To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Merrie Shannon Carpenter entitled "The Discourse of Working-Class Self-Education in Victorian Narrative." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Nancy Goslee, Major Professor

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THE DISCOURSE OF WORKING-CLASS SELF-EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN NARRATIVE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Merrie Shannon Carpenter
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Rachel McCurley and James W. Carpenter, for bequeathing me the vision – and the courage – to always seek my own truth, to Megan and Hannah for being my guiding stars into the future, to my sister, Shawn, and Aaron and Laura for their confidence in my abilities, and to James E. Collins, II, for his unwavering support and faith.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which working-class subjects were constituted by the cultural practices of education in Victorian England, the ways in which working-class subjects resisted and attempted to appropriate such hegemonic constructions, and the ways in which the terms of this struggle were defined in literary representations of self-educated working-class individuals by middle-class authors.

In Victorian Britain, formal education of the working poor tended to consist of just those skills they might need to be effective industrial workers. By so narrowly defining the content of education, the educational system participated in a form of social control. But there is an imbalance within the concept of education itself which becomes evident when individuals acquire education for themselves outside the boundaries of authorized channels, to aspire to an educational level denied to them by the social, political, and economic status quo.

This situation is represented in fiction about the working-class autodidact in Victorian England. These representations articulate the agendas of the self-educated who attempt to resist their exclusion from power as well as the agendas of the dominant discourse which struggles to defend its position. These narratives present characters who attempt to create subject positions through which they can define *themselves* and assign a value to their lives and experience that is not automatically granted to them by their society. In other words, they attempt to enter the discourse of power from which they are traditionally excluded. In response, authors of fiction (mostly middle-class authors) create characters who make this attempt of self-fashioning in order to critique the very

possibility and advisability of discursive appropriation by the disenfranchised. Quite often, these fictional narratives reinscribe the social boundaries and limitations of the project of self-fashioning, even if they do so with a reformist agenda.

This study looked at the autobiographies of working-class autodidacts, Thomas Carter, William Lovett, and Thomas Cooper, as well as the social-problem fiction of Charles Kingsley (*Alton Locke*) and George Eliot (*Felix Holt, the Radical*) to examine the ideological underpinnings of these representations of working-class autodidacts.

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Chapter 1: The Narrative of Self-Education in Victorian England

> Our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves. It makes very little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history, provides us with an identity.
>
> Paul Ricoeur
> "History and Narrative Practice" 214

> . . . [T]he way in which education is organized can be seen to express, consciously and unconsciously, the wider organization of a culture and a society, so that what has been thought of as simple distribution is in fact a particular shaping to particular social ends.
>
> Raymond Williams
> *The Long Revolution* 125

"Aspiring to know more than could be taught at the Sunday School in Hollinwood," writes British workman Benjamin Brierley in his 1887 autobiography, *Home Memories and Recollections of a Life*, "I joined the [mutual improvement society] known as the 'Old School' . . ."

> Here I found a number of congenial spirits, who, like myself, had grown out of their childhood, and were looking forward to becoming men. We banded ourselves together, and formed the nucleus of the present Mechanics Institution, then existing under the name of the Mutual Improvement Society. Wonders were to be done by this body of aspirants to learned greatness; and some were accomplished. (qtd. in Vincent 129-30)

Cut off from more traditional avenues of education because of their position in British industrial society, Brierley and his "congenial spirits" did what working men all over England were doing – they embarked upon a course of self-education, determined that

neither economic nor social barriers would prevent them from aspiring to "learned greatness." This decision to educate oneself outside the disciplines of a formal educational system had consequences for the ways in which these autodidacts saw themselves in relation to the rest of their society: its political, social and economic systems. Many saw themselves as creating new self-determined identities for working-class individuals, identities not determined by traditional class definitions, economic factors, or an increasingly industrialized social system. They would decide for themselves what identities and roles would suit them, much like Thomas Hardy's Jude in *Jude the Obscure*, contemplating the university city of Christminster:

> "It is a city of light," he said to himself.
>
> "The tree of knowledge grows there," he added a few steps further on.
>
> "It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to."
>
> "It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion."
>
> After this figure he was silent a long while, till he added:
>
> "It would just suit me." (27)

Workmen like Jude and Brierley envisioned for themselves an education that would allow them to participate in the cultural, political, and economic life of Britain, as active agents, as full voting citizens. They made these claims in various ways: through popular political movements, through violent agitation, and through organized labor unions, just to name a few. But a central strategy used by working autodidacts to claim political agency was the use of narrative, the recitation of the stories of their lives. Ricouer writes

that "It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity" (214). In telling the stories of their struggle to educate themselves, autodidacts posit for themselves an identity that is well qualified to participate in British political, cultural, and economic life.

This, then, is a study about the representation in narrative of working-class individuals who found unconventional ways of educating themselves outside the aegis of so-called formal educational systems. It will examine how these autodidacts portrayed themselves in the narratives that they wrote and about how middle-class writers portrayed working-class autodidacts in so-called social-problem novels. This is also a study about the political nature of both education and narrative, and an examination of how the discourse of a particular period of British history shaped and was shaped by working-class self-learners and those who wanted to control that learning. The focal point of this study, then, is the discursive intersection between these two groups, the working-class autodidacts and the middle-class reformers, which is illuminated by the varying ways in which they represented the figure of the working-class autodidact in narrative. Points of conflicts between these groups include the definition of the purpose and use of education, the power to define what kind of subject positions working-class individuals could inhabit, and ultimately the definition of who could wield economic and political power inherent in the right to vote.

While many scholars have turned their attention to the cultural and literary production of the working classes in Victorian Britain, the social-problem novels of this same era, or educational reform and the self-education movement of the nineteenth century, no one has investigated the discursive intersection of all these cultural forces. That is exactly what this study intends to do, and where this study differs from the very

good work that has already been done on working-class autodidacts, working-class autobiographers, and the construction of working-class subjectivity. In particular, David Vincent's 1982 publication of *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, the subsequent publication by Burnett, Mayall, and Vincent of *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography, Volume I: 1790-1900* and Burnett's *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* signaled a renewed interest in the life writing of working class individuals. These volumes surveyed and catalogued a wide spectrum of extant texts and manuscripts, bringing to light the variety and the sheer volume of writing about self that the working class practiced, claiming for the material and political experiences of these unheard voices a lost legitimacy. In *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, Regenia Gagnier analyzes how the autobiography functioned for working-class writers as "rhetorical projects embedded in concrete material situations" (40). What these projects do, Gagnier claims, is create a subject position – which she identifies as "the modern literary subject" – through which the individual subject both participates in and is antagonistic to the hegemonic discursive structures of his or her society. This project is not particular to the working-class autobiographer, but is a function of Victorian autobiography in general:

> A comparative study of Victorian autobiography across social class and gender will situate *precisely in contrast to other subjectivities* what I call the *modern literary subject*: a mixture of introspective self-reflexivity, middle-class familialism and genderization, and liberal autonomy. (31)

This literary subject then claims the right either to participate in the existing social,

political, and economic order, or the right to challenge it.

Both autobiographers and novelists attempted through the narrativizing of the experiences of the working-class autodidact to create either subject positions that could participate in the social, political, and economic life of their society, or subject positions whose recognition was contingent upon their subjection to the prevailing social and political order. The genres of the working-class autobiography and the social problem novel borrowed the literary conventions of each other in order to make ideological claims which either posit a particular kind of subject position with individual agency, as in the case of the autobiographers, or impose a particular kind of passive subject position, as in the case of the social problem novelists.

The first to identify the social-problem novel as constituting a sub-genre was the French critic Louis Francois Cazamian, who in 1903 published *Le Roman social en Angleterre, 1830-1850: Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley*. Cazamian was primarily interested in examining the intellectual milieu that produced these novels, in the history of ideas that is expressed in the purposeful narrative of social novels. Other foundational studies include that of Kathleen Tillotson's *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, which is concerned with the aesthetics of the social-problem novels and with how changes taking place in the social world affected and caused changes in the narrative techniques of the novelists of the 1840s.

But Raymond Williams was one of the first to read the novels as political and ideological texts. For Williams, neither the form nor the subject content of the industrial novel could be separated from the political and intellectual life of the novels' readers and society at large. Most critics following Williams continue to acknowledge the

ideological underpinnings of the social-problem novel, although they differ in how they define the relationship between the novels and ideologies of reform, politics, and society. Joseph Childers claims that the genre of the social-problem novel is so tightly tied to industrialization that the two cannot be separated ("Industrial Culture" 78-79). Josephine Guy locates the source of the "large-scale problems in contemporary British society" which Carlyle called the Condition of England question as being the "changing demographic patterns and changes in work practices associated with the accelerating industrialization of the British economy" (3). Other critics like Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Regenia Gagnier, and Catherine Gallagher want to remind us that these well-intentioned novels were more often than not implicated in and dependent upon those very forces which caused the "large-scale problems in contemporary British society," the problems Guy cites as the object of the novelists' reform. Like Tillotson, Bodenheimer would have us return to a deeper consideration of the formal and technical aspects of this fiction, yet unlike Tillotson, Bodenheimer sees in "the shape and movement of narrative" not just aesthetic considerations but also "the 'politics' of the novel in its deepest, most interesting, most problematical expression" (3). The novel's politics are not to be found in the ideological position that it *claims* to take, but in its enactment as narrative. According to Gagnier, the middle classes used social-problem fiction as a way to redirect class-conflict from violence to resolution, which is the motive behind the strategies of the social problem novelists I will be looking at. By attempting to create a working-class subject position that supports the social order rather than one that threatens it, these

novelists attempt to contain potential social conflict. Catherine Gallagher uses much of the same critical vocabulary that I use here to discuss the debates over industrialism[1] as discourse, insisting that "there is normally some sort of tension between ideology and literary forms," and, in fact, "[l]iterary forms often disrupt the tidy formulations and reveal the inherent paradoxes of their ostensible ideologies" (xiii). In speaking specifically of the social-problem novel, she writes:

> [N]arrative fiction, especially the novel, underwent basic changes whenever it became a part of the discourse over industrialism. The works most immediately affected were those we now call the "industrial novels" . . . (xi).

Gallagher's insights will be especially pertinent in looking at how the narratives of Kingsley and Eliot reveal the prescriptions of middle-class society through their use of narrative form and choice of narrative voice.

But critics have yet to examine how both the working-class autodidacts and the middle-class reformers discursively battled for the right to define subject positions through the use of narrative, and how they appropriated and re-appropriated the narrative forms of the opposing group to make their arguments. Such an oversight is due in part to the failure of literary critics to consider how the discourse of education affected the formation of literary forms, as well as the failure of social critics to consider how literary forms affected the discourse of education. For many literary critics, the project of self-

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[1] In this study, the term industrialism refers specifically to nineteenth-century industrialism. The industrialization of England did not begin in the Nineteenth Century, nor end there. But the texts examined here are concerned with a particular response to industrialism (industrial novels), not to the historical phenomenon of industrialism itself.

education has been seen as an aesthetic project rather than a political one. But by viewing it as part of the political act of subject formation, we can analyze how literary genres, narrative strategies, and the struggle for material and political power exist in complicity with each other. I will be looking specifically at how the working-class autodidacts appropriated the middle-class genre of autobiography and made it their own in order to claim legitimacy for self-determined subject positions, and how the middle-class reformers and novelists then re-appropriated the form of working-class autobiography into their fiction in an effort to re-define what a legitimate subject position was for a self-educated, working-class individual. It is in examining this intersection that that this work is exploring new territory.

By the time Samuel Smiles began his *Self-Help* series in 1859, as well as his biographies that valorized the lives of engineers, the phenomenon that Ivanka Kovacevic terms the "Gospel of Self-Help" was a firmly established concept among all classes of Victorian society, informing the discourses of social reformers, Christians, Chartists, utilitarians, social reformers, and labor unionists alike. According to Kovacevic, the Gospel of Self-Help was the moral equivalent of *laissez-faire* economics, in which "the fate of the individual is in his own hands" (Kovacevic 35). It was, essentially a middle-class doctrine, the very doctrine through which the middle class was consolidating its wealth and legitimating its power. Originally a tool used primarily for social climbing, when appropriated by politically minded working-class radicals, it could also become a tool for developing a working-class consciousness, and legitimating their claims for

political and economic equity.[2]

For the working class, as for many women, self-help often meant beginning with a program of self-education. Yet by its very nature, self-education holds a socially and culturally ambiguous – even suspect – position. The effect of education, many have argued, is the subjection of the individual to societal norms and the authorization of power and economic relationships.[3] With the project of *self*-education, the individual attempts to appropriate knowledge and authority without the sanction (and regulatory oversight) of "official" educational practice. The aim of the autodidact is usually the possession of some kind of power, i.e. political, economic, intellectual, or even spiritual, that is denied to the individual in his or her present condition. This goal could be shared equally by Chartists seeking suffrage or journeymen wishing to become masters, as well as by those who would teach the working classes how to read in order that they could read their Bibles. The role of self-education was ambiguous for middle-class Victorian society because many felt that while it was a productive doctrine for teaching and disseminating middle-class values, it was also a dangerous doctrine when appropriated by the lower orders to further their own interests. At the same time, middle-class discourse on the poor tended to blame the poor themselves for their condition and imply that if they would but better their moral and social behavior, then they would better their economic

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[2] J.F.C. Harrison, on the other hand, claims that self-help began as a *working-class* impulse with the mutual aid societies, and that the middle class appropriated the concept and made it into a "philosophy of individualism" (*The English Common People* 271).

[3] On the literary side, see Raymond Williams, especially in *the Long Revolution*. In education and cultural studies, the work of Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael Apple examine the work of education as cultural reproduction that works both for the domination and the liberation of the student. For useful surveys of this line of thought in educational theory, see Apple, *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education* and Raymond Morrow and Carlos Torres, *Social Theory and Education*.

lot. There was a fine line between enough self-help to excuse the middle class of responsibility for poor relief and too much self-help that might foment social unrest. The Gospel of Self-Help, then, cannot be considered a unified, or unifying, concept. The definition of this term will become one of the contested sites between the discourse of the middle-class reformers and the working-class autodidacts.

In the same way, the singular term "narrative" in my title is a bit misleading because it seems to suggest that there was only one narrative paradigm of self-education in use in England during the nineteenth century. In fact, however, there were as many different ways to tell the story of an individual's efforts and successes in the project to educate him or herself as there were individuals embarking on this project.[4] I use the singular form to emphasize the *activity* of narrating self-education and the ideological positioning such narrating implies. I wish to demonstrate that the "narrative" the title speaks of is really a discursive practice, made up of many different types of narratives, complementing and competing with each other, while at the same time existing in relation to other discourses and narratives constituting the socio-cultural world of Victorian Britain. The narrative of self-education is not a unified narrative, nor is it a consistent narrative. What is of interest here is its function, which was to attempt to carve out particular subject positions within a hierarchical -- and often exclusive -- class and economic system.

At stake is the way in which an individual could conceive of himself as a subject

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[4] Vincent writes in *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*: "As a category of source material, autobiographies draw attention to the sheer diversity of human experience. The infinite variation in the patterns of occupational and family life, and in the forms and fortunes of attempts at self-improvement and self-expression which are to be found in these works serve as a necessary reminder that the shared experience of

within his society, the way in which an individual could imagine himself as a self. Particularly, the struggle is over who had the power to define what these subject positions might look like -- what does it mean to be working class? what is possible for a working man to achieve? in what ways does education change those possibilities? In short, the issue was who had the authority to define the kinds of subject positions possible for the working-class individual. The concept of subjectivity that will be operative in this study emerges at the intersection of two slightly different theories as to what forces cause or allow for the constitution of an individual as a subject. The first sees the subject as a disciplinary construct. For Althusser, *"ideology has the function (which defines it)* of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (244). The individual is called or interpellated into being as a subject "through its relation to the ideological practices of society" (Paul Smith xiii). For Foucault, the individual becomes a subject insofar as the individual is an object of knowledge in the disciplines of knowledge produced by power. "The soul," Foucault writes, "is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy" *(Discipline and Punish* 30). A second concept of subjectivity views the subject as a literary construct, as "a product of language" (Kerby 4). The work of Judith Butler articulates this position well:

> The genealogy of the subject as a critical category . . . suggest[s] that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation. Individuals come to occupy the site of the subject (the subject simultaneously emerges as a 'site') and

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particular material and ideological forces did not produce identical life-histories" (198-99).

> they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language. The subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency. (10-11)

This process of linguistic construction, however, is not simply a philosophical or psychological process; it is grounded firmly in the discursive practices of a culture, specifically in the language practices of the many discourses that make up a culture. While Regenia Gagnier claims that nineteenth-century autobiographical practices created in contrast to other subjectivities the *"modern literary subject:* a mixture of introspective self-reflexivity, middle-class familialism and genderization and liberal autonomy" (31), she and other critics like Paul Kerby would remind us that this subject is "a result of discursive praxis rather than either a substantial entity having ontological priority over praxis or a self with epistemological priority, an originator of meaning" (Kerby 4). The subject is a result of the discursive processes of a culture. In *The Subject of Modernity* , Anthony Cascardi claims:

> The condition of subjectivity is defined through the (contradictory) discourse[s] of philosophy, literature, . . . politics, religion, and psychology... [T]hese discourses mark off the social and historical contexts in and through which the subject-self is shaped. (2)

As a discursive process, narrative is both constitutive and evaluative of the subject. Kerby notes: "As social beings we are already indoctrinated into certain traditional narratives that set up 'standard' expectations and obligations and that guide our explicit evaluations; narrative, as Jean-Francois Lyotard has claimed, is a primary vehicle of

ideology" (12-13). As such, narratives become a form of power, as Nancy Armstrong demonstrated in her study of the novel and gender, *Desire and Domestic Fiction:*

> If my study of the novel clarifies only one point, then I would like it to demonstrate the degree to which modern culture depends on a form of power that works through language -- and particularly the printed word -- to constitute subjectivity. According to this premise, as purveyors of a specialized form of literacy, we invariably perpetuate the hegemony I have been describing. That we do so is especially true when we make novels into literary texts where psychosocial terms control the meaning of cultural information that might otherwise represent some contrary political viewpoint. When that happens, our interpretive procedures not only conceal the process by which the novels themselves reproduce modern forms of subjectivity. Our procedures also conceal the degree to which we think and write novelistically in order to make sense of the past and of cultures different from our own. In fact, we render ourselves unconscious of the political power we ourselves exercise whenever we represent sexuality as existing prior to its representation. (25)

This "politics of writing subjectivity" (Armstrong 26) will be the object of analysis in this study of the narrative of self-education. I prefer to use the term "subject position" rather than the term "subject" in order to emphasize the fact that even for a single individual, many different possible subject positions, or subjectivities, are possible, as each individual is subject to many different "value-spheres, each of which tends to exclude or attempts to assert its priority over the rest" (Cascardi 3). Thus it is useful to think of the

subject as a site in discursive practice, in Butler's terms, a "placeholder," and therefore attempt to sidestep any arguments of a priori notions of the self. I am interested here not in ontological considerations, but in epistemological ones: how can we know who we are within our material and historical situatedness in a particular culture? I am concerned with "how people situate themselves in the world" (Gagnier 4), specifically how they do so through educational practices.

This study will examine the ways in which working-class subjects were constituted by the cultural – and hegemonic – practices of education in Victorian England (Chapter 1), the ways in which working-class subjects resisted and attempted to appropriate such hegemonic constructions (Chapter 2), and the ways in which the terms of this struggle were defined in literary representations of self-educated working-class individuals by middle-class authors (Chapters 3 and 4).

The Paradox of Self-Education

If education is a hegemonic practice, then it can be made apparent that education has within its own system, within its own argument, a kind of call for resistance. This resistance is possible because, as Raymond Williams notes,

> *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention* . . . [because modes of domination] select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. (*Marxism and Literature* 125) [italics in original]

In Britain, formal education of the working poor tended to consist of just those skills they

might need to be effective industrial workers: reading but little writing, simple ciphering, and a familiarity with Bible stories. By so narrowly defining the content of education, the educational system participates in a form of social control. But there is an imbalance within the concept of education itself which is not so easily controlled. This imbalance becomes evident when individuals decide to acquire education for themselves outside the boundaries of authorized channels, to aspire to an educational level denied to them by the social, political, and economic status quo; in other words, when individuals decide to educate themselves. A particular discourse's power to determine how an individual will be interpellated becomes greatly impaired, because that individual no longer internalizes the values of that discourse. Human practice, energy, and intention exceeds the bounds set by the dominant hegemonic practice. The self-educated individual illegitimately claims the discourse of her superiors for herself. In response, education, as a hegemonic practice, tries to absorb the activities of the self-educated while at the same time remaining "selective in terms of which experiences, meanings and values it is able to absorb."[5]

This situation is represented in fiction about the working class in Victorian England. These representations articulate the agendas of the self-educated who attempt to resist their exclusion from power as well as the agendas of the dominant discourse which struggles to defend its position in a relationship of power. These narratives present characters who attempt to create subject positions through which they can define *themselves* and assign a value to their lives and experience that is not automatically

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[5] John Thurston, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irena

granted to them by their society. In other words, they attempt to enter the discourse of power from which they are traditionally excluded. Authors of fiction (mostly middle-class authors) create characters who make this attempt of self-fashioning in order to critique the very possibility and advisability of discursive appropriation by the disenfranchised. Quite often, these fictional narratives reinscribe the social boundaries and limitations of the project of self-fashioning, even if they do so with a reformist agenda.

Yet this struggle is not without its own ambiguities, which these literary representations make clear. And these ambiguities must be considered. Education is the point where working-class ideology and middle-class ideology intersect, affecting and reforming each other in the process. Hegemony, according to Williams,

> does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 112-13)

The middle-class teacher develops a curriculum that will maintain the status quo *and* provide better workers for industrial use. She wants the working classes to aspire to a certain level of middle-class respectability. *But*, she wants them to aspire only up to a certain point. Cleanliness and Godliness are usually enough; economically and socially the workers are expected to be content. Yet, these tools that the teacher provides can be used to improve the workers' lives economically and socially. The use to which the

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R. Makaryk (Toronto & London: U or Toronto P, 1993) 550.

teacher intends the tools to be put is altered when placed in the hands of the learners. Thus education of any kind has the potential to encourage the working classes to try to improve their lot. The working-class student wants to learn so the he can "better" himself economically and socially, so that he can become middle class. As such he attempts to joins the ranks of the dominant discourse and often adopts its ideological strategy of exclusion and domination. It is at this point that one ideology can become infected by aspects of another. Thus it is from within hegemonic practice itself that we must look for resistance. There may be no "outside" position from which an individual can actively resist the interpellation of a dominant discourse. But each act of resistance from within the discourse itself will open more of the ideology of that discourse for critique, and, perhaps more importantly, began to shift the agenda of that discourse as it becomes the site of debate.

We must not assume, however, that when we talk of ideology, the ideology of Victorian Britain or the ideology of education or even the ideology of the middle class, that we mean a univocal ideology. There were, in fact, multiple ideologies and multiple interpellations, all intersecting, crossing and coming into conflict with each other. This study will deal with those that attempted to define and create possible subject positions for working men through autobiographical and literary accounts of the self-educated man. Through these narratives of self-education, it becomes clear what working-class autodidacts and middle-class reformers were attempting to do: define what could be known by whom and what types of subjects persons could be. The novelists did this by the imposition of a legitimating discipline of education, and the autodidact autobiographers by the appropriation of the discipline of education. It also became clear

that if it were the *content* of education that made the difference – that made a person powerful, worthy of the vote, deserving of economic advancement – than any autodidact that mastered Latin could have all these rewards. *But*, the fact that they could not illustrated plainly that it was not necessarily the *content* of education that conferred these benefits, but one's own position as defined by the *discipline* of education. For example, if there must be managers and workers, rulers and the ruled, then the discipline of education determines who is to have the power of assigning these roles. It is in this way that the institution of education works as a tool of subject formation, as an enactment of power.

It is from within this theoretical framework that I want to examine a particular debate within a particular historical context in Victorian Britain. The arena of education illuminates the struggle for power that was taking place between the middle class and the working class as the former struggled to consolidate its newly won political capital and the latter fought for its piece of the action. The First Reform Bill in 1832, by granting the vote to £10 householders, draws the dividing line between the interests of the working classes and those of the middle classes. The middle classes distinguish themselves from their former allies in the quest for suffrage, and now align themselves with the established political culture. E.P Thompson notes that in Reform "blood compromised with gold to keep out the claims of *égalité*" (820). The middle class, he claims, became fully aware of itself as a class with its own interests, which were at odds with the interests of the working classes. "[T]he final definition of this class consciousness," Thompson states, " was . . . the consequence of the response to working-class strength [by] the middle class" (807). One of these response was through attempts, both conscious and

unconscious, to use the education of the workers as a means of social control.

But this study is not interested in ways in which particular educational systems could be either oppressive or liberating. What is of interest here is the drama of power that was enacted as working-class individuals attempted to appropriate education as a pathway to power, how they did so outside the aegis of official, institutional (read: under control of the dominant ideology) educational systems, and the response of the middle class as it tried to bring such rogue individuals back within its purview. Of interest here are the discursive strategies each side used in the debate about working-class self-education. Working-class self-education became a contested site of power and knowledge, a site where particular subject positions were created and where other subject positions were denied legitimation. The larger question became not who could read and write, but who had the right to define what kind of person a working-class individual could be.

This, of course, had implications farther reaching than the schoolroom. Self-education could mean self-determination, and the possibility of participation in the political and economic life of the nation, which meant that these individuals could participate in the determination of body politic. Vincent notes that "For the first time it seemed possible that the uneducated might free themselves from the world view of the educated. . . . If working men could demystify the social, economic and political forces which controlled their existence, they would then be in a position to mount a real attack on the power of 'the Class'" (174-75). It meant that the relations of power were shifting. What interests us here is just one of the discursive strategies that each side used in this enactment of power, that of narrative. Indeed, many strategies were used, from

Parliamentary petitions to the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes to, in some instances, physical force. However, much of the debate was carried out in the form of narrative, in storytelling, each side presenting a different picture of possible subject positions and possible solutions to the problems that plagued a rapidly industrializing society.

Therefore, to repeat an important point, the singular form of the term "narrative" in the title of this work is misleading. It is used to suggest a discursive practice, made up of many different types of narratives, complementing and competing with each other, while at the same time existing in relation to other discourses and narratives constituting the socio-cultural world of Victorian Britain. I will be concerned with looking at just two narrative forms: autobiography and the novel. As both of these genres will amply demonstrate, the narrative of self-education is not a unified narrative, nor is it a consistent narrative. What is of interest is its function, which is to attempt to carve out particular subject positions within a hierarchical -- and often exclusive -- class and economic system. The guiding question will be how authors of autobiography and novels used the project of self-education to create a particular political and literary subjectivity or subject position for the working-class autodidact. It is this concentration on the discourse of self-education that makes this study different from other critical works analyzing representations of the working classes in nineteenth-century narrative.

Within the middle class itself the debate on educating the working classes had its fierce proponents and detractors, positions which Mrs. Gaskell's characters attempt to delineate in her novel *My Lady Ludlow*, which appeared in *Household Words* in 1858. This Chinese puzzle box of a novel tells the story of the elderly Lady Ludlow of Hanbury

Hall, a rural duchess of the early nineteenth century. In Lady Ludlow's battles and disagreements with her reforming vicar, Mr. Gray, Gaskell outlines the debates over allowing the working classes to be educated that were raging during the first decades of the century. Lady Ludlow represents the eighteenth-century monarchist viewpoint; her world is divided by rank, and individuals are classified by station. The only authorities she recognizes for herself are King and Church, and she is the authority to everyone below her own rank. She is adamantly opposed to any learning on the part of the working classes because it will make them discontent with their station, encourage them to neglect their duty, spread sedition, and end in another Reign of Terror.

The Reverend Mr. Gray, on the other hand, is the fresh breeze of the new middle-class century of progress that blows into Hanbury. Mr. Gray is an earnest young vicar, of a different breed than his fox hunting and card-playing (read: eighteenth-century) predecessor. He feels personally responsible not only for the souls of his own parish, which is the traditional duty required of Church hierarchy, but also for those souls residing outside the parish boundaries with whom he comes into contact. He cares not for the form of his duty, but for the spirit. Believing that ignorance is the cause of much poverty and crime, as it is of the lamentable religious state of his flock, he wishes to begin a Sunday School. The latter portion of the novel is given over to Lady Ludlow's conversion to the progressive view by the saintliness and selflessness of Mr. Gray. She finally allows a school to be built, although with not uncommon qualifications. Boys can be taught reading and writing and the first four rules of arithmetic only; girls can only be taught reading, and they must also complete needlework or spinning before they get their lessons.

The bone over which these two worthies fight is a poacher's son named Harry. Lady Ludlow's agent had begun Harry's education, but that project is thwarted when it is inadvertently brought to Lady Ludlow's attention that Harry can read. However, Harry is eventually crippled by a fall, and Lady Ludlow is convinced that since he will never be able to make his living by physical labor, he should be taught. Harry is ultimately sent to University to take holy orders.

The course that Mrs. Gaskell outlines in *My Lady Ludlow* reflects the general strategical rethinking by the ruling class about the efficacy of education for the poor that took place between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the post-Napoleonic War years of the 1820s. Reformers of the early decades of the nineteenth century had inherited certain attitudes, as well as certain strategies of dealing with working-class education, from the eighteenth century.[6] The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was still a viable presence, sponsoring both Charity Schools and Sunday Schools. These institutions were basically catechistic institutions, in both religious and civil terms.[7] Many within the SPCK and other Charity School organizations were concerned that the working classes not learn to write, and that learning must in some way be coupled with work and religion. In writing a contemporary about her curriculum, Hannah More claims to educate her students in those subjects and skills that "may fit them for servants. . . . I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to

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[6] See especially Smelsner's Chapter 3, "Primordial Imagery in the Nineteenth Century" (39-63) in which he defines and analyzes the genealogy of attitudes regarding the education of the poor and working classes, and Midwinter, Chapter 2, "The Eighteenth Century Heritage" (16-21).

[7] Clara Reeves' *Plans of Education* (1792) suggested that: ". . . It is Schools of *Industry* that are wanted, to reform the manners of the common people; where they are taught their duties *everyday* and *all day long*" (Richardson 85).

make fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety" (qtd. in Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 85).[8] In other words, she promotes only a restrained literacy, or a passive literacy, in which the passive pupils would be taught Christian morals and deferential behavior. Since rank and order were thought to be implicitly natural, their observance and preservation were part of a Christian's duty.

Of course, Christian meant Anglican, for all political purposes, at the turn of the century. But that would change, as would the assumptions and strategies and backgrounds of a new generation concerned with how best to educate a potentially dangerous lower class. Utilitarians and Philosophical Radicals entered the fray in more and more numbers and with more and more influence. This new generation supplanted the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Charity Schools and Sunday Schools began to disappear as Infant Schools and Mechanics Institutes began to crop up. There appeared even a University for working men, the University of London. Instead of insisting on the natural order that demanded deferential behavior, the enlightened self-interest of the lower orders was invoked (Midwinter 32). Reason was beginning to replace Right as an argument. In fact, the concept of rank itself was slowly being replaced by the concept of class, a view of "natural" divisions between people replaced by a view of constructed social and economic divisions.

The character that Mrs. Gaskell's novel leaves out, however, is the self-determining working-class autodidact, i.e. the individual taking control of his own

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[8] See also Lawrence Stone, "Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900," *Past and Present* 42

education to determine his own economic, political, and social fate. In the novel, the education of Harry the poacher's son is dependent upon the patronage of his middle-class (and aristocratic) neighbors, as is his entry into University and the clergy. Harry can take his place among his middle-class patrons because he has also taken on their middle-class virtues. There actually were such workmen, however, who thought themselves perfectly capable not only of determining what their own interests were, but also of taking action to forward those interests, as is evidenced in the autobiographies of men like William Lovett and Thomas Cooper. What these interests might be were variously conceived as both personal and class based: suffrage, better working conditions, the ability to move into the middle class, economic gain. But the autodidacts made the claim that their self-education gave them legitimate authority to pursue their own interests.

It is exactly at this point of intersection between the interests of the middle classes and those of the working classes that the ideologies of each can best be delineated. The working-class autodidacts were not representative of their class, but they became the spokesmen. The radical reformers were not representative of *their* class, but their legislation eventually became law. Because these two groups shared the same putative goal and the same rhetorical vocabulary, the differences behind the assumptions of each group can stand out in relief. Despite all the religious rhetoric that infused much of the debate, at heart this is a class struggle. The issues to be decided are issues of political power and economic self-determination: who is to be allowed to vote, whose interests are protected by legislation, which citizens are to be self-determining and which are not.

(1969):109-12 and M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement.*

Chapter One will examine first the experiences of the working-class autodidacts and the resources available to them, creating an historical and sociological context for the debate on working-class education. Chapter Two will look at the attempts of working-class authors to carve out literary subject positions as protagonists of their own autobiographies; I will examine how these literary identities both participate in and resist middle-class ideology. Representative texts of the working-class autodidact will include the autobiographies of Thomas Carter, William Lovett, and Thomas Cooper, and I will focus on how they attempted to create their own identities through the narration of their lives. The following chapters will look at how individual middle-class authors constructed in novels with working-class, self-educated protagonists literary subject positions "appropriate" for working-class autodidacts to mimic as well as subject positions that should be avoided. They do so, however, by appropriating the literary genres favored and developed by working-class autodidacts and by speaking *as if* they were working-class autodidacts, concealing their actual class affiliations. Representatives of middle-class novelists and their work will include Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* and George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical.* I will focus on how these novelists appropriated in their fiction the voices of the working-class autodidact. Chapter Three introduces the reader to the social problem novels and what they were trying to accomplish. In addition, this chapter also begins the investigation of the fiction of autobiography, the rhetorical strategy of middle-class reformers writing as if they were working-class autodidacts, in an effort to model the subject position boundaries that should be observed by working-class individuals. In particular, the work of Charles Kingsley will be the focus of this chapter, both his journalistic prose and his novel, *Alton*

Locke. Chapter Four will turn to the work of George Eliot, her *Felix Holt, The Radical* and "An Address to the Workingmen by Felix Holt," a piece she wrote for the newspapers in the voice and guise of her fictional working-class autodidact. At the same time, however, I will be sensitive to ways in which these middle-class texts themselves critique middle-class ideology, both intentionally and unconsciously. The main interest will be in looking at the conflicting and intersecting points of these discourses of self-education as they attempt to negotiate subjects into social and cultural being.

Chapter 2: The Discourse of Working-Class Self-Education

> A nation under a well regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed. It is monarchical and aristocratical governments only, that require ignorance for their support.
>
> Tom Paine
> *Rights of Man*

> For each class of society, there is an appropriate education.
>
> Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth
> (Smelser 45)

The attitudinal transitions of the nineteenth-century sketched out in the preceding section were not limited to education. Britain itself was in transition during the entire nineteenth century.[9] The changes were many and deep: from an agricultural economy and social structure to an urban and industrial one; from an oligarchic political system to a democracy; from a state-established religion to a somewhat more open denominational competition; from a social system where position is based on privilege and on patronage to a system where position is based on merit. George Eliot plotted these changes across the landscape of England in the introduction to *Felix Holt, the Radical*, through the conceit of a coach ride that might be taken at the time of the First Reform Bill in the early 1830s. She tells first of the hedgerows along the old coach roads, a symbol of England itself in their "unmarketable beauty." The hedgerows give way to "trim cheerful villages" which would have

> a neat or handsome parsonage and grey church set in the midst; there was the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the patient cart-horses

[9] I am particularly indebted for my narrative of British historical change to historians E. P. Thompson (*The*

> waiting at his door; the basket-maker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting the last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright transparent windows showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums, and little gardens in front all double daisies or dark wallflowers; at the well, clean and comely women carrying yoked buckets, and towards the free school small Britons dawdling on, and handling their marbles in the pockets of unpatched corduroys adorned with brass buttons. . . . The passenger on the box could see that this was the district of protuberant optimists, sure that old England was the best of all possible countries, and that if there were any facts which had not fallen under their own observation, they were facts not worth observing: the district of clean little market-towns without manufacturers, of fat livings, an aristocratic clergy, and low poor-rates. (6-7)

Yet by the 1830s, this was not the only English landscape (and more to the point, it verged on anachronism):

> But as the day wore on the scene would change: the land would begin to be blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of handlooms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine, going home to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight, then rise

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Making of the English Working Class) and Asa Briggs (*The Age of Improvement*).

> and spend much of their high wages at the ale-house with their fellows of the Benefit Club; here the pale eager faces of handloom-weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work, hardly begun till the Wednesday. . . . Here was a population not convinced that old England was as good as possible; here were a multitudinous men and women aware that their religion was not exactly the religion of their rulers, who might therefore be better than they were, and who, if better, might alter many things which now made the world perhaps more painful than it need be, and certainly more sinful. (7-8)

Each of these changing social landscapes was reflected in attitudes and positions about educating the lower orders. The arguments made throughout the nineteenth century fall into two general trends. On one side were the arguments which had held sway before the First Reform Bill, espoused by Gaskell's Lady Ludlow and based upon the assumptions that the aristocratic order of society was the natural order. On the other side were the arguments of post-1832 middle-class reformers like the Rev. Mr. Grey, who were convinced that their middle-class virtues of thrift, hard work, and respectability would counter the detrimental effects of increased industrialism upon the working classes. Neither side, however, considered the laboring classes qualified as active participants in the civic life of the nation; on the contrary, both these arguments sought to prevent anything that tended toward the political and economic empowerment of the working classes. At stake, in the eyes of both the middle and upper classes, is the maintenance of social order through responsibility, respectability, and orderliness. As a representative of the upper classes, Earl Grey urged: "It is of the utmost importance to associate the middle

with the higher orders of society in the love and support of the institutions and government of the country" (qtd. in Thompson 817).[10] The middle and higher orders began to close ranks.

After the passage of the First Reform Bill and the growing consolidation of middle-class political power, however, it is a different England that needs to be preserved. Economically, England needs bolstering if it is going to compete internationally, and for this a better educated work force is needed. At the same time, this work force is gaining in political force and pushing for the franchise. By the time of the Second Reform Bill in 1867, educating those future voters would be a positive investment in England's future survival and supremacy.

