to be a genuine working-class movement is now something like middle-class careerism. Indeed, the narrator's apparent distaste for contemporary Methodism shares much in tone and feeling with George Eliot's famous essay "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming," in which she excoriates both the movement and the person in question. This essay, first published in 1885, begins with the question,

Given, a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? (Eliot, 1883, p. 64)

Eliot then answers her own question, saying that the most suitable thing for such a person to do would be to become an “evangelical preacher”. Eliot’s condemnation of evangelical preachers in the person of Dr Cumming is essay-length, and yet the self-serving careerism of such figures, and the way they instrumentalize everything else with a view to their own advancement, is arguably the main source of her ire. Such middle-class aspirations are the source of the narrator’s discomfort with contemporary Methodism in *Adam Bede* as well, a fact which becomes even more apparent when he talks of “that modern type which reads quarterly reviews and attends in chapels with pillared porticoes” (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 35). In contrast, Dinah, portrayed in a favorable light and in fact modeled after George Eliot’s aunt Elizabeth Evans herself, is constantly shown to be selfless, with no thoughts for herself and always thinking of the poor and the needy. She turns down Seth’s marriage proposal by saying, “God has called me to minister to others, not to have any joys or sorrows of my own, but to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with those that weep” (p. 32). She says that it’s her calling “to help, to comfort and strengthen the little flock” in Snowfield, which she describes as a very poor community; and most notably, she stands by Hetty through the latter’s imprisonment, ultimately eliciting her confession and becoming instrumental in her soul’s salvation. Perhaps with the exception of the end of the narrative, Dinah’s allegiance is undoubtedly to the poor and the needy, a position which is contrasted with both the later, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century incarnation of Methodism and also with some other characters in the narrative.

That this positive representative of early Methodism should be a woman is no surprise, either; for making this lay preacher a woman was a certain way of locating her in the narrow window in history in which she exists. Mark Knight and Emma Mason (2006) note that early Methodism placed an emphasis on gender equality:

Freed from the rigid, unbending orthodoxy of a male-dominated Anglicanism, early Methodism readily embraced female believers, some of whom were encouraged to preach themselves as a marker of the unbounded availability of God's grace ... Part of Methodism's mass recruitment was reliant on an open acceptance of women and over half of Britain's Methodists were female in the eighteenth century, many of them unmarried, choosing a personal commitment to Christ over a potential husband" (Knight & Mason, 2006, pp. 32-33).

Lay preaching, then, was initially not just reserved for men but also for women. However, both Wesley himself and Methodism in general became more conservative as time went on, and eventually, an 1803 conference prohibited women from preaching, except under extraordinary circumstances. Dinah herself is affected by this decision, as at the end of the novel we find her married to Adam, who finds the prohibition fitting, and voices his opinion by saying that "most o' the women do more harm nor good with their preaching" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 481). The novel's historical aspect, then, functions not only through the gap of sixty years which separates the narrator from the period of time which he is recounting, but also through this gap of several years between the beginning and the end of the narrative. Through the insertion of this prohibition on women preachers into her plot, it is made clear that religion, and the way it bears on groups of people, is subject to constant changes even across such brief periods of time.

And so, through this process of continuous contrasting, Eliot designates two wholly distinct social groups, or "spiritual communities", centered around. Nominally and ostensibly, they are the same; the people in the 1850s are called "Methodists" as much as those in the 1800s are. In fact and practice, however, they

are very different, and this difference is a key theme of Eliot's novel. In order to better understand the transformation of Methodism in *Adam Bede* and what this transformation ultimately signifies, it is necessary to look at the other major religious group that is represented in the novel; that is, the Established Church.

The Established Church, or the Church of England is represented first and foremost (but not exclusively) by Mr Irwine, the rector of Broxton in *Adam Bede*. Interestingly enough, the first mention of Irwine in the narrative is in conjunction with Dinah's preaching, which foreshadows the way that Eliot portrays the relationship between their competing ideologies as one that is mutually transformative. When an ostensible stranger on horseback, passing through the village of Hayslope, asks a local man how the parson reacts to "a young woman preaching just under his nose," the local landlord replies by informing the stranger that Mr Irwine doesn't live there, and adds: "The parsonage here's a tumble-down place, sir, not fit for the gentry to live in" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 14). Thus, much prior to making his actual appearance in the novel, the Anglican priest is already presented in contrast to Dinah, who not only condescends to come to Hayslope in person, but does not even require a parsonage, tumble-down or otherwise, for it. Indeed, these continue to be Mr Irwine's distinguishing characteristics throughout the novel: his gentility, and his disengagement from actual issues, which he thinks is good manners. On his actual introduction, it is implied that Mr Irwine has "inherited more blood than wealth," and his first dialogue is a playful banter with his mother following a game of chess, where he accuses her of being a "witch-mother", a "sorceress" and continues: "How is a Christian man to win a game of you? I should have sprinkled the board with holy water before we began" (p. 50). The joking manner in which he talks about sorcery and holy water is certainly in contrast to how

“a young woman talks in a serious way to a handful of people on the Green” (p. 54).

When a villager from Hayslope, the parish clerk and sexton, comes to complain to him about Methodist activities, Mr Irwine says to him: “We must ‘live and let live,’ Joshua, in religion as well as in other things... you must mind and not lower the Church in people’s eyes by seeming to be frightened about it for a little thing” (p. 54). Overall, Mr Irwine’s doctrinal position is High Church, in the sense that the term was applied prior to the Oxford Movement and the Tractarianism of the 1830s: respectful of the Church as an institution rather than for any of its particular doctrines, and given to the liberal thinking of the eighteenth century, otherwise known as the Age of Reason. As Hilary Fraser (1986) writes,

the theological basis of Anglicanism in the years before the advent of Tractarianism was extremely weak. Wellington’s idea of the Church of England as a maker of ‘honest men’ expressed the limits of most people’s understanding of its function and status. The Church was primarily seen as a guide to the moral life. (p. 8)<sup>29</sup>

Mr Irwine represents the High Church prior to its contact, and subsequent transformation by, the Evangelicals in its high-and-dry Tory incarnation. This high-and-dry Anglicanism was outdated by at least thirty years by the time *Adam Bede* was published, a change that Eliot acknowledges when her narrator remarks: “Sixty years ago – it is a long time, so no wonder things have changed – all clergymen were not zealous; indeed there is reason to believe that the number of zealous clergymen were small” (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 158).

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<sup>29</sup> Fraser also quotes the following succinct overview offered by J.A. Froude, infamous Victorian apostate and author of the novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), of the High Church in the eighteenth century, prior to the Oxford Movement: “It was orthodox without being theological. Doctrinal problems were little thought of. Religion, as taught in the Church of England, meant moral obedience to the will of God. The speculative part of it was accepted because it was assumed to be true. The creeds were reverentially repeated; but the essential thing was practice. People went to church on Sunday to learn to be good, to hear the commandments repeated for the thousandth time, and to see them written in gilt letters over the communion-table. About the powers of the keys, the real presence, or the metaphysics of doctrine, no one was anxious, for no one thought about them. It was not worth while to waste time over questions which had no bearing on conduct, and could be satisfactorily disposed of only by sensible indifference” (p. 8-9).

The narrative proceeds to depict the ascendant Low Church in the portrayal of Mr Ryde, the new curate. The narrator's choice to refer to zealotry as the one quality that sets the clergymen of old apart from the new ones, as opposed to any particular doctrinal or theological points, is not a haphazard one.<sup>30</sup> In the extended discussion on the church and clergymen that takes place between the narrator and Adam in the present day of the narrative, Mr Irwine is compared to his successor Mr Ryde who, the narrator says, came to the parish "twenty years afterwards", which places him there in the mid-1820s. Based on the date as well as other indicators, such as his insistence on the importance of the Reformation and his opposition to ritualistic traditions such as "the Christmas rounds of the church singers", this new priest does not appear to be a High Churchman – or an Anglo-Catholic, or a Tractarian. Mr Ryde is likely a Low Churchman, for he is described with a number of qualities that were commonly attributed to Evangelicals in nineteenth century novels; in fact, these are the very same qualities attributed by the narrator to modern Methodists at the beginning of the novel:

[H]e was sourish-tempered, and was for beating down prices with the people as worked for him; and his preaching wouldn't go down well with that sauce. And he wanted to be like my lord judge i' the parish, punishing folks for doing wrong; and yet he scolded 'em from the pulpit as if he'd been a Ranter, and yet he couldn't abide the Dissenters, and was a deal more set against them than Mr Irwine was. (Eliot, 1859/2008, pp. 163-164)

According to Adam, Mr Irwine's successor is unpleasant, stingy, judgmental, overly aspirational and intolerant; his initial success with the parishioners where he educates them in "a great many notions of doctrine" and "the genuine gospel" gradually fades away as people get to know him, "the congregation [begins] to fall off, and people

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<sup>30</sup> Regarding the importance of zeal and strength of feeling, Ian Bradley (2006) writes, "Evangelicalism was never really a theological system so much as a way of life. It did not present itself to its adherents as a logical set of beliefs but rather as a series of vivid and compelling personal experiences" (p. 18).

[begin to] speak light o' [him]" (p. 162). His zeal is clearly contrasted to the goodwill and kind-heartedness of Mr Irwine; and both the narrator and Adam find Mr Ryde lacking in comparison to his predecessor. Adam says that "religion is something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing – it's feelings," thinking of how well-loved Mr Irwine was in Broxton and Hayslope, and believing that the feeling of love he engenders in his parishioners is superior to whatever the other man has to offer. This sentiment is shared by the narrator, who writes that "Mr Irwine's influence in his parish was a more wholesome one than that of the zealous Mr Ryde" (p. 163).

Convention and tradition were more emphasized and favored than intellectualism in the High Church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, both the narrator's and older Adam's idea of a good churchman in this chapter are in line with Fraser's depiction of the role of the Church as it was understood prior to the 1830s: a moral, rather than strictly religious, guide to the people. Adam's words on how feelings, rather than ideas are the guide to moral behavior is in fact a reiteration of George Eliot's formulation of morality being grounded in sympathy. In "Sympathy and the Basis for Morality", T.H. Irwin offers the following summary of Eliot's position on this subject:

In her view, emotions are essential to moral virtues because they express our reactions to particular situations, and only secondarily apply to generalizations. Just people, for instance, respond to particular acts of injustice with the appropriate indignation, and their recognition of a general requirement to be just is secondary. General principles are summaries and reminders; they affect us in so far as they recall the particular situations that arouse our emotions. Their secondary moral significance is derived from the primary moral significance of the responses to particular situations that they recall. This outlook is both particularist (in so far as it takes responses to particular situations to be primary) and sentimentalist (in so far as it takes emotion and sentiment to be primary). (Irwin, 2013, p. 282)

On the one hand, then, Mr Irwine's behavior and responses to situations, which are grounded in his own character rather than in a system or doctrine, are in fact more in line with Eliot's particularist formulation. However, the limitations of such a position are also made clear by the way the narrative is organized, among other things. Most tellingly, this long analysis of the merits of Mr Irwine in comparison to Mr Ryde come right after the chapter in which Mr Irwine fails to act as a moral and spiritual guide to Arthur Donnithorne out of an unwillingness to seem as if he is prying. This chapter, titled "Links", is one of the turning points of the narrative: because of Mr Irwine's failure to ask, and Arthur's subsequent failure to confess, the affair with Hetty remains unmentioned, and the chain of events that lead to Hetty's infanticide continue uninterrupted. As such, it is an apt title; it is not only history on a large scale – of ten, or sixty years – that is unfolding in a great chain of cause and effect, or thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but also the day-to-day lives of the people, in which the greatest tragedy is interlinked to the most insignificant-seeming evasion or omission.

