

Abstract

Inductive readings of Jane Eyre, Shirley, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda demonstrate how the non-realistic elements of Charlotte Brontë's and George Eliot's novels complete rather than mar their work. Through heightened language, symbols and motifs, and the mixing of genres, Brontë not only expressed her dissatisfaction with the world; she was also able to remedy it. Eliot's unlikely characters and her visibility in her plots--the improbable coincidences, convenient deaths, and sleights of hand--were Eliot's response to her dissatisfaction with society. In her novels, Brontë expresses rebellion through violating the conventions of realism; she seeks the gratification of her heroines' desires by subverting those conventions. Eliot's devices, on the other hand, generally promote the submission of her heroines to intolerable circumstances. This apparent difference masks a common result: by breaking the realistic surface of their novels, Brontë and Eliot were able to express the whole of their vision.

The introductory chapter places this argument in the critical debate: the readings of these novels dispute the current contention that Eliot should be censured for her advocacy of self-sacrifice and Brontë extolled for undertaking to avenge her female characters. Their difference in vision might partly reflect the fact that Eliot did not begin publishing fiction until after Charlotte Brontë had stopped--Eliot saw the chaos that the angry claim to rights might cause. A brief discussion of Brontë's early published work identifies that aspect of passion which wishes to control and dominate. Not forswearing that passion, Brontë's later work tries to accommodate the violence of human relations, to turn the pain into a sado-masochistic pleasure. In Eliot's work, by contrast, the plots are

more violent than the characters. Eliot will increasingly make her female characters assume responsibility for their angry impulses. At the same time, she works through plot and presentation to exclude those impulses.

The chapter on Jane Eyre focusses on the points at which the realistic novel mutates into fantasy. If one thinks of Jane Eyre as an unreliable narrator, the inventor of her own story, then these points can be seen to describe much that is the matter with reality and all that must be done to rectify it. Through books, drawings, charades, dreams, fairy tale, allegory, romance, and a Gothic plot, Jane and Charlotte Brontë gain for Jane all that cannot be acquired through realistic means, and thus take the measure of reality. Celebrations of Jane's achievement in some current criticism not only ignore the destructive implications of Jane's dominance; they also overlook Brontë's achievement, the literary sophistication of her clever weaving of romance and reality.

In Shirley, Brontë endeavours to confine her vision to the life of domestic reality. She renders convincingly women who are denied control of their lives yet nevertheless achieve power in subterranean ways. Brontë again uses non-realistic techniques and improbable events to overcome the problems that cannot be resolved realistically. Yet, more significantly, Brontë demonstrates how women use the opportunities of everyday life to exert control. Her female characters use food and illness metaphorically; they also speak words that at the same time preserve decorum and assert their wills. Through covert (but understood) means, women are able to counteract the power that men exercise openly. In this way, a balance is effected.

The issues that Charlotte Brontë has expressed in metaphor George Eliot brings in Middlemarch to the level of plot. Eliot uses her own system of metaphors--that of acting--to seek a distinction between self-display

and beneficent activity. Eliot's aim in Middlemarch is the impartiality of the dramatist; by continuously shifting points of view, Eliot practises the countering of egoism that Middlemarch advocates. Its advocacy of self-sacrifice, however, conflicts with its aim of impartiality. Improbable coincidence and sleights of hand ensure that the sacrifice of self has favourable consequences. Middlemarch renders simultaneously both points of view. Even techniques that do not observe the conventions of realism enhance the reality of the book by allowing both argument and counterargument to be read.

Like the structure of Middlemarch, the structure of Daniel Deronda is mimetic: its two halves represent different points of view. One half is a story of psychological realism; the other half is a romance. But just as they are experienced together, the two halves must be understood together. The romantic half of the novel, the Jewish half, obviates the need to press a resolution on the realistic half, and so allows it to avoid violating realistic expectations. The Jewish half allows Eliot to break through the conventions of realism, those happy endings and easy resolutions of difficult problems. It permits Eliot to confront the murderous, anarchic, force of the will.

The Roar the Other Side of Silence:
Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot,
and the Literary Consequences
of Women's Passivity

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For my mother

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Chapter One

Introduction

This study is an exploration of anomalies: Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot are both writers who are committed to realism, but their work contains elements that most critics concur in calling unrealistic. Yet one cannot subtract those elements from a novel and call the rest real, because it is the whole novel that speaks to our experience and makes us think of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot as realists. What, then, is the function of the mixed styles and distortions, contradictions and sleights of hand, excesses of style and evasions of plot? And why when questioned about characters and plots that are frankly improbable did these authors--reliable critics of the work of others--insist so tenaciously on the truth of these improbabilities? These non-real elements that break through the realistic surface of Charlotte Brontë's and George Eliot's novels are nevertheless operative parts. In examining their function, the following chapters--close readings of Jane Eyre, Shirley, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda--conclude that these elements permit Brontë and Eliot to record all of what they saw, even when by contemporary social standards their vision might be unacceptable. Charlotte Brontë's symbols and motifs and her mixing of genres and George Eliot's visibility in her novels may disrupt the realistic surface, but these non-real elements and the dislocation that their presence creates allow the reader to see whole the world that these authors inhabited.

This study undertakes a literary task. It questions the realism of these realistic novels. Through this literary analysis, it makes what might be called a political point: because of the repressive social

conditions that affected women, these women novelists used methods at odds with the realistic art that they both practised and helped to shape in order to express the experience of their central women characters. Though Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot shared a motive--the determination to express everything that they perceived--the peticular non-realistic techniques that they employed differed, at least partly because of the social changes that occurred between the period when Brontë published her poems and her novels (1846-53) and that when Eliot published fiction (1856-1878). The political interpretation that this study proposes serves to disclose a literary argument: these non-real elements may mar the work, but they also complete it. The phenomenon of non-real elements turns out to be not an anomaly but a paradox; and they are best understood not in isolation but in their relation to their context.

Recent feminist criticism has noted that Charlotte Brontë uses metaphor to record the experience of women and has celebrated the political import of these transcribed metaphors.¹ Critics have also noted Eliot's activity in the plots, for example, in the way she invents convenient deaths--and I would add--the blocking of the fulfilment of her heroines' wishes.² Feminists have criticized the political implications of that activity. But the matter has largely been left as a judgment: Brontë is extolled, and Eliot censured. This study draws away from praising one at the expense of the other; instead, it holds that these non-real elements form a continuum. An inductive reading of two novels by each author will demonstrate that these elements enable each writer to render a more complete picture. They are the signs of Brontë's and Eliot's commitment to truth and of their resistance to easy resolutions of the problems that were their subjects. Though their techniques differ--Brontë's symbols tend to encapsulate while Eliot's activity tends to interrupt intense experience--

these elements enable both writers to communicate truths about women's lives.

I

In using the term "non-real," I wish to call attention to the common function in describing Brontë's and Eliot's work of all those adjectives, descriptive and critical, that are habitually opposed to realistic: improbable, melodramatic, rhetorical, sentimental, idealized, romantic, metaphoric, imaginary, symbolic, emblematic, allegorical, fantastic, surreal. In the readings of these four novels, I will use these separate terms (which constitute the non-real) to characterize the points within Brontë's and Eliot's novels where the surface becomes uneven. Within this common function, there is a dichotomy: the non-real elements in Brontë's work--the heightened language and the fantastic plots and the metaphors that have real consequences, carry, even embody meaning. Brontë's transcendent intensity--what critics commonly call her lyric quality--her rush of unchecked and apparently unexamined feeling become manifest in her metaphors, symbols, rhetoric, dreams, and fantasy. While non-real elements in Brontë's work represent the vision itself, those in Eliot's novels are its agent. The uneven spots in Eliot's work create gaps through which we can glimpse the scenery being shifted and the strings being moved. We are forced into noticing its fiction. The coincidences and convenient deaths, and the stratagems for implicating or separating characters from critical events are part of Eliot's determined effort to promote an ideal world. In order to do so, she must first show the necessity of that ideal world, and she does so by painting acute temptations, rending conflicts, the overpowering force of will and rage, and almost always when she creates a heroine, a woman torn by angry impulses. Eliot's fantastic invention--

where she departs from realism--serves her heroines' saintly turning away from these signs of egoism.

Eliot's and Brontë's departures from the predominant realism are signs of dissatisfaction. Though its cause might appear to be different for each author, its forum is usually the same: women's view of the world. To choose a heroine is to choose this forum; the female bildungsroman consists of a view rather than a career. But beyond the generic similarity in Brontë's and Eliot's stories, there is a common intense questioning of the purpose of women's lives. One might think of this pursuit as inevitable given the conjunction of the Woman Question (as it was called) and the moral earnestness that was characteristic of the times. Such a climate might make a de facto debate of a heroine-centered work and cast its heroine as an everywoman. Like categories in general, the category of "everywoman" is a useful tool of analysis: it risks conflation, but it also helps to focus differences. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot return again and again to the subject of how women wish to spend their lives and whether the world will accommodate that wish, though Eliot has other subjects, some of which are, as I will show, related in profound ways. Each return represents the next stage in a personal and intellectual coming to terms with the aspirations of women living in circumstances that offered limited possibilities for their fulfilment.

II

Before introducing the readings of the four major novels, I shall briefly look at the early stages of the careers of Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) and George Eliot (1819-1880).

Charlotte Brontë's first publication was the poems that she published with those of her sisters (Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell [London:

Aylott and Jones, 1846]). Like all George Eliot's work that was not published anonymously, all Brontë's work was published pseudonymously; Brontë's declared reason was the straightforward wish to avoid the condescending dismissiveness with which the (usually) male critics reviewed the work of women. Ironically, Brontë's harshest critic of her first published novel, writing in the Quarterly Review, was a woman.³ To this well-known story, all I wish to add is that the "forced" use of a pseudonym is perhaps an equivocal hardship. Though it may be born of false perceptions of women's ability and though the elements of masquerade that a pseudonym introduces into the pursuit of truth that Victorian literature undertakes might unsettle a writer, a pseudonym nevertheless provides a character that can be put on and taken off--a "George Eliot" who can be dropped at will if he turns out to be a dull dog.⁴ George Eliot has never been dropped, of course; yet, Currer Bell is now always Charlotte Brontë. The reason lies, I think, in the unmediated way in which Brontë writes of her cause. Even in Shirley, which is told in the third person, Brontë does little to separate the viewpoint of her narrator from the interests of her gender.

The poems of Currer Bell are populated by perfidious men and wronged women. They mostly tell of bitter partings and transient happiness. The women either fear that "Life will be gone ere I have lived" ("The Teacher's Monologue," p. 50),⁵ and tell of an existence "Decayed to dark anxiety" ("The Teacher's Monologue," p. 48) or weep angrily for the men who have abandoned them; on the other hand, the men speak triumphantly of their dominance of women--"my will shall yet control/ Thy will so high and free" (Passion, p. 52). When the women do speak lovingly of the men who love them, these men are "loved though stern" ("The Letter," p. 44). The tone of the poems, even when melancholic, is violent.

Through an extreme example I will show how the poems reveal a characteristic pattern in Brontë's imagining of human relations. The

three-part poem "Gilbert" (pp. 28-40) is the history of a cruel and callous man who leaves the woman whom he has said he loves and who loves him.

Gilbert says of Elinor,

"She loved me more than life;
And truly it was sweet
To see so fair a woman kneel
In bondage at my feet. (p. 29)

He takes a sadistic pleasure in his power:

There was a sort of quiet bliss
To be so deeply loved,
To gaze on trembling eagerness
And sit myself unmoved; (p. 30)

The climax of his pleasure is leaving her; he gloats over the freshness of his victim:

"Her youth, her native energy,
Her powers new-born and fresh;
'Twas these with Godhead sanctified
My sensual frame of flesh.
Yet, like a god did I descend
At last to meet her love;
And, like a god, I then withdrew
To my own heaven above. (p. 30)

While Gilbert reminisces in the garden of the house where he lives happily with his family as his life passes in "gathering gold" (p. 31), the poem undertakes to avenge Elinor.

The (female) Misery lays her hand on Gilbert's heart and shatters his imperviousness. Gilbert sees Elinor's "pale dead features"; and their "hollow anguish . . . move[s] [the] fiend to sorrow" (pp. 35, 36).

Finally, he hears

An accent strange . . . repeat
Heaven's stern but just decree:
"The measure thou to her didst mete,
To thee shall measured be!"

The spectre of the drowned Elinor leads Gilbert to take his own life, just as his cruelty led Elinor to take hers:

Across his throat a keen-edged knife
 With vigorous hand he drew;
 The wound was wide--his outraged life
 Rushed rash and redly through.

Men's selfishness and women's sorrow are also the themes of Charlotte Brontë's mature work. But peculiar to Brontë is the fundamentally sadistic pleasure that her men derive from women's pain. More importantly for the terms of this study, the revenge that Brontë exacts is distanced--here through the agency of the non-real spectre--from the woman whose wrong it avenges. Furthermore, the revenge is effected through the man's own actions. Rochester will wrong Jane, but will be punished through the actions--not of Jane--but of the Gothic figure whose presence testifies to the attitudes that have humiliated Jane; Robert Moore will be shot by a mad member of the workers whom he has treated with the same indifference as he has treated Caroline.

George Eliot's first story, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" (begun in September 1856), also undertakes to punish the man whose actions have harmed his wife.⁶ The story, however, is much less openly violent than Brontë's stories; in fact, the punishment is almost covert. Because of Amos Barton's blindness to the incriminating construction that his parishioners put on his relationship with the Countess Czerlaski, Milly Barton becomes increasingly isolated. When the Countess moves into the Bartons' house, Milly, pregnant again, is not only isolated but worn out from the Countess's demands and starving from the poverty caused by the Countess's extravagance. "Gentle, uncomplaining" (p. 99), Milly is a saint, a "gentle Madonna" (p. 54); she recognizes the Countess's faults, though

she does not blame her for them, and loves Amos despite the improbability of her loving such a blundering man. The effect of the Countess's visit, and therefore of Amos's wilfulness, is that Milly falls ill. Amos is punished first by her (uncomplaining) death: "She was gone from him; and he could never show her his love any more, never make up for omissions in the past by filling future days with tenderness" (p. 110). And then, in a somewhat excessive turn of the plot--"another blow [is] inflicted on the bruised man" (p. 113)--Amos loses his parish and is thus expelled from Milly's grave.

Though the plot, rather than Milly, avenges her suffering, the narrative does comment on Milly's passivity. The narrator praises, as George Eliot always would praise, Milly's self-sacrificing nature. Yet, the story also criticizes it. On the one hand, Milly is described by the narrator as "placid and lovely in her feebleness" (p. 105), but on the other, Milly (according to Mrs. Hackit) is "i' the wrong to let herself be put upon" (p. 90). Everybody except Milly is angry on her behalf. Milly is "only vexed that her husband should be vexed--only wounded because he was misconceived" (p. 100). Angry on her husband's account, the tradesmen's account, her children's account, Milly almost reaches the point at which it becomes absolutely necessary to do for others what it would be impossible to do for herself: "She began to feel that it would soon be a duty to tell [the Countess] frankly that they really could not afford to have her visit farther prolonged" (p. 100). Shepperton blames Amos and pities Milly. The fact that others will act on Milly's behalf underlines Milly's inability to do so. Milly cannot expel the Countess; her salt-of-the-earth maid, Nanny, saves, as Eliot writes, "Milly from having to perform this painful task" (p. 100). Eliot resolves the argument on the limits of the sympathetic treatment of others that the situation

illustrates by associating one side of the argument (that Milly should evict the Countess) with the less admirable people in the story.

Eliot returns to the moral issue of whether one should claim one's own happiness if it involves hurting others in the histories of Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke and in the interlocking stories of Daniel Deronda. In looking at the fates of Eliot's characters, one can trace a movement away from avenging the suffering of these women by indirectly punishing the men who oppress them. Amos Barton's "Sad Fortune"--the suicidal death of Milly Barton--is followed by "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story." Though Captain Wybrow, in fact, dies of a heart attack as Caterina Sarti goes to act on her plan, Caterina intends to kill the man who has betrayed her. Caterina's desperate, passionate behaviour is, however, excused and accounted for by the fact that Caterina is both Italian and an orphan. Like that of the West Indian Bertha Mason, Caterina's aberrant behaviour is simply alien to English ways. Only in the last of her novels does Eliot locate this dangerous wish to act on angry impulse in a middle-class English woman. And though the woman is English, the scene takes place in Italy. Like Caterina, Gwendolen will be assured of her innocence.

If one looks at the fates of these victims, one can trace a pattern of progressively more direct revenge. The partly self-sacrificial death of Maggie Tulliver will include that of her brother. Dorothea, however, is rescued from the prison that her self-sacrifice entails; instead, Casaubon dies, or rather formalizes his death, for he has been dying ever since we have met him. But the plot exacts a price from Dorothea: whereas Milly Barton's grave attracts a pilgrimage (the final scene of "Amos Barton"), Dorothea will rest in "unvisited tombs" (the last words of Middlemarch). While Maggie willingly shares a watery grave, Gwendolen is repelled by that solution to the oppressiveness of her life; instead, she contemplates drowning Grandcourt and fears that her wish has become fact. In effect,

however, Gwendolen gets out of her husband's grave, and Daniel Deronda ends not with her death but with Mordecai's. This overview illustrates an increasing effort, unnoticed by critics, to bring the victim and her revenge closer together, to make the violent events that occur to the people who harm her part of her consciousness, even to the point of making her assume responsibility for the violence. Writing over twenty years before, Charlotte Brontë allows her heroines moments of self-righteous anger, but Jane Eyre is not responsible for Rochester's maiming, nor Caroline Helstone for Robert Moore's shooting, nor Shirley Keeldar for Louis Moore's illness, and though it is not precisely a matter of revenge, neither is Lucy Snowe responsible for Paul Emanuel's "drowning."

That George Eliot strives to shift the responsibility for retribution away from poetic justice and into the hands of the realistic female characters undermines the currently popular argument which holds that Eliot's depiction of women is reactionary where Brontë's is revolutionary. Not only does Eliot bring her heroines closer to the events that serve them, but she also makes her heroines participate more fully in the rest of their lives. Eliot begins by writing of Milly Barton, a woman of whom the narrator says "you would even perhaps have been rather scandalized if she had descended from the serene dignity of being to the assiduous unrest of doing" (p. 54). (Even though her life depends on it, Milly cannot ask the Countess to leave.) Eliot ends her career as a novelist by imagining Gwendolen, who, though her plans are thwarted, wants to go on stage and wishes to do just as she likes.

Eliot's work includes remarkably active women. In her early work, they make up a rogues' gallery. To be active is to be unacceptably active: like the alcoholic Janet Dempster, who leaves her husband; or even criminally active: Caterina plots murder, Hetty Sorrel kills her child,

and Mrs. Transome commits adultery. Yet Dinah preaches and Romola nurses. Those women who are unquestionably the heroines of her full-length novels increasingly resent their enforced passivity and increasingly take responsibility for their behaviour. When Maggie Tulliver complains to Tom that she cannot do anything to help her father, she resents rather than questions this restriction. All Maggie's effort is bent on resigning herself to the life that others decide she must live. "Our life is determined for us--and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do" (Bk. 5, Ch. 1, p. 397)⁷ Just as she fundamentally accepts the constraints of her life, she also allows others to take responsibility for her actions. Maggie blames Stephen rather than herself for their elopement, even though it is she (facing forwards) rather than he (facing backwards) who, as they row past, might be expected to see the way marks. Dorothea with a history of "treading in the wrong place" (Ch. 4, p. 59), seeks to free herself from the responsibility of action first through Casaubon and then through Will. She does so because she knows the remorse which seems to her to be the result of all her efforts. Dorothea, who enters adulthood determined to lead an epic life, endures the fate that Philip Wakem predicts for Maggie:

"You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite." (Bk. 5, Ch. 3, p. 429)

Gwendolen, on the other hand, begins by indulging her appetites, by assuming an "empire over her own life," and denying her remorse; the novel brings her to fear the savagery of those appetites and live in remorse. After doing a "willing wrong" to Lydia Glasher, Gwendolen now "the victim of [Deronda's] happiness"⁸ is made to desire Maggie Tulliver's life, the life of a woman who could not "take a good for myself that has been wrung

out of [another's] misery" (Bk. 6, Ch. 14, p. 605). Gwendolen is brought back, as it were, to Dorlcote Mill. The chapters on Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda will demonstrate how Eliot's interventions in their plots are the consequence of her terrifying vision of the savage appetite.

III

This study proposes a synthetic way of looking at Eliot's interventions and Brontë's covert activity. Because there is a remarkable consensus on the points at which these shapers of the realistic novel abandoned reality, the areas for examination will seem familiar. Brontë's Gothic machinery, the purple prose of Jane Eyre, and the bombast of Shirley have all been noted, as have Eliot's impossible men and convenient deaths.⁹ These topics, however, are most often examined in isolation, as aberrations in an otherwise evenly realistic surface. This study stresses the critical relationship between the parts of each of the four novels which it examines that all agree are mimetic of everyday life and those events and characters that are not life-like. It argues that Brontë's and Eliot's criticism of and dissatisfaction with their society is articulated not simply in their narrative, nor in their fantasy, but in the conjunction of these two systems. The novelists' imagined alternative to the society that did not accommodate their desires quite simply cannot be expressed within the conventions of realism.

To look only at the non-realistic events and characters not only risks missing the realistic problem to which they are the solution; it also risks underestimating Brontë's and Eliot's artistic sophistication. Though, for instance, Brontë's use of heightened language to describe everyday occurrences has been commented on (by Roberts, for example), the correspondingly everyday tone in which the most extraordinary events are

described has been missed. As a result, the clever fusion of fact and fantasy that expresses the conflict of the active woman in the passive setting is lost. To focus on the nexus between the realistic passages and the metaphors, symbols, allegory, and fantasy within Jane Eyre is to uncover a sustained commentary on the "real" life of which Jane tells.

At the most simple level of Brontë's method, descriptions of food mark the stages of Jane's career: she climbs, as it were, from porridge to prosperity, achieving a status where she is able to offer even Rochester a wholesome meal. Besides this symbolic significance of literal events, there is a continuous interplay of reality and appearance. Brontë makes literal the allegories that she had read in childhood. She uses them both to organize the novel (both Q. D. Leavis and Adrienne Rich have pointed out Jane Eyre's debt to Bunyan) and to satisfy the desires that Jane's realistic life cannot fulfil.¹⁰ Jane's travels parallel Gulliver's; her progress resembles Christian's; and the tale that she tells is as fanciful as the Arabian Nights. If, as I suggest in Chapter Two, one were to think of Jane as an unreliable narrator, and take the Gothic plot as her invention, then one can better see what function these non-real elements serve.

Many of the rhetorical passages, unlikely coincidences, and improbabilities, have been noted separately. Besides the contemporary attention given to these "flaws," Robert B. Heilman, Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar have all written on the Gothic, Doreen Roberts and Margot Peters have analyzed the rhetoric, and Tom Winnifrith has commented on the improbabilities.¹¹ These phenomena, however, should be seen together as an elaborate construction designed to express and satisfy the disappointments of a "Disconnected, poor, and plain" (Ch. XVI, p. 201) governess. Be it the fantasy of marriage with the master of the house, or the surreal

pictures, sketches of characters, and predictive charades that occur within that central fantasy, each invention describes--and remedies--a problem in Jane's "real" situation. When the books on which Jane has depended can no longer provide an escape from intolerable circumstances, Brontë brings into her work the stories in which one lives during childhood. From the point in the red-room when Jane imagines the absent uncle who will avenge her wrongs, the novel uses the fantasies of fairy tales and literature to achieve the task that Jane imagines for her uncle. If one notices the points at which Jane's ordinary, domestic, "realistic" life changes into fantasy, one comes to a new appreciation of the playfulness of Jane Eyre.

Jane Eyre has drawn considerable recent attention from feminist critics who approve of its politics. For them, Jane's marriage with Rochester is ideal. The Madwoman in the Attic, for example, which itself has received much attention, asserts that Jane Eyre is Brontë's most "optimistic imagining."¹² But such a view does not take account of the terrifyingly destructive anger that Jane's revenge implies. Jane's story leaves Rochester blind, mutilated, and completely in Jane's power. Neither does this view (which seems to be achieving a kind of orthodoxy) question the usefulness of this reversal of dependence. One should focus attention not on the depressing political import of Jane Eyre but on the wonderful imaginativeness of Charlotte Brontë's art. In turning attention to the artistic cleverness of Jane Eyre, we come, I think, to a truer appreciation of the novel.

Charlotte Brontë thought of Shirley (and not of Jane Eyre) as her book about the condition of women.¹³ Just as present-day criticism of Jane Eyre ignores the destructive consequences of Jane's attaining independence, criticism of Shirley overlooks its undertow of violence. Current criticism extols the feminine qualities of nurturing and caring in the women's serving of food and nursing of the sick; it also laments women's lack of

power, as Shirley itself does on the level of narrative. Shirley, however, demonstrates how women gain control of their lives through these same feminine functions. It further concludes that in their relationships with men, women turn their pain and dependence into sado-masochistic pleasure.

Brontë's heroines typically exhibit behaviour that might in psychological terms be called passive aggressive. They will express aggression in a way that is invisible to themselves; they therefore do not have to take responsibility for overt anger. Such a defence pushes the perpetrator's victim into expressing anger, which has the acceptable result of confirming the perpetrator in the belief of her good behaviour. George Eliot notes this style in her character Rosamond Vincy, who "intrench[es] herself in quiet passivity"¹⁴ and then infuriatingly asks, "What have I done?" Though this is a style typical of Brontë's heroines, Brontë nevertheless gives us the information that permits us to criticize it.

Those critics who admire behaviour that might be termed pathological (for example, Patricia Beer and Gilbert and Gubar) have also attacked Eliot's advocacy of self-sacrifice, calling it the view of a woman who does not wish other women to have the fulfillingly creative life that she herself enjoyed.¹⁵ Eliot advocates self-sacrifice because she sees the chaos and destruction that simple anger and revenge cause. Yet Eliot takes the matter of women's resentment and women's claim to determine their own lives a stage further. She advocates self-sacrifice because she sees the chaos and violence that can result when each person, each gender, attempts to impose his or her own wishes on life. Eliot's early solution is to focus on what women might do to hold the world together; she sees achievement in renunciation. She insists, for example, on the beauty of Maggie Tulliver's choice. At the same time, however, she invents a series of men--Philip Wakem, Will Ladislaw, Daniel Deronda--who are able to enter

"into every one's feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging [their] own" (Middlemarch, Ch. 50, p. 539). Eliot's solution is therefore two-fold. But partly because the contribution that she imagines for men is to become a type of man who is not recognizably male and partly because the novels concerned with this subject "take a woman's lot for [their] starting-point" (Middlemarch, Ch. 11, p. 123), attention falls on the women's effort. Because women are asked to do what they have in fact always been expected to do, Eliot's resolution of the conflict seems reactionary.

One might resist Eliot's prescription of self-sacrifice and yet concede that its roots are in Eliot's effort to confront the consequences on society of women's resentment at their "meanness of opportunity" (Middlemarch, Prelude, p. 25) and at being held "at a discount." Eliot's novels increasingly make that resentment the subject of her novels, but her response is not to indulge it but to limit the destruction that it might cause. In order to do so, she has recourse to noticeable coincidence, such as the timing of Dorothea's meeting with Will in Rome, and convenient events, such as the liberating death of Mr. Casaubon, which, though appropriate, serve to promote the moral. Though the convenience of Casaubon's death has been noted (most recently by Carol Christ), Dorothea's part in that death has been overlooked. Though Eliot carefully distances her from direct implication, Dorothea is associated with the events that rescue her. This manipulation is a function of the intensity of the destructive anger that Eliot depicts. The rage that is expressed by the plot of Jane Eyre is now included in the realistic depiction of domestic life. Eliot controls these unleashed wishes, but the non-realistic means of control make her vision yet more complex: she puts at once the argument and the counterargument.

It is Eliot's ability to render simultaneously both points of view

that has led to the recent perverse reading of Rosamond Vincy as the true heroine of Middlemarch. The "sylph caught young and educated at Mrs. Lemon's" (Ch. 16, p. 189), whom readers and critics have known as vain, egoistic, and cruelly cold, is currently admired for her determined controlling of her own life. In Eliot's depiction, Rosamond is both victim and villainess: she is the despicable product of male fantasies, the monster that Frankenstein creates. Rosamond is, therefore, a criticism of men as well as of women. This duality is an example of the way in which Eliot's technique of shifting from self to "equivalent centre of self" (Ch. 21, p. 243) practises the countering of egoism that Middlemarch teaches.

The structuring of Daniel Deronda is also mimetic: in Daniel Deronda, Eliot seeks the limits of this continuous shifting from point of view to point of view. A position must now be taken. One character is no longer both victim and villain: different sets of characters represent separate attributes, and the novel falls into two halves, each commenting on the other. Just as they must be experienced as a whole, the two halves should be understood together. From first readers "who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing but Gwendolen," to Leavis, who salvaged "Gwendolen Harleth" for his Great Tradition, to recent commentators on George Eliot, who, when they write on Daniel Deronda at all, frequently ignore the Jewish part, critics have wished to excise the idealistic, Jewish half of the novel, without recognizing its crucial function. The Jewish half obviates the need to press a resolution on the painful problems that the realistic part of the novel uncovers.¹⁶ By not considering the way these broken fragments fit together, past criticism has overlooked Eliot's daring experiment. Because the idealistic characters must--in order to make them life-like--be placed by their author in the setting of domestic realism, the realistic part of the novel can become progressively abstract. In

Gwendolen Harleth's story, we increasingly follow the ebb and flow of the heroine's mind rather than the events of daily life. Indeed, though it has the practical consequence of freeing Gwendolen from Grandcourt's tyranny, the critical event of her life--the drowning of her husband--occurs chiefly as a differently imagined event in her mind. While the Jewish part of Daniel Deronda violates the conventions of realism and turns into romance, the story of Gwendolen Harleth breaks through the conventions of realism: it does not subscribe to the resolution of the problems that it presents or to happy endings. It is as if Eliot took the prototypical plot of the novel about women, the plot of Emma, say, and set it in reality. Her experiment produces a portrait of a woman whose force of will leads her to contemplate murder.