Although the central question of both the First Reform Bill of 1832 and that of the 1867 bill was the same, who is to be qualified to vote, the terms under which one could be included in suffrage had changed considerably. In 1832 the First Reform Bill enfranchised voters based upon property qualifications, specifically £10 householders in the boroughs and 40 shilling freeholders, £10 copyholders, and £50 tenants in the counties. The effect of this Act was to extend the vote to a growing middle class.

The battle for this reform was fierce, pitting the aristocratic power holders against the rising economic power of the commercial and professional classes. In this battle, the middle-class activists enlisted the aid of working-class radicals, promising to return support for support as both groups fought for the right of representation. When the First

[10] Thompson further emphasizes the newly-formed alliance between the middle classes and what he calls the "established culture" (727). Revolution did not come in 1832 because of "the skill of the middle-class Radicals in offering exactly that compromise which might, not weaken, but strengthen both the State and property-rights against the working-class threat" (817).

Reform Bill passed, just under a million new subjects became voters, bringing male suffrage to a ratio of about 1 in 5. But the qualifications laid out by the Bill did two other things: one, it defined what it meant to be middle-class, and, two, it cemented the line dividing the middle class from the working class (Thompson 807, 820). After the 1832 bill passed and the working classes sought the middle class's further support, they met opposition from the very people they had helped into power. Many working-class radicals felt that they had been betrayed, and in a sense they had been. At first, the middle class had defined its values in opposition to a decadent and self-serving aristocracy, but now it was ready to separate itself from an economically and morally suspect working class. As the middle class gained power, it barricaded itself firmly behind its own interests and its own set of values. By separating itself from the working class, the middle class allied with the traditional aristocracy, and indeed after 1832 the aristocracy encouraged this alliance, As Earl Gray's earlier comment indicates.

In *Social Paralysis and Social Change*, Neil Smelser maps out many of these transitions. He reviews several historical and sociological "accounts" of the changes that took place in the practice of educating the working classes in Britain during the nineteenth century (8-16). Most salient to a discussion of the narratives presented in this study is the account Smelser calls the Whiggish, or Reform, account of educational change. It considers the work and efforts of different groups of political, ideological, and economic leaders of the middle classes, mapping the progress of reformist idealists who held positions of influence. These groups include middle-class "radicals" such as the utilitarians and Benthamites, Christian Socialists, and Whig politicians in favor of institutional state education, just to name a few. This interpretive focus is most relevant

for this study because it provides a point of contact between middle-class education theorists and working-class intellectuals, mostly autodidacts, which illuminates the essential assumptions of each group about the benefits and privileges of education. These two groups ask the same questions, use the same vocabulary, yet strive for completely different goals. Each group values education, but not for the same reasons. The first task for this study, then, is to examine the assumptions, and therefore the language, governing the terms of the debates about educating the working classes within middle-class political and intellectual discourses, as well as between middle-class reformers and working-class learners. The debate that perhaps best highlights this dichotomy between shared language/different assumption is the debate over what constitutes an appropriate education, and over how to define the definition of what constitutes "Useful Knowledge" for the working classes.

The Quest for Useful Knowledge

There were many reasons that early Victorian society felt a pressing need, after centuries of neglect, to consider educating the lower orders. The nature of the social order and the physical characteristics of both land and people were changing rapidly. For one thing, the population of Britain experienced a true explosion throughout the nineteenth century. In the early eighteenth century the population of England and Wales had been just under 6 million people. By 1801, when the first census was taken, that population had increased to 9 million; in 1831 to 14 million; by the turn of the next century, to 32.5 million (Harrison, *The English Common People* 213-14). Along with increasing forms of industrialization and decreasing forms of traditional rural labor and

cottage industry, the increase in population literally changed the face of the British landscape and the make-up of the growing urban areas. The country was becoming urbanized, a change which led to an increase in overcrowded and diseased conditions within the cities, crime, and moral profligacy like drunkenness and promiscuity.

Revolutionary ideas inherited from the eighteenth century continued to be discussed and disseminated among radical elements of the working-class population throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, revolution from the continent during the 1840s threatened at any moment to poison the well of British class relations. Control of the press seemed no longer a viable method of class control, as innovations in printing and increase in communication throughout the nation (mainly due to the reduction of the Stamp Act, a tax on printed material, in 1836 and its eventual repeal in 1855 [Walven 82; Stephens 157]) insured a wide and rapid distribution of printed material. Newspapers became affordable and available throughout most of England, and they were avidly consumed.[11]

Thus it seemed only prudent to turn attention to other methods of controlling a potentially unruly, dangerous, and immoral class. One method was through education. As one contemporary commentator noted in 1833, education is "the best form of social police, inasmuch as it destroys the chief seeds of crime, and ignorance."[12] Social policing

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[11] Historian Ian Machin notes the "Defense of the unstamped (or 'pauper') press and campaigns for the repeal of taxes on newspapers combined the efforts of middle- and working-class radicals. An alliance between them was seen in the Society for Promoting a Cheap and Honest Press, which was founded in 1836 and shortly became the London Working Men's Association (LWMA)" (33). It is the LWMA which will, with the cooperation of several radical MPs, propose and publish the People's Charter, the founding document of the Chartists, which figures so prominently in the lives of many of the working-class autodidacts in this study, even the fictional ones.

[12] John Wade, *History of the Middle and Working Classes* (1833) (qtd. in Harrison, *Learning and Living*

took many forms in the middle-class response to the need for working-class education, and the motives for these responses were varied. For many reformers, their support of working-class education was prompted by sincere Christian and humanitarian concern. They felt that it was their moral duty to try to alleviate some of the misery they saw in the lower orders. Fortunately, alleviating this misery also served their own self-interest, at least as reflected in their methods, for what most reformers advocated was that the lower classes assimilate the very values and virtues that had enabled the middle classes to rise to prominence. The solution of the middle classes was:

> . . . to make over the whole of society in their own image. The ideas and standards and methods which had brought them such conspicuous success could do the same for all the people -- if they would let them. "What some men are," declared Samuel Smith in *Self-Help*, "all without difficulty might be. Employ the same means, and the same results will follow." (Harrison 39)

Self-restraint, temperance, and sexual and familial responsibility were espoused in an effort to "wean the working classes from sensual gratifications" (Harrison 86). This lack of sensual self-restraint was seen to be a great part of the problem with the working classes. They must be taught, then, to productively fill what leisure time they had with more acceptable, and respectable – that is to say, middle-class – activities.

But the middle-class project of disseminating its own ideology among the working poor would inevitably fail if it placed too much reliance on the elementary

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77f).

educational institutions already in place. The Sunday schools, the dame schools, and the factory schools barely taught most children to read; they were even less qualified to provide the kind of "inculcation of 'sound principles of political economy'" (Harrison 79) that would be necessary if the working classes were to understand how their own best interests were served by the interests of their betters and by the *status quo*. For this the middle-class reformers would look to adult education: Mechanics' Institutes, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and workingmen's colleges. These were the programs that reformers could and did stand by (and bankroll and set curriculum for) staunchly, and it is here that the middle-class reformer and the self-taught "improving" working-class subject meet, both physically and intellectually.

Many working men and women emerged from the available courses of elementary instruction with a desire to learn more. Many continued their efforts at acquiring knowledge into their adult years, as they strove to add to their small store of learning of any kind. John Bezer, a Chartist whose autobiography was printed in *The Christian Socialist*, complained of the Sunday school he had attended:

> Now, that school did not even learn me to read; six hours a week, certainly not *one* hour of useful knowledge; plenty of cant, and what my teachers used to call *explaining* difficult texts in the Bible, but little, very little else. (qtd. in Vincent 155)

Others, like Thomas Carter, complained of the quality of literature available to those who could read:

> . . . my prevailing desire was to obtain some useful knowledge; consequently I was soon satiated with what was adapted only to please a

> vagrant or a sickly fancy. When I first began to read for amusement, I had, as has been hinted, access to but few books that were likely to be useful as well as entertaining. (qtd. in Vincent 155)

So while opportunities and resources for knowledge acquisition were sometimes available, its quality was uneven (Johnson 77). The reader of working-class autobiography notices the frequency with which the term "useful knowledge" is used, and how it is defined by the self-learner. For many working learners the concept of "useful knowledge" "expressed the conviction that real knowledge served practical ends, ends, that is for the knower" . . . and "should be relevant to the experienced problems of life . . ." (Johnson 84). Science, history, literature, and religion all fell into this category as far as the autodidacts were concerned.

This desire on the part of the working man seemed to be answered by the formation of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1826. The Society (SDUK) was a publishing house for the working man, providing affordable volumes of ""useful knowledge" for the adult learner. The publishing decisions of the SDUK were made by leaders of the Whig government, but evinced a genuine commitment to value knowledge for its own sake and for the benefit of the working classes. Practically speaking, the SDUK did much to foster educational reform and supported educational philosophies that would lead to state-sponsored schooling for working-class children. The SDUK became the political voice defending the right of all men to learning and knowledge. While the SDUK provided books, materials, and lectures to working-class learners, the leaders of the SDUK argued in the House for the political justification of an educated work force.

However, as well-meaning as many of the middle-class leaders and supporters of the SDUK were, their methods and pedagogy still implied a paternalistic stance toward the uneducated masses, a stance that the uneducated masses seemed determined to resist. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the different ways each group would define the term "useful knowledge," and in the assumptions each made that the very act of defining the term should be their prerogative. For the SDUK, "useful knowledge was the discovery of and the property of the ruling class" (Vincent 163). Through their publishing arm, they decided what types of subjects were appropriate. Science, of course, was supreme, because it seemed to be a type of knowledge totally divorced from issues of class relations. Fiction was not appropriate, as it offered no practical application for the worker, although other reformers valued fiction as a means of teaching moral lessons in the manner of Hannah More. Politics were entirely out of the question. These two fields might one day be appropriate for working-class learners, but the SDUK did not think that these learners were ready to tackle such subjects quite yet -- even though the majority of self-learners read widely on their own in literature, theology, and politics. At the same time, the SDUK's avoidance of these potentially controversial and subversive fields of knowledge circumvented certain controversy and battle with opponents of any type of education for the working classes. Without such concessions, it is doubtful whether the SDUK would have been able to overcome its conservative opposition and accomplish what it did.[13]

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[13] See Vincent for a more complete consideration of the eventual failure of the SKUK to achieve its stated goals.

Self-learners and other working-class radicals had a different definition of useful knowledge. According to historian Richard Johnson, knowledge had to be political, relate to social science, and foster an understanding of the prevailing economic system (87-88) if working-class radicals were to consider it "really useful knowledge." It was, according to the *Poor Man's Guardian* "knowledge calculated to make you free" (qtd. in Johnson 87). So while the autodidacts were interested in science, this interest was based on the desire to be freed from the ignorance of superstition and, in some cases, from the tyranny of "Church Christianity" (Johnson 88). Fiction was popular with the autodidact who was often drawn to the classics, the works of Shakespeare and Milton, as well as the poetry of Burns, Wordsworth, and Byron. Such works elevated the minds and spirits of readers of all classes. This evaluation of the power of literature was shared by educators like the Tunbridge schoolmaster Vicesimus Knox, who wrote in 1801 that

> Through the pleasant paths of poetry [young people] have been gradually led to the heights of science: they have been allured, on first setting out, by the beauty of the scene presented to them, into a delightful land, flowing with milk and honey; where, after having been nourished like the infant at the mother's breast, they have gradually acquired strength enough to relish and digest the solidest food of philosophy. (qtd. in Altick 174-75)

Fiction and poetry contributed to the enlightenment of the person – as long as it was good fiction and poetry. In addition, Charles Dickens and the working-class reader appeared to have a mutually admiring relationship, at least if one goes by the evidence of an 1853 speech Dickens gave to the Birmingham Society of Artists. He tells his audience:

there are in Birmingham at this moment many working men infinitely better versed in Shakespeare and in Milton than the average fine gentlemen in the days of bought-and-sold dedications and dear books. (qtd in Altick 243)

The subject of politics, though, was the greatest source of contention in the struggle to define useful knowledge. As one writer for the *Poor Man's Guardian* quipped: "A man may be amused and instructed by scientific literature but the language which describes his wrongs clings to his mind with an unparalleled pertinacity" (qtd. in Johnson 84). Politics was the most useful kind of knowledge for someone who was struggling for political power. Johnson also quotes *The English Chartist Circular* criticism of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge: "Their determination is to stifle inquiry respecting the great principles which question their right to larger shares of the national produce than those which the physical producers of the wealth themselves enjoy" (qtd. in Johnson 78).

It must also be noted that the SDUK was not the only institution for working-class education wishing to avoid controversial subjects. The Mechanics' Institutes, which were also sponsored and partly controlled by middle-class interests, also steered clear of political and social issues. For these controversial, and more interesting, topics, working-class students would have to rely upon the radical press and the many coffee houses where these topics were discussed by the working-class readers (Vincent 149-50).

The SDUK made two assumptions that would characterize its paternalistic stance toward, and its ultimate failure to understand, the people it was attempting to educate. The first assumption was that, ideologically speaking, knowledge is value-free. This

assumption, however, was actually the presumption that "value-free" coincided with their own values and interests. This accounts for their intentional emphasis on the "objective" sciences and the rejection of the "subjective" study of literature, philosophy, and politics. They assumed that the physical sciences simply describe the world as it is, discovering laws that apply to both the rich and the poor, to all members of society. They ignored the connections between the acquisition of knowledge and issues of class relations, maintaining that "in the pursuit of knowledge all men were equal and bound together in common fellowship" (Vincent 142). Knowledge then becomes the great leveler, but a leveler that does not necessarily disturb the prevailing class structure.

The second assumption the SDUK made was that if a working-class learner did desire to pursue knowledge, then he "was necessarily identifying himself with the practices and the ideology of his social and economic superiors" (Vincent 163). The Society assumed that the learners valued education for the same reasons that the SDUK valued education: an intellectual love of learning for its own sake, the acquisition of virtues of self-discipline, the acceptance of the social order, the development of good citizens. They could not have been more mistaken. Although they shared a common vocabulary with their working-class learners, the vocabulary itself did not share a common meaning for both groups. For the middle-class reformer, adult education was one way of disseminating political and economic ideology which valued order through the advocacy of such traits as sobriety, industriousness, and obedience. As Harrison argues through *Learning and Living*, adult education was often a means the working-class student to acquire the tools for resistance. Both terms "useful" and "knowledge" had different practical and political meanings for the two groups.

The working-class learners had their own definitions of what constituted "useful knowledge," and of the role and benefits of knowledge. Self-learners describe the transforming power that literature, science, political philosophy, and theology had upon both their self-image and how they saw their relationship to the world at large.[14] For the Chartist and champion of working-class education, William Lovett, useful knowledge was knowledge that could effect "a transformation in his consciousness and in his relationship with the external world" (Vincent 135). In his autobiography he describes falling into acquaintance, quite by accident, with a "small literary association" made up "chiefly of working men, who paid a small weekly subscription towards the formation of a select library of books for circulation among one another" (Lovett 28). One evening during a discussion, "either literary, political, or metaphysical," he hears for the first time

> impromptu speaking out of the pulpit -- my notions then being that such speaking was a kind of inspiration from God -- and also that the question discussed that evening was a metaphysical one respecting the soul. There were very excellent speeches made on that occasion which riveted my most earnest attention, and from what I heard on that evening I felt for the first time in my life how very ignorant I was and how very deficient in being able to give a reason for the opinions and the hopes I entertained. (28)

Useful knowledge becomes, for Lovett, something relevant to him as a subjective being, and not simply as a laboring being.

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[14] "For Lovett, as for every other reader, the 'use' of knowledge was nothing less than to effect a

As I will go on to prove, what the autodidacts were looking for is a usefulness not confined to occupational efficiency or better domestic economy. They were searching for knowledge that would benefit them as rational, moral human beings. They did not want to develop the characteristics that would simply make them better, harder workers within the present system, but to acquire the tools that would enable them to exercise free inquiry and to decide moral and social issues through their own rational thought. And here, of course, was the danger for middle-class educators. If education provides the tools for the free exercise of thought on the part of the working classes, then the working classes might begin flexing those rational muscles in the area of their own interests, becoming self-directing political subjects.

Knowledge was almost always associated with freedom for the working-class autodidact. The subtitle of Lovett's autobiography, *In his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, makes clear the connection between economics, knowledge, and politics. Book knowledge could emancipate the learner in several ways. He could be freed from the non-rational thought patterns that produced mental fancies such as superstitions or behavioral excesses like drunkenness. He could be free from the intellectual dominance of the middle classes to think for himself. And for the first time, he could have the tools essential for the pursuit of both intellectual and political freedom: writing and organizational skills.[15]

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transformation in his consciousness and in his relationship with the external world" (Vincent, *Bread* 135).

[15] As will be argued in later discussion of William Lovett's autobiography, Lovett's great influence upon the political advancement of the working classes was due not to his skill as a writer, orator, or thinker, but to his organizational skills. Lovett's usual role in an organization was as secretary, and it was his talent to get an organization rolling and then to keep it viable and useful.

Freedom, however, like the pursuit of knowledge, did not come without its own price. Autodidacts were often given to extremes of freethinking, as they had no experience with intellectual discipline whatsoever in their reading and their thinking. This could lead to serious crises of faith, and it is interesting to note how many autodidacts did leave conventional faith behind. But the pursuit of knowledge and the freedom it gave to one could also put the learner in conflict with members of his own class in other ways. There was little time or privacy for reading and study, and habits of study removed the reader from the social life of his family and his peers. The coffee house or solitary reading replaced the pub as the primary leisure activity of the autodidact, who often did not drink, for either moral or economic reasons, or simply from temperament. In addition, many self-educators included in their study grammar and speech, and were further isolated from their communities as they attempted to change their speech patterns. In his autobiography, poet and former cobbler Thomas Cooper complained:

> Now, to hear a youth in mean clothing, sitting at the shoemaker's stall, pursuing one of the lowliest callings, speak in what seemed to some of them almost a foreign dialect, raised positive anger and scorn in some, and amazement in others. Who was I, that I should sit on the cobbler's stall, and "talk fine"! They could not understand it. (56-57)

One's position within one's own class becomes unstable. Identity is no longer defined or bounded by class affiliation. The autodidact thus must construct a new identity, a new subject position to inhabit as old positions become untenable.

Not everyone in the working classes saw the value in education. While the labor aristocracy, the skilled artisans like Lovett, saw education "as an avenue to respectability, self-improvement, and perhaps social mobility" (Smelser 256), the semi- to un-skilled laborers, such as agricultural workers and factory operatives, "valued education, but mainly as a means of securing the essentials of literacy and numeracy" (256) that were needed for making a living. The unemployed and the pauperized, had very little contact with education at all. Thus, the self-learner met with challenges not only from other classes, but from within his own ranks as well. But despite such challenges, or perhaps because of them, the self-learner became dependent upon his own free exercise of reason.

Such intellectual and social isolation tended to produce free-thinkers who did not always come to the conclusions about the uses of education that the middle-class educators would have preferred. This accounts for the inability of the self-educated to understand the logic of "political economy" and the natural operation of economic law. When the Mechanics' Institute in Leeds sponsored a series of lectures on Political Economy, the historian Harrison notes in *Learning and Living*,

> The general response . . . was no more enthusiastic than their response to the advanced scientific lectures which they were offered. But the need for such lectures, in order to correct "popular errors," was strongly felt by the middle-class directors; and the events of the next two decades confirmed this belief. Militant trade unionism, strikes, and the short-time committees showed plainly that the working classes did not appreciate the "natural" laws regulating social and economic life, and that they consequently fell an easy prey to "agitators." The problem was primarily education, that is,

> dispelling the people's ignorance of economic laws. . . . Their very "naturalness" removed them from the realm of argument and doubt; they were truths to be explained, not hypotheses to be debated. The problem was . . . how to disseminate most effectively these truths among the working classes. (80-81)[16]

The useful knowledge of the working-class autodidact, however, did not always lead to this conclusion. To middle-class capitalists the lessons of political economy seemed clear: follow the laws that now regulate economic and social life, and everything will run smoothly. Instead, some autodidacts like William Lovett and Thomas Cooper, using their new tools of rational analysis, found effective ways to critique and resist the tenets of capitalist and *laissez-faire* political economy. However, the leadership of the SDUK was committed either explicitly or implicitly to laissez-faire economics, and the political and economic survival of their class depended upon the assumption that what was good for their own economic interests was good for society as a whole. Thus what was "reasonable" by their standards was an economic system that furthered their interests; what was "reasonable" by the standards of the autodidacts, however, was an economic system sensitive to their own particular economic needs. Because of its refusal to acknowledge the social and economic implications of the pursuit of knowledge and the paternalistic assumption that it had the correct definition of "useful knowledge," the SDUK was doomed to fail in its stated purpose.

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[16] Middle-class reformers also published such texts as Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*, Mrs. Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy*, as well as Charles Knight's *Rights of Industry* and *Results of Machinery* as practical and philosophical rebuttal against the arguments of the demagogues who would lead the workers into error (Harrison, *Life and Learning* 81).

The Mechanics' Institutes survived longer, but they changed so drastically to be almost unrecognizable when compared to their original purposes. They had been founded as institutions of science for the working man, but they became instead institutions of moral improvement:

> By 1858 it was possible for Edward Baines, a founder and supporter of the institutes, to deny that mechanics' institutes had ever been intended mainly as centres for a serious study of scientific principles by artisans, and that in fact the objects of the founders had been ". . . to promote the intellectual and moral improvement of young men of the industrial classes, to counteract the temptation to sensual indulgences by which they are beset, to supplement an imperfect education, and to introduce to the study of science or art those whose talents or avocations especially led them to such pursuits." (Harrison, *Learning and Living* 74)

Where once scientific lectures had been the only choice on the menu, now audiences were treated with "lighter fare." Harrison notes how the lecture series of 1842 of the Mechanics' Institute at Bamford included 15 lectures, all with scientific topics. However, the series of 1845 included 14 lectures, none of which was scientific (70). Science was replaced by literature, history, music, the fine arts, phrenology, and other popular and entertaining topics. The character of the audiences filling the lecture hall changed, as well. The change in curriculum coincided with a change in the makeup of the student body. Eventually artisans would be greatly outnumbered by women and white-collar workers, as the institutes became purveyors of popular middle-class culture more rather than of science.

We must note, however, the exact nature of the "failure" of adult working-class education. The Mechanics' Institutes did survive throughout the nineteenth century. The SDUK was a viable publishing concern for twenty years. And whatever their ideological motives, they did provide materials that many autodidacts found "useful," by any definition of the term. The Mechanics' Institutes may not have provided the practical advantages to the working classes that Edward Baines envisioned:

> "In one family we see the very first step a wrong one: the husband and wife marry whilst they are yet boy and girl, and without having made any provision for household expenses", with the resultant train of poor housing, discontent, children born to wretchedness, resort to the public house, and rapid descent into vice and pauperism. By contrast, "in another family we see a prudent beginning and a fair start in domestic life: the industrious husband brings his wages to a thrifty wife: the humble house is clean. . . ." On the shelf are a few books, "and no bottles." After a decent interval of time, ". . . dear little creatures enliven the scene, and they are decently clad and properly fed. . . ." In due course these children go to school, payments are made to a savings bank and a sick club, more books appear upon the shelves, the boys enter the mechanics' institute, and at last the happy artisan becomes ". . . the proprietor of a house -- a freeholder, and a voter." It is advantages such as this which the mechanics' institutes have to offer. (Harrison *Learning and Living* 86)[17]

[17] Baines quotations taken from the leaflet *Address to Working Men, on the Advantages of the Mechanics'*

However, the Institutes did provide working men with valuable tools that they would use to their own ends. In many instances, the institutes provided models for voluntary, grassroots organizations. They widened the intellectual horizons of people whose lives were intellectually narrow by introducing both scientific and cultural topics and issues. They encouraged an attitude of earnest and serious study and discipline in the learner's approach to all aspects of lived experience. And finally, the institutes provided a point of actual contact between working-class intellectuals and would-be intellectuals, and middle-class scientists, reformers and radicals.[18]

This point of contact became ambivalent for both the home-grown intellectuals and the middle-class management of the Mechanics' Institutes, the SDUK, and other approved avenues of adult education. While the working-class autodidact was in contact with the ideals of the middle-class reformers, there was always the possibility of over-identification with the ideology of middle-class reform, and indeed many learners did internalize the aims and ideals of the middle classes. At the same time, the working-class learner was often obtuse and intractable in learning the intended lesson, and instead took away something else altogether, as in the case of the failed lessons of political economy.[19]

Institutions 1 January, 1851.

[18] From Lovett's autobiography:

> . . . [O]n leaving the lecture room . . . I got into conversation with Sir Richard Phillips, the author, and walked with him round and round St Paul's churchyard, Newgate Street, and the old Bailey for several hours, it being a bright moonlight night, while he explained to me many of his scientific theories, among others one which he entertained in opposition to Sir Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation . . . (Lovett 29)

[19] Such a situation is often the case with ideology – and provides the possibility for the individual agent to resist ideology. See especially Smith's *Discerning the Subject* and Judith Butler.

Analyzing the failures and successes of institutions such as the SDUK and the Mechanics' Institutes can only reveal ambiguous results. In many ways, the middle classes succeeded in disseminating their ideology throughout the whole of society. Harrison feels that by the 1850s and 1860s, the middle class had effectively achieved their aim:

> They had established among the more prosperous sections of the working classes the goal of respectability, the hallmark of which was a regard for knowledge and print. Once this was effected the way was open to widespread appeals, arguments, and "reason" via the printed word. (Harrison 43)

In addition, middle-class discourse, which had so effectively legitimated its own rise through valorizing the narrative of self-improvement, attempted to place constraints on how the working classes might appropriate this narrative for themselves, removing it from political, class-based discourse to the discourse of individualism and Smilsian self-help:

> Whatever is done *for* men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves. (Smiles, qtd. in Richardson 247)
>
> [R]eforms can only be effected by means of individual action, economy, and self-denial, by better habits, rather than by greater rights. (Smiles, qtd. in Richardson 247)

Middle-class ideology would seem to have taken the day.

However, while such critics are correct in identifying prevalent attitudes, they ignore what actually happened in the history of the struggle of the working classes in the nineteenth century. Almost everything that middle-class ideology fought against for most of the century eventually came into being. Suffrage became universal,[20] and education became secular, state-sponsored, and available to all[21]. For working-class activists, the nineteenth century was a century of learning, even though they did not always take away the lessons that middle-class educators would have them learn. As I hope to demonstrate, learning often allowed the learner to think of himself in a different light. Through learning they appropriated the discourse of middle-class education as a means for their own personal and political identity and power. Learning to join the discourse in the struggle to define "useful knowledge" gave them the tools they needed to begin positing possible subject positions within the social structure based upon their own interests.

One of these tools that had been provided by the SDUK and other middle-class publishers of literature for the working classes, as well as by an increasingly interested middle-class reading public, was that of the working-class autobiography. In his study of working-class autobiography, David Vincent writes:

As the new middle class began to exert a formative influence on the book trade, the long-established tradition of encouraging certain forms of literary self-expression among the lower orders began to take on a new dimension and a new meaning. After

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[20] The franchise was extended by the Third Reform Act of 1884, and again in 1918, when the Fourth Reform Bill (or the Representation of the People Bill) "granted at last manhood suffrage and a large degree of women's suffrage (Machin 152). Ten years later, the second Representation of the People Act, also called the Equal Franchise Act, gave the vote to all adult women (Machin 152-53).

[21] The Education Act of 1870 was the most important in a series of Acts that moved toward a national and secular educational system. Fees for attending the schools were abolished in 1891 (Rose, "Education,

some hesitation, the market for accounts of the "real life" of the working class rapidly expanded. A respectable readership which had neither the desire nor the courage physically to enter the homes and the neighborhoods of the urban working class, eagerly seized the opportunity of gaining access through the safer and cleaner medium of the printed word. (36)

The autobiographical narrative allowed the autodidact an opportunity to make his argument, so to speak. Describing who he was and what knowledge he had acquired, the autodidact made a claim about the kind of person he was as an individual, and the kind of individual he was in the social and political body. If, as I argued in the introduction, education systems are one means of subjecting individuals to particular ideological frameworks, then self-education is an attempt to legitimate a non-sanctioned subject position – in this case, to claim that one's education entitled one to a subject position that had political and social power.

This part of the discourse on self-education took place in narrative form. There were the autobiographical narratives which were "approved" by the middle-class reformers, which were printed by the cheap press controlled by middle-class publishers, such as that of Thomas Carter, which appeared in Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, and which will be considered in depth in the next chapter. These were, in effect, middle-class narratives, by which I mean narratives that copied both the generic style and the moral content of middle-class autobiographies. Vincent notes that while some critics in the middle-class press

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Literacy, and the Reader" 34).

> felt able to dismiss the early working class autobiographies as corrupt imitations of a middle class art-form, . . . it was for the same reason that the majority of the middle class extended a welcome to what appeared to be an attempt by the lower orders to borrow their mode of expression. . . . Consequently, providing the more overtly political working class writers were excluded, there was every reason to encourage working men, particularly the more intelligent and influential amongst them, to abandon a private tradition of oral reminiscence in favour of a form of self-expression which had been perfected by their social superiours. (37)

This subtle form of flattery, however, could cut both ways. While at times the autobiographical form was used by working-class writers to posit a tacit submission to middle-class cultural and political power, the very act of self-narration could not be contained by any one particular cultural hegemony. As Vincent stated, the "more overtly political" autobiographers had to be excluded, but their voices could not be completely silenced. At the level of the individual, the simple act of self-narrating raises the possibility that alternative subject positions than the ones assigned by the social and economic system might be possible, which I argue is correlative to what Vincent calls "the essential first steps towards emancipation" (37). The autobiographer, by writing his life, creates hitherto unimagined possibilities for self.

Where political power was lacking, other discursive tools were used to make claims and arguments. Whether overtly political or not, whether radical or cooperative, the autobiographies of the autodidacts attempt, through narrating their lives, to delineate

not only who they are as individuals in society, but also what other subject positions they might legitimately be able to claim.

Chapter 3: The Construction of a Literary Self

Literary Subjects

> The classics of the *papier mâché* age of our drama have taken up the salutary belief that England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia. Modern primer-makers must needs leave *confessions* behind them, as if they were so many Rousseaus. Our weakest mob-orators think it a hard case if they cannot spout to posterity. Cabin-boys and drummers are busy with their commentaries *de bello Gallico*; the John Gilpins of "the nineteenth century" are the historians of their own *anabases*, and thanks to "the march of the intellect," we are already rich in the autobiography of pickpockets.
>
> John Lockhart
> *Quarterly Review*

> I am supposing, all along, that the person who writes memoirs of himself, is conscious of something more peculiar than a mere dull resemblance of that ordinary form and unsignificance of character, which it strangely depreciates our nature to see such a multitude exemplifying. As to the crowd of those who are faithfully stamped, like bank notes, with the same marks, with the difference only of being worth more guineas or fewer, they are mere particles of a class, mere pieces and bits of the greater vulgar or the small; they need not write their history, it may be found in the newspaper chronicle, or the gossip's or the sexton's narrative.
>
> John Foster
> "On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself"[22]

One way that the working-class autodidact positioned himself as subject was through the appropriation of another form of literary discourse that the middle class had come to think of as their own: autobiography. By telling their own stories, in their own words, the autodidacts could construct and posit for themselves subject positions that might not be constrained by middle-class definitions of what subject position working-class individual should inhabit subjectivity. The autodidact learned the lessons of literacy and used what he learned as a tool to construct a literary subjectivity that laid claim to

certain types of identities, identities that were not always recognized or acknowledged as legitimate by the ruling classes. The appeal that the power of literary subjectivity had for a class struggling to define itself is evident by the fact that so much of the writing by working-class writers in the nineteenth century falls under the category of autobiography.

The term "autobiography" was coined in 1797, and immediately rejected as a cumbersome, inelegant construction.[23] The fact that a term for this genre was needed demonstrates that the set of practices it describes was already established and recognizable as a distinct genre. In other words, the practice itself was of long standing, stretching back through the spiritual autobiographies and journals of the Puritans going at least as far back as the spiritual autobiography of Augustine's *Confessions*. But the impulse to define this set of practices shows the emergence of a new set of concerns, incipient, I would claim, in Defoe's "fictional" autobiographies and the general secularization of the autobiographical form. The apparent purpose of an autobiography is to reveal a "self" -- either a given, stable self which is faithfully reproduced through the text, or a self that is being produced or constructed through the writing of the text. Most recent theorists of autobiography would claim the latter, adding that the "implications of this critical view require the definition of 'self' at the center of autobiography to be understood in terms of political and social power" (Berryman 75). Autobiography, in being an act of self-expression, is also a political/social act.

Historians and critics of English autobiography would agree. In *The*

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[22] Qtd. in Marcus 20-21.

[23] "The first recorded usage of 'autobiography' in fact occurs in 1797, when the reviewer of Isaac d'Israeli's *Miscellanies* -- thought to be William Taylor of Norwich -- writes in discussion of d'Israeli's use of the term 'self-biography': 'It is not very usual in English to employ hybrid works partly Saxon and partly Greek: yet

Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England, Felicity Nussbaum examines the history of the autobiography up to the end of the eighteenth-century as a genre for English writers. She argues that

> the "self" is an ideological construct that is recruited into place within specific historical formations rather than always present as an eternal truth. . . . [The self is] an ensemble of social and political relations. . . . "Autobiography" then comes to depict the special position that the "self" exists and that it can be represented in text. (xii)

Nussbaum and others have identified this "self" as being the bourgeois subject, using the genre of autobiography as one "technology of the self," drawing upon the vocabulary of Foucault, one way of asserting a specific type of subjectivity, which then "become[s] the dominant way of regarding the subject" (xvi). The autobiography, according to Nussbaum's argument, was one way the emerging middle-class consciousness both asserted and legitimated its status as privileged subject:

> [T]hese first-person texts disseminate a regimen that enables the production of a particular kind of self, assumed to be free and equal, as a class solidifies its alliances. This regimen also calls into place a reader who recognizes herself or himself in the text, and subordinates women within its domain. . . . [B]y the end of the eighteenth century, a middle class regulates itself through this technology of self, and . . . the technology is deployed to maintain gender hierarchies. (xvii)

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autobiography would have seemed pedantic'" (Marcus 12).

Likewise, in reading nineteenth-century autobiographies, Martin A. Danahay has examined how this "self" posits itself as a bourgeois, autonomous, *masculine* self. As the spiritual autobiography had been a means of legitimating one's position in the spiritual kingdom, the secular autobiography became a means of legitimating one's position as a bourgeois subject in the political/economic/social realm. In effect, the subject of the autobiography could become a politically and economically self-determining individual.

Granting this function of autobiography then illuminates both the appropriation of the form by working-class authors and the resistance of such appropriation by critics such as Lockhart and John Foster. What the autobiography accomplished for the bourgeois subject, it could also accomplish for the working-class subject: the legitimization of a particular politicized and empowered subject position.

This was a genre, then, of which the working classes could also take advantage, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century more and more working-class authors were deciding to put their memoirs, lives, and reminiscences to paper. In their monumental bibliography of nineteenth- and twentieth-century working-class autobiography, Burnett *et al* trace the roots of the genre back to the spiritual autobiographies so integral to dissenting sects and see the surge in the practice of secular autobiography as reflecting a major transformation in the way in which the laboring poor regarded themselves and were in turn viewed by those who had hitherto monopolized the use of the printed word (xiii). We must also keep in mind, however, the long tradition of gallows confessions and thieves' tales that had substantially made up the content of broadsides and other forms of street literature. While these forms had presented lower-class voices, they were voices from completely outside the law. However, they

comprised a popular and easily obtainable source of reading matter for the working classes. Others attribute this increase of autobiographical impulse to the reading revolution that occurred on both sides of the Atlantic around 1800 when, according to many historians of books and literacy

> there was an exponential leap in the production and consumption of books and periodicals, when reading became a daily habit rather than a special occasion, and when communal reading aloud gradually gave way to silent and solitary reading. (Rose, "Rereading the English Common Reader" 48)

Oral history, Jonathan Rose demonstrates, became less dominant as a form of working-class cultural communication and print culture become more dominant. The great increase in the population of England, as well as the shift from rural to urban population centers, made mass communication both possible and necessary.

According to Burnett *et al*, the autobiographers themselves fall into several distinct groups or sub-genres. After the Napoleonic Wars, and then again after the Crimean War, the lives and adventures of soldiers and sailors (Lockhart's "Cabin-boys and drummers") were widely printed and distributed. In fact, one third of the early autobiographies in the Burnett *et al* bibliography are written by either sailors or soldiers. A second major sub-genre is the reminiscences of low life (the "autobiographies of pickpockets"), including thieves' tales, the lives of beggars, and gallows confessions. A third genre emerged in response to the interest in the Condition of England, going into the "underside of Victorian society" and the "hidden way[s] of life" where middle class journalists such as Henry Mayhew and novelists like Mrs. Gaskell could not venture (xv-xvi).

A popular sub-genre of working-class autobiography was the Bildungsroman of self-improvement, the recitation of the lives and struggles of the autodidact determined to get along in life in quest of mental enlightenment and moral ennoblement, in quest of recognition as a subject participation in the social and political body. Within this discourse the language of the autodidact and the middle-class reformers meet, and they completely misunderstand each other. For here was a project that the middle class could, and did, approve. Burnett *et al* claims that in the autobiography of self-improvement, the middle class found a hope that "a stable pattern of class relations was possible" (xvi). Whether this was because self-improving autobiographers justified the promise many middle-class reformers saw in them as representatives of their class who were demonstrably worthy of rights and respect, or whether because a working-class individual who helps himself takes the responsibility for the alleviation of social ills off the shoulders of the middle class or the capitalist system and puts the blame on the workers themselves, or because to become bourgeois affirms bourgeois values, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that publishers and editors were usually supportive of the publication of autobiographies of self improvement. Of the more than eight hundred autobiographies cited in *The Autobiography of the Working Class*, over a third were printed by London publishers, including Longman's, Simpkin Marshall, William Tweedie, and other well-established firms, as well as smaller firms wishing to capitalize on the popularity of the genre. One quarter were printed by local, provincial businesses, many printed in journals and other serial publications, and the rest were generally sold by subscription at the initiative of the author or his friends. Some in the bibliography, of course, remain in manuscript form, having been written for personal enjoyment and family edification only.