The relationship between High Church and Evangelical movements is presented by the narrative in its historicity. Much attention is given to the connections between the past and the present day in this chapter, both with regard to Arthur in particular, and in a more general way. At the very beginning, as Arthur is on his way to visit Mr Irwine for breakfast, during which he also intends to unburden his secret to the rector, the narrator muses on the civilizing effect of discussing otherwise serious issues over meals, and says that while the "progress of civilization has made a breakfast or a dinner an easy and cheerful substitute for more troublesome and disagreeable ceremonies," yet "there was this advantage in the old rigid forms, that they committed you to the fulfilment of a resolution by some

outward deed” (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 147). This general observation is a foreshadowing of the encounter between Arthur and Mr Irwine: owing to the overall pleasantness and leisureliness of the breakfast setting, Arthur fails to stick to his resolution to confess his affair with Hetty. Here, then, the narrative is offering a different moral lesson than the one drawn out by the narrator and the older Adam in the next chapter; it is not always best when a clergyman is kind and loving but also undemanding and lenient, and sometimes “the old rigid forms,” that is, the rituals, do serve a function – granted, this function is psychological rather than anything divine or supernatural, according to the reasoning laid out (“they committed you to the fulfilment of a resolution by some outward deed”) – and yet, it is clear that it would have been much better for everyone involved had Mr Irwine zealously pursued the truth in this instance. On the other hand, although there is this difference between the two subsequent chapters, in one of which the behaviour of Mr Irwine is cast in a more unforgiving light, and in the other absolved by the narrator and the older Adam, what both chapters have in common is the apparent refusal to believe that progress, or novelty, is in itself good: both the “old rigid forms” and Mr Irwine have their admitted advantages, and their alternatives, or successors, are not better because they are newer.

The relations between the past and the present day are explored in this chapter are through reminiscences of Arthur’s childhood, which are reflected through the memories of Adam, whom he encounters on his way to the parsonage, and also through Mr Irwine’s memories of his childhood. Like Dinah and Hetty, Adam and Arthur are also mirror images, but the difference in their moral and religious development can be attributed to their class difference. Adam is a few years Arthur’s senior, and having known him since Arthur was a boy, is very fond of him. Of

course, one function of this friendly encounter between the two men is to provide a foil against the later chapter where Adam confronts, and strikes Arthur because of his refusal to admit that he's having an affair with Hetty. Arthur even remarks, seemingly out of nowhere, that Adam "would knock [him] into next week if [he] were to have a battle with [him]," even though he was a very capable boxer in Oxford, and Adam answers him by saying that "[he] will never fight any man again, only when he behaves like a scoundrel" (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 151). This is, in fact, what happens in Chapter 28, "A Dilemma". And even though Adam regrets his behavior afterwards, the implication that he thought of Arthur as a scoundrel at that moment is obvious. Adam's judgment is significant for a number of reasons: he has been personally fond of Arthur since his childhood, perhaps excessively so; he is "very susceptible to the influence of rank," and so reveres Arthur more than he would a person of his own class; and lastly, he is very set in his ways once he's made a decision – as he himself says: "When I've said a thing, if it's only to myself, it's hard for me to go back" (p. 151). For him to change his mind about Arthur is no small thing, and also speaks of the enormity of Arthur's wrongdoing, especially as among all the characters, Adam is the moral center of the novel despite his shortcomings. By contrast, Mr Irwine lets his longstanding acquaintance with Arthur exert an undue influence on his assessment of the situation at breakfast. Even in greeting the young man, Mr Irwine evokes the memory of their shared past, saying, "Why, this is like old days, Arthur; you haven't been to breakfast with me these five years" (p. 155). His comment puts Arthur in a position where the young man feels it would be inappropriate to let on that he has a problem – indeed, being very impressionable,

the mere fact that he was in the presence of an intimate friend, who had not the slightest notion that he had had any such serious internal struggle as he

came to confide, rather shook [Arthur's] own belief in the seriousness of the struggle. (p. 155)

All of his character traits, such as his unwillingness to be too prying as well his tendency to put people at their ease rather than to confront them – incidentally, all attributes of the well-bred gentleman at the same time – work against Mr Irwine in this instance; so even though he thinks about Hetty as he listens to Arthur speak, he flinches in the face of Arthur's discomfort when he asks the young man if there might be something personal behind his questions. "Mr Irwine was too delicate to imply even a friendly curiosity. He perceived a change of subject would be welcome," remarks the narrator, and indeed, the awareness of what happened comes much later to Mr Irwine, when Hetty is arrested for killing her baby (p. 158).

It was plain enough now what he had wanted to confess. And if their words had taken another turn... if he himself had been less fastidious about intruding on another man's secrets... it was cruel to think how thin a film shut out rescue from all this guilt and misery. He saw the whole history now by that terrible illumination which the present sheds back upon the past. (p. 366)

The past weighs heavily on the present, bending it to its own design, and it's not just their own shared pasts that clouds Mr Irwine's judgment – it is also the past and tradition in a general sense, whether in the form of a class structure, whereby Mr Irwine thinks it would be unpleasant to impugn the behavior of another gentleman, or in the form of a religious institution which tells him that a laissez-faire approach to the wellbeing of his congregation is the ideal –not to mention the easiest – one.

Despite his failures, however, the narrative does not, in the final analysis, privilege Dinah and her Methodism above Mr Irwine's Anglicanism as it explores the best way of reaching out to the lower classes, and fully integrating them in the religio-social order. Although his shortcomings are put on display, Mr Irwine is never ridiculed or maligned by the narrative, and after news of Hetty's arrest arrive

in the village, he does all he can to ameliorate the situation. Furthermore, Eliot's choice to formulate *Adam Bede* as a historical novel, and thus to simultaneously offer two versions of Methodism separated by time, can be read as an implicit comment on the issue. By presenting not just its fresh and vital beginnings but also Methodism as an ossified institution, the narrative argues that in religious practice as in many other things, there is endless potentiality for transforming into what one once mobilized against.

As well as a novel of psychological realism, *Adam Bede* is also a historical novel, and this formal fact informs how it treats its social problem in the context of religion and class. The novel begins with the image of an "Egyptian sorcerer" demonstrating "far-reaching visions of the past." The narrator then proceeds to compare his own task to that of the sorcerer, for the events of *Adam Bede* take place some sixty years before the publication of the novel in 1859; that is, around the turn of the nineteenth century. However, the description is apt in another sense, as well: these visions of the past are far-reaching in the sense that the past described in the novel actually shapes the present from which the narrator is speaking. In this, *Adam Bede* is a historical novel in the sense that Georg Lukacs (1937/1989) defines the concept in *The Historical Novel*, where, in describing the "prehistory" of the historical novel in the eighteenth century, he writes that "the contemporary world... is accepted naively as something given: whence and how it has developed have not yet become problems for the writer" (p. 19). The historical novel *par excellence*, as opposed to this sort of costume drama, exhibits an awareness of the changing, transforming nature of human existence, according to Lukacs. In the particularly well-known and much quoted seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede*, titled "In Which the Story Pauses for a Little," Eliot's narrator defends himself against accusations of

representing things as they are, rather than as they ought to be, claiming that for him, it is a moral imperative to be realistic rather than idealist or romantic, since it teaches people to also confront and love the world as it is (Eliot, 1859/2008, p. 160). This chapter is a defense of realism in fiction, and focuses on why representation should be true to life rather than how; but since the narrator is recounting events from sixty years ago, his reasoning also functions as a defense of the historical novel as defined by Lukacs: the aim is to answer the question of how events unfold in the ways they do truthfully, and to establish causality, and not to idealize or romanticize.

After having offered an overview of how Lukacs formulates the historical novel, Perry Anderson (2011) claims that according to this particular conception, “the historical novel is not a specific or delimited genre or subgenre of the novel *tout court*. Rather, it is simply a path-breaker or precursor of the great realistic novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” This is rather an interesting claim with wide-ranging repercussions; taking it as a starting point, it is possible to say that subgenres such as the historical novel, rather than being distinctly separate, are actually all variations on the same realism, the difference being the emphasized aspect. In the historical novel, causality and dialectics play a particularly important and foregrounded role, and there is a sustained emphasis on how the past becomes and shapes today. This is the sense in which *Adam Bede* is a historical novel: it is a work of realism with a particular interest in the kind of processes, negotiations, and conflicts through which the past continuously transforms itself into today. The novel explores these within two distinct timeframes: firstly, through the eight-year duration between 1799 and 1806 in which the plot events unfold; and secondly, through the distance between this eight-year period itself, and the year 1859, from which the narrator is speaking.

Methodism looms large in the novel, presented as a vital and new kind of religion taking the country by storm at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This early Methodism is contrasted to both its later incarnation in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as well as to the practices of the Established Church at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout, Eliot portrays these ideologies as supporting various social classes: for instance, the early Methodism represented by Dinah is a movement for the poor and the needy, whereas the representative of High Church Anglicanism, Reverend Irwine, is both a member of the gentry himself, and supports the interests of the gentry, if more unconsciously than not, as the main events of the plot plays out. In drawing out these interactions and differences, both synchronously and diachronically, Eliot posits a sort of dialecticism as the guiding principle of her novel: the underlying assumption is that opposing ideas and positions eventually resolve into a synthesis through a process of interactions. Just as the reconciliation of the working classes and their masters, the industrial middle classes, as well as that of the gentry and the industrial middle classes is central to *North and South*, the grand dialectical project of *Adam Bede* is the reconciliation of Methodism with Anglicanism – of Low Church with High Church, of Dissent with Establishment, and finally, of working class with bourgeois ideology. Supporting this overarching theme are a number of interlocking dichotomies which resolve, or fail to resolve into syntheses: the “hardness” of Hetty and Adam, different from one another, as contrasted with Dinah’s enthusiasm and passionate feeling; on a similar note, the depth of Dinah versus the shallowness of Hetty, but also, the shallowness of Mr Irwine’s religious involvement, which is of a different kind, but shallowness all the same; the good manners and refinement of Mr Irwine which prove to be ineffectual in the final analysis as opposed to the less polished yet effective actions of Dinah.

Like *North and South*, *Adam Bede* too resolves, or attempts to resolve, the social problem it had presented by means of the marriage plot. In an underwhelming ending where Cunningham (1975) argues that “George Eliot ... let her novel ... run aground firmly on the sunken rocks of melodrama and convention,” Adam and Dinah are married, their marriage representing a reconciliation between the older order and the new, and also between social groups with formerly conflicting values (p. 170). Adam’s embodiment of the old order, including Anglicanism, in this scheme of reconciliation is perhaps not so surprising, since he is presented as a mediating presence throughout the novel. Adam is a working-class craftsman, yet respectful of his social superiors, and he believes that people are born into their stations. He is not interested in the inner sense or experience of religion like Seth or Dinah are, but he is a staunch follower of the Established Church since it represents tradition and continuity. Despite not being religious in the modern or enthusiastic sense, he has a strong moral compass and doesn’t flinch from uncomfortable truths. It is also unsurprising that the narrative reconciles the Establishment and non-Establishment groups it represents not by means of someone like Mr Irwin, who after all is revealed to be among the last of his kind, soon to be obsolete and replaced by the likes of Mr Ryde, but through the working-class but traditional Adam. The tampering and benevolent influence of Margaret Hale on Thornton’s political economy at the end of *North and South* is reflected somewhat more cruelly in how the marriage domesticates Dinah, who is no longer pursuing her vocation and is bearing children instead. Women’s vocational autonomy is often a problematic issue in these narratives of social reconciliation and is often traded for marriage; *Villette*’s ending offers a comparison in that although Lucy Snowe becomes the headmistress of her

own school through the help of her fiancé M. Paul, she is a single woman as the narrative ends, with M. Paul lost at sea.