In this analysis of Jane Eyre, Shirley, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda, my intent is to celebrate Brontë's and Eliot's art. To focus on areas that have been or might be considered flaws is to recognize the inventiveness of Brontë's and Eliot's to reproduce the world that they felt and saw. Jane Eyre is not simply a gripping story with an improbable plot but a clever weaving of romance and realism that allows us to see the dreams as well as the nightmare of a young woman's life. Despite its moving tale of the emptiness of that life and of the pains of courtship, Shirley is much less successful and much less frequently read. It nevertheless records a moment in literary history, and its lacunae give insight into the nature of the tension that Brontë's subject creates. Eliot's aim in Middlemarch is the impartiality of the dramatist; the novel is therefore at a distance from the tension between dream and reality. Yet its advocacy of self-sacrifice makes its own demands on probability. Through the mixing of genres, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot inscribe not only their vision, but a criticism of it.

Notes

¹ The most significant recent analyses of Brontë's use of metaphors are those by Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; London: Virago, 1978), and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

² Most recently by Carol Christ, "Aggression and Providential Death in George Eliot's Fiction," Novel, 9 (1976), 131-40, and Richard Poirier, "Middlemarch, Chapter 85," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 35 (1980), 448-53.

³ [Miss Rigby], "Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre, and the Governesses' Benevolent Institution Report," Quarterly Review, 84 (1848), 153-85.

⁴ "If George Eliot turns out a dull dog and an ineffective writer--a mere flash in the pan--I, for one, am determined to cut him on the first intimation of that disagreeable fact." George Eliot, "To John Blackwood," 14 March 1857, in The George Eliot Letters, 9 vols., ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), II, 309-310. (Within the chapters on George Eliot, extracts from this work will be referred to by the name of the person to whom the letter is addressed, the date, and the volume and page numbers.)

⁵ The page numbers refer to the facsimile edition of The Complete Poems of Charlotte Brontë, ed. Clement Shorter, with Bibliography and Notes, by C. W. Hatfield (1923; rpt. St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1976).

⁶ "The Sad Fortunes of The Rev. Amos Barton," in Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. David Lodge (1858; Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1973). All references are to this edition.

⁷ The Mill on the Floss, ed. A. S. Byatt (1860; Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1973). All references are to this edition.

⁸ Daniel Deronda, ed. Barbara Hardy (1976; Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1967), Ch. 31, p. 406. All references will be to this edition.

⁹ For examples of contemporary comment on these features, see, for Charlotte Brontë: review of Jane Eyre, Spectator 20 (6 November 1847), 1074-75, in The Brontës: The Critical Heritage, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 74-78 ("the 'Returned Letter Office' suspends its laws that Jane Eyre may carry on her tale with 'effect'" p. 74); [G. H. Lewes], "Recent Novels: French and English," Fraser's Magazine 36 (1847) 686-95 ("too much melodrama and improbability" p. 692); review of Jane Eyre, Christian Remembrancer 15 (1848) 396-409; rpt. in Allott, pp. 88-92 ("The plot is most extravagantly improbable" p. 90). For George Eliot: R. H. Hutton, review of Middlemarch, Spectator 16 (December 1871); rpt. in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 286-314. ("It seems to us somewhat

unnatural that a girl of Dorothea Brooke's depth and enthusiasm of nature should fall in love with a man of so little vital warmth and volume of character as Mr Casaubon" p. 287). For more recent comment, see, for Brontë: Nina Auerbach, Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), Margot Peters, Charlotte Brontë: Style in the Novel (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), and Doreen Roberts, "Jane Eyre and 'The Warped System of Things,'" in Reading the Victorian Novel: Detail into Form, ed. Ian Gregor (London: Vision, 1980), pp. 131-149. For George Eliot: see note 2 above.

10 Q. D. Leavis, Introduction to Jane Eyre (Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1966). Adrienne Rich, "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman." Ms, October, 1973, pp. 68-69, 72, 98, 107 (rpt. On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978 (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 89-106.

11 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, p. 371.

12 Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's New Gothic," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinman, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 118-132; T. J. Winnifrith, The Brontës (London: Masters of World Literature Series, Macmillan, 1977) and The Brontës and Their Background: Romance and Reality (London: Harper & Row, 1973). See also note 9.

13 "To W. S. Williams," 12 May 1848. "I often wish to say something about 'the condition of women' question." The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, 4 vols. (Oxford: The Shakespeare Head, 1932). II, 215-16. (Within the chapters on Charlotte Brontë, this work will be cited as LL.)

14 George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. W. J. Harvey (1871-72; Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1965), Ch. 65, p. 715. All references are to this edition, except if otherwise noted.

15 Patricia Beer, Reader, I Married Him (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 189; Gilbert and Gubar, p. 316.

16 Eliot's complaint about her readers. "To Mme Eugene Bodichon," 2 October 1876, The George Eliot Letters, 9 vols., ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), VI, 290; F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972). In a later essay, "George Eliot's Zionist Novel," Commentary, 30 (1960), 317-25, Leavis partially revised his opinion of the value of the Jewish part.

Chapter Two

"What Shall I Do?--What Shall I Do?":
Jane Eyre the Dreamer

"It seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control." (Ch. IV, p. 28)

Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it--and certainly they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended--a tale my imagination created and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (Ch. XII, p. 132)

Jane Eyre, pacing through the corridor of the third story of a house owned by an upper-middle class Englishman, invents for herself a tale of incident, life, fire, and feeling, which is, as we discover, straight out of the pages of a Gothic romance. When Jane begins to imagine the tale, she has emerged from a life of dependency and privation, whose only bright moments have come through creativity--books and painting; she is now living the life of a governess, of teaching punctuated with meals, living the life, that is, of domestic reality. The story that this situation produces provides Jane, as she says here, with all that "I desired and had not in my actual existence" (p. 132).

Given the coincidence of the point at which Jane Eyre the novel starts to become fantastic and the point at which Jane begins to tell her tale, I want to suggest that we should for a moment scrutinize Jane's activity with

the scepticism with which we treat that other first-person narrative told by a governess, The Turn of the Screw. Until Chapter XI, when Jane arrives at Thornfield, nothing extraordinary has happened to her; and nothing extraordinary has happened to her enemies. The wicked aunt, Mrs. Reed, thrives at a distance (although "Mr. John's conduct does not please her" Ch. X, p. 108), and Mr. Brocklehurst's power has been turned over to a committee. Jane has led the typically tortured life of a child at an English boarding school (one should recall Dotheboys Hall and Salem House). Jane's experience at Lowood modulates, as it usually does--especially in the telling--from the new girl's keen sense of being abandoned on a hillside in Sparta to the older survivor's (a word that is literally appropriate to Jane in her typhoid-infested school) to an exhilarated appreciation of her own life. And that appreciation is extended to the school in which her life has taken place. So far, even Lowood's transformation into a "truly useful and noble institution" (Ch. X, pp. 98-99) could not be called unusual; it has after all fulfilled Jane's expectations by teaching her "certain accomplishments" (Ch. III, p. 25) and recognized and rewarded her superiority.

Just as Jane is about to graduate from her "prison-ground" (Ch. X, p. 100), Bessie, the Reeds' servant, reappears, and one section of the novel is marked off as Jane and Bessie reminisce "about old times" (p. 110). Then, "each went her separate way." And Jane, I am suggesting, goes into another novel. The self-reflective opening of the next chapter seems almost to recognize as much: "A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play," the text reads. Before proposing some reasons why Jane offers this limited analogy here, I want to stress how this passage covers up a remarkable break within Jane Eyre.

Adrienne Rich has observed that "the Thornfield episode is often recalled or referred to as if it were the novel Jane Eyre."¹ Rich then

offers a synopsis of the novel such a truncated and abridged version of Jane Eyre would be and comments: "Thus described, the novel becomes a blend of Gothic horror and Victorian morality." Rich's interpretation of Jane's leaving--"On the wedding day, it is revealed that he has a wife still alive. . . . The governess decides that her only course of action is to leave her lover forever"--justifies "Victorian morality," as a description (though Rich, as we shall see, later describes a "Victorian morality" with unusual connotations. Jane Eyre is a tale, as children would say, of "blood and violence." Nobody--from its first reviewers to its present-day readers would disagree with the description "Gothic horror." Nobody, except, perhaps, Charlotte Brontë. (The "Lowood part . . . is true," she tells W. S. Williams; she knows of cases of mad wives being kept in attics; Helen Burns was real; Jane's telepathic communication with Rochester "is a true thing; it really happened." It is in this fantasy that for her a truth lies.² Only through the apparatus of a genre (Gothic) opposed to the conventions of realism which her story in part observes can Brontë comment on and correct the inadequacies of real life, as it is known, to Jane Eyre, "disconnected, poor, and plain," (Ch. XVI, p. 201).

The tales that Charlotte Brontë and Jane imagine as Jane paces restlessly through the third story of Thornfield satisfies all the anger and all the longings that Jane's life of deprivation and subservience has raised in her. With an almost parodic insistence on the parallels of fairy tale, each wrong that Jane has suffered is avenged; each prayer answered. "Jane" then becomes archetypal; she is the mid-nineteenth century woman struggling to realize her wishes, her will, within a society predicated on her renunciation of both. Jane Eyre, with its tension between romance and realism, duplicates the struggle between the woman's will to assert (which

the romantic elements in Jane Eyre satisfy) and her social function of self-abnegation (to which a uniformly realistic treatment would condemn her).

Furthermore, the tension within the text enacts the author's nervousness as she engages in the act of writing, an act she knows to be subversive. "Who blames me?" Jane asks, "and answers herself, "Many, no doubt and I shall be called discontented." In Jane's next sentence, I contend, is the clue to Jane Eyre's continued popularity in the face of many attempts (by early reviewers, and later by Leavis and by Cecil) to ignore or dismiss it, "I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature."³ The battle Jane here articulates, Charlotte Brontë's own battle, is brought into the novel through the mixture of genres. The imagination whose activity "she could not help" surfaces in fantasy and metaphor and leads her to places inaccessible (largely because of the historical facts of the author's existence) to reason. Her

. . . Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (V.i.14-17)

I shall argue that Jane Eyre is successful because of the resulting cross-fertilization of typically opposed genres. Just as the wood scenes in A Midsummer Night's Dream (which are brought into the text by Mr. Rochester calling Jane Mustard-Seed [Ch. XXIV, p. 325]) both express the protagonists' chaotic and painful feelings and solve the problems that gave rise to them, the romantic incidents of Jane Eyre also express and solve Jane's problems. Through the romance, Charlotte Brontë includes the disorder and the wish that the conventions of realism work to repress, and because of this creates, "something of great constancy" (V.i.26).

I

So much has been written about the Gothic (or romantic) elements in Jane Eyre, which because they are filled with "incident, life, fire [and] feeling" are anyway present to us, that there now seems a need to remember its "real" elements--the anchor on which the success of the Gothic depends. Before I examine the ways in which Jane Eyre employs the characteristic features of domestic realism (using this framework, however, subversively, not just as a counterpoise but also as a register of the gains made through fantasy), I want to look at the comments of critics for whom the mixing of genres is a problem (or an irritation) rather than the source of Jane Eyre's life. Because I am making a large claim for Jane Eyre's artistry and its place in the realist tradition, I shall briefly discuss the assessment of literary historians, among whom this view seems to be most common.

Tom Winnifrith, who has written two recent books on the Brontës, claims that

what we find exciting at the age of ten, namely the story with its episodic shifts of scene and preposterous coincidences, is obviously what is wrong with Jane Eyre.⁴

This remark places Winnifrith at the end of a long line of reviewers and critics for whom the romantic elements are somehow extraneous to the novel, whose remarks leave one wondering what sort of novel they would have it be which did away with all the mechanisms that turn dependent Jane into an heiress. If one were to remove all the coincidences to which critics object, one would have to begin erasing if not with Miss Temple's knowing Mr. Lloyd then certainly with the "mirthless laugh" (Ch. XI, p. 129) that precedes Jane's pacing the corridors and inventing her tale. Having erased

this, one would be left with what was the all too common story of a governess's miserable life. One would also be left with the motive for Jane's exotic tale.⁵

Lord David Cecil also complains that Charlotte Brontë "stretches the long arm of coincidence till it becomes positively dislocated" (he is writing of Villette); in his comments on Jane Eyre, he cites the "Incredibility" of Rochester's hiding a mad wife at Thornfield and of Mrs. Reed's conspiring "to cheat Jane Eyre out of a fortune because she had been rude to her as a child of ten"; and he finds it "supremely incredible that when Jane Eyre collapses on an unknown doorstep after her flight from Rochester it should turn out to be the doorstep of her only surviving amiable relations" (p. 117). Yet Cecil's comment recognizes that Charlotte Brontë's achievement depends on these contradictions:

Out of her improbabilities and her absurdities, she constructed an original vision of life; from the scattered, distorted fragments of experience which managed to penetrate her huge self-absorption, she created a world. (p. 125)

While this comment seems to acknowledge that it is through the improbabilities and distortions that Charlotte Brontë rendered the self, Cecil implies that because of the "self" she has rendered, her work, compared, say, with that of the male novelists of the time, is limited. Cecil's method is syllogistic: he writes that Charlotte Brontë's

books are not about men like Dickens', nor about man like Thackeray's, but about an individual man. With her the hero or more frequently the heroine for the first time steps forward and takes a dominating position on the stage; and the story is presented, not through the eyes of impersonal truth, but openly through her own. (p. 111)

To deal with all men seems to be preferable to dealing with one, so that Dickens and Thackeray must take precedence over Charlotte Brontë. Though

Cecil can see the everyman in Thackeray's and Dickens's heroes, he cannot see the everywoman in Jane. But then neither could affluent and connected Virginia Woolf.⁶ By allowing her imagination ("her sacred subversive force," as Eagleton describes it)⁷ to "dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it," by including in her world of domestic reality the improbabilities, the reflections of her will, Charlotte Brontë recorded the conflict of the middle-class woman living in mid-nineteenth century England. Because the fantasy and fact, the romance and the domestic realism, coexist, the conflict is suggested rather than merely the wish. I now want to look at this fusion of romance and realism.

Jane Eyre's method both attempts to reduce the romantic to the ordinary and to imbue the ordinary with the romantic. The existence of the Gothic tale of the madwoman seems to lead to a highly rhetorical treatment of everyday event. Actions, such as advertising for a job, are treated, as Doreen Roberts comments, "with all the momentousness of the conversion of a St. Paul on the road to Damascus";⁸ the episode is given almost as much space as the scene in the red-room. The same sense of excitement pervades the household preparations for Christmas at Moore House and for the arrival at Thornfield of the house guests--and the arrival itself is treated as Scott would treat the arrival of a Jacobite troop:

Four equestrians galloped up the drive, and after them came two open carriages. Fluttering veils and waving plumes filled the vehicles; two of the cavaliers were young, dashing looking gentlemen; the third was Mr. Rochester on his black horse, Mesrour; Pilot bounding before him: at his side rode a lady, and he and she were the first of the party. Her purple riding-habit almost swept the ground, her veil streamed long on the breeze; mingling with its transparent folds, and gleaming through them, shone rich raven ringlets.

"Miss Ingram!" exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax, and away she hurried to her post below.

The cavalcade, following the sweep of the drive, quickly turned the angle of the house, and I lost sight of it. (Ch. XVII, p. 208)

The plausible events in the life of a nineteenth-century eighteen year-old are invested with adventure, while, conversely, the romantic elements are deliberately reduced in importance. In the disproportion between style and the events described, especially in the rhetorical treatment of relatively prosaic actions, the dissatisfaction of such a girl is made evident.⁹ Because the "madwoman" exists within the mid-nineteenth century girl, her everyday life will assume a perfervid hue.

There is a corresponding everyday quality to the description of the romantic elements of the story. The romantic is deflated: the tension generated by the red-room incident, the visit of Mr. Lloyd, and the narration of the history of Jane's parents (who died--remarkably--within one month of each other) is dissipated by Bessie and Abbot's leaving to eat roast onion and Welsh rabbit; when Jane is left "winner of the field" (Ch. IV, p. 40) after her rebellious attack on Mrs. Reed (that follows the interview with Mr. Brocklehurst), her "fiendish feeling" (p. 41) is made to evaporate by Bessie's familiar call to lunch; the disembodied laugh is heard first at mid-day rather than at midnight; Grace Poole's "oral oddities" (Ch. XII, p. 133) are contrasted by her appearance; the Gytrash turns out to be a dog; and the hero (not the heroine) falls off his horse and sprains his ankle. All these are attempts to persuade the reader of the truth of Jane's story. This strategy, combined with the tactic of deflecting objections by anticipating them, creates a confidence that permits the introduction of yet more improbabilities, including the central improbability of mad Bertha Mason's hidden existence. They also, however, suggest that in some way the romantic is more real--a medium that is more natural than the reality in which the young mid-nineteenth century girl finds herself. Yet no matter what might be happening in the attic, it is business as usual downstairs. Meals are served, people come and go, life

goes on. Jane leads the life of a governess, and imagines her tale; Charlotte Brontë looks after her father, and writes hers.

II

Virginia Woolf noted in Jane Eyre a "desire to create instantly, rather than observe patiently."¹⁰ In Shirley, reality is patiently observed and found wanting; in Jane Eyre, Jane is allowed to create for herself a perfect world. Yet it is through this improbably instantaneous creation, through this mixture of genres, that Woolf could have observed the reality. The romantic invention is the response to reality's pressure.

In her search for this perfect world, Jane moves through six different communities. Each one is presented in realistic ways: we know what time it is, how the inhabitants spend their days, what they eat (and this becomes for Jane an important index of her status¹¹), and something about the architecture and furnishing of their houses. The events of Jane's "insignificant existence" are, as she says, "recorded in detail" (Ch. X, p. 98). The periods spent within each of the houses are conceived in terms of domestic realism, but the passages between communities and to a certain extent the impetus for each change--are treated in non-real ways that reflect the improbability of all that motion. They indicate (with the important exception of the flight from Thornfield, which is self-consciously mythic) that the journeys themselves are only important as they remove Jane, complete with lessons learnt and expectations formed, into a new sphere which tests both. Whereas in Shirley, Caroline Helstone acts as a prototypical character tested and altered by a variety of event and circumstance centered in Briarfield, in Jane Eyre it is the world that magically agrees to alter.

So much movement between houses would suggest an affinity between this

novel and the picaresque, or with hero-centered novels, rather than with the domestic novel and the enforced confinement of its heroines (a confinement that reflects the difficulty of travel in the pre-railway age within England and abroad and that is mimetic of the confined nature of women's lives). As if in acknowledgment of this violation of convention (fictional and otherwise), Jane's transit between the five communities (counting, for the moment, Moore House and Morton School as one) is deliberately blurred. There is a pause of three days and three nights between the end of Jane's wanderings and the beginning of her life at Moore House (Ch. XXIX, p. 432). Jane can "remember but little" (Ch. V, p. 45) of the journey between Gateshead and Lowood; and the sixteen-hour journey between Lowood and Thornfield takes place between Chapters X and XI. Written for the first two paragraphs in the historic present, Chapter XI opens "like a new scene in a play" (p. 112). Jane has arrived at Thornfield with the suddenness of Alice stepping through the looking glass. If each time the reader were made conscious of the actual journey, Jane's life would seem either too adventurous or too allegorical; the significance of the fantasy derives from the narrative's adherence to representing actuality elsewhere. In this way, it avoids being all romance, or all reality--and the romance explains what is most profoundly the matter with reality.

Accounts of Jane Eyre often compare Jane to Christian moving through life among people who function as representatives of alternate values, striving for a compromise between independence and abnegation (or, more traditionally, between Reason and Passion). Beaty, for instance, applying Ewbank's judgment of Caroline Mordaunt (a possible source for Jane Eyre), states that Jane Eyre is "not a picaresque satire but a domesticated Pilgrim's Progress."¹² But Jane is also Gulliver (Gulliver's Travels plays an explicit role in the novel) discovering new worlds. Jane's mission is

to resolve, as a contemporary critic (whose review Charlotte Brontë admired) wrote, "that inner conflict, that fatality arising from . . . a disharmony between birth, education, and fortune," to find, that is, "a place in the sun." (For Lodge, this would be a place near the fire; and for Heilman, a place in the daylight.)¹³

The Jane who paces through the corridors of Thornfield is at the age when novels of domestic realism usually begin. Although Lowood was a significant improvement on Gateshead, removing Jane as it did from her "hated and hating position" (p. 41), its real effect is to turn Jane into a "pre-social 'atom'" (as Terry Eagleton argues all Charlotte Brontë's central figures are),¹⁴ free to negotiate her own life. She arrives at Thornfield "cut adrift from every connection" (Ch. XI, p. 112). Later, when she draws a picture of herself, she will describe herself as "Disconnected, poor, and plain" (Ch. XVI, p. 201). To say that she is a "pre-social 'atom'" then becomes misleading, because her definition of herself is primarily social, proceeding from her experience so far, which has taught her those words, disconnected, poor, and plain. But the words for Jane are made resonant by her gender. Her social claims are animated by her sense of women's oppressed position.

The "bright vision" that Jane must see--the novel that must develop from this point--will mirror the constraints on the mid-nineteenth century woman. Suffering (as she says "millions" of others do [Ch. XI, p. 132]) from the stillness of her life, Jane imagines a life of incident; rebelling against "too rigid a constraint," Jane longs "for a power of vision which might overpass" the limits of all she can now see from Thornfield's attic; and enduring a "too absolute a stagnation," Jane wishes for "more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character" (p. 132).

When Jane first hears "the curious laugh" which is the prelude to the Gothic tale, her position is similar--despite her disadvantages and the teaching--to that of any middle-class unmarried woman who is not independently wealthy. In the last scene at Lowood, Betty has restored Jane to the middle class. She says of the Eyres, "Well, you know Missis always said they were poor and quite despicable: and they may be poor; but I believe they are as much gentry as the Reeds are"; she then describes Jane's uncle as "quite a gentleman" (Ch. X, p. 150). He is to play the part of this Cinderella's fairy godfather--first protecting her from an unlawful marriage and then making Jane and (through Jane the Rivers sisters) independent. (He is, on the other hand, the Rivers' wicked uncle.) So restored, Jane at Thornfield is living in a "beau ideal of domestic comfort" (Ch. XI, p. 115). Yet because of Jane's previous life at Gateshead and Lowood, we understand more clearly the typical conditions of a young middle-class woman's life. The significance of Thornfield's constitution is brought out through the features that it shares with the other communities in which Jane has lived--and so we know why it must be destroyed.

Gateshead (Jane's painful experience of the status to which her birth entitles her) and Lowood (her triumphant experience of her own talents) are both houses which seem at first glance to be run by women but are in fact owned by men whose misuse of power (economic and otherwise) threatens the survival of their own properties and of the women who live there. Mrs. Reed, who is "clever" with the "household and tenantry," is only the nominal manager of the property; the real authority is the tyrannical Master John, who tells Jane "all the house belongs to me" (Ch. I, p. 8). Eventually the results of Mrs. Reed's efficiency are dissipated by her son's indulgence. The Gateshead framework of an apparently powerful woman who is undermined in some way by the man on whom she is dependent is

repeated at Lowood (as it will be in other establishments). Miss Temple can only evade, rather than confront, Mr. Brocklehurst's despotism, "she has to answer to Mr. Brocklehurst for all she does. Mr. Brocklehurst buys all our food and all our clothes" (Ch. VI, p. 56), Helen Burns tells Jane. Miss Temple even has to give way over the extra toast she orders for Jane and Helen to Mr. Brocklehurst's surrogate, the housekeeper, Mrs. Harden (who is later morally damned by running away from the Lowood epidemic only to reappear in Shirley as Mrs. Hardman, Mrs. Pryor's cruel employer, who speaks the words of Jane Eyre's harshest critic).

At Gateshead, the first in the series of patriarchal mansions, Jane's only sustenance is gained in secret: she is smuggled a bun and a cheese-cake by Bessie, and "shrined in double retirement," Jane habitually escapes from "the vague sing-song" of her dependency by living the pictures of Bewick's History of British Birds:

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she . . . fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland. (Ch. I, p. 5)

When she returns to Gateshead, Jane will again escape from the Reed children's oppressive company through drawings, but they will be hers, the creations of her "ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination" (Ch. XXI, p. 292), and one of the creations will be "a very faithful representation of Mr. Rochester" (p. 293).

At Lowood, as at Gateshead, Jane's body and mind are nourished secretly. After Mr. Brocklehurst has humiliated Jane before the whole school, Miss Temple covertly feeds Jane and Helen Burns seed cake, and Jane forgets her misery in listening to

things I had never heard of; of nations and times past; of countries far away; of secrets of nature discovered or guessed at: they spoke of books: how many they had read!
(Ch. VIII, p. 85)

Jane learns that whatever a master--here Mr. Brocklehurst--"might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was further beyond his interference than he imagined" (Ch. VII, p. 74).¹⁵

Like Lucy Snowe, Jane seems "to hold two lives--the life of thought, and that of reality" (Villette, Ch. VIII). Thought makes reality enduring. By providing images (learnt from books), the world of thought transforms Jane's ordinary childhood struggle--and her struggles against dependency--into the historic struggles related in "Goldsmith's History of Rome": she screams at John Reed:

"Wicked and cruel boy! . . . You are like a murderer--you are like a slave-driver--you are like the Roman emperors."
(Ch. I, p. 8)

Her imagination frames her life in a compensatory grandeur that will satisfy her ego; it turns reality into romance. Her imaginative experience also, however, seems itself to be real: Jane considers Gulliver's Travels to be "a narrative of facts"; Lilliput and Brobdingnag were "solid parts of the earth's surface" (Ch. II, p. 20). Perhaps we should take our "scepticism" of Jane's narrative even further back.

IV

"She's an underhand little thing: I never saw a girl of her age with so much cover." (Ch. II, p. 10)

Jane has found relief from "insupportable oppression" at Gateshead through her imagination; yet after the trauma of the red-room, this route

out of terror and anxiety seems blocked. When Bessie brings her Gulliver's Travels, its "charm" fails, "all was eerie and dreary" and Gulliver himself has become "a most desolate wanderer in dread and dangerous regions" (p. 20). Jane closes the book; books no longer offer escape from Gateshead. Gateshead is a society in which Jane cannot succeed. She is neither a pretty girl ("a beauty like Miss Georgiana would be more moving in the same condition" [Ch. III, p. 26], Bessie tells the maid Miss Abbot) nor a boy (with opportunities to gain independence in the world). Gateshead disappears. Recommending "a change of air and scene" (p. 25), Mr. Lloyd sets plans in motion to move Jane from Gateshead to Lowood, from Lilliput to Brobdingnag. (Elaine Showalter points out Brocklehurst's Brobdingnagian features.¹⁶) Jane can no longer imagine escape, so her author imagines it for her.

Jane Eyre begins with the bad Master John taunting Jane with her dependence. Jane fights back, speaking for the first time those parallels "drawn . . . in silence, which I never thought . . . to have declared aloud" (Ch. I, p. 8), parallels between this gentleman's oppression of her and Nero's and Caligula's oppression of their slaves. She tells us, "I was a trifle beside myself; or rather out of myself" (Ch. II, p. 9). Later, Mrs. Reed will comment on the surprising suddenness of Jane's transformation: "how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend" (Ch. XXI, p. 300). The scene in the red-room, which is Jane's psychic experience of Gateshead (Rich's "death chamber"), summons up from Charlotte Brontë and from Jane, who are here--I want to suggest for a moment--indistinguishable, the romantic incidents which are the only means of escape for Jane, whose plainness might otherwise make her a dependent in perpetuity. While Jane meditates on

some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression--[such] as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die. (Ch. II, p. 113)

Brontë invents the "strange expedient" that Jane longs for. Instead of the passive aggressive revolt that a "realistic" heroine, such as Caroline Helstone is forced into, Brontë resorts to romance. Standing in the garden at Lowood, Jane is whisked away. Jane reflects (on her very first day) that "Gateshead and my past life seemed floated away to an immeasurable distance" (Ch. VI, p. 54).

Jane's imagination also supplies her with the means of escape from Lowood. As we have already seen, Lowood becomes Thornfield with suddenness. With Miss Temple's departure, Jane is "left in [her] natural element" and "feels the stirring of old emotions" (Ch. X, p. 100). She tells us that she "tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon" (p. 101). As she muses over the means to "change, stimulus," her "petition seemed swept off into vague space" (p. 101). Jane's prayer is then interrupted (as are all Jane Eyre's rhetorical passages) by reality, this time, in the form of the supper bell and then a fellow teacher's small talk. Yet it seems to Jane that

if, I could go back to the idea which had last entered my mind as I stood at the window, some inventive suggestion would rise for my relief. (Ch. X, p. 101)

Dismissing "such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment" (p. 102) that came to mind as "a mere waste of time to listen to them," Jane formulates her wish: "now all I want is to serve elsewhere. . . . A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances." "Can I not get so much of my own will," she asks. In this presentation of Jane's wishes in terms that undermine the usual meaning of the word "wish," we can see--in a compressed form--the strategy behind the mixing of genres going on in the

whole book. In the very next chapter, Jane finds herself at Thornfield, and we believe in the probability of the move. Large claims can be passed off as small ones; romance can be passed off as realism; the psyche with all its asocial components--"hunger, rage, and rebellion"--can find expression.