However, although critics like Lockhart thought more working-class autobiographies got into print than was perhaps necessary, it is evident that the working-class autobiography found an audience.

The genre of autobiography itself is neither "naturally" conservative/oppressive nor "naturally" subversive/radical.[24] It could, indeed, serve the purposes of either or, paradoxically, of both. Many working-class autobiographers chose to use the genre to illustrate their similarity to -- and therefore solidarity with -- middle-class respectability. Others used the genre to construct a subject position different from the bourgeois subject but one which is also equally valid, one of working-class solidarity and insistence upon political and economic rights for their own working-class subject position. The autobiography of Thomas Carter provides an example of the first type of working-class autodidact-autobiographer. Carter uses the story of his self-education to prove how, through his conduct and his moral and intellectual makeup, he has always exemplified the values of middle-class respectability. By his appropriation of the "middle-class genre" of autobiography, he creates for himself a subject position that, in the most Foucauldian sense, is subject to the hegemonic forces of middle-class respectability. He accepts and internalizes the values of his "betters" in an attempt to be recognized by them as a worthy and legitimate subject. William Lovett, on the other hand, is an autodidact-autobiographer of the second kind. The self-learner of his autobiography consciously works to create a specifically working-class subject position that at the same time

[24] Nussbaum notes that "autobiographical writing often sparks nonhegemonic concepts about the self as well as new hegemonies in formation" (xiv). Laura Marcus identifies autobiography as "the form which has the potential to resolve oppositions," but as also subject to "contradictory views" which see "the genre as dangerous/anarchic or conservative, as alienating or centering the self, as creating or binding divisions"

participates in – while also seeking to redress -- the political and economic processes that are for the most part dominated by the middle and upper classes. Thomas Cooper's autobiography is an amalgam of both positions, being both complicit in and resistant to the forces of middle-class hegemony implicit in the project of self-education. Cooper's work is of special interest because of its obvious reliance on and implicit recognition of the literariness of subjectivity – Cooper being a poet and a fiction writer – and the obvious adeptness with which Cooper creates his literary self.

Each of the three autobiographers made a claim about who he "really" was, in spite of the appearance of poverty and the assumptions a middle-class observer might make about him. He may appear to be a simple tailor, or cabinet maker, or cobbler, but there are to be found within each writer unsuspected depths, aspirations, thoughts, feelings, and erudition. Avrom Fleishman has pointed out that the great middle-class Victorian autobiographers were "creators of commanding self-images" (112). These working-class autobiographers attempted to create a deserving self-image, either by aligning themselves with the dominant values of the middle class or by claiming legitimization for working-class values. They carry out this project by appropriating a genre of bourgeois legitimization: the autobiography.

I am going to examine how these three autobiographers, one from the 1840s and two from the 1870s (though writing about activists' lives from the 1830s through the Chartist turmoil of the late 1840s), used their autobiographies to make certain claims about who they were and what their place in society was. Each claims a subject position

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(12-13).

contrary to that "assigned" to him by social convention. Each claims that he is "more" than the conception society has of him, and this "more" is attributable to and evidenced by his learning and his love for learning. The undeserving poor are ignorant and uncultured; therefore, they have a weak claim to any rights or respect from the middle class, politically, economically, or socially. Much of middle-class society believed that this class of poor deserved what they got. But these autobiographers, by dint of their intellectual achievements, argue that society's view of them is wrong; they deserve, they claim, the rights and respect due to the bourgeois subject.

The claim that each writer makes, however, is different, and each participates in and resists hegemonic forces in different ways and to different degrees. I will turn to the autobiographies as textual constructions to examine what claim each author makes about his subject position, what image of self he presents, how he uses the genre to present this image, and his reason for writing. Finally, I will evaluate the success of each text, relative to what the author purports to be trying to achieve, and what the text in fact does achieve.

The Autobiographies

A Working Man of Reputable Character

Thomas Carter was born in Colchester on July 5, 1792. His father had been a husbandman, then became a man-of-all-work for a wine merchant. Carter's mother was a servant to the wine merchant's family when the two met and married. The wine merchant promoted the senior Carter to cellar-man, a position that put his parents "in comfortable circumstance" (Carter 16) for several years, until his father "contracted a habit of

drinking intemperately, which ultimately became the source of many domestic troubles and privations, in the midst of which my mother gave me birth" (16-17). When Carter was two years old, his father left the family for a time to serve under the Duke of York's regiments, and was sent first to Portugal and then to Gibraltar. He was finally discharged because of a fall that disabled him from soldiering. It is in contrast to his father's inability to live up to standards of middle-class respectability and morality that Carter will define his own subject position as a working man of reputable character.

Carter tells us that he was sickly from the beginning of his life, and therefore was kept much indoors. His mother taught him how to knit, and his eldest brother taught him how to write. He could not remember a time when he could not read. His mother opened a dame school which he attended, then he won a place for three years in a school supported by a congregation of Dissenters. This was the extent of Carter's formal education.

At age twelve, Carter turned his thoughts to ways of making a living. His poor health -- he suffered from asthma -- precluded many occupations, but he finally decided that he should become a domestic servant. A place was found for him with a woolen-draper who also employed several tailors. The work proved to be too strenuous for him, so he learned the tailoring trade in his spare hours, "although," he writes, "I saw it to be a wearying and unhealthy occupation, especially if diligently worked at -- I hoped [it] would not be altogether beyond my power" (112). In spite of frequent interruptions due to poor health, Carter followed the tailoring trade throughout his life.

All autobiographers, I have argued, make certain claims about who they are and how they should be perceived. They claim for themselves certain subject positions.

Carter is no different; he too claims a particular identity, one that is perhaps not evident to those looking at the external conditions of Carter's life. Carter's claim, simply put, is "I am respectable." He is nothing like the ragged poor seen in the streets, his argument goes. He is intelligent; he has refined sensibilities; he is worthy of the esteem and regard of his social betters. That these claims are true is evidenced by his great learning and by his love of learning. He *really* belongs to that class that values books, learning, poetry, newspapers, and good fires to read them beside, not the class into which he had been born.

In his narrative, Carter is quick to point out his distinction as a member of "the orderly and decent class of poor people" from that of "the opposite class" (23), the "dirty, ragged, [and] disorderly" poor (22). His mother had never allowed him to play in the streets. While this activity might have improved his health and his spirits, it would have been too high a price to pay for having been "allowed to contract habits of idleness or dissipation" (22). The division between the street-playing type of poor people and the non-street-playing type is one that Carter wants to make clear. The two groups are antipathetic to each other, and Carter's narrative is redolent of his resentment of the treatment he received from his less orderly peers. It is worthwhile to quote at length to get the sense of Carter's preoccupation with the behavior of this sub-class of the poor and his care in separating himself from it.

> The principal source of this hostility [between the two groups] is, I think, Envy; for there is much of the "Dog in the Manger" temper among the indolent, the dirty, and the dissolute poor. They will not take the trouble to secure the advantages arising from industrious, cleanly, and sober

habits; and they would fain prevent all others from gaining them. But as they cannot do this, they frequently do all they can to make their more prudent and reputable neighbours as uncomfortable as it may be possible to make them. They will therefore call them by opprobrious names; charge them with being imitators of the dress or the manners of the rich; and moreover, will often go out of their own way and take much pains in order to insult or to injure them. (22)

Visions of Trabb's boy following Pip down the street, mocking him, may be a humorous example of some well-deserved heckling, but what Carter identifies here is something that many self-educated writers described: the alienation they felt from their own class because of their efforts at self-improvement. Carter, however, feels not so much alienated as persecuted. These childhood feelings of mistreatment seem to still provoke a strong emotional response from him as an adult. He continues:

> Whether I am right or wrong in ascribing this hostile feeling and conduct to the cause above stated, I know not, nor does it much signify. The fact remains the same; for it is certain that the children of the orderly and decent class of poor people are in many cases persecuted by those of the opposite class, both as fiercely and relentlessly as is a domesticated bird or quadruped when it falls in the way of the untamed and more powerful of its species. (22-23)

Carter's imagery of the domesticated/untamed opposition raises interesting questions. To be domesticated implies that one is domesticated by someone else, essentially for the use of that someone else. His image of the untamed and powerful of the working-class

species carries connotations of strength and independence -- albeit a certain cruelty as well -- that are more attractive than the image of the timid, domesticated variety of the species. Carter goes on to describe the effect this treatment had on one of his temperament and strength:

> For several years I suffered much from this maltreatment, which I certainly never provoked, for I loved peace, and moreover, had neither strength nor courage enough to warrant my being the aggressor. Yet I was often insulted -- and sometimes injured -- by such as were both much bigger and older than myself; and in some instances, by adult persons. I, at length, dreaded going into the street unprotected, as much as some children would have dreaded a severe correction. (23)

Certainly, Carter assures us, this persecution is because he belongs, temperamentally, at least, to the more refined of the species. In other words, he has middle-class sensibilities.

Evidence of the distance between Carter and his peers continues to manifest itself throughout Carter's boyhood. He remembers his three years at the Dissenter's' school as being "spent in sitting apart from the other boys -- in whose frolics and tricks I took but little interest" (47). Carter's health was an influence on his choice of favorite childhood activities, mainly reading, gardening, and long, solitary walks, but at the same time there does seem to be something Wordsworthian in the way Carter describes his boyish response to nature:

> One of [my juvenile recreations] was to place myself in a reclining posture, and look up into the clear blue sky, which, especially when its uniformity was relieved by a few fleecy clouds, was to me a beautiful

> spectacle. It suggested the elevating idea of an ascent without a summit, while it seemed to lead to another world -- a brighter and happier one than this. At other times I found pleasure in contemplating the reflection of the sky and the clouds, as shown in a vessel of clear water. Here the idea of a descent without a bottom would sometimes present itself to my imagination, and so forcibly as almost to make me recoil from the object that produced it. . . . I have sometimes done this until it seemed to be a reality, and I have wished it were possible to explore the "vast profound." (66-67)

This subjective sensitivity to Nature continues throughout his life. He describes not the ocean that he sees on a trip to Portsmouth, but the feelings which the view produces in him:

> I cannot adequately express the wonder and delight with which I contemplated a scene in which ocean, earth, and sky seemed to vie with each other in grandeur or beauty. As a whole, it was admirably adapted to awaken adoration and gratitude towards the Divine Being, and to excite a lively regard for the beautiful scenes and social advantages of one's native land. (175)

Carter closes this description with lines of poetry. What is important in this view of the port town is not the commercial or military activity but the poetical feelings the scene elicits within the autobiographer. Therefore, one way that Carter differs from his working-class peers is through his sensibility. He shuns the rough sport of the poor for the quiet repose of a poet's appreciation of Nature, and it is this sensitivity that affiliates

him with the subject-position of the middle class.[25] Once again he shows that he has the sensibilities of a middle-class subject.

Carter is further distinguished through his temperance. This will be true for all three of the autobiographers I will be examining, who agree that drink is a terrible millstone around the necks of the poor, for one reason or another. For Carter, intemperance appears to be simply a character defect, brought on by a lack of self-control and moral turpitude. Carter recounts the drinking that tailors indulged in while plying their trade, and he recalls that one of his tasks as servant to the woollen-draper was to go "to the public-house to get beer for the tailors" (74). His view of tailors in general as drunkards does not abate throughout his narrative. While recounting his occupational adventures in London, Carter offers this opinion:

> It may seem harsh, but it is not the less true, that tailors, in general, are both improvident and intemperate men. They have, I know, many temptations to both these faults; but this is no valid excuse. In proportion to the force of the temptations ought to be their efforts to resist them. By doing this, they would get rid both of their ill-name, and also of much personal suffering. I always held these views as many among them can testify, and I have sometimes been glad to see that my efforts to enforce them have not been without some good effect. (154-55)

Carter is careful to make it clear to his reader that he has always held this view, and that he has always urged this view upon his fellow craftsmen. He himself always arrived

[25] Carter, unlike Matthew Arnold, sees the middle classes as the guardians of high culture.

home from work in the evenings "in a sober state, which was more than could be said of many among my fellow-craftsmen, whose evening pastimes were in general, both chargeable and otherwise hurtful" (190). By distancing himself from this most working-class of vices, and by criticizing it with the fervour of a middle-class temperance reformer, Carter attempts to prove by fiat that he is just like those of the middle class. Working-class drunkenness is "chargeable," outside the law. But having acquired the virtue of temperance, Carter is firmly within the law. He is, as it were, already a bourgeois subject.

Carter's harnessing his sobriety to his claims of respectability, however, causes him to gloss over some important family history. Carter's father was dismissed from his comfortable and lucrative job as cellar-man after he developed a taste for the wares. Carter calls this his father's "imprudence," and dispatches with the cause of this imprudence in one sentence: "Unhappily [my father] contracted a habit of drinking intemperately, which ultimately became the source of many domestic troubles and privations, in the midst of which my mother gave me birth" (16-17). Only once more does he refer to his family's "domestic troubles": "In my earlier years, this day [Sunday] was too often beclouded and made uncomfortable by domestic troubles, which, although I was then so young, I could not witness without much pain and concern" (106). As he grows older, his home life becomes more comfortable, and he never mentions his father's improvidence again, only his skill in kitchen gardening. But Carter's rejection of this aspect of his father and of his family history is more than textual. He literally rejects him by considering his father "a stranger and an intruder" upon his father's return from Gibralter, stating that "it was a long while before I could regard him with any of the

affectionate tenderness which I always felt for my mother" (18). And at his father's death, he claims that occupational considerations keep him from attending the funeral, and he discharges his filial duty by sending his mother some money.

Carter bolsters his claim to respectability through his adherence to conservative politics. Although he is writing in London in the early 1840s,[26] he never once mentions Chartism. His politics through the Teens and Twenties remain mainstream. The elections of 1818 are a case in point. Carter criticizes the supporters of Radical candidate Henry Hunt, whose platform included universal suffrage. They were

> men of the lowest character, whose unruly and frequently riotous conduct greatly impeded the business of the election. . . . Their rioting was several times of so serious a character as to call for the interference of a military force. . . . Some . . . got smart blows from the broad-sides of the soldiers' swords, at which I was glad, and only wished that each delinquent could have been punished in like manner, for I was indignant at their ruffianly conduct. What I here saw of mob law . . . inspired me with a real horror at the thought of mob government, and led me to conclude that by far the worst despotism is that which such a government exercises. (201)

Carter goes on to give an encomium to "that great and good man, Sir Samuel Romilly" and praises the way that he was elected with "no noise or show," supported by "a very large portion of the truly respectable men of Westminster" (202).

Carter also witnessed some of the social unrest of 1816, and while he attributes

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[26] Carter's account was published in 1845.

the unrest to "the distressed state of the working classes," he also uses the riots to distinguish between the reputable and the disreputable kind of working-class character:

> From what I know of working men, I feel assured that none of reputable character ever voluntarily take part in popular commotions. Such men as these are as thoroughly fond of public tranquility and safety as are the possessors of large wealth. In times of distress they suffer quietly, and, in general, patiently, buoyed up by the hope of better times. In times of riot, their only fault is that of going to look at what is going on: thus they often get both into danger and subsequent disgrace. (193-94)

The reputable working-class person wants *just what* the person of wealth wants. Thus, suffering quietly and hoping patiently that better times are coming is the response to economic distress that Carter advocates; this is his political call to action. Even in his political opinions, then, he defines himself through his acceptance of middle-class values.

Carter does not consider himself a political being, so he is not overly concerned with politics or economic justice. He recognizes that in his society, his class position is fixed; he will never rise socially or economically. He notes early in his narrative that as a very young man he

> was then simple enough to imagine that this [worldly riches] was attainable even by such a one as myself: this, however, was a delusion under which it was scarcely possible I should long continue. (76)

Yet Carter's implicit critique here – calling the possibility of economic improvement a "delusion" – maintains his alliance with the opinions and values of the middle class.

One thing that Carter can claim for himself, then, if not economic or social

embourgeoisement, is a domestic embourgeoisement. Only in the last 30 pages of his autobiography, does Carter introduces "*that* subject which, above all others, may be said to be of universal interest" (204). At twenty-seven years of age, he marries -- not a "'bookish woman,'" but "one of plain good sense and of thoroughly domestic habits" (206). A period of about twenty years is condensed into the final thirty pages of his autobiography: he and his wife have eight children, he becomes a master tailor, his health continually fails, his business fluctuates, they lose several children to illness, he has a few works published, and he writes his autobiography. But that subject of universal interest is not what fills the pages of his story. His domestic life is not successful, and at times his narrative about it deteriorates to complaint. Middle-class readers, and the middle-class editor who asked Carter to cut the more personal, familial material, could not be expected to be interested in a working-class failure.

More important to his sense of self, however, is his claim to intellectual embourgeoisement. The reason for the short-shrift that Carter gives to this section of his life is that since it was taken up mostly with work and with family, it is of no importance as a revelation of Carter's unique character. By definition, working-class people work and most have families. What Carter the autobiographer considers most important about himself -- that which reveals the image he most wants to foster -- is his literary and intellectual interest and ability. The bulk of his narrative is made up of what he was reading. The external conditions of his existence enter into the consciousness of the textual Carter only in the struggle to find good fires to read by and the effect of his ill health on this studies.

Carter indeed read widely: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Paradise Lost*, Goldsmith,

Thomson, The *Spectator*, *Rambler, and Tattler*, Gay, Gray, Cobbett's *Political Register*, Pye's Horace, "Kirke White's Remains," Byron, the entire works of Shakespeare, travel literature, history, even a treatise entitled "Police of the Metropolitan." But Carter was not an indiscriminate reader; he was not a reader of broadsides or penny dreadfuls. Reading should, while always entertaining, be instructive and uplifting, and good reading should always provide both:

> without being conscious of the fact, I was, while only looking for amusement, receiving real instruction upon many important points of both principle and practice -- instruction for which I have since had much occasion to be grateful. (81)

Even in his choice of reading material, Carter is the very picture of respectability. He balances quite comfortably between the reader's desire to be amused and entertained, and the reformer's desire to instruct (a balance upon which Carter's publisher based his entire career). Carter repeats this theme when describing the lack of educational materials available to the poor and the attitudes toward educating the poor when he was a child:

> It did not in those days seem to be understood that abstract treatises on religious or other serious subjects were not adapted to fix the attention of children and other young persons. There was but little recognition of the obvious fact that the human mind needs recreation as well as instruction; that it desires amusement, and, therefore, will seek to obtain it from frivolous, if not dangerous sources, in the absence of such as are useful and innocent. (26)

This was an argument bound to find favor with Carter's publisher and reform-minded

friends, and it was in fact one of the arguments used to introduce these "useful" educational materials into the Mechanics' Institutes

It was, indeed, important to Carter that he be favored and esteemed by that class which he so respected and whose values he emulated under such difficult circumstances. The final chapter of his autobiography begins:

> In the course of this summer I was unanimously elected a member of a literary society which numbered among its members many of the most respectable gentlemen, professional and private, of the town and its neighbourhood. It also included a goodly number of the principal tradesmen. I believe that I was the only *poor* man of the whole number. This very gratifying mark of good-will from men so much my superiors in all respects I owed to the good offices of my old and tried friend, the woollen-draper. (215)

Carter is quite pleased to be a part of this distinguished and respectable company. This association will lead to bigger things. Each member of the society is required to either provide a lecture or pay a fine. Carter is daunted by the prospect of lecturing, but to pay the fine is out of the question -- as would be to relinquish his membership. He prepares and reads his lecture, on a subject he previously knew nothing about, and records that "to my great surprise, no less than to my high gratification, [I] found that I had acquitted myself to the satisfaction of the society. . . . [M]any of the members noticed me in a very kind and encouraging way" (216). He gives a second lecture, which proves to be his last. His health and "the numberless duties and cares of my station," he writes, prevented him from lecturing again or of maintaining his membership in the literary society. His

association with the group, however, had been most fruitful. Not only had his lecture earned the approbation of his fellow members, he had also "thereby obtained the good-will of those whose circumstances and disposition made them both able and willing to afford me substantial help at a future day" (218). His membership in this society lead to trade and financial patronage, as well as to his eventually becoming a published author.

After a bout of ill-health, which prevented him from working, he begins to wonder about the feasibility of obtaining some funds by the publication of one of his lectures. The members of his literary society not only encourage this project, but help obtain subscriptions. The money that this publication brings in over the next six years helps the family survive some lean times. It seems that the possibility of financial remuneration from learning only now occurs to Carter for the first time: "Here then I saw the utility of having, when young, sought amusement in reading and observation rather than in the foolish or vicious pursuits which, in general, are so eagerly followed by young men of my own class" (229). In addition, the good reviews of the work bring him to the attention of "several kind-hearted gentlemen" who were to become Carter's "generous patrons" (229)

One of these gentlemen, in 1840, brings Carter to the attention of Charles Knight, the "Victorian pioneer of cheap literature" (Altick 41). Knight was also the publisher for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. In his classic work, *The English Common Reader*, Altick describes Knight as "a moderate, tolerant man who wished simply to make the printed page the agent of peace, justice, and pleasure" (281). Knight publishes Carter's autobiography as one of his Weekly Volumes, a series of decent fiction and non-fiction, printed in durable, pocket-sized editions, meant, Altick claims, to be

passed from reader to reader (283).

But Knight did more than publish Carter's autobiography. Like the patrons of many a working-class writer before Carter, Knight wrote a preface to Carter's work, commending the author's "rational and contented tone of mind" (x), and defending a working-man's autobiography as being of interest to "*his own class of students*" (italics are Knight's) who could "cherish his lessons and examples" (vii). In holding up Carter as a model, Knight is defending his own stand in the debate over educating the working classes. Knight was dedicated to providing useful and decent printed material that the working classes could afford. Although his politics were usually more conservative than the leadership of the SDUK, his view of the working class's ability to appreciate and find useful literature as well as science, poetry as well as political economy, was much more liberal than most of his fellow leaders in the Society. Knowledge, any kind of knowledge, could only be ennobling; it was not by necessity incendiary. Learning did not by necessity lead to discontent and rebellion. Examples like Carter proved that

> [not] a man who diligently performs all the duties of the humblest calling is necessarily ignorant; or . . . reach some of the acquirements which were once held to belong to the noble, the wealthy, and the professional learned, . . . must be discontented with his station, and become incapable of performing the offices by which he claims a share of the labour-fund, which is the only inheritance of him and his class. It is beginning to be felt that knowledge is the common property of the human family -- the only property that can be equally divided without injury to the general stock. . . . [O]ne of my chief inducements to include [Carter's Memoirs] in

> this series is to add another to the few public examples of the blessings that directly, and independent of any collateral advantage, belong to the cultivation of a taste for reading and composition, amongst the great body of our fellow-men who pursue the most mechanical and laborious employments of society. (viii-ix)

Anyone can be intelligent -- and the exercise of this intelligence need not tear the fabric of society.

What is interesting to Knight about Carter's narrative, and what he thinks will be interesting to others, is that it is filled not with "striking adventures, but present[s] a clear reflection of the mind of the writer" (vi). This mind, which "had never been patronized out of the proper performance of his duties,"

> show[ed] how the humblest lot is not incompatible with literary tastes, with the love of the excellent, with cheerful thoughts reflected from the contemplation of nature, with tranquil musings derived from a familiarity with nature's best interpreters, and, above all, with a contented spirit founded upon deep and constant piety . . . (vii)

Because it is the development of this reflective mind that Knight finds of real value, he has exercised an editor's right and suggested certain changes in Carter's original manuscript. He suggests that Carter leave out those particulars which pertain to his family and can be of interest only to them. Knight writes: "I recommended him to continue with brevity to the present time" (xi). This, perhaps, explains the abruptness of the final two chapters as the narrative of twenty years and eight children are compressed into thirty or so pages. Knight believes that "what would be interesting to all -- the

history of the formation of his habits of thought, and thence of his system of conduct -- [is] the development of his intellectual and moral life" (xi).[27] Carter acquiesces, thereby allowing the editor to determine what is most important about the narrator's character.

In many ways, Carter's purposes would appear to complement Knight's. Where Knight wishes to show that a working-class intellect could be developed in ways palatable to middle-class interests, Carter is anxious to show that he himself is that intellect worthy of respect; his narrative defines his "self" in middle-class terms. Yet, Carter's desire for respectability, combined with his acceptance of the social order as static, puts him in an awkward and ambiguous position. Without a change in the political and economic systems that keep Carter in poverty, the only relief he can have is through luck -- and patronage. The final pages of his narrative are an odd admixture: a litany of the ills that befall his life at present ("I am, in truth, a prematurely old and worn-out man" [222].) and of his unending, but futile, attempts at labor ("Except when wholly overborne by bodily pain or infirmity, I am *rarely* unemployed, either in the daytime or in the sleepless hours of the night" [234].) Carter seems to feel that he has deserved to be used better than life has chosen to use him. He does his best, keeps to his needle, is cheerful and content with his station, supports the prevailing structures of society, and yet there seems to be no relief for him. The words he once wrote in his *Manual for the Apprentices to Tailors*, from which Knight chooses to quote at length in introducing Carter's life, appear to mock his present circumstances:

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[27] Here, perhaps, one can detect a brief note of stylistic rebellion from Knight's exemplary author. Carter begins the penultimate chapter of the autobiography, in which he marries and begins his family, by asserting that a subject other than mental and moral development may actually be of "universal interest" -- the subject of marriage (Carter 204)

> [A]lthough all cannot be masters, much less wealthy masters, yet all my be worthy and intelligent men, and, being such, may reasonably look for a sufficient maintenance, and also for much real and lasting enjoyment. (xi)

Carter's own narrative, however, has difficulty in maintaining this "happy ending," as the rewards that he expects from his learning do nothing to alleviate his real, lived conditions of poverty and suffering. Carter has been faithful to the ideals and ideology of middle-class respectability; he has conformed himself just as hegemonic forces would have him molded; he has answered the call of interpellation, acknowledging the name by which the structure of power would have him called. Carter has indeed achieved a kind of respectability through his learning. Its only reward, however, is a nod of approval from his middle-class patrons. It is not, however, Carter the material man who must eat and feed his family who merits approval so much as it is the literary subject of Carter's autobiography who garners the accolades. This "self" that Carter painstakingly constructed through rigorous self-education, in the end, can only exist as a literary subject, one that cannot be embarrassed by poverty, hunger, ill-health. It is this subject that is touted by Knight and other reformers, while the actual conditions of Carter's life remain unchanged.

The Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom

> Education is still regarded by vast numbers as a means of filling churches and Chapels, instead of a glorious instrument of human elevation – vast revenues are still squandered on armies and warriors – and a privileged few still maintain an ascendancy for evil, in court, camp, navy, and senate-house. The Working Classes are still to a vast extent following blind guides, and trusting to leaders and orators, outside their own ranks, to achieve that for them which their own efforts, self-sacrifices, and organization can alone effect. They still, unhappily, undervalue *mental*

> *and moral effort* for raising their class and advancing the welfare of their country . . .
>
> William Lovett
> *Life and Struggles* xxxi-ii

One of the most well-known of the working-class autobiographers of the nineteenth century in England is the Chartist, William Lovett. Lovett was a contemporary of Thomas Carter, but Lovett's London was worlds away from the London Carter seems to have inhabited. Lovett's vision was ever turned outward into the world of relations between classes, relations between labor and capital, and relations between politics and economics. Unlike Carter, Lovett never felt himself to be a passive participant in these relationships; he became instead an indefatigable worker for the causes of the working classes, especially as delineated in the Six Points of the People's Charter. His autobiography, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett In His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, was published in 1876, a year before his death. Although Lovett worked on his narrative from about 1840 until 1875, the text itself is concerned primarily with the 1830s and 1840s, a period of intense political uncertainty in which Lovett himself played a pivotal role.

William Lovett was born in a small fishing village near Penzance on May 8, 1800. His father had been the captain of a small trading ship but had been drowned before his son was born. Lovett was raised by his Methodist mother. Economic survival was a constant struggle, one which contributed to Lovett's dedication to economic justice for the working poor. He was apprenticed to a rope-maker and worked for several years at this trade, until the profession itself slowly disappeared, a victim of the increasing industrialization of manufacturing. Because of a propensity for sea-sickness, Lovett was

unable to take up the regional business of fishing. So, because of the dearth of employment -- and because of his mother's unhappy second marriage -- Lovett decides to try his luck in London. He does find some carpentry work in London, but is almost run out of the profession by co-workers resentful that he had never served an apprenticeship as a carpenter. Lovett calls a shop-meeting to lay his case before his fellow workers and convinces them through the force of his logic and appeal to fair-play to give him a chance. This incident early indicates Lovett's particular talents for organization and argumentation. He works long enough in the trade of cabinet-maker to qualify him for membership in the Cabinet-Makers' Society, "of which body," he writes, "I was soon after elected a member, and subsequently president" (26).

Lovett reverses the emphasis of the narrative of intellectual development that Carter so carefully traces in his early years. Lovett dedicates only a few chapters to his childhood and to his educational efforts as a youth and young man. (He has dispatched his childhood within twenty pages and is married by page thirty-two.) Life for Lovett really begins when he moves to London, for it is there that he discovers politics. His election as president of the Cabinet-Makers' Society is just the first step in Lovett's discovery of collective political and social action. From this point on, he becomes a joiner and an organizer, pursuing the goal of economic and political equity for all of his class. Education becomes for him the tool through which the working classes can best prepare themselves to exercise the rights and responsibilities that belong to them as political beings.

Political being is exactly the claim that Lovett makes for his self-identity. The emergence of this identity was intimately tied up with Lovett's "discovery" of the world

of books and ideas, an event which does not take place until he is in London. Back in his home village, although his mother had sent him to more than one day school, Lovett writes that "my love of play was far greater than that of learning. . ." (3). As a consequence, his tenure at one day school lasted only two days, ending with Lovett "being put in the coal-cellar for bad conduct" (3). He fared no better at a boy's school where he was sent to learn to write and do elementary arithmetic, "thought at that time to be all the education required for poor people" (3). Lovett paints a picture of the school that could have served for a model for Dickens's fictional schools:

> The first master was a severe one, and the second was somewhat worse. Custises on the palm of the hand and very severe canings were punishments for not recollecting our tasks, and on one occasion I saw him hang up a boy by the two thumbs with his toes just touching the ground for playing truant. (3)

Lovett's memory of such injustices was long, and it is from such experiences that he would one day develop his own pedagogy for the poor. Unlike Carter, Lovett did not see himself as having any special intellectual prowess from an early age. For Lovett, his sense of self did not spring from any sense of innate poetic or scholarly genius.

Lack of competent formal instruction was not the only circumstance that handicapped Lovett's juvenile career as scholar. There was also a lack of reading materials. He notes:

> I was also fond of reading from a boy, but found great difficulty in procuring instructive books. There was no bookshop in the town -- scarcely a newspaper taken in, unless among the few gentry -- and there

> was at that period a considerable number of the adult population who could not read. To the best of my recollection there was only one bookseller's shop in the market town, and, with the exception of Bibles and Prayer Books, spelling-books, and a few religious works, the only books in circulation for the masses were a few story-books and romances. . . . Therefore the Bible, and Prayer and hymn-book, and a few religious tracts, together with fragments of an old magazine, and occasionally one of the nonsensical pamphlets described, were all the books I ever read till I was upwards of twenty-one years of age. (17)

Even these "story-books and romances" are too expensive for Lovett to buy. But Lovett mentions this situation not to describe the evolution of his intellect, but the evolution of his later political actions, for Lovett will become a fierce contender in the "Unstamped Agitation" (48), as he calls it: the fight against the Stamp Office and for affordable newspapers and other publications. In 1830 several publishers came out with a substitute newspaper that was eventually called *The Poor Man's Guardian*, designed to circumvent the high tax placed upon publications. The Stamp Office immediately retaliated against both the publishers and the booksellers who carried these unstamped (untaxed) publications. Lovett became part of the Committee of Management that both began distributing these newspapers from their homes and on the streets, and organized a "Victim Fund" for "the support of those who were suffering or likely to suffer for striving to disseminate cheap political information amongst the people" (Lovett 48). Publishers such as William Carpenter and Henry Heatherington were imprisoned several times before the publication was declared legal. Lovett notes the importance of this particular

skirmish for generations of future readers:

> But this triumphant change was by no means so important as the amount of good that otherwise resulted from the contest. For the unstamped publication may be said *to have originated the cheap literature of the present* day – for few publications existed before they commenced – and the beneficial effects of this cheap literature on the minds and morals of our population are beyond all calculations. (51)

But the benefits of the present age, benefits which Lovett has fought so hard to secure for his class, were not then available, and Lovett is quick to point out his regret for missing out on these educational boons – and by implication criticizing the philosophy and ideology which would deny such benefits to the working classes:

> But in looking back upon this period of my youth, and contrasting it with the present, and the advantages that young people have in the present age - -in the multiplicity of cheap books, newspapers, lectures, and other numerous means of instruction -- I cannot help regretting that I was so unfortunately placed; for, with a desire for knowledge, I had neither books to enlighten nor a teacher to instruct. (17)

Further hampering his childhood education is the rampant superstition and lack of reasoning that he sees as rife in the working class, especially in his native Cornwall. He tells of growing up next door to "a house having the reputation of being haunted" (11). The younger Lovett never questioned this fact, "the particulars of which, and the forms it assumed, hav[ing] often been told me by mother, son, and daughter, with whom I was well acquainted" (11). But the elder Lovett, writing as an educated adult about the

childhood belief, comments that "Whether an indigestible supper had anything to do with their fright, I had not the sense then to inquire" (11). It is his lack of education, he implies, that keeps him shackled to superstition; the habit of exercising reason upon the phenomena of the world, which is alien to the poor, he argues, is what is denied them when education is denied:

> I mention these silly things to show that superstition of one kind or another was the curse of my boyhood, and I have reasons for believing that such notions are still firmly believed by thousands of our people. And those rulers, who by a wise system of education can succeed in enlightening the rising generation, so that they may laugh down such absurdities, will render to society a benefit none can estimate as well as those who have been the victims of such superstitious delusions; for notwithstanding the progress of knowledge among our people, by means of the press, the school, and the rail, the belief in ghosts is still widely entertained. (11)

Lovett goes on to relate that on a visit home to Cornwall as an adult, he laughs at a story then circulating about a headless ghost that was wandering the countryside. He is "seriously reprimanded," and told that if he cannot believe in the ghost, then he "could not believe the Bible . . ." (11).

However, Lovett's childhood desire for knowledge does not seem to have been a burning desire. He was "fond" of reading, but his childhood afforded him little educational opportunity: "Owing to the many difficulties I had met with in the way of learning a trade by which to earn my bread, I had hitherto made very little intellectual

progress" (28). But in London he makes the acquaintance of a group of primarily working men who had formed a small literary society which they called "The Liberals." Each member contributed to a weekly subscription with which the group compiled a "select library of books for circulation among one another" (28). Lovett first read chiefly on Christianity, then found his true passion: politics. He read up on "parliamentary debates and questions of the day" (28) in order to be able to participate in the lively political debates that his society enjoyed. It is here for the first time that Lovett begins to see himself and his world differently than before, for this world of words and ideas seemed to awaken his mind "to a new mental existence; new feelings, hopes, and aspirations sprang up within me, and every spare moment was devoted to the acquisition of some kind of useful knowledge" (29). Lovett soon joined other literary societies and the Mechanics' Institute, attended coffee houses that were known for lively debate, and began to collect a library of his own. For him, "useful knowledge" had nothing to do with his trade, nothing to do with learning one's place in the social body. Instead, to gain useful knowledge is to be "encouraged to admire the beauties of nature, to cultivate a taste for the arts and sciences, to seek for rational instruction and amusement" (47). Lovett is just the sort of self-learner that the SDUK wished to circumvent, as his method of self-education led to greater political organization among the working classes.

Indeed, Lovett's route of collective self-education appears to be far more typical of how most working men approached learning than that of Carter's solitary reader. But such collectivity was not merely social for Lovett; in fact, Lovett appears not to have

been by nature very sociable at all.[28] Collectivity and economic cooperation were means of exercising power. And this was a right that Lovett was determined to exercise. Between the time he joined "The Liberals" and his disassociation from Chartism, a period of about twenty-five years, he joined a committee to promote the Friendly Societies Act of 1829, the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge, the Radical Reform Association, the National Union of the Working Classes, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, the London Working Men's Association (which he helped found), the Association of Working Men to Procure a Cheap and Honest Press, the National Chartist Convention, National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People (as founder), the Democratic Friends of All Nations, the People's League, and at Sturge's Complete Suffrage Conference was a delegate. Through his activity of organizing working-class activism he creates for himself a subject position quite different from the one usually imagined for working-class individuals. For Lovett, his sense of self, the "I" that he creates and narrates in his autobiography, is defined through his activism. When he uses the pronoun "I" in his narrative, it is to position himself within an organizational framework: "I joined the Co-operative Trading Association" (44); "I became connected with the 'Unstamped Agitation'" (48); "I became a member of the Council of the Anti-Slavery League" (267). This organizational framework, however, is not one that supports the status quo, but one that insists on the political self-determination of its members. The bulk of the remainder of Lovett's autobiography is filled with reproductions of addresses and resolutions written by Lovett

[28] The Radical Francis Place, with whom Lovett shared a long friendship, "described him as a 'man of

in the service of these organizations. For although Lovett had no talent for oration or the charism of a popular leader, he did possess the organizational skills that got things done, and the success of many radical political organizations was due to their foresight in electing Lovett secretary. It was in that capacity that he served most efficiently. His organizational abilities and unflagging energy kept more than one organization functioning. Lovett was in many ways the workhorse of movements like as the Peoples' Charter and, later, the London Working Men's Association.

Lovett invested his energies and talents primarily in three things: his work for the "Unstamped Agitation," his involvement and dedication to the People's Charter, and his role as schoolteacher for the working class, often under the auspices of the London Working Men's Association and the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People. These three phases of Lovett's political activity correspond to shifts in his political thinking, all of which are present in his autobiography, but which are given unequal weight and emphasis.

The first phase of Lovett's political thought, roughly continuing until 1839-1840, followed a mainstream course of leftist Radicalism. Lovett was able to articulate the political wrongs that the working classes suffered at the low end of an inequitable economic and political system, and he often did so in strong and combative terms. At great personal risk Lovett resisted the system of drawing for the Militia, which required that the person drafted must either serve in the Militia or pay a fee to provide a substitute, arguing before the Deputy Lieutenant of the County that he was exempt for service

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melancholy temperament soured with the perplexities of the world'" (Tawney vii).