However, Hetty's fate is perhaps more emblematic of that device in these fictions of social problem by which the "remainder" that cannot be fit into the newly-formulated scheme of reconciliation is sent off overseas. The immigration scheme is present at *Alton Locke*'s resolution, as well; although not central to the narrative, in *North and South* Margaret's brother Frederick immigrates to Spain, too, and although *Villette*'s M. Paul does not strictly immigrate, he is lost at sea as he returns from a couple of years spent in South Africa. Although these narratives expand considerable effort to resolve the social problems they represent, and are actually adept at seemingly resolving some of these problems by recontextualizing them, on closer scrutiny, someone is always being swept aside in them. Whether it is Mrs. Sweeny, the Irish pretender exposed by Lucy and dismissed from her post in *Villette*, or the family of Jemmy Downes, dead from typhus fever in their filthy room in *Alton Locke*, there are often unresolved, irresolvable working-class characters in these novels. The fictional representation of working-class subjectivity in the Victorian novels is often problematic, and prone to irresolvable crises. In the following chapter on *Alton Locke*, the focus is on the problems and limitations of representing working-class interiority and subjectivity in an authentic manner in the mid-Victorian novel.

## CHAPTER 5

### *ALTON LOCKE, THE BROAD CHURCH*

#### AND INTERACTION AMONG THE GENRES IN THE 1840s

Charles Kingsley's 1850 novel *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*, his second published work of fiction following the serialization of *Yeast: A Problem* in 1848, is a social-problem novel written in response to the issues of the 1840s, most prominent among them being Chartism, the working-class movement for political reform and the franchise. The novel's working-class protagonist, the eponymous Alton Locke, moves from a childhood in a strict Dissenting household to working in a tailor's sweatshop, where he becomes acquainted with radical ideas and Chartism. Alton goes on to become a poet, and his close encounters with the upper classes, combined with his thwarted romantic ambitions, continue to breed resentment in him. In the second half of the novel, Alton is imprisoned for inciting a riot, and while in prison, becomes disillusioned with his political convictions. Meanwhile, Chartism dies out as a political movement and as a result of both a dream vision and the efforts of an upper-class woman named Eleanor, Alton is converted to Christian Socialism. He decides to emigrate to the United States, and dies on the voyage.

Following Louis Cazamian and Raymond Williams, modern critical works on *Alton Locke* have more often than not analyzed it in the context of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century social-problem novels: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, and Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (published in 1866, George Eliot's *Felix Holt* is thematically, if not chronologically, associated with these novels). For a fuller appreciation of *Alton Locke*, however, we must centralize its indebtedness to and interactions with other narrative conventions than those of the

traditionally middle-class forms of realist fiction. More specifically, life writing narrative traditions, such as Victorian working-class autobiographies and spiritual autobiographies, as well as a number of other genres such as the sermon and the tract, with which Kingsley was very familiar as a clergyman and a social reformer, are key points of reference in reframing, if not redeeming, those aspects of the novel, such as its unwieldy plot structure and incoherent character development, that are generally considered as problematic by readers and critics alike. As well as being a writer, Charles Kingsley was also a clergyman of the Broad Church party within the Church of England, which meant that represented an Establishment position defending the status quo against contemporary social and political upheavals. His engagement with Christian Socialism, alongside a number of other Broad Churchmen, found its meaning within this broader context and was a direct response to Chartist agitation. Through this engagement, he sought to curb the Chartists' revolutionary fervor and to appropriate the agency the working classes were demanding and entrust it to the custody of clergymen. Kingsley believed and defended the idea that clergy should function as a liaison between the workers and the State, providing moral guidance to the former and supplying important knowledge to the latter regarding the condition of the working classes. As a result, a mediatory as well as appropriative stance colored Kingsley's outlook on working-class issues. Deploying several life-writing narrative conventions in an exploration as well as defense of this particular position, Kingsley formulates in *Alton Locke* a working-class subjectivity that is at times at odds with the conventions of middle-class realist fiction. It was unlikely for an Establishment Churchman like Kingsley to embrace a working-class narrative tradition, but a compromise became possible by the utilization of some of his deeply held, if vaguely defined beliefs in Broad Church

tenets<sup>31 32</sup>. Among these are a rejection of the doctrine of predestination, the unity of Church and State (sometimes referred to as Erastianism in denoting the Church's subservience of the state) and finally, a tendency to anti-intellectualism by way of Coleridge's anti-rationalism.

Critics have found in *Alton Locke* the various inconsistencies, lapses and overall shortcomings generally attributed to social-problem novels, some of which were also discussed in the chapter on *North and South*. More specifically, a causal indeterminacy is thought to undermine the coherence of *Alton Locke* as a narrative: it is not clear why things happen the way they do, why Alton's life unfolds in the way it does. Catherine Gallagher (1985) formulates this narrative indecision in terms of two competing "models of causality" that coexist in the novel: "a providential vision that justifies suffering as a necessary soul-making process, and a view of suffering, especially the suffering of the poor, as a socially determined evil" (p. 92). As a result, Alton's suffering is portrayed as simultaneously transcendent and instructive, as well as socially determined and therefore avoidable, often in contradictory terms. In *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*, Rosemarie Bodenheimer (1988) similarly finds Kingsley "struggl[ing] with and against the doctrine of environmental determinism," and claims that "Alton Locke oscillates wildly between its commitment to the circumstances of working-class life and its yearning for a pastoral

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<sup>31</sup> Kingsley was a Church of England clergyman whose public personality and reputation grew from the 1850s onwards. He became the personal chaplain of Queen Victoria in 1859, and "in 1860, through the influence of Prince Albert, he was appointed the Regius Chair of Modern History at Cambridge" (Kingsley, Van Thal & Lodge, 1969, p. xvii). He was influenced by the thoughts of Coleridge, who believed that "society was an organic whole ... elevated and civilized by the 'clerisy'" (Wolff, 1977, p. 253). Both intellectually, and in his personal and public life, then, Kingsley opposed Dissenting positions on religion, and stood under the aegis of the Established Church.

<sup>32</sup> I talk about Kingsley's Broad Church stance and beliefs in a broader, lifelong sense whereas his engagement with Christian Socialism spans a much briefer period of time – late 1840s and early 1850s – and is a direct response to the Chartist agitation. So although Christian Socialism belonged under the Broad Church and was informed by its beliefs, it was necessarily more limited in scope than the Broad Church as a movement was.

world,” drawing attention to how the narrative fails to resolve this conflict on its original terms (p. 135). Remarking on how Kingsley defends and justifies the Establishment towards the end of the narrative, David Alderson (1996) writes in “An Anatomy of the British Polity: *Alton Locke* and Christian Manliness”:

The institutions and historical development of British society are sanctified and vindicated. The basis of this understanding of history is Providence, but this passage [defending the Establishment] only appears at the end of a book which outlines the contemporary precariousness of that order which it claims to be coterminous with Providence. (p. 46)

The paradox Alderson draws attention to is a reformulation of the point Gallagher makes with regard to the competing and incompatible versions of causality present in *Alton Locke*: either history, on an individual as well as national level, is unfolding as it ought to, and should be accepted as such, or it is not, and something must be done about it – but the two versions are very difficult to simultaneously sustain in a logical and coherent manner. Other seminal interpretations of the novel, such as Patrick Brantlinger’s in *The Spirit of Reform* (1977), have drawn attention to what they perceive as its irreconcilably dual nature in broader terms: Brantlinger writes of *Alton Locke*’s “two-sidedness” on multiple occasions, and traces this quality to Kingsley’s engagement with Christian Socialism. In its attempts to reconcile Christianity and some self-defined version of socialism, Brantlinger argues that Christian Socialism not only “led” Kingsley to “strike bargains with Chartists and socialists that [he] cannot keep,” but also alienated him from all factions equally: “[t]he same two-sidedness that was meant to put [Christian Socialists] in harmony with everybody also put them at odds with everybody” (pp. 136, 144). The duality in Brantlinger’s formulation extends to Kingsley’s prose style (a “two-sided apocalyptic style,”) as well as the characterization of Alton Locke himself: “[t]he extremes threatening to pull Kingsley’s two-sided tailor-poet apart are the desire to be true to

the working class and the desire to rise into the middle class” (pp. 137, 144). Both structurally and thematically, then, literary critics have responded to this quality, which they perceive as an incoherence that undermines the novel’s integrity, in *Alton Locke*. Such criticisms also tie into the wider discussions of social-problem novels which, as briefly mentioned above, tend to focus on the negative aspects of these narratives. Regarding this broader context, Josephine M. Guy (1996) notes in *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel*,

common to nearly all of [the critical interpretations of social-problem novels] is the conclusion that the works are in some way flawed - that they are marked by incoherence and contradiction and that they possess fundamental weaknesses of plot and characterisation ... on the one hand there is a considerable body of critical work devoted to the social-problem novels; but on the other, most of the judgements about them appear to be negative. (p. 3)

However, an alternative paradigm for explaining such seemingly incongruous elements may be established if we consider Victorian literary culture in its interconnected totality, instead of the novel in isolation as a work of art. Drawing on a contemporary review of *Alton Locke* which speaks of the novel as it was a sermon or tract, and indicating that this indiscriminating approach was quite standard, O’Gorman writes in “‘To Amuse Merely as a Novel’: *Alton Locke* (1850) and Literary Pleasure”:

Perhaps it might be that this reviewer, and others who took the same view, had a strong understanding of the coherence of literary culture at the end of the 1840s: that fiction, politics, Christian teaching, and what we would call sociology were all part of the same whole, where one could legitimately do the work of another. (p. 67)

Unmentioned by O’Gorman but particularly relevant to *Alton Locke*, to this list may be added Victorian working-class and spiritual autobiographies. *Alton Locke* itself is a fictionalized biography of the Chartist poet Thomas Cooper, with whom Kingsley engaged in lengthy correspondence; and at all events, as Carl Dawson (1979) writes in *Victorian Noon*, “[Kingsley] wanted his novel to herald what the Chartists

themselves were calling for, a distinctively working-class literature” (p. 194). In attempting to examine structural and plotting “oddities” or “failures” in it, this recontextualization of *Alton Locke* alongside works which are not commonly associated with the novel genre offers an alternative framework of discussion.

Since Alton is a working-class protagonist, as highlighted from the very beginning of the narrative, the most readily recognizable literary subgenre that *Alton Locke* models itself on is the working class-autobiography, and familiarization with some of the characteristics and preoccupations of this form sheds light on how *Alton Locke* perceives and structures itself as a text, as well. Part of a broader tradition of life-writing, with its origins in 17<sup>th</sup>-century spiritual autobiographies among other sources, the working-class autobiography first “became sufficiently established to attract the attention of the literary establishment” in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, David Vincent notes (2016, p. 165). Kingsley places *Alton Locke* with this tradition from the beginning of the narrative, where the narrator, Alton, identifies himself as a “Cockney among Cockneys,” that is, a working-class Londoner and goes on to assert his status as “a poet of the people” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, pp. 1-2). His class status is the distinguishing feature of his identity as a writer, a connection which Alton explicitly recognizes when he writes that his position as a poet of the people “was worth buying with asthma, and rickets, and consumption, and – worst of all to me – with ugliness. It was God’s purpose about me; and therefore, all circumstances combined to imprison me in London” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, pp. 2). The emphasis on the seemingly inextricable nature of Alton’s class-status and his writing, established in the very beginning and consolidated throughout the narrative – Sandy Mackaye’s injunction, “True poetry, like true charity, my laddie, begins at home” is especially relevant here – thus identifies working-class autobiography as a relevant framework