Like Gateshead and Lowood, Thornfield also appears to be run by a woman, Mrs. Fairfax, who is in a position of authority which like Mrs. Reed's and Miss Temple's can be revoked (and is) by her master. But there is another household in Thornfield--the hidden one, whose story avenges the displacement of these women (good and bad) by proving the ontological insecurity of these dominant men. While Mr. Rochester appears to have complete control over Mrs. Fairfax's household, it is nevertheless subject to periodic invasions from the mad world upstairs. His control over Thornfield, then, is precarious--dependent on essentially unstable elements: a tipling jailor and a lunatic, who functions--it has almost become a commonplace of criticism--as Jane's "dark double."¹⁷ The Gothic romance of which Bertha Mason is a part will destroy the model constitution and replace it with one more favourable to women. Through Bertha's acts of revenge, patriarchal Thornfield will give way to a matriarchal Ferndean.¹⁸ (Later another romantic invention--the timely death of Jane's uncle--will spare the Rivers sisters the consequences of being dependent on a brother, St. John Rivers, who by refusing to marry the Rose of the World deprives them of the home he should provide. In one of the novel's clever economical strokes, the same money that saves Diana and Mary also punishes St. John by permitting him to go to India where he (not Jane as the Rivers sisters had feared) is "grilled alive in Calcutta" (Ch. XXXV, p. 530).

Jane has only spent one chapter at Thornfield, and that one is largely taken up by a tour of the house, when we find her pacing the third story,

hearing the "mirthless laugh," and opening her "inward ear" to the "tale my imagination created." At Thornfield, just as at Gateshead and Lowood, Jane escapes from the tedium of reality through fiction. She is now suffering from the restlessness (which creates a corresponding sense of expectation) of those other heroines (for instance Dorothea and Caroline Helstone) when the reader first meets them.

Because the reader comes to possess Thornfield through Jane's perceptions, there is a sense--recognized by those critics who see Thornfield's geography as a substitution of either Jane's mind (Moglen) or her body (Showalter) or her life (Gilbert and Gubar)--in which Thornfield represents Jane more than it does her absent master.¹⁹ Thornfield, like Jane, seems to be waiting for something. Everything about the house is in a state of perpetual readiness:

"In what order you keep these rooms, Mrs. Fairfax!" said I. "No dust, no canvass coverings: except that the air feels chilly, one would think they were inhabited daily."

"Why, Miss Eyre, though Mr. Rochester's visits here are rare, they are always sudden and unexpected; and as I observed that it put him out to find everything swathed up, and to have a bustle of arrangement on his arrival, I thought it best to keep the rooms in readiness." (Ch. XI, p. 126)

Not only is everything ready, but everything is also in a state of incompleteness. Thornfield and "all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see" (p. 126) are in need of their master. Mrs. Fairfax tells Jane: "I fear it will be getting out of order . . . great houses and fine grounds require the presence of the proprietor" (p. 120). Jane joins everything else in the wait, suggesting two more mythic tales--that of the besieged princess and that of the Fisher King.²⁰

When Jane first hears Mr. Rochester's horse (whose name--which we are told later--is from the Arabian Nights²¹) galloping towards Thornfield, she tells us that she "remembered certain of Bessie's tales wherein figured a

North-of-England spirit, called a 'Gytrash'" (Ch. XII, p. 136); her life, however, is about to become another of Bessie's tales, Pamela--Jane (as the Quarterly's critic, Miss Rigby, noted) is the servant Pamela to Rochester's Mr. B. The scene in which they meet illustrates Charlotte Brontë's cunning fusion of romance and realism. Beginning only in the fourth paragraph after Jane has been telling the reader of the relief her imagination provides for her restlessness, the story of Mr. Rochester's arrival nevertheless seems to occur many dreary months later, and not simply because we have been told that "October, November, December passed away" (p. 133). The monotony of Jane's unseen existence is asserted by the details of daily life. Its mundanity is brought to our attention by Jane's apology for the "exotic" Grace Poole's seen life: Grace fetches a pot of porter and Jane remarks "(oh romantic reader, forgive me for telling the plain truth)" (p. 133). Next, plain Jane's down-to-earth nature is implied by her assuring us that the wax doll she gives Adèle to play with is "usually kept enveloped in silver paper in a drawer" (p. 134). Then Jane's reliability is suggested: with the accuracy of the natural historian, she gives an account of her walk. And the walk itself--of all prosaic things--is to post a letter. This insistence on the dulness of reality might be called--as Terry Eagleton calls it--romantic.²² What it represents, however, is the failure of Jane's life to measure up to her expectation of it.

By deliberately bringing the Gytrash into the story, Jane and her creator-collaborator Charlotte Brontë can disclaim, as she turns the Gytrash back into a Newfoundland dog, all romantic invention. Charlotte Brontë again exploits the dialectic she has set up when later she disingenuously has Rochester say of this meeting, "I thought unaccountably of fairy tales" (Ch. XII, p. 149). By recording the fanciful aspect of their relationship in the words they speak to each other--in the fairy

motif and the "mythic" comparisons (for instance, to King Ahasuerus, who married a beggar maid), Jane and Charlotte Brontë insist on the reality of their story.

After this encounter in Hay Lane, Jane Eyre brazenly asserts:

The incident had occurred and was gone for me: it was an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense. (Ch. XII, p. 140)

She immediately points out, however, its moment ("trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing"), its romance (although Rochester is described in Charlotte Brontë's "new Gothic"²³ as ugly, he is nevertheless "masculine," "dark, strong and stern" [p. 140]), and its interest (which is such that Jane now dreads returning to Thornfield "to slip again over my faculties the viewless fetters of an uniform and too still existence" (p. 141)).²⁴ By building up an incident while simultaneously insisting on its triviality, Charlotte Brontë suggests the emptiness of Jane's (and through Jane, everywoman's) life; the invocation of the Gothic tale describes the limitation of actual existence, the failure of the conditions of society to solve the problems those conditions raise.

When Rochester is at Thornfield, everything comes to life: Thornfield Hall becomes "a changed place . . . a rill from the outer world was flowing through it; it had a master" (Ch. XIII, p. 144). Business is reactivated by Rochester's presence, the "fires" are lit, and Jane's sleeping soul, to use Rochester's gypsy's terms, is awakened. Jane stops pacing the corridor; in fact, the door to the third-story is now locked (p. 205).²⁵ Charlotte Brontë and Jane now have to overcome Jane's central problem: her plainness. Mrs. Gaskell relates how Charlotte Brontë

once told her sisters that they were wrong--even morally wrong--in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, "I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours."²⁶

But how? Anne Brontë's heroine Agnes Grey, a woman with "pale hollow cheek[s]" and "ordinary brown hair," describes the problem of having "no power to make her presence known" by comparing a woman without beauty to a glow-worm without light:

She might hear her winged darling buzzing over and around her; he vainly seeking her, she longing to be found, but with no power to make her presence known, no voice to call him, no wings to follow his flight;--the fly must seek another mate, the worm must live and die alone. (Ch. XVII, "Confessions")²⁷

Charlotte Brontë sets out to prove that beauty is an ignis fatuus (Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason serving as examples) and that her heroine can attract a husband without it.

In Jane Eyre, the usual equation is reversed: to be beautiful is to be damned--as silly (Georgiana Reed), as frivolous (Adèle), as passively predatory and tyrannical (Blanche Ingram), as shallow (Rosamond Oliver), or as cold (St. John Rivers). The means Charlotte Brontë chooses to show that a lack of beauty is no handicap, however, suggests that she is cheating: she slips a romantic element into her realistic setting. Mr. Rochester's first sight of Jane's mind is through her portfolio of drawings. No typical schoolroom drawings these: Rochester is interested. Yet as Robert B. Heilman notes of these and other surrealist features of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë "is plumbing the psyche, not inventing a weird décor."²⁸ Such a recourse on Brontë's part, however, suggests the failure of realism and reality to provide an opportunity for profound revelation that society does not allow. The fanciful pictures are offset by the picture of family life; Rochester tells Adèle and Mrs. Fairfax, "No crowding . . . take the

drawings from my hand as I finish them; but don't push your faces up to mine" (Ch. XIII, p. 152). Jane's title for the last picture, "the shape which shape had none" (p. 154) (Milton's description of Death²⁹) appropriately describes the narrative purpose of these paintings. Through these pictures, these shapes, Jane "makes her presence known" to Rochester, which might otherwise be an insuperably difficult task.

In fact, it is not just that Jane comes to life with Mr. Rochester; she comes to live through him. At Lowood, Jane's mind "had borrowed of Miss Temple" (as an author might borrow a character); now at Gateshead, she lives Mr. Rochester's life: "I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imaging the new pictures he portrayed" (p. 180). He is "the power of vision" that she has wished for as she paced the third story. Through him, she acquires experience of "the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen" (Ch. XII, p. 132); and through him, she discovers life's "mysteries" (Ch. XIV, p. 167). Jane seems to derive a delight from this which is sometimes erotic--she imagines with fear and then excitement the joy of "wandering amongst the volcanic-looking hills" (Ch. XVIII, p. 235) of Rochester's mind (its geography is exotic like Angria's)--and sometimes greedy--"I knew Mr. Rochester had been a traveller . . . but I thought the continent of Europe had bounded his wanderings; till now I had never heard a hint given of visits to more distant shores" (p. 239).

Before her wedding night, Jane tells Rochester "I thought of the life that lay before me--your life, sir--an existence more expansive and stirring than my own" (Ch. XXV, p. 354). Just as the nineteenth-century middle-class woman saw the public world through men; and just as Charlotte Brontë overpassed the limits of her world by creating Jane, Jane escapes from the stillness of her existence through Rochester. Before Jane can

make this escape permanent, however, she and Charlotte Brontë must expose the falseness of Blanche Ingram's light.

V

Before turning to look at the method Brontë chooses to accomplish this, I want to recall another of the text's submerged allegorical strands. At the same time as Jane's worlds mutate--in Swiftian fashion--in response to her desires, her conscience makes her conceive of her progress--Bunyan style--as though it were through a series of temptations (though as Rich's list suggests,³⁰ these are revisionary). The two systems are superimposed to give a sense of Jane's moral struggle. Life with the Rivers' family, for example, is life amid the Houyhnhnms (Jane's and Gulliver's fourth world), and it is also a struggle with the temptation of self-abnegation--no longer a virtue. As preparations are underway to move Jane from Gateshead to Lowood ("November, December, and half of January passed away" (Ch. IV, p. 28) charting Jane's dreary life), Jane is consumed by her need for vengeance. She says, "I would . . . fain find nourishment for some less fiendish feeling than that of sombre indignation" (p. 41), and she cries out, as Christian does (also from a jail), "What shall I do?" (Ch. IV, p. 41).³¹ Like Christian, Jane is asking "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30), but her dream leads her to Thornfield and eventually Ferndean, an earthly Celestial City. After Jane has saved Mr. Rochester's life, and he speaks to her as if he loves her, Jane lies awake:

I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne: but I could not reach it, even in fancy,--a counteracting breeze blew off the land, and continually drove me back. Sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion.
(Ch. XV, pp. 187-88)

Jane's vision is a revision. Her Beulah restores its literal meaning to the Song of Solomon that Bunyan had turned into allegory; Christian and the Church are changed back into the bride and the bridegroom. Rochester, the allusion suggests, is telling Jane:

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.³²

VI

Jane's reverie concludes Volume One, and when the next volume opens Rochester has disappeared, apparently into high society, and therefore lost to Jane. From Mrs. Fairfax, Jane learns of Rochester's intended marriage to the Honourable Blanche Ingram, and to make the difference between herself and Blanche more real, Jane draws two pictures: "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain," and "Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank" (Ch. XVI, p. 202). In the next chapter, as if summoned by the painting, Blanche appears, and the scene that is played out illustrates the meaning of the painting's titles. Jane reports the disdain with which she is treated by high society; and the Quarterly Review calls Jane's report improbable.

The Ingrams' visit, which as critics have remarked, takes up a surprisingly large proportion of the novel,³³ includes--besides an increase in the activity in the mad world upstairs--two episodes of fantasy downstairs: the charades and the visit of Rochester in the guise of a gypsy. The charades satirize the social marriage, a marriage which is unavailable to Jane. Jane (whose appearance leads one guest to say that she is "too stupid for any game of the sort" [Ch. XVIII, p. 228]) looks on, as she has been looking on at the day-to-day pantomime between Rochester and Blanche Ingram. They now act out in symbol Jane's criticism of their

behaviour. But they also, as we shall see, act out the criticism that Jane's severe conscience would level at her own unconscious desires.

The word they enact is "bridewell," the name of an English prison. In the first scene, Blanche Ingram figures, as she does in Jane's imagination, as Rochester's bride, a part Jane has also imagined for herself. The scene is also prophetic; Rochester intends that Jane will go through a "pantomime of a marriage" (p. 228). In the second scene, Rochester is actually dressed as the despotic sultan he later becomes for Jane after he has proposed to her (Ch. XXIV). Here Jane is undecided in her interpretation of him. He is either "an agent or a victim of the bowstring" (p. 229). This description, extraneous here, becomes entirely appropriate in Rochester's later account of the circumstances of his marriage and his courting of Blanche Ingram--the ambivalence also suggests his guilt: the guilt of the patriarch in a patriarchal society ("It will atone--it will atone" [Ch. XXVII, p. 321], he says when he proposes to Jane). And this larger meaning is picked up in the description of Blanche as suggesting "the idea of some Israelitish princess of the patriarchal days" (Ch. XVIII, p. 229). The scene illustrates "well." In return for water, Rochester gives Blanche jewels. While Blanche accepts with delight the gifts that Rochester fastens on her, Jane will later revise the scene. When Rochester tries to dress Jane in silk and jewels, Jane "burn[s] with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (Ch. XXIV, p. 338).

The third scene, "'the tableau of the Whole'" (Ch. XVIII, p. 230), depicts Rochester in prison (Bridewell). Jane reports "a very dim light," Rochester with his "coat hanging loose from one arm," a "desperate and scowling countenance," and "rough, bristling hair." As he moves, a chain clanks, and his wrists are attached to fetters. Blanche is not in this scene, but immediately after it, she tells Rochester, "Do you know . . . that, of the three characters, I liked you in the last best?" Just as

Bertha Mason acts out Jane's unconscious, destructive fantasies, so Blanche, I suggest, acts out Jane's more conscious anger and resentment. Rochester will appear to Jane in these three different characters--gentleman, sultan, and prisoner. Bridewell's "sordid scene" will become Ferndean, "ineligible and insalubrious" (Ch. XXXVII, p. 550). The light at Ferndean, like the light in the prison scene of the charade, is also dim, making it scarcely visible in the gloomy wood. At Ferndean, Rochester's coat arm must also hang loose as he keeps his mutilated arm "hidden in his bosom" (p. 552); his countenance here is also "desperate and brooding" (p. 552); his hair is "thick and long--uncut" (p. 558); and as he moves, Jane asks, "Where was his daring stride now?" (p. 552). He is, in effect, fettered. Jane's response to this picture is identical in meaning to Blanche's response to the prison pictured in the charade: she says, "one is in danger of loving you too well for all this"? (p. 558).

Whereas Jane can project onto Bertha, the mad animal (epithets also used of Jane by John Reed) her violence, she can project onto Blanche her resentment at Rochester's wealth, and in revealing Blanche's avarice exercise her own. Charlotte Brontë later creates an opportunity for Jane to declare--in contrast--the purity of her love:

"Ask me something now, Janet--the least thing: I desire to be entreated--". . . .

"Well then, sir; have the goodness to gratify my curiosity; . . .

"Curiosity is a dangerous petitioner: it is well I have not taken a vow to accord every request--"

"But there can be no danger in complying with this, sir."

"Utter it, Jane: but I wish that instead of a mere inquiry into, perhaps, a secret, it was a wish for half my estate."

"Now, king Ahasuerus! What do I want with half your estate?" (Ch. XXIV, p. 329)

Rochester of course has his reasons for dreading Jane's curiosity, so that the passage also suggests (another effect of the Gothic tale) that

Rochester would prefer to give Jane half his estate than lose her.

Just as Bertha-Jane has to be destroyed to make way for Jane, so too must Blanche be removed. Jane's marriage is facilitated by two Gothic apparitions: the madwoman and the gypsy. The "madwoman" story, in combination with the "fairy godfather" story, will produce the revolution that will turn the Thornfield patriarchy into the Ferndean matriarchy. Removing Blanche requires less drastic measures and so a different level of fantasy is employed. Rochester, in the disguise of an asocial gypsy, will expose this society lady's mercenary nature.

The appearance of Rochester in the guise of a female gypsy follows a day of "perceptible dulness," which Jane says "steal[s] over the spirits of his guests" (Ch. XVIII, p. 235) if Rochester is absent from the room for an hour. This fantastic event is presented by Jane through the sceptical comments of the guests, which she interprets, and then through her own scepticism (proved right of course). Blanche Ingram's mother describes the suggestion of entertaining the gypsy as an "inconsistent proceeding" (p. 240). She is overruled by Blanche, who sneers at the other characters' "organs of wonder and credulity" (p. 242); Jane thinks (correctly) that Blanche herself attaches "undue importance" (p. 243) to the gypsy's revelations.

Besides the immediate satisfaction that this scene provides--the patriarch is transformed into a sub-social gypsy and no longer sports the rich clothes of a sultan but the poor clothes of a woman--it changes the relation between Jane and Rochester. Rochester now becomes dependent on her:

"If all these people . . . dropt off and left me one by one . . . Would you go with them?" (Ch. XIX, p. 256)

Yet Jane also has her aspirations endorsed: the gypsy tells Jane that she

is singled out from the thousands of other "solitary dependent[s]" in "great house[s]" (p. 246). Jane clearly does not believe her, and as the gypsy turns from palm-reading to phrenology (which Jane--so Doreen Roberts argues--uses to interpret her acquaintances³⁴), she says, "Now you are coming to reality" (p. 247). This movement from scepticism to assertion repeats the strategy that Jane has previously employed to introduce extraordinary events. The gypsy scene, remember, is a prelude to Bertha's attack on Mason. This device, combined with the emphasis in Rochester's words on the make-believe of his gypsy--his quotations from Twelfth Night ("the play is played out" [p. 252]) and King Lear ("Off, ye lendings" [p. 253])--work to preempt our disbelief of what is to follow.

By prefacing the gypsy's unlikely arrival with the convincing picture of the boredom of a wet afternoon in a country house, the men playing billiards and the women listless without them; and by turning the gypsy back into Rochester (after he has fulfilled his gypsy function) and convincing the reader that the narrator at least knows the difference between appearance and reality; the narrator can smuggle in the most extraordinary event of all. This playful questioning of appearance and reality is the clever prelude to the direct introduction of the Gothic tale into the domestic one.

VII

In juxtaposing the three-scene charade with Jane's subsequent revisions of them, and in emphasizing the beneficial effects for Jane of the gypsy's arrival (Jane's session with the gypsy is sufficiently important to be given a whole chapter), I mean to suggest--to put it provocatively--that we should question Jane's reliability as a narrator. We should suspect Jane just as we suspect Lucy Snowe. The idea becomes

less outrageous if we recall the person to whom the second edition of Jane Eyre is dedicated, Thackeray, and his complex use of the first person narrator in Barry Lyndon (1844). If we start taking Jane's reliability less seriously, as it were, we will end, I suggest, by taking Jane Eyre more seriously. The improbability of the "improbabilities" will become part of the book in a way which will supplement our reading of them as the means whereby Jane attains the "almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom."³⁵ I find I want to turn Gilbert and Gubar's adjective "unthinkable" into the terms of an oxymoron: it is unthinkable because it can only be thought. Because Jane Eyre's goal is in actuality unachievable, it will only be achieved in fantasy. Jane Eyre's pictures, fairy tales, dreams, stories, storytelling, drawing, playacting, and writing create a nexus with reality which locates reality's insufficiency. To suspect Jane, just for the space of an essay, is to highlight Jane Eyre's masterly weaving of romance with realism, of the subjective and objective experience of the world, of what it was like to be an ambitious and gifted middle-class woman living in the mid-nineteenth century.

The author's sense of the extraordinariness of plain Jane's escape from her "governessing slavery" (Ch. XXIV, p. 340) is expressed in images that question Rochester's substantiality. Chapter XXIV, which opens immediately after Jane and Rochester agree for the first time to marry, begins:

As I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again. (p. 324)

When Jane does see Rochester, he calls her "young Mrs. Rochester--Fairfax Rochester's 'girl-bride'" (p. 325), and she replies:

"It can never be, sir: it does not sound likely . . . I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me, is a fairy tale--a day-dream."
(p. 325)

Even before this, beginning, as we saw, with the sighting of the Gytrash, Jane surrounds Rochester with an aura of illusion, often through an interplay of fantasy and reality. As she approaches Thornfield after visiting Gateshead (where she had conjured up Rochester in a drawing, done it seems without her will), Jane tells us: "And then I strangled a new-born agony--a deformed thing which I could not persuade myself to own and rear" (Ch. XXII, pp. 305-306). She does not explain what the deformed thing is; presumably it is her fear that she will not see Rochester, or that he might be dead. But Rochester is

sitting there, a book and a pencil in his hand: he is writing.

Well, he is not a ghost. (p. 306)

When Jane recalls the scene which ends with the proposal, she describes it, as Charlotte Brontë, might do who used to "sit alone, and 'make out'": the "new picture in the 'gallery of memory'" (as Jane describes Rochester) comes to life:³⁶

I look round and I listen. I see trees laden with ripening fruit. I hear a nightingale warbling in a wood half a mile off; no moving form is visible, no coming step audible; but that perfume increases: I must flee. I make for the wicket leading to the shrubbery, and I see Mr. Rochester entering.
(Ch. XXIII, p. 312)

Though this description is perfectly in keeping with Jane's stance as the storyteller of her own life, recapturing its excitement by writing in the present tense, its effect is to convey Jane's anxiety in case Rochester is not there or will not notice her, that her life will be solitary and still, the destiny, as she knows, of the "rest of my species." The night before

her wedding is due to take place, this fear turns (convincingly) into the neurotic suspicion that Rochester never existed at all:

" . . . Everything in life seems unreal."

"Except me: I am substantial enough:--touch me."

"You, sir, are the most phantom-like of all: you are a mere dream."

He held out his hand, laughing: "Is that a dream?" said he, placing it close to my eyes. He had a rounded, muscular, and vigorous hand, as well as a long strong arm.

"Yes; though I touch it, it is a dream," said I.

(Ch. XXV, p. 352)

Jane ends this episode of "hypochondria," as Rochester calls it, with the wish that "this present hour would never end: who knows with what fate the next may come charged?" (p. 353). One might answer, "the reader," for this questioning of reality is Jane's habitual introduction to an account of a fantastic (if realistically presented) occurrence.

VIII

Before Jane tells Rochester (and the reader) of her encounter with "the foul German spectre--the Vampyre" Bertha Mason (p. 358), Jane tells him of the dream that prophesies Thornfield's destruction; before telling him of the prophecy, she tells him of the dream of the child (and to dream of a child, we have been told, is an ill-omen); before telling him of this premonition, she tells him in detail of her day, that is, of the preparations for the wedding. And all of this precedes the revelation in the church and the visit to the Vampyre's den. Jane leads the reader through a series of Chinese boxes; the last box turns out not to be an illusion but to be a fact, and the first turns out to be illusion--preparations for a wedding that cannot occur. And Jane sticks to her story: though The Pilgrim's Progress ends, "So I awoke, and behold it was

a dream," Jane Eyre will end "Reader, I married him" (Ch. XXXVIII, p. 574).³⁷

From the rending of the veil to Jane's escape from Thornfield, Jane returns, in a sense, to the red-room twice. At her first look at the Vampyre, Jane tells us that "for the second time in my life--only the second time--I became insensible from terror" (p. 359). Once Jane has decided to leave, she is

transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling. (Ch. XXVII, p. 407)

This return to the red-room signifies for Jane a return to a confined life right at the moment when freedom seems possible. The story up to this point has performed all the functions that in the red-room she imagines for her ghostly uncle, when "troubled in [his] grave by the violation of [his] last wishes" he will "revisit the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed" (Ch. II, p. 15). The light that now turns into a white human form to tell her "My daughter, flee temptation!" (p. 407), was then the "herald of some coming vision from another world" (p. 15). From this point (when the light sends Jane into the fit which brings Mr. Lloyd to the house), the story will punish the perjured and avenge Jane, the oppressed.

When Jane returns to Gateshead summoned by Bessie to her aunt's death-bed, her story has a curious--if natural--duality: she experiences both her sense of oppression and her escape from it. She approaches its "hostile roof," still feeling, she says, "as a wanderer on the face of the earth" (that is, like Gulliver), yet with a "less withering dread of oppression. The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished" (Ch. XXI, p. 285). The breakfast

room is both the place of her meeting with Mr. Brocklehurst and the home of Bewick's Book of Birds, Gulliver's Travels, and the Arabian Nights. Jane first describes her aunt's bedroom as the place of "chastisement or reprimand," and then assures us that "time quells the longings of vengeance, and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion" (p. 288).

In spite of this assertion, Jane tells us, "I felt pain . . . I felt ire" (p. 289), and then describes a scene that satisfies all those (supposedly) quelled longings: she learns of her uncle Reed's care and preference for her; of her uncle Eyre's intention of adopting her and making her his heir; that the Reed money is gone; and that Gateshead is to be let. She hears, too, her aunt speak aloud words that the child Jane must often have spoken to herself: "I dream sometimes that I see [John Reed] laid out with a great wound in his throat, or with a swollen and blackened face." She witnesses Georgiana "the cynosure of a ballroom" and Eliza "the inmate of a convent cell" (Ch. XXII, p. 304) at each other's throats, and hears Eliza pronounce on Georgiana the verdict of the King of Brobdingnag on mankind.³⁸ The Reed family self-destruct; and Jane is in at the death of her arch enemy. The combination of Jane's righteousness and Mrs. Reed's unrepentant hatred with Jane's feeling "grating anguish for her woes--not my loss" (Ch. XXI, p. 301), as she gazes at the corpse, has all the features of passive aggressive fantasy.

IX

In a similar series of reversals, the pain and humiliations of Jane's dependent life at Thornfield are avenged in the dependent conditions of Rochester's life at Ferndean. Jane can "realistically" say that she sympathizes with Mr. Rochester (that is, she can say it and we believe her) because the "non-real" elements within the story have inflicted

retribution: the Gothic tale has destroyed the patriarchy (symbolized by Thornfield) and the romantic inheritance plot has not only restored her status to Jane but has also elevated her to equality with Rochester (Ferndean is smaller than Thornfield and Jane can build a house alongside his). Jane's revenge has also been exacted both in terms of the system of metaphors which the story itself has set up and in terms of the submerged allegories which organize the novel. At Thornfield, the housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax was sceptical that Rochester would marry Jane ("Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" [Ch. XXIV, p. 335]), but at Ferndean, Rochester's servant, John, anticipates the marriage ("I knew what Mr. Edward would do" [Ch. XXXVII, p. 574]). Rochester is now the caged bird (as he once named Jane), "a royal eagle, chained to a perch . . . forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor" (Ch. XXXVII, p. 562); and it is Rochester who is now in need of "the power of vision" that he once supplied for Jane; and Rochester who now fears that Jane is a vision and a dream (p. 555). Jane now wears the gold watch to whose chain Rochester had intended to attach her; and it is Jane who teases Rochester with an account of another lover. While it was once Jane who was made passive through syntax in order to give the impression of someone "acted upon by external forces,"³⁹ it is now Rochester who is syntactically and actually passive: Jane says of their marriage, "Reader, I married him" (p. 574).

Ferndean is the Celestial City in Beulah, dreamt of by Jane at the end of Volume One; it is also Judah, promised to the meek in the psalm from which Jane quotes at the end of Volume Two (the psalmist also imagines--at some length--retribution for all his enemies). Jane is Scheherazade leaving her "tale half-told" (p. 561); and Rochester is the king, made repentant by "chaste, wise, and eloquent" Jane.⁴⁰ Rochester, now a "hermit" (p. 547), is Nebuchadnezzar, the violent king who "dreamed

dreams," and who was "driven from men" to teach him to "break off [his] sins by righteousness" and to obey the God "who removeth kings, and setteth up kings."⁴¹ But he is a Nebuchadnezzar who has gone through his own fiery furnace. He is blind and mutilated, having suffered the Biblical punishments for adultery (written in Matthew 5, which Jane learns at Lowood); and Jane, poor and meek, has inherited the earth (also prophesied in Matthew 5).⁴² And Rochester is "a fixture now" (p. 548), punished for having had so many foreign mistresses, and prevented from having any more. The realistically powerless Jane could not have avenged her wrongs or escaped dependency, and so the non-real apparatus has to do both for her, in order that, avenged and independent, Jane can marry Rochester.