> on the grounds of not being represented in Parliament, and of not having any voice or vote in the election of those persons who made those laws that compelled me to take up arms to protect the rights and property of others, while my *own rights*, and the only property I had, *my labour*, were not protected. (54)

Such rhetoric was indicative of, and indeed helped to produce, a fierce spirit of class solidarity among the disenfranchised. At this point in his career, Lovett is stridently opposed to a middle class which either ignores or, worse, exploits the "useful classes" (76), which denies them their "equal political and social rights" (76). Another example of such incendiary rhetoric occurs in a pamphlet Lovett wrote for the Working Men's Association which he entitled "The Rotten House of Commons." The pamphlet asks the reader to consider how the interests of the present members of the House of Commons would be affected by the institution of "a just and economical system of government, a code of wise and just laws, and the abolition of the useless persons and appendages of State" (82). He urges readers to consider then how the interests of the members are *not* identified with the readers' interests, and in fact, those who legislate actually use their power "to grind and oppress" the readers. Lovett criticizes the landowner, the aristocracy, and the military representative in the House, but he saves more than enough invective for the middle-class representatives:

> Have we fit representatives in the multitude of *Barristers, Attorneys,* and *Solicitors*, most of them seeking places, and all of them having interests depending on the dissentions and corruptions of the people? -- persons whose prosperity depends on the obscurity and

intricacy of the laws, and who seek to perpetuate the interests of "*their order*" by rendering them so abstruse and voluminous that none but *law conjurers* like themselves shall understand them. . .

Is the *Manufacturer* and *Capitalist*, whose exclusive monopoly of the combined powers of wood, iron, and steam enables them to cause the destitution of thousands, and who have an interest in forcing labour down to the *minimum* reward, fit to represent the interests of working men?

Is the *Master*, whose interest it is to purchase labour at the cheapest rate, a fit representative for the *Workman*, whose interest it is to get the most he can for his labour? (83)

This is forceful rhetoric from the pen of the man that would be derided, in just a few years time, by fellow Chartists as a "moral force humbug" (Lovett x), because of his opposition to the use of physical force to achieve the Charter.

The second phase of Lovett's political action and political thought embraces Lovett's association with the movement for the Peoples' Charter, which Lovett helped to draft.[29] Lovett is most widely known for his activity as a proponent of and active participant in the struggle for the Charter, although in his autobiography he downplays this period of his life that became decisive in the history of the labor movement. Lovett's sense of his political self required him to dissociate himself from the violent and irrational image that became the legacy of the Chartists after their 1848 defeat. Traditional academic wisdom would have it that the Chartist movement had two spiritual

[29] The Six Points of the Charter were: Equal Electoral Districts; Abolition Of The Property Qualifications

leaders who represented polarized positions within the organization: William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor (Wiener 54-56). Traditionally Lovett has been thought to represent the "moral force" Chartists and O'Connor the "physical force" Chartists. Recent scholarship is beginning to question the oversimplification of this characterization,[30] but Lovett does use the competition and controversy between himself and the more charismatic O'Connor to define his own self-image in contrast to that of his nemesis. Lovett defines himself in relation to O'Connor: he is not what O'Connor is and he is what O'Connor is not.

As leaders, Lovett and O'Connor could not have been more different. While Lovett was solidly of the artisan class, O'Connor had genteel ties in his background. O'Connor was a gifted and inspiring speaker (or mob-orator, according to Lovett and his partisans), while Lovett did his best work in print. O'Connor represented the workers and operatives of the industrial north, a world with which Lovett, who represented artisan-dominated London, was totally unfamiliar. O'Connor did often use the rhetoric of physical force, promising his listeners that they would take what they wanted if it was not granted them. Lovett, on the other hand, appears to have been moving to a more circumspect position. It is at this point that Lovett begins to intersect with the middle-class reformers, appropriating their terminology and advocating some of their methods, most specifically, the method of education as a means toward political equality.

Lovett dramatizes several of the confrontations he and O'Connor had in meetings

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For MP's; Universal Manhood Suffrage; Annual Parliaments; Vote By Ballot; The Payment Of MP's.

[30] In his biography of Lovett, Joel Wiener argues that Lovett was a much more complex and contradictory character "than some of his admirers were prepared to admit" (35). It will be my contention that Lovett's autobiography is itself Lovett's attempt to rewrite some of these contradictions.

and in print, always taking the line that he, Lovett, remained true to rational means of advancement for the working classes while O'Connor was a wild-eyed revolutionary interested only in the exercise of his own power. This latter criticism has been convincingly echoed in other contemporary reports as well as in the estimation of some historians of the Chartist movement. The main source of disagreement between the two men was temperamental: Lovett could under no circumstances tolerate O'Connor. He writes in a letter to members of the National Charter Association, rejecting their request that he be nominated as secretary for O'Connor's Land Scheme Association:

> . . . I regard Fergus O'Connor as the chief marplot of our movement in favor of the Charter; a man who, by his personal conduct, joined to his malignant influence in the *Northern Star*, has been the blight of democracy from the first moment he opened his mouth as its *professed advocate*. Previous to his notorious career there was something pure and intellectual in our agitation. There was a reciprocity of generous sentiment, a tolerant spirit of investigation, an ardent aspiration for all that can improve and dignify humanity, which awakened the hopes of all good men, and which even our enemies respected. He came among us to blight those feelings, to wither those hopes. (245)

Lovett claims that O'Connor had "beg[u]n his career by ridiculing our '*moral force humbuggery*,'" a characterization that stung a man as sincere in his beliefs as was Lovett, who in this same letter defends "moral force" as "our efforts to create and extend an enlightened and moral public opinion in favor of Chartist principles" (245). O'Connor perverts this effort by using "trickery and deceit." His newspaper, the *Northern Star*,

became "an instrument for destroying everything intellectual and moral in our movement" (245).[31] Lovett continues:

> By his constant appeals to the selfishness, vanity, and mere animal propensities of man, he succeeded in calling up a spirit of hate, intolerance, and brute feeling, previously unknown among Reformers, and which, had it been as powerful as it was vindictive, would have destroyed every vestige and hope of liberty. . . . I refer to that brutal spirit which denied the free utterance of thought, and which, had it possessed power, would consequently have silenced every opposing tongue. . . . Did any man, or body of men, venture to assert that they had equal rights with others, to proclaim their views, or to agitate for their principles, their motives were at once impugned by this great "I am" of Chartism . . . (245-46)

According to Lovett's evaluation, O'Connor's sin was two-fold. First, he eschewed reason as a way to enlightenment in both the moral and the intellectual spheres. Second, Lovett viewed O'Connor's brand of political equality to be just as unequal and oppressive as Toryism was to those who opposed it. Politics is a thinking man's game, Lovett's philosophy argues, not to be played at by an emotional mob. It is for this reason that education is so important. Working-men needed to be prepared to take on the responsibilities of self-governing. O'Connor's game, however, depended on a duped and ignorant constituency; the only factor that would change with the success of O'Connor's

[31] O'Connor and his newspaper, the *Northern Star*, will appear again, in barely disguised fictional form, as

Chartism is the identity of the leadership. Chartist leaders would sit in the house instead of Tories and Whigs, but Lovett seems to fear that the people whose interests were being represented would remain in the same ignorant and oppressed state. The passing of the Charter was not enough; the working classes had to prepare themselves to wield the power that the Charter would finally give them.

Any scheme or organization that included O'Connor was anathema to Lovett. One example will suffice. The Complete Suffrage Conference of 1842 was a meeting of both middle-class reformers and working men, mostly Chartists. Despite the disappointment of many working-class radicals in what they considered middle-class desertion of the cause of universal suffrage after the Reform Bill of 1832, which granted the franchise to most middle-class males, Lovett and others, including O'Connor, seemed ready to forge an alliance once again. However, the Chartist representatives were determined to stand firm on the Six Points of the Charter; here there would be no room for negotiation. The middle-class delegates to the Conference, however, began to push for compromise and proposed to replace the People's Charter with a "New Bill of Rights" (235).[32] According to Thomas Cooper, who was also present, Lovett's rejection of this substitution is moving and eloquent, and O'Connor warmly endorses Lovett's speech. Lovett, however, rejects alliance with O'Connor, as well as alliance with the middle classes, thereby effectively ending his leadership role in the Chartist movement. Lovett's evaluation of the events at the Universal Suffrage Conference are different, however. He

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Alton Locke's nemesis and the leader of the physical force Chartist's in Charles Kingsley's novel of 1848.

[32] Wiener claims that the middle-classes could not accept the Charter, because it was to them a symbol of, to quote Joseph Sturge, "'improper and violent conduct,' possibly a threat of revolution" (Wiener 90).

claims that the split between the middle classes and the working men were caused "not so much . . . by the adverse vote [on the Bill of Rights], as from the strong resolve of the minority [the middle-class representatives] to have no fellowship with Fergus O'Connor" (237).

This conference is really the last time that Lovett plays an effective role in Chartist leadership and it signals a shift into what might be considered the third phase of his political thought and action: Lovett becomes an educationalist. Lovett had always been interested in education for the working classes. Most of the organizations that he had worked for had always included an educational platform, thus joining the fray over the definition of useful knowledge for the working classes. In a petition to Parliament in 1829, Lovett argued for the opening of the British Museum on Sundays for the enjoyment of those who had to toil the remaining six days. He argues that providing places of culture for the working classes to go on Sunday would keep them out of the pubs, "those haunts of vice and dissipation" (47). They go there not so much from a "love of drink" as from "a desire of participating in agreeable pastimes." Once there, however, "they imperceptibly contract bad habits, and from merely sipping in the first instance the intoxicating poison, they ultimately become actively vicious, and often . . . fall a prey to pauperism and crime" (47). The solution is to provide an alternative -- and secular -- form of recreation for Sundays, one that will develop the moral faculties. That would be really useful.

> [I]f useful knowledge was extensively disseminated among the industrious classes, if they were encouraged to admire the beauties of nature, to cultivate a taste for the arts and sciences, to seek for rational instruction

> and amusement, it would soon be found that their vicious habits would yield to more rational pursuits; man would become the friend and lover of his species, his mind would be strengthened and fortified against the allurements of vice; he would become a better citizen in this world, and be better qualified to enjoy happiness in any future state of existence. (47)

There must have been members in Parliament that wondered what "future state of existence" the working classes expected to enjoy that would be enhanced by visits to the British Museum, and they must have wondered why these people weren't going to Church for fortification against vice. But Church-supported schools were not acceptable to Lovett, because they did not provide the kind of knowledge that would be "useful" to the working man or woman. In the introduction to his autobiography, written in this case by the author himself, Lovett claims that even in the enlightened and progressive age in which he writes, 1874, "Education is still regarded by vast numbers as a means of filling Churches and Chapels, instead of a glorious instrument of human elevation" (xxxi). This, then, is Lovett's conception of what education can do for him. But when Lovett speaks of human elevation he has a specific type of elevation in mind: political.

It is also typical of Lovett that he does not think in terms of education, or political power, for himself only, but for his class as a whole. Thus Lovett agrees with the projects of organizations like the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, but he is deeply suspicious of any organization that claims to be *for* the benefit of the working classes that is not under the authority *of* the working classes. It is to provide just such a *working-class* organization that Lovett helps to found the London Working Mens' Association (LWMA), whose stated purpose from the beginning is "to promote, by all

available means, the education of the rising generation, and the extirpation of those symptoms which tend to future slavery" (111). Lovett saw education as having a definite purpose, as being a tool that could be used to further the interests of the educators. Those interests did not always coincide with the interests of those being educated. Lovett comments on the state of working-class education at the birth of the LWMA:

> [W]hile a large portion of the hawks and owls of society were seeking to perpetuate that state of mental darkness most favourable to the securing of their prey, another portion, with more cunning, were for admitting a sufficient amount of mental glimmer to cause the multitude to walk quietly and contentedly in the paths they in their wisdom had prescribed for them. A few, indeed, had talked of education as a means of light, life, liberty, and enjoyment for the whole human family, but these were, of course, *the Utopians of the world*; men who failed to perceive that God had made one portion of mankind to rule and enjoy and the other to toil for them, and reverentially obey them. (111)

Lovett's bitterness toward those who would educate is obvious. His solution is for the working classes to have working-class educators, and so after his final break with Chartism, Lovett opens classes for working-class children, and is involved in teaching the children of his own class throughout the rest of his life. He leaves direct political action behind, preferring instead to prepare his class to exercise the political rights that he always believed they deserved.

Historians have pointed out how Lovett became a disciple of the political economy of William Ellis and a "proponent of middle-class respectability and propriety"

(Wiener 134). Where once he had been a proponent for the education and suffrage for women, in a later work, *Social and Political Morality*, Lovett claims that the exploitation of women, specifically prostitution, was mostly caused because, Wiener points out, "they were unfaithful to a proper code of morality, as in their refusal to take the elementary precaution of working in separate areas from men" (133). In the same work, Lovett claims that while "many lives have been ruined by economic exploitation and rapaciousness . . . the only truly inferior people . . . are 'those whose own vices have degraded them'" (Wiener 130).

This is not, however, the Lovett that is presented in the narrative of *The Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*. This Lovett acknowledges no middle-class masters -- although to give credit where due, Lovett would have been likely to characterize his adherence to Ellis and his tenets as simply the reasonable and rational position to take for the improvement of the working class. The Lovett of the text is uncompromising in his demand for political equality; he never wavers for a moment from his principles. And this is to a great extent an image shared by his contemporaries and by historians. What Lovett the autobiographer fails to see is how his principles not only changed, but were complexly ambiguous to begin with. He attempts to create not only a politicized being but a politicized position which could be inhabited by any one from his own class. This position, he felt, was to be completely independent of the interests of the middle classes, and was in fact to be equal in influence and power. Lovett, to the extent that he succeeds in this project, does so by appropriating the methods and vocabulary of the middle-class educationalists. At the same time, he is forced, by dint of the vocabulary he uses, i.e. self-improvement, self-responsibility, to – perhaps unconsciously -- internalize many of

the values of the middle class which rejected any hint that the political and economic system itself was responsible for the political and economic condition of the working classes.

But the text of Lovett's autobiography presents not so much a personal life as a political philosophy, one which Lovett wants to unify. Most of the text is made up of addresses, letters, resolves, petitions, and pamphlets that Lovett had written over his long career. Before Lovett ever intended to put his life on paper, his life was, indeed, being constructed on paper. Lovett claims that he is, in the tradition of the rationalist political philosophies of the eighteenth-century, a rational, and therefore political, being. This claim is substantiated by reference to his many written works of rational political thought. His own texts legitimize his claim of identity. No editor provides an introduction to Lovett's life and works; he writes his own. His narrative becomes a tool of self-legitimization. Within his text, if not always in his life, Lovett creates a self that is supported by the work and evidence of his own mind, and not by the approval of his classed society. That the textual Lovett does not see the contradictions inherent in his position is not surprising; nor does it negate the success of Lovett's textual self's appropriation of education as a means of asserting its political existence.

"The Milton of the Chartists"

While Thomas Carter's autobiographical autodidact creates a subject position which collaborates, as it were, with the middle class by internalizing its values, the subject position William Lovett's autobiographical self-learner creates directly challenges that same middle class by appropriating its political language in order to

appropriate political power. The case of Thomas Cooper is more complex. Cooper's narrative seems much more aware that the autodidact hero of the text is a literary subject, composed of the conventional use of literary genres and of the artistic arrangement and juxtaposition of the "events" of Cooper's life. Or, perhaps, as a professional poet and fiction writer, Cooper is just more adept at handling his material in the particular medium of the narrative form. The literariness of Cooper's subject is further highlighted, in retrospect, by the fact that it is his life that forms the basis for Charles Kingsley's Chartist hero of the fictional autobiography, *Alton Locke*, which will be the subject of the next chapter. It is, in fact, the fiction that comes first, as Kingsley's novel was published in 1850, while Cooper's autobiography did not appear until some 22 years later (1872). But Cooper's text is also more complex because it highlights the ambiguities and contradictions that are inherent in the projects of both the autobiographer and the autodidact. Cooper's literary subject does demonstrate the appropriation of and internalization of some middle-class values, especially concerning the marketing of his literary output; at the same time, this subject also acts as a radical hero of the people, battling against oppression and inequity. As with the two other autodidacts, Cooper makes certain claims about who he is and what is his place in society; also like the other autodidacts, Cooper's claim will at the same time both participate in and resist hegemonic cultural forces, positing a complex and ambiguous subject position.

The third and final autobiographer that we will be looking at is a Chartist of a completely different ilk. Thomas Cooper was a contemporary and acquaintance of Lovett, and for a time a very active member of the Chartist movement. Cooper is also the

only one of the autobiographers we are examining who was a professional writer; although Carter did make some money from his writing, his never gave up his occupation of tailoring. Cooper, on the other hand, became a journalist, poet, and fiction writer. His adeptness with the pen makes his autobiography, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, extremely readable as he strikes a balance in his narrative between his personal, intellectual, and public lives.

Cooper was born in Leicester on March 20, 1805. His mother was widowed by the time Cooper was four years old. She took up her late husband's profession of dyeing, and endeavored to provide for her only son to the best of her ability. She was a strict Methodist, but seems to have indulged her son as much as she could. His elementary education was actually more thorough than most of the boys of his class, due in part to his mother's reluctance to remove him from school and apprentice him to some trade. He remained in one school or another until he was almost sixteen years old. Cooper does seem to have been a talented scholar, being interested primarily in languages and poetry.

In his autobiography, Cooper divides his life into three distinct yet overlapping spheres: learning and art, politics, and religion. He lays out these concerns in three sequential paragraphs early in his text. He mentions poetry first, and the origin for his artistic sensibility:

> . . . I do not remember that poetry really touched any chord in my nature, until, in my thirteenth year, by some accident there fell into my hands one of the cantos of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and the drama of "Manfred." I had them in my hands for only a few hours, and I knew nothing of their noble author's life or reputation; but they seemed to create almost a new

sense within me. I wanted more poetry to read from that time; but could get hold of none that thrilled through my nature like Byron's. (35)

Cooper will, in fact, follow the examples of Byron's poetic heroes, and consciously craft a life through art. Byron writes in *Childe Harold*:

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
> A being more intense, that we endow
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
> The life we image, even as I do now.
> What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
> Soul of my thought! With whom I traverse the earth
> . . . (3.6.46-50a)

The new sense that Byron's poetry creates in Cooper is the possibility of a new kind of self that can be fashioned by the artist.

In the next paragraph, Cooper marvels that at the same time that a passion for poetry was being inflamed in his breast, an equally bright fire began to burn for politics:

> . . . I was becoming thoroughly impregnated with the spirit of Radicalism. There was a shop of brushmakers very near to us, and they were most determined politicians. . . . [T]hey used to lend me . . . "The News," weekly, and talk to me of the "villanous (sic) rascals," Lord Castlereagh, and Lord Sidmouth, and Lord Eldon, and the Prince Regent, until I hated the Liverpool Ministry, and its master, bitterly, and believed the sufferings of the poor were chiefly attributable to them. (36)

But what Cooper sees as the most "signal" (36) change in his young life is his religious conversion at age fourteen to the Ranters, a Primitive Methodist sect. The event is signal in that it is the first of many religious conversions that Cooper would experience. In fact, Cooper will lose his faith altogether, until he experiences a final conversion back to faith

on stage while giving a lecture to a group of working men, after which he will dedicate his life to preaching. But although he sincerely follows his calling to preach, his autobiography pays much more attention to Cooper the poet and author of "The Purgatory of Suicides." Cooper's narrative becomes a Bildungsroman of the poet, the genius of letters and literature. It is the foundation of this identity that Cooper's autobiography attempts to construct. The claim that Cooper makes to his audience is, I am a Poet.

Cooper's tenure as a working artisan was actually rather short in comparison with his other careers. He worked for several shoemakers while he was a very young man, although he was never apprenticed to them, and for four years he did piece work from his mother's home for very low wages. But even then, he claims in his autobiography, the time he spent making shoes in a corner of his mother's house was time spent in preparation. He was serving his true apprenticeship to his true craft:

> [H]ow resolute I was on becoming solitary, and also on becoming a scholar! What though I could not get to Cambridge, like Kirke White, could I not study as hard as he studied, and learn as fast? Friends and acquaintances had left the little old town, one after another; but I would not leave it. I would learn enough in that corner to enable myself to enter on mature life with success . . . (53)

Although Cooper claims that he accepts the fact that he "could not get to Cambridge," he invokes the spirit of Kirke White, a working-class poet who was sent to Cambridge by his patrons in order to take holy orders. Robert Southey wrote the popular biography of the poet's short life, which was published with White's verse "The Remains of Kirke White."

By doing so, Cooper points out that some working-class scholars *do* make it to University, that it is not altogether unheard of. At the same time, he claims that he will study just as hard and learn just as much as one who has entered professional academia, and therefore he will be just as learned -- he will be just as good.

As a matter of fact, there were many working-class models that Cooper could call upon to legitimate his desire to be a scholar. Part of the improving literature available for the working classes often included success stories of unusual and extraordinary people who overcame tremendous odds -- like having to work for a living -- to succeed in some respectable endeavor. This strategy would be very popular in the publications of the SDUK, the Mechanics' Institutes, and in Samuel Smiles' *Lives of the Engineers* and *Self-Help*. The young Cooper was a fertile field for such sowing. He remembers:

> One of the greatest incentives I had to solid study was the reading, in Drew's "Imperial Magazine," an account of the life of Dr. Samuel Lee, Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, and a scholar, it was said, in more than a dozen languages. He had been apprenticed to a carpenter at eleven years old, had bought Ruddiman's Latin Rudiments on an old bookstall for a trifle, and learnt the whole book by heart; and had stepped on, from Corderius's Colloquies to Caesar, and from Caesar to Virgil, and so on; and had learnt to read Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac, all from self-tuition, by the time he was five or six and twenty. Yet he was ignorant of English Grammar and Arithmetic. (55)

Cooper then decides that what Dr. Lee could do, he can do. But Cooper is also convinced that what Dr. Lee could do, he can do better -- a personality trait that Cooper will

continue to exhibit throughout his entire life:

> I said in my heart, if one man can teach himself a language, another can. But there seemed such a wealth of means of learning now around me, that I felt as if I must attempt to accomplish a broader triumph of self-education than Lee accomplished. I must try if I could not combine the study of languages with that of mathematics; complete a full course of reading in ancient and modern history, and get an accurate and ample acquaintance with the literature of the day. . . . (55)

To give him his due, Cooper indeed commits himself fully to this course. Before he reaches the age of twenty-three he has a complete mental and physical breakdown, which brings an end to his ambitious plans. But the desire to be, if not University educated, then at least as good as University educated, never leaves Cooper. Even in old age he writes:

> "Oh that I had been trained to music -- or painting -- or law -- or medicine -- or any profession in which mind is needed; or that I had been regularly educated, so that I might have reached a University!" -- I say, I often catch myself at these wishes still, even at sixty-six. . . . (17)

But while Cooper may have lacked a University education, he never lacked the confidence in himself that he was *capable* of great things, no matter at what he might try his hand.

Cooper's confidence indeed becomes overconfidence with alarming, and amusing, regularity. It is alarming because Cooper is always convinced that his way is best, amusing because Cooper never sees this as a flaw and is always surprised and hurt when

people will not fall in line. After his breakdown, he feels unable to continue at shoemaking, so he starts a school for poor children. This school becomes one of his many "perfect passion[s]" (73), and he characteristically plays the schoolmaster to the extreme. He often spends, Cooper claims, sixteen hours in the classroom, arriving at five in the morning and not leaving until nine o'clock. He spends money to cover the walls with pictures and the classroom with plaster busts and figures. His scholars do fine until he decides that they all need to learn Latin. However, he finds that the working-class parents of his pupils have no desire for their sons to learn Latin. Cooper mocks the "stupid listlessness" and "stolid ignorance" of the parents, imagining them saying "'I want our Jack to larn to write a good hand. What's the use of his larning Latin? It will nivver be no use to him'" (76). He is amazed at this response: "Such were the kind of thanks I had from the poor, when I tried to benefit their children, without any cost to themselves!" (76). Cooper's indignation leads him to lose his passion for teaching, and he soon gives up his school. Cooper next becomes a Methodist circuit minister, but a dispute with his superintendent drives him out of both the ministry and the Methodist community. He and his wife move to Lincoln, where he becomes active in the Mechanics' Institute, teaching classes in Latin and French. He is also asked by a group of young men who wanted to start a Choral Society if they can use his schoolroom for rehearsal. This proves to be a mistake on the part of these men, for the Choral Society becomes a grand passion for Cooper, and he soon commandeers its organization:

> I planned, I visited, I wooed, I entreated, till I obtained the aid and co-operation of the best musicians and the best singers in the ancient city. Like every true reformer, I had to put down the authority of the imperfect,

> and put the authoritative perfect in its place. Over the company of raw amateurs -- despite some grumbling -- I succeeded in placing the most perfect "singer at sight," and most thoroughly experienced person in the music of Handel, to be found in the whole city, as conductor; the best violinist in the city, as leader; [and] the best alto and tenor singers in the city, as leaders of their parts in the choruses, and as principal solo singers . . . (108)

Cooper never seems to realize the irony of his response to that grumbling of the "raw amateurs." The perfect must always have authority over the imperfect.

It is at this point that Cooper begins in earnest the profession which would engage his attention for a considerable portion of his life and would induct him into the ranks of professional writer. He begins writing for the newspapers. Cooper views his performance in his new role with typical confidence and aplomb. He notes without irony: "Of course, I ceased to be a schoolmaster; and began now to be regarded by some with strong dislike, and by others with no little fear and dread, as the powerful correspondent of the *Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury*!" (112). It is as a reporter that Cooper is introduced to the Chartist movement which will become the object of his political passion, and yet another medium through which he will shape his self-identity.

Cooper writes that he was sent to cover a Chartist meeting in Leicester for his newspaper. The argument of the orator was not alien or unfamiliar to Cooper. Most of the Six Points he had cherished and supported since he was a boy (with the exception of the ballot -- he cannot, he asserts without explaining why, support that). Leaving the meeting, however, he "was surprised to see the long upper windows of the meaner houses

fully lighted, and to hear the loud creak of the stocking-frame" (137). Asking one of the locals if this was usual -- and learning that people worked when they could, the stocking-trade being poor -- he is told that the average pay is four and sixpence. He calculates

> " . . . that's seven-and twenty shillings week. The wages are not so bad when you are in work."
>
> "What are you talking about?" said they. "You mean four and sixpence a day; but we mean four and sixpence a week."
>
> "Four and sixpence a week!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean that men have to work in those stocking frames that I hear, going now, a whole week for four and sixpence. How can they maintain their wives and children?"
>
> "Ay, you may well ask that," said one of them, sadly. (139)

Cooper then decides that although lately he had "mingled a good deal with the well-to-do circles of society, and shared in their enjoyments" (143), now it was time for him to show his solidarity with the class with whom he had spent his childhood, the class that now needed a spokesman. It was not long before he is "resolved to become the champion of the poor" (146).

It is curious to note here how Cooper deftly manages to distance himself from his own class, his connection to them evolving from one of membership to one of patronage. He will become their champion: such a claim asserts that he can do for them what they cannot do for themselves. (The perfect must exercise authority over the imperfect?) Although he has come from the people, there has been something to elevate him above them. What is that something if not his learning, both intellectual and moral? In addition

to his journalistic skills, which he diligently puts to use for the cause, he begins teaching classes to the Chartists. His addresses to the Sunday night meetings in Leicester always "mingled religious teaching with politics" (162). But Cooper's passion for literature is not to be neglected, either. His group of Leicester Chartists dub themselves "The Shaksperean Association of Leicester Chartists,"[33] and Cooper

> lectured on Milton, and repeated portions of the "Paradise Lost," or on Shakespeare, and repeated portions of "Hamlet," or on Burns, and repeated "Tam o' Shanter"; or . . . recited the history of England, and set the portraits of great Englishmen before young Chartists, who listened with intense interest; or . . . took up Geology, or even Phrenology, and made the young men acquainted, elementally, with the knowledge of the time. (169)

Cooper's enthusiasms -- politics, literature, and religion -- are joyfully combined in his self-proclaimed role of champion of the people. If previously the "hero" of this autobiographical narrative had been defined as the poor genius struggling against unfair odds, now he is recast as a Moses leading his people out of the ignorance of their Egypt. Cooper easily maintains the narrative position of hero of his own story.

Cooper's dedication to the Chartist cause, for as long as his passion lasted, was without a doubt sincere, and his narrative provides an interesting "behind-the-scenes"

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[33] Cooper had, not surprisingly, caused a schism in the organizational structure of the Leicester Chartists. He describes the split:

> John Markhan, a shoemaker, who had been a Methodist local preacher, was considered their "leader" by the Chartists, when I entered Leicester. We continued friendly for some time. But himself and a few others began to show signs of coldness in the course of the autumn, and went back to the little room at All Saints' Open, and constituted themselves a separate Chartist

look at leaders of the movement, including Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett. His dramatization of the Sturges' Conference and the eloquence of Lovett's defense of the Charter against middle-class compromise is both stirring and moving, adding a depth of feeling that Lovett's autobiography either ignores or does not recognize. His depictions of O'Connor also provide a kind of corrective to Lovett's portrait of the "physical force" leader. While Cooper ultimately disapproves of O'Connor's leadership, he does provide pictures of the fire in O'Connor that made him so popular with so many workers. Yet he does not gloss over O'Connor's more questionable behavior, providing a complex picture of a complex movement and the men who led it.

After Cooper spends two years in prison (1843-45) for sedition, his activity for Chartism is curtailed, but his prison time is important because, after agitating for better conditions and more nutritious food, there are no passions or causes to distract Cooper. Therefore, he turns again to a literary project that he had long had in mind: the composition of a poem which he entitled "The Purgatory of Suicides." He had conceived this work either as "a drama, or an epic, wherein the spirits of suicidal kings, and other remarkable personages, should be interlocutors on some high theme . . ." (115). He finally decides on Spenserean stanza for the poem that would be his "great business in the gaol" (250). When he emerges from prison in May of 1845, Cooper has a new passion: the publication of his poem. He is as indefatigable in this passion as he had been in either learning Latin and Greek or teaching Shakespeare to Chartists.

Cooper's narrative follows his tortuous search for a publisher while at the same

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Association. (163)

time sketching an interesting mini-portrait of the London publishing world of 1845. It is also a tour-de-force of namedropping. Disraeli actually helps Cooper find someone willing to publish his poem; Cooper sits in the same publisher's room that Wordsworth and Tennyson "had passed an hour together in . . . lately" (266); Dickens allegedly read the manuscript for "Purgatory" and asked to take it home with him. The poem does appear in print in August of 1845, and from that point on Cooper considers himself a literary man. Cooper positions himself -- narratively and actually -- among other working-class writers, both hack and literati. He spends time with his childhood friend and neighbor, Thomas Miller, a prolific writer of penny dreadfuls and other fiction for the working classes, and with Willie Thom, a poet of the people popular in middle-class literary society. But Cooper does not consider himself a poet of the people, nor does he consider his poetry to be "working-class" poetry. His poetry is art, in the tradition of English poetry from Spenser and Shakespeare, through Milton to Byron. And in fact, his poem was much admired, if not read, for its erudition; a reviewer in the *Northern Star* refers to Cooper as "the Milton of Chartism" (qtd. in Murphy 147). Although Cooper completely renounces Chartism because of the "Monstrous" National Charter of 1848 (Cooper 311), the reviewer's image is one that is not repugnant to Cooper.

And it is the literary image that others will associate with him as well, although from 1856 on Cooper will spend his life as an itinerant Baptist minister. The image of the working-class poet, the native genius, had captured the imagination of the middle-class intelligentsia and reformers alike. Here was a type that supported their reforms of working-class education, who proved that education could raise men from brutality to sublimity, from ignorance to intimate apprehension of the beautiful, from moral depravity

to moral ennoblement. Yet, this type was also a danger if he turned his artistic powers to the benefit of revolutionary political movement like Chartism. But, there were some of this type, among whom Cooper is included, who came to reject Chartism. Cooper's own narrative seems to suggest that he rejects Chartism because it is replaced as an object of his passion by his poetry. This is an argument palatable to reformers and educationalists, like those in the SDUK, who would like to substitute an interest in literature or science for an interest in revolutionary politics. This group had often argued that education and an appreciation for culture naturally led the individual away from vice and violence. Cooper set just such an example:

> I had on several occasions seen it right to speak strongly against the old Chartist error of physical force. For the more I reflected on the past, the more clearly I saw that the popular desire for freedom had failed through those errors. (297)

This attitude, and the trajectory of Cooper's career from politics to literature to religion, was exactly what many reformers hoped would result from an increase in the educational resources for the working classes. It is not long before Cooper himself is turned into a very real model to be held up for emulation decades before he himself publishes his biography, through the literary invention of Charles Kingsley, novelist, reformer, and clergyman.

Cooper and Kingsley had met after the publication of "Suicides," and Kingsley mined Cooper's life as a general foundation for the character of Alton Locke in his novel of that name. Kingsley, or "[m]y good friend, Charles Kingsley," as Cooper calls him (342), also becomes a kind of spiritual adviser for Cooper's journey back to orthodox

Christianity around 1856. But here life seems to be imitating art -- Cooper's life story begins to follow the plot of Kingsley's novel which had been published six years earlier (1850). Kingsley's fictional autodidact is also led away from Chartism through literature back to Christianity.

We will be looking at Kingsley's work closely in the next chapter, but for now what is interesting to note is the way that the self-identity of the autodidact becomes interwoven with the literary identity created in the novel of the reformer, and how Cooper's autobiography becomes a re-writing of *Alton Locke*, with a happy ending. In *Alton Locke*, Kingsley both transports and kills off his hero; there seems to be no way for the novel to reintegrate such a creature as Locke back into society.[34] Cooper, however, has no problem positioning himself as the triumphant hero of this story. He makes his mark in everything he tries: he is a phenomenal self-taught scholar; he is a true champion of the people; he is the "Milton of the Chartists" and a poet to be ranked with England's greats; he is the instructor of his class; and finally he is an instrument and apostle of the Lord. Cooper lives a long life, surviving the publication of his autobiography by almost twenty years. He claims in the final pages of his narrative: "My work is, indeed, a happy work" (398). He is satisfied with his calling, with his home life, and with the work of his youth. Although he may still have yearned for the formal education that had been out of his reach, in evaluating his life he constructs a narrative of success, judging by the very same standards by which the middle-class reformers would measure their own lives.

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[34] I will argue in the next chapter that Kingsley is actually forced, narratively speaking, to kill his hero. The novelist writes himself into an ideological corner from which he cannot extract himself with integrity. He creates situations whose resolutions would call for a more stringent critique of even reformist ideology, so Locke is killed off in order to avoid the consequences of such a critique.

Cooper appropriates their terms, appropriates their values, and makes himself the protagonist in a story which, normally, they would be writing. But Cooper, with that self-assurance that had been the bane of the Choral Society, takes over the narrative of self-improvement, turning it into an epic of heroism, sacrifice, and victory.

So with Cooper we see the closest point of discursive contact between the autodidact autobiographers and the middle-class novelists. These two groups, I have argued, shared a common goal: to create subject positions inhabitable by the working-class autodidact. The autobiographers have made individual claims for what this position might be. Carter claims respectability; Lovett claims political existence; Cooper claims the place of a poet. Each author, however, in making a claim at all, no matter what that claim may be and how compromised it is by middle-class values, is assuming the authority to position himself as a subject, both in the sense of an interior subjectivity and as an individual subject to the exterior forces of society. This claim is indeed revolutionary, and threatening to even the most sympathetic of reformers, and the three autobiographies examined here are only a sample of what was being written by working-class authors. These autodidacts were creating literary subject positions which would provide models for others to follow; novelists also could create literary subject positions which could be used as normative models, correcting the misguided and uninformed viewpoints of the autodidact autobiographers. These subject positions were designed to keep the autodidact safe from society and society safe from the autodidact.[35] In other

[35] Brantlinger notes: "In the so-called industrial novels . . . workers are shown to have considerable literacy and knowledge, only it is the wrong sort of knowledge. Just how the workers have gained their miseducations and how to provide them with correct knowledge are the major preoccupations of middle-class discourse between the two Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867" (95).

words, novelists could create characters that would warn of the dangers of the wrong kind of knowledge and demonstrate the benefits of the right kind of knowledge. That they might do so by masking the fictionality of their work and appropriating the form of working-class autobiography demonstrates how the discourse of self-education continued and propagated itself through this sharing and appropriation of vocabulary and cultural forms by both groups, the autodidact and the reformers.

Chapter 4: The Fiction of Autobiography

I argued in the introduction that while working-class writers appropriated the bourgeois narrative form of the autobiography, middle-class reformers and novelists subsequently re-appropriated the form of working-class autobiography into their fiction in an effort to re-define what a legitimate subject position was for a self-educated, working-class individual. These middle-class writers wrote as if they were working-class autodidacts, masking the fact that the voices that spoke were actually from the dominant class, whose interests were vastly different from the class that they pretended to represent. The strategy here is obvious. The working-class autobiographers were models for other members of their class, models who were trusted because they were indigenous, so to speak. A middle-class reformer or publisher could wait in vain for an autobiographer like Thomas Carter who reinforced middle-class values and virtues for his working-class fellows; or, such an autobiographer could be invented, avoiding thereby the messiness inherent in narratives written by real working-class authors. Even Carter's work has an implicit, albeit gentle, critique of middle-class society. But a fictional autobiographer would speak only what the middle-class reformer, novelist, or publisher wished.

The masquerade could be effected in several ways. The middle-class author could simply claim that his narrative was an autobiography written by a working man. Charles Kingsley uses this strategy in his periodical, *Politics for the People.* By the time he comes to write the novel *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography*, he somewhat modifies the deception. The novel's title claims that it is an autobiography,

but the author is clearly Kingsley. This second strategy entails the adoption of a working-class narrator who only purports to be relating his own life story. George Eliot used a third strategy by simply providing a working-class protagonist for her novel *Felix Holt, Radical.* In this novel, she does not pretend that Felix Holt is writing his own life. However, she does later write a piece for *Blackwood's* that is signed by Felix Holt and urges that Felix's fellow working men use caution as the Second Reform Bill extends the franchise. This character who exists nowhere but in the pages of Eliot's novel addresses the actual recipients of franchise reform, and his opinions here, as in the novel, reflect the fears of the middle class rather than the expectant gladness of a class (partially) receiving the vote.