(p. 86). Widespread literacy among the working classes, as well as the increasing affordability of reading and writing materials contributed to the popularization of the form, and a wide variety of occupations were represented in these works: “errand boys, domestic servants, farm labourers, soldiers and sailors, navvies and hawkers, and a host of trades in the by-ways of the nineteenth-century economy such as coal trammer, docks hobbler, rivet carrier, and slope-dresser” were among these (pp. 167-8). In purporting to be the autobiography of a London tailor and poet, *Alton Locke* defines itself against what is itself a recognizably defined and well-represented genre. In *Alton Locke*, not only is there a textual awareness of, and response to a number of working-class and Chartist writers who are explicitly named in the text, such as Thomas Cooper and John Bethune, but also a recognition of Alton as a writer and poet participating in the same tradition as many others like him. Alton says of his own writing:

if any one's curiosity is so far excited that he wishes to see what I have accomplished, the best advice which I can give him is, to go forth, and buy all the working-men's poetry which has appeared during the last twenty years, (p. 98)

The relation of this body of writing to the middle-class fiction of the period is particularly relevant to a discussion of *Alton Locke*. Highlighting the mid-century social-problem novels in particular, Regenia Gagnier (1987) observes that “middle-class fiction” had an effect on how working-class writers formulated their selves, and life stories in their narratives:

[T]he working classes were competing with more imaginative and compelling pictures of themselves in fiction. Due to the climate of political unrest and fear extending from the French Revolution through the housing crises of the 1880s, middle-class fiction increasingly included representations of the lower classes within the structure of a compelling and conflict-ridden narrative. (p. 341)

Thus focusing on how the two spheres of writing were not cut off from one another, Gagnier underlines not just the element of competition as unwelcome, because unfair, from a working-class perspective, but also that of misrepresentation: “many [working-class] writers found middle-class fiction both unflattering and disturbingly untrue to their experience” (p. 341). Vincent (2016) also acknowledges the uneasy interactions between working-class narratives and middle-class fiction:

It mattered to the [working-class] autobiographers that they were not writing fiction, and indeed one of the stimulants to the proliferation of the genre in the Victorian era was the need to counter the increasing representation of working-class lives in the novels of Dickens and other middle-class writers. (p. 170)

Complementing the influence of working-class narratives such as autobiographies and Chartist literature on *Alton Locke*, there is also the issue of middle-class social-problem novels with which *Alton Locke* is traditionally associated, influencing working-class narratives by creating certain expectations in the reading public as regards narrative conventions. In a wider sense, however, there is an awareness in the novel regarding the tendency to interpret the act of writing itself as inherently non-working class. The precarious and sometimes paradoxical position of the working-class writer, where he is often perceived to be distancing or removing himself from his working-class status in the very act of writing, is a recurring thread in *Alton Locke*. Alton identifies the seemingly impossible choice facing an aspirational working-class man between “desert[ing] his own class ... [to] try to become a sham gentleman” and “dar[ing] to be true to his own class,” being perceived as a result as “the demagogue, the incendiary, the fanatic, the dreamer,” and recognizes the double bind facing him, where the middle and upper classes, those “exclusive worldlings,” “have the monopoly of talent, too” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 50). Alton’s preoccupation with Romantic poetry – especially Byron – in his formative period as

a poet, and his later rejection of such literature as being “frivolous, insane, or even worse” is another way in which the novel problematizes the connection between the working class, and literature produced by the middle or upper classes (p. 28).

The spiritual autobiography is another form of life-writing whose shaping influence is felt throughout *Alton Locke*. Also popular during the Victorian period, the spiritual autobiography’s history in England stretches back to the Puritans and Dissenters in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, although in a broader sense, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, in which he recounts his earlier, sinful life and his eventual conversion to Christianity, also provides a blueprint for such narratives. In “The radicalism of early modern spiritual autobiography”, Molly Murray (2016) notes the “double vision”, directed both backwards and on the present, that is required to write an autobiography; this duality becomes “especially striking in the case of spiritual autobiography, which often presents the authorial self in relation to, and in terms of, both the sinful life that preceded the moment of writing and the new life that the writing portends” (p. 41). This idea of religious “conversion”, as opposed to the secular conceptualization of life as “becoming,” is particularly relevant to how issues of causality and determination are handled in *Alton Locke*. Even before delving into such structural parallels, however, Alton Locke’s affinities to the spiritual autobiography are evident on even a superficial level, since it tells the story of Alton’s rocky path in life, which leads him to being converted to Christian Socialism. The event of religious conversion, taken at face value rather than interpreted through a skeptical or secular lens, bestows its own dynamics of agency and causality to the narrative.

Finally, in both working-class and spiritual autobiographies, we find one particular conceptualization that is difficult to reconcile with the conventions of

realist fiction, and this is a site of contention that is directly relevant to *Alton Locke*'s perceived critical failures. The representation of the self as a unified whole, interacting with the world through its agency – engaging in actions with certain, comprehensible motives, which in turn yield certain outcomes – is not a given in life-writing, either working-class or spiritual; and this is the case for reasons other than artistic ineptitude. “Far from a ‘metaphor of the self’ ... nineteenth-century British working-class autobiography did not stress self-discovery or the literary presentation of a unique individual,” Nan Hackett (1989) observes in “A Different Form of ‘Self’: Narrative Style in British Nineteenth-Century Working-class Autobiography,” and adds: “most working-class autobiography consists of an impersonal chronology with little or no dramatic narrative or introspection” (pp. 209, 210). This is true for *Alton Locke*, as well, where the two central scenes of Alton's conversion – first to Chartism, later to Christian Socialism – are portrayed in a curiously flat and static way, with Alton seemingly absent from the scene of both events even though physically he is there. Likewise, Vincent's discussion of the unstable self, as well as multiple narratives inhabiting the same space in working-class autobiographies, anticipates and responds to the criticisms of Gallagher, Bodenheimer and others regarding *Alton Locke*'s indeterminate causal scheme. Speaking of “[t]he deployment of multiple narratives of the self,” Vincent (2016) reports that “working-class autobiographers negotiated with available versions of selfhood, often bequeathed from earlier eras” (p. 175). According to Vincent, such plurality was owing to the growing irreconcilability between “the [earlier] traditions of spiritual and oral memoirs,” which gave a shape to these autobiographies, and the brand-new sociohistorical contexts in which the lives in question were lived (p. 172).

There being no previously established models for what they attempted to do, working-class writers improvised:

Men and sometimes women set out on an unfamiliar project lacking confidence in any single model of temporal self-analysis. The consequence was a plural and provisional approach to the task of shaping the narratives. Inexperienced writers responded to their own and their audience's demands by attempting various approaches to explaining a life, sometimes reviving fading structures, elsewhere contributing to emerging literary sub-categories or trying different models within the boundary of a single account. (p. 172)

This lack of a "single model of temporal self-analysis" becomes especially relevant in the framework of *Alton Locke*, where Kingsley uses the perspective offered by the autobiographical form – the narrator and the protagonist both the same person, and yet distinct from one another until the end of the narrative where they converge – to defend an Establishment perspective from a working-class position.

The deployment of spiritual autobiography presents similar challenges to the representation of the self as a unified and rational totality. Earlier, we noted that the conversion trope in particular, found in spiritual autobiographies, meant that such narratives could not be unproblematically accommodated by conventions of realist fiction. Discussing the origins of spiritual biography through a comparison of St. Augustine and John Bunyan, one writer makes the following observation regarding this issue:

Spiritual autobiography, as Augustine presents it, posits a crucial disparity between the narrator and the protagonist, which involves more than the usual autobiographical time lag. In most secular autobiographies, such as Franklin's *Autobiography* or *The Education of Henry Adams*, the teller and the hero are "the same" with a different degree of awareness: behold me then becoming what I am now. In the *Confessions*, we have seen a much more remarkable distinction, effectively presenting two different beings. (Bell, 1977, p. 114)

The formulation of the self as "two different beings," before and after the conversion, provide a useful model for understanding the inconsistencies and discontinuities in Alton's characterization.

The two strains in Kingsley's thought that critics have often highlighted in contextualizing *Alton Locke* have been his engagement with Christian Socialism, and Muscular Christianity. However, Kingsley's participation in the Broad Church movement offers a more comprehensive understanding of how *Alton Locke*, in the specific novelistic form it assumes, interacts and responds to the issues of the day. As one critic notes, despite "the common tendency to equate it with liberalism," "the broad church movement was essentially conservative and reactive ... [fighting against] the rise of sectarianism within the church, and the erosion of the church's authority within society at large" (Morris, 2006, p. 429). The autobiographical form of *Alton Locke* with its first-person point of view and narration is a way for Kingsley to maintain his commitment to Establishment ideas while appropriating working-class agency. Distinguishing between authorial intent or beliefs, and those of the characters represented in fiction, is clearly a very fundamental aspect of critical practice; however, in the case of a polemical novel such as *Alton Locke*, it is often the case that a number of characters, among which is the protagonist, function as mouthpieces of the author in a very straightforward manner. Raymond Williams (1958/1960) calls *Alton Locke* "a book which is extremely discursive in mood," and writes that in the text, there is a "major emphasis on argument, on prolonged discussion of events" (p. 108). Indeed, all throughout the narrative but more and more frequently towards the end, entire chapters, conveniently titled as "Priests and People" or "Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood," are thinly-veiled tracts in whose seeming dialogues, one of the characters preach sermons from Kingsley's convictions. As such, moving from opinions or viewpoints stated by the characters to those of Kingsley himself is not quite unjustified as it might commonly be, unless the context indicates otherwise.

## 5.1 Predestination and agency

The novel's engagement with the issue of predestination, and the doctrine of unconditional election, is explored or discussed through two strands in the narrative. The first of these is Alton's mother's faith, a strict Calvinism which he cannot bring himself to believe in, even as a child. According to the Baptist beliefs of Mrs Locke, only a small portion of the people on earth are saved, and the rest are eternally damned as God wills. The impossibility of any human thought or action to be meaningful in this scheme is thus summed up by Alton: "Had it not been decided from all eternity? We were elect, or we were reprobate. Could [my mother's] prayers alter that? If He had chosen us, He would call us in His own good time: and, if not—" (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 4). One reason why Kingsley, through Alton, objects to this Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election is because for him, such a formulation of God precludes his goodness and benevolence, which is a central tenet of his own faith. In a sermon entitled "The Loftiness of God," Kingsley (1898) underlines this point by claiming that as attested to by his suffering on the cross, God is "[a] good God; a God of love; a God of boundless forbearance and long-suffering" (p. 321). Kingsley also opposes this simple faith to the efforts of those who attempt to understand or explain not just what things are, but also how they are: those "puzzling their brains with theories of the atonement, and with predestination, and satisfaction, and forensic justification, and particular redemption, and long words which (four out of five of them) are not in the Bible, but are spun out of men's own minds," are merely engaging in "folly and madness", according to him (p. 321). On emphasizing God's goodness and mercy on the one hand, Kingsley also shuts out discussions of its specifics by a stance of anti-dogmatism, or even anti-

intellectualism. Elsewhere in *Alton Locke*, Calvinism is equated with a form of blasphemy that replaces the one true Christian God with its false idols: “our god, or gods rather, till we were twelve years old, were hell, the rod, the ten commandments, and public opinion” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 5). The absence of a loving, benevolent God in Calvinism, then, is a major point of contention for Kingsley, as Alton chastises not just the Calvinists and Dissenters, but Christians in general for failing to represent God accurately: “[this failure] is the cause of the contempt into which not merely sectarian Protestantism, but Christianity altogether, has fallen in the minds of the thinking workmen. Clergymen, who anathematize us for wandering into Unitarianism – you, you have driven us thither” (p. 8). Although Unitarianism, in its rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, is a Nonconformist sect existing outside of the Church of England, its rejection of the doctrine of everlasting punishment makes it thus preferable to even Established Church beliefs that do not drive home the centrality of God’s goodness and love. Kingsley’s position regarding God’s goodness and love, argued on the basis of unconditional as opposed to conditional election, finds a correspondence in Broad Church thinking, as well. In outlining the intellectual background of Broad Church positions on various doctrines, Robert Lee Wolff (1977) considers Thomas Erskine, a Scottish politician, as an obscure yet influential figure who inspired both Coleridge and the Broad Church in general. Wolff (1977) writes,

Erskine repudiated [the] extreme Calvinist insistence that God had died only for the elect ... [he] believed in a loving, fatherly God: God would indeed punish sinners, but he would not relish his power for its own sake, using it instead to teach his children. Christ’s atonement was for all mankind, not only for the elect, and as a consequence the doctrine of eternal punishment must be rejected. (pp. 255-256)

Elsewhere, in discussing another leading figure of the movement, Thomas Arnold, he argues that “[Arnold’s] God was not the Calvinist God of power, but a God of truth

and goodness” (p. 259). The same is true for Kingsley’s own mentor, F.D. Maurice, who believes “in a loving God who would be a loving, if stern, father, and who would forgive rather than condemn” (p. 263). In his rejection of the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election, then, Alton is aligned both with Kingsley’s position on the issue in particular, and with the overall tendencies of the Broad Church in general.