The ending of Jane Eyre satisfies all the "hunger, rebellion, and rage" that Jane acknowledges in the red-room but endeavours afterwards to repress. It does so by conscious recourse to romantic invention. And the moment at which the probable changes to the improbable is marked by Jane herself or by her report of remarks made by other characters: when Jane returns to Ferndean an "objective" innkeeper tells Jane her own story; and at Jane's school-house Rosamond Oliver is sure that Jane's "previous history, if known, would make a delightful romance" (Ch, XXXI, p. 470). Jane also carefully prepares her readers for the shift into improbability. Before she begins to narrate the story of St. John's visit to her school-house, which sets in motion the chain of events that lead to her discovery, to her inheritance, and to her return to Rochester, Jane confides her dreams to the reader:

At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sunk with dejection: and yet, reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence--after a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone--I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy--dreams

where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic change, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him--the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its force and fire. Then I awoke. Then I recalled where I was, and how situated. (Ch. XXXII, p. 468)

By including accounts of her dreams, Jane provides a standard: if these are dreams, then everything else is reality. Yet the turning to romance--even though it might be presented, like Jane's response to the news of her inheritance, in a matter-of-fact manner--describes the limitations of real life for the contemporary young woman. A governess would most likely not marry her master, nor anybody else; and a school-teacher would not be rescued from her tedious career by a legacy of £20,000. The romance describes, in effect, the reality.

In comparing the romance to the novel, Northrop Frye writes that

the romance . . . often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and [that is] why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which makes it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.⁴³

In its intensity, its exploitation of allegory, and its revolutionary implications, Jane Eyre shares the characteristics of romance; but it is a romance rooted in society, concerned with the relations between the social mask and the self, and deeply conscious of its defiance of real life. For Adrienne Rich, Jane Eyre takes place between "social mores" and the "psyche," "between the realm of the given, that which is changeable by human activity, and the realm of the fated, that which lies outside human

control: between realism and poetry."⁴⁴ Minor novels of this time suggest that everything--if we would only try to make it so--would be within human control. Anxiety, dissatisfaction, and ambivalence are repressed. Jane Eyre's greatness lies not just in its realism, the sense it gives of actual life, nor in its poetry, its lyric intensity, but in its rendering of the space between.

Notes

- 1 Rich, "The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 96.
- 2 "To W. S. Williams," LL. II, 213; LL. II, 144; LL. II, 156.
- 3 In The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 39, Leavis writes under the heading of "The Brontës," that "It is tempting to retort that there is only one Brontë . . . Emily," although he acknowledges that Charlotte had a "remarkable talent that enabled her to do something first-hand, and new in the rendering of personal experience"; Lord David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists (London: Constable, 1934).
- 4 Tom Winnifrith, The Brontës (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 103.
- 5 Cf. Michael Irwin, "Readings of Melodrama," in Reading the Victorian Novel: Detail Into Form, ed. Ian Gregor (London: Vision, 1980). "The exotic story is necessary not to create but to express the dilemma that is central to the novel" (p. 19).
- 6 For Woolf, Jane's political definition of herself is Jane Eyre's most serious limitation. We read Jane Eyre for its poetry, but Charlotte Brontë does not, as Emily does, "transcend reality" and "free life from its dependence upon facts." We do not read Jane Eyre "for a philosophic view of life--hers is that of a country parson's daughter." The Common Reader (First Series) (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1925), pp. 159-65.
- 7 Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 132.
- 8 Roberts, "Jane Eyre and the 'Warped System of Things,'" in Reading the Victorian Novel, p. 139.
- 9 For Roberts, "The style itself enacts the struggle which is the theme of the plot: between Id and Superego, reaction and quiescence, private and public" (pp. 137-38).
- 10 Woolf, p. 163.
- 11 At Gateshead, Jane is banned from family meals; when she arrives at Lowood, she is given burnt porridge and oatmeal. But by the end of her stay the food has been improved. As Jane ascends the social ladder, food becomes more plentiful; but when Blanche Ingram visits and becomes her rival for Rochester's attention, she and Adèle are compelled to forage. When she achieves independence as the schoolmistress at Morton, she fulfills a dependent's fantasy by giving food to others; and at Moore House, she effectively presides over the family Christmas and indulges in an orgy of cooking. The reversal in Rochester's and Jane's positions is marked by Jane giving Rochester his breakfast.

12 Gilbert and Gubar bring out the significance of Jane Eyre's Bunyanesque structure, pp. 341, 679-80; Jerome Beaty, "Jane Eyre and Genre," Genre, 10 (1977), 619-54.

13 Eugène Forçade, "Jane Eyre: Autobiographie," Revue de deux mondes; see Lodge, "Fire and Eyre"; Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë, Reason and the Moon," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 14 (1960), 283-302.

14 Myths of Power, p. 26.

15 In the scene between Rochester and Jane in which Jane makes her critical declaration, "I care for myself," Rochester calls Jane a "resolute, wild, free thing" (p. 405), adding that "whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it."

16 Showalter, p. 115.

17 For example, Gilbert and Gubar, p. 360.

18 The sense that critics share of the improbability of Ferndean's existence indicates the reason why Brontë had to draw on Gothic to depict a series of events that would culminate in Jane's rule there. Realistically, it could not have happened.

19 Helene Moglen, Charlotte Brontë (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 124; Showalter, p. 113; Gilbert and Gubar, p. 347.

20 Moglen points out the tale's similarity to the myths of dispossessed princesses.

21 Jack and Smith's edition of Jane Eyre provides invaluable notes which identify allusions to the Arabian Nights, The Pilgrim's Progress, and the Bible.

22 Myths of Power, p. 87.

23 In his essay on Charlotte Brontë's "New Gothic," Robert B. Heilman defines the function of Gothic: "to open horizons beyond social patterns . . . and institutionally approved emotions: in a word to enlarge the sense of reality." Gothic, says Heilman, "released Charlotte Brontë from the patterns of the novel of society" and thus "increased wonderfully the sense of reality in the novel" (p. 132).

24 "Still" is an important word for Brontë, as we shall see in Shirley.

25 In his Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon, 1969), Gaston Bachelard notes that "up near the roof all our thoughts are clear . . . The dreamer constructs and reconstructs the upper stories and the attic until they are well constructed" (p. 18). Both Charlotte Brontë and Jane construct and reconstruct Thornfield. In the manuscript of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë quite literally constructs and reconstructs: sometimes it is the third story, sometimes the second, where Bertha Mason is supposedly kept. In some editions the plan is changed. Jane has difficulty when she first imagines Thornfield from her prison-ground at Lowick, she says, "Thornfield! that, doubtless, was the name of her house: a neat, orderly spot, I was sure, though I failed in my efforts to conceive a correct plan

of the premises" (Ch. X, p. 105). Brontë's indecision points towards Thornfield and Rochester's existing as the fulfilment of a wish. Both Brontë and Jane are dreaming their way out of constricted lives.

26 Life of Charlotte Brontë, II, 9. Miss Rigby resents "the author's chief object," of "making a plain, odd woman, destitute of all the conventional features of feminine attraction, interesting in our sight," and declares it a failure (p. 174). Although by the end of the novel, Jane is called "pretty," the novel, I think, has effectively revised the term.

27 Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey (1847; London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

28 Heilman, p. 121.

29 Paradise Lost, II, 666-73. Jack and Smith point out many other quotations and verbal echoes.

30 The "temptations" are victimization, self-hatred, self-immolation, romantic love and surrender, and self-abnegation.

31 John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress: In the Similitude of a Dream (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 17.

32 Song of Solomon 2, vv. 10-11.

33 Pp. 203-75.

34 Roberts, p. 141. Charlotte Brontë consulted a phrenologist herself. LL, III, 256-58.

35 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 339. Cecil's suspicion of Jane, "If we had a chance to see Mr. Rochester with our own eyes--it is a solemn thought--he would certainly have looked different from what he does when seen through the eyes of Jane Eyre" (p. 113), does not go far enough, amounting--as the context makes clear--to a criticism of Brontë's objectivity. Woolf's comment, "Think of Rochester and we have to think of Jane Eyre" (p. 161), points in the same direction. Elizabeth Hardwick's comment that the story is "the circuitous path to dominance imagined by a luckless girl" seems to attach to Brontë rather than to Jane.

36 Life of Charlotte Brontë, II, 159.

37 The Pilgrim's Progress, p. 148.

38 See Jack and Smith, p. 598. Note to p. 295.

39 Roberts, p. 135.

40 N. J. Dawood's translation of the king's description of Scheherazade. Because Scheherazade is "chaste, wise, and eloquent," she is spared the fate of the king's former wives. See The Thousand and One Nights (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1954).

41 Daniel 1-4. Nebuchadnezzar, like Rochester, is compared to a tree.

⁴² Elizabeth Barrett Browning shares Jane and Brontë's fantasy. Romney is blinded before he marries Aurora Leigh.

⁴³ Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 304-305.

⁴⁴ Rich, p. 90.

Chapter Three

Framebreaking: Shirley, "A Story of an English Life"

I would fain exercise some better
faculty than that of fierce speaking;
fain find nourishment for some less
fiendish feeling than that of sombre
indignation.

Jane Eyre (Ch. IV, p. 41)

"I like that romantic Hollow, with all my heart."
"Romantic with a mill in it?"
"Romantic with a mill in it. The old mill and the
white cottage are each admirable in its way."
"And the counting-house, Mr. Keeldar?"
"The counting-house is better than my bloom-coloured
drawing room: I adore the counting-house."
"And the trade? The cloth--the greasy wool--the
polluted dyeing vats?"
"The trade is to be thoroughly respected."
"And the tradesman is a hero? Good!"
(Ch. XI, p. 226)¹

After writing a novel of almost pure wish, dream, and archetype, in which the trappings of realism are bent to the domineering will of Jane Eyre the dreamer, Charlotte Brontë turned to a novel of "real" domesticity, in which romantic will and desire are curbed into socially acceptable forms. Once again, however, the "realistic" elements of Shirley are deceptive. In Jane Eyre, a realistic style is used to record the improbable and melodramatic, and a romantic style used to inflate ordinary events, such as advertising for a job; the realism, that is, incorporates the wish, the dream. Similarly, in Shirley realistic episodes--of illness and eating--allow the will to assert itself; they become, paradoxically, the servants of the dream. But the expressed wish, dream, and discontent, that somehow--like advertising for a job--seem more a part of real life,

are voiced in poetic flights of fancy and rhetoric. Although in both novels a realistic style is used to describe rebellion, in Shirley the conventions of realism are used to symbolic effect. Through language and commonplace events, women attempt, in subversive ways, to control their lives in a society which through law and custom denies them power.

There is a sense in which Charlotte Brontë understood the concept of realism to be circumstantial. If a Byronic hero is a tutor or a tradesman and not the owner of battlements and a mad wife, then he is no longer a romantic figure but a man; if the dramatis personae and their pursuits are moved down the social ladder and their ordinariness is insisted upon, then the world that has been construed is the one we live in. To this extent, Shirley is a novel in which "romantic characters" have been transported (as the quotation suggests) to a society operating under laws which, unlike those of Jane Eyre, we recognize as real. There are no madwomen--though Shirley Keeldar's illness suggests that there could be; the events are, for the most part, commonplace events--teas, picnics, and church services--and those that are not, for example, the battle at the mill and the shooting of Robert Moore, are lent credibility by history.

Yet, in spite of this ordinariness (and because of it), Shirley is a story in which the needs of the female characters collide with rather than override the conditions of society. The tale of the courtships of Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore, and Shirley Keeldar and Louis Moore, is told mainly from the female perspective; it divagates into the male point of view merely to push the men towards the women. Furthermore, even though, as Hellman says of The Professor, Charlotte Brontë's "characters keep escaping to glorify 'feeling' and 'Imagination'"² and speak in bombastic, stilted language, their fate is not romantic; the resolutions in Shirley are not, like those of Jane Eyre, governed by an interceding Providence, but by the facts of history. Only when the Orders in Council are repealed

can Robert marry Caroline. The men are dependent on "chance and change" (Ch. VI, p. 97), and the women are dependent on the men. But although the characters' situations, and their destinies, both personal and historical, could be labelled realistic, in many ways the domestic realism of Shirley is still only a mask, worn uncomfortably, and the mask is fiction's equivalent of the life prescribed for the contemporary woman. When the realistic mode is dropped, the discontent that lies behind the forms of conventional life is revealed; while in place, the social convention that it describes conceals subversive activity.

Unlike the ending of Jane Eyre, the conclusion to Shirley is dictated not by the demands of an "I" but by the third person, the voice of society. In consequence, Shirley is not so oblivious to probability as Jane Eyre, but neither is it so structurally solid. Shirley's disunity, evident in its style, registers the tension between need (the romance) and satisfaction (the reality). This jarring is the result of what the book describes: Shirley is most often interrupted by the polemics of its author's unmediated voice in passages where the social conditions speak most loudly.

From the first reviews of Shirley, critics have concentrated on these rhetorical flourishes and on the story's structural flaws. The problem that Shirley presents has been met with dismissiveness, accusation, and ingenious defence. Korg, for example, argues the presence of structural unity in the arrangement of characters in concentric rings around Tartar, the dog, who is an epicentre of romantic attitudes.³ Dessner, on the other hand, briefly outlines the two popular theories (the biographical and the literary biographical) used to account for the radical difference between Jane Eyre, in which plot, according to Craik, is fused with theme, and Shirley, which has been called "a veritable storehouse of detachable

exhibits"⁴ and "a portfolio of random sketches."⁵ Dessner concludes that Charlotte Brontë is simply unable to handle the "platform" that the third person offers and which Fielding and Thackeray assume, in Dessner's words, with "charm and personal attractiveness." Dessner praises the men, that is, not only for their male qualities--their easy assumption of authority--but also for having the female qualities of "charm" and "attractiveness" that Charlotte Brontë should have.⁶ He implies that the men do better what Charlotte Brontë should do best.

To take the implications of this view one step further, this "artistic flaw" is associated with gender. Terry Eagleton attributes this disjunction partly to the Brontës's situation as women; having nailed down an explanation, Eagleton, however, leaves the matter very much as statement.

The friction between 'realism' and 'imagination,' then, manifests itself not only as theme but also as a problem of how to write. It is a dilemma structural to the Brontës' situation, as women brought up in a disturbed social environment yet privately nourished on myth and archetype; and that dichotomy reproduces itself as a stylistic unevenness in the texts themselves.⁷

In making his political point, Eagleton elides the literary cleverness of, for instance, Jane Eyre; neither does he "read" the meaning of the friction that he identifies nor the inventiveness of the solution. Charlotte Brontë's stylistic unevenness is most apparent in Shirley, a novel, as the contemporary critic Eugène Forçade wrote, about "the conditions of women in the English middle-class."⁸ Such a novel therefore takes on an "reproduces" the dichotomy itself. The dream (of women acting on their own lives) chafes against the reality (of men's action and women's subjection). In this chapter, I shall show how the female characters nevertheless use reality to make their dreams come true.

I

Even though Shirley is presented as a romantic heroine (the product of myth and archetype) rather than as the typically passive victim of the nineteenth-century middle-class situation, this romantic heroine--unlike Jane Eyre--has to adapt to her situation; the situation will not providentially adapt to her. In Shirley, as in the other novels that this study considers (with the exception of Jane Eyre), we see women characters sometimes struggling against their situation, but always eventually absorbed by it.⁹ The point is here made emphatic by the potential mates of these women being so at the whim of global events, of history. The women's dissatisfaction with their lot in Shirley escapes into rhetoric, particularly in Shirley's speeches. It is as if Jane Eyre were to be imprisoned in Mansfield Park.¹⁰

Like Jane Austen's novels, Shirley is about a rural, middle-class community. It has a large population (Fraser's counts nearly a hundred characters),¹¹ which includes the usual characters of parish life--old maids, vicars, peasants, and, of course, the curates, who function as a boundary-beating device, creating a sense of community and space. At its centre is Caroline, a young woman just about to emerge from the school-room into a life confined to the village in which she has grown up. At first Caroline is the heroine of the story, at the centre of the social conditions postulated and the victim of their consequences. Shirley begins, that is, as the tale of Robert and Caroline, living in a "real" world. But when Robert decides he must marry money and Shirley is brought into the story both to provide the money for him to marry and to explore the possibility of friendship between women, the novel mutates.

The changes that Charlotte Brontë made in the title not only reflect the changing focus of her novel but identify the nature of these

transitions. Her editor, W. S. Williams, suggested that Brontë drop the original title, Hollow's Mill, which would have appropriately announced a novel set (allegedly) amidst cloth, greasy wool, and dyeing vats, in favour of either Fieldhead, which would have aligned the novel with other renderings of organic communities (such as Mansfield Park) or Shirley, which locates, as Jane Eyre does, our interest in the character.¹² When Shirley enters the story, our interest moves from Hollow's Mill to Fieldhead, but moves more precisely to the character of Shirley herself. The tale wants to become a romance, but like its heroine, it ends instead as a "lioness" (Ch. XXV, p. 689) forced to live amongst cats and dogs, the Amazon Thalestris forced into a "quiet domestic character" (Ch. XXVIII, p. 574).

Shirley invites us into the domestic sanctum, but not simply in order to celebrate domesticity. The vignettes of celebration with which the novel is interspersed are elegiac. They are poems for something known well and attractively safe, yet lost because unattractively confining. Brontë's ambivalence is seen in the decision to have two heroines, Shirley and Caroline--to have, therefore, two sets of attitudes to the domestic lot. And it is seen as well in the novel's images of Eden, the traditional symbol of the best of all possible estates.

The Eden that Jane Eyre postulates is the result of converting the world as it is into the world as Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë or any other disconnected, poor, but educated young woman would like it to be. The novel is organized as a progress through successive worlds, which are in turn rejected or escaped from until a world with a correct constitution is established. Shirley begins where Jane Eyre leaves off, inside Ferndean, that is, inside the middle-class domestic world. In Shirley, only one world is depicted, a domestic, realistic world, although there are several

attitudes to it. The interest of the book lies, therefore, in the characters' and the text's responses--both articulate and inarticulate--to its conditions.

For Caroline Helstone, life at the rectory is life in a "tomb," or as Rose, one of Mr. Yorke's precocious children, says, a "black trance like the toad's, buried in marble" (Ch. XXIII, p. 451). These images link Caroline to Shirley's imagined Eva, who is described as "a small forgotten atom of life . . . now burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow" (Ch. XXVII, p. 550). What Caroline sees from her "windowed grave" (Ch. XXIII, p. 451) is "Moore at his garden-gate" (Ch. VII, p. 116). That garden, owned by Robert Moore, is her Eden, a point at which to fix herself, and Robert, "something agreeable to sit near, to hover round, to address and look at" (Ch. VI, p. 89). When Caroline is parted from Robert, she looks at Hollow's Mill longingly, as at "an earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the First Woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden" (Ch. XIII, p. 281). Caroline can only return when Moore invites her, just as Shirley's mystical Eva has to be summoned by her Lord. And just as Jane has to wait for Mr. Rochester to be forcibly confined to Ferndean by the narrator (though the narrator is herself), Caroline has to wait for Robert to recognize Hollow's Mill as his Eden and to place himself within its confinements. This recognition is one of the effects of Robert's illness: when he returns to Hollow's Mill, it seems as much an Eden to him as it does to Caroline. "I am pleased to come home" (Ch. XXXV, pp. 679, 681), he says, twice, and the narrator adds, "he had never before called the cottage his home . . . its narrow limits had always heretofore seemed rather restrictive than protective" (Ch. XXXV, p. 679). Like Mr. Rochester, Robert Moore has been domesticated. Once he is brought to recognize Hollow's Mill as an Eden, he will need an Eve.

Shirley, on the other hand, is already in the garden: she owns

Fieldhead, and her home is not a tomb (even though it is a "dark, old manor-house") because it is kept "bright with her cheery presence" (Ch. XXII, p. 434). She has a place to be and things to do; but she is still unsettled, and her attitude is consequently ambivalent:

The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its "sweet regent," new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. (Ch. XXII, p. 437)

Yet she experiences Eden both as a poem and as a prison, and her eventual husband, Louis, both as her rescuer and as her jailor. Shirley feels, as the last chapters show, the constraints of Eve's role, or rather a conflict in its conception between the Eve of the "rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window" (Ch. XVII, p. 359) and the Eve who is "Jehovah's daughter" (Ch. XVII, p. 361). But the other roles of Eden are unavailable. Shirley is not Lilith (though perhaps her particular imagined illness pictures her as this); and Adam's part has already been taken. The only other way for Shirley to possess "the vision of life as she wishes it" (Ch. XXII, p. 437), Charlotte Brontë suggests, is to write, to become in Eden's cast of characters, its creator:

If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments; or at least while the recollection of such moments was yet fresh on her spirit: she would seize, she would fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. Had she a little more of the organ of acquisitiveness in her head--a little more of the love of property in her nature, she would take a good-sized sheet of paper and write plainly out, in her own queer but clear and legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. (Ch. XXII, pp. 437-38)

The act of creation, one infers from this passage, is the method through which the authorial voice, and perhaps Charlotte Brontë, achieved liberation from oppressive circumstance.¹³ If Jane Eyre is the

transcription of "the song that had been sung to her," the means whereby Charlotte Brontë could "possess what she was enabled to create," then Shirley is the vision measured against the world. Part of Shirley's confusion lies in the uneasy coexistence of the measure (the vision of the perfect Eden) and the thing to be measured (the available Eden, the world of domestic realism). Charlotte Brontë cannot express within the conventions of realism what is not within those conventions; her most successful expressions of rebellion are not in the visionary passages which openly express it but in the subversion of those conventions which prompt it. Within its declaration of realism,¹⁴ Shirley cannot reconcile its many versions of Eve--Milton's Eve, Eve the mother of Titans, and Eva, Humanity, the bride of Genius. But all assume essentially passive postures towards Adam: Milton's Eve cooks for him, Eve, Jehovah's daughter, claims her power, according to Shirley's description, in her ability to bear Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus, and Prometheus, and even the Eva of Shirley's erotic adaptation and revision of the creation myth waits for an already powerful Lord. Caroline also waits. Shirley, too, adopts a passive attitude towards Louis, her "master," even though she is active in adopting her passivity. In Shirley, Charlotte Brontë can only imagine "a life [that] shall be a life" (Ch. XXIII, p. 451) for a woman "under another sort of sky" (p. 450) (perhaps the Belgian one of Villette). Yet she puts this hope in the mouth of the twelve-year-old Rose, and looks into the future (in another of the passages that has alienated critics by ignoring the conventions of realism) to show this life being lived--abroad and at a later time--but, apparently, at the sacrifice of Rose's sister.

Through these dichotomized responses, Brontë renders her ambivalent attitude to the conventional domestic life. The divisions abound. Besides the two female attitudes (Caroline's and Shirley's) to Eden--that is, the contemporary vision of women's lives--and the two conflicting genres

(romance and realism), there are, of course, two heroines, a passive one and an active one (just as there are two appetitive heroines in Jane Eyre, the good Jane and the bad Bertha), and two heroes, passive and active (just as there are two masters in Jane Eyre, the passionate Mr. Rochester and the ascetic St. John). And besides these, there are all the familiar conflicts of the state-of-England novel--between domesticity and business, trade and agriculture, country and city, poor and rich, gentry and bourgeois, Whig and Tory, foreigner and Englishman. The impetus of the novel is to effect in "realistic" terms a reconciliation between all these broken pieces. Though marriage in Victorian fiction traditionally resolves these social and political conflicts, it cannot "resolve" the psychological conflicts, which are Shirley's subject, that the circumstances of marriage itself cause. By creating two heroines, Charlotte Brontë can present the histories of two struggles against subjection and allow the two case studies to comment on each other.

The two heroines, as critics frequently point out, function as doubles, "two selves [who] united fulfill the requirements of womanhood."¹⁵ Where Caroline wishes to act, Shirley acts; when Caroline wishes to talk, Shirley talks. Through their friendship, Caroline acquires something of Shirley; she is able, for example, to enjoy the Sunday school feast. Friendship becomes a means of fusion, and it is established, at first, through an exchange of views on nature, which in Charlotte Brontë's novels signifies the feminine principle ("my mother Eve, in these days called Nature," [Ch. XVII, p. 361]). By promoting Caroline's absorption of Shirley's characteristics and in generating discussion of how women should behave, Caroline and Shirley's friendship undertakes, in a sense, a thematic working-out of the formal split between passive and active heroines. But the friendship also illustrates the difficulty of forming an

intimate bond between women within a society whose arrangements create women rivals.

Opposing or complementary female characteristics are often represented by sisters (the Dashwoods, the Bennets, and the Brookes); the device seems almost inevitable to storytelling. Sisterhood is a pre-existing relationship, bringing with it expectations, which allows the actual to be played off against the strong presumption in favour of the ideal-- registered in the metaphorical applications of the word "sister." The relationship between Caroline and Shirley, on the other hand, has to be made by placing two young women side by side, when the expectation raised by their social conditions is that they will be rivals. (The parallel relationship between men, the "heroic" friendship, by contrast, is part of a strongly defined literary tradition.) Establishing an intimacy between women, then, presents both a problem between the characters themselves and a problem in technique that requires an original solution. Jane Eyre evades this problem, as it does others, by idealizing the relationship between Jane and the Rivers sisters and by isolating them from the drama of social intercourse. In her book on "sisterhood," Communities of Women, Nina Auerbach writes that Charlotte Brontë's novels

never seem at ease with the necessities of intimacy. The bombastic declamatory dialogues between Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar are her only attempt to approximate sisterhood and these sound indeed as if their author had "long forfeited the society of her own sex."

This judgment overlooks the novelty of the attempt.¹⁶ In Shirley, Charlotte Brontë endeavours to construct a friendship between two women that is not based on reference to men--one perhaps, if Shirley had her wish, which would exclude men, "the black eclipse" (Ch. XIV, p. 296)--a friendship that can survive the threat of men making them competitors. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the best in women, it seems necessary

to assume a male stance,¹⁷ as Shirley frequently does towards Caroline, or as she does in order to choose a friend at all:

She . . . was on quite free and easy terms with all the Misses Sykes, and all the Misses Pearson, and the two superlative Misses Wynne of De Walden Hall; yet, it appeared, she found none amongst them very genial: she fraternised with none of them: to use her own words, if she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbour parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. (Ch. XI, pp. 233-34)

Making a friend, it seems, is inevitably an awkward, difficult enterprise:

Shirley said she liked the green sweep of the common turf, and better still, the heath on its ridges, for the heath reminded her of moors: she had seen moors when she was travelling on the borders near Scotland. She remembered particularly a district traversed one long afternoon, on a sultry but sunless day in summer: they journeyed from noon till sunset, over what seemed a boundless waste of deep heath, and nothing had they seen but wild sheep; nothing heard but the cries of wild birds.

"I know how the heath would look on such a day," said Caroline; "purple-black: a deeper shade of the sky-tint, and that would be livid."

"Yes--quite livid, with brassy edges to the clouds, and here and there a white gleam, more ghastly than the lurid tinge, which, as you looked at it, you momentarily expected would kindle into a blinding lightning."

"Did it thunder?"

"It muttered distant peals, but the storm did not break till evening, after we had reached our inn: that inn being an isolated house at the foot of the range of mountains."

"Did you watch the clouds come down over the mountains?"

"I did: I stood at the window an hour watching them . . ."
(Ch. XII, pp. 235-36)

The young women throw out sentiments like bridge partners making bids. The narrator's remark that "the very first interchange of slight observations sufficed to give each an idea of what the other was" (p. 235) emphasizes that this awkward interchange is designed to do precisely this. Like conversations between men and women in Shirley, this dialogue is periphrastic, a series of manoeuvres through which the desired conclusion is reached:

Hereupon Caroline presented her hand, which was accordingly taken and shaken. "We are compatriots," said she. "Yes," agreed Shirley, with a grave nod. (p. 237)

Ostensibly Caroline and Shirley are celebrating the discovery that they are both not only Yorkshire women but belong to the same village; but really they are shaking hands on a pact of friendship. In a few more paragraphs, the delicate business of becoming Caroline and Shirley instead of Miss Helstone and Miss Keeldar is accomplished, initiated, of course, by Shirley.

The currency in which this friendship is negotiated is the feminine one of nature, which exists in Charlotte Brontë's mythology in a dichotomy with masculine society. Nature, the force that directs and supports Jane Eyre in her escape from Rochester, is an important aid for the women in Shirley: it acts as a gauge of sensitivity (against which Robert, Louis, and Mrs. Pryor are all tested), a coin in conversation, a refuge, and a source of strength to which the characters need to return. But Nature is not enough, at least not for Caroline:

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, beside which holly-oaks spired up tall; she looked at the close hedge of privet and laurel fencing in the garden; her eyes longed to see something more than the shrubs, before they turned from that limited prospect: they longed to see a human figure, of a certain mould and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate.
(Ch. XXIII, p. 461)

Shirley and Caroline's proposed excursion to the woods acts as a metaphor for their relationship: it is secure, self-sufficient, and harmonious until it includes men:

"We will go--you and I alone, Caroline--to that wood, early some fine summer morning, and spend a long day there. We can take pencils and sketchbooks, and any interesting reading-book we like; and of course we shall take something to eat. I have two little baskets, in which Mrs. Gill, my housekeeper, might pack

our provisions, and we could each carry our own. . . . You would be dull with me alone?"

"I should not. I think we would suit: and what third person is there whose presence would not spoil our pleasure?"

"Indeed, I know of none about our own ages--no lady at least, and as to gentlemen--"

"An excursion becomes quite a different thing to what we are proposing."

"We were going simply to see the old trees, the old ruins; to pass a day in old times, surrounded by olden silence, and above all quietude."

"You are right; and the presence of gentlemen dispels the last charm, I think. If they are of the wrong sort, like your Malones, and your Sykes, and Wynnes, irritation takes the place of serenity. If they are of the right sort, there is still a change--I can hardly tell what change, one easy to feel, difficult to describe."

"We forget Nature, imprimis."