All social-problem novels were attempts to negotiate solutions, actual or wishful, to class conflict. In addition, merely by representing working-class characters in their fiction, these novelists made claims about the kinds of subjects that working-class individuals should be.

The Social-Problem Novel

> Detailed descriptions of the life and labour of the people in all its various aspects, sensational or scientific, derived from personal observation or statistical calculation, became a characteristic feature of the publications of [the 1880s], whether newspapers or magazines, plays or novels, the reports of philanthropic organisations, or the proceedings of learned societies. It may be said that this novel concentration of attention of the social condition of the people was due neither to intellectual curiosity nor to the spirit of philanthropy, but rather to a panic fear of the newly enfranchised democracy.
>
> Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*
> (qtd. in Gagnier 99)

One of the most interesting developments in the history of the novel is the rise of the "social problem novel" in England during the first half of the nineteenth century.

While the didactic potential of the novel had long been recognized and exploited by writers such as Edgeworth, More, Martineau, and others, early Victorian writers combined this didactic spirit with increasing narrative realism – Blue Book statistics, contemporary political events, and economic philosophy. While most critics agree as to what novels constitute the canon of the social problem or industrial novel – Trollope's *Michael Armstrong*, Disreali's *Sybil*, Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Dickens's *Hard Times*, and Eliot's *Felix Holt* comprise the standard list – there is wide disagreement among critics as to what the function of the social problem novel as a genre was and its relationship to reform, politics, and society.

The first critic to identify the social-problem novel as a sub-genre was the French critic Louis François Cazamian, who in 1903 published *Le Roman social en Angleterre, 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley.*[36] This work, however, was not translated into English until 1973, so Cazamian's ideas were for the most part bypassed by an entire generation of English critics, although he is cited in Kathleen Tillotson's seminal and important work, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties.* Cazamian defined the "'social novel with a purpose'" (qtd. in Guy 41) as being "produced by 'a new emotional and intellectual response to the subject of social relations on the part of English society in general, and the middle class in particular'" (Guy 41). While Tillotson would not quibble with this definition, she differs from Cazamian in several important and essential ways. What Cazamian is centrally interested in is an examination of the intellectual milieu that produced these novels, the history of ideas that is expressed in the purposeful narrative of

[36] See Guy (40-47) for an historical and critical survey of Cazamian's work.

the social novels. Tillotson, on the other hand, is concerned with how changes taking place in the social world affected and caused changes in the narrative technique of the novelists of the 1840s. She is not much interested in the why's or wherefore's of the changes taking place in society, and the reflection of a changing society which she sees in the novel form is considered strictly in aesthetic and formal terms.

Writing less than ten years after Tillotson, Marxist critic Raymond Williams defines the social-problem novel, or industrial novel, as he dubbed it, as a "response to industrialism" which "provide[s] some of the most vivid descriptions of life in an unsettled industrial society, but also illustrates certain common assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken" (Williams 94). For Williams, neither the form nor the subject content of the industrial novel could be separated from the political and intellectual life of the novels' readers and society at large. These novels illustrate what he calls throughout *Culture and Society* a "structure of feeling" in the society. While the novels do expose the wretchedness of a goodly portion of the British population and provide sometimes cogent criticisms of industrialism, they also propose certain solutions that are nevertheless implicated in maintaining middle-class economic interests and which advocate middle-class social values.

Most critics following Williams continue to acknowledge the ideological underpinnings of the social-problem novel, although they differ in how they define the relationship between the novels and ideologies of reform, politics, and society. Joseph Childers claims that the genre of the social-problem novel is so tightly tied to industrialization that the two cannot be separated:

Each looked to the other for models of effecting and controlling as well as

> understanding change. Novels turned to the "records of industrialism„" for example to parliamentary reports and the press, for the details of everyday life that came to characterize their narratives, while the social investigations looked to the novel as the most effective way of organizing and presenting those details. ("Industrial Culture" 78)

Without industrialism, there would be no industrial novels; further, without the industrial novels, the face of industrialism would have been quite different.

Josephine Guy locates the source of "large-scale problems in contemporary British society" as being the "changing demographic patterns and changes in work practices associated with the accelerating industrialisation of the British economy" (3). She claims that the novelists of this period envisioned "a new kind of relationship between the novel and the social and political worlds which produced it," one in which the novelists wrote

> with the intentions of trying to educate, and therefore by implication to change, the opinions and prejudices of their readers. In so doing, they are seen to be implying that the novel can, and should, have an important role to play in social and political life. . . . The principal distinction of the sub-genre, then, exists not so much in any formal features or properties . . ., but rather in the non-literary ambitions which certain authors were assumed to have held. (4)

By seeing the relations between formal narrative properties and social and political life as transparently related or causal, then, Guy glosses over the fact that these well-intentioned novels were more often than not implicated in and dependent upon those very forces

which caused the "large-scale problems in contemporary British society" which she cites as the object of the novelists' reform.

This relation is just what critics like Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Regenia Gagnier, and Catherine Gallagher would insist that we not ignore. For Gagnier, the middle classes used social problem fiction as a way to redirect class-conflict from violence to resolution through "romantic love and Christian charity" (113). This "plot redirection" is a narrative misdirection strategy that implies that

> the convergent viewpoints of author, character, and reader hold that social conflict can be resolved by acceptance of hierarchy and philanthropy rather than economic restructuring, or that the human spirit can survive any amount of material deprivation. (113)

Like Tillotson, Bodenheimer would have us return to a deeper consideration of the formal and technical aspects of this fiction, yet unlike Tillotson, Bodenheimer sees in "the shape and movement of narrative" not just aesthetic considerations but also "the 'politics' of the novel in its deepest, most interesting, most problematical expression" (3). The novel's politics are not to be found in the ideological position that it *claims* to take, but in its enactment as narrative. She writes:

> Since a novel traces out a model of motion and transformation in time – or conflicting models within a single text – it can be understood as political in at least two initial ways. First, its plots define and delimit imagined possibilities for social thought, action, and change. Second, a narrative may be called "politic" because it evokes both social wishes and social fears and then negotiates among them, establishing fictional paths through

highly charged ideological territories. (3)

These "fictional paths" then become prescriptive in certain ways; however, they are not prescriptive in the way that the narratives of Harriet Martineau, for example, were prescriptive. Instead of saying to the working classes, "Here is a model of how you should behave. Follow it," these texts create a view of the real in which the middle-class writers attempt to articulate a "model of social order and government" (7) while at the same time masking their own jockeying for the ways that these models consolidate their own political power. Ultimately, then, social-problem novels are really about the middle classes:

> . . . they allow us access to the minds of observant, sensitive, and articulate members of the middle class as they confronted troubling and unanswerable questions. For us the novels may be less about factory conditions or the status of trade unions than about the patterns of contradictions and paradox which characterize the formal fantasies of people living through a period of unprecedented social change. Once articulated, the content of those patterns points to a middle-class crisis of self-definition: insofar as the social-problem novels can be treated as a group, they display conflict about the nature and diversity of a newly empowered and newly fragmented middle class as they attempt to reimagine the roles that it should play in the maintenance of social order. (5)

The social-problem novels are expressions of fear, while at the same time they are also the expression of wish-fulfillments.

Gallagher uses much of the same critical vocabulary that I use here to discuss the debates over industrialism as discourse, insisting that "there is normally some sort of tension between ideology and literary forms," and, in fact, "[l]iterary forms often disrupt the tidy formulations and reveal the inherent paradoxes of their ostensible ideologies" (xiii). According to Gallagher, industrialism, as a subject of fiction, exposes the conventions of realism "governing the play of contradictory exigencies" (xii). As realist novelists, Fielding and Austen had "established dynamic tensions between freedom and determinism, between public and private worlds, and between the representation of facts (what is) and that of values (what ought to be)" (xii). But the novelists dealing with the issues of industrialization were faced with a paradoxical problem. Realist fiction, Gallagher argues, depended upon certain implicit assumptions about human freedom and determinism, public and private realms, and representation; industrial fiction made such assumptions explicit and exposed their inherent contradictions:

> But fiction concerned with the Condition of England Debate turned these implicit tensions into explicit contradictions because the debate was composed of controversies over the same issues that were delicately suspended to form the framework of the novel. Thus the industrial novelists found themselves uncovering the tensed structure of their own form, making the always unsettled assumptions of the novel the object of their scrutiny. (xii)

Industrial social life belied the assumptions behind realist fiction through its exposure of the gap between what is and what should be. What should be, that is, in the view of the middle-class novelists.

My own reading of the emergence of the sub-genre of the social-problem, or industrial, novel is that it was an extension of earlier middle-class fiction critiquing the mores of an aristocracy that had become unfit to rule Britain, at least without a healthy infusion from the financially and morally sound middle classes. The novels of this tradition that immediately comes to mind are, of course, Richardson's *Pamela*; and Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny becomes the middle-class instructress *par excellence* who must lead Church and Gentry back to their respective, and respectable, duties and responsibilities. With the passage of the First Reform Bill in 1832, for which cause the middle classes had allied themselves politically with the working classes, the political clout of the middle class was firmly established, and their political influence began to correspond with their economic influence. In many ways, the First Reform Bill was a middle-class victory over an aristocratic government. Both middle-class and working-class activists had banded together to fight for the extension of the franchise, with the often explicitly stated promise that the middle classes would commit themselves to even further extension of the franchise until their working-class allies also were enfranchised. Much of the bad blood between the activists of these two groups in the 1830s and 1840s was due to the fact that the newly-enfranchised and newly-empowered middle classes immediately reneged on this promise. Their allegiance seemed to be transferred to maintaining the ruling system that they had joined; the status quo now protected their interests, and their argument became that the working classes were not yet ready for the vote.[37]

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[37] Thompson notes: "The line from 1832 to Chartism is not a haphazard pendulum alternation of 'political'

So just as the novel of social purpose had been (and often continued to be) used as a critique of the aristocracy, so it also became a critique of the working classes, presenting a picture of society as it should be, if all would simply embrace their roles and responsibilities. At the same time, these novels often sought to be a self-critique of the middle classes who were guilty of ignoring their responsibilities. In many cases, however, this responsibility was envisioned to be the exercise of sympathy and charity, not, however, the extension of political and economic rights. In many cases the narrative argument seems to be that if the working classes would accept the hierarchical structure of society, then it would become the responsibility of the higher orders to take care of their needs and their interests. The rub would always be, of course, deciding what these needs and interests were.

One problem was that working-class discourse of political action – especially including the discourse of working-class education –was in many ways an expression of the logical extension of the arguments that the lower and middle class had used to win the First Reform Bill. The social-problem novels can be seen as the middle-class response to the assumption of these rights by working-class individuals and working-class authors. Elements of this discourse included the press and autobiographies. I will consider one instance in which the press became a contested site in the next chapter, but at this point the press also contributes to the discourse along with the novel and the genre of working-class autobiography. The autobiography provides a perfect example of the contact point

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and 'economic' agitations but a direct progression, in which simultaneous and related movements converge towards a single point. This point was the vote. There is a sense in which the Chartist movement commenced, not in 1836 with the promulgation of the 'Six Points,' but at the moment when the Reform Bill received Royal Assent" (826).

between the middle-class reformers and the working-class autodidacts where they battle in a literary form for the right to define a solution to the social problems of Britain. As I argued in Chapter 2, the autobiography had been considered a discourse of middle-class subjectivity. The working-class autobiographers appropriated the form and put it to the same purposes – the positing of a self that is self-defining. In the novelistic work of Charles Kingsley and his fellow Christian Socialists writing for the short-lived journal, *Politics for the People*, this form is re-appropriated and put to a slightly different purpose: the positing of a self defined by the tenets of middle-class morality and Christian virtue. Where middle-class autobiographies were considered to be the representation of a natural subject position, the working-class autobiographies that attempted to imitate the "Lives" of their betters were seen as misrepresentations and misappropriations. While the middle-class writer was unconscious of the narrative self-determination going on in his autobiography, he was more than able to spot it in the work of socially or politically forward working-class autobiographies. In turn, middle-class writers then provided a corrective to the autobiographies of the autodidacts by composing them themselves, representing the proper subjective position that the autodidacts should inhabit. My argument will work its way back to the social-problem novels in general, and Kingsley's novel of a working-class autodidact, *Alton Locke*, in particular, through a brief examination of other pieces of the general discourse – specifically, the response of a group of middle-class reformers to the People's Charter, their use of the penny press to disseminate their views of what the working class's proper response to political and economic injustice should be, and their appropriation of the form of working-class autobiography in order to make their own views and suggestions more palatable to a

working-class audience.

The Search for an Ideal Principle

> So long as individual minds do not adhere together from a unanimous agreement upon a certain number of general ideas, capable of forming a common social doctrine, the state of the nations will of necessity remain essentially revolutionary, in spite of all the political palliatives that can be adopted; and will not permit the establishing of any but *provisional* institutions. It is equally certain that, if this union of minds, from a community of principles, can once be obtained, institutions in harmony with it will necessarily arise, without giving room for any serious shock, -- that single fact of itself clearing away the greatest disorder.
>
> George Lewes (qtd. in Graver 7-8)

First, however, it is important to emphasize more clearly what the social problem novelists in general, and Kingsley and Eliot in particular, were attempting to do with their fiction. Wish-fulfillment is an integral part of the narrative motivation behind industrial fiction; changes in the social and political fabric destabilized British culture and some center – some ideal principle – around which to base the society's values was wanting. This ideal principle is what the social problem novelists tried to provide.

As early as 1831, J.S. Mill characterized *The Spirit of the Age* as being that of transition: "mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones" (qtd. in Houghton 1). These old institutions and doctrines were those that had formed the foundation for English society -- church, the aristocracy, agrarianism -- and they had indeed been in transition for quite some time, at least since the Reformation. But the Victorians saw themselves as the agents who would finally usher in the future of new institutions and new doctrines. For what had been growing since the Reformation was the creation and consolidation of the industrial and commercial middle class, which became the force pushing against the power of church, aristocracy, and

agrarianism -- against feudalism, in short, as Houghton argues in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*. The Age of Progress had come to England. Bernard Semmel identifies this transition as "[t]he necessary movement from the traditional community to modern society. . .":

> Such a change reassured the nineteenth-century middle classes that their social order would supplant the aristocracy and gentry as the preeminent force influencing the nation's policymakers. Bourgeois values would overwhelm feudal values, and merchants, industrialists, and professional men would claim the power traditionally held by landholders, the military, and the clergy. The "intellectual classes," as the representatives of the modern constellation were described by the Victorian historian H. T. Buckle, would supplant the feudalists, who sat on inherited acres and sought to perpetuate wars and superstition from which they alone profited. In modern society achievement and individual merit would triumph over the false values an unscientific era had attached to birth. (5)

Industry, science, and dissent were the new economic, social, and intellectual forces that were to carry England into the future.

There were, however, high prices to be paid for progress. The new foundations of social order could not be built up quickly enough to take the place of the old. Disagreement over what the new foundations of society should be seemed to be unresolvable. The retreat of an establishment religion left many in doubt about the part that God played in their lives. The advance of scientific knowledge led many to question whether God played any role at all in the governance of mankind. The more earthly

forms of governance came into doubt as well. Was a king a divine ruler, or should the government be in the hands of a representative parliament, or was every person entitled to have a say in the legislation of the country? Science, economics, politics, and religion -- all those repositories of Truth -- were now battlefields of differing opinions and theories and interests. John Morley wrote: "It was the age of science, new knowledge, searching criticism, followed by multiplied doubts and shaken beliefs" (qtd. in Houghton 11). For the individuals who benefited from industrial society, this age also constituted a loss, of the certainty of their own place in their society and their own place in nature. In addition, it was becoming increasingly clear that the solutions that industrial society proposed for these problems, such as individualism, political economy, commercialism, material wealth -- in short, the values of bourgeois industrial society itself -- also failed to answer the needs of the individual in society for an adequate basis for value and meaning, what I will call below an ideal principle.

It is at this juncture that Victorian social criticism enters the field with the assertion that industrialization had most emphatically been able to develop those new institutions and doctrines that were meant to forward the progress of humanity and to provide those ideal principles upon which society should be based. This theme is again and again resounded in the works of social critics like Ruskin, Spencer, Mill, Matthew Arnold, and indeed formed the substance that was the intellectual atmosphere that Mary Ann Evans entered first as a friend in the Bray family circle in Coventry, as part of the Chapman household in London, as editor of the Westminster Review, and as translator of the works of Strauss and Feurbach. What this middle-class liberal intellectual discourse that produced George Eliot was struggling with was the search for an ideal

principle, some idea which would replace the old ideals of church and state, whether this principle was thought to lie in Positivism, in Muscular Christianity, in feminism, in art or in culture, in socialism, or in a host of other movements. What this ideal principle was to do was allow for a return to a unified society, a community of social ties, a sharing of values and priorities, which had been lost with the old institutional values and replaced by the individualistic and self-serving values of industrialization. Intellectual discourse, according to Simon Dentith, was to "attempt to construct a middle-class counter-culture" (*George Eliot* 11). The development of George Eliot's intellectual life must be seen in this context, as she was a full participant in this discourse, in both her non-fictional prose and in her novels. Dentith notes that as translator, essayist, and novelist, her careers "can be seen as extended attempts to reconstruct the ideological basis for social cohesion without the help of God or King "(13).

But careful attention must be paid to Dentith's characterization of the construction of "a *middle-class* counter-culture" (italics mine). This is a reaction from within the middle class itself, questioning and criticizing many of the values and principles of the industrial bourgeoisie from the standpoint of the intellectual bourgeoisie. It is not, however, a challenge to middle-class hegemony itself, such as was being launched by working-class radicals. This fact is crucial to understanding the ideological work that takes place in such narratives as *Alton Locke* and "An Address to Working-men by Felix Holt," which purport to be written by members of the working classes. And it is also critical in understanding the essentially conservative bent that liberal criticism took in the 1860s and 1870s. The critics of the industrial bourgeoisie held many of the most essential values in common with those whom they also criticized, such as notions of

progress, the value of individual industry, self-restraint, rationality. Their criticism was that these values had been bound too tightly to individual economic interest, not that these values were worthless in themselves. Liberal critics, like the more commercial members of their class, opposed the excesses of the aristocracy as well as the indolence of the workers. The problem as they saw it with the values of their own class was that they had become imbalanced in favor of the individually economic at the expense of the nation as a whole, humanity as a whole, and the high art and culture that they considered to be the legacy of England. What was needed was a new ideal principle, replacing both the old principles of feudalism as well as the newer principles of commercialism. For Kingsley, this principle was religion; for Eliot it was a concept of sympathy based on the tenets of science and history.

Alton Locke

Politics *for* the People

On April 10, 1848, Chartist leaders intended to march to Parliament and present it with a "monster petition" in favor of the Six Points of the Charter, signed by six million of Her Highness's subjects. The fear that this intention sparked in London cannot be overestimated: as Susan Chitty describes the situation in Kingsley's biography, "[t]he old Duke of Wellington himself had barricaded the Thames bridges, regiments had been brought in from all over the country, the Queen had left the capital, and nearly a quarter million members of the middle class . . . had transformed themselves into special constables" (107). What the country anticipated was revolutionary action as had recently been witnessed in France. In the middle of this potential foment, a young clergyman in

Eversley, Hampshire, decided that "he was anxious to prevent bloodshed by addressing the mass meeting of Chartist," (Chitty 108), so he and a friend went to London. The young clergyman, Charles Kingsley, never got the opportunity to address the masses; on the way to the Kennington meeting, he and his friends met the straggling remains of the Chartists who had been dismissed as their leaders decided to take the petition to the House of Commons themselves. The day ended as an ignoble defeat of the Chartist movement. There were only two million names on the monster petition, many of them obvious forgeries ("Victoria Rex," "No Cheese," and the "Duke of Wellington" were some), and the Chartist movement was effectively considered to be permanently discredited.

But it was only a Pyrrhic victory for the British government against working-class discontent. The very conditions that had given rise to the pressing social problems to which the Charter was responding still remained, and the danger of social unrest was still very present. Kingsley's reforming fervor was hardly quenched. That evening he composed and wrote out a placard addressed to the Workmen of England, and signed by A Working Parson. In it Kingsley first articulates his sympathy with and solutions for the injustices and oppression of the working classes. It is worthwhile to repeat the placard in its entirety, for in it are the seeds for Kingsley's later commitments, both literary and social:

> You say that you are wronged. Many of you are wronged; and many besides yourselves know it. Almost all men who have heads and hearts know it -- above all, the working clergy know it. They go into your houses, they see the shameful filth and darkness in which you are forced to live crowded together; they see your children growing up in ignorance and temptation, for want of fit education; they see intelligent and well-read men among you, shut out from a Freeman's just right of voting; and they see too the noble patience and self-control with which you have as

yet borne these evils. They see it and God sees it.

WORKMEN OF ENGLAND! you have more friends than you think for. Friends who expect nothing from you, but who love you, because you are their brothers, and who fear God, and therefore dare not neglect you, His children; men who are drudging and sacrificing themselves to get you your rights; men who know what your rights are, better than you know yourselves, who are trying to get for you something nobler than charters and dozens of Acts of Parliament -- more useful than this "fifty thousandth share in a Talker in the National Palaver at Westminster" can give you. You may disbelieve them, insult them -- you cannot stop their working for you, beseeching you as you love yourselves, to turn back from the precipice of riot, which ends in the gulf of universal distrust, stagnation, starvation. You think the Charter would make you free -- would to God it would! The Charter is not bad; if the men who use it are not bad! But will the Charter make you free?

Will it free you from slavery to ten-pound bribes? Slavery to beer and gin? Slavery to every spouter who flatters your self-conceit, and stirs up bitterness and headlong rage in you? That I guess is real slavery; to be a slave to one's own stomach, one's own pocket, one's own temper Friends, you want more than Acts of Parliament can give. . . . Who would dare refuse you freedom? for the Almighty God, and Jesus Christ, the poor Man, who died for poor men, will bring it about for you, though all the Mammonites of the earth were against you. Another day is dawning for England, a day of freedom, science, industry. But there will be no freedom without virtue, no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God, and love to your fellow citizen.

Workers of England, be wise, and then you must be free, for you will be fit to be free.

There are two main thrusts to Kingsley's argument here that will be followed out in his political fiction as well as in his social action. The first is the recognition that a new "day is dawning for England, a day of freedom, science, industry." But this new day will be corrupted if freedom is not allied with virtue, science with religion, and industry with the fear of God and love for one's fellow citizen. This new age has indeed come, yet it will take careful shepherding if the promise of the new day is to come to fruition. This shepherding will be done by those who are the subject of the second thrust of Kingsley's argument, the "Friends" of the workmen of England, those "who are drudging and sacrificing themselves to get you your rights; men who know what your rights are, better

than you know yourselves." These men include Kingsley and his circle of friends, the men who also gathered and met on the eve of April 10, and in the next week remained together hatching a plan for "a new periodical, a Penny People's Friend," as Kingsley described it in a letter home to his wife (Chitty 109). This circle of men became known as the Christian Socialists, although in reality their commitment to this cause did not last beyond a few years, and their political interests caused many of them to drift apart. But for a few short months, the publication of *Politics for the People* held them together.

F.D. Maurice was the heart and soul of this group. As a theologian, Maurice had an enormous influence on Kingsley, who insisted on addressing Maurice as Master. Maurice himself had been heavily influenced by Coleridge, and he developed in his own ideas of the role of the clergy, Coleridge's notions of the relationship between the priesthood and the State. James Ludlow, a young barrister who had recently come from France and who called himself a Socialist, became the editor of *Politics for the People*. Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, was a contributor, as was Charles Mansfield, a close friend of Kingsley's since their University days. This was the core of the group that would come to be known as the Christian Socialists, although as an active movement, Christian Socialism lasted only from 1848 until 1854.

The impetus of Christian socialism as developed by Maurice, Ludlow, and Kingsley grew out of a fear of revolution spilling over from the continent. If revolution was to reach the shores of England, and it looked as if it might, then it should be Christianized. According to Allan John Hartley in *The Novels of Charles Kingsley*, Ludlow, who was most closely associated with French socialism, feared that "socialism would destroy Christianity unless the Church 'christianized' it" (30). Hartley further

claims that the Christian Socialists associated themselves with the defeated Chartists because their Christianized brand of socialism was meant to merge "with the Chartism that it was soon to ameliorate and eventually to replace" (28). However, at this juncture a contradiction becomes clear – if not a exactly a contradiction, then at the very least a gap in the language of social reform being used here. I have discussed how the battle lines were drawn between the working-class learners and on the middle-class reformers over the definition of the term "useful knowledge." Here again we have a similar situation: a vocabulary is shared by both radical working-class activists and middle-class reformers, but the assumptions behind each group's use of such language preclude a meeting of the minds on this issue. For Maurice, and Kingsley, following his Master's lead, defines socialism in a very particular way. Hartley explicates Maurice's definition, quoting from a letter Maurice sent to Ludlow in 1852:

> [For Maurice] socialism meant an "acknowledgement of brotherhood in heart and fellowship in work," and . . . this was "the necessary fulfillment of the principle of the Gospel." However one might twist the word, democracy implied "a right on the part of the people to choose, cashier, and depose their rulers," Maurice declared, and this was not Christ's way. People might govern themselves, but "What I wish to know is, '*do they make* Christ their king?'" Under Him, an earthly king is never above the law. On the contrary, the king stands as "the witness for law from generation to generation," whereas when people govern themselves they tend as mere majorities to defend "self-willed power." The Gospel . . . begins "with the proclamation of an invisible and righteous King," and

since earthly polity was to imitate the heavenly, the established order had to retain the elements of an organic Christian society, comprising "Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Socialism or rather Humanity." (34)[38]

Maurice believed that "the voice of Demos" was "the devil's voice and not God's" (*Life of Maurice*, II, 497, qtd. in Hartley 32).

The earthly polity in Britain was structured exactly the way that it needed to be structured – but its citizens of all ranks were not carrying out their God-given duties within this polity. This was the source of poverty, social injustice, poor living conditions, and low wages. The Church, as shepherd of the state, had allowed this condition to come about without saying a word. Christian Socialism enters the discourse of which the social-problem novel takes part at exactly this juncture, because the Christian Socialists believed that they had isolated the original cause of the imbalance of their social world, and that original cause was industrialism. Industrialism changed the nature of the relationships between men and masters, the landed and the laboring, the Church and its flock. Kingsley succinctly delineates the factional lines in a letter to Thomas Hughes: "the real battle of the time is . . . the Church, the gentleman, and the workman against the shopkeepers and the Manchester school" (Alderson 45). Yet this statement also reveals the blindness of the Christian Socialists, a blindness that pervades every issue of *Politics for the People* and all of Kingsley's social fiction. This is the blindness that sees no irony in the title of their periodical: *Politics* for *the People*. It assumes that it knows best what the rights (and responsibilities) of the working classes are. This is also the blindness that

[38] It is on this point that Maurice and Ludlow will later part company, as Ludlow leans more and more

refuses to recognize that it too is benefiting from the progress and increasing prosperity brought about by shopkeepers and the Manchester school. In many ways, the Christian Socialists considered themselves in the light of Coleridge's clerisy, as the priests who were called upon to be shepherds of the people, shepherds of the state, and shepherds of British culture. As such, they would appear to have no class connections, a position that they in fact suggest in the Prospectus printed in the first issue of *Politics*:

> We, who do not, properly speaking, belong to your body or their [the upper classes], shall not try to make out that our interests are in common with either. But we believe that we have a DUTY to both, and that you have a DUTY to your own class, to every other, to God. (*Politics for the People* 1 May 6, 1848)

The blindness of the Christian Socialists was such that they mistook their own interests as coinciding with those of the working classes and thus often appeared allied with the working-class cause. They could sound like raving radicals to their middle-class peers. Kingsley once stood up in a Chartist meeting and declared "I am a parson and a Chartist," and although he went on to explain that while sympathizing with their plight, he considered their methods completely wrong-headed, what was heard by his peers – and often used against him – was the claim "I am a Chartist." Critic David Alderson notes the irony of the charge of radicalism often made against Kingsley: "If Kingsley was ever mistaken for a radical it is because he was really a paternalist, and his analysis of Chartism is deeply indebted to Carlyle's in which the 'dumb' masses present themselves

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towards favoring a democratic form of government.

in need of being governed" (45).

But Kingsley's claim to be a Chartist was a rhetorical strategy used in an attempt to form a bond of interest between the workmen and the clergy, between the workmen and the reformers, and ultimately between the workmen and those who ruled them. This is the strategy that he uses in his "Letters to the Chartists" which appeared in *Politics for the People*, and which he signed as Parson Lot. He so names himself because "[l]ike Lot, [he] was alone amid the Cities of the Plain" (Chitty ff 110ff). Throughout Parson Lot claims to be sympathetic to the conditions under which the working classes suffer, and understands the impulse behind Chartism. In fact, he claims his "only quarrel with the Charter is, that it does not go far enough in reform" (*Politics for the People*). Although this type of rhetoric did frighten the middle classes, it was nevertheless not intended to satisfy political radicals like William Lovett. Again, it is a matter of definition. Reform, in Parson Lot's term, means "*social* reform" and the change of men's hearts. The Charter promises only "*legislative* reform," and an act of Parliament can never change men's hearts. The men whose hearts need to be changed, however, are not the men in Parliament, but the lower orders: "I want to see you *free*; but I do not see how what you ask for, will give you what you want. . . . If any one will tell me of a country where a Charter made the rogues honest, or the idle industrious, I shall alter my opinion of the Charter . . ." Parson Lot may claim to be a Chartist, but he is, after all, a parson as well, and it is the parson's voice that is heard through the rhetoric of the radical reformer.

It is interesting to note, though, how Kingsley himself was attempting to create a subject position for himself that would allow him to transcend his own situatedness in class. He is a priest of the Church, but as such he is also a shepherd, and perhaps

champion, of the people. He considers his own position to be beyond the pale of class or economic interest, because he speaks for God's position. But he is just as obviously attempting to create positions for his working-class readers. He advocates a social program that rests solely on the working classes *becoming the kind of men* who are morally worthy of the franchise, by *becoming the kind of men* who are free – but he, Parson Lot, will define what freedom means. It is not the freedom of Tom Paine or the *liberté* of the French Revolution. It is the freedom that is found in following rationality and God's will. The working classes, beginning with the autodidacts, must indeed become self-made men, but those selves must be made in the image that God has given them. It is this image that Kingsley, as Parson Lot and as novelist, will model.

It became a common rhetorical strategy in the pages of *Politics for the People* for its editors and contributing staff to speak not only for the workers they addressed, but also to speak as if they *were* those workers. One of the series initiated in *Politics* was "Sam. Gorze's Country Letters," which purported to be a letter to the Editor from a worker in the agricultural district of Scantypane.[39] Sam Gorze acknowledges that there is poverty, suffering, and injustice in his village:

> We all feel that the poor farm labourer is not felt for, as if he had any of the same feelings as his employers have; we are worked more hours than the animals are, but they are fed so as to be healthier; they are better lodged oftentimes than we are, and really seem to be more valued. They want us when there is work to be done, and yet they for ever act as if they

[39] Perhaps a joke on the poverty of the district – they can't afford the window tax.

> wish there were none of us, but just those they want at the time. . . .
>
> [T]hey treat us as if we were to be all young strong men or women, but never to have any children, or to live to be too old to work. (*Politics for the People* 36)

But what Sam Gorze complains of is not "bad laws," but the "customs" of the landowners "in our country parts which bear us down in a manner in which we all feel the Parliament men would never let a law touch us." The real target of this criticism is not the industrial or class system under which these people labor, but the failure of the landed classes to uphold their part of the natural social order. They are ignoring their social duties which have been ordained by God; thus the problem becomes a *social* problem rather than a *political* one.

The author of Sam Gorze's letter is at pains to emphasize this point. For the people, according to Sam Gorze, are not interested in politics, especially radical politics:

> [T]hough we don't know much about politics, somehow or other we all feel as if we could not be under a better ruler and better magistrates than we are now. We had a man come into the street a time ago, trying to get us to buy tracts of him, which he said would show us what fools we were for being so contented, and how wise the French were, for they had kicked their king off the throne, and just governed themselves. Some of us told him we did not choose to be called fools by a man who knew nothing about why we were content; that we were quite sure we should not know how to set about governing ourselves; and Bill Thorpe, the blacksmith, went so far as to tell the fellow, that if he said a word more that was bad

about the Queen, why he would just put him and his papers into the river,

and see if he could not wash his heart and tongue a bit cleaner. (36)

Outside agitators were the cause of any political protest, but the people themselves were not to be fooled, for, as Sam Gorze claims, "we love the Queen somehow as if it was our very nature."

The fact remains, however, that there is no Sam Gorze from Scantypane who speaks thus for the people of his district. The real speaker behind Sam Gorze is one of the professional, middle-class contributors or editors of *Politics for the People*, again attempting to construct an ideal – by middle-class standards – working-class individual who said the right things, exhibited the right behavior, and affirmed the status quo of class relations. Sam Gorze is not an individual but a fantasy, born f the wish-fulfilling narrative impulse of his middle-class creator. Gorze would easily fit into the paternalistic – and anachronistic – world of Lady Ludlow. The rural agricultural village life described by Gorze was an alien environment for the industrial workers and urban artisans who read *Politics for the People.* He describes a way of life increasingly irrelevant to the majority of the working-class population, but one that was attractive to the Christian Socialists and their nostalgic paternalism.

In addition to writing letters in the name and voice of the working classes, *Politics for the People* also included poetry written by Kingsley, addressed to the priests, landlords, poets, and industrialists of England, purporting to be the voice of "We, Workmen of the nation." The poem makes clear two pertinent points: first, that this group of writers habitually used the stratagem of hiding behind the voices of the oppressed they purported to speak for; and second, that they felt the necessity for the social reform of the

middle and upper classes who were not upholding their traditional duties in the social contract. The poem is entitled "The Working Man's Appeal":

Priests of the English nation!
Who stand before the shrine,
Charged with the dispensation
Of words and things divine,
Leave monkish tales and strings of beads,
Nor fawn on earthly powers,
But bend you to your country's needs,
And join your hands with ours.

Ye Landlords of the nation!
Dowered by the chance of birth
With rank, and wealth, and station,
The great ones of the earth,
No more between you and your kind
Place your old feudal towers,
But meet us, mind with brother mind,
And join your hands with ours.

Ye Poets of the nation!
Commissioned to declare
The secrets of creation,
Truths pure, and good, and fair,
No longer dream enchanted dreams,
Nor moralize on flowers,
But nerve your hearts to worthier themes,
And join jour hands with ours.

Taskmasters of the nation!
Beneath whose fostering shade,
Whirl in untired rotation
The million wheels of trade,
Look forth beyond the labour-mart,
Where Mammon want devours,
Confess a common human heart,
And join your hands with ours.

We, Workmen of the nation!
The vast untitled mass,
Joint heirs of man's probation,
Though lacking style or class,
We cry to you, Oh! let us, share

The harvest of your powers,
The burden of Your brethren bear,
And join your hands with ours!

While this poem repeats a common theme that all people basically share "a common human heart," it also clearly delineates the different segments of society and outlines the duties of each, duties which, Kingsley's poem implies, are being neglected. The priests need to turn from their monkishness as well as their catering to worldly power to serve the needs of their country. The landowners and the industrialists need to remember that they too share the common human heart and need to look beyond their own narrow interests, beyond their feudal towers and their labor markets. Poets, as well, in their role as declarers of truths, need to turn the focus of their art upon their fellow man, and quit declaring on flowers.

One group conspicuously absent from "The Working Man's Appeal" is Parliament. Once again, Kingsley's solution rejects political action as a viable means of reform and of justice for the working man. The problem is social, thus the solution must be social. In addition, this poem is an appeal from the working man to groups outside his own class, to the middle and upper classes. The possibility that the working man himself may have some power to act on his own behalf is not even entertained. As in much of the social fiction of the era, attitudes must change are attitudes, and the agents of this change are charitable middle-class reformers.

One final example from the pages of *Politics for the People* will lead us directly back to Kingsley's social fiction, for the piece entitled "Recollections and Confessions of William Milward" provides a model for Kingsley's own fictional use of the genre of

working-class autobiography. Part melodrama, part morality tale, part sentimental fiction, part social critique, this piece is the story of William Milward, a workman who becomes a Socialist. Calling his piece Told in his own words, as his "Recollections and Confessions," he the putative narrator traces his development as a socialist and activist. At the same time, however, this is also the tale of the good woman he woos and weds, a woman whose very goodness is often oppressed and suspected by the habits of mind of those who live around her in poverty. She is a sort of angel of the poor man's house, her goodness and Christianity providing a shining example to others. She is also connected to the upper classes – first by the friendship of a gentleman who falls in love with her goodness (but whom she refuses because of their difference in rank), and second by her service as lady's maid to a young and unhappy wife of the aristocracy. Thus she maintains the traditional relationships between the classes, relationships that are social; this contrasts with her husband's socialism, which sees the relations of the classes in strictly political and economic terms. William Milward's story, thus, is really the tale of a man whose wife's goodness and sacrificial death lead him back from politics to a Christian Socialist view of the relations that exist between the classes, and to a traditional view of the duties that each class owes to itself and to the other. The tale makes use of stock characters of social-problem novels such as the middle- or upper-class patron and the working-class woman whose gentleness domesticates the politically and economically discontent working man.

What is of interest in these "recollections" is certainly not the plot – for the author uses just about every clichéd plot device popular with the reading public: illicit romance, innocence wrongly accused, the moral depravity of the upper classes, family feud, and

sentimental death scenes, just to name a few. More interestingly, the work provides a model for the rhetorical strategy that Kingsley would adopt in his own "working-class autobiography," *Alton Locke,* although this piece was certainly not the first of its kind to use a first-person working-class narrator to demonstrate social and moral "truths." For while *Politics of the People* was being published, Kingsley published in serial form his novel *Yeast*, a social-problem novel whose target audience was the middle class. Lancelot Smith is the middle-class protagonist of *Yeast*, a vain and self-centered young man who loses his fortune and must discover the true meaning of life. The novel criticizes the clergy and the squirarchy of rural England, and was considered quite radical by the targets of its criticism (Hartley 43-61). Kingsley uses the third person point-of-view favored by "realist" novels in *Yeast.* However, when Kingsley turns his attention to the working-classes, he chooses the autobiographical form and opts to speak as one of the workers, as "a Cockney among Cockneys" (*Alton Locke* 5).