However, this rejection is only part of the reason why Alton is so opposed to Calvinism and unconditional election. The other objectionable part of this doctrine, for him as well as for Kingsley, is its spiritual elitism, by which it seeks to appeal not to all, but to a chosen few. Early in the narrative, an unpleasant, self-seeking Baptist minister, Mr Wiggington, is introduced. This is a man who regularly comes to the Locke household to enjoy his own conversation and eat Mrs Locke’s food, and Alton says of him, “I hated him – and if any man ever deserved hatred, he did” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 11). As such, Wiggington is clearly marked as one of the foils against which the ideas endorsed by the narrative are defined. On one occasion, he says: “how delightful to think of the narrow way of discriminating grace! How it enhances the believer’s view of his own exceeding privileges, to remember that there be few that be saved!” (p. 15). This outburst is occasioned by a song that Alton composed as a child, in which he declares that “Jesus loves all,” to which the minister responds, “Bad doctrine ... Jesus does *not* love one and all” (p. 15). Much later, in prison, contemplating the Bible placed in his cell, Alton thinks of it as preaching “passive obedience, and the slavery of the intellect,” and says that perceived from the standpoint of his mother’s unwavering Calvinism, Christianity is “the mystic application of rare exceptions to the fanaticism of a chosen few—the elect—the saints, who, as the fifth-monarchy men held, were one day to rule the world with a

rod of iron” (p. 292). His hostility to this perception of Christianity as an exclusive club with conditional membership is an important element of Kingsley’s opposition to High Church (Tractarian) theology just as much as that of the Evangelical Low Church and Dissenters – while the elitism is “mystical” or ineffable in the case of Dissenters and their Calvinism, it has an element of intellectual and ritualistic gatekeeping with the Tractarians. In a sermon titled “True Repentance,” Kingsley (1898) criticizes these tendencies by identifiably describing them:

But what do they mean by repenting? Coming as often as they can to church or chapel, and reading all the religious books which they can get hold of: till they come, from often reading and hearing about the Gospel promises, to some confused notion that their sins are washed away in Christ’s blood; or perhaps, on the strength of some violent feelings, believe that they are converted all on a sudden, and clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, and renewed by God’s Spirit, and that now they belong to the number of believers, and are among God’s elect. (p. 99)

Although Kingsley avoids naming sects explicitly, the stress on reading and transubstantiation points to the Tractarians, whereas the “violent feelings” of vital religion and an idea of being elect, equally contemptible from Kingsley’s point of view, identify the second group as Calvinist Evangelicals. However, his distaste for intellectual elitism is not just limited to the Tractarians, and “Emersonians” also receive their due censure from Eleanor – another of Kingsley’s mouthpieces in *Alton Locke*, and the woman who converts Alton to Christian Socialism. Eleanor calls Emerson, Strauss and other such philosophers (as opposed to practitioners, or preachers) of religion “the exclusive mystagogues of an enlightened few,” and asks: “What gospel have they ... for the suffering, the oppressed?” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 364). In Kingsley’s response to Chartism and his formulation of Christian Socialism, the rejection of predestination plays an important role precisely because of these two points of refutation. Firstly, he opposes the concept of an eternal punishment which cannot be altered through human effort or faith. Secondly, he also

rejects the idea of salvation as an elite club, admittance to which is either inscrutably arbitrary or based on intellectual merit.

The second strand in the narrative through which Kingsley engages with the idea of predestination is a political one, as opposed to this more obviously religious framing. Kingsley presents Chartism as a response to the circumstances of working-class life, and Christian Socialism as a more suitable alternative to Chartism.

Through his protagonist's concomitant search for a political ideology and a faith, Kingsley similarly explores – as with the Calvinist debate – whether the circumstances of human beings are implacably predetermined, or can be changed through intervention. In moving from one framework to another, however, a shift occurs in how certain terms are defined; through this conceptual sleight-of-hand, Chartism is invalidated and Christian Socialism is celebrated instead as a viable solution. At first – within the first, explicitly religious debate – it seems as if against the ironclad determinism posited by Calvinism, a liberal understanding of human freedom is being vindicated. However, the shifting paradigm reveals the hidden clause: freedom, but only in and through God. As such, the agency assumed by the Chartists is undermined, because they put human, rather than divine agency first.

Although the Chartist position is built against a discourse of human misery which is first approached from, and made expressible within the framework of Calvinism in the novel, it is also set up to fail once it takes down this Calvinist position, so it can be supplanted by Kingsley's favored Broad Church/Christian Socialist position. In describing Christian Socialism as formulated by F.D. Maurice, Brantlinger (1977) describes a "Coleridgean yoking of opposites in a single idea by a kind of political leap of faith, and a declaration of the historical communism of the Church, or of equality in Christ" (p. 135). Especially relevant in this context is the emphasis on

“equality in Christ,” which takes with one hand what it gives with the other, that is, defines a kind of agency so abstract and unspecified that it can have no real-life application whatsoever.

To better understand how the debate changes its own terms halfway throughout the narrative, let us observe how the anti-determinist discourse, from being deployed against Calvinism in the first place, is over time absorbed into the rhetoric of social and political reform. To this end, the narrative represents the current state of the British working class as being parallel to that of all humanity, as seen from the perspective of Calvinism. In a rousing speech to his fellow tailors, the Chartist Crosssthaite makes the point that unless they take matters into their own hands and assume agency, the social order as it stands will remain an iron cage of causality from which they cannot escape:

We were all bound to expect this. Every working tailor must come to this at last, on the present system; and we are only lucky in having been spared so long. You all know where this will end—in the same misery as fifteen thousand out of twenty thousand of our class are enduring now. We shall become the slaves, often the bodily prisoners, of Jews, middlemen, and sweaters, who draw their livelihood out of our starvation. We shall have to face, as the rest have ... ever more penury, slavery, misery, as we are pressed on by those who are sucked by fifties—almost by hundreds—yearly, out of the honourable trade in which we were brought up, into the infernal system of contract work, which is devouring our trade and many others, body and soul. (Kingsley, 1850/1969, pp. 101-102)

The emphasis on the inescapably determined quality of life, as it unfolds for the working class – “bound to,” “must come to this,” “where this will end” and so on – is matched only by the sense that multitudes – “fifteen thousand out of twenty thousand”, hundreds of men “falling” from their established positions every year – are doomed to this “infernal” state of affairs, as opposed to the few who can enjoy the security of their stations. The rhetorical allusions to hell and damnation also serve to strengthen this connection, and in both aspects, the state of affairs is reminiscent

of the worldview of Calvinism: only a few are saved, and there is nothing else the rest can do to change it. In equating the status quo with a Calvinist worldview, however, Kingsley does not vindicate the alternative offered to it by Chartism, either. Crossthwaite urges his fellow workers, “if neither the Government nor Members of Parliament can help us, we must help ourselves. Help yourselves, and heaven will help you” (p. 102). He asks them, in other words, to assume agency – and more importantly, he says that divine help can only follow from this. Also the scene of Alton’s “conversion” to Chartism, this passage is reenacted in a crucially altered form towards the end of the narrative, in Eleanor’s preaching of the gospel to Alton, and his second conversion, this time to Christian Socialism. Looking like an “inspired prophetess,” Eleanor says to Alton and Crossthwaite, “you have tried to realize, by self-willed methods of your own, what you can only do by God’s inspiration, by God’s method” (p. 366). The correction she offers is not that they were wrong to seek transformation, but that they were wrong in asserting themselves as the agents of this transformation. “Denounce the effete idol of property-qualification ... because ... there is no real rank, no real power, but worth; and worth consists not in property, but in the grace of God,” she says, discrediting the fundamental demand of Chartists, which is political representation (p. 368). Instead, she proposes a model in which the clergy act in stewardship over the working classes, representing God’s will:

till you gain the respect and the confidence of the clergy, you will never rise. The day will come when you will find that the clergy are the only class who can help you ... you will find them the only bulwark against the modern tyranny of Mammon. (p. 176)

The narrative discusses its successive endorsement or condemnation of various ideologies through Alton’s conversion to these positions. However, in each of these instances, Alton as the protagonist is suspiciously absent from the scene of his

conversion, and the central event of the conversion itself – the moment of persuasion, the corresponding change in the psyche and so on – is also missing, the absence obscured in a cascade of expository dialogue leading up to it, and retrospective evaluation, offered from the perspective of the narrator rather than the protagonist, in its aftermath. To begin with Alton’s conversion to Chartism, this event is narrated in a chapter titled “How Folks Turn Chartists,” and it begins with an exhortation to the casual readers “who read [his] story only for amusement” to “skip this chapter” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 98). Although there is obviously an element of sarcasm to this disclaimer, nonetheless it also acknowledges on another level that the event of the conversion itself, and the circumstances of Alton’s changing his mind on such a central issue, are somehow incidental to the narrative. The closest Alton comes to reflecting on his own state of mind is when he writes that in listening to Crossthwaite speaking of Chartism, his “mind had been undergoing a strange perturbation” (p. 103). Similar mental absences or ellipses take place during such central events in Alton’s life as his unintentional leadership to a village mob, and his conversion to Christian Socialism. This last event, the genuinely religious conversion, retrospectively sheds light on the earlier, vague causality of other key events in Alton’s life, and provides a model according to which they can be interpreted.

The trope of conversion challenges the understanding of a character unfolding/becoming in time, and presents the event of conversion as a transcendental rupture, rising above causality or determination. The “being beside oneself” inherent to the transcendental experience complicates the conventionally realist understanding of agency in the novel. As such, the dilemma of predestination is resolved in terms of a religious conversion: the path to genuine freedom is through the self-willed abandonment of absolute, undistinguished freedom. Although not impossible to

articulate in secular terms, a formulation of this idea that is not to some extent paradoxical is really possible only in a religious framework, of which the conversion narrative is one instance.