"And then Nature forgets us; covers her vast, calm brow with a dim veil, conceals her face, and withdraws the peaceful joy with which, if we had been content to worship her only, she would have filled our hearts."

"What does she give us instead?"

"More elation and more anxiety."

(Ch. XI, pp. 238-40)

This exclusion of men is for Caroline emotionally and economically impossible; and it becomes emotionally impossible for Shirley too. Both have to face the elation and anxiety, and if Nature is somehow an inclusive term for those things that they consider demand their best responses--friendship, for example--they also have to face the inevitability of the threat to those things, perhaps even their destruction (the book suggests), by men. Just as the copse is turned into firewood, the natural terrace into a paved street, and Nunnely Common is enclosed by an Act, the friendship between Caroline and Shirley gives way to the insidious assumption that it is a temporary arrangement waiting to be dissolved by a commitment to a male, which is somehow more real. Its intensity has made their friendship into more than just a premarital shelter (somehow redundant in the adult world), a support through the difficulties of courtship, or a substitute for an emotional bond with a man. The

manipulative strain (frequently overlooked) in Caroline and Shirley's friendship suggests that it is even an alternative.

The last conversation between Caroline and Shirley is not witnessed by the reader but becomes part of the dialogue between Caroline and Robert, signalling that Caroline and Shirley's friendship will give way to marriage:

"Miss Keeldar spent a day at the Rectory about a week since. The evening came on very wintry, and we persuaded her to stay all night."

"And you and she curled your hair together?"

"How do you know that?"

"And then you chatted; and she told you----"

"It was not at curling-hair time; so you are not as wise as you think: and besides, she didn't tell me."

"You slept together afterwards?"

"We occupied the same room and bed. We did not sleep much: we talked the whole night through . . . About things we never thoroughly discussed before, intimate friends as we have been: but you hardly expect I should tell you?"

"Yes, yes, Cary,--you will tell me: you said we were friends; and friends should always confide in each other."

"But are you sure you won't repeat it?"

(Ch. XXXV, pp. 683-84)

And Caroline tells.

Although conflict is evaded by Mrs. Pryor's appearance and Shirley's visitors, it is clear during the middle section of the novel that the friendship between the two young women is threatened by and eventually superseded by Caroline's feeling for Robert. Caroline seems to struggle to prevent this, but when she believes that Robert and Shirley are in love, she gives way:

"But I shall be forgotten when they are married . . . Let them be married then: but afterwards I shall be nothing to him. As for being his sister, and all that stuff, I despise it. I will either be all or nothing to a man like Robert." (Ch. XIV, p. 292)

Caroline says nothing about Shirley, and the omission is made obvious by Shirley's walking past the rectory window as Caroline concludes her

thoughts. But in response to Shirley's direct statement of resentment against what she terms "the black eclipse" (p. 296), Caroline makes a declaration of sisterhood. In this scene, Caroline's and Shirley's manipulative intent illustrates the intensity of their relationship:

"I am every day growing more accustomed to--fonder of you. You know I am too English to get up a vehement friendship all at once; but you are so much better than common--you are so different to everyday young ladies--I esteem you--I value you: you are never a burden to me--never. Do you believe what I say?"

"Partly," replied Miss Keeldar, smiling rather incredulously . . .

"Shirley, I never had a sister--you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other. Affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. . . . I am supported and soothed when you--that is, you only--are near, Shirley. Do you believe me now?" (pp. 295-96)

The contradiction between the two passages registers Caroline's confusion; in a sense Caroline's poetic reply, which is in part a response to the dynamics of conversation, is a rhetorical trap: it persuades one into accepting a compromise, "you only," as if it were complete affection.¹⁸ The duplicity, it suggests, is involuntary, an internal conflict between what is and what should be in which what should be is made to exist through poetry. Like the poetic flights of fancy which obtrude from Shirley's predominantly realistic style, this poetry too lodges a vision; the realism conceals the subterranean struggle with what is.

The confused intensity of Caroline and Shirley's friendship which is manifested in the excesses of style, in Caroline's declaration and Shirley's declamations, is suppressed in marriage. It becomes regularized. Caroline and Shirley become sisters in law but also sisters in powerlessness: Shirley has to act passively ("'Louis,' she said, 'would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern,'" [Ch. XXXVII,

p. 730]), and although Caroline is given the traditionally feminine role of power, that of guardian of the virtues that men feel the "sordid cankering calculations" (Ch. XXX, p. 614) of the marketplace strip from them, she cannot stop the destruction of the Hollow. She is neither "tracked as a guide, [n]or read as a prophecy" (Ch. XXVII, p. 550). Although starting from different points, Caroline and Shirley arrive at the same position socially and economically, a depressing conclusion to the range of possibilities of feminine activity that the "split" heroine raised; even the independent half can only act to arrange her own subjection. The similarity of their fates--wives to two brothers and "daughter" to the same mother--represents the socially determined convergence in marriage of all possible, acceptable versions of womanhood. Jane Eyre assumes a male position in her marriage, but the conditions of her marriage flagrantly ignore reality. But if within the conventions of realism, subjection is the fate of all women, how then does the female will assert itself? The rest of this chapter will take up the strategies--one rhetorical and two imagistic--which Charlotte Brontë shows women employing.

II

Shirley is a novel about silence. It is not only about the silence of women's lives, the stillness of life in a "windowed grave"; it is also about silence as a strategy, about the silence of omission (most frequently in novels of this genre, the refusal to tell one's love but rather to close one's hand on the scorpion and break one's teeth on the stone),¹⁹ but more interestingly about the silences of commission, which turn out to be not silences of concealment but of revelation. The same restrictions that govern a woman's action inevitably pervade not only her speech, but also her thoughts, and in Shirley show up in the lacunae and evasions of the

dialogue and interior monologue. The lacunae and evasions, however, are often responses that while appearing to conform to those restrictions in fact subvert them.

A central problem faced by women in novels of domestic realism is how simultaneously to reveal and conceal their love. In Jane Austen's novels, the balance gradually changes. Sense and Sensibility condemns Marianne Dashwood's display. Pride and Prejudice, however, criticizes Jane Bennet's reticence; and directness does not exist as an issue between its central couple until Elizabeth's love has been sanctioned to some extent by Darcy's first declaration. In Persuasion, we are asked to admire Anne Elliot for the persistence of her love, though again Captain Wentworth has declared once already, but we would be expected to disapprove of her doing anything about it besides waiting. In Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë completely overrides social and literary conventions by not only having Jane declare her love but by having Jane marry Rochester rather than the reverse. Observing the conditions of its realistic context, Shirley takes on the question of how direct women should be in the verbal expression of their needs in a culture that appears to endorse St. Paul's injunction, quoted in the novel, "Let the woman learn in silence" (Ch. XVII, p. 371). It is the explicit subject of conversation between Shirley and Caroline, a subject of Caroline's meditations, the subject of the book, and the subject the book itself raises: Shirley participates in the common paradox, a book by a woman that exposes the secrets of the soul which their own survival demands that women conceal--but not completely.

Among Charlotte Brontë's cast of female characters, Caroline Helstone is Miss Domestic Realism; she exhibits a passivity that is sometimes criticized by other characters, but always understood by the narrator. When Robert asks Caroline about her future, she replies:

"As to the life I am destined for, I cannot tell: I suppose to keeping my uncle's house, till--" she hesitated.

"Till what? Till he dies?"

"No . . . But till--in short, till events offer other occupations for me." (Ch. V, p. 81)

She waits; the extent of her ability to act is "to take a situation" (Ch. XI, p. 208). Her one attempt to overstep the limits of decorum is prevented, by Shirley, for tactical purposes; the rest of her behaviour, one assumes, falls within those limits. The most noticeable feature of Caroline's conversations is its periphrasis. With her words, periphrasis becomes a trope: in Shirley, periphrasis operates as a code, allowing a latitude of interpretation within which contradictions, such as evasion and commitment, can coexist.

Because Caroline and Robert are the more conventional pair of lovers, their conversations employ the most straightforward, as it were, circumlocutions. Theirs is a language of diplomacy (that is, to use Von Clausewitz's definition, of war carried on by other means): her words both declare and deny; his reject and retain. Caroline tells Robert:

"I like to come here; but I have no desire to be intrusive. I am not hinting to be asked: you must understand that."
(Ch. VI, p. 107)

and

"I know it is your duty to try and get on and that it won't do for you to be romantic; but in future you must not misunderstand me if I seem friendly." (Ch. VII, p. 138)

Here, empathy is also expedience, and altruism strategy. In one of the long rhetorical passages that both disturb and describe the book, Charlotte Brontë states the choices:

To pursue him, or to turn upon herself? If she is weak, she will try the first expedient,--will lose his esteem and win his aversion: if she has sense, she will be her own governor, and

resolve to subdue and bring under guidance the disturbed realm of her emotions. (Ch. VII, pp. 120-21)

But implicit in this latter choice is the hope that she will win (the word registers both battle and game) Robert's esteem. Caroline decides therefore "to turn upon herself." She is silent, at first, even to herself, about what she really wants, but Caroline manoeuvres adroitly around that silence. Yet Shirley is a story about Caroline's pain, of the damage done by decorum and men (in that decorum has reference usually to men), and the reader has to know of it. Caroline writes letters, but does not send them ("shame and good sense" [Ch. XI, p. 208] prevent her); nor does the reader know what she has written. Her longing can only be expressed in extremis, in illness. And the pain is seen chiefly from outside; it has to remain a matter of conjecture. She is silent, even to the reader, so that we are able to admire a love that Caroline is ashamed of and praise a thought that if it became a deed would "lacerate self-respect." Her story is told so that we admire, in fact, silence and pain.

Robert also observes the silence. If he did not, Caroline would be compromised. He lets her know that he cannot marry her by making the case as hypothetical as he can. He counsels her "benignant heart" rather than "her" to exclude "one" rather than "me" (Ch. VII, p. 138). Even after their separation is over, Caroline's justifiable recrimination is left unsaid, as if the future might depend on Caroline's silence here too. Although the central silence is observed in name, Caroline is allowed a voice: but instead of the voice of "hunger, rebellion, and rage" given to Jane Eyre, it is one that appears to accept starvation and sorrow, and in fact takes power from that acceptance. The solution, then, is to say that one is not going to say anything and in doing so say it all:

"It appears you walk invisible. I noticed a ring on your hand this evening; can it be the ring of Gyges? Henceforth, when

sitting in the counting-house by myself, perhaps at dead of night, I shall permit myself to imagine that Caroline may be leaning over my shoulder reading with me from the same book, or sitting at my side engaged in her own particular task, and now and then raising her unseen eyes to my face to read there my thoughts."

"You need fear no such infliction: I do not come near you: I only stand afar off, watching what may become of you."

"When I walk out along the hedgerows in the evening after the mill is shut--or at night, when I take the watchman's place-- I shall fancy the flutter of every little bird over its nest, the rustle of every leaf, a movement made by you; tree-shadows will take your shape; in the white sprays of hawthorn, I shall imagine glimpses of you. Lina, you will haunt me."

"I will never be where you would not wish me to be, nor see nor hear what you would wish unseen and unheard."

"I shall see you in my very mill in broad daylight: indeed I have seen you there once. But a week ago, I was standing at the top of one of my long rooms, girls were working at the other end, and amongst half a dozen of them, moving to and fro, I seemed to see a figure resembling yours. It was some effect of doubtful light or shade, or of dazzling sunbeam, I walked up to this group, what I had sought had glided away: I found myself between two buxom lasses in pinafores."

"I shall not follow you into your mill, Robert, unless you call me there." (pp. 285-86)

Through periphrasis, Caroline creates an opportunity to break silence; it constitutes a powerful medium. Otherwise, Caroline's speech is controlled by Robert. She is the statue to Robert's Pygmalion:

Moore placed his hand a moment on his young cousin's shoulder, stooped, and left a kiss on her forehead.

"Oh!" said she, as if the action had unsealed her lips, "I was miserable when I thought you would not come: I am almost too happy now. Are you happy, Robert? Do you like to come home?" (Ch. IV, p. 65)

After union with Robert, Caroline, like Hermione, comes alive:

"there was an obvious change in Miss Helstone: all about her seemed elastic; depression, fear, forlornness, were withdrawn" (Ch. XXXV, p. 681).

Robert's function, then, resembles that of Shirley's imagined man. Like Eva's master, Caroline's "take[s] from thy vision, darkness: . . . and loosen[s] from thy faculties fetters" (Ch. XXVII, p. 552). Yet when

Caroline does speak, she is conscious both of the fullness of the life summoned up by Robert and of the limits imposed by him:

Sometimes I am afraid to speak to him, lest I should be too frank, lest I should seem forward: for I have more than once regretted bitterly overflowing, superfluous words, and feared I had said more than he expected me to say, and that he would disapprove what he might deem my indiscretion; now, to-night, I could have ventured to express any thought, he was so indulgent. (Ch. VII, pp. 111-12)

Periphrasis is what happens in conversation, not what is advocated; in fact, Shirley and Caroline agree that openness is laudable:

"I consider you very timid and undemonstrative," remarked Miss Keeldar. "Why did you not give Moore your hand when he offered you his? He is your cousin: you like him. Are you ashamed to let him perceive your affection?"

"He perceives all of it that interests him: no need to make a display of feeling."

"You are laconic: you would be stoical if you could. Is love, in your eyes, a crime, Caroline?" . . . The two girls paced the green lane in silence. Caroline first resumed.

"Obtrusiveness is a crime; forwardness is a crime; and both disgust: but love!--no purest angel need blush to love!" (Ch. XVII, p. 356-57)

When Shirley's "frank kindness" (Ch. XXXIII, p. 608) leads Robert to propose to her, the difference between frankness and forwardness is found to be indistinguishable. One, after all, is the other judged. While in Jane Eyre, directness was part of love (Rochester's "indirection" is what stains his image for Jane), in Shirley indirection is the clue to love's presence. Robert's proposal convinces Shirley that reserve is necessary in all dealings with men and in her openness, which the reader is asked to take as innocent, she concludes: "I am a traitor to all my sisters" (Ch. XXXIII, p. 609).²⁰

Shirley's silence towards Louis is a different matter. She experiences Dorothea Brooke's problem, not Caroline's: an economically powerful woman, she is forced to assume powerlessness in order to marry the

man she loves. Shirley and Louis' conversations must produce the formula that will permit Louis, in his quasi-female role, to break silence, or force Shirley into speech. Shirley is determined not to "dishonour my sisterhood" (Ch. XXXVI, p. 701), not to pass "the line which is my limit" (p. 700); that is, she knows, according to Louis' reading of her, "how far I may reveal my feelings, and when I must clasp the volume" (p. 700). Louis is, nevertheless, equally determined not "to utter one word of love" (p. 697). Progress depends on Louis' interpreting Shirley's silence and Shirley's allowing him to do so. Louis must find in Shirley's "shyness--coyness and in the coyness--love" (p. 697), while simultaneously protecting her honour by seeing (in his "gloomy moments" [p. 697]) her silence as indifference.

Shirley's honour is preserved at least partly through the device of Louis' journal: she is made passive through point of view. The awkwardness of the device--the seventeen-page shift into the first-person strains the conventions of realism--indicates the problem. For Shirley to marry and to preserve her essential independence--two contradictory states--compromises reality. Shirley is at once independent yet committed to choosing--or being chosen, as she might put it--by a husband who can "master" (Ch. XXXI, p. 627) her. Yet it is hard not to see a strong character's wishes as active in their own fulfilment. In the courtship, how, then, can her passivity and her independence be made to coexist? Since Louis tells the story, we know his wishes but only guess Shirley's. If the story were to be told from Shirley's perspective, then her taunts might seem to be attacks; from Louis' viewpoint they are defences.

Having first used his paradoxical role of tutor to arrange a conversation, Louis then uses Rochester's technique of imagining marriage to someone else. But at the point when Jane--who turns Rochester's treatment of her into a class issue--makes a declaration, Shirley is

silent. Not until Louis is arrogant can Shirley retaliate. His picture of being tutor (which, of course, invites Shirley's jealousy²¹) to his imagined orphan, who will cook for him, turns that too into a class issue. The crisis comes when Shirley's attack on Louis' "monstrous pride" (Ch. XXXVI, p. 704) leads to his statement, "I am a dependant: I know my place" and Shirley replies, bringing the subtext of the conversation and her silence to the surface, "I am a woman: I know mine" (p. 704). Shirley and Louis collaborate in a script that exposes Louis' reluctance to propose to Shirley as false pride and endorses Shirley's determination not to speak--at least not openly. That the cover for their sado-masochistic struggle should be conceived as a class struggle rather than as a sexist struggle--if the two may be unravelled for the moment--suggests the acceptability of middle-class assertiveness (at least in this middle-class genre) while at the same time offering reassurance about the limits of female assertiveness. The journal limits the extent of Shirley's activity to collusion in her own subjection. From having spoken and acted in the first half of the novel, Shirley "withdraws" (p. 718) into silence after agreeing to marriage. Her declaration to Mr. Sympson that Louis is her "future husband" (p. 716) asserts Louis' right to assume the position rather than hers to choose: Mr. Sympson's objection is class-based, and Shirley now oversteps the limits of ladylike behaviour in the cause of the middle-class. Afterwards she becomes, as Louis writes, "very silent: I think she never spoke to me--not even when she offered me tea" (pp. 719-20). Shirley assumes, that is, a female role, in which she then silently acts to transfer her power to Louis. Both Caroline and Shirley use silence to control their lives; but after their marriages are arranged their silence changes from a weapon to a mark of subjection. Shirley "abdicates without

a word or a struggle" (Ch. XXXVII, p. 730), and Robert's kisses now seal Caroline's lips.

III

Besides the periphrasis that is almost endemic to direct speech, there is a periphrastic mode of communication that is not spoken at all; in this section, I will show how women operate from behind the metaphor of food. Critics have previously noted that Shirley, like other novels by Charlotte Brontë, employs the vocabulary of hunger to express in metaphor the psychological needs of its characters, especially of its heroines. Studies of food metaphors in Shirley (which are after all traditional in literature--Brontë herself draws on Biblical uses) note how they are used to express need but overlook how effectively literal food is employed to satisfy those needs. The naming of food, as of all objects, is a means of persuading the reader of the reality of the story; in Barthes' words, of its "intractability."²² Brontë uses this "reality" to implement her dream. Eating--including what is eaten, where, with whom, and whether something is eaten--is a significant mode of expression (for character and for text), a key means of satisfying those needs that are articulated in the metaphor of hunger. Episodes of eating, or of the refusal to eat, become, therefore, instruments through which character is not only defined but is also asserted. For women characters especially, the meal is an important medium for exerting the control over their lives that is denied them on the level of action. Conversely, for men, the eating of food can be an assent to or an evasion of control by women. The evasion preserves male power--but an evasion is a response, a reaction rather than an action initiated by men, and so food in this novel is mainly a female instrument.

In life, we use food, of course, primarily to sustain, but we also use

it to celebrate, to mourn, to reward, to punish, as well as to propitiate and to pacify--in other words, to control. But eating is also an act of incorporation; in offering food, women ask to be taken in--incorporated in male structures. The offering of food--the wish to control and be controlled--is, like Shirley's other demonstrations of the struggle between the sexes, sado-masochistic.²³ Before the rise of the realist novel, the instances in literature of food as symbol are frequent, and even in the early examples of the novel, food and the occasions of eating provide plausible event and create verisimilitude. In Shirley, however, Charlotte Brontë presents food and meals as structures of interaction in which psychosexual conflicts operate. In Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë uses the taking and giving of food as a consistent and important indicator of the structure of power: Jane, the powerless suppliant for burnt porridge and dry oatcake at the beginning of the novel, promotes herself, by the end of the novel, to the donor of ham and eggs. (When Jane can hand out something as substantial as this, then the novel can end.) The metaphor is extended in Shirley. The meal is a framework for establishing and exercising power; the transference of food is a sometimes blatant, more often surreptitious, means of enacting hostility and friendship, of celebrating community, and of insisting on individuality.

Shirley opens with a description of itself as a meal: the dishes that Charlotte Brontë describes show yet again that hers is a fundamentally romantic view of reality. Like the overtly romantic passages, this description expresses dissatisfaction:

It is not positively affirmed that you shall not have a taste of the exciting, perhaps towards the middle and close of the meal, but it is resolved that the first dish set upon the table shall be one that a Catholic--ay, even an Anglo-Catholic might eat on Good Friday in Passion Week: it shall be cold lentils and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb. (Ch. 1, p. 7-8)

This metaphorical opening meal is the preamble to a meal that is literal but which also lays the groundwork for the working out of issues through symbol that the novel undertakes. The thoughtless curates treat their female landlady as a servant. She is defined solely, even in the narrator's description, by her function; "the hot kitchen fire is in her eye" (Ch. I, p. 10). The curates' landlady-cook is not only reluctant and resentful but both "fears" and "hates" (p. 11) those who feed off her. Nevertheless, Charlotte Brontë adds, "if they would only seem satisfied with what they get, she wouldn't care" (p. 10). This act and reaction, of men consuming and women serving, with attendant hate and fear, but fear which is potentially allayed by male satisfaction, provides a blueprint for the interactions between male and female that follow. This manoeuvre to satisfy, the consequent satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and the silent rebellion form a diagram of control. Later in the novel, Shirley is "radiant with glee" (Ch. XIV, p. 307) at her ability to "gratify and satisfy (p. 307) the vicars by her "judiciously concocted repast" (p. 308). Her primary object is, of course, not the feeding of her guests but the securing of their consent to Miss Ainley's proposal for charitable works.

The success of Shirley's "recherché supper" (p. 307) in cajoling the vicars leads her to compare their male susceptibility to the persuasive powers of "choice wines and scientific dishes" (p. 308) to the naïveté of children" (p. 308). Women, she says, are immune to this particular influence. Food for them is functional: their usual supper is "some bread and milk" (Ch. XIX, p. 375). When Caroline and Shirley go off to the woods, for instance, they demonstrate their attempt at self-sufficiency as a pair by packing "two little baskets" (Ch. XII, p. 238)--instead of the formal meal that the inclusion of men in the party would entail.

An index of male worth seems to be the ability, if not to avoid, at

least to recognize this form of manipulation. Helstone can be made to yield "at the cost [of] several cups of tea, some toast and cake" (Ch. XIII, p. 265), but he is, as he says, aware of these "little female manoeuvres" (Ch. XIV, p. 306). Using food to manipulate is also, but rarely, a male manoeuvre: Mr. Sykes is seduced by drink (though not food) to join his fellow mill-owners in prosecuting the machine-breakers. The attractiveness of Robert Moore is indicated, on the other hand, by his imperviousness to the inducement that an invitation to eat represents: "I watch Moore sometimes," Shirley tells Caroline, "to try and discover how he can be pleased; but he has not that child's simplicity about him" (p. 308). To please, it now appears, is not only a means of survival for women but also a means of control. As something that gives men pleasure, food has the potential of a weapon. It enacts love's conflicts.

Knowing the potentially threatening properties of food, Robert Moore attempts to protect himself by keeping his own supplies within his mill, in order, as he says, "not to be dependent on the feminity [sic] in the cottage yonder for every mouthful I eat or every drop I drink" (Ch. II, p. 32). By the end of the book, Robert Moore is in a sense punished for his evasions by being imprisoned at Briarfield through illness--which in Shirley has been established as a system through which the imbalance of power (seen in the exchange of food) can be corrected or even reversed--and made totally dependent on Mrs. Horsfall, who, according to Martin, starves him, and on Mrs. Yorke, who both creates and rewards his dependency by "always making sago or tapioca, or something good for him" (Ch. XXXII, p. 649).

The female relationship to food in Shirley is a bifurcated one: on the one hand, it is an elaboration of the story of Eve, the temptress proffering the apple; on the other, it is an extension of the mother suckling her baby. The two systems sometimes diverge, sometimes converge.

Throughout Shirley, the dependency of the fed and the consequent love of those who give food is stressed, as if it is necessary to create dependency in order to love. In her account of the bond between Mrs. Yorke and her youngest child, Charlotte Brontë writes, "it is all her own yet--and that one she has yet begun to doubt, suspect, condemn; it derives its sustenance from her, it hangs on her, it clings to her, it loves her above everything else in the world" (Ch. IX, p. 165-66). Similarly, Caroline says:

"If I take a little baby into my arms . . . I feel that I love that helpless thing quite peculiarly, though I am not its mother. I could do almost anything for it willingly, if it were delivered over entirely to my care--if it were quite dependent on me."
(Ch. XXI, p. 454)

The closeness of the bond between Caroline Helstone and Mrs. Pryor is also expressed through a comparison of Caroline to the baby Caroline: "Caroline no more showed such wounding sagacity or reproachful sensitiveness now, than she had done when a suckling of three months old" (Ch. XXV, p. 504). The interrelationship of food and fulfilment is, of course, not limited to mother and child: Hortense Moore also derives satisfaction from seeing her brother eat his breakfast with relish.

The women in this novel seem to perceive the relationship between the nursing mother (there is no mention of wet-nurses) and her child as an ideal; within it, their function is unquestionable, vital, and powerful. The giving of food, then, is associated with fulfilment. Caroline remembers as her happiest times the occasions when she would feed Moore, "berry by berry, and nut by nut, like a bird feeding its fledgling" (Ch. X, p. 193), and while she is sick, she fantasizes about calling Robert in to breakfast (Ch. XXIV, p. 482). The acceptance of food acknowledges a relationship, and because of the poverty of ways in which such a relationship can be sought by women, the giving of food is likely to become

less innocent than the image of mother and child usually suggests. Administering food, a role assigned to women, fulfills some of the psychological function of the modes of action from which women are barred.

If most women are doomed, as Rose Yorke says scornfully, to bury their ten talents amid "a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder" (Ch. XXIII, p. 452), then the manner in which the role of administrator of all this food is performed becomes significant. The style indicates not only the character of the donor but also the relationship both to the recipient and to the world at large. Caroline Helstone's ability to function in society has its first test in her social *début*, when she has to "take a tray"; she spills the tea, and Mr. Hall has to help her with it "like any old woman" (Ch. XV, p. 318). At the same event some years later, having profited by Shirley's influence, Caroline performs this duty with confidence, and now insists that Mr. Hall "must not help himself--he must be served by her; and she provided herself with a little salver, that she might offer him variety" (p. 336). The "proper spirit of liberality" (p. 343) at this particular feast is very different from the requirement for "a multitude of plates of bread and butter varied in sorts and plentiful in quantity" (Ch. VII, p. 127) that causes Caroline and the servants such trouble when the curates invite themselves to tea. To serve the curates is an obligation; to serve Mr. Hall is a pleasure, an expression of warmth and friendship.

The performance of this central social function becomes a revelatory event. It marks Shirley's confidence, the increase in Caroline's self-assertion, and the total want of power in Mrs. Pryor. Unable to mother the child Caroline, Mrs. Pryor is also incapable of ordering food. One event (the request for provisions for the wounded men) where the helplessness of the wounded seems clearly to demand action but instead causes Mrs. Pryor paralyzing indecision anticipates the revelation--only a few chapters

away--of Mrs. Pryor's behaviour to her baby daughter. Just as Caroline comforts Mrs. Pryor here--and the narrative speaks of Mrs. Pryor's "innocent self" (Ch. XXII, p. 411)--when Caroline hears her mother say that she abandoned her because she was so pretty, Caroline again comforts her (Ch. XXIV, p. 489) and the narrative is silent. Shirley's response to the same event is similarly prophetic. The excess of the amount of food that she wishes to send is checked by Robert. When Shirley is made to laugh at the quantity of food she has ordered for the wounded men, she is made to acknowledge a male view of how she should behave--just as she will by marrying, and just as she will have to do within marriage.

To offer someone food might be to offer him many other things; it is an invitation that requires a response, and the response is a significant, figurative one. The complicity of eating with someone is made clear early in the novel in Mr. Helstone's refusal to eat anything in Mr. Yorke's house:

The Rector remained standing; he seemed not to like his quarters; he would not touch the wine his host offered him.

"E'en as you will," remarked Mr. Yorke. "I reckon you're thinking of Eastern customs, Mr. Helstone, and you'll not eat nor drink under my roof, feared we suld [sic] be forced to be friends." (Ch. III, p. 51)

When Robert Moore and Louis Moore refuse the food that Shirley offers, they are refusing more than food. Robert is refusing to be manipulated. Shirley has asked Robert if he would like breakfast as a way of forestalling his questions:

"What have you and she been doing?" asked Moore suddenly.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

"What is your mutual mystery?"

"If you are hungry, Mrs. Gill will give you something to eat here. Step into the oak-parlour, and ring the bell--you will be served as if at an inn; or, if you like better, go back to the Hollow."

"The alternative is not open to me: I must go back. Good-

morning: the first leisure I have, I will see you again."
(Ch. XX, p. 408-409)

Despite Shirley's white flag (if it really is a disclaimer) of presenting her house as an inn, Robert remains aloof, reiterating in the word "leisure" the exclusion of the women from the world that matters, an exclusion which has been so painfully demonstrated to Caroline in the battle of the night before.

A more complex expression is the serving of food to a lover: Louis Moore's refusal to eat Shirley's grapes is not just a negative response to an offer of food; it is a manoeuvre which reverses their relative positions. He is no longer a dependent tutor; she rather than he is the suppliant. He uses the "female" weapons appropriate to his "female" position. Similarly, by declining breakfast, the child Martin, also in a "female" position, accedes to the armchair and parental attention, and thus sets his plan to help Caroline visit Robert in motion. Most spectacularly, Caroline, through refusing to eat, acquires the attention of her uncle, who serves her food from his own plate, and a mother to prepare her food with "trembling pleasure and anxious care."