Kingsley's choice of narrative presentation in *Alton Locke* suggests two things about its intended audience. In fact, this choice suggests that there are in reality two audiences in mind. The first is the middle-class audience who is traditionally the target of social-problem novels. If this group only knew of the conditions under which the poor labored, if they could only develop sympathy for the oppressed, then surely they would want to improve those conditions. And who better to present this world to middle-class readers than an articulate representative of the oppressed class itself? Such a narrator not only provides the added credibility to the facts of working-class life that are presented, facts most convincing coming from a first-person witness, but also adds a touch of pathos, as the reader is invited to get to know one of the poor intimately and personally,

to begin to have sympathy for this narrator. The second audience implied by Kingsley's narrative choice is the working class itself. Most working-class autobiography was meant for working-class readers; many working-class autobiographies, especially by autodidacts, are handbooks on what to do to get ahead in life, so the lives of the protagonists become models for the lives of the readers; thus it is implied that the protagonist is a character whose values and behavior should be emulated. The good that the autobiographer finds should be pursued, while the evil that he falls into should be avoided.

Thus Kingsley's novel attempts to address both audiences – which accounts to a certain extent for the novel's lack of narrative and structural cohesion. The novel cannot decide if it is wants to be social critique, philosophical discourse, adventure story, or Bildungsroman. And, indeed, readers today are often at as much a loss as the novel's contemporary critics were to know what to make of it. The *Quarterly Review* of September, 1851, entitled its review "Revolutionary Literature," and "declared *Alton Locke* to be a defence of 'Chartist socialism' and an 'un-English menace' leading to bloody revolution" (Hartley 36). *The Times* (October 18, 1850) "warned its readers to 'beware of confounding the shortcomings of a nation's governors with the faults and crimes of the governed'" (Hartley 36-37). Yet Francoise Dottin points out that *The Times* also wrote that "*Alton Locke* is the composition of anyone but a Chartist. . . . *Alton Locke* is not the labour of a working-man with a smattering of learning, but of a scholar with an inkling of Chartism. Not another word need be said to prove its utter worthlessness as a handbook for our guidance" (qtd. in Dottin 36).

Twentieth-century critics have vacillated between the same extremes in

approaching and interpreting this novel, although they almost universally agree that it is a flawed narrative. Kingsley never lets the reader forget that this is didactic literature, and rarely do the characters rise above their function as representatives of particular social and political attitudes and characteristics. What the critics disagree about is the lesson that Kingsley is attempting to teach his readers and the ideological underpinnings for this lesson. In many ways, Raymond Williams set the tone for Kingsley scholarship, and much of the scholarship on industrial novels in general, in his *Culture and Society 1780-1950* , where he describes *Alton Locke*, in a very brief section in the brief chapter on the Industrial Novels, as "a story of conversion: of the making of a Chartist in the usual sense, and of his remaking in Kingsley's sense" (111). Kingsley's sense of what a Chartist should be, according to David Alderson, is based upon the tenets of Christian Socialism and a nationalistic, and ethnic, ideal of Christian manliness. The novel argues for the moral reform of the entire nation, a reform of the national morality back to its traditional duties to the state and to the social body rather than to the tenets of political economy. In this light Patrick Brantlinger explores the way the novel uses the image of the outside agitator to emphasize the Christian Socialist view that true representation of working-class interests can only come from the higher order of society, that the working-class individual is seen as "incapable of adequate self-expression." At the same time, Christian Socialism feared that the working class was "all too clamorous, articulate, and capable of representing themselves" (94-95). This latter was perhaps the worse danger, as the Christian Socialists were not sure that those capable of representing themselves were worthy citizens. As Catherine Gallagher points out, the novel's aim is "the realignment of social organization with Christian values" (91).

Gallagher pinpoints the contradictory nature of the values that Kingsley espouses in his narrative. Her reading of *Alton Locke* includes a rigorous examination of Kingsley's contradictory views on free will and determinism. On the one hand, Kingsley inherited Romantic notions of freedom Maurice as consisting of "rationality and obedience to God's law" (89) from Carlyle, Coleridge, and his mentor F.D. On the other hand, Gallagher emphasizes Kingsley's scientific interests. He was an avid naturalist, and passionately dedicated to sanitary reform. Both pursuits enabled him to recognize environmental determinants at work in social conditions. Gallagher calls this "[a]n ambivalence about causality" that characterizes Kingsley's novel:

> . . . Kingsley chose a form that expressed his Romantic faith in a free will benevolently reconciled with God-given circumstances; however, his reforming purpose led him to add incongruous elements, suggestions of negative environmental determinism, to that form. . . . Indeed, the narrator is so indecisive about causality that he is simply unable to create a defined central character, and *Alton Locke* becomes, quite unintentionally, a novel that questions the reality of individual identity and undermines faith in the possibility of referential, realistic fiction. (89)

There are two issues in Gallagher's argument here that need attention. The first is Kingsley's narrative attempt to reconcile the contradictions in his views on free will and determinism, and the second is the troubled status of the narrative as referential fiction.

Gallagher compares *Alton Locke* not to the autobiographies of other autodidacts or even other working-class poets, but to Carlyle's, again fictional, autobiography of Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, *Sartor Resartus*. In that text, according to Gallagher, "Carlyle's

hero does not rise above circumstances: rather, he transcends the previous limits of his selfhood by moving into the world and acknowledging it as his God-given home," "reconciling himself with Nature" (90). This form is incompatible with the experience of a working-class poet, and Gallagher claims that Kingsley is not only aware of this incompatibility but deliberately courts it:

> In writing a poet's autobiography, Kingsley was able to validate the Romantic tenets that he had inherited from his mentors and that were consonant with his broad Church beliefs. The form assumes that the human will is free, that man's spirit emerges out of his encounter with his God-given surroundings, and that such spiritual births are momentous events. (91)

But Kingsley is able to critique "the faults of the Romantic tradition and its apparent blindness to the facts that some people are less free than others; that some circumstances prevent the birth of the spirit; and that, even when a poet's spirit does emerge, its existence is not an end in itself" (91). The poet, then, becomes "a tool of God's will" and Alton Locke's emergence as a poet is a means to "the realignment of social organization with Christian values" (91). However, as Gallagher points out, this does not reconcile the tension between free will and determinism; Kingsley will deal with the contradictory situation by "allowing the issue . . . to become the narrator's irresolvable obsession" (94). Alton Locke never resolves the contradiction, and subsequently neither does the narrative. Quoting from Kingsley's letters that men's "'minds' are not yet capable of 'binding' the idea of 'Free Will' with its true 'correlative,' 'predestination'" (95ff), Gallagher must, like Kingsley's narrative, come to the unsatisfying conclusion that "man

is free and yet determined" (95).

On this point Gallagher's analysis is directly on target. However, her second point, that the novel represents a crisis of representation, what she calls "the book's insistent questioning of the concept of identity" misses the mark. She argues:

> Alton is never exactly a character, never anything so strongly defined that we might call it by that name; nor does he simply exemplify the stultification of the self by working-class life. He is rather, a consciousness of disintegration and plurality that attests to the fictional nature of all identities. At various moments of crisis, Alton experiences himself as plural and begins to wonder if all ideas of continuous, singular personality are not simply convenient fabrications. (97)

Gallagher insists that this is a metaphysical problem, not one simply caused by a lack of imagination on Kingsley's part. I would disagree, however, and claim that the failure of Alton Locke as a continuous personality is due to two things. First, Kingsley's imagination does fail, in his inability to imagine, and to write, a working-class subject position for the successful working-class autodidact, one that would accurately represent "real" autodidacts yet not threaten the social order. Secondly, Kingsley (and perhaps Gallagher) does not claim that "all ideas of continuous, singular personality" *are* "simply convenient fabrications," to misappropriate Gallagher's language. That is exactly the point of each of these narratives – to fabricate an idea of a personality, a subject position, that can claim for itself certain kinds of identities that have certain kinds of power. Kingsley creates his ideal, and yet even that ideal cannot be integrated into the social order without threat. Alton Locke must be both deported to America and die, because

Kingsley cannot yet imagine a place for him in British society.

Yet this failure is not merely aesthetic. Anne Graziano explores the necessity of Locke's deat in "The Death of the Working-Class Hero in *Mary Barton* and *Alton Locke*. Both Gaskell and Kingsley, Graziano claims, are unable to reconcile their working-class characters both as *individuals* and as *representatives* of what she calls "working-class urban suffering" (137). Relying on Bakhtin's definition of novelistic individuals in "Epic and the Novel," Graziano claims that Locke is too identified as a singular individual and lacks a firm connection to his socio-historical condition.[40] He never does come to represent his class. Therefore, his representation is incomplete, both aesthetically and politically, but the remains of his character (narratively speaking) must be disposed of in some fashion:

> Faced with the botched forms of their heroes, Gaskell and Kingsley turn to narratives of westward expansion in order to create the necessary futurity that Bakhtin locates within the novelistic individual. . . . The hero does end up in the New World but as a corpse, and there is no clear hope of future life for any of the main characters. Failing to create futurity within individual characters, Kingsley offers a generalized but vague sense of it in the overdetermined finale of emigration. (148-49)

However, Graziano's argument abstracts the actual fiction-making process that Kingsley goes through to create the "novelistic individual," Alton Locke. Kingsley makes choices about how to represent his working-class hero, but beyond Locke's conversion to

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[40] She argues that the opposite holds true in the case of John Barton, who is so representative of the

Christianity, and to Christian Socialism, Kingsley's imagination cannot produce a self-determining, politically empowered working man. He cannot envision the kind of subject that Alton Locke – and others like him – might become.[41]

Alton is suffering an identity crisis which that Kingsley cannot solve formally. He uses the Romantic form of the poet's autobiography to tell his protagonist's story, but he then denies that the working class has the type of free-will assumed by that form. However, the narrative persists in blaming many of the conditions of poverty on the sins the working classes themselves, (as well as on the theory of political economy). Likewise, Joseph Childers notes in *Novel Possibilities*, the novel argues that the discourse of the metaphysical is superior to that of the material or political in interpreting industrial experience. *Alton Locke*, Childers claims, critiques "middle-class notions of moral rectitude, civic prudence, and social respectability" (132), mainly because most of the middle classes are not living up to these notions, while at the same time insisting that many social and political problems would be solved if the *working class* would embrace these ideals. Thus, as Josephine Guy points out, the form of the spiritual autobiography, Raymond Williams's story of conversion, is indeed appropriate to the central message that reform must be individual and moral before it can be collective and political. Guy reminds us how Kingsley re-interprets the French revolutionary call to *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* through a Christian Socialist filter, emphasizing the moral at the expense of the political. Alton is a model whose path must be followed by the working classes if real

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collective that Gaskell fails to represent him as a singular individual.

[41] Here Cooper fails to operate as a model for Kingsley any more. Cooper's own post-Chartist life of teaching and preaching is evidently not the template that Kingsley wants to endorse.

reform is ever to be possible.

Thus many critics see the novel as a wish-fulfilling solution to political unrest, and it is in this light that Rosemarie Bodenheimer reads the novel's structure as an aristocratic pastoral, one which is committed to exposing the misery of working-class life. Bodenheimer defines a pastoral as the "kind of writing that asserts or implies a continuity between the human spirit and the natural universe that is distinct from social definitions or placements of character" (115). The novel, according to this view, imagines a solution to social ills that is contingent upon everyone playing their natural and God-given roles within society. However, the narrative cannot sustain this burden and the whole structure collapses, "deconstruct[ing] the ideological opposition between social conflict and pastoral harmony, producing versions of pastoral that reveal on the one hand its reliance on aristocratic society and on the other its evolutionary connection with human drives to lust and power" (155). The naturalness of aristocratic society is seen to be a construct, while the natural universe is revealed as a barbaric struggle of conflicting drives. The novel reveals the tenets of aristocratic hegemony and the fears of Kingsley, and other industrial novelists and reformers, about an increasingly secular and industrial social order.

We would do well, however, in our own critique, to remember the warning of Francoise Dottin that an evaluation of Kingsley as either a revolutionary or a toady to the aristocracy will ignore the truly nuanced and complicated – and even contradictory – position occupied by Kingsley. And I would argue that Kingsley's complex position and contradictory theories and impulses are a reflection of the ambivalent position of the sincere and thoughtful middle-class reformers as they sought stability and security in a

world that was quickly becoming unrecognizable.

But these critics have not considered the peculiar position of Alton Locke as a *self-educated* working-class individual. This project places him in a peculiar position between his own class and the class above him, one which I will argue the novel is finally incapable of negotiating because the ideology of the novel cannot imagine an acceptable negotiation. For while Kingsley was an advocate of working-class education, he had a very particular view of the aims and purposes of that education, of what kinds of subjects that education should produce, and the trajectory of his narrative provides a blueprint. Kingsley absolutely rejected the notion that working-class self-education should be a means for political action or social climbing.

As a clergyman and a reformer, Kingsley was interested in improving the spiritual and physical condition of the workers in England. In *Alton Locke*, he creates the kind of educated working-class hero that he envisions as being capable of shouldering the responsibilities of Reform. What he in fact creates is a type of working-class activist (Alton Locke) who is not threatening, and who, together with a certain type of upper-class activist (Eleanor Staunton), can mediate the violence of actual class conflict, a move that Fredric Jameson calls in *The Political Unconscious* a "strategy of containment." Although Kingsley seems sincerely concerned with the economic and sanitary conditions of the working classes, he is even more interested in their spiritual condition. As Sheila Smith points out in *The Other Nation*, Kingsley situates Alton Locke's salvation not with "political agitation" but with "moral regeneration" (265). While I agree that Kingsley was a sincere reformer, perhaps even an extremist when compared to many of his contemporaries and fellow clergymen, I contend that what *Alton Locke* does as a

narrative is prescribe a certain kind of educated working-class individual as desirable. It does so by envisioning the benefits of education in moral and spiritual terms rather than in political or economic ones. Thus Kingsley's novel attempts to disarm the working classes, to turn them away from practical politics. And most insidiously, by making the contest a personal and individual moral struggle instead of a social and political one, the values of domesticity, meekness, and reflection – cultural values used to domesticate and control an unruly class – are to be internalized by the working-class characters, and become part of their own internal monitoring system. Kingsley replaces real, violent class conflict with the moral regeneration of Christian Socialism, and this becomes the acceptable goal of self-education. Self-education should become another discipline that creates the right kinds of subjects, and should in fact make the wrong kinds of subjects unthinkable – or in the case of narrative discourse, unspeakable. By appropriating the working-class voice, this is what Kingsley's narrative attempts to do: define from which subject position an individual may speak himself, and to exclude those who don't speak rightly.

This argument is played out in the movement of Kingsley's narrative and the evolution of his poet-tailor, Alton Locke. This trajectory can be mapped out in three distinct stages: first, an examination of Alton's original goals for his own self-education; second, Kingsley's critique of the goals of working-class self-education as they were conceived in common currency of the time and as they are personified in Alton's educational guides; and third, an explication and analysis of Kingsley's own argument for the true goals of working-class self-education, as advocated in the novel by the upper-class, Christian reformers, represented by Alton's final educational guide, Eleanor

Staunton.

Kingsley's novel opens with the first person narrator of this putative autobiography declaring that "I am a Cockney among Cockneys" (5). As such, this narrator will position himself as if he is a voice from the people, one that is able to speak for the working masses, a representative "everyman" of the working class. But this is not the voice of the street orator, the political demagogue, or even the social climber. It is the voice of the poet, a fact emphasized by the title of the first chapter, "A Poet's Childhood." Even as a child, Alton is different from those around him. His mother, because of her intense non-conformist piety, shields him from the ugliness of their working-class surroundings and neighbors. On the few occasions that she takes Alton through the streets of London, he claims, "She would have hoodwinked me, stopped my ears with cotton, and led me in a string . . . lest I should be polluted by some chance sight or sound of the Babylon which she feared and hated . . ." (10). But Alton's temperament craves stimulation. He becomes first a naturalist, despite the obvious limitations upon objects of nature that were observable in the heart of London:

> I knew every leaf and flower in the little front garden; every cabbage and rhubarb-plant in Battersea-fields was wonderful and beautiful to me. Clouds and water I learnt to delight in, from my occasional lingerings on Battersea-bridge, and yearning westward looks toward the sun setting above rich meadows and wooded gardens, to me a forbidden El Dorado. (9)

Ultimately, however, Alton has the temperament of a poet. Although he collects butterflies and wild-flowers, it is "not in the spirit of a naturalist, but of a poet" (9). But

because of the religious beliefs of his mother, poetry and literature are completely unknown to him: "The only books which I knew were the Pilgrim's Progress and the Bible. The former was my Shakespeare, my Dante, my Vedas, by which I explained every fact and phenomenon of life" (10). His imagination is further stimulated by the one other form of literature allowed to him: missionary stories. These tales of faraway places and strange cultures and climes inspire Alton to yearn for some place away from the ugliness of the urban poverty around him and the narrowness of his mother's religion. This literature provides for him an avenue of escape when he first is put to work in a tailor's workshop and first exposed to the roughness and ribaldry of the tailors. Through these stories, Alton claims, "I gathered material enough to occupy my thoughts during the next day's work, and make me blind and deaf to all the evil around me" (28). Imagination, and literature, become the means through which Alton escapes, or even transcends, the conditions surrounding him. But it is a purely aesthetic escape, away from the ribaldry and the blasphemy of his fellow tailors. He finds their degenerate moral state not only objectionable, but evil and corrupting.[42]

The missionary tales only create in Alton a drive for more material upon which to work his mind and imagination:

My great desire now was to get knowledge. By getting that I fancied, as

[42] Kingsley takes this opportunity to use the tailors as a case study for his argument at large. In brief, the bad character of tailors is well-established. It is necessary for the consumers of their goods to be aware of this fact, because the consumers are "'their brothers' keepers'" and therefore responsible for changing this behavior. In addition, Kingsley credits the masters who "have built workshops fit for human beings, and have resolutely stood out against the iniquitous and destructive alterations in the system of employment" (27). But while acknowledging the role that an unhealthy environment and an oppressive system of employment can have upon the morals of the workers, Kingsley goes on to aver that "nine-tenths of the improvement has been owing, not to the masters, but to the men themselves" (27). It is the worker who is

most self-educated men are apt to do, I should surely get wisdom. Books, I thought, would tell me all I needed. (30)

But Kingsley's Alton faces the sometimes insurmountable challenge that faced many a real-life autodidact: where is he to get more books? He happens to find a bookseller's whose wares overflow out through the door and into the street, and he takes the opportunity, each time he passes, to snatch a few pages' reading – mostly of the poems of Byron. But he also, prophetically, stumbles upon a text that likewise inspired and discouraged many a working-class learner before him:

> One evening, however, I fell accidentally on a new book – "The Life and Poems of J. Bethune." I opened the story of his life – became interested, absorbed – and there I stood, I know not how long, on the greasy pavement, heedless of the passers who thrust me right and left, reading by the flaring gas-light that sad history of labour, sorrow, and death. – How the Highland cotter, in spite of disease, penury, starvation itself, and the daily struggle to earn his bread by digging and ditching, educated himself – how he toiled unceasingly with his hands – how he wrote his poems in secret on dirty scraps of paper and old leaves of books – how thus he wore himself out, manful and godly, "bating not a jot of heart of hope," till the weak flesh would bear no more; and the noble spirit, unrecognized by the lord of the soil, returned to God who gave it. I seemed to see in his history a sad presage of my own. If he, stronger, more self-restrained, more

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responsible first for his own moral improvement, and only peripherally is it the responsibility of the system.

> righteous far than ever I could be, had died thus unknown, unassisted, in the stern battle with social disadvantage, what must be my lot? (31-32)

The historical Bethune becomes, then, a model for the fictional Alton Locke, who presumably is to be used as a model for working-class readers. But this incident brings Alton to the attention of the bookseller, Sandy Mackaye, who undertakes to guide Alton's further efforts to educate himself.

The tailor's workshop having introduced Alton to the brutal world of labor, it is left to Mackaye to initiate him into the brutal world of poverty that lies just outside Alton's Cockney door. Alton has hitherto been unaware of this world, Cockney among Cockneys though he is. So to further Alton's education about his own world, Mackaye leads him to a dilapidated house in St. Giles, through streets of open sewers and foul odors, where four women live in misery high up in a garret. An old woman has been driven to dementia by hunger and deprivation. A dying girl is protected from the cold only by a fancy riding habit that the other two girls are sewing in a feverish attempt to finish for "My lady's going to ride early they say, whoever she may be, and we must sit up all night" (93). The two little seamstresses have had to turn to prostitution in order to care for themselves and their weakened companions. But the dying girl, Ellen, whose pockmarked face has saved her from prostitution, exhorts Mackaye to advise the two who have gone "the bad way" that

> it'll never prosper. I know it is want that drives them to it, as it drives all of us – but tell them it's best to starve and die honest girls, than to go about with shame and the curse of God on their hearts, for the sake of keeping this poor miserable, vile body together a few short years more in this

world o' sorrow. (90)

As will become evident throughout Kingsley's narrative, the responsibility for making the personal, moral choice is always upon the sufferer him or herself. Although poverty and unfair employment practices drive these girls to the streets, it becomes their own personal and moral responsibility to maintain their virtue. While Kingsley is sympathetic – and understands that economic injustice and the desire to care for their fellow sufferers is the impetus for their prostitution – it still remains a moral failing on their part that they do not resist the sin even at the cost of their own survival.

Mackaye's purpose in exposing Alton to the miserable side of poverty is to provide him with literary material from Alton's own environment. Noticing that Alton's sidewalk reading has consisted mainly of "that aristocrat Byron's poems," Mackaye promises that if Alton will "just leave alane that vinegary, soul-destroying trash . . . I'll lend ye, gin I hear a good report of ye, 'The Paradise Lost,' o' John Milton – a gran' classic model" (34) It is through Mackaye's encouragement and under his tutelage that Alton becomes that which he has always been by nature – a poet – and that which he might be by the accident of birth – a poet of the people.

Mackaye's lesson for Alton is that the poet also has a responsibility to these sufferers. Alton's poetic efforts had so far followed his imagination with the missionaries to the South Pacific, inspiring him to write lines beginning "'Twas sunset in the lone Pacific world . . . ." Mackaye argues that there's more meat for poetry within the confines of London than ever Alton could invent about the Pacific islands. When Alton complains that the world directly around him is "so unpoetical," Mackaye responds as one versed in classical definitions of poetry:

> "Poetic element? Yon lassie, rejoicing in her disfigurement and not her beauty, like the nuns of Peterborough in auld time, -- is there no poetry there? That puir lassie, dying on the bare boards and seeing her Saviour in her dreams, is there na poetry there, callant? That auld body owre the fire, wi' her "an officer's dochter," is there na poetry there? That ither, prostituting hersel to buy food for her freen – is there na poetry there? . . . Ay, Shelley's gran'; always gran'; but Fact is grander – God and Satan are grander. All around ye, in every gin shop and constermonger's cellar, are God and Satan at death grips; every garret is a haill Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained: and will ye think it beneath ye to be the "People's Poet"? (93-94)

Alton has been given certain gifts by God, the gift of poetry, but he has also been placed in a particular social class by God, and that too is part of God's design. Alton tells his readers:

> I do not complain that I am a Cockney. That, too, is God's gift. He made me one, that I might learn to feel for poor wretches who sit stifled in reeking garrets and workrooms, drinking in disease with every breath, -- bound in their prison-house of brick and iron, with their own funeral pall hanging over them, in that canopy of fog and poisonous smoke, from their cradle to their grave. I have drank of the cup of which they drink. And so I have learnt – if, indeed, I have learnt – to be a poet – a poet of the people. That honour, surely, was worth buying with asthma, and rickets, and consumption, and weakness, 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. . . . I used, as I said, to call it the curse of circumstance that I was a sickly, decrepit Cockney. My mother used to tell me that it was the cross which God had given me to bear. I know now that she was right there. (5-6)

His gifts are to be used to bring to light – for the middle classes and the aristocracy – the conditions of his own class and to give voice to its misery and want, as well as be a voice calling the poor themselves out of their own moral darkness.

The poet's education, then, leads necessarily to the education of the radical, as Alton learns of the misery and the oppression that is rife among the working classes. Here, just as with his literary reading, Alton will need much guidance if he in not to go astray, and he is presented with many different models and teachers whom he can follow. Kingsley carves his characters according to the terms of debate given much popular currency at the time, as well as by subsequent critics and historians: physical force Chartism v. moral force Chartism. This is, of course, the same dichotomy that characterized William Lovett's struggle against Feargus O'Connor, and in fact, most critics have recognized the unscrupulous demagogue and newspaper publisher O'Flynn as a caricature of O'Connor, while in the mouth of Sandy Mackaye he places many of the sentiments of Lovett and the moral force Chartists. The tailor Crossthwaite is, like Alton, caught between the horns of this ideological dilemma, knowing that some relief must come to the working classes, but not knowing the best way of bringing about this relief. But in his delineation of the several forces within the Chartist movement itself, Kingsley is being a bit disingenuous. Mackaye's philosophy is not that of a William Lovett, whose

political demands exceeded anything that Kingsley was yet willing to grant to the working classes. Mackaye is often something of a reactionary, as Crossthwaite points out (306). And Mackaye is not at all a supporter of the tenets of the Charter, which he calls "the monster petition":

> "leeberty, the bonnie lassie, wi' a sealgh's fud to her! I'll no signt it. I dinna consort wi' shoplifters, and ideios, and suckin' bairns . . ." (313)

Lovett and the moral force Chartists did not insist that the working classes hold themselves first to some standard of moral and religious behavior and then they would be worthy of political and economic redress, but instead insisted upon that redress as an inherent right, not as one that must be earned by conforming to particular standards of behavior. The moral force Chartists simply did not see how the use of physical force would further their cause.

Mackaye, then, cannot be read as a realistic portrait of moral force Chartism, but as the mouthpiece for a position much closer to Kingsley's own solution, one which, however, he must ultimately reject. Mackaye becomes, then, a conduit for the views of Carlyle, which Kingsley followed up to a point, only to reject in favor of Maurice. As such, a consideration of Kingsley's characterization of Mackaye becomes a way of examining the transitions that Alton Locke's goals for self-education go through before they arrive at the position that Kingsley himself is advocating through his novel.

Hartley has suggested that early on for Kingsley, Carlyle and Maurice seem to be speaking the same language, but that during the composition of *Alton Locke* Kingsley comes to see a difference. According to Hartley's argument, Mackaye represents the early Carlyle, the author of "Chartism" and *Sartor Resartus*, while the character

Crossthwaite represents the later Carlyle, of whom Kingsley would write to Maurice:

> Never heard I a more foolish outpouring of the Devil's Doctrine . . . raving cynicism [and] . . . all the ferocity of the old Pharisee without Isaiah's prophecy of mercy and redemption – the notion of sympathy with sinners denounced. . . . Though I never can forget what he has taught me . . . where should I be if you had not brought me *the* step beyond him? (qtd. in Hartley 82)

Alton will also find one to bring him *the* step beyond the ideas of Mackaye and Crossthwaite, but for now it is this representation of the later Carlyle, Crossthwaite, who become the model for Alton's next goal for self-education – the education of the radical political activist. Through Crossthwaite, Alton becomes a dedicated Chartist, for it is through Crossthwaite that Alton learns the ways of the world of labor, how the employers feed upon the laborers, how the government keeps the working classes ignorant and miserable, and how Parliamentary representation would make the working masses "good, and free, and happy" (Kingsley 110).

Kingsley indeed makes a compelling argument for "How Folks Turn Chartist," the title of Chapter X – or he at least places a compelling argument in the mouths of his fictional Chartists. The argument is so convincing, in fact, that Kingsley cannot help but tip his hand and show how he will ultimately refute the Chartists' arguments. But this refutation must needs come from Alton Locke himself, for his educational journey will not allow him to remain a radical. Alton's third and final goal for his self-education must ultimately merge with Kingsley's own proposed goals for working-class education. Alton's autodidactic aims were first those of a poet, then those of a political radical.

Finally, however, he is led to see that the only proper goal of self-education – the only proper goal of life itself – is to acquire the kind of education that makes the moral man. The self-development of a Coleridge or a "Childe Harold" had given way to the social development of political activism, which must ultimately give way to a Christianized view of the individual's place in the world: f. From Byron to Carlyle to Maurice.

But Alton's conversion is neither spontaneous nor self-generated. He has not only a model – Lord Lyndale – who offers him a glimpse of the kind of social order that could and should be, but also a schoolmarm – Eleanor Staunton (Lady Lyndale) – who will take him step-by-step into the realization that the perfection of the inner man, the moral man, must precede the perfection of the polis and of the political man, and that both inner and outer perfection comes only through God and the true religion. This, in a nutshell, is the thrust of the arguments put forward by the Christian Socialists in general and Kingsley in particular. This is the meat the Christian Socialists meant to serve in *Politics for the People*, and this is the final lesson of Kingsley's novel, as he himself testifies in a description of the novel given to the publishers Chapman and Hall. From an unpublished letter at the University of Illinois, Hartley paraphrases thus:

> The principal part of *Alton Locke* . . . was none other than "the struggles of a poor genius," his "temptations to political discontent," and his ultimate acceptance of "real Christianity" as the "permanent remedy" for them. (67)

Kingsley is at pains to make perfectly clear Alton's progression from poet to politico to proselyte, and to also make perfectly clear that Alton's fall into error is due to his lack of guidance, specifically Christian (read: Church of England) guidance and the lack of the

educational benefits and opportunities that would both let him exercise his poetic genius in productive ways, and teach him the way that God wanted the social world to function, instead of teaching him the ways that man would have it work.

For Kingsley is not really at odds with his own fictional tailor, nor does he fault Alton for his desire for education. On the contrary. He is in favor of Alton's educational project. The problem, once again, is in defining what kind of education a working-class individual needs, and, most germane to the case here, to what purpose that education is to be put. Kingsley uses the adventures of Alton Locke to critique many of the prevailing ideas about the aims of working-class education that were in common currency at the time, and to propose his own theory defining the true aim of education in general and working-class education in particular.

The targets of his critique are unambiguously identified in the novel. From the viewpoint of many working-class autodidacts, there were two main reasons for furthering one's education and for self-study: one, to prepare oneself for political action and intellectual political debate, and, two, to advance oneself economically and socially. In many ways, these goals serve the purpose of allowing the learner to forge his own identity in the political system. But this is exactly what Kingsley will not allow, and the rejection of this view is, according to David Rose, one of the cornerstones of Kingsley's notion of Christian manliness and masculinity, although Rose doesn't relate this to self-education. He quotes a letter that Kingsley wrote delineating the limits of the self:

> Self is not evil, because self is you, whom God made, and each man's self is different from his neighbour's. Now God does not make evil things, therefore he has not made self evil or wrong; but you, or self, are wrong in

> proportion as you try to be something in and for yourself, and not the child of faith. (qtd. in Rose, "The Volcano and the Cathedral" 35)

There is nothing wrong with being oneself. The danger lies is assuming the authority to define what that self is. Rose comments:

> In the last distinction he makes in this letter, being "the child of a father," Kingsley derides the idea of a remaking of one's self in whatever fashion one chooses. Such shaping results in misshapen distortions that pervert society, he claims. Rather, one should follow the "innate" shape of the self. Thus he uses the "liberating" masculine ideal of self-fulfillment as a conservative buffer against those who wish to "rise" beyond their station or to "get on." . . . Kingsley worried that his notion of masculinity might license all sorts of socially and politically egalitarian movements. (35)

The socially and politically egalitarian movements that Kingsley targets in *Alton Locke* can be defined as the use of working-class self-education for social climbing and for political action

Above One's Station

The middle class feared the incursions into their own ranks that many working-class improvers were making. The ranks of the semi-professional class were being filled with boot-strap pulling devotees of the Gospel of Self-Help. Being familiar with numbers could secure one a post of clerk or a bookkeeper instead of a laborer. Many working-class autodidacts turned a talent for writing into a career of paid journalism, including, at one point in his life, Thomas Cooper, the model for Alton Locke.

Education, instead of being an end in itself, became the means one could use to advance out of one's class. From skilled artisan to master, from peddler to shopkeeper, from farm laborer to corn factor; a little education might go a long way in bettering one's condition – first economically, then socially. The middle class, after all, had its origins in just such upward economic and social movement, and continued to desire the mobility to keep moving up.

This motive, in fact, provided the impetus behind the cult of self-help that would culminate in Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859). At first glance, the Smilesian philosophy seems very close to Kingsley's own views of the responsibilities of the working classes for their own improvement:

> The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. Whatever is done FOR men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves; and where men are subjected to over-guidance and over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless. . . . But in all times men have been prone to believe that their happiness and well-being were to be secured by means of institutions rather than by their own conduct. Hence the value of legislation as an agent in human advancement has usually been much over-estimated. To constitute the millionth part of a Legislature, by voting for one or two men once in three or five years, however conscientiously

this duty may be performed, can exercise but little active influence upon any man's life and character. (1)

However, Smiles's contention that personal improvement consisted of economic improvement, to the point, specifically, of advancing out of one's class of origin, a firmly middle-class concept, was a theory that Kingsley could not accept. Not only did it imply the worship of Mammon, it re-arranged the classes that God himself had ordained. Guy Kendall notes that Kingsley "wrote in 1851 that he was opposed to workmen rising above their class. A tailor or a costermonger 'can be every inch of him a saint and scholar'" (72).

In the character of the social climber one sees the conflicting values of British nineteenth century culture as it confronts itself as if in a mirror – albeit a distorting mirror. Nineteenth century novels are full of such characters, and they can be found in the streets of the East End as well as in the most exclusive drawing rooms of high society. The narrative of social advancement is above all a narrative of the middle class. As the middle class rose from the ranks, this became their guiding narrative – work hard, be thrifty, internalize all the good middle-class values. Yet this middle-class narrative did not disappear with the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, and was certainly still alive and well in 1859 when *Self-Help* received such a strong popular response. The discourse of self-help most assuredly found expression in the novels of the time. Mrs. Gaskell's *Lady Ludlow* offers the example of the poachers' son who is to be educated to take holy orders. And in Dinah Maria Craik's novel, *John Halifax*, the protagonist himself rises literally from rags to riches through his honesty, nobility of character, and industriousness

– and the friendship and patronage of a wealthy family.[43]

At the same time, the middle-class social climber was a stock character of fun in Victorian novels. For example, the social aspirations of Dickens' Pip and Eliot's Vincy family were a target for those authors satire. Sometimes, though, social climbers were seen as threatening figures of social violence, like Thackeray's Becky Sharp. Kingsley harshly criticizes the use of self-education to move out of one's class in *Alton Locke*, caricaturing such social climbers as Alton's Uncle Locke and his son, George. Alton's uncle had risen from working in a grocer's shop to being foreman of the grocer's shop to marrying the widow of the grocer, which act put him in possession of "a first-rate grocery establishment in the city, and a pleasant villa near Herne Hill" (20). He is a pragmatic disciple of Mammon and exemplifies everything that Kingsley found wrong with "the shopkeepers and the Manchester school" (qtd. Alderson 45). For this class of people, education was simply a means to a worldly end. Kingsley has Alton's uncle set forth the philosophy of education for gain. When he learns of Alton's educational efforts, he replies:

> [W]ithout capital, I think brains a curse. Still we must make the best of a bad matter; and if you are inclined to help raise the family name – not that I think much of book writers myself – poor starving devils, half of them – but still people do talk about them – and a man might get a snug thing as newspaper editor, with interest; or a clerk to something or other – always some new company in the wind now – . . . But you must mind and make

[43] It is worth noting, however, that John Halifax can claim a gentleman for a father. He obviously has a

yourself a good accountant – learn double entry on the Italian method –

that's a good practical study . . . (66-67)

For Uncle Locke, education must lead to some financial advancement.

And because of this attitude, his son, George, is at King's College, Cambridge, studying for the ministry. For George, education and the Church are but means for advancing into society and securing economic gain. His criteria for every act is whether he can "make it pay," a trait which manifests itself in "his consistent and perpetual habit of ingratiating himself with every one whom he approached. He never cut a chimney-sweep if he knew him. And he found it pay" (67). George looks upon every being as potentially useful, and is ready to manipulate all relations to his advantage. After, the good will of a chimney sweep might come in handy some day. His ministerial vocation is the vocational plan his father set for him ("I was always intended for the ministry" [223]), as the Church is seen as a way to get one's foot into the drawing room doors of the upper classes. And indeed, George is adept at cultivating the aristocracy and gaining their acceptance. But Alton is shocked that a prospective clergyman views his vocation as a way "to get on" rather than as a holy calling. George bemoans the fact that he will have to endure a country-curacy before he can take a fashionable London church. But he also recognizes that he must at some level mimic the dedication that clergymen are supposed to have, but rarely do: " '. . . I must make a name, I can tell you, if I intend to get on. A person must work like a horse now-a-days, to succeed at all, and Lynedale's a desperately particular fellow, with all sorts of *outré* notions about people's duties and

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genteel pedigree that causes him to stand out from the common crowd of the laboring poor.

vocations and heaven knows what'" (222). Clearly George worships Mammon, and he and his father pride themselves on the fact that they have come up in the world. George is an alter-image of Alton, what Alton might be able to be himself, if he works it right. As George points out to him, "'The self-education dodge pays well just now'" (140). Alton could negotiate his status as poet of the people into that of favorite of the aristocracy ("'At all events,' said Lord Lynedale, 'a self-educated author is always interesting'" [149]), which certainly had been done before.[44] But although Alton does excise the more inflammatory sentiments from his poetry in order to get it published, he has no intention of using either his poetry or his education as a way to rise above his station. He will, however, use it to impress the Dean's beautiful daughter.

According to Kingsley, the attitude of George Locke and his father is damaging to class relations and the social organization as a whole, because it is concerned only with the interests of the individual. The goal of education as a way to raise in the world, in Kingsley's view, served only the middle class, the class that individuals were trying to either climb into or out of. It was not conducive to good social relations because it ignored the needs of the entire social body. Such people are trying to ordain a destiny for themselves, and ignore the destiny that God has given them. They replace God with the worship of Mammon, and in so doing they attempt to supplant the will of God. God has a plan for the individual, the class, the social body, the political body. It is the duty of all to live out that plan in its fullness.