## 5.2 Agency and the stewardship of the clergy

Another topic through which the issue of determination and agency is contested in the narrative is the authority of the Church and the clergymen. Kingsley's approach to the Church of England, and to the clergy in *Alton Locke* is very much informed by his Broad Church – Christian Socialist conviction that the role of the clergy, and the Church as an institution, is to act as a custodial and paternalistic entity towards the working classes, as well as to society as a whole. As Brantlinger (1977) notes, “the assumption behind Christian Socialism is that religion has a direct role to play in changing contemporary reality, and that ‘a Churchman must be a politician.’” (p. 132). More specifically, Broad Church envisages a medieval or rather, medievalist power dynamics among classes according to which the clergymen of the Church of England are able to exert a political and everyday, as well as spiritual, influence over the laity that is comparable to the priests and monks of the Middle Ages. As such, although the narrative sides against “the present code of commercial morality” or that “commercial class” which is “devouring [the working classes],” it does so not with a view to the emancipation or self-determination of the working classes, but in the hope that they will, in time, learn to accept the stewardship of a reformed Church of England, which has repented of its “sins [committed] during the ‘godless eighteenth century’” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, pp. 100, 299, 137). On a political level, such support for proxy clearly runs counter to the tenets of Chartism, which advocated for the direct participation of the working classes in the electoral system;

however, in *Alton Locke*, the narrative's endorsement of Christian Socialist values proves to be problematic, and liable to contradictions on an individual level, as well. Arguing against Dissent on the one hand and Catholicism on the other, Kingsley's attitude regarding ecclesiastical authority is far from being uncomplicated; while earlier chapters recounting Alton's childhood in particular demonstrate that Kingsley is not fine with the unmediated intensity of the practice of "the vital religion," with its emphasis on individual salvation, Kingsley does not condone Catholicism and its "priestcraft" either. In negotiating the agency of the Church and its clergy in the lives of the working classes, then, Kingsley in *Alton Locke* is in fact formulating the extent to which the individuality and interiority of the conscience is acceptable, and even desired; and conversely, the degree to which it must be subject to the examination and guidance of external forces. Since Kingsley negotiates this point from a position of pragmatism and circumstances – guidance and stewardship must be offered to the masses, but by his clique specifically, and none other – more than he does from a position of mere principles, the indeterminacy observed by critics in *Alton Locke*'s overall structure and causality is particularly evident in its Broad Church treatment of the theme of clergy. Once again, the indeterminacy revolves around the issue of agency: in whom does the possibility of emancipation lie, Alton the tailor and poet, or the clergy? Novelistic conventions dictate that Alton, as protagonist, must be an active force, and do things, rather than wait to be acted upon. Kingsley's Broad Church – Christian Socialist outlook, however, envisages a scenario where people are always already emancipated, through Christ and his Church, if only they would recognize the fact. Representing, and advocating for the Broad Church – Christian Socialist outlook throughout the narrative, Eleanor illustrates this tenet as follows:

you [must] look a state founded on better things than Acts of Parliament, social contracts, and abstract rights – a city whose foundations are in the

eternal promises, whose builder and maker is God. ... That state, that city, Jesus said, was come – was now within us, had we eyes to see. And it is come. Call it the church, the gospel, civilization, freedom, democracy, association, what you will – I shall call it ... the kingdom of God”. (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 367)

This is an attitude which preempts any secular human action and agency, and it is one to which Alton is “converted” towards the end of the narrative, after he has exhausted, or so it appears to him, his endeavors in being a working man, an artist and a political activist – that is, after he has stopped creating or doing things.

How is this transition from conventional fictional protagonist to passive receptacle of grace managed? Not very successfully, as the general critical consensus outlined at the beginning of the chapter indicates; and yet, there is a method to how the narrative gradually switches lanes, as it were, so that towards the end, elements of the realist Victorian novel are outweighed by other, more autobiographical, and less strictly fictional modes of writing. Specifically, Kingsley borrows themes or tropes from forms of life writing, some of which we discussed above. In exploring the implications of a clergy active in the Broad Church – Christian Socialist sense, he particularly draws from the tradition of spiritual autobiography, and utilizes two aspects of this genre: its emphasis on sincerity, and the centrality of the event of “conversion” to many such narratives.<sup>33</sup> However, before beginning to analyze how these features are deployed in *Alton Locke*, let us first consider the portrayal of the clergy and the Church in the novel in a general sense.

In line with the polemical nature of how *Alton Locke* treats its religious and political themes, the representation of clergymen in the novel is divided between what is, and what ought to be. In a particularly memorable instance Eleanor,

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<sup>33</sup> I borrow these terms from Richard Hughes Gibson and Timothy Larsen (2016) who, in “Nineteenth-century spiritual autobiography: Carlyle, Newman, Mill”, use these two particular concepts to offer an assessment of spiritual autobiographies of the time.

countering what she perceives to be a knee-jerk reaction to the clergy on his part, asks Alton:

‘Do you mean to condemn, just now, the Church as it was, or the Church as it is, or the Church as it ought to be? Radicals have a habit of confusing those three questions, as they have of confusing other things when it suits them’.  
(Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 174)

The distinction she makes goes to the heart of the matter: on the one hand there is the preoccupation with the idea of change, not just on an individual level – per conversions, for instance – but also on an institutional level, whereby the transformation of the Church throughout the ages for the better or worse must be recognized, and accounted for. On the other hand, truthfulness and sincerity must attend acts and thoughts on both a personal and institutional level, so just as Eleanor judges Alton and his peers for the bad-faith way in which they conflate their rhetoric regarding the clergy, Alton’s main problem with the clergy is that they do not practice what they preach – that they are less than sincere and straightforward in their intermediary and guiding role.

From Alton’s perspective, the clergy is negligent in its duties against the working classes; shortly before offering a lengthy analysis of the clergy’s shortcomings, he likens the working classes, neglected and abandoned, to “sheep scattered on the hills ... that had no shepherd” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 193). Even beneath this indictment, however, is present the presupposition that the clergy are failing in a duty which they have, rather than the more radical idea that there is no *raison d’être* for the clergy’s existence as a class. Indeed, Alton’s problems with the various stripes of clergymen he encounters throughout the narrative have more to do with the specific ways in which they fail in the fulfilment of their duties, and not with the fact of their existence. One of the reasons why clergymen have failed in their duties, according to the narrative, is that they no longer abide by standards of

sincerity and truthfulness, and engage in undemocratic standards instead. Thus, when Alton says to Crossthwaite that the clergy are “doing so much to educate the poor,” the latter is able to retort:

"Ay, educating them to make them slaves and bigots. They don't teach them what they teach their own sons. Look at the miserable smattering of general information—just enough to serve as sauce for their great first and last lesson of 'Obey the powers that be'—whatever they be; leave us alone in our comforts, and starve patiently; do, like good boys, for it's God's will. And then, if a boy does show talent in school, do they help him up in life? Not they; when he has just learnt enough to whet his appetite for more, they turn him adrift again, to sink and drudge—to do his duty, as they call it, in that state of life to which society and the devil have called him." (p. 46)

Crossthwaite, an avowed Chartist, does not condone the clergy because they don't do their duty, but because they do it in such a twisted way as to hinder rather than help their flock. This is his (and Kingsley's) judgment of the Church of England clergymen; however, the same sentiment is extended also to Dissenting ministers and Catholic priests alike. Writing of a “vulgar” and “cunning” Dissenting minister who came to visit his family when he was a child (and who, incidentally, marries his sister Susan some years later) Alton notes how he

overlay[s] all his unintentional confessions of his own greed and prosperity, with cant, flimsy enough for even a boy to see through, while his eyes were not blinded with the superstition that a man must be pious who sufficiently interlards his speech with a jumble of old English picked out of our translation of the New Testament. (p. 12)

Cant, that is, insincere, hypocritical and self-righteous speech, is the way in which Mr Wiggington and his likes continually persuade Alton's mother to participate in their unloving, unforgiving Evangelical faith, according to Alton. Similarly, his self-serving, pragmatist cousin tells Alton, in the space of the same conversation, both that taking holy orders in the Church of England is the only way for a man without money, such as Alton, to access social mobility, and also that he himself has “...in a happy hour fallen in with Mr Newman's sermons, and learnt from them, and from his

disciples, what the Church of England really was; not Protestant, no; but Catholic in the deepest and highest sense” (p. 134). As such, the negligence and failure of the various kinds of clergy in the novel is expressed through a vocabulary of sincerity and truthfulness – more often than not, their failure is either caused or accompanied by insincere practices (cant, servility, self-interest and so on), or results in them. Conversely, in (successfully) persuading Alton to the righteousness of Christian Socialism, Eleanor talks of the “the miraculous, ever-increasing improvement in the clergy,” and posits this newly-improved clergy’s genuine devotion to the cause of the working classes as a badge of their sincerity (p. 382). Combined with the accumulated weight of his past intellectual, romantic and political failures, the recognition and acceptance of this genuine sincerity proves to be the turning point for Alton, as he adopts Christian Socialism more or less around that time.

That sincerity is not just a virtue, principle or even an overarching theme in the novel, but an actual guiding force on a par with what are the determining elements of causality in a more conventionally realist novel such as character, circumstance and so on, can be interpreted as a failure on the novelist’s part to achieve formal coherence; alternately, it can be read in a framework of interaction among literary genres, among which the realist novel is one. More specifically, we note that in their discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritual autobiographies, Gibson and Larsen (2016) attest to an Evangelical stress on the concept of sincerity that has become so culturally entrenched at that point that it is found in the works of even such un-Evangelical figures such as Thomas Carlyle or Cardinal Newman. Gibson and Larsen (2016) are careful to delineate the parameters of this interaction: “These writers do not simply or easily participate in the Protestant tradition of spiritual autobiography: they draw on its resources self-consciously, show the genre’s

flexibility and variety, and highlight areas where their experiences require alternative descriptive categories” (p. 193). Similarly, although Kingsley is almost as vehemently against Evangelicalism as he is against Tractarianism, the medium of the spiritual autobiography, extant in the literary culture of the time, imposes its own formal characteristics even as it accommodates Kingsley’s Broad Church advocacy.

Earlier, we discussed how the conversion trope worked as a way to resolve the problem of predestination in the narrative. Similarly, the treatment of the conversion trope also ties into the issue of the stewardship of the clergy and the church, specifically because Alton’s conversion is ministered by Eleanor. Although not formally a member of the clergy herself, Eleanor in the narrative represents and propagates the ideals and practices of Christian Socialism, or an ideally reformed Church of England as according to Kingsley. As such, this one other element of the spiritual autobiography – conversion narrative that Kingsley appropriates, he also uses to bolster his advocacy of more agency for the clergy. The point is made early in the novel by Eleanor when she defends churches against Alton’s Chartist point of view:

The working classes would have been badly off without them. They were, in their day, the only democratic institution in the world; and the only socialist one too. The only chance a poor man had of rising by his worth, was by coming to the monastery. And bitterly the working classes felt the want of them, when they fell. (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 173)

Eleanor’s advocacy of the church and the clergy is couched in the same vocabulary in which Kingsley and his Christian Socialist fellows would advocate for their own intervention in representing the working classes, especially as an alternative to Chartism, or their self-representation. These two particularly Victorian inflections of the spiritual autobiography, then, the emphasis on sincerity and conversion, are used

in Alton Locke to make a Christian Socialist – Broad Church point about whom social agency should belong.

### 5.3 Anti-intellectualism

Formulated on occasion as an extension of, or an overemphasis on “the practical nature of the English mind” with its tendency towards facts and pragmatism rather than theory or philosophy, anti-intellectualism during the Victorian period was a widespread mental habit, rather than the special province of a few men like Kingsley (Houghton, 1957/1985, p. 110). In discussing the underlying causes of anti-intellectualism during this time, Walter E. Houghton touches on two particularly important bases: on the hand, the proliferation of business and commercial activities following the Industrial Revolution appeared to confirm for the English that direct action and not intellectual activity was valuable; on the other hand, the moral and religious uncertainties attendant upon the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant that one had to be careful about “pushing arguments to their logical conclusions, or examining first principles too closely” (p. 134). Drawing expressions of similar sentiment from contemporary critics as varied as Matthew Arnold and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Houghton further distinguishes among three possible ways in which anti-intellectualism might be defined; while above is given a more immediately socio-historical definition of Victorian anti-intellectualism, in that it is an anti-intellectualism specifically shaped by the circumstances of this period in time, he notes that there is also a kind of anti-intellectualism which harbors fundamental doubts about the capacity of the human mind to understand the world, as well as yet another kind of anti-rationalist anti-intellectualism, which consists of “reliance upon authority or upon inner feeling, conscience, or intuition rather than upon logical

reason” (p. 110n2). Interestingly, although Houghton discusses only the first of these three versions of anti-intellectualism in his essay, and considers Kingsley to be a prime example of the industry-admiring, theory-fearing kind of anti-intellectual, what he condemns in Kingsley – support and praise for commerce, business and money-making – is in fact what Kingsley so vehemently opposed, at least during his Christian Socialist years, as the arguments of both *Alton Locke*, and the tract *Cheap Clothes and Nasty* (which Kingsley published under the *nom de plume* of Parson Lot) attest. Therefore, although the overall climate of the Victorian period may have tended towards pragmatism, Charles Kingsley’s anti-intellectualism during the time in which *Alton Locke* was written was motivated by different reasons than the mainstream, and as such, bears exploring in its terms.