But before food becomes activated, made to carry meaning, that is, turned into the economy of the novel, it exists in a relation between a character and himself. The way a character eats food is revelatory--for instance, Malone takes two glasses of wine to others' one--and so is the quality of the food taken. There is a scale of identification, beginning with the simple use of food to identify a difference, usually in country or class--Malone, for example, is from the land of "shamrocks and potatoes," and Hortense Moore, with her melasse and purée, bouilli, and choucroute, is always an outsider--to its more subtle use as an indicator of personality. Shirley is exotic in her choice of grapes to feed Louis Moore but also excessive--he wants dry toast; she is romantic in the studied simplicity of

the food she shares with Henry and Moore in the schoolroom--new milk and toasted oatcake. (Moore accepts the milk but marks his difference--as an alien and an outsider--by rejecting the oatcake.) Like the episode in Jane Eyre in which Jane advertises for the position of governess, an ordinary action--here a meal--is turned into an adventure.

She then took the post of toaster-general; and kneeling on the rug, fork in hand, fulfilled her office with dexterity . . . She appeared unconscious of the humility of her present position--or if conscious, it was only to taste a charm in its lowliness. It did not revolt her pride that the group to whom she voluntarily officiated as handmaid should include her cousin's tutor. (Ch. XXVI, p. 526)

This "innovation on ordinary usages" (p. 526) at once expresses the romantic heroine in Shirley and a romantic comment on the ordinariness of the life to which Shirley is bound.

There is always a cornucopia of food around Shirley, as if there were a correlation between the profundity, warmth, or some other prized quality of a character and the quantity of the food surrounding him. Shirley always has food to give to birds, animals, and children--at one point she supplies Louis' lack--and is always ordering meals, repasts, regales, and *recherché* suppers. Even though Hortense is surrounded by food, her absorption with it as a subject of conversation and warfare with Sarah, her maid, makes a caricature of her, ranging her alongside the tureen of cold potatoes. The comic end to Hortense's interests and efforts--burnt cherries and inedible purées that no-one will eat--suggests another of food's functions: if quantity of food is an index of substance, then success in its distribution is an index of achievement. Hortense is not only unmarried; she is about to be made redundant and more completely dependent on her brother's charity. Although Shirley can feed birds, animals, and children--a traditional province of women--and can even

preside at suppers where charities are formed--again part of the female domain--when it comes to feeding men wounded while defending her own (but let) property, there is a limit set on her participation.

As an event, a meal can take many forms. It can be used to celebrate--for instance, the Sunday school feast--to mourn, or to meet--as Market Day is. It can be an ordinary or a special occasion, scheduled or improvised like the "impromptu regale which it was Shirley's delight to offer any chance guests." It can be inclusive, like the Sunday school feast, or exclusive: Mrs. Yorke excludes from her table her husband's bachelor friends. A meal can be an occasion one courts, as the curates do, or avoids, as the Moore brothers do; one to which one can be invited and one from which, as with Mr. Donne, a guest can be expelled.²⁴ The meal is both a context and a text. Within its elements and structures, character is stated and interactions observed, and characters state and act. Because the administration of food is traditionally a female occupation, it is the women who arrogate its possibilities to themselves. Through food, women can initiate action and capitalize on the power invested in them. Men can only react.

IV

The metaphors of food and illness--a condition that often involves an inability or even a refusal to eat, but which can also solicit better things to eat--are intimately connected. Both explore issues of dependency and control. Because together meals and sick-beds (presided over by mothers and nurses) make up the arena for female activity, they are used by women as theatres of self-assertion. In Shirley, each of the four main characters becomes ill; for the women, the illness functions as the expression of a problem and its purgative.

Robert Moore's illness offers a focus for the discussion of power in Shirley. The episode begins with Mr. and Mrs. Yorke's response to Moore's helplessness: "Well did Mr. Yorke like to have power, and to use it: he had now between his hands, power over a fellow creature's life: it suited him" (Ch. XXXII, p. 639). Similarly, Mrs. Yorke's "tough heart almost yearned towards him, when she found him committed to her charge,--left in her arms, as dependent on her as her youngest-born in the cradle" (p. 640). These two responses illustrate in the population of Charlotte Brontë's novel the darker side of ordinary male and female caring; these responses are then seen in parodic form in Martin Yorke's treatment of Caroline and Mrs. Horsfall's of Moore. Because Robert Moore's illness does not have any lasting effect on his male acquaintance (when he endeavours to leave Briarmains, Mr. Yorke collaborates in his escape from the "bad" women), this discussion will examine the effect of his illness on his relationship with women and on himself.

Although Robert Moore's illness is both corrective and retributive (its timing and the shot that causes his illness make it a punishment), it is not, like Mr. Rochester's maiming, vindictive. In Jane Eyre, the first-person narrative and the immediate reversal of relative power in Jane's favour makes Rochester's injuries seem to be caused by Jane. Robert Moore is the narrator's victim, not Caroline's. As Caroline is kept away from Robert Moore's sick-bed, she does not benefit directly by becoming powerful through Robert's powerlessness. Instead of reversing Robert's and Caroline's positions, Robert's illness educates him into a knowledge of Caroline's experience:

"Only last night, I despaired of ever seeing you again. Weakness has wrought terrible depression in me--terrible depression."

"And you sit alone?"

"Worse than alone."

"Do you suffer pain, Robert?"

"Not so much pain now; but I am hopelessly weak, and the

state of my mind is inexpressible--dark, barren, impotent. Do you not read it all in my face? I look a mere ghost."

"Altered, yet I should have known you anywhere: but I understand your feelings: I experienced something like it. Since we met, I too have been very ill."

"Very ill?"

"I thought I should die. The tale of my life seemed told. Every night just at midnight I used to wake from awful dreams--and the book lay open before me, at the last page where was written 'Finis.' I had strange feelings."

"You speak my experience." (Ch. XXXIII, p. 662-64)

Robert's description of his condition as "unmanned" (p. 664), his belief that there is "nothing for it, after such exhaustion, but decline" (p. 663), usually a feminine condition, and the words he uses to describe his state of mind, "dark, barren, impotent," words which not only describe Caroline's mind after Robert's rejection of her, but in their associations, the experience of all unmarried, uncourted women, suggest that Robert's illness acts in part as a metaphor for women's situation. Martin predicts the effect of the condition in which Robert is kept:

"He is . . . as ill-used as ever--mewed up, kept in solitary confinement. They mean to make either an idiot or a maniac of him, and take out a commission of lunacy." (Ch. XXXIV, p. 674)

The product of these conditions, which society makes permanent for many women, then, is either an idiot or a maniac. Earlier in the novel, we have been told that even "the acutest men" see a woman either as an "angel" ("told she is an angel but treated as an idiot," [Ch. VII, p. 130]) or a "fiend" (Ch. XX, p. 395).

Although Caroline gains from Robert's loss, her gain is in his knowing what it is like to be "mewed up" in solitary confinement. Previously, the Moore's maid, Sarah, has referred to Caroline as "mewed up" (Ch. VI, p. 94). Robert's sentence, which unlike Caroline's is justified, is short; he has to wait only a month, whereas Caroline has to wait "till events offer other occupations for me" (Ch. V, p. 81), till, that is, she is married.

The wounded Robert, who is harsh to his workers and cruel to Caroline, is first described as a "tall, straight shape prostrated in its pride" (Ch. XXVII, p. 639). This description makes vivid the picture of his physical helplessness and ineffectualness against Zillah Horsfall, "a sort of giantess" (p. 643) capable of crushing even Mrs. Yorke. But the satisfaction with Robert's punishment turns to pity as the illness is seen largely through Caroline's loving eyes. Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Horsfall--not Caroline--infantilize him: Mrs. Horsfall, who has him "at dry-nurse" (p. 643), turns him "as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle" (p. 644), calls him "honey" when he is good, and shakes him when he is bad. Caroline is therefore not implicated--even by proximity, as Jane Eyre is--in Robert's illness. Yet her account of her illness, told--superficially--more in sorrow than in anger, makes Robert wish to atone, suggesting that Caroline is being dissociated from the fulfilment of her passive aggressive fantasies, which are nevertheless achieved. Although the effects of Robert Moore's education, it is suggested by the last pages, may be transitory, they last long enough--like Puck's potions--to allow Robert to marry Caroline.

"It is queer," comments Martin Yorke after his first encounter with Caroline, "Zillah (they call her Zillah)--Zillah Horsfall is a woman, and Caroline Helstone is a woman: they are two individuals of the same species--not much alike though" (Ch. XXVII, p. 652). Among female reactions to an ill man, Zillah Horsfall's is obviously the lowest: because Robert is ill, she acquires power, both from his helplessness and from his money. Robert expresses his gratitude to Mrs. Horsfall "by the chink of his coin" (Ch. XXXV, p. 677), and she "underst[ands] this language perfectly" (p. 677). The kiss that Robert offers Mrs. Yorke is her reward. Her affection for him derives from his total dependency, and Robert is careful to preserve her sense of omnipotence: he kisses her daughters when

she cannot see, knowing that "it was not in their mother's nature to bear to see any living thing caressed but herself" (Ch. XXXV, p. 678).

Caroline's love for Robert and care for him is offset by Mrs. Horsfall's and by Mrs. Yorke's to suggest that in comparison it is neither exploitative, nor neurotic, nor malign, although she--like they--gains from his helplessness. Through pathology, Charlotte Brontë describes by contrast the normal relationship between care and dependency and love.

Whereas illness makes Robert Moore ineffectual, it gives Caroline Helstone power. Although initially Caroline's physical incapacity seems to dramatize the condition of her life--through it she acts out her starvation, isolation, hopelessness, and weakness--her illness in fact brings her attention, purpose, and power. On the day that Caroline falls ill, her "cheeks seemed rosier and fuller than usual" and "her spirits were raised" (Ch. XXIII, p. 474). These are the symptoms that the cultural essayist Susan Sontag has described as the classically "deceptive" symptoms of tuberculosis, "liveliness that comes from enervation, rosy cheeks that look like a sign of health but come from fever."²⁵ Caroline is an appropriate candidate for an illness which Sontag describes (and Charlotte Brontë's portraits bear out the description) as "celebrated as the disease of born victims, of sensitive, passive people who are not quite life-loving enough to survive" (p. 24):

"I think I grow what is called nervous. I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do. I have fears I never used to have--not of ghosts, but of omens--disastrous events; and I have an inexpressible weight on my mind which I would give the world to shake off, and I cannot do it." (Ch. XIII, p. 270)

In her illness, Caroline is the representative of a class of "sensitive, passive people," that is, of women. Even with the attention of her uncle and Mrs. Pryor, Caroline still wishes to "shut out the world and sun, of

which she was tired" (Ch. XXIV, p. 478); in reply to Mrs. Pryor's question, "Do you wish to live?", Caroline answers, "I have no object in life" (p. 486). Mrs. Pryor's consequent revelation that she is Caroline's mother makes it clear that it is not Robert's rejection of Caroline's affection in itself that makes Caroline say this, but that the removal of a love which she saw as the solution to the purposelessness of her life reveals again her life's pointlessness.

The Times wrote of Caroline's illness, "Disappointed love never in its bitterest working perpetrated a hundredth part of the mischief produced in the delicate form of Caroline Helstone."²⁶ It is not only mischief that is produced: through her illness, Caroline Helstone finds both a means of revenge and an object in life. Unlikely to commit suicide through direct action, the Victorian woman dissatisfied with life had nothing to do but wait. If she had tried to die the death that is currently imagined as the typical death of female protest--anorexia nervosa--she would, ironically, have been prevented from achieving even this: consumption would have probably killed her first. Apart from this inaccuracy, the "anorexic" readings of Caroline's illness correctly emphasize Caroline's control over it, but they do not take the matter far enough.²⁷ By controlling her body, by consenting to her illness, Caroline can control others. In a society in which overt protest is impossible, her illness is a means of sedition.

A decline is the logical conclusion of the "stillness" that society admires in women. In Shirley, this ideal is represented by Mary Cave, "stillness personified" (Ch. IV, p. 60), who is described tellingly as being "beautiful as a monumental angel" (Ch. IV, p. 61), and whom both men of the older generation wished to marry. Pygmalion, another man who liked only women made from stone, was motivated by his disgust at the sexuality of the Propoetides. He is a figure whose story haunts the relations between the sexes in Shirley; it is implied in Robert's power to bring

Caroline to life and mentioned by Shirley, who accuses Louis of having the contrary gift. The other parts of the myth have an application which is equally suggestive. As the sculptor, Pygmalion was the man who made the woman in stone, and his work was prompted by his distaste for female sexuality without love. What he created, consequently, was a woman without sexuality but also without life, whose life depended on his bestowing a kiss. She has life only through his love. Deprived of love, Caroline's life is threatened and she threatens to end it. By becoming ill, Caroline turns the social demand for feminine passivity into a weapon against society.

Both mothers (and this is perhaps why there are so few in Brontë's novels, which examine modes--albeit subterranean--of female activity) and men demand passivity; in her illness, Caroline has both obeying her commands and responding to her needs. Mr. Helstone brews her tea, feeds her from his plate when she asks him to, promises her partridge, and even hugs her and calls her "bairnie" (Ch. XXIV, p. 496). Caroline says to Mrs. Pryor before her identity is revealed: "I shall hardly wish to get well, that I may keep you always" (p. 475); and after the revelation, Caroline's requests provoke this response: "Oh Caroline! it is well you are gentle. You will say to me go, and I shall go; come, and I shall come; do this, and I shall do it" (p. 491). Illness seems a return to the promise of love and care that infancy holds. Becoming ill is not only, as Sontag has written, "a way of retiring from the world without having to take responsibility for the decision" (p. 33); illness makes a complaint in an extreme form against the world which radically alters the patient's relationship to it, but by doing so facilitates a return to it. From the headache to the suicidal act, illness is, in Freud's terms, a regression in the service of the ego, an act through which the weak can wield power, if only in the potentially



tyrannical licence accorded invalids. Louis becomes ill, it seems, in order that one scene can take place, a scene in which he can assert power over Shirley:

"Henry, give me some water."

"Let me give it to him."

But he half rose to take the glass from young Sympson, and declined her attendance.

"And I can do nothing?"

"Nothing." (Ch. XXVII, p. 543)

"I have brought you some grapes: can you taste one?"

"No: but I thank you for remembering me."

"Just one."

From the rich cluster that filled a small basket held in her hand, she severed a berry and offered it to his lips. He shook his head, and turned aside his flushed face. (p. 541)

The Times complains that the "author has but one prescription for all her lovers" and that after Louis' fever "we are all left just as forward as we found ourselves before the fever came on."²⁸ In this short illness, however, there are subtle but important changes in Shirley and Louis' relationship.

Pity, fear, and guilt prompt the attention to the heroine in decline. They render her prostration compelling, her non-activity powerful, and her extreme muteness articulate. The decision to give way to illness, therefore, effectively transforms others' neglect into concern and turns the patient into the focus of attention. What begins as an admission of an inability to control, an abdication of responsibility for oneself, and a demand to be taken care of has the potential for realigning the world to resemble more nearly one's ideal. Going into a decline becomes, in fact, a decisive act, one of the few available to women without property. Even though Caroline cannot declare, "I care for myself," like Jane Eyre (and one feels like Shirley could had she decided to do so instead of deliberately not to), her decline is presented as a tribute to the strength

of her love, rather than evidence of her weakness. Instead of criticizing her mother, Caroline's illness comments on social forces, in the shape of her uncle, the Rector, which deny her anything in life apart from food, clothes, and a home:

"And the reason of it all? That's the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear, as usual." (Ch. XI, p. 212)

The novelist who "invokes" illness, so it has been claimed, "is in a sense . . . confessing failure, his art cannot record the emotional or moral turmoil that his story has generated . . . In a literary context it is insufficiently expressive."²⁹ In Caroline Helstone's story, illness, on the contrary, provides the means of expression; it permits a release for the repression that society expects of ladies. In fact, its "insufficiency" in its literary context (that is, its failure to record the emotional turmoil generated), parallels the insufficiency that real-life "metaphorical" illness--a psychosomatic illness--represents, and as it does so it makes the metaphor paradoxically expressive in that it is a sign of an inability to express. For Caroline, illness means the loss of "healthy self-possession and self-control" (Ch. XXIV, p. 479): her illness is the giving way to the misery that she must conceal at all other times. If a character cannot be active, then she will be active in metaphor; some metaphors have real consequences. Illness is this character's (as Henry James claimed it is the novelist's) "very shortest of all cuts to the interesting state."³⁰

Shirley also thinks that strength is the ability to conceal; she tells herself, "If you must tremble--tremble in secret!" (Ch. XXVIII, p. 564). But Shirley's body, like Caroline's, grows thinner and paler and plainer, expressing her agitation. Caroline's body almost gives way to her misery at Robert's treatment; Shirley's to the control that she imposes on

herself, in this case by the refusal to share her fears. Caroline is brought to life by Robert, and when Robert rejects her she nearly dies. Shirley, however, is just turned to stone by what she takes to be Louis' indifference:

"One man in times of old, it is said, imparted vitality to the statue he had chiselled. Others may have the contrary gift of turning life to stone." (p. 557)

Though Shirley may "refuse . . . to mope shut up between four walls" (p. 564) and rides each day away, seeking out "the wilder solitude" (p. 564), hers is Caroline's reaction turned inside out. Caroline is confined but wild inside. Shirley's emotions are controlled but she is free to come and go and do as she likes. Caroline does not matter to herself because she matters to no-one; Shirley is unable to admit that she matters to anyone but herself; to Louis' assertion that she has changed, she replies, "That matters to none but myself" (p. 574). (Caroline looks in mirrors; Shirley stands by windows.) The discussion of her feared illness--in which she could not, as she does here, waste away unattended--creates a conduit for admitting needs which otherwise, like Caroline, but for different reasons, she must conceal:

[Louis] "I remember listening the whole time we sat at luncheon, to hear if you moved in the room above: all was quiet."

"I was sitting at the foot of the bed, wishing Phoebe had not bitten me."

"And alone! You like solitude."

"Pardon me."

"You disdain sympathy."

"Do I, Mr. Moore?"

"With your powerful mind, you must feel independent of help, of advice, of society." (pp. 579-80)

and later,

"In fact, I am neither so strong, nor have I such pride in my strength as people think, Mr. Moore; nor am I so regardless of sympathy." (p. 583)

Shirley's role as a "woman of spirit" is thus enabled to include her love for Louis rather than conflict with it.

Shirley cannot acknowledge her "illness" (a state, as Caroline's illness has shown, in which issues of weakness, dependence, and independence are worked out), but rabies, which she fears Phoebe's bite has given her, is one of the few imaginable illnesses it is impossible to defy for long. Rabies would make Shirley absolutely powerless--unlike a decline which has strategic advantages--while it suggests, at the same time, power gone mad. In a decline, the patient-sufferer-victim rejects the actual food given in the absence of emotional nourishment; in rabies, or hydrophobia, the victim is terrified of liquids and has difficulty swallowing them but nevertheless craves them, as Shirley both fears and craves Louis' love.

If she were to be affected by rabies, Shirley, usually so in command, would run out of control in a spectacular way. In this illness, the independent heiress would be immediately at the mercy of her relations. Stripped by illness of the privileges of control that an heiress may exert, Shirley would be in the position of dependence that most women inhabit. She then imagines, as those other women would, rescue from this state by a man. The illness therefore corrects her advantage, an advantage which in terms of society is in fact a handicap to marriage with the man she loves. The illness functions, then, as metaphor, but it offers both diagnosis and therapy; it does not, as Spacks writes, suggest "that every woman is after all a fool," and neither is it simply a "gambit . . . contrived to demonstrate Louis' power."³¹

Shirley's illness is created by the fear of a worse illness, and the

symptoms of her induced illness--depression, restlessness, malaise--are also the symptoms that herald hydrophobia, just as her withdrawal from Louis is caused by the suspicion that her power is destructive. Its two stages, the actual and the imagined illness, are the obverse of Caroline's and Robert's illnesses. Caroline's illness is an inability to control her feelings and her life any longer, whereas Shirley's is caused by the rigidity of her self-control. Robert's illness, caused by violence, makes him absolutely powerless; Shirley, turned violent in illness, would become demonically powerful. Illness in Shirley, far from being a mere "trick . . . of the trade,"³² is the physical expression of psychic complaints; its physical effects prompt a change in the patient's relationships and in their friend's perceptions of them, which affects, in turn, the complaint itself. These episodes of illness, like those of eating, provide a forum for women to exert control over their lives without violating social mores; similarly, the episodes' observance of the conventions of realism allows the expression of the romantic will.

v

Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old; and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced. Before that time, we sit listening to a tale, a marvellous fiction; delightful sometimes, and sad sometimes; almost always unreal. Before that time, our world is heroic; its inhabitants half-divine or semi-demon; its scenes are dream-scenes; darker woods and stranger hills; brighter skies, more dangerous waters; sweeter flowers, more tempting fruits; wider plains, drearier deserts, sunnier fields than are found in nature, overspread our enchanted globe. What a moon we gaze on before that time! How the trembling of our hearts at her aspect bears witness to its unutterable beauty! As to our sun, it is a burning heaven--the world of gods.

At that time--at eighteen, drawing near the confines of illusive, void dreams, Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front. These shores are yet distant: they look so blue, soft, gentle, we long to reach them. In sunshine we see a greenness beneath the azure, as of spring meadows; we catch glimpses of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters. Could we but reach this land, we think to hunger and thirst no

more: whereas wilderness, and often the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as Death, is said to be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. (Ch. VII, p. 109)

Shirley attempts "the true narrative of life." But like Caroline Helstone, who is also about to enter an adult world, it is poised between "the world of gods," "the heroic world," and "the shores of Reality." Its indecision records both a moment in literary history and in social history. Shirley is committed to the ordinary, to the accurate reflection of middle-class life, to "the drama . . . of the thousand moral situations, the thousand infinitesimal feelings and sweet passions which slowly intertwine and grow out of the least incidents."³³ But it is also committed to the tradition of the novel as agent of reconciliation, whose impetus is to bind society's inharmonious parts into a whole and reassert--usually through redefinition--the social forms. To allow Caroline's primary tuberculosis to develop into progressive and fatal pulmonary tuberculosis would be to leave an unacceptably bleak vision of woman's lot--unacceptable, that is, because so blatantly and finally bleak. But Caroline's death is more probable than her mother's reappearance, which is a romantic device used to promote a reconciliation. In Shirley, the two aims of representation--the picture of a wilderness including sorrow and death--and that of reconciliation--the "marvellous fiction" in which the end of the tale must mirror the promise of heaven at the end of our lives--conflict. What is the consequence of this conflict on Charlotte Brontë's deployment of the inherited convention of marriage at the ending? Do the marriages enact a reconciliation or is the convention used in name only as a subversion?

Charlotte Brontë's novel about the condition of women in England declares the suspicion that women's dreams are "illusive, void"; but Shirley seems to embody conflicts about the significance of that finding. Its conclusion, forecasted by the placing of the story thirty-seven years

back, appears to be that a woman's happiness lies in the suppression of a large part of herself in marriage (at least at that time--Rose Yorke's career suggests otherwise), that her best possible fate is to occupy, as Shirley and Caroline do, the typical role of the upper-middle-class wife of teaching Sunday school and laying foundation stones.³⁴ Robert's prophecy that Shirley (a woman whom he considers to be "jealous of compromising her pride, of relinquishing her power, of sharing her property" [Ch. XXXV, p. 686]) will teach in a day school seems more like the promise of penance--the price of her assertion--than of a fulfilling career. From having occupied the centre of the stage, Shirley and Caroline, like *Hermia* and *Helena*, are relegated in the final act to a silent presence, while the men make "a great stir" (Ch. XXXVII, p. 740). Just as the passages that make a protest about this condition--for example, the passage on "how to endure without a sob," which is, in fact, a long wail, and the passages that record Shirley's visions--draw attention to themselves, the disproportion between the promise of Shirley's character and her fate draws attention to itself, suggesting the inadequacy of marriage.³⁵ Caroline's wail and Shirley's dreams, because they are in such obvious conflict with the ending, speak across its silence.

Yet, perhaps like the other silences of this novel, this silence too is equivocal. Perhaps, like *Isabella's* silence at the Duke's proposal, Shirley's final silence may be a consent to her situation. Spoken consent would compromise her former position. The point of Shirley's last reported words is to reassert her power in the face of facts:

A remark she made a year afterwards proved that she partly also acted on system. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier." (p. 730)

At the same time, these words are a reminder of the subterranean exercise

of power on the part of women which counters the open practice of power on the part of men and in doing so maintains an equality that allows for the coexistence of sovereign and premier. Shirley's marriage is significant as it seems to offer an opportunity to examine female motivation in a form which is not grossly determined by economic necessities. But an examination discovers in Shirley "a bondswoman" (Ch. XXXV, p. 689) and "a fellow-slave" (p. 689) for Caroline, whose dependence on men is absolute; the implication is that there is in women a will to be mastered, and the existence of this psychological drive is borne out in the sado-masochistic fantasies of "John Henry," possibly an embryonic version of Shirley.³⁶ This discovery conveniently justifies the preservation of the status quo.

A look at the workers in Shirley, with whom the women are implicitly compared throughout, might offer an insight. The nineteenth-century novel inevitably reflects the two key social and political issues of the time--the Woman Question and class conflict. Jane Austen's novels question neither the place of women nor the class structure. Shirley, a novel about the condition of women, is also about the Luddite riots. The fate of the workers and the women is linked in their dependence on middle-class men (this is seen most clearly in Caroline Helstone's story). The fullest description of the position of women takes place among Caroline, Shirley, William Farren, and Joe Scott--all disenfranchised--and the Biblical texts of this chapter ("Which the Genteel Reader is Recommended to Skip, Low Persons Being Here Introduced") are the story of Eve and St. Paul's defence of the subjection of women. These precepts on which society is founded are discussed by these four, significantly, outside the church of which the misogynist Mr. Helstone is incumbent and from whose pulpit, the arrogant Mr. Donne is preaching. Instead of going inside the church, Shirley has decided to "stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature" (Ch. XVIII, p. 361). Only among such an audience is open defiance safe.

Shirley says to Caroline, "Cary, we are alone: we may speak what we think" (p. 359), and then declaims an alternative to Eve. Her visions are first undercut by Caroline and then disputed by the workers. The male position is made ridiculous in the mouth of Joe Scott; however, Shirley's victory under such conditions is compromised. Yet in this conversation, the workers feel free to express resentment to the "inferior" women, and the women feel free to express resentment to the "inferior" workers. The pathos lies in the fact that these antagonists have a common enemy.

Within Shirley's social order, the survival of the workers, like that of the women, depends on the existence--and the concern of--masters. Part of the novel is given over to the violence of the relationship between the workers and their master. There is even a battle at the mill. Yet Charlotte Brontë suggests that the workers enjoy the antagonism: "There is nothing," she writes, "the lower orders like better than a little downright, good-humoured rating" (Ch. XX, p. 399). Like Shirley and Louis' relationship, that of the workers and the middle-class is conceived in sado-masochistic terms. The suggestion, which would fit in with Charlotte Brontë's politics, is that masters are essential to the economy, that the arrangement tolerates "playful" antagonism, acting as a release for the potentially destructive hostility, and that the male's formal power is counterbalanced by the women "acting" in subterranean ways--through periphrasis, food, and illness--which conform on the surface.

The same dynamics operate in Charlotte Brontë's relationship to her writing. In Jane Eyre, Brontë is able to present the history of a woman who rebelled against the passivity enforced at Gateshead Hall and took control of her own life: the novel incarnates her vision of all the things denied her as a woman and as an orphan. Yet critics objected both to the improbability of the plot and to Jane's impropriety. Shirley, Charlotte

Brontë's second published novel, is marred by too close an attention to the criticism that Jane Eyre received. Responding to the opinion of the establishment, Charlotte Brontë, like a good girl, tries in Shirley for a natural, probable, and proper story. The novel is the product of an imagination confined by and in conflict with an alien poetics which is itself the product of a society hostile to women. Written in a genre that mirrors the stasis and confinement of women's lives, Shirley observes the ways in which women counter the prohibition on directing their own lives. In her use of periphrasis and of the metaphors of food and illness, Charlotte Brontë (like the workers and the women) both subverts and reasserts the conventions of this borrowed form.

Notes

¹ My title is taken from a contemporary review by William Howitt in Standard of Freedom, 10 (November 1849); rpt. in Allott, p. 133. All quotations from Shirley are taken from the Clarendon Edition, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Chapter and page numbers will be given in the text.

² Robert B. Heilman, p. 119.

³ Jacob Korg, "The Problem of Unity in Shirley," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 12 (1958), 130.

⁴ W. A. Craik, The Brontë Novels (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 130; Lawrence Jay Dessner, The Homely Web of Truth (The Hague--Paris: Mouton, 1975), pp. 85,88.

⁵ Lewes, p. 160.

⁶ Dessner, p. 88.

⁷ Myths of Power, p. 86.

⁸ Eugène Forçade, rev. of Shirley, p. 143.

⁹ Jane Eyre is a special case. Her fantasy (her life) subverts rather than transcends these conditions: Jane gains dominance rather than independence. Writing in The Guardian, 28 November, 1978, Emma Tennant complained, "I don't think we have yet arrived at the heroine who can do what she wants and get away with it--there are always repressions" ("Feminists Turn to Fiction" p. 11). When Jane Eyre ends, Jane has everything she wants, and that is why the novel can end.