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[44] The poet Willie Thom, who died of disease and starvation in London, had enjoyed great success in the fashionable salons of the time after his one and only volume of poetry was published. Unfortunately, his success also exacerbated his alcoholism, which contributed to his death.

Power to the People

Another reason that working-class individuals might decide to begin a program of self-education was in order to improve their access to political power. Just as William Lovett devoured Parliamentary reports and political philosophy as a way to engage thoughtfully in the debates of the day with his fellow working men, other self-educated readers were beginning to call for an equal voice in electing their representatives and in setting national policy. In the novel, the character Crossthwaite represents the individual for whom self-education is self-empowerment in a very real political sense. Crossthwaite is an active Chartist, one who truly believes that the acceptance of the Charter by Parliament will change the conditions under which the working classes of Great Britain live. He is full of talk of rights and of taking those rights, by force, if necessary. He inflames within Alton the same passion for getting his rights and the same resentment against those who keep those rights from him. Under Crossthwaite's tutelage Alton learns that he

> was unjustly used; that society had not given me my rights. It came to me as a revelation, celestial-infernal, full of glorious hopes of the possible future in store for me through the perfect development of all my faculties; and full, too, of fierce present rage, wounded vanity, bitter grudgings against those more favoured than myself, which grew in time almost to cursing against the God who had made me a poor untutored working man, and seemed to have given me genius only to keep me in a Tantalus'-hell of unsatisfied thirst. (50)

Crossthwaite's remedy, the remedy of the Chartists, is be to have Parliament legislate

such rights that the working classes thought they deserved.

Lest, however, the naïve reader may be swayed by Crossthwaite's admittedly persuasive rhetoric, Kingsley allows Alton, the *narrator* of the autobiography, to correct the error that Alton, the *protagonist* of the autobiography, falls into on this point. Not for one second does Kingsley want the reader to entertain the notion that the granting of political and voting rights will make men worthy of the franchise. There is much to be said for Crossthwaite's complaints, much abuse that Kingsley would descry. But the talk of rights is a two-edged sword, one that plants "a new seed of mingled good and evil" (50). While the complaints are justified, the remedy is not. While one understands why the oppressed might be prepared "to die upon a barricade" (52), one knows that the solution does not lie within the power of the oppressed themselves. Kingsley uses the metaphor of the children of Israel crossing the Jordan into the promised land to symbolize the release of the working classes from oppression and want, emphasizing the fact that on their own they cannot make the crossing. Alton tells his putative working-class readers:

> Or after all, my working brothers, is it true of our promised land, even as of that Jewish one of old, that the *priests*' feet must first cross the mystic stream into the good land and large which God has prepared for us?
>
> Is it so indeed? Then in the name of the Lord of Hosts, ye priests of His, why will ye not awake, and arise, and go over Jordan, that the people of the Lord may follow you? (52)

Once again, the agency to effect change lies not with the people, but with the priests, whose task it is to lead. And although Alton addresses "my working brothers," it is really the priests themselves who are being schooled in their duty. One duty for the workers,

one duty for the priests. If all would perform these duties as they should, there would be no need for talk of rights.

This is exactly what Crossthwaite must learn, that rights are not any man's to give or to take. The dispensation of rights belongs to God. And this leads directly back to Kingsley's own argument, which is espoused, in the novel, in the person of Eleanor Staunton, aristocrat, intellectual, reformer, Christian. Through her lectures to Alton and Crossthwaite on rights, they are led out of error and into the light of truth:

> "And therefore, before you attempt to attain them [rights], make yourselves worthy of them – perhaps by that process you will find some of them have become less needful. At all events, do not ask, do not hope, that He will give them to you, before you are able to profit by them. Believe that He has kept them from you hitherto, because they would have been curses, not blessings. Oh! look back, look back at the history of English Radicalism for the last half century, and judge by your own deeds, your own words; were you fit for those privileges which you so frantically demanded? . . ."
>
> Crossthwaite had kept his face fast buried in his hands; now he looked up with brimming eyes –
>
> "I see it – I see it all now. Oh, my God! my God! What infidels we have been!" (164-65)

What Crossthwaite has been guilty of is substituting the worship of political power for the worship of God, and of relying on the agency of Man rather than on God. When he is able to see God's plan, his political agitation is at an end.

The use of self-education for political action is just as flawed as its use to get on in the world, and for the same reason. God has ordained a political order that is just, as long as all the participants faithfully follow the duties of their stations. We learn how to play our parts through education. For Kingsley, education was not a matter of mastering a set of facts so that one could improve one's material lot, nor was it a matter of mastering abstract ideas that would help one argue political issues. In Kingsley's view, education should be nothing less than moral regeneration. It was only of value insofar as it helped one see the sovereignty of God and enabled one to fully divine and live according to God's plan for mankind. This was as true for the education of an aristocrat as it was for the education of a tailor. Education itself can become a false idol that causes one to depend upon the efforts of man instead upon God. English society was in the dire condition that it was in because all classes had forgotten the roles that they were ordained to play. Kingsley freely criticizes the selfishness and excesses of an aristocracy that had forgotten its duty to the land and to its people. He vehemently criticizes the greed and hypocrisy of a middle class that seemed to care only for profit and to worship only the god of industrialism. He is most critical, however, of a clergy that has forgotten that it is both to serve and lead, and forgotten exactly who it is to serve and follow. All these sections of society needed reforming, and in many senses, *Alton Locke* is really addressed to them. Although the narrative uses the voice of a workman to speak ostensibly to workmen, Kingsley's criticism of the aristocracy and middle class does have some sting to it. In addition, it is more than likely that the actual readership of the novel would be made up of these classes much more so than of working-class readers.

But the novel maintains its claim that it is speaking directly to the working classes

through the argument that although all classes and conditions of the social whole must go through a moral regeneration, that of the working class must come first. It cannot be a matter of granting the franchise, and then expecting that workmen will improve morally, nor of improving working conditions and then expecting that the workers will improve in their hearts. The people themselves must first improve their inner states, then improvement of their outer state will follow. In other words, before such rights and responsibilities can be granted, the working class must show itself to be worthy. But this notion of what constitutes worthiness is slippery, if one is looking to become worthy of economic and political power. As Eleanor, Kingsley's mouthpiece in the last section of the novel, preaches to Alton and Crossthwaite:

> "look for 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, civilisation, freedom, democracy, association, what you will – I shall call it by the name by which my Master spoke of it – the name which includes all these, and more than these – the kingdom of God." (363)

The people already have freedom, the freedom that God has granted them. They already have a democratic state – the kingdom of God. This is the state for which they need to make themselves worthy; this is the state from which they need to claim their rights. From such a perspective, Eleanor re-interprets the points of the Charter:

> [D]emocracy [is] the will and gift of God. Take it for the ground of your

> rights. If, henceforth, you claim political enfranchisement, claim it not as mere men, who may be villains, savages, animals, slaves of their own prejudices and passions; but as member of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and therefore bound to realise it on earth. All other rights are mere mights – mere selfish demands to become tyrants in your turn. If you wish to justify your Charter, do it on that ground. Claim your share in national life, only because the nation is a spiritual body, whose king is the Son of God; whose work, whose national character and powers are allotted to it by the Spirit of Christ. Claim universal suffrage, only on the ground of the universal redemption of mankind – the universal priesthood of Christians. . . . Denounce the effete idol of property qualification, not because it happens to strengthen class interests against you, but because . . . there is no real rank, no real power, but worth, and worth consists not in property, but in the grace of God. Claim, if you will, annual parliaments, as a means of enforcing the responsibility of rulers to the Christian community . . . . But claim these, and all else for which you long, not from man, but from God, the King of men." (364)

Those agitating for rights have forgotten the true source of those rights. But Kingsley's argument remains ambiguous, distinguishing between the kind of worthiness that makes one a full citizen of the kingdom of God and the kind that makes one a full citizen of the kingdom of Queen Victoria, while at the same time linking them inextricably. One cannot be worthy of the worldly kingdom until one is worthy of God's kingdom. And yet

to become worthy of God's kingdom is to no longer need what the worldly kingdom can grant you: "'And therefore, before you attempt to attain them [rights], make yourselves worthy of them – perhaps by that process you will find some of them have become less needful'" (364).

Again, the goal is to determine the true structure that God intends for the social whole, and to conform to that. The interests of one class cannot override the interest of society as a whole. At the same time, the working classes can do nothing in and for themselves without disengaging themselves from the whole – and that would go against God's plan. When Alton asks, "'[W]hy do we need the help of the clergy?'", Eleanor answers:

> Because you need the help of the whole nation; because there are other classes to be considered beside yourselves; because the nation is neither the few nor the many, but the all; because it is only by the co-operation of all the members of a body, that any one member can fulfil its calling in health and freedom; because, as long as you stand aloof from the clergy, or from any other class, through pride, self-interest, or wilful ignorance, you are keeping up those very class distinctions of which you and I too complain, as "hateful equally to God and to his enemies;" and, finally, because the clergy are the class which God has appointed to unite all others; which, in as far as it fulfils its calling, and is indeed a priesthood, is above and below all rank, and knows no man after the flesh, but only on the ground of his spiritual worth, and his birthright in that kingdom which is the heritage of all. (378-79)

The various classes are each ordained by God for various duties, duties which they have forgotten how to perform. The task of *Alton Locke* is to speak to all classes and again teach them their duty. The working classes are educated through the model of Alton Locke, who dramatically presents a model for the proper goals of working-class self-education. The middle classes are educated on the excesses of Mammon. The aristocracy are educated on their proper duty. If each of these groups can learn their lesson well, then it will become obvious that each social role contributes to the interest of the entire society and the entire nation. Kingsley's use of an ostensibly working-class voice to espouse his doctrine is contrived to lend credence to the argument that the best interest of the working classes are served when the best interests of the social body as a whole are served. Kingsley's stratagem, however, fails. Although he imagines that the clergy have no class loyalties or class connections, he is simply ignoring his own bias toward aristocratic paternalism. Though the tailor speaks throughout *Alton Locke*, it is the voice of the Churchman that rings through.

The Model for the Model

The fact that Thomas Cooper was Kingsley's main source and model for his fictional hero, Alton Locke, although Kingsley also drew from other sources as well, allows us to compare the position of the hero in the fictional text and in the autobiographical text that Cooper was to write many years after the publication of *Alton Locke*. Kingsley's hero is putatively victorious, as he has been converted to the right, Christian way of thinking, although his health has been broken and he has been convinced to leave England for America. Eleanor Staunton's health, too, has been

damaged beyond repair and she is expected to die. These two figures of the reconciliation and right relation between the classes, it seems, cannot survive in the atmosphere that is industrial Britain. Kingsley has created these models, but can find nowhere for them to exist in a world that is not yet ready for their kind of reform.

In his autobiography, however, Thomas Cooper always conceives of himself as a victorious and successful hero. His (final) conversion to Christianity does not lead him to passive acceptance of the guidance of Church of England, but instead drives him to become a hard-working evangelist himself, taking the Gospel as his responsibility to disseminate to his fellow countrymen, not as something that he will be fed by others. As we saw in Chapter 2, the narrative self that Cooper posits in his autobiography is establishes himself as and remains the active protagonist in his own life. This is a fate that Kingsley denies to Alton Locke.

Chapter 5: Felix Holt

> I will never write anything to which my whole heart, mind, and conscience don't consent.
>
> George Eliot, *Letters* 3:417

> A man or woman who publishes writings assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind.
>
> George Eliot, *Essays* 440

The January 1868 edition of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* carried an article entitled "An Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," which purported to speak to the working-class subjects newly enfranchised by the Reform Act of 1867. The putative author of this piece, Felix Holt, was well known to the audiences of *Blackwood's* as the fictional protagonist of the novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical.* And in fact, this "Address" also had been written by the famous author of that novel, George Eliot, at the request of Blackwood himself. In the "Address," Felix Holt calls upon his credentials as a self-educated workman and radical at the time of the 1832 Reform Act in order to legitimize his exhortation to his "fellow" workmen to move but cautiously into the realm of political power. As one who had been a victim of mob violence and mob rule, Felix Holt warns his 1867 audience to make sure that they are morally and intellectually prepared to assume their new responsibility of self-representation, and that they should not attempt precipitously to change society. They must, he urges, educate themselves into the kinds of persons who are capable of shouldering the weighty burden of self rule.

This is essentially the same argument made in the narrative of *Felix Holt, the Radical*, in which, according to critics, George Eliot either stridently articulates her conservative politics (Brady 136) or subverts the conservatism of middle-class culture

(Hollis 155). Critics and readers alike have had trouble interpreting Eliot's Condition of England novel, mainly because it is, as David R. Carroll argues, an industrial novel with a difference (206). It is an industrial novel, he notes, that critiques the genre itself. It was written after the period when most industrial novels were written -- long after the Hungry Forties and the Chartist agitation -- and so can recall the failure of the First Reform Bill to improve the conditions of society. The novel argues that the solution to England's social problems is not political but moral. This, of course, was also the argument of novelists and social critics like Charles Kingsley, who earlier had offered their own often one-dimensional versions of reform. Yet Eliot offers no simplistic solutions in her social problem novel. She is too rigorous a thinker and too wide-visioned a novelist not to recognize the complexities of her world. This novel is, in fact, her challenge to the Christian solution that Kingsley offers in *Alton Locke* (Perkin 131).[45]

Unlike Kingsley, Eliot is a marginalized member of the society that she is both critiquing and validating. Kingsley is male, a member of the Establishment clergy, respectable. Eliot is female, a some-time agnostic, and lives in a socially and legally unsanctioned domestic situation. These experiences, as well as her intellectual integrity, make her aware that there are many sides to any issue, social or political. Eliot explores the many sides of political reform, presenting various voices and opinions within her narrative. In "Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot's Mouthpiece," Hilda Hollis argues that "*Felix Holt* is a genuinely dialogic novel in which Eliot is exploring and testing, rather than simply endorsing, Felix's opinions." I find this argument

[45] Perkin emphasizes "Eliot's faith in the power of human affections to provide the basis for a new

unconvincing, however. It is my contention that Eliot ultimately endorses the political sentiments of one character -- her self-educated working-class protagonist, Felix Holt. Like Kingsley and the self-taught autobiographers discussed in previous chapters, Eliot constructs a model of what a working-class autodidact should look like and what kind of *self* the self-educated should become. Although she presents many different voices and opinions within her narrative, she means for him to serve as a model. So while Eliot's novel indeed presents many different voices and opinions, as Hilda Hollis claims in her challenge to the critical tradition that reads Eliot as a conservative in *Felix Holt*, I argue that this dialogism is not a deliberate act of subversion on the part of a radical novelist -- or a "realistic" representation of the voice of a working-class radical. "[T]he bent of my mind is conservative rather than destructive," Eliot assures one correspondent (*GEL* IV:472), and she pushes a conservative solution to social unrest and the extension of the vote, despite the many competing voices in *Felix Holt*. The position of the self-educated working-class character of Felix Holt is the center to which she retreats. Eliot will define her own brand of *conservatism* by Felix's *radicalism*, and the character of Felix Holt becomes a model of Eliot's conception of the ideal working-class radical and working-class learner.

The solution that Eliot's social fiction advocates is at heart profoundly conservative, a solution that yearns for a social body reminiscent of pre-Industrial England. The novel is not, as Hilda Hollis argues in "Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot's Mouthpiece?", "a genuinely dialogic novel in which Eliot is

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'religion' which will depose Evangelical dogmatism" (133).

exploring and testing, rather than simply endorsing, Felix's opinions" (155). As I indicated earlier, a more persuasive argument is that while the novel is dialogic, Felix is the conservative center to which Eliot retreats after considering the complexities and contradictions of organicism and incarnate history. Whereas Hollis claims that "Felix's argument for conformity and submission to the state is contested by the lack of beneficial change for the individuals who most need it" (155), the working classes, I counter that the failure of reform in the text is not the result of Eliot's intentional subversiveness, but of the failure implicit in her conservative solution.

Hollis turns to the "Address" to support her claim that "the absolute identification of an author and her character" is "naive" (158). Just because Eliot has the character speak outside of the confines of the novel which created him does not mean, according to Hollis, that this voice then belongs univocally to the author herself:

> I suggest that while the article does not contain the multiple voices from various characters as does the novel, we do hear more than one argument through Eliot's use of "hybridization," what Bakhtin defines as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance." (158)

But the dialogism of the address consists of one class's attempt to speak in the voice of another. The slippage that Hollis notices occurs not because Eliot subjects Arnoldian Culture to a satirizing lens (Hollis 158), but because she attempts to appropriate the voice of the working-class autodidact for her own didactic purposes. In the "Address," as in the novel, Felix Holt is used to articulate and model a prescriptive subject position for the working-class autodidact (and other would-be working-class radicals).

Eliot's posturing – a middle-class woman novelist writing in the voice of a working-class male radical – was narratively deceptive. She placed an argument advocating middle-class interests in the mouth of a working-class speaker as if it were an argument that best promoted working-class interests. Eliot's theory of sympathy indicates that she believed that gradual political reform would ultimately be in the interest of the working classes. But it also highlights the gulf between how Eliot conceived that interest and how working-class radicals like William Lovett conceived it. Eliot's narrative desires reflect a conservative conception of English culture and, despite the forwardness of her own life, attempt to set parameters of political, social, and cultural Progress.

The Second Reform Bill of 1867 is the event which calls forth Eliot's narrative response to the Condition of England.

By the mid-1860s, however, the pressure for reform once again made itself felt. Trade unions had burgeoned in number and in influence after 1832. Individual Chartists were still pressing for reform, and women's suffrage was becoming an issue. With respect to the question of reform, the Liberal party was itself divided. While the campaign of radical John Bright of the Liberal Party influenced Parliament and public opinion, the extension of the franchise was opposed by members of his own party, particularly Robert Lowe. The Reform Bill was introduced, instead, by Disraeli's Conservative government. Disraeli perceptively saw this issue as tearing the Liberals apart, and he recognized that if he could control the terms of Reform, he could consolidate power for Conservatives. As historian Ian Machen points out, it was this combination of pressure both social and political that ultimately pushed the Bill through:

> While it is highly doubtful whether such important Reform bills as those of 1832 and 1867 could have been carried without considerable public pressure behind them, it is also doubtful whether they would have proposed the changes they did if these had not been in keeping with the party interests of the governments which introduced them. Both measures moved only slightly toward democracy. (66)

Disraeli could propose a conservative extension of the franchise while maintaining safeguards within the qualifications which would ensure that only the right kind of voters were brought into the fold.

As in 1832, franchise reform became not so much about inclusion, but exclusion. The type of persons to be included looked very much like the middle-class males who already had the right to vote. They were to hold the same values and to have the same political and economic interests. Not to get the vote was the kind of working-class subject who would vote only for his own self- or class-interest to the detriment of the nation-at-large. The "nation-at-large," however, was defined in terms of middle-class interests and middle-class values. In *Defining the Victorian Nation,* Keith McClelland notes that "Citizenship in Britain of the 1860s was about political rights: but *how* citizenship came to be defined was a question of social and cultural identities, their formation and articulation in movements and ideas" (77).[46] This struggle was played out

[46] Even supporters of franchise reform eschewed the language of political identity in favor of the language of cultural identity. Ann Clark points out how fatherhood became a term defining who deserved the vote and who would be a responsible voter (i.e. not vote purely for self-interest): "Proponents of working-men's votes portrayed them as sharing the manly virtues of the middle class . . . Liberal advocates of reform could therefore claim that working men deserved the vote as fathers rather than needing the vote to represent their distinct interests" (240).

not only in Parliament, but in extra-political discursive forms such as fiction and magazine essays, the fields upon which George Eliot exerted her influence.

The terms under which one could be considered worthy of the vote in 1832 had centered around property; these terms shifted by the 1860s. By the 1860s, what one owned was not a sufficient measure of one's class. Being middle class had come to be defined as something more than a £10 piece of property. It had become a matter of "class," as in a quality of culture. In other words, the possession of property was replaced by an ideal of culture, conceived of in terms of both education and morality, as a requirement for being classified as middle class, and therefore as a pre-requisite for political power (Lesjak 80). McClelland emphasizes this shift:

> [W]ho was being brought within the pale of the constitution was a particular kind of man whose definition -- the social, political and moral qualities he was thought to carry, his perceived relationship to processes of government and politics -- as crucial to the redefinition of what the political nation was and might become. . . . It was central to the debates about culture in and after 1867, evident across the range of intellectual argument and controversy, from Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* or Carlyle's essay on the political rights to Positivists like Frederic Harrison or E.S. Beesly and liberals like John Morley. (72)

Or, one might add, novelists like George Eliot. These narratives define who is a political being, and how the right kind of education is crucial in forming such a being. This is the discourse to which Eliot brings her formidable talents as a novelist and as an intellectual.

Indeed, Eliot's intellectual commitments are inseparable from her novelistic and political commitments, and understanding one is contingent upon understanding the other. The narrative of Eliot's intellectual development also traces the fascinating story of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, which I distill (not quite arbitrarily, although it is unavoidably reductionist) into two main fields or disciplines of inquiry. The first is a discipline of the future, from which the paradigm of progress was originally taken: science. The second is a discipline of the past: the legacy and inheritance of a people and a culture, what George Eliot terms "incarnate history." By applying metaphors from both these disciplines to theories of society, nineteenth-century liberal discourse would attempt "to integrate individualistic and communal values and to transform religious ties into social ones" (Graver 2), and to re-establish definitive answers to the question of where the individual's rights, duties, and responsibilities lie in a society.

These two discursive arenas were to satisfy what Dentith calls "the ideological needs of the mid-nineteenth-century middle class" (20). He also claims that the intellectual development of middle-class liberal thought, as well as the individual intellectual development of George Eliot, "can be understood as part of a general attempt to construct a middle-class, anti-aristocratic culture based on a belief in science and drawing on the traditions of Nonconformity and Dissent" (20). This project included

> a conservative aspect . . . involving a repudiation of rapid or revolutionary political change, a commitment to the laws of the market and the current division of labour, and even, in extreme form, a rejection of politics as such. A dual project, in fact, embracing both the necessity for change and

the necessity for that change to be ordered and to come from the internal dynamics of society itself . . . (20)

This need for "change to be ordered" prompted a search for an ordering principle, one that would validate and reinforce the interests of the middle class, meeting their "ideological needs." Such principles were found in scientific theories of organicism and evolution, and in theories of a national culture and "incarnate history."

The Metaphors of Science

The first metaphor that social critics borrowed from the sciences is that of society as an organic body. Much of this organic language was taken from the literary criticism of Coleridge, who in turn had lifted it from the German Romantic philosophers. The concepts that could be used to describe a living organism could also be used to describe a poem, or even a society. In fact, such an analogy finds its origins in the *Poetics*, where, Murray Krieger tells us, Aristotle "makes clear his principle of closed structure that would serve a totalizing functionalism" (130). For Aristotle, this means the positing of an internal purposiveness of a work of art, of a beginning, middle, and end related by contingency and not merely by succession. Coleridge later takes from Schlegel and others the notion that the art object has an organic form which is innate, which "shapes, as it develops from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form" and which is in its essence a "special relationship between part and whole" (Krieger 132).

In the work of Eliot's friend Herbert Spencer, though, the organicist analogy begins to be applied specifically to human society. Again the emphasis is upon the internal purposiveness of the form as well as the relationship of the parts to the whole.

Spencer's analogy stresses the interdependence of the different parts of society and conceives of their arrangement as being a "natural" development of their essential form. As a result, Spencer's organic society "tends to consecrate the actually existing" (Dentith 21):

> [T]his meant that the laws of the market and the division of labour were permanently secured by being the essential processes by which the social organism continued . . . , that historical changes or improvements can only be sanctioned if they are adaptive, incremental, growing out of the already existent. (21)

The forms of society are naturalized; the present forms are as they should be according to the laws of nature. Spencer was committed to all forms of *laissez-faire* in economics and in politics, supposing natural processes would manifest themselves. Thus the analogy of society as an organic whole had real material consequences to the "parts" of which it was comprised.

Following Spencer, liberal discourse too began to apply the notion of evolution not only to biological entities, but social entities as well. Spencer's theories on evolution pre-dated Darwin's, and in fact Spencer originated the term "survival of the fittest."[47] He was also the founder of what came to be called Social Darwinism. But Spencer was not the only influential theorist applying the language of biological evolution to social development. Auguste Comte describes society as an evolutionary series leading

[47] In the 5th edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* he writes of natural selection that the "expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient."

ultimately to a Religion of Humanity, "a world ruled by invariable sequence and succession" (Dentith 24). God is to be replaced by the natural processes of human society, which in turn reflect the natural processes of biological science. While Eliot herself ultimately rejected the Comtist view, George Lewes had been an enthusiastic translator of Comte's works, and Eliot herself remained close to the Positivist Frederic Harrison.[48]

In a social system considered to be organic, the role of the individual is clear: one has a "natural" place in the structure of the system and should readily submit to its evolutionary laws. To do so was to accept conditions as they are. But the first order of a society's business must be to discover what these processes were, to discover what Dentith calls the "social limits" of the system. "This is only possible, moreover, given a rigid separation of the theoretical and the practical, for a recognition of the true and right must always precede political action, and indeed be uncontaminated by it" (24). Thus both the evolutionary and the organic view of society attempt to establish a new basis upon which to ground social values, a basis that is seen as being both natural and rational, grounded in scientific objectivity and humanistic rationality. The language of this project becomes part of the general intellectual discursive vocabulary. That George Eliot uses the metaphors of organicism and evolution in her fiction and in her essays has been well documented.[49] Most important is the image in *Middlemarch* of society as a web. Even in

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[48] For a further of examination of Eliot's relationship to Comte's thought and to the English positivists, see Martha S. Vogeler's "George Eliot and the Positivists," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35:3 (Dec., 1980), 406-431.

[49] See, for example, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Dickens, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Sally Shuttleworth's *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science*, Nancy Paxton's *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*,

"An Address to Working-men by Felix Holt," Eliot describes society as a body (519), claims that it operates by the "gradual operation of steady causes" (520-21), and speaks of the "wants and demands urged into existence by the forces of a maturing world" (529). This most political of arguments is filled with the language of organicism.

The assumptions which lie behind this particular scientific analogy allow the image to work in the service of a particular ideology. By claiming to ground their social theory in the rational discourse of objective science, these thinkers and writers claim to have found the truth of social life, a reality uncontaminated by tradition, by personal or class interest, by any political interest whatsoever. Through objective science, and through scientific metaphor, they could claim to have discovered how things really work, and thus to have the organizing principle, writ large, upon which society should be based. Their claim is for a rightness not based on God, on politics, on power, or on anything but scientific -- and therefore unassailable -- truth. Truth, reality, and science were supposed to be descriptive of the world; but they described not the world as it was but as the advocates of the scientific view wanted it to be.

Incarnate History

The second discursive arena which provided a vocabulary for an ordering principle which reinforced middle-class interest was that of culture, or what Eliot termed "incarnate history." "[I]t is clear that the conditions of an age are determined by the conditions of the age that went before it," George Eliot wrote in notes to her essay "Historic Guidance" (qtd. in Graver 46). History itself, then, is also described in

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just to name three of the most interesting studies.

evolutionary terms. In "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot reviews an essay by the same name by German social scientist Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, and picks up his term "incarnate history" which she defines in organic imagery:

> What has grown up historically can only die out historically, by the gradual operation of necessary laws. The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both. (127)

Truth, therefore, is also found in the inheritance of a culture, what critic Bernard Semmel calls the national inheritance, "the inheritance of the nation's culture and historical traditions" (6), and that culture is in fact the incarnate (or organic) history of a people. Such a conception of history is more possible in Europe, Eliot argues, than in England, "where we have to recall it by an effort of memory and reflection," because "though our English life is in its core intensely traditional, Protestantism and commerce have modernized the face of the land and the aspects of society in a far greater degree than in any continental country" (129). The effects of industrialization have cut off the English people from their traditional social and economic relations, from their national inheritance, the ideal organizing principle of a national culture.[50] Like Kingsley, Eliot

[50] Protestantism here is equated with Dissenting Protestantism, not that of the Church of England.

looks back to an earlier social system, one in which these relations were ordered by aristocratic paternalism. An anachronistic solution for a very modern problem.

In this review Eliot also seizes upon a favorite term of Riehl's that will later figure prominently in the work of Matthew Arnold, and indeed forms an intellectual bridge between the thought of Eliot and of Arnold. This term is *Philister*, which Riehl uses to characterize those who are only motivated by self-interest. The *Philister*, Eliot summarizes in her review, is

> one who is indifferent to all social interests, all public life, as distinguished from selfish and private interests; he has no sympathy with political and social events except as they affect his own comfort and prosperity, as they offer him material for amusement or opportunity for gratifying his vanity. He has no social or political creed, but is always of the opinion which is most convenient for the moment. He is always in the majority, and is the main element of unreason and stupidity in the judgment of a "discerning public." (187)

But Riehl's description of the *Philister* does not go far enough, in Eliot's opinion. She adds her own expanded definition:

> It seems presumptuous in us to dispute Riehl's interpretation of a German word, but we must think that, in literature, the epithet *Philister* has usually a wider meaning than this -- includes his definition and something more. We imagine the *Philister* is the personification of the spirit which judges everything from a lower point of view -- which judges the affairs of the

> nation from the parochial point of view, and does not hesitate to measure the merits of the universe from the human point of view. (187)

According to Eliot's definition, Riehl's *Philister* sounds very similar to Arnold's Philistine, that "ordinary self" which is concerned only with its own selfish interests. And the value Eliot places on incarnate history, or the national inheritance, seems echoed in Arnold's claim that "establishments tend to give us a sense of a historical life of the human spirit, outside and beyond our own fancies and feelings" (*Culture and Anarchy* 15). He calls this "historical life" "the main current of human life" (21).

Again, these writers are speaking in organic terms of relationships between the parts of society and the whole, relationships which are based upon an organizing principle. Arnold calls that principle Culture, locating it within the individual:

> . . . culture . . . places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality, in the ever-increasing efficaciousness and in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling which make the peculiar dignity, wealth and happiness of human nature. (32-33)

Although Culture is an inward condition, it is also manifested outwardly into society. Culture is not for individual enlightenment only, but for the enlightenment of society as a whole. This is what has been called the national inheritance, when "the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light":

> those are the happy moments of humanity, . . . those are the marking epochs of a people's life, . . . those are the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative power of genius, when there is a *national* flow

> of life and thought, when the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive. Only it must be *real* thought and *real* beauty; *real* sweetness and *real* light. (47)

But this principle of Culture must permeate the entire society, must form what Comte called a "community of thought" (Graver 7). The success of the society is dependent upon the success of its individuals, and they in turn are dependent upon each other. This is what binds humanity together, "For if one member suffer, the other members must suffer with it; and the fewer there are that follow the true way of salvation the harder that way is to find" (Arnold 8). The success of the whole is contingent upon the cooperation of its parts -- all its parts. Each individual is bound to each other individual, no matter what his or her class, because they together make up the whole that is society, that make up what is humanity. Culture is what will hold it all together. "This is the *social order*," Arnold claims, "and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality" (48).

This is, however, a highly qualified equality, not the egalitarian concept of Tom Paine or of the French Revolution, or even of William Lovett or Thomas Cooper. Equality for Arnold, and for Eliot, as I will argue, means that all are members of the social order, not that all are of equal value or rank in the social order. It does not mean that all have an equal voice in setting policy or in determining the course of the nation. It merely replaces subjection to a conservative political and economic system with subjection to a conservative *cultural* system.

In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Catherine Gallagher argues that in *Felix Holt* Eliot "undertakes the task of the Arnoldian intellectual" (237), and uses Arnold's vocabulary to examine Philistinism in her lower- and middle-class characters

and the Arnoldian best self in the character of Felix Holt. Although Gallagher views the problems of representation inherent in Arnold's "discourse of culture" (243) through an Arnoldian lens, her reading of *Felix Holt* provides a useful vocabulary with which to talk about the relationships between individuals and society, between culture and political power, that Eliot lays out in the novel.[51] But as interesting as this Arnoldian overlay is in reading George Eliot's novel, Eliot herself provides us with her own version of an organizing principle, one that not only provides a paradigm for social relations, but also constitutes the basis of her theory of realist fiction, and is consistent with the organicist view. This is what Eliot calls sympathy.

Sympathy

George Eliot wrote to a correspondent that "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" (*GEL*, II: 403). Eliot posits this sympathy between all individual members of a society, indeed all individual members of humanity, as the organizing principle upon which to base our relations with each other and with the social body. But she conceives of no "sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity" ("The Natural History" 110), but sympathy that is the "greatest benefit we owe the artist," who gives us "a picture of human life . . . [which] surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment"

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[51] "[*Felix Holt*] elucidates the central problem within the discourse of culture itself, revealing the paradoxical relationship between the Arnoldian idea of culture and that of representation: on the one hand, culture disparages representation; on the other hand, it elevates representation onto a plane above the world represented, a plane on which it constitutes its own separate and determining reality without attaching itself

(110). This sympathy is not sentimentality, but the extension of our ability to feel outside of ourselves and our own egoistic concerns to those of others and ultimately to the good of society in general. Eliot implies here a suppression of self-interest in favor of the greater good for all of humanity.[52] The way to develop this sympathy is through art. Coleridge had his poetic clerisy, Arnold his "men of culture;" for Eliot, the artist would create the sympathy that would hold society together, "to strengthen social cohesion, to bind people together in a social organism threatened by the exclusiveness of class" (Dentith 53). "Art is the nearest thing to life," Eliot writes in "The Natural History;" "it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (110). Or as she claims in a letter:

> If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that *opinions* are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures. (*GEL*, 3:111)

Sympathy becomes for Eliot the ordering principle which answers the question of where the individual's responsibilities and duties lie in a society. It becomes the unifying principle that lends cohesiveness to a society divided by class interests.

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to some higher realm of spiritual value, without, in other words, becoming symbolic" (Gallagher 243).

[52]It is also interesting to note that it was Lewes who introduced the Comtian term "altruistic" into English. And according to the OED, in a 1865 essay in the Westminster Review J. S. Mill writes of the desire "to make altruism (a word of his [Comte's] own coining) predominate over egoism."

There certainly appears to be an impulse in Eliot's call to transcend class prejudices, or, as Dentith puts it, "to bind people together in society, to gain recognition for people on the strength of their moral rather than their social worth" (53). But Dentith further notes this impulse also contains a conservative twist which "obscures these real material differences that will continue to divide people no matter with what sympathy 'we' regard our 'more heavily-laden fellow-men'" (53).[53] According to Eliot's principle, the internal conditions of men's hearts (Kingsley would have said souls) is important, not their external economic and political condition. In fact, Eliot's concept of sympathy as social melioration would repress this economic and political condition.

Thus Eliot's social theory might be summed up as follows: society is an organism that evolves at a constant rate guided by its own internal logic of development; history is the operation of natural evolutionary law in human society; this historical evolution is the cultural inheritance of the nation. While the individuals in a society may seem to be independent of each other, they in fact are bound together by a sympathy that transcends any differences in their positions in the social body. It is the role of the artist to facilitate the extension of sympathies of all individuals beyond their own personal lot.

The ideological implications of Eliot's social theory become clear when she applies her system to particular instances of class conflict. In fact, *Felix Holt* is the fictional elucidation of this theory -- although I argue that the novel does *not* carry out the artist's task of extending our sympathies, at least not in the character of Felix. He

[53] Dentith is here quoting Eliot in "The Natural History" (111).

provides a model that readers are to follow (if they are working class) while serving as a mouthpiece for Eliot's social theory.

The New Form of Industrial Novel

Although Eliot's novel *Felix Holt, the Radical* is traditionally classified by critics with the social problem or industrial fiction of Gaskell, Disraeli, and Kingsley, Eliot diverges sharply from the conventional form. An examination of the characteristics she shares with other social problem novelists -- and where she parts company from them -- enables us to see how her narrative form of argumentation is meant to prescribe a certain type of working-class, educated subject.

As I argued in Chapter 3, the social problem novels were a sub-genre of the novel form which shared a particular set of concerns and a particular set of conventions. Social problem, or industrial, novels were concerned with class conflict, with the relation of the economic to the social, with critiquing a hierarchical social system that was not working because the classes were not fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, and with a desire to effect both material change and changes in ways of feeling and thinking. These novels expressed real fear about the consequences of a breakdown of the social system and sought fictional resolutions for these conflictual elements of society. These narratives certainly represented members of the working class as individual protagonists whose lives were impacted by the class-issues of the day -- by unemployment, by hunger and poverty, by unwholesome working conditions, and by the political forces of both the ruling parties and radical pedagogues of their own class. In effect these novels made ideological claims about the representability of working-class individuals in a two-fold way.

The first strategy was to make the poor visible, perhaps for the first time, to a middle class which had become accustomed to averting its gaze from misery. Many of the industrial novels painted the life of the poor so vividly that their pathos could not be ignored. [54] This is not to say that the poor were in fact invisible, even to the most casual observer, but that respectable folk had become adept at looking away. City builders designed neighborhoods and streets so that one could bypass areas of industry and poverty. On a visit to Manchester, George Eliot comments on how unpleasant the sight of the poor is, and how quickly she and her companions decide to get away. "Horrid place!" she writes, "we were rather glad to leave it the next day" (GEL I:179). Social problem novelists brought many of the physical conditions of the poor into the discourse of reform, and into the consciousness of the middle classes, in a more emotional way than the empirical descriptions of social science.

The second way social problem novels made ideological claims was through the portraits they drew of working-class characters. However, while bringing the figure of the working-class individual into view, the pictures are generally drawn in black and white. Representation is also definition, an inclusion of some characteristics and an exclusion of others, an idealization of some images and a demonization of others. John Barton's aggressive political agitation is bad and needs to be avoided; Mary Barton's patient resignation should be emulated. Thus the social problem novelists defined what type of working-class character was entitled to approval by the reading public and what

[54] Dickens is the undisputed master of this kind of scene painting. One thinks immediately of the death of Stephen Blackpool, or that of Jo in Bleak House. Kingsley himself did no mean job describing the conditions of the sweated tailors being held prisoner with the corpses of their kin in lightless, disease-ridden rooms.

type disapproval. Through the act of narrating, the social problem novel brought into being, at least into a certain *kind* of being, the working-class subject.