Houghton mentions, but does not elaborate on, the anti-rationalist variety of anti-intellectualism; however, he does note the connection between the Broad Church movement and a certain kind of anti-intellectualism: “Though the liberal Broad Church movement was by no means unintellectual (Coleridge, Maurice, and Jowett, as well as Arnold himself, are evidence of that), its primary emphasis on Christian ethics and the Christian life had a distinctly anti-intellectual influence” (Houghton, 1952, p. 307n62). However, “emphasis on Christian ethics and the Christian life” in describing the Broad Church is not nearly specific enough to differentiate between the High and the Low Churches. Broad Church differed from the High and Low Churches, themselves so opposed to each other in so many points of doctrine and practice, because it disagreed with the rationalistic premise on which both parties rested their justification of Christianity. In “The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to ‘Essays and Reviews’, 1860-1864,” Josef L. Altholz (1982) offers the following insight into this shared persuasion:

An Anglican scholasticism (as we may call it) had produced a consistent rationalistic case for the acceptance of the Christian revelation. It was only after this rationalism had laid the intellectual foundations for belief that Anglican orthodoxy invoked the distinctively Victorian demand for certainty of faith. (p. 187)

More specifically, the “rationalistic case” for Christianity was an “evidential theology which rested the case for Christianity on the arguments from miracles, the fulfillment of prophecies, and the correspondence of types and antitypes in the Old and New Testaments” (p. 191). An intellectual system that was both comprehensive and consistent within itself, this evidential theology, based on a particular understanding of the “evidences” within the Bible, preceded faith for both the Evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics.

Anti-intellectualism in Kingsley is particularly modelled after Coleridge’s anti-rational and mystical understanding of religion. And in Coleridge’s formulation of religious experience, the established Anglican order of reason first, and then faith, is quite upturned. “Without the initial emotional commitment and the priority of the emotions, the will and the understanding could not, [Coleridge] argued, play their necessary role in a man’s commitment to the faith that justifies,” Wolff (1977) notes of Coleridge’s belief system (p. 255). The same order of importance, present throughout *Alton Locke*, becomes particularly pronounced during Alton’s drawn-out conversion to Christian Socialism; as he listens to Eleanor evangelize, he thinks to himself at one point that “the sense of her intense belief, shining out in every lineament of her face, carried conviction to my heart more than ten thousand arguments could do. It must be true!” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 359). This prioritizing of emotion (“sense”) over the intellect (“ten thousand arguments”) is the particular understanding on which Coleridge’s founding position within the Broad

Church movement, which is intellectual rather than actual, rests. Wolff (1977)

explains this position as follows:

Having lost his religious faith in his youth, Coleridge recovered it. But for him the recovery was not an intellectual but an emotional experience, a visceral, instinctive feeling of the need for religion. "Make a man feel the want of it," Coleridge wrote in *Aids to Reflection* (1825), "rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of the need of it," and he will work out his own intellectual rationale. Away with proofs and counterproofs: arguments were of no avail... Coleridge made the leap: he acted as if he believed, and he did believe. But he was repelled by shallow eighteenth-century rationalism, by rigid High-and-Dry orthodoxy, and by Evangelical or Methodist emotionalism and rant. (p. 252)

The constant efforts of Kingsley in *Alton Locke*, then, and during that period in general, to strike a happy medium between the Low and High Churches, and in doing so, to vehemently oppose the beliefs and practices of both sects, are thus traceable back to Coleridge, even if the immediate socio-political context of Kingsley, who wrote *Alton Locke* in the late 1840s, is not the same as that of Coleridge, who belongs to an earlier generation. Notwithstanding the specific pressures in the political and ecclesiastical climate that Kingsley was responding to during the time, however, the more general sense in which Kingsley advocates for an emotional, rather than rigorously intellectual understanding and practice of Christianity, is generally understood to be on a par with his literary and argumentative style both. The more favorable of his critics tend to interpret this bent in Kingsley through positive terms such as "instinct" and "nature," such as Joseph Ellis Baker (1965) in *The Novel and the Oxford Movement*, who writes:

The key to the art, as well as to the thought, of Kingsley's novels is found in reliance on nature. The author's plots are not deterministic, like those of later naturalists. We find little of the careful preparation of cause for consequence, little descriptive emphasis upon environment, little subjective analysis... In Kingsley [characters] lead themselves, trusting their own emotions. (p. 98)

It will immediately be seen that even the critics who favor Kingsley find it necessary to remark on the haphazard way in which his narratives unfold, with little regard for

novelistic conventions of his period such as causality, faithful representation of the external world or rigorous analysis of the individual's interiority. His public controversy with the Catholic scholar and Cardinal John Henry Newman, a convert from the Church of England, in which Kingsley accused Newman (and the Catholic Church in general) of intellectual dishonesty, was considered to have ended with humiliating defeat on Kingsley's part, and this is still the prevalent impression today. Another, less favorable critic, writing during the late Victorian period, reminisces on the Kingsley – Newman debate and then, remembering an earlier Kingsley sermon where he was personally in the audience, extrapolates from the event to Kingsley's artistic – intellectual process in general:

The subject was one which concerned the social suffering of the poor. Mr. Kingsley approached it broadly and boldly, talking with a grand disregard for logic and political economy, sometimes startling the more squeamish of his audience by the Biblical frankness of his descriptions and his language, but, I think, convincing every one that he was sound at heart, and explaining unconsciously to many how it happened that one endowed with sympathies so humane and liberal should so often have distinguished himself as the champion of the stupidest systems and the harshest oppressions. Anybody could see that the strong impelling force of the speaker's character was an emotional one; that sympathy and not reason, feeling rather than logic, instinct rather than observation, would govern his utterances. (McCarthy, 1872, p. 212)

The sentiment that Kingsley was never a methodical and rigorous thinker is shared by his proponents and detractors alike, both in his time and since then. In *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, for instance, Edward N. Norman (1987/2002) writes of Kingsley, by way of apologia, “the spread of his interests, and the seemingly indiscriminate seriousness he allocated to each, ought not to obscure his very great achievement as a publicist for social reform” (p. 36). Whereas for others, such as McCarthy quoted above, Kingsley's lack of intellectualism actually endangered and even tainted his good intentions as a whole.

On a thematical or topical level, Kingsley's Broad Church anti-intellectualism in *Alton Locke* reveals itself mainly in two categories. The first of these is the more directly Coleridgean and anti-rationalistic idea that Christianity requires no intellectual justification, and that science, as a domain, need not be reconciled to religion, since religion is the underlying basis for science, as well as for all other domains, on a fundamental level. The idea is first formulated by Dean Winnstay, a clergyman sympathetic to Alton, albeit in a half-formed way:

“I am in no wise anxious to weaken the antithesis between natural and revealed religion. Science may help the former, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the latter. She stands on her own ground, has her own laws, and is her own reward. Christianity is a matter of faith and of the teaching of the Church. It must not go out of its way for science, and science must not go out of her way for it; and where they seem to differ, it is our duty to believe that they are reconcilable by fuller knowledge, but not to clip truth in order to make it match with doctrine.” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 169)

This is a particular way of responding to German Higher Criticism, which became known, if not popular among the English-speaking scholars from the early nineteenth century onwards, and which held that the Bible, instead of being the Word of God, was a historical document like any other, and could be studied as such. The Broad Church position represented by Coleridge evaded being drawn into this debate by claiming that only parts of the Bible were divinely inspired, or the Word of God, thus always holding on to the possibility that the contradictions or illogicalities present in the Bible were the work of men; as for the rest, believing in the parts that were divinely inspired was something that one did, as an act of faith. As noted earlier, the dismissal of some parts of the Bible as inaccurate, illogical, and so on contradicted with the orthodox Church of England position which held that miracles were part of the internal logic of Christianity, as divine promises made and delivered.

Towards the end of *Alton Locke*, we see Kingsley refine his position on the separation of the domains of science and religion. Visiting Alton at his sickbed, Dean

Winnstay tells him that he has revised his own opinions regarding this separation after feeling “a desire to reconcile two lines of thought—which [he] had hitherto considered as parallel, and impossible to unite” (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 371). His conclusion is that miracles, prophecies and other such instances are in fact perfectly normal, if rarely occurring phenomena that are explainable within the bounds of science by referring to

some great primal law . . . manifesting itself, according to circumstances, in countless diverse and unexpected forms—till all that the philosopher as well as the divine can say, is—the Spirit of Life, impalpable, transcendental, direct from God, is the only real cause. (p. 371)

This explanation is directly at odds with the Anglican orthodoxy, precisely because in the evidential theology of the Church of England, miracles, by virtue of their being unlike other phenomena, are a mark of Christianity’s validity, whereas in Kingsley’s theology, they are governed by the same deep rules as any other phenomena.

Although on a surface level Kingsley’s Broad Church version seems the more commonsense and “intellectual” explanation, in the broader context of this issue, it is more a refusal to engage with, or thoroughly refute the existing arguments in the field by cutting through them. This equivocal manner of engaging with arguments is replicated on a narrative level as well, where characters make decisions, or come to conclusions that are only believable if one already accepts Broad Church and Christian Socialist principles; hence the utter childish suddenness and totality, for instance, of Crossthwaite’s conversion to Christian Socialism, and the abandonment of his Chartist convictions. In other words, Kingsley begs the question rather than persuading either his characters or his readers to it.

The other aspect of anti-intellectualism in *Alton Locke* is that Kingsley associates the privileging of the intellect, and intellectual pursuits with an elitism and aristocracy that is incompatible with the – to him – essentially democratic nature of

Christianity. Any kind of intellectual activity or argument that isn't directly addressed to, or understandable by the general public is suspect on this account. Earlier, in discussing Kingsley's Broad Church opposition to the doctrine of predestination, we explored the spiritual dimension of his anti-elitism, whereby Tractarianism, Evangelicalism and Transcendentalism are all undesirable in their own ways, because each proposes a scheme of salvation conditional on something other than faith. In *Alton Locke*, there is an anti-intellectual dimension to this anti-elitism, represented as a wariness about intellect for the sake of establishing superiority over others. This anti-elitist discourse is deployed against a variety of would-be elites who seek to assert their superiority and authority over others, from the Calvinist Mr Wiggington to Alton's High Church priest cousin, but the most elaborate condemnation of such intellectual elitism in the novel is actually delivered by Mackaye against a Transcendentalist philosopher:

"Well, but," I asked again, "is not complete freedom of thought a glorious aim—to emancipate man's noblest part—the intellect—from the trammels of custom and ignorance?"

"Intellect—intellect!" rejoined he, according to his fashion, catching one up at a word, and playing on that in order to answer, not what one said, but what one's words led to. "I'm sick o' all the talk anent intellect I hear noo. An' what's the use o' intellect? 'Aristocracy o' intellect,' they cry. Curse a' aristocracies—intellectual anes, as well as anes o' birth, or rank, or money! What! will I ca' a man my superior, because he's cleverer than mysel?—will I boo down to a bit o' brains, ony mair than to a stock or a stane? Let a man prove himsel' better than me, my laddie—honester, humbler, kinder, wi' mair sense o' the duty o' man, an' the weakness o' man—and that man I'll acknowledge—that man's my king, my leader, though he war as stupid as Eppe Dalgleish, that could na count five on her fingers, and yet keepit her drucken father by her ain hands' labour for twenty-three yeers." (Kingsley, 1850/1969, p. 214)

One particularly interesting thing about this passage is that while the Transcendentalist speaker in question is modeled after Emerson, Alton's mentor and friend Mackaye is modeled after Thomas Carlyle, who was Kingsley's own mentor

and friend, particularly during Kingsley's early career. Walter E. Houghton (1957/1985) quotes Carlyle as writing the following words to Emerson in a letter: "all theory becomes more and more confessedly inadequate, untrue, unsatisfactory, almost a kind of mockery to me" (p. 299). As such, Mackaye's criticism of the Transcendentalist speaker, who tries to establish a hierarchy through his intelligence over the simple masses, represents even more decidedly an anti-intellectual attitude against the elites and elitism.