¹⁰ My comparison is not entirely whimsical: the writing of Shirley followed a series of letters between Charlotte Brontë and G. H. Lewes in which Lewes advises Brontë to read Jane Austen. Despite complaining that Jane Austen is "more real than true" (18 January 1848) and that she would "hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant and confined houses" (12 January 1848), Brontë writes, "I think too I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's 'mild eyes'; to finish more, and be more subdued" (12 January 1848), British Library MS. 39, 763.

¹¹ Fraser's Magazine, 40 (1849); rpt. in Allott, p. 153.

¹² LL: III, 12.

¹³ The act is both sensuous (so the passage suggests) and subversive.

¹⁴ Not only do the events of Shirley observe the conventions of realism, but there are also frequent and overt declarations on its realism, beginning on the first page: "If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you reader, you never were more

mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have to work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto" (Ch. I, p. 7).

¹⁵ Anne W. Passel, "The Three Voices in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley," Brontë Society Transactions, 79 (1969), 323-26; Margot Peters, Style in the Novel (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973); Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 140-47; Gilbert and Gubar.

¹⁶ Communities of Women (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978). Auerbach quotes from the Quarterly Review's attack on Jane Eyre: "If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex" (p. 176). A letter from Charlotte Brontë to her editor, W. S. Williams, suggests its rarity in life: "You allude to the subject of female friendship and express wonder at the infrequency of sincere attachments amongst women--As to married women, I can well understand that they should be absorbed in their husbands and children--but single women often like each other much and derive great solace from their mutual regard. Friendship however is a plant which cannot be forced--true friendship is no gourd springing in a night and withering in a day" (3 January 1850), LL. III, 512.

¹⁷ For Caroline, Shirley has the mystery, the "otherness," generally associated with men. She is a "real enigma" (Ch. XXVI, p. 523). Her mystery, and with it the intensity of Caroline's attraction, disappears in the scene that Caroline describes to Robert. Because the scene takes place off-stage, the sense of that intensity does not disappear altogether, surviving in the final description of the fascination that Shirley has for others: "She had e'en that pierced a body through" (Ch. XXXVII, p. 740). In Jane Eyre, Rochester and Jane seem at their most intimate and collaborative when Rochester is dressed as a female gypsy.

¹⁸ Caroline's declaration has also persuaded critics. Charles B. Burkhardt writes that, "it is unbelievable that Caroline is not jealous" (Charlotte Brontë, London, Victor Gollancz, 1973, p. 81); and G. H. Lewes that "what is more incredible still, Caroline--who believes that Moore loves Shirley and will marry her--never once feels the sharp and terrible pangs of jealousy! . . . Caroline Helstone merely bows her head in meakness, and loves and clings to Shirley all the more; never has even a moment's rebellion against her, and behaves like pattern young ladies in 'good books'!" (p. 166).

¹⁹ See Shirley (Ch. VII, p. 117): "A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery . . . You expect bread, and you have got a stone; break you teeth on it . . . you held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion." The passage is another example of poetry being used to express rebellion in spite of the constraints of reality: it advises silence and yet is a passionate complaint.

20 In Daniel Deronda, Rex's mother says of Gwendolen, "I cannot help thinking that she must have made him believe something, or the disappointment would not have taken hold of him in that way" (Ch. 8, p. 116).

21 In the novels that this study considers, Louis Moore is the only official "tutor" to a heroine who later becomes her wife, but the role is characteristic of courtship, perhaps even identifying the relationship as such. Louis Moore wishes to be "first, tutor then husband" (Ch. XXIV, p. 702) to his imagined orphan. Jane Eyre calls Rochester "my master" not just because he pays her. Daniel Deronda takes the role to its limit; he is Gwendolen's "supercilious mentor," but he does not marry her. The relationship describes relative positions of power--Shirley and Caroline, for instance, "delight to lend [William Farren] books" (Ch. XVIII, p. 364). Within Shirley, this common coin links the relations between classes to the relations between sexes; the adoption of superior and inferior positions and the system of reward and punishment which is part of teaching suggest that Charlotte Brontë conceives both the relations between the classes and those between the sexes as sado-masochistic.

22 Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), p. 45.

23 See Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 165.

24 This is another occasion when Shirley acts where Caroline would have liked to: earlier in the novel when the curates come uninvited to tea at the Rectory, Mr. Donne offends Caroline: "The meal . . . would have been over long ago, if Mr. Donne had not persisted in sitting with his cup half full of cold tea before him, long after the rest had finished . . . He seemed to think that this isolated position gave him somehow a certain Importance . . . think[ing] it much to his credit that a party should thus be kept dependent on his movements" (Ch. VII, p. 132).

25 Susan Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 12.

26 The Times (7 December 1849); rpt. in Allott, p. 149.

27 See, for example, Gilbert and Gubar, p. 380.

28 The Times, Allott, p. 151.

29 Michael Irwin, "Readings of Melodrama" (article in MS).

30 The Art of the Novel, p. 289.

31 Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 86.

32 The Times, Allott, p. 151.

33 Eugène Forçade's description of domestic realism. Allott, p. 145.

34 The contemporary critic Fonblanque saw in these marriages "a rational acquiescence in the inevitable tendencies of society" but "suspect[ed] that this acquiescence . . . [was] reluctant." Albany Fonblanque, The Examiner (3 November 1849); rpt. in Allott, pp. 128-29.

³⁵ Robert B. Heilman also comments on Charlotte Brontë's use of the convention: "Before Charlotte, no love story tapped such strange depths, no consummation was so like defeat" (p. 126).

³⁶ See the Introduction to the Clarendon Edition of Shirley, pp. xiii-iv; "John Henry" is the story of a pair of brothers called Moore, one of whom is a mill-owner.

Chapter Four

Middlemarch

. . . the barren selfish soul laid bare, no longer a fascinating secret, but a measured fact, urging itself perpetually on my sight."¹

If Jane Eyre and Shirley counterstate reality, Middlemarch states it; it accepts the "imperfect social state"² (Finale, p. 896). Yet, it resembles Charlotte Brontë's novels in looking at the ways the self, especially the female self, can tell upon the world. Shirley is a story in which female action is covert but effective; Middlemarch, on the other hand, recounts a history of failures, in which actions are constantly thwarted. Action no longer operates subversively through metaphor; it has moved to the level of plot. Characters' literal actions no longer simply have figurative purposes.

In Shirley, women control their lives through the rhetorical strategy of periphrasis, and the metaphorical strategies of eating and illness. The codes of conversation are intended for interpretation, and the interpretations are successful. Everyone understands everyone else too well. In Middlemarch, however, though language is clear enough the characters misunderstand each other--each being "a cluster of signs for his neighbours' false suppositions" (Ch. 15, p. 171). And though there are several dinners held in Middlemarch, these are occasions for the conversational exchange of opinion and information and are without symbolic intent. The power that food represents in Shirley appears as money in Middlemarch. (The only food that is mentioned in the novel is the apple-puff that distracts Ben Garth from his lessons and the soup that Mr.

Casaubon offends Celia by eating.³⁾ No-one falls strategically ill. Illness is no longer under the control of the characters; rather, it returns to the author's arsenal of punishments. The people who fall ill in Middlemarch--with the exception of Raffles, who dies, and Rosamond Vincy, who miscarries---are curiously those who have large amounts of money, those, that is, whose capacity for action is the greatest--Casaubon, Featherstone, and Bulstrode--as if the author wishes to limit their activity. Issues of dependency and control that were played out symbolically in Shirley are expressed directly in action.

Characters no longer act through metaphor; women no longer act subterraneanly. Even Rosamond Vincy's subversive behaviour takes place on the level of plot. Furthermore, metaphors of acting abound, clustering around the female characters, which in itself suggests that there are new possibilities for women, either for significant activity or for self-display. Middlemarch is conceived as a drama; its author, like Fielding, is the presenter of the play, bringing her "arm-chair to the proscenium" (although the arm-chair, she claims, is a "camp-stool" and the theatre, a "parrot-house" (Ch. 15, p. 170).⁴ This vision of the world as a stage is not only manifest in the passages that reflect on the writing of the novel; the metaphors of the novel itself frequently draw on drama: "Destiny stands by sarcastic with our dramatis personae folded in her hand" (Ch. 11, p. 122); and the particular faults of our "valued friends" are spoken of as "filling up parts in very various dramas" (Ch. 15, p. 179). Eliot conceptualizes like a playwright; she turns her people around to look at them from different points of view, against different backgrounds, aiming at the seeming objectivity of the theatre rather than the partiality of a narrator. Like Lydgate with his microscope, she "provisionally fram[es her] object and correct[s] it to a more exactness of relation" (Ch. 16, p.

194), shifting points of view (from Dorothea, for example, to Casaubon as she comments "but why always Dorothea?" [Ch. 29, p. 312], or from Lydgate to Rosamond "Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond!" [Ch. 16, p. 195]) and holding up her characters against different backgrounds. Dorothea is seen against Celia, against Casaubon, against Lydgate, against Will, against Rosamond, and against Rome (where she stands by a statue of the reclining Ariadne near Will and the artist Naumann, who looks at her as at a tableau vivant).

The purpose of these different scenarios is to see how the lines fall when the candle is held up to the pier-glass in different places. Farebrother seen at home, for example, "seem[s] to wear rather a changed aspect, as most men do when acquaintances made elsewhere see them for the first time in their own homes; some indeed showing like an actor of genial parts disadvantageously cast for the curmudgeon in a new piece" (Ch. 17, p. 198). George Eliot's metaphors themselves operate as a change of scenery: "It is astonishing," she remarks in The Mill on the Floss, "what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor," and concludes, "we can seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else."⁵ The purpose behind this panorama of points of view, achieved through changes of background, shifts from character to character, and the piling of metaphor on metaphor, is the countering of egoism. It is also a technique which defends the author; its multiplicity not only provides overwhelming evidence for any assertion, but it also makes it difficult to discern--in order to attack--any one view.

In its implied analogy with drama, Middlemarch claims for the novel (after over a century of the novel's being treated as an inferior form) the territory of literature's highest forms: tragedy and epic. Epic has become "home epic" and tragedy is located not in the magnitude of an action but in its "frequency" (Ch. 20, p. 226). Its "novelistic form" is not only

as Richard Poirier says, "designed slowly and relentlessly to impose the domestication of life on everyone,"⁶ (from the men, like Casaubon, Lydgate, and Bulstrode, who wish to claim an "epic life" to the women who cannot), but also domesticates tragedy and epic. Similarly, Jane Eyre imprisons Rochester in Ferndean and presses romance into the service of the bourgeois idyll which Ferndean represents. Tragedy is located in the ordinary human lot in a story in which "everything is below the level of tragedy except the passionate egoism of the sufferer" (Ch. 42, p. 460). The histories that Middlemarch presents--of Dorothea, Casaubon, and Will; and Will, Rosamond, and Lydgate--are the life-sized dramas of the suffering ego. This novel transmutes not romance, like Shirley, but tragedy; it stakes a larger claim.

Not only are the characters of Middlemarch imagined as characters in a drama but the language that is used to describe them or describe how they imagine themselves and others draws on dramatic terminology. The metaphor is seen in the simple naming of thought as "inward drama" (Ch. 64, p. 710), in Will's "mak[ing] scenes of what would happen in church and coming out" (Ch. 47, p. 512), in the capacity of memory to edit as the capacity to "shift[. . .] its scenery like a diorama" (Ch. 53, p. 566). The effect is to reinforce--what we are being told as we move from self to "equivalent centre of self" (Ch. 21, p. 243)--that the play running in one's head might be just that, a play, without reference to actuality. The solipsistic ego sees itself as actor and its acquaintances either as supporting cast or as audience. This is the attitude of the egoist Casaubon. It is also that of Rosamond, around whom these acting images cluster, who produces not a manuscript but herself: in Will's presence, Rosamond has a

sense of romantic drama which Lydgate's presence had no longer the magic to create . . . She constructed a little romance which was to vary the flatness of her life: Will Ladislaw was always

to be a bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes. (Ch. 75, p. 810)

Will, too, is touched by egoism; but he is more likely to see himself as the victim rather than as the controller of events. He is "continually creating collisions for [himself] in dramas which nobody is prepared to act with [him]" (Ch. 19, p. 223). When Dorothea, on the other hand, whose suppression of self is frequently brought to the reader's attention, thinks of the Lydgates' marriage, it seems like

a drama to her, and made her eyes bright, and gave an attitude of suspense to her whole frame, though she was only looking out from the brown library on to the turf and the bright green buds which stood in relief against the dark evergreens. (Ch. 76, p. 818)

These metaphors of acting seek a distinction between the wish to act beneficently, through work which "men are the better for" (Ch. 56, p. 596), and the wish to act for the purposes of self-display. In envisioning the operations of the ego in terms of the theatre, George Eliot examines the nature of our actions, distinguishing between the displays of a self which sees the world as its audience and the actions of a self (like Dorothea's) motivated by a recognition of others. George Eliot's insistence on the need for such a distinction informs her treatment of women's aspirations to an "epic life" (Prelude, p. 25); it also informs her writing in indirect ways.

In Middlemarch, characters no longer act through metaphor: the will, which in Shirley can only operate subterraneanly, has come to the surface to test out its actions in terms of plot. Middlemarch considers what happens when women try to take control of their lives. There is still subversive behaviour--which one might claim is the inevitable effect of female powerlessness. When her dependency on her husband's economic

situation takes control of her life away from her, Rosamond Vincy acts through subterfuge to try to take it back. After the close of the novel, she continues to "frustrate him by stratagem" (Finale, p. 893), in order to lead--from her point of view--a successful life. Although her behaviour is judged wanting by contrast to that of the other dependents in the novel--Mrs. Garth, Mrs. Bulstrode, Mary Garth, and Dorothea--the portrait of Rosamond does more than merely denounce Rosamond's Machiavellian tactics: it demonstrates, rather, the futility of her education--both in and of itself and as a method by which to subordinate women. And as it does so--the subtle effect of multiple plots--it argues Dorothea's case. While Dorothea and Rosamond both wish to escape from the restrictive conditions of their single lives, and both imagine escape to be possible through their husbands, Rosamond wishes to bend the world to her will while Dorothea wishes to affect the world beneficently.⁷

I

Middlemarch explores the interrelationship of women's actions, women's education, and men's authority. The subject is treated directly in Dorothea's history but also indirectly in the story of Lydgate's failure, which is seen as a consequence of man's false definition of woman, of his circumscribing of her education and of her activity. The fates of the male cast subserve this explication: Eliot's men are mostly sacrificed to points she wishes to make about women. Even Fred Vincy, the successful proprietor of Stone Court and the (uncelebrated) author of the Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle-Feeding, lives, one infers, very much under Mary's thumb. In Shirley, on the other hand, the success of women's lives depends on that of men's. The fear that informs Charlotte Brontë's authorial decisions is that men can act and women cannot: if

things do not work out in England, men can go abroad to lead successful lives. Men can escape from women, and might be planning to do so. This fear, which is hysterical in its extremity, is nearly under control in Villette when Brontë almost allows us to believe that Paul Emanuel will come back from abroad. Charlotte Brontë must plot to prevent these emigrations: once the Orders in Council are repealed, Caroline Helstone discovers (without rebuking him) that Robert Moore was packing up to go to America. The novelist has had to act to ensure Moore's successful life in order to ensure the success of Caroline's.

Charlotte Brontë's response to the oppression of women by men, which she depicts as institutionalized in marriage, is to collaborate, to wish for marriage, to turn subjection into a sado-masochistic pleasure. George Eliot's response is strikingly different. She defies oppression but denies she is doing so; she simultaneously kills her men and drenches them in compassion--a pattern of inflicting hurt and compensating with sympathy that provides both a form of control and a screen for her plotting activity.⁸ The failures of George Eliot's men often serve women's advantage. Although Lydgate's talents atrophy in London and continental bathing-places, Rosamond Vincy achieves her ambition of leaving Middlemarch. Similarly, authorial decisions seem to favour Dorothea for a time: as Carol Christ points out, Dorothea, like Eliot's other penitential heroines, never has to test her resolution because Eliot kills off Casaubon.

In her disposal of her male characters, George Eliot avenges Dorothea's failure; she also exonerates it. The relationship between the failures of the men and that of Dorothea is further obfuscated by the fact that it is George Eliot finally who arranges Dorothea's failure. While George Eliot allows neither her men nor her women to succeed, she does not excuse her women (until the end of the novel) from the "stress of action"

(Ch. 52, p. 560), a stress, as Farebrother tells Mary Garth, that is usually experienced by men and not by women.

Richard Poirier hears in Eliot's plotting "the accents of feminist revenge . . . If [the epic life] is to be denied women by force of historical circumstance, then [George Eliot] will deny it to men by novelistic arrangements."⁹ Yet this is not as simply done as Christ and Poirier suggest. While their essays usefully correct the traditional view of a uniformly sympathetic George Eliot, in isolating Eliot's vengeful plots rather than understanding those plots as a part of a whole, they deny Eliot's complexity. There is something touching as well as oppressive in the "despicable" Casaubon's rows of notebooks (Eliot, for one, was pleased when Casaubon met with sympathy¹⁰)--something heroic in Lydgate's speeches in his tragic circumstances, something pathetic as well as comic in Mr. Brooke's fear of going too much into things and in his humiliation at the hustings, and something pitiable in Mr. Bulstrode's fall. Such a contradictory response is a function of the author's determined sympathy. This sympathy is part of a dynamic of hostile assertion followed by guilty compassion--rather than simple revenge--a dynamic shared too by Dorothea. That two attitudes exist here suggests an endeavour to come to terms with the terrible destructiveness of the anger at oppression that Eliot depicts so well. It does, however, lead to contradiction. George Eliot's determination to show human relations as they are requires that she separate the strands of her complex vision into separate couples. Following Eliot's key divisions, in the first part of this chapter I shall discuss Dorothea's relationship to Casaubon and Will, and in the second part Lydgate's relationship to Rosamond, with incidental glances at Mary Garth's relationship to Fred Vincy.

Part One

"What Could She Do, What Ought She to Do?"

I

Dorothea Brooke wishes to act; she is a woman looking for a part which she fears she must also invent, a "soul . . . in [its] young nudity . . . tumbled out" (Ch. 20, p. 226) into the world and left to find its own way. The solitariness, vulnerability, and terror of her position--the anxieties of acting--are felt by Dorothea with the intensity of physical sensation that this image evokes. She is caught between the frowning, limiting audience of most of her immediate world (Casaubon, Sir James Chettam, Mrs. Cadwallader, Celia, and--when he goes into it--Mr. Brooke), who disapprove of her "ardour" for "a vague ideal" as an "extravagance," and those who condemn her "ardour for . . . the common yearning of womanhood" (Prelude, p. 25) as a lapse (chiefly Dorothea herself).

Dorothea's story illustrates the "anxieties of self-assertion" (Ch. 42, p. 462) (a phrase that the narrator uses in connection with Casaubon) from her beginnings as the architect of cottages with what she fears are incompatible stairs and fireplaces, to her later career as wife and mother, actor of the passive parts of sympathy and charity. Her history is marked (though the terms are glossed differently at different stages of her career) by a pattern of alternating advance towards action and retreat from it, which ends in her eventual surrender in marriage. The "systole and diastole" (Ch. 63, p. 690), which Lydgate (who experiments in science) says are necessary to all inquiry, are seen in Dorothea's experiments in life as they are also seen in George Eliot's "experiments in life."¹¹ Dorothea's life alternates between the "pregnant existence" imagined before her

marriage, to the withered one of her marriage to Mr. Casaubon, in whose presence even the furniture shrinks; she lives between assertion and submission, anger and guilt.

The problem of "what could she do, what ought she to do" (Ch. 3, p. 50) presents itself differently to Dorothea in her three different conditions--those of marriageable girl, wife, and widow. Although in each condition her "activity" takes a different form--whether it is building cottages, defiance of Casaubon, support of Lydgate, the wish to found a phalanstery, or marriage to Will--it is always accompanied by anxiety, partly because her activity is always more or less threatening to the social order. George Eliot adjudicates these schemes of Dorothea's--which represent the claims of progressive women--through plot. She is guided by reforming principles rather than the revolutionary principles that one might assume in a person whose own curriculum vitae was, at least, defiant.

Broadly speaking, Middlemarch argues for charitable acts on behalf of individuals but against those on an epic scale, and against the disruption of accepted authority, preferring to imagine reform through the "incalculably diffusive" (Finale, p. 896) effects of individuals. Dorothea is shown to be right in her support of Lydgate in opposition to the men--though she is made to obey their injunction to wait; but impractical in her plans for a matriarchy, "a school of industry" financed by capital raised by her private fortune.¹² The men are proved wrong in claiming that they "know the world better than [a woman] does" (Ch. 72, p. 791) as a reason for Dorothea not to act in the Lydgate case, and Dorothea is permitted to express her resentment. They are presented as right, however, in helping to look into Dorothea's epic project and advising her against it. We are not told what Dorothea feels about this since her attention is quickly turned from a suffering society to a suffering individual. She

becomes absorbed in Lydgate's misfortune and in the support of the local hospital. In short, the exercise of sympathy is promoted, but the exercise of power is discouraged.

Both as a single girl with a fortune of £700 and as a widow with control of £1,300 more, Dorothea is in a powerful position. In these circumstances, "the greatest safeguard of society and of domestic life . . . that [women's] opinions were not acted on" (Ch. 1, p. 31) is inoperative. Her "notions," therefore, are subjects of alarm. Mrs. Cadwallader, whose reverence for "birth" makes her a spokesman for the establishment, advocates restraint through matrimony, which of course deprived a woman of control over her money (and would do so until the passage in 1882 of the Married Women's Property Act).¹³

Though Dorothea has the independent income necessary to indulge her notions, her plans can only be effected through a male agent. In pursuit of her ambition, Dorothea (the narrator and Celia suggest) exploits Sir James Chettam's affection. Her "wilfulness" (Ch. 3, p. 56) here has a counterpart, perhaps, in her later blindness to Casaubon's hatred of Will. This wilfulness accommodates Dorothea's wish for self-assertion. Yet despite her delight in the planning and building of cottages, Dorothea is more typically beset by anxiety; she has had a history, as Celia often reminds her, of "treading in the wrong places" (Ch. 4, p. 59). Her anxiety appears in self-deprecating remarks--"I shall think," she says, "I am a great architect, if I have not got incompatible stairs and fireplaces" (Ch. 1, p. 37)--in her eagerness to tell Chettam that her plans are copied from a book, and in her ready self-doubt. Pleased with her cottages one moment, the next she wavers:

She constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the

classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory? (Ch. 7, p. 88)

Noting that knowledge seems to be the factor which separates men who control their own lives from women who cannot, Dorothea decides that knowledge is the solution to her problem; she seeks it, Elliot stresses, not as an accomplishment to "wear . . . loose" (Ch. 10, p. 112), but as something "to feed her action," (p. 112) "a standing-ground" (p. 88) from which she might see the correct way to be. Dorothea perceives knowledge as an external force that will not only preserve her from treading in the wrong places but will confer authority upon her actions: she considers Casaubon to be "a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed" (Ch. 2, p. 45). For Dorothea, knowledge is a magical power that will somehow spare her the pains of marking out her life, and will allay the anxieties associated with any action. Even at the end of her struggle, Dorothea feels "that there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better" (Finale, p. 893).

From the beginning of Middlemarch, Elliot emphasizes that Dorothea would serve others, but until Dorothea is educated in marriage to see the possible egoism in the wish for "higher duties" (Ch. 4, p. 64), she is treated ironically, pictured as desolated by finding the Lowick cottages in good repair. Elliot's narrative locates Dorothea's fears in Dorothea's ignorance. In juxtaposition with Lydgate's history, however, the account of Dorothea's experience identifies her ignorance and therefore those fears as an effect of male authority and control in men's exclusion of women from knowledge. Dorothea's fear of assertion, then, is a consequence of male oppression. Significantly, this is an inference that George Elliot declines to draw, avoiding defying society in words that would literally speak of

defiance. She systematically acts in the novel to prevent this inference from being drawn.

First, the plot produces Mr. Casaubon as a response to Dorothea's conjecture. This "wise man" is to be her deliverer from her "girlish subjection to her own ignorance" (Ch. 3, p. 51). Marriage--that is "the really delightful marriage . . . where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew" (Ch. 1, p. 32), presents itself as an access to male knowledge, a solution to Dorothea's psychological problem just as it is the solution to the economic problems of other heroines. Dorothea mistakenly believes that she can achieve an equality in knowledge, which she conceives of as permitting action, through an institution that is predicated socially and legally on women's subjection and consequent passivity. Gwendolen Harleth is similarly mistaken in her belief that marriage, a sign and symbol of female powerlessness, will provide her with freedom and power.¹⁴

Instead of freedom, marriage brings increased restraint. The strategy designed to allay Dorothea's self-doubt, then, inevitably ends by reinforcing it. Furthermore, marriage to one's teacher is marriage to the evidence of one's own ignorance. For Brontë's heroines, this inequality of power is a stimulus. Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar, and Lucy Snowe all yearn to display their knowledge; and in mastering it, they endeavour to master the master. Their response typifies Brontë's sado-masochistic solution to inequalities of power between the sexes. Dorothea's lessons, on the other hand, cause her to be "shocked and discouraged" (Ch. 7, p. 89). She believes not that she is treading in wrong places but that she is wrong to tread at all. And Mr. Casaubon's teaching methods seem, shall we say, conducive to that belief: his speeches on the value of the Greek accent raise in Dorothea "a painful suspicion that . . . there might be secrets not capable of explanation to a woman's reason" (p. 89). Dorothea's

exclusion from the "provinces of masculine knowledge" (p. 88) presses on her still more because it is no longer abstract but embodied in Mr. Casaubon's form. Mr. Casaubon invokes his superior wisdom to counter Dorothea's attempts at assertion. When Dorothea expresses her wish for a purposeful life in the form of an offer to help him, he says:

My love . . . you may rely upon me for knowing the times and the seasons, adapted to the different stages of a work which is not to be measured by the facile conjectures of ignorant onlookers. (Ch. 20, p. 233)

And when Dorothea pleads for reparation for Will, Casaubon replies:

You have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope. Into the question of how far conduct, especially in the matter of alliances, constitutes a forfeiture of family claims, I do not now enter. Suffice it, that you are not qualified to discriminate. (Ch. 37, p. 410)

While Dorothea has married for somewhat "theoretical" reasons, the living (more accurately dying) presence of Mr. Casaubon complicates the conclusions that she might draw from putting theory into practice. By attaching theoretical issues to people (as the novelist must), Eliot can limit the action those conclusions might suggest by invoking the claims of human fellowship.

While Eliot uses humanity to dissolve theory, Casaubon uses theory to promote his egoistic desires. He uses his claim to a greater wisdom, for instance, to justify the codicil that will limit Dorothea's choice in his successor: "In marrying Dorothea Brooke," he argues, "I had to care for her wellbeing in case of my death. But wellbeing is not to be secured by ample, independent possession of property" (Ch. 42, p. 458), and so on. Mr. Casaubon's egoism (the opposite of human fellowship) exposes his argument to attack. His behaviour identifies men's stake in sustaining women's ignorance: by basing their authority on the greater wisdom that

their wider and more thorough education was assumed to confer, men would, if that monopoly were surrendered, only be left with the less easily demonstrable claim of genetic superiority.

Dorothea's wish for masculine knowledge, then, is potentially subversive. Elliot keeps it from being actually so by the inventiveness of the plot. The subversive nature of Dorothea's wish for knowledge is demonstrated in the Casaubons' most critical quarrel. When Dorothea defies Casaubon personally, there occurs a corresponding attack on his monopoly of knowledge. In the exhilaration of her anger at Casaubon (caused by his reaction to Will's letter, a reaction which makes Casaubon seem to Dorothea "stupidly undiscerning and odiously unjust" [Ch. 29, p. 316]), Dorothea appears to acquire new knowledge: "she felt she was forming her letters beautifully, and it seemed to her that she saw the construction of the Latin she was copying, and which she was beginning to understand, more clearly than usual" (p. 317). If the defiance of authority leads to an acquisition of the knowledge on which it is based, then what would the acquisition of knowledge lead to?¹⁵

George Elliot, alert to this possible argument, acts to limit the inference which the drama she has created might justify in being drawn. She does so through Will. Dorothea's defiance of her husband--after her meeting with Will in Rome--is sponsored by Will. Casaubon believes that Will "can make [Dorothea] believe anything" (Ch. 42, p. 458). But it is not only Casaubon's jaundiced mind that links Dorothea's "rebellion" to Will. The plot, too, connects Dorothea's assertions with Will's appearances. Will's letter provokes a quarrel between the Casaubons, prompting Dorothea to accuse her husband of implying that she "consults [her] own pleasure apart from [his]" (p. 317); and Will's inheritance forms the subject of one of Dorothea's more subversive suggestions. Dorothea's

acts are in this way subtly endorsed by Will, and this pattern reveals Will's function.

Will is brought back into the story precisely when Casaubon's insecurity has first led him to insist on Dorothea's ignorance, and when by declining her help, he has prevented her from leading the life of activity that marriage to him was to have provided. Dorothea feels both useless and angry, worn down by "fits of agitation, of struggle" (Ch. 20, p. 230). By bringing on Will to tell Dorothea of the uselessness of Casaubon's work, Eliot creates a solution both to the crisis in the narrative and in the theory that the narrative incarnates.