Eliot's industrial novel participates in this narrative strategy and shares many of the conventions of social problem fiction. *Felix Holt* has a working-class hero, specifically a self-educated working-class hero. However, Eliot's representation of her protagonist is quite different from the representation of fictional characters like Alton Locke or autobiographical characters like William Lovett and Thomas Cooper. Whereas good portions of their narratives describe the difficulties they encounter in the efforts to educate themselves while trying to make a living, Felix's education is a *fait accompli* at the start of the novel, and he is never depicted practicing his chosen craft, watchmaking. What readers know of Felix's educational accomplishments comes mostly second-hand from the other characters who comment on his learning. In fact, "learning" is the only term that Eliot uses to describe the store of Felix's knowledge, reading, and wisdom. The term "education," on the other hand, is a contested term and provides an example of the novel's dialogism, for the attitudes toward education vary tremendously. "Education" applies to the acquisition of accomplishments that denote class position. For example, Ms. Transome was educated to be an ornament in aristocratic society:

> For Miss Lingon had had a superior governess, who held that a woman should be able to write a good letter, and to express herself with propriety on general subjects. And it is astonishing how effective this education appeared in a handsome girl, who sat supremely well on horseback, sang and played a little, painted small figures in water-colours, had a naughty sparkle in her eyes when she made a daring quotation, and an

air of serious dignity when she recited something from her store of correct opinions. (26-27)

The education of the lawyer Jermyn, on the other hand, has enabled him to increase his wealth and buy his way into polite society (or rather, it enables him to imitate high society). As the rector describes him, he is

> "A fat-handed, glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief; one of your educated lowbred fellows; a foundling who got his Latin for nothing at Christ's Hospital; one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen, and think they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture." (30)

Where Mrs. Transome's education has been appropriate to her station, Jermyn's gives him aspirations above his. Neither receives the kind of education in human sympathy that Eliot proposes.

Even when Esther uses the term "education," she always couples it with "refinement." Her association with Felix is

> All the more undignified because Felix chose to live in a way that would prevent any one from classing him according to his education and mental refinement -- "which certainly are very high," said Esther. (188)
>
> "But suppose every one did as you do? Please to forgive me for saying so; but I cannot see why you could not have lived as honourably with some employment that presupposes education and refinement." (220)

Her views in this, as in all else, are at odds with Felix's, and she must be schooled by him in the right view. Most emphatically, Felix refuses to use his learning simply to better his own social and economic position:

> "Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning? The most of the middle class are as ignorant as the working people about everything that doesn't belong to their own Brummagem life. That's how the working men are left to foolish devices and keep worsening themselves: the best heads among them forsake their born comrades, and go in for a house with a high door-step and a brass knocker." (55)

What Felix has is a quality, not a commodity or ornament -- a brass knocker -- that can be bartered for individual economic or political gain. Felix's learning does not benefit him in a crassly materialistic way -- more income or a higher social standing. His learning has developed his sympathy, as Eliot defines it, and enabled him to appreciate his national inheritance. His patrimony does not consist of brass knockers but of the realization of the organic evolution of British society. His sympathy motivates him to work toward the fulfillment of his society's evolution for the betterment of all, not just the advancement of the individual.

Formally, though, Eliot's representation of Holt is deeply flawed. The motives for his sympathetic development and the mechanism behind his realization of the national inheritance remain unaccountable.

But Eliot seems not so interested in how Felix gains his "learning" (which is a fault in her characteristic of him), but in what he is to do with it. The account of his own

learning is conspicuously absent in a text that emphasizes his intellectual accomplishments. In Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, the reader is presented with a detailed account of the intellectual and moral development of the young tailor. We see his struggles in the workplace; we are given vivid pictures of the misery around him. This misery contributes to his political action and in turn drives him to his eventual moral deliverance. But we are with him at each step while he wends his way through a world of poverty and abuse in order to find the right response to those crushing conditions. With Felix, however, his development has already been effected before the beginning of the novel. All we know of his "conversion" is that he spent six weeks of debauchery in Glasgow and decided to turn his life around. Of his formal education we hear that he spent "five miserable years" apprenticed "to a stupid brute of a country apothecary" (53), an education that did not encourage literary pursuits. But we are never exactly sure what it is that Felix reads and how his develops his erudition and sensibilities. He paraphrases Shakespeare: "But while Caliban is Caliban, though you multiply him by a million, he'll worship every Trinculo that carries a bottle" (224); but he disparages Esther's reading tastes. She reads Byron, French novelists, and at school had been fond of Racine. These choices were popular, but considered racy, as well. Her reading habits are more similar to the real-life autodidacts than Felix's. No where else does the narrator mention Felix's reading. Unlike Alton Locke, and unlike the autodidact autobiographers, the narrator does not obsessively catalogue what books Felix reads and what subjects he explores. Also in contrast to his literary predecessors, Felix's narrative does not emphasize the difficulties faced by a workman who desires learning. There is the problem of getting books to read, first of all, if one has been able to acquire the skills for reading. Then

there is the matter of when to read. Most of the day is taken up with labor, and reading at night costs both sleep and candles. These conditions were real impediments to learning, to which Kingsley as a novelist showed great sympathy. Eliot, however, glosses over such material impedimenta. We know that Felix's father had enough money to apprentice his son, but how Felix manages to acquire his great store of knowledge and wisdom we get not an inkling. While I argue that Eliot intends Felix as a guide for how a working-class autodidact should act and think, she certainly does not provide a blueprint for how one can *become* a working-class autodidact oneself. While Gallagher claims that "[t]he inexplicability of the working-class hero's development . . . is characteristic of the industrial novel" (245), it is indeed this development that I find as the central narrative paradigm in most industrial novels: how did the working-class hero get from being one of the mob to standing out from the mob? The story that the autodidacts tell in order to claim their own empowered subject positions traces the material conditions of their educational journeys. Thus, Felix's extraordinary character is even more puzzling and unaccountable. Divorced from the material conditions of his development, this full-grown autodidact, sprung, as it were, full-blown from a Scottish garret, simply highlights the prescriptive nature of Eliot's presentation. She models how the autodidact should be, while offering no practical guidance as to how he should get there.

The development of Felix's politics, too, are in many ways unaccounted for. We are not given a convincing presentation of why Felix thinks as he does nor how his political convictions arose. He tells Mr. Lyon that he "was converted by six weeks' debauchery" (53), speaking of the time he spent in Glasgow:

> "If I had not seen that I was making a hog of myself very fast, and that pig-wash, even if I could have got plenty of it, was a poor sort of thing, I should never have looked life fairly in the face to see what was to be done with it. I laughed out loud at last to think of a poor devil like me, in a Scotch garret, with my stockings out at heel and a shilling or two to be dissipated upon, with a smell of raw haggis mounting from below, and old women breathing gin as they passed me on the stairs -- wanting to turn my life into easy pleasure. Then I began to see what else it could be turned into. Not much, perhaps. This world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it. They may tell me I can't alter the world -- that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers in it, and if I don't lie and filch somebody else will. Well, then, somebody else shall, for I won't." (53)

Felix has seen the misery of poverty, raw haggis, and gin, and he decides that he does not want to participate in that world. But at core, this is a very individualistic decision. He makes a *moral* decision, as a member of the working class, to reject such a life. He acknowledges "that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers" in the world, but in refusing to join their number he implies that those conditions of dissipation which he witnessed and participated in are matters of individual moral choices and not systemic social conditions. But the reasons for making this moral and political choice are ultimately as mysterious as the source of his learning.

As far as Eliot is concerned, the solution to social problems is a moral choice, because social problems are caused by individual moral turpitude. Therefore, the reform of the individual is the first requisite step toward the reform of the society. The moral elevation of the individual within his own class would lead to the elevation of the class as a whole. As Cottom notes, "the structure of relations in society and its economic and political order were subsumed for [Eliot] entirely within the moral -- or, as Eliot dignified it, the philosophical -- consciousness of a hidden identity in all humanity and in fact in all the universe" (122).

And indeed this lesson is not for the working class alone. All of society must be educated in this principle. Thus the sub-plot of the novel -- the stolen patrimony of Esther Lyon, and the lengths to which Mrs. Transome has gone in order to secure this inheritance for her own favorite son, Harold – reiterates this point. These characters from the higher orders of society, too, are also educated about their place in the social body. The inheritance plot enacts Eliot's social solution on a personal level, making up what Brady calls the "private plot" or "Esther's romance plot" (139).

The social landscape of Treby Magna in 1832 had undergone many of the same upheavals as the rest of the country. There is still a recognizable traditional aristocracy, represented by the Debarrys. There is still a recognizable working class, represented by the miners of Sproxton and the agricultural workers of the district. But it is the composition of the many gradations of class in-between these two traditional classes that is no longer recognizable. The middle class includes certain Treby Magna storeowners, the personal servant of the Debarrys, a Dissenting minister, a successful lawyer, and even the inhabitants of Transome Court. At the lower end of the Treby Magna middle class

are those who have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, as it were, and risen from the ranks of the working class, embracing the commercial and individualistic values of the middle class. At the upper end are vestigial members of the aristocracy, like the Transomes, who, while suffering from a lack of funds, embrace the middle-class virtues of commercialism and individualism in order to maintain their social and economic position.

The Transomes have allied themselves with the middle class in several ways. First, by putting the management of the estate in the hands of the lawyer, Jermyn, Mrs. Transome has entrusted the family's fate to a social upstart, one devoted to his own economic improvement. He maintains the estate by means not always honorable. He keeps the property in the hands of the Transomes by repressing claims that the estate legally belongs to another family. This is due to a complex inheritance issue. The Transomes are not hereditarily entitled to their wealth, their lands, their name: in short, everything that makes them "aristocratic."

The Transome alliance with the middle class is further complicated by the fact that Mrs. Transome had a clandestine sexual affair with the lawyer Jermyn, and the issue of that affair is now the heir of Transome Court.[55] Harold, then, is doubly removed from a legitimate, ancestral claim to his "family" wealth and position. He is a self-made commercial success, which compounds this distance. He has been in the East, making

[55] On Jermyn's sexual connection to the Transomes, and the Transome's questionable hereditary legitimacy, Bodenheimer writes: "The plot so intertwines the parvenu and the landed class that an attack on one is equivalent to an attack on the other. . . . The conflation of these normally opposing social categories obviates the need for a choice or a balance between them; rather the middle-class is rejected as a body with neither legal nor moral claim to its power" (102).

his own fortune as a merchant and a banker. It is this commercial fortune that is to save the "ancestral" estate.

The true heir of Transome Court is Esther Lyon, the step-daughter of a Dissenting minister in Treby Magna. When Esther's lineage and claim are recognized, Esther is forced to choose between her working-class love, Felix Holt, and her (upper) middle-class -- and wealthy -- suitor, Harold Transome. Esther's choice is between the middle-class values of individual interest, profit and the pursuit of the "fine things" of this world, and Felix's conception of a society composed of individuals all working towards "some great good" (363). But the tension that Eliot's narrative creates is not between the working classes and the middle classes over political power. That is the struggle that culminates in the election day riots, and which the aristocracy and the military put down by force. The real tension is between Eliot's ideal of sympathy as an organizing principle of society and the conservation of a national culture (values espoused by Felix), and the prevailing ideals of a commercial, individualistic, selfish, and uncultured middle class (values represented by Harold). This is the basis of the choice that Esther must make between her two suitors.

A quick look at the political plot will emphasize this point that Eliot's solution is never actually conceived in political terms. In fact, Kristin Brady characterizes the "political sub-plot" of Election Day as "evasive" (136). In Eliot's novel, the working classes of Treby Magna are not ready to wield the vote. They are swayed by the promise of pints and pound notes, not by the prospect of furthering the interests of the nation as a whole. They are not even interested in furthering their own class interests, only their own individual interests. They are, in short, the *Philisters* that Riehl identified. If they had

the vote, they would only join their fellow *Philisters*, the 10£ householders, who now use their vote to further their own economic interests -- or to please their landlords. Thus election reform does no real good, Felix fumes,

> "As long as three-fourths of the men in this country see nothing in an election but self-interest, and nothing in self-interest but some form of greed, one might as well try to purify the proceedings of fishes and say to a hungry cod-fish – 'My good friend, abstain; don't goggle your eyes so, or show such a stupid gluttonous mouth, or think the little fishes are worth nothing except in relation to your own inside.'" (124)

Both the working and the middle classes, it is clear, need a reformation in sympathetic feeling, if they are ever to be effective voters.

The lower middle class of Treby Magna almost get this point, but their understanding is perverted by being overlaid by the greedy values of commercialism. Echoing the famous image from *Middlemarch*, Mr. Nolan, the retired London hosier, tells his Treby Magna cronies: "It's all one web, sir. The prosperity of the country is one web" (177). He speaks, however, of mere economic prosperity. He is telling the story of a man he had once worked with in the London warehouses, who now had a household rich enough to eat two thousand pounds of butter during a short season in London. This acquaintance also has a Lord for a son-in-law. This kind of prosperity, however, is self-serving and selfish. Prosperity is a web only because the Lord's marriage to the rich daughter of a self-made man enables that Lord to settle his overdue accounts. Thus the Lord is able to pay his hosier bill with Mr. Nolan. Mr. Nolan prospers. This is not, however, the kind of social web that Eliot, and Felix Holt, have in mind. There is no

reformation of either the political system or men's sympathies. At the end of the day, the working classes are still not ready to become voters. Thus the political plot remains unresolved.

But the political plot does serve as a means to compare the characters of Esther's two suitors. The parallels between Felix and Harold are clear and obvious. They both call themselves radicals; they are both sons of disappointed mothers; they both become Esther's suitors; and they are both "aliens" come home with an eye toward reform. Eliot writes:

> There could hardly have been a lot less like Harold Transome's than this of the quack doctor's son, except in the superficial facts that he called himself a Radical, that he was the only son of his mother, and that he had lately returned to his home with ideas and resolves not a little disturbing to that mother's mind. (44)

But these facts are, as the narrator points out, superficial indeed.

For example, the term "radical" could not mean something more different than it does when applied to both Felix and Harold. Further, neither man exemplifies "Radical" as does someone like William Lovett, or Alton Locke, or even Thomas Cooper. For Harold, radicalism is the vehicle of political opportunism. Harold sees the old order losing steam, but he also sees an opportunity -- for those who are able to seize it. "Radical sticks are growing, mother, and half the Tory oaks are rotting" he tells Mrs. Transome (21). He convinces his Uncle Lingon, a Rector, that

> In these hopeless times, nothing was left to men of sense and good family but to retard the national ruin by declaring themselves Radicals, and take

the inevitable process of changing everything out of the hands of beggarly demagogues and purse-proud tradesmen. (31)

A Radical, according to Harold, is one ready to take the helm when political change seems inevitable. The Rector is convinced, reasoning that: "'If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few homes and hearths, and keep the country up on its last legs as long as he can'" (31).[56] Harold convinces him that being Radical is simply a way of protecting the interests of their own class.

Felix, however, is a completely different kind of Radical. Rev. Lyon charges Felix:

"you will not deny that you glory in the name of Radical, or Root-and-Branch man . . ."

"A Radical – yes; but I want to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise." (224)

Felix's Radicalism is an attempt to go beyond political radicalism to something even more foundational than the vote, something more essential than the political being of the working class. He is searching for the root of sympathetic feeling. The working class needs this kind of education, not a political one.

It is as obvious to the narrator of *Felix Holt* as it is to the radical pedagogues of the day that the nation is in need of reform. As the coach which traverses the British landscape in the novel's introduction wends its way from the countryside to the manufacturing town, the narrator speaks of the air being filled with "eager unrest":

[56]A sentiment that foreshadows Felix's "crime."

> Here was a population not convinced that old England was as good as possible; here were multitudinous men and women aware that their religion was not exactly the religion of their rulers, who might therefore be better than they were, and who, if better, might alter many things which now made the world perhaps more painful than it need be and certainly more sinful. (8)

Likewise, during the election, the radical speaker at the corner accuses the monopolists of oppressing the poor:

> "And these are the men who tell us we're to let politics alone; they'll govern us better without our knowing anything about it. We must mind our business; we are ignorant; we've no time to study great questions. But I tell them this: the greatest question in the world is, how to give every man a man's share of what goes on in life --." (245)

To which sentiments Felix responds with a hearty and "sonorous" "Hear, hear!"

But while correct in identifying the need for reform, the disgruntled inhabitants of the manufacturing town as well as the radical pedagogue fail to comprehend that the true source of reform is not, and cannot be, political. Felix argues this point in his response to the corner speaker. He agrees that the speaker identifies the "great question," but he disagrees with the speaker's proposed solution. This pedagogue, Felix claims, expects that voting will give "every man a man's share in life." But Felix disagrees with this premise, arguing that

> there are two sorts of power. There's power to do mischief -- to undo what has been done with great expense and labour, to waste and destroy, to be

> cruel to the weak, to lie and quarrel, and to talk poisonous nonsense. That's the sort of power that ignorant numbers have. It never made a joint stool or planted a potato. Do you thing it's likely to do much towards governing a great country, and making wise laws? . . . But I should like to convince you that votes would never give you political power worth having while things are as they are now, and that if you go the right way to work you may get power sooner without votes. (247-48).

Power, for Felix, consists of something other than political power. Indeed, political power, as the corner speaker conceives it, will never provide "a man's share in life" because it is antithetical to the life of the nation as a whole.

Eliot has a personal stake in the situation as well. As a woman, she is unenfranchised, too. But she believes that she can effect the national life without political power.[57] Of course this argument appeals to someone who lacks power but yearns to influence the world. Dorothea in *Middlemarch* enacts Eliot's solution for bright, capable, yet powerless women – marry a bright and capable man. Unfortunately this solution is not available to working-class autodidacts. For Eliot's solution to be palatable to the politically powerless, the definition of power must be de-politicized, turned into power that never does mischief.

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[57]Bodenheimer notes Eliot's ambivalence about the "Woman Question." "She was willing to support women's higher education so long as it would afford women an equal opportunity of access to the knowledge on which good judgment might be founded, but she did not like the idea that young women might be moved to political action rather than to individual efforts of goodness and social melioration. . . . In her novels, George Eliot elucidated more powerfully than anyone the social attitudes which restrict and stifle talented women, but she would not take the step of turning such knowledge into radical theory or practice" (Cambridge Companion 35).

Likewise, in Felix's estimation, power does not consist of economic advancement, either. Improving one's lot in life does nothing, he argues with Rev. Lyon, to improve the lot of society in general (55). Like many of his self-educated predecessors, Felix is poised at the threshold of the middle class. His father tried to prepare Felix for this new status. It is what Esther and Mrs. Holt would like to see him embrace. Indeed it is the desire of every other inhabitant of Treby Magna. But Felix will have none of it, as he tells Rev. Lyon:

> "O yes, your ringed and scented men of the people! -- I won't be one of them. Let a man once throttle himself with a satin stock, and he'll get new wants and new motives. Metamorphosis will have begun at his neck-joint, and it will go on till it has changed his likings first and then his reasoning, which will follow his likings as the feet of a hungry dog follow his nose. I'll have none of your clerkly gentility. I might end by collecting greasy pence from poor men to buy myself a fine coat and a glutton's dinner, on pretence of serving the poor men. . . . " (55)

Felix's aspirations for himself and his aspirations for his class, which cannot be separated, are much higher than the pecuniary and political interests of the individual. The political solution that the radical pedagogues suggest must be superceded by a solution of another kind. "The way to get rid of folly," Felix tells the corner crowd on election day, "is to get rid of vain expectation, and of thoughts that don't agree with the nature of things" (248). He compares the process of voting with the working of steam engines. For the steam engine to run, the engineer has to understand the nature of water, which is what powers the steam engine. Likewise,

". . . all the schemes about voting, and districts, and annual Parliaments, and the rest, are engines, and the water or steam -- the force that is to work them -- must come out of human nature -- out of men's passions, feeling, desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feelings; and if we have false expectations about men's characters, we are very much like the idiot who thinks he'll carry milk in a can without a bottom." (248)

An even greater power than political power, then, is public opinion, which is made up of the sum of individual opinions and beliefs. Felix defines such opinion as "'the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That's the steam that is to work the engine'" (248). While public opinion is low and corrupted, the political system will be low and corrupted; while individual men only pursue their private interests and not the interests of the whole nation, there can be no political solution to social problems. This indictment includes would-be voters from both the middle classes and the working classes.

And here is where education plays a role in Felix's own scheme of social reform. Education should be used to make better men, not richer men or enfranchised men. It does so by educating the individual in sympathy, that is, the sympathy of the individual for other individuals. Such sympathy is the result of Felix's *self-* education, and it is this education that he would teach his fellow workmen, starting with the Sproxton miners. Felix believes that this education in sympathy is the only true path to reform. He begins his educational campaign with the miners, but they resist firmly, suspicious of Felix's motives and unwilling to exchange time at the pub for time with a pedagogue. So Felix

must place his hope in the possibility of educating their children. But even this plan fails. He still believes the cause itself is worthy; however, he tells Esther from his jail cell: "'The only failure a man ought to fear is failure in cleaving to the purpose he sees to be best'" (363).

Thus the position that Felix occupies within the political plot is neither that of the working-class radical nor the middle-class voter. His is a third position, based on Eliot's ordering principle of sympathy. But the social world of Treby Magna is not yet ready for Felix's message, and indeed no political solution is forthcoming in the novel. Felix's message must be transmitted from individual to individual; thus his true student in this novel becomes the woman that he loves, Esther Lyon.

Felix's brand of morality and his plans for social reform remain negatives, outlining what the classes should not do. Eliot imagines no concrete way that Felix's political plan for the working classes will actually work. This is what Josephine Guy calls "the absence of 'concrete' detail on Felix's morality (and how it will transform society)" (200). He is suspiciously ineffectual with everyone except Esther. The inheritance plot, then, must enact Eliot's social solution. Bodenheimer claims that Esther chooses not between gentility and the working-class, but between two men, between love and status. This analysis ignores Felix's role as Esther's pedagogical lover. "'But you'll remember the old pedagogue and his lectures?'" Felix asks when he thinks that Esther has chosen to accept her inheritance and join the gentry (364). Esther's choice is between two classes, but not that merely. She does not choose simply between two individual men, but between two principles: the self-interestedness of an individual inheritance and the bonds of sympathy that work toward the preservation of the national inheritance.

This purpose, Felix comes to see, can best be served by educating not the masses, but individuals -- one individual at a time. Esther, then, becomes his first pupil, who successfully learns Felix's lesson of the true source of social reform. The schooling she has from Felix enables her to make the better choice between her inheritances -- the lost inheritance of material wealth or the moral inheritance of sympathetic feeling.

Esther's past places her in a position where she can choose between the two "radicalisms" presented in the novel. She has the legal right to take possession of Transome Court and to rise above the middle-class society of Treby Magna. She can become what she has always aspired to be -- a lady, after the pattern of Mrs. Transome. In fact, as Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes, the traits that Felix so criticizes in Esther are those that describe the young Arabella Transome. Arabella Transome is

> an historical alter ego for Esther, a possible version of herself; as such Mrs. Transome acts as an embodiment of one alternative about which Esther must choose when she decides whether to become mistress of Transome Court. (104)

But the reader knows that deception and corruption lie behind Mrs. Transome's gentility. Like Esther, she has had to make choices; but they have both complicated and compromised her life, making of her old age a time of reckoning instead of a time of peace, threatening both her social and economic security. In her desire to control her own fate, she marries a man inferior to herself in intellect, but the match secures her social position. From this union she produces an heir as imbecilic as his father. She breaks the rules of society by having a sexual relationship with the lawyer Jermyn. However, the son that results from this affair is an heir capable of becoming a worthy son

to such a mother. To those like Samson the coachman, who provides the reader with this brief sketch of Arabella Transome, she is a woman who desires to be "master" (10). But being master is an exercise of *individual* will and *individual* desire, and is antithetical to the workings of sympathetic feeling for one's fellow. In addition, the desire of a woman for such power is contrary to the traditional hierarchies of society, which is also a part of the national inheritance. A woman's access to power traditionally came through male "endorsement and sponsorship" (142), as Kristin Brady terms it; Mrs. Transome has sought such sponsorship through her husband, through her relationship with Jermyn, and through her son, Harold. Each thwarts her ambitions and desires because they have their own contrary ambitions and desires. Thus Mrs. Transome is continually disappointed and lives in a state of constant frustration and regret.

The same system of power-through-patronage applies to Esther as well. In discussing Esther's address to the court during Felix's trial, Brady claims that her success is due to the favorable impression she makes on the men in power. Eliot writes: "There was something so naive and beautiful in this action of Esther's, that it conquered every low or petty suggestion even in the commonest minds" (374-75). The important men in town, including Sir Maximus Debary who declares Esther "A fine girl! something thoroughbred in the look of her" (377), are so moved "by Esther's maidenly fervour" (377) that they intervene in Felix's legal fate. Thus Esther is able to effect a real change in Felix's condition, but only through the patronage of powerful men who find her appeal amenable to their own values and to their own estimations of themselves. As Brady notes,

> unable to break through the structures of masculine hegemony, Esther succeeds like her biblical namesake, merely by pleasing the men who exercise power. In this sense, her life is not altogether different from Mrs. Transome's, though she succeeds where Arabella fails and both women must seek access to the world through men, and neither can act without male endorsement and sponsorship. (142)

Esther succeeds in the long run because she chooses wisely between two kinds of male sponsorship. She rejects Harold Transome and his self-serving view of power in favor of Felix's idealism and sense of high purpose. In a word, she decides to please the man whose sympathies have been educated to extend to all of society. Thus Esther's education becomes Felix's success story as a pedagogue and his salvation as a citizen, thus proving the efficacy of his model..

The solution lies not with the political agitation of working-class radicalism nor with the commercialism of a self-serving middle class. It lies, as Bodenheimer has argued, with those who have been educated in the national inheritance and its concomitant development of sympathy for one's fellow. Felix Holt, the enlightened radical, and Phillip Debarry, the enlightened aristocrat, are the only two in Eliot's novel who have a clear conception of the true value of the national inheritance. Debarry, that "moral aristocrat who represents the possibility of rising standards made possible by a stable class hierarchy" (Bodenheimer, *Politics* 102-03) plays the same part as Lord Lyndale in *Alton Locke.* The political burden of reform is his, according to the national inheritance. He takes the duties of his station seriously, and works for the good of the entire nation and not just the aristocrats. The landed aristocracy must take up their

inherited responsibilities and fight against the de-stabilizing effects of industrialism. Felix Holt models the role that the noble worker should play within the social body. This role does not yet allow for political power, but it does call for raising the consciousness of the entire class. Only then will they be prepared to enter into political life as fully integrated citizens. Political power is to be wielded by those who have proved themselves to be above personal interest, those who traditionally have borne the national inheritance -- the aristocracy. Aristocrats are called to fulfill their proper function, which Philip Debarry does admirably, because he has sympathetic feeling for all people and understands the national inheritance. The denizens of self-interest, the Transomes, are completely defeated in this narrative. Holt and Debarry emerge as the true heirs of the national inheritance.

Phillip Debarry's role is to legislate with sympathy. The role of the self-educated working-man that Felix Holt is supposed to be modeling is educator of his fellow work-men. Felix attempts to educate the Sproxton miners in both sympathy and the national inheritance. This attempt is unsuccessful, as he can interest few of them in his doctrine of "sober truth" (110). But still he desires to be the kind of demagogue whose "preliminary work," as the Rev. Lyon describes it, is "to free men from the stifled life of political nullity, and bring them into what Milton calls 'the liberal air,' wherein alone can be wrought the final triumphs of the Spirit" (224). Yet in this role Felix is a dismal failure, as he tells Esther, if one judges such matters by their effects. But that is not Felix's estimation -- he has not lost sight of the "great good" in which he believes, and thus has not failed his purpose:

> "I don't mean to be illustrious, you know, and make a new era, else it would be kind of you to get a raven and teach it to croak 'failure' in my ears. Where great things can't happen, I care for very small things, such as will never be known beyond a few garrets and workshops. And then, as to one thing I believe in, I don't think I can altogether fail. If there's anything our people want convincing of, it is, that there's some dignity and happiness for a man other than changing his station. That's one of the beliefs I choose to consecrate my life to. If anybody could demonstrate to me that I was a flat for it, I shouldn't think it would follow that I must borrow money to set up genteelly and order new clothes. That's not a rigorous consequence to my understanding." (363)

Despite the outcome of his demagoguery, Felix wishes to remain an example to his fellows. He is a working-man who has educated himself in the national inheritance and who has taken his proper place in the social body. And if Felix has failed to educate the sensibilities and the sympathies of his fellow work-men, he succeeds in educating Esther, who, under Felix's tutelage, learns where her better portion lies -- not in the mansion of the Transomes, which may be her legal home, but working at Felix's side, also "'teaching a great many things'" (396). The evolution of society will move slowly, the narrator states, at its own natural pace, from "a few garrets and workshops" outward, from one individual to another, on into the next generation to that "young Felix, who has a great deal more science than his father, but not much more money" (398). Felix thus succeeds in becoming a different kind of demagogue, one whose radicalism consists in the realization of Rev. Lyon's lesson that

> the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness. . . . And even as in music, where all obey and concur to one end, so that each has the joy of contributing to a whole whereby he is ravished and lifted up into the courts of heaven, so will it be in that crowning time of the millennial reign, when our daily prayer will be fulfilled, and one law shall be written on all hearts, and be the very structure of all thought, and be the principle of all action". (127)

Felix is the demagogue of this principle, of Eliot's own meliorating social theory of organic social evolution, incarnate history, and sympathy. Eliot implies that in the social body "[d]uties replace rights" (Semmel 13), and as parts of the whole, each sector of society, each class and each interest, has a specified responsibility. The conservation of an orderly society is the duty of all, because it is in the interest of all.

Politically speaking, then, reform starts not with legislation or with a restructuring of the class system but with the individual's moral and intellectual reform. This is certainly not a new or original argument. Mill wrote in his Autobiography: "I am now convinced that no great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible, until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought . . . until a renovation has been effected in the basis of their belief, leading to the evolution of some faith, whether religious or merely human" (*Collected Works*, I: 45-47). Kingsley uses a similar argument in *Alton Locke*, that the working classes must get their spiritual lives in order before they can get their economic and political lives in order. What Eliot argues for in both *Felix Holt* and in "An Address to the Working-men" is a revolution of consciousness that will one day lead to enlightened political action: "with individuals, as

with nations the only safe revolution is one arising out of the wants which their *own progress* has generated" (*GEL* I:162). This revolution of consciousness will be achieved only through the development of the sympathetic faculty in the individual, as each individual takes on the duties inherent in his or her position in the social body. The individual develops this faculty through (the right kind of) education.

As Eliot had noted in "The Natural History," the forces of commerce and Protestantism had dispossessed the British people of their national inheritance. They now must be educated out of their habit of looking only to their own narrow self-interest. The utilitarians might "dream that the uncultured classes are prepared for a condition which appeals principally to their moral sensibilities" ("The Natural History" 112), but since the moral sensibilities of all *Philisters* was their weakest faculty, this hope could remain a dream only. In her notebook Eliot writes: "If you ask how, then, are the reformatory changes [to society] to be brought about? I answer, by the gradual spread of advanced knowledge over such a majority in the community as would make the changes an imperious demand" (qtd. in Graver 63). Incarnate history at work again – or lots of Felix Holts. Again the inculcation of a organizing principle is touted as being "natural," as arising from the organic form of society as it evolves according to its real structure. Its function as a system of thought which fulfills the "ideological needs" of a particular class -- the class that controls the terms of this discourse -- is again repressed. Daniel Cottom's criticism of the middle-class impulse to educate is to the point here: "The fable of this social change was that the development represented by education was an evolution of man and his spirit, not the articulation of the power of a class in society" (13). Even the organizing principal of sympathy, which might appear to carry the egalitarian banner, had

its roots wrapped around the interests of a class which saw that its continued dominance was dependent upon the existing economic system.

But George Eliot had no desire to infiltrate the halls of the Mechanics' Institutes herself, or even to preach like Dinah in *Adam Bede*. Her pedagogical method was inseparable both from her aesthetic and from her conception of the role that the artist was to play in the social body. The artist's function, she writes is

> that of the *aesthetic*, not the doctrinal teacher -- the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge. (qtd. in Graver 10)

However, prescribing measures for individuals is just what Eliot does in her art -- in *Felix Holt* and in the fictional "Address." Elsewhere she claims that

> the inspiring principle which alone gives me courage to write is, that of so presenting our human life as to help my readers in getting a clearer conception and a more active admiration of those vital elements which bind men together and give a higher worthiness to their existence; and also to help them in gradually dissociating these elements from the more transient forms on which an outworn teaching tends to make them dependent. (*GEL* IV: 472)

She is confident that she herself has a clear conception of which elements are vital and which transient, and her fiction stands ready to replace "an outworn teaching." This vital element is altruism, the will to subordinate one's own egoism to a greater social good.

If Eliot was to educate through her novels, then one must ask who her pupils were to be. Eliot was a best-selling author to middle-class readers, and her novels are primarily addressed to that class. Even so, her most pointed criticism is aimed at the foibles and excesses of those in the middle classes who had gone farthest in forgetting their part in the national culture. Her novels lampoon those who ape and usurp the traditional place of the gentry, who sacralize the tenets of commercialism and industrialism, and who replace true culture with fashion and etiquette. Eliot's subversiveness (or perhaps perverseness) as a novelist lies in her ability to criticize her own class so harshly in the very books that they clamor to buy. But despite her critique, she wrote for a middle-class audience. The working classes often appear in her novels as characters -- even as protagonists -- but they are not her primary readers. She published in the *Westminster Review* and *Blackwood's*, not in the *Penny Magazine* or even *Politics for the People*.

The issue of Eliot's audience highlights the disparity between the working and the middle classes in Eliot's social theory. When the great artist depicts the lower orders realistically, as in the work of Scott or Wordsworth, or Kingsley or Horning, then

> more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations. . . . All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. . . . [because] it *is* serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-

men, should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of a true one. ("The Natural History" 110-11)

The sympathy of the middle-class observer or reader is expected to be enlarged by these portraits of the People. However, despite this supposed sympathetic connection, the People are not only viewed very much as the Other ("the fearfully internal Other" [81] as Lesjak characterizes them): a separate People, to whom "our" sympathy should be extended, who are "our" fellow-men, as if their existence were contingent upon being simply an object of "our" observation.

In Eliot's novels, the sympathetic working-class characters are not those from the very lowest orders, whom she often characterizes as stupid or animal-like. These people appear incapable of developing sympathetic feeling. Instead she depicts those artisans whom Dentith calls "the more prudent, vocationally hard-working" (36), those who are most like the middle classes in their values. Education is for those of the working class more capable of understanding, but not for all, least of all the Sproxton miners. Her working-class protagonists are always a cut above their fellows, both physically and morally -- and intellectually, in the case of Felix Holt. Adam Bede is hard-working, physically large, and attractive. Felix, too, is described as an admirable physical specimen, whose outer form is but a reflection of the inner:

> He was considerably taller [than the trades-union man who had just addressed the crowd], his head and neck were more massive, and the expression of his mouth and eyes was something very different from the mere acuteness and rather hard-lipped antagonism of the trades-union man. Felix Holt's face had the look of habitual meditative abstraction

> from objects of mere personal vanity or desire, which is the peculiar stamp of culture, and makes a very roughly-cut face worthy to be called "the human face divine." . . . [D]oubtless those Duffield men . . . were unconsciously influenced by the grandeur of his full yet firm mouth, and the calm clearness of his grey eyes, which were somehow unlike what they were accustomed to see along with an old brown velveteen coat, and an absence of chin-propping. (247)

This portrait of Felix is certainly not a characterization of the average working-man, and as Eliot's protagonist, he is not in any way average; he is a working-man with the "peculiar stamp of culture" upon him, one who has taken up his cultural inheritance. Or perhaps, as Gallagher argues, he is the Arnoldian "alien" who unaccountably sets himself apart from his own class interest.[58] This in spite of Eliot's exhortation that the perverted representation of the people which predominated in English art (those great writers listed above excepted)

> is not the less fatal because the misrepresentation which gives rise to it has what the artist considers a moral end. The thing for mankind to know is, now what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks *ought* to act on the labourer or the artisan, but what are the motives and influences which *do* act on him. We want to be taught to feel, not for the

[58] "Therefore, when we speak of ourselves as dived into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, we must be understood always to imply that within each of these classes there are a certain number of *aliens*, if we may so call them, -- persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection . . . " (Arnold 73).

heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness. (11)

Eliot violates her own realist agenda in *Felix Holt* in order to present a model to be followed by an unruly working class who once again demands suffrage. Her novel shows what a working-man with the "peculiar stamp of culture" looks like, and how self-education needs to be used to acquire this culture. Self-education should never be a means of acquiring individual economic or political power. Society as a whole is not ready for such a revolution. Eliot's social fiction, therefore, has a different thrust than much of the social fiction that came before it, and these differences signal a change in the terms of Victorian discourse on social issues as the nation moves past the Second Reform Bill.

I has been my contention that Kingsley and Eliot appropriate the personal of the working-class autodidact in their fiction in order to prescribe the possible "selves" that the autodidact could claim. In the long-run, however, their projects, like their narratives, failed. Both works are weak as novels, and the representations of the main characters is poorly executed. Felix Holt is, in fact, one of the least developed and least realistic characters Eliot ever created. Actual working men seemed to have eschewed the models that Kingsley and Eliot constructed. Actual working men followed the examples of Craik's *John Halifax*, a self-made businessman from the working class, or of Samuel Smiles's engineers, and moved into the middle and professional classes. The increasingly powerful trade unionists emulated their Chartist forebears in pressing for the political and economic betterment of the working class as a whole. And while the specific solutions Kingsley and Eliot suggested to the social problems of their day are of little

interest to us in the twenty-first century, their strategies should interest us greatly. Now especially we must understand how narrative can be used in the discourse of self, both as an oppressive force that limits an individual's agency and as a liberating tool of individual agency. These novelists and autobiographers demonstrate the movement of a discourse as it draws, redraws, and erases boundaries.

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