However, if one function of this anti-intellectual anti-elitism is to wield democracy as a levelling instrument against would-be elites of any kind, anti-intellectualism is also deployed in quite an undemocratic manner as a tool against the would-be upstarts of the working class, such as Alton. Critic Ying Lee (2007/2016) notes how, just as he is liberated from the constraints of his social class by an inheritance and immigration to America, and becomes free to pursue his poetry, Alton finally succumbs to his illness and dies:

It is even possible that the strain of intellectual labor, uninterrupted by other demands and necessities, is itself deleterious to Alton's health. One interpretation of the contradictions and the sometimes inarticulate rage revealed, but never fully explained ... [is that] these inconsistencies and artistic failures [are] the specific result of a type of social miscegenation: perhaps an upper-class social theory implanted within a working-class poet can only result in flawed and sterile art. (188-9)

Even the simultaneous deployment of the two major *deus ex machina* plot devices of social mobility in the Victorian novel, inheritance and immigration, are unable to save Alton. Lee reads into this choice a judgment against "social miscegenation," and indeed, the earlier parts of *Alton Locke* in particular abound with injunctions against Alton, issued by Mackeye, to not imitate the exotic or aristocratic qualities of poetry he admires in his own work. However, Christian Socialism, too, is in the end

just as inauthentically working-class, and in co-opting Alton's mind, cannot sustain him.

The genre-bending, by which *Alton Locke* failed to be a novel in the standard, or canonical manner in the eyes of the critics as we discussed at the beginning, was certainly perpetrated by Charles Kingsley himself – as a result of authorial ineptitude, or because he was guided by his own religio-political agenda, which required his fiction to be formulated in a specific way. Francis O’Gorman attests to this personal element:

Kingsley would pursue historical writing that was criticized for being too imaginative with its sources. But genres are fluid—in some kind of way interchangeable—for Kingsley: history, fiction, and politics blend, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the political fiction. (p. 68)

However, there is also a larger context in which Kingsley was able to experiment with various genres and modes in the way he did. The other side to the argument posited by Catherine Gallagher, that the social problem fiction of the 1840s “failed” on a novelistic level because these novels represented the problems of an industrializing society which had been neither reconciled or resolved in real life, is that the cultural perception of the intersection of literary genres at that point in time made it possible for novels, such as *Alton Locke*, to borrow from other genres where their own devices proved to be insufficient. O’Gorman’s (2021) portrayal of the literary culture of the 1840s as perceiving various literary modes to be almost interchangeable with one another supports this idea. Similarly, in “The Novel as Genre,” Vilashini Cooppan (2018) formulates an observation made by many theorists of the novel from Bakhtin onwards – that the novel has a “cannibal capacity to ingest a wide range of literary genres, modes, and forms” (p. 23). For all its aesthetic shortcomings to the modern reader, then, perhaps it is better to recognize *Alton Locke*

as a work of its time and place, ideologically-charged, eclectic – in that it is picked out from many parts – and driven, rather than to see it as the realist novel that failed.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In my dissertation, I explore how religion and class intersect in Victorian literature, and particularly in the mid-Victorian novel by looking at a set of canonical, as well as non-canonical novels representing a wide array of various literary conventions and tropes, as well as religious affiliations and disputes. Form and content in literature are never mutually exclusive in their entirety; with that said, I argue for the interaction and correspondence of religion and class both on the level of content, where the same issues are formulated in religious as well as class-based terms, and on the level of form, where the same metaphors, tropes and conventions are meaningful in a religious as well as class-based or political context. My intervention in the study of Victorian literature, and the role of religion, particularly as it interacts with class issues in Victorian fiction, is situated in a broader context in which scholars are reformulating established frameworks regarding the relationship between Victorian culture and religion.

An important shift which took place in Victorian Studies, as well as within broader scholarship in the 21st century has been the problematization of the Victorian secularization narrative which held sway in the academia during much of the 20th century. In describing this critical narrative, Charles LaPorte (2013) writes, “a broadly-held ‘secularization narrative’ pointed to industrialization, urbanization, and material science as key forces behind religion’s inevitable decline, which would supposedly culminate (or else had already culminated) in God’s effective death” (277). The narrative of Victorian secularization was formulated in an environment where religion appeared to be in perpetual decline; however, starting with the 2000s,

this consensus changed. LaPorte argues that just as the secularizing atmosphere of the 20th century shaped the perception of religion in the 20th century, highlighting skepticism and doubt in Victorian culture to the detriment of faith and religion, the reconsideration of the “triumphalist” secularization narrative in the 21st century has also had an effect on the field of Victorian Studies in challenging the dominant framework (p. 278).

While scholarship that prioritized the role of religion in Victorian literature was relatively few and far between in the 20th century, especially against the dominant secularization narrative, in recent years there has been a proliferation in critical works which seek to emphasize and foreground the role of religion in Victorian literature, as a brief overview in the Introduction chapter demonstrates. Consequently, my dissertation, whose objective is to formulate a more integrated understanding of the representation of class conflict and social issues in the mid-Victorian novel, does so in the context of this “religious turn”, drawing attention to the previously neglected ways in which religion and religious discourses intersect with class discourse in the four novels discussed within.

Across the four 1850s novels studied here, which, taken together, are representative of a wide variety of tropes and conventions in the Victorian novel, religion is a constant framework through which values are formulated, and find their meaning. The vocabulary of the middle-class Victorian novel is not particularly oriented towards representing class conflict and struggle through a directly political language, and to some extent, the urge to “reconciliation” in these narratives often glosses over, rather than resolves, some or most aspects of the conflict with a view to concluding the narrative at some point. In a memorable passage in *North and South* Margaret, after having quoted the Bible at Mr Thornton regarding his relationship

with his workers, hesitates and says, “I know so little about strikes, and rates of wages, and capital, and labour, that I had better not talk to a political economist like you,” to which Mr Thornton heartily objects, and invites more of her input (p. 119). Margaret’s substitution of the religious discourse for a political or class-based one, while being aware of their intersection and even overlap at the same time, is emblematic of the way mid-Victorian novels accommodate arguments and ideas about social class.

In the representation of social and class-related issues, religion serves as a readily-available, ubiquitous, and comprehensive discourse. This is the case even for *North and South*, a typically industrial novel, and which demonstrates through its engagement with Unitarianism how religious frameworks are a part of the Victorian novel even when they are not perceptible on the surface. Through the themes of social reconciliation, the relationship between truthfulness and individual conscience, and religious tolerance, *North and South* attempts to resolve class conflict with reference to Unitarian values, even as it initially formulates the problem in terms of “political economy” such as labor and wages.

In *Villette* as in *North and South*, the focal character through which class issues are observed, and represented, is a young woman and while the marriage plot in *North and South* seemingly resolves the class conflicts occurring along multiple lines in the narrative, the absence of a similar plot resolution in *Villette* exposes the limits of religious discourse in engaging with class issues. In comparison to the more straightforward reception of *North and South* as an industrial or social-problem novel, *Villette*’s dominant narrative mode is psychological realism, with gothic tropes imparting an anti-Catholic dimension to the whole. Despite not being conventionally classed as a social-problem novel, however, *Villette*’s treatment of a

social issue is formulated along the same lines as *North and South*, as well as the other two novels.

In the *Villette* chapter, I discuss how the novel utilizes anti-Catholic discourses as well as traditionally anti-Catholic gothic tropes to express the complexities of a particular middle-class identity. The ghost nun subplot, which has been interpreted as a psychoanalytic representation of Lucy's repressed sexuality, is here interpreted as a representation of her precarious middle-class identity. I also discuss hunger and deprivation, tension between individualism and authority, confession and conversion as themes that bring together religious and class issues.

While middle-class interiority and subjectivity is quite central to *North and South* and particularly to *Villette*, both *Adam Bede* and *Alton Locke* are more interested in formulating working-class interiority. In *Adam Bede*, which I read as a work of psychological realism as well as historical fiction, I look at the specific class alignments of denominations. This novel compares and contrasts the engagement of the established High Church and the Dissenting Methodists with the agricultural working class. Issues of individualism appear as a religious, political, and novelistic problematic of imagining and representing working-class interiority. I discuss the ways in which Eliot's particular use of free indirect speech parallels the Methodist preaching style. On the level of plot, Hetty's confession displays the differences between religion as tradition, as represented by the High Church, and religion as a living experience, as represented by Methodist preacher Dinah.

After exploring intersections of religion and class on the level of individual experience in the psychological realism of *Villette* and *Adam Bede*, I return to the conventional social-problem novel with *Alton Locke*, which is perhaps mistakenly known as a Chartist novel. The chapter on *Alton Locke* continues to discuss the

issues of confession, conversion, and working-class interiority. While the first three novels are realist novels whose forms are inevitably mediated by bourgeois subjectivity and ideology, in *Alton Locke*, Charles Kingsley attempts to write a working-class novel. I show how the novel's formal and stylistic failures can be explained by the particularities of working-class autobiography, which is a descendent of spiritual autobiography and confession narratives. The political conversion of the protagonist into Chartism is followed and replaced by his religious conversion into Christian Socialism. I explore the relationship between political and religious conversion, while discussing Kingsley's conformist response to Chartism and working-class issues.

In all four novels, the central tropes and themes find their meaning in a religious, as well as class-based context at the same time; for instance, while reconciliation is particularly foregrounded as a social value in *North and South*, there is also the undercurrent of religious reconciliation in the context of which a reasonable mean between Margaret's sensible Anglicanism and her father's honest Dissent, or the working-class Bessie Higgins's fervent Methodism, is sought. Hunger in *Villette* is represented both in terms of a spiritual deprivation, and also as a material condition; while in *Adam Bede* as well as in *Alton Locke*, confession and conversion are both religious and class-based, or political acts. In a testament to the complementary, rather than contradictory ways in which class and religion is formulated in the mid-Victorian novel, these tropes and themes are meaningful in terms of both class and religion, rather than corresponding to just one or the other.

The recognition of the limits of the Victorian secularization narrative, and the subsequent "religious turn" in the field of Victorian Studies, has meant that there is now a broader vista in which to explore these correspondences, which expand and

even transform our understanding of Victorian literature. Focusing on the religious elements of those works more conventionally received as being social-problem novels, or conversely, emphasizing the class-related aspects of the variety of Victorian religious novels would contribute to this wider project by means of a cross-fertilization between spheres formerly read as, if not as mutually exclusive, then also not as closely associated and intersecting as they really were.

The scope of my project, I believe, is amenable to expansion without becoming repetitive since no two literary text conceives of and represents the same theme in the same way, modulated as they are by innumerable external factors operating on them. As such, exploring further connections between faith groups and social classes in a variety of Victorian novels, both in the 1850s and at other times, would be a rewarding way of following up on the premise laid out in my dissertation; namely, that the correspondence of class and religion in the Victorian context is essential to an accurate understanding of the period and its literature. In a wider sense, too, the centrality of religion to Victorian culture and literature is an overarching theme in this dissertation which I sought to establish. The habit of questioning the validity and the parameters of received categories such as “religious” versus “secular” (or “sacred” versus “profane”), which the exploration of this subject imparted to me, has likewise become a very useful part of my academic toolbox and going forward, I intend to make use of this practice in my future research.

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