Revolt is as unacceptable as inactivity. By imagining Will, Eliot at the same time prevents revolt and avenges Dorothea. Eliot not only suggests that if Dorothea's life is to be useless, Casaubon's will be "void" too (Ch. 21, p. 240), and that if she is not to find a "binding theory" (Ch. 10, p. 112), then neither will Casaubon find his key--the function of plotting noted by Poirier; she also provides Dorothea both with a "new motive" (Ch. 21, p. 243) of tenderness (rather than ambition) and a justification for defying Casaubon.¹⁶ George Eliot sidesteps the possibility that Dorothea will see all male assertions of superiority as unjust, making Dorothea's case against the tyranny of male learning an individual one. Dorothea is then allowed to resent Casaubon because he amounts to "bad" male knowledge: his book is of no value, amounting only to a manifestation of his will, which he will tyrannically try to force on Dorothea. Because a man exposes Casaubon's scholarship, its futility rather than its oppressiveness is stressed--after all Dorothea might just as easily have learnt German at Lausanne as not. Will, furthermore, is an exemplar of "good" male knowledge, which he is willing to share with Dorothea. Casaubon's oppressive use of a knowledge which is in itself backward and unnecessarily exclusive is countered by Will's; Dorothea is,

thus, prevented from drawing the conclusion that her experience seems to warrant.¹⁷

Casaubon's authoritarian learning is exchanged in Dorothea's mind for Will's liberal knowledge; a man who can "take the pressure of [her] thought" (Ch. 50, p. 539) is substituted for one who "dictates" to her. Will succeeds Casaubon in Rome, "the spiritual centre and interpreter of the world" (Ch. 20, p. 225). Rome is also, however, "the centre of Imperial and Papal power," and this is the Rome with which Mr. Casaubon is more closely associated. While Will is telling Dorothea of Casaubon's limitations, Casaubon himself is immured in the Vatican, home of the Holy Father, the head of a patriarchal church committed to women "learning in all subjection." Rome supplies the appropriate landscape for Dorothea's encounter with the inadequacy of Mr. Casaubon to the role she had planned for him; it makes concrete in its own "stupendous fragmentariness" (p. 224) the fragmentariness of her husband's mind.¹⁸ Having looked to Casaubon for "the binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with that amazing past" (Ch. 10, p. 112), and having imagined that he will lead her to "large vistas" (p. 228) and that with him she will "explore the sea," Dorothea finds herself, instead, confronted by the "unintelligible Rome" that Casaubon shows her. Casaubon's Rome seems to her a nightmare city "where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in a funeral procession"; she is lost among "ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither," exploring "an enclosed basin" (p. 228). Just as he used to intensify her sense of her own ignorance, Casaubon now intensifies Dorothea's alienation.

But Casaubon's Rome is not Will's Rome. Will's Rome includes "touches of incident among the poor people" (Ch. 22, p. 244). While Mr. Casaubon is immobilized in the Vatican and Dorothea has to be escorted through Rome,

Will moves about freely. George Eliot suggests through Will that Dorothea was not wrong to seek a "guide" and "interpreter"--an escort--in a man but that she was merely wrong in her choice. Just as Jane Eyre's possible choices ranged from the "bad master," St. John Rivers, to the "good master," Rochester, Dorothea's range from Casaubon to Will. But for Jane, Rochester was a real, uncoerced choice--her autobiographical self had provided her with most of the things that Jane, "disconnected, plain and poor," had once required of Rochester. George Eliot's panorama of possibilities for Dorothea excludes independence as a choice.

Even later when independence is offered unconditionally, as it were, Dorothea cannot choose it. As a widow, legally, socially, and economically free, Dorothea is made to give way once again to the anxiety that the necessity of acting (a responsibility incurred, for her, by the possession of property) causes her. Will comes to rescue Dorothea from anxiety, ignorance, and the necessity of acting. When he re-enters her life, Dorothea is struggling to "lay hold of" political economy (which might enable her to dispense with her male advisors) in order to find out "the best way of spending money so as not to injure one's neighbours" (Ch. 83, p. 863). Finding it difficult to concentrate, Dorothea turns to learn the geography of Asia Minor, part of Mr. Casaubon's knowledge, which she thinks of now as a "mere task" (p. 864). Will, who is also interested in a "settlement on a new plan" (Ch. 82, p. 859) (but in the Far West, because reforming society abroad--like Charlotte Brontë's vision of a differently constructed society--seems more practicable), can as a Reforming M.P. take on himself the burden of putting the teachings of political economy into practice. Will's knowledge, like his Rome, accommodates the poor.

Will, then, is to be Dorothea's guide and interpreter. Rome's fragmentariness, he says, "stimulate[s] his imagination and ma[kes] him constructive" (Ch. 22, p. 244); he also "puts shape" into Mr. Brooke's

documents. Will is the true owner of "the provinces of male knowledge," just as he is the rightful owner of Casaubon's other estate, Lowick. But neither Will nor Dorothea inherits estates to which they have some claim; an estate (Brooke's Tipton), however, is inherited by their son. That this inheritance is achieved and that Will and Dorothea are later accepted by the society of the provinces suggests that their ideas, too, will gain reluctant acceptance. Within the book, though, society (like many of his readers) finds it "difficult to say what Mr. Ladislav is" (Ch. 84, p. 877). One of the things Will is, however, is a reformist's solution to the Woman Question: a man who will share his knowledge with a woman and who will accept her "wifely help" (Finale, p. 894) without, presumably, turning, as Mr. Casaubon does, his wife into the slave of his egoistic projects. Where Charlotte Brontë imagines sado-masochism as a solution, George Eliot imagines symbiosis as "the lunette . . . in the wall of [the] prison" (Ch. 37, p. 396):¹⁹ Dorothea's ideas feed Will's ("Will Ladislav always seemed to see more in what she said than she herself saw" [p. 396]), and therefore find expression through him in the world--to which he has access and she does not); although the world is his kingdom, it is hers also, as she has "a little kingdom" (Ch. 37, p. 402) in his soul, and he agrees "never . . . [to] do or say what [she] would disapprove" (p. 402).²⁰

Will's status as deus ex machina underlines just how perilously close to revolt Dorothea might have been. Her outrage at her exclusion from an active life expresses itself in her attitude to culture, which is used as a metonym for male authority. Dorothea's anger here suggests perhaps that if men will not share their knowledge, then insurrection could be the consequence. That Will's role is to forestall this unacceptable chaos is suggested by the subject of their conversations. Dorothea's first words in front of Will are a description of art as "a language I do not understand"

(Ch. 9, p. 105) linking it for her with Greek, another exclusively male province. In Rome, Dorothea confesses to Will (the grandson of a man of whom we are told "he could speak many languages" [Ch. 37, p. 401]) the effect that art has on her. Her words reveal a pattern of response that is similar to the cycle of assertion and guilty submission before Casaubon's authority:

At first when I enter a room where the walls are covered with frescoes, or with rare pictures, I feel a kind of awe--like a child present at great ceremonies where there are grand robes and processions; I feel myself in the presence of some higher life than my own. But when I begin to examine the pictures one by one, the life goes out of them, or else is something violent and strange to me. It must be my own dulness. I am seeing so much all at once, and not understanding half of it. That always makes me feel stupid. It is painful to be told that anything is very fine and not be able to feel that it is fine--something like being blind, while people talk of the sky. (Ch. 21, p. 238)²¹

Dorothea's reverence for Mr. Casaubon also turns at first into intimidation; she feels that she is superfluous--"he needs me less than I need him" (Ch. 10, p. 114)--like the child at a pageant, whose only possible role is that of audience. Dorothea's scrutiny of Casaubon, like her scrutiny of the pictures, reveals his lifelessness; her exclusion from his "higher life"--"the higher duty" that she thought marriage to him would provide--causes a similar alienation, figured in the effect on her of Rome's appearance, which like the pictures is "violent and strange," jarring her "as with an electric shock" (p. 225). Dorothea's immediate response to her altered feeling for her husband is a "self-accusing cry" (p. 224), a guilty response which matches the self-blame of "it must be my own dulness." Yet as she describes this reaction, her guilt seems to turn into anger. Through the analogy, she accuses those who exclude her from this knowledge. "How dare," her words imply, "they talk of the sky when one is blind."

Dorothea's response to art and her response to the male authority

represented by this art diverge. Her habitual response to art is to counter her exclusion with self-righteousness: "It seems as if there were so many things which are more wanted in the world than pictures" (p. 239). She opposes art with charity, the traditional sphere of female activity, with a defiance that sets up charity as a competing camp, making a virtue out of a necessity. But when Will replies to Dorothea, he speaks not to the competing claims of art and charity but to the feeling that inspired the analogy that led to this debate. He dissipates Dorothea's outrage by identifying its source.

"Oh, there is a great deal in the feeling for art which must be acquired," said Will. (It was impossible now to doubt the directness of Dorothea's confession.) "Art is an old language with a great many artificial affected styles, and sometimes the chief pleasure one gets out of knowing them is the mere sense of knowing. I enjoy the art of all sorts here immensely; but I suppose if I could pick my enjoyment to pieces I should find it made up of many threads." (Ch. 21, pp. 238-39)

Will's casual exposure of the egoism of art's devotees and his assumption that Dorothea could acquire this feeling for art interrupt her anger. Will agrees with her feeling, but also suggests other motives, other threads, just as his presence in the novel deflects Dorothea's anger at Casaubon's treatment of her into a "new motive."

Will comes into Dorothea's life to show her what neither Mr. Brooke nor Mr. Casaubon had shown or could show: how she could bring "these severe classical nudities and smirking Renaissance-Correggiosities . . . into any sort of relevance with her life" (Ch. 9, p. 99). He, as it were, tempers authority with charity--he is both a reforming M.P. and has vaguely described philanthropic projects; he teaches her about art so that "things which had seemed monstrous to her were gathering intelligibility and even a natural meaning" (Ch. 22, p. 246). By doing so, Will defuses Dorothea's resentment.

Will Ladislaw, then, is used to break the connection in Dorothea's mind between learning and male authority (a connection insisted on by most men in the book). By declaring Casaubon's learning void, Eliot forestalls what seems an inevitable defiance, just as later by killing off Casaubon she prevents, as Carol Christ has remarked, Dorothea's ever having to fail in her resolution.²² Both decisions suggest that Eliot--like Charlotte Brontë--resorts to romantic devices when her story threatens to conflict with social practice and when the truthful representation of a heroine might lead Eliot to portray actions that are unacceptably disruptive.

With each new novel, Eliot brings her heroines nearer to the unendurable. By doing so, she risks provoking them into taking measures to free themselves. To permit them to do so would be to allow the heroine's egoistic desires to override all else. Eliot plots to prevent this outcome and then works to convince the reader of the likelihood of her heroine's independently turning away from egoism. But Eliot's task is inherently impossible to achieve. The more successful her depiction of the heroine's temptation, the more necessary her rescue, and the more difficult it is credibly to effect.

At the point in Dorothea's marriage when her "mental shiver" (p. 228) might turn to defiance, Eliot invokes the principle of self-abnegation in Dorothea's decision "not to claim justice, but give tenderness" (p. 234). She channels Dorothea's will into a doctrine of self-suppression. While such a doctrine might (as George Eliot writes of fanaticism in general) "supply the needed self-satisfaction"²³ ("I have no longings," Dorothea tells Will [Ch. 39, p. 427]), it nevertheless seems intolerable in these circumstances. George Eliot now responds to its intolerableness not by changing the doctrine but by changing the circumstances. Mr. Casaubon must

die in order for Elliot's solution to the anger and alienation that she has uncovered to seem to work.

11

Besides making the plot act (by introducing Will) in order to prevent Dorothea from deducing a right to act herself, George Elliot also employs sleights of hand on Dorothea's behalf to shield her from guilty association with Casaubon's death. Later she will employ a device for the opposite effect, in order to associate Gwendolen with her husband's death. During her marriage, Dorothea's possible area of assertion is reduced from "the higher duties," to which building cottages was a prelude, to resistance or submission to Casaubon's will, which is incarnated in his book--an image which conflates masculine learning and masculine authority. While Dorothea's exercise of her will is symbolically justified by the subject that expresses it (Will), it nevertheless lethally affects Casaubon: her assertions lead to his sickness. In Rome, Dorothea asserts her right to help Casaubon in his work (asserting, in effect, her equality). Her next angry response provokes Casaubon's first stroke. This stroke is the seemingly paradoxical result of Dorothea's saying, "Why do you attribute to me a wish for anything that would annoy you? You speak to me as if I were something you had to contend against" (Ch. 29, p. 316). The words deny their effect, and Dorothea's innocence is sustained. Dorothea, one concludes, feels guilty at her husband's sickness; yet, instead of experiencing her guilt with her, the narrative is occupied by Sir James's musings over "the horrible sacrifice" (p. 319) of Dorothea in her marriage. That is, our sympathy is deflected away from Mr. Casaubon, who as a victim might have a claim on it, towards Dorothea, even though Casaubon has been recommended to it in the first sentences of this chapter: "But why always

Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble" (p. 312). Even when Casaubon has recovered "his usual condition" (p. 322) by the opening of the next chapter and when he could be considered fair game, Mr. Brooke's inappropriate advocacy of backgammon intervenes between the stroke and our next sight of Dorothea. When we do meet her, the guilt, obliquely referred to before ("Sir James . . . did not know how much penitence there was in the sorrow" [p. 319]) has been transformed by these manoeuvres into a noble endurance of intolerable conditions.

The next battle between Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon occurs silently; the landscape expresses its meaning: it is prophetically set against a backdrop of a funeral, the funeral of a man who, like Casaubon, endeavours to impose his will from beyond the grave. Dorothea is silent in her husband's presence, feeling that "he often inwardly objected to her speech" (Ch. 34, p. 362) and Mr. Casaubon responds silently to Mr. Brooke's news of his invitation to Will. He concludes, however, that Dorothea "had asked her uncle to invite Will to the Grange" (p. 363). The landscape suggests the deathly nature of their silence, its function as a symbol is made emphatic by the comparison of its effect on Dorothea with that of St. Peter's--it too is a scene which "afterwards came back to her at the touch of certain sensitive points in memory" (p. 360). Though Dorothea has become passive and silent, Mr. Brooke is made to bring Will to Dorothea and the landscape is made to articulate the alienation between husband and wife. Through the deflection of Dorothea's wishes onto her uncle and of their consequences onto the landscape, the conflict between Dorothea and Casaubon has been escalated, but in a way that protects Dorothea from actively participating in a series of events that will lead to her freedom.²⁴

In the final stages of the killing of Casaubon, Dorothea is increasingly absent. When Casaubon summons Lydgate to see him in the Yew-Walk, a place that the yew tree's association with graveyards makes ominous, Casaubon has told Dorothea that she need not attend. Dorothea's removal from the scene both suggests Casaubon's hostility towards her and dissociates Dorothea from the death-sentence that Casaubon hears there. It is in the Yew-Walk that Casaubon dies, alone, and where if he had not died, Dorothea would have died spiritually by giving a promise that would bind her to Mr. Casaubon's Key and prevent her from marrying Will. She is systematically drawn back from a death, for which, she--in police terms--would have had the best motive, and which is arguably precipitated by the resistance of her will to his.

Casaubon's death is--at the least--hastened by the stress of a marriage that intensifies instead of relieving his paranoia, bringing Carp and Company into his home. Each episode of illness is provoked (though sometimes obliquely) by an act of Dorothea's. Furthermore, each of Dorothea's actions is preceded by an incident involving Will. Will's function here is complex. To the extent that he becomes in the Casaubons' quarrels a symbol of their differences and is believed by Casaubon to be capable of making Dorothea "believe anything," Will, with his "rebellious temper and undisciplined impulsiveness" (Ch. 42, p. 456), and, of course, his name, represents Dorothea's "will." He forms the subject of Dorothea's assertion just as Mr. Casaubon's book--an embodiment of his will ("all the significance of [his] life" [p. 460])--is the subject of his. That Will represents the clash between Dorothea's and Casaubon's wills is further emphasized in the codicil that endeavours to prevent the union of Dorothea and Will. Just as Caroline Helstone is kept away from Robert Moore's sick-bed to prevent her from being implicated in an illness that acts to her

advantage, Dorothea is prevented from being implicated in Casaubon's death, the means of her freedom. Dorothea must be seen to be Casaubon's victim rather than Casaubon hers. To this end, Dorothea's innocence is stressed even in her unprovoked attacks on Casaubon. When she suggests that he change his will, the action is presented as external to her: "When young ardour is set brooding over the conception of a prompt deed, the deed itself seems to start forth with independent life" (Ch. 37, p. 408).

Moreover, even Dorothea's assertions in her marriage (that is, Dorothea's convictions "that she was in the right and her husband in the wrong, but that she was helpless" [Ch. 48, p. 516]) are presented as more or less selfless. Dorothea acts in Will's service: she is Will's champion both in his immediate capacity of unfairly disinherited heir and--in the larger pattern--as the representative of liberal men who are ready to share their knowledge and who will "take the pressure of [another's] thought instead of urging [their] own" (Ch. 50, p. 539). Even Dorothea's demands, then, are presented as "beneficent activity." For this fiction to work, the reader must believe in Dorothea's ingenuousness in her advocacy of Will's claims. In order to maintain the innocence both of her feeling for Will and of her behaviour towards Mr. Casaubon, from the beginning of the novel Eliot stresses Dorothea's propensity for innocent blundering. Yet this stratagem is in danger of seeming transparent. Though during Dorothea's marriage, the narrator maintains that there is no wilfulness in Dorothea's obtuseness; earlier in the story Celia has detected Dorothea's wilfulness in her inability to see Sir James Chettam's motive for helping her. Everything possible is done to emphasize that Dorothea's passivity in her marriage--the passivity of a woman once eager for action--is a laudably self-sacrificial choice rather than a mere consequence of Casaubon's tyrannical will. Dorothea has chosen duty over rights and her self-abnegation is shown to be morally enriching. Though the fact that Dorothea

is saved from the consequences of living by her morality undermines its persuasiveness, the alternative of choosing rights over duty is unacceptable. She tells Lydgate, "I cannot bear to think that there might be something which I did not know, and which, if I had known it, would have made me act differently" (Ch. 30, p. 322).

The case of rights over duty is put to Dorothea by Celia. She suggests that Dorothea should not have submitted to Casaubon. Though Celia (a benign version of Rosamond Vincy) is clear-sighted, she thinks of people as "merely animals with a toilette" (Ch. 2, p. 43). Dorothea, who sees Casaubon clearly enough now, replies, "it was my feeling for him" (Ch. 72, p. 792). Her knowledge of Casaubon's inadequacy, like her new understanding of Rome, has passed, according to Will's prescription (Ch. 22, p. 256), into a feeling of tenderness and pity through which she apprehends a new organ of knowledge--the sympathetic imagination. By having Celia make a claim for rights, Eliot makes the relation between male egoism and female self-sacrifice, which the clear-sighted can see, seem a view which turns humans into animals. Eliot's promotion of the sympathetic imagination, however, depends on a plot and a narrator which are sympathetic to the sympathizer.

The Casaubons' final encounter brings to a crisis the conflict between rights and duties that his marriage dramatizes. This scene illustrates in an extreme form (and in a way that the book until this point has made vivid) precisely what women agree to in the legal and religious contract of marriage. Casaubon's demand that Dorothea promise to "carry out my wishes . . . avoid doing what I should deprecate, and apply yourself to what I should desire" (Ch. 48, p. 518) is a promise to which Dorothea has already legally and religiously agreed by promising in the marriage ceremony "to obey" her husband. Furthermore, it is a promise which she not

only would eagerly have given during courtship but has implicitly given in her answer to Mr. Casaubon's proposal (Ch. 5, p. 68). Yet as Dorothea approaches the Yew Walk to give her promise, Eliot interrupts Dorothea's thoughts to have the narrator declare, "Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this--only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage" (p. 523). This disclaimer at once makes Dorothea more noble, Casaubon more tyrannical, and the conflict personal rather than generic. The interruption, however, seems to indicate that Eliot is uneasy in her belief in duty rather than in rights. Sympathy might require--as it does here--sacrifice to a pointless cause. The surprising assertiveness of the narrator's interruption suggests the wish on his part to halt Dorothea on her way to this sacrifice.

In writing of Jane Eyre's pivotal crisis, George Eliot sets similar limits on self-sacrifice: "All self-sacrifice is good--but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase."²⁵ Though the narrator raises an objection, Eliot is about to tie Dorothea to "shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins" (p. 519). The difference between Brontë's handling of her heroine's crisis and Eliot's of hers reveals the difficulty that Eliot has in sustaining her advocacy of self-sacrifice. Both Jane Eyre and Dorothea seem to comply with the ideal interpretation of their duty. Dorothea will obey Casaubon; Jane will reject Rochester. They do so, however, from opposing motives. Despite the appearance of obedience to social custom, Jane's rejection of Rochester is essentially a self-assertive choice: she declares, "I care for myself" (Ch. XXVII, p. 404), and by doing so puts her claim--here to integrity--before Rochester's call, say, on her pity. Dorothea, on the other hand, puts Casaubon's call on her pity before her

own claim to a life of useful activity: "she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers" (p. 523). By caring for herself, Jane is in fact defying society. "Who in the world," she says to herself, "cares for you . . . the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (p. 404). Jane asserts her rights; Dorothea sacrifices them.²⁶ Dorothea's nobility risks seeming like delusion.

When it no longer has harmful consequences for another and when she imagines Casaubon's death has demonstrated to him (as it has to the reader) the egoism of his work, however, Dorothea is permitted to protest in a "little act" (Ch. 54, p. 583) of self assertion. She writes on the envelope of the "Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs. Casaubon," the key to the Key: "I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?" (p. 583). This "little act" is both paradoxical and contradictory. Its defiance restores to Dorothea the nobility that had been based on her self-sacrifice. The terrible directness of her words which restores Dorothea's risked dignity is offset by the childishness of the gesture. While Brontë shows these complicated human responses sequentially--having asserted her rights by leaving Rochester, Jane asserts them again by returning to him, Eliot attempts to render the ambivalence of the moment. The danger of doing so is that one half of the feeling continuously threatens to undermine the other. George Eliot allows her heroine the moral advantages of both positions.

Why then did George Eliot choose to kill off Casaubon in a way that requires these complicated strategies of plot and narrative to protect Dorothea? Why did she put her heroine in a situation that requires such an elaborate apparatus to rescue her? In order for the woman's self-sacrifice to be meaningful, the conflict between male authority and female wish has

to be acute. Eliot's advocacy of the sympathetic imagination demands a situation in which that imagination must be almost prohibitively difficult to exercise and in which it would be forgivable to choose the more attractive alternative. Dorothea cannot be saved by an accident--as it were, randomly. In order to make Dorothea's self-sacrifice not only hard but also significant, Dorothea and Casaubon's marital conflict must somehow be represented in Casaubon's death. Dorothea must be made to seem a martyr to a cause (but one who must be paradoxically saved at the last minute). For the moral to come out right--that is, for Dorothea's self-sacrifice to have a consequence that will reinforce its value--then Mr. Casaubon's tyrannical will must be in part responsible for his death. His death must seem appropriate to his offence, just as his fits seem to Sir James Chettam appropriate to Casaubon's character. Yet because the exercise of Casaubon's will presupposes the existence of Dorothea's, and because Dorothea's wishes--like the appeal of the life of "warm activity and fellowship" (Ch. 48, p. 516)--must be sufficiently strong to make her renunciation significant, then Casaubon's death will implicate her. Eliot, therefore, has to present this event in a way that prevents this from happening. She does so by sleights of hand, such as moving Dorothea away from the action, and by assertions of Dorothea's innocence in her persistent advocacy of Will that despite anticipatory preparation strain the credulity of the reader.

George Eliot uses the Casaubons' marriage to test self-sacrifice. Because Dorothea is a woman who from the very first pages identifies some of the limitations on her life as constraints of gender, and because Eliot wrote in a time of increasing feminist activity, Dorothea's choice between asserting rights and fulfilling claims that others make accentuates the political dimension of this ethical decision. The Casaubons' marriage dramatizes the issues raised by the Woman Question. For Eliot, self-

sacrifice becomes not only a consequence of male tyranny but also an acknowledgment of the force of the female will. Through its clever interweaving of plots, Middlemarch suggests that will's potentially murderous nature. Mme Laure, the actress, actually murders her husband, and Rosamond Vincy, the pot of Basil, figuratively murders hers. Eliot further uses these interrelated histories to complicate her argument, to show another view from the safety of a different perspective.

By raising an objection to her own argument in the context of a different couple, Eliot can claim a truthful, comprehensive exploration of an issue and yet protect her thesis from attack. For one partner knowingly to subsume his interests in those of the other, for example, exacts a price. The Lydgate marriage illustrates not only the effect on men of a woman's following her wishes; it also shows us the bitterness and resentment that such tyranny breeds. Yet Lydgate's reaction must be contained so that it does not undercut the plausibility of Dorothea's. The bitterness and resentment are therefore confined to a few appealingly heroic remarks and his unhappiness is moved off stage to the postscript of the Finale. These devices permit Lydgate's story to draw attention to itself as a warning rather than to the limitations of Dorothea's solution. Yet the Lydgate history offers a further twist: at the same time as it functions as an example of the egoism of women's desire to control their lives, it also serves as an example of the destructive effects of women's relinquishing this desire. Lydgate, then, performs two apparently contradictory roles. Within the logic of his and Rosamond's relationship, he is the victim of his own prejudices, principally those male prejudices that require women to be educated into Rosamond Vincys. Because Dorothea is linked with Lydgate rather than with Rosamond, this point can be made without it refuting the argument for self-sacrifice.

III

Nobody approves of Dorothea's second marriage. Like Mrs. Cadwallader's disapproval, that of first readers settled mainly on Will. Henry James felt that "if Dorothea had married anyone after her misadventure with Casaubon, she would have married a trooper"; Eliza Lynn Linton is self-righteously incredulous that anyone could top the first mistake with that second; F. R. Leavis claims that Will "is not substantially (everyone agrees) there," that he is unlike Lydgate neither "real" nor "a man." Barbara Hardy, in her analysis of Casaubon's impotency, continues the attack on Will but argues that it is only in his relationship with Dorothea that he is asexual: his relationship with Rosamond is sexual, as can be seen in "the pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance" (Ch. 79, p. 841), that is Will's imagined adultery with Rosamond. Hardy claims that the "idyllic and romantic innocence of Will's love for Dorothea" is "implausible and inappropriate," a "psychological and structural flaw." For Richard Ellmann, Will is "a fantasy of middle-age," in which Eliot's "critical powers . . . are largely suspended" and Will treated "with utter indulgence."²⁷

Feminist criticism, on the other hand, usually attacks Dorothea: George Eliot's activist friend Bessie Rayner Belloc wrote,

No young woman born in the Shires, however "unked" she might feel at times, had any cause to marry Mr. Casaubon's big book or Will Ladislaw's unworthy personality. No, no Dorothea! I am obliged to admit and believe that you were a real person, but you will never persuade me that you might not have done better in every sense of the word!

Later feminist critics focus their attack more directly on George Eliot. Mary Carruthers, for example, claims that George Eliot "did not have the

linguistic means with which to imagine a congruent shape for her heroine's life beyond the single act of matrimony." Using Pip and Great Expectations as a comparison, Carruthers continues,

Apparently, we are unable to imagine a woman's life that is not related to a male life, because we cannot conceive of a woman's life as a whole, shaping its own vision in response to its own inner logic. Dorothea Brooke's requirement of Will Ladislaw to complete her life, and Pip's evident freedom to have Estella or not is crucially instructive.²⁸

Had Carruthers considered the ending of Daniel Deronda, she might not have come to the same conclusion. She could have maintained that Eliot "did not have the linguistic means" to depict a life for a woman without a man by claiming that Eliot ends Daniel Deronda at the point at which Gwendolen Harleth loses Deronda, but then Dickens ends the cancelled version of his novel at a similar point in Pip's career. In the published version, Dickens has to give Pip Estella. In this revision of Carruthers' competition between male and female novelists, one must come to an opposite conclusion. Eliot succeeds in imagining and publishing the history of a woman's life not related to a man's. Though Dickens might imagine a life for Pip without Estella, he cannot publish it. This mining of Eliot for examples has led, I think, to the devaluing of Eliot in much current criticism. The method typically conflates all Eliot's heroines, and because it ignores the complicating effects of context reduces Eliot's life-long concern with the difficulties engendered by aspiration and egoism into a simply reactionary recipe for self-sacrifice.

Nevertheless, Eliot does not permit Dorothea to lead the life of beneficent activity that she herself led. Zelda Austen defends Eliot against orthodox feminist criticism on this charge by claiming for Eliot the right to hold her mirror up to other women's lives and the right not to make her novels prescriptive. Though Eliot does hold her mirror up to

other women's lives, she is prescriptive--it is just that her prescriptions are not those of her feminist readers. Austen does, however, point to an interesting contradiction: although "Dorothea herself submits joyfully," Austen writes, it is despite "her author's rue." Auerbach also notes this ambivalence: in her view, "the unmistakably elegiac tone of the Finale" with its "mournful emphasis on waste and erosion blends Dorothea's disastrous marriage to Casaubon with her supposedly triumphant marriage to Ladislaw."²⁹

Obviously there is a problem; I think it is caused by George Eliot's method of attempting to defend all the positions her novel describes. Before looking at this consequence of her strategy, I want to suggest a reason why George Eliot's treatment of this subject, Dorothea's marriage with Will, might inevitably generate ambivalence. Marriage between a disinherited man and an economically and socially powerful woman who has in fact inherited the money to which the man has an older claim (through primogeniture) makes courtship actually and fictionally a tricky enterprise. It is a type of marriage, however, that seems to be given disproportionate attention--even in the novels examined here--compared with the number of people affected by this problem, perhaps because it casts in personal terms the issues raised by contemporary feminist activity. If Dorothea's first marriage asks whether under oppressive conditions revolt is justified, Dorothea's second marriage takes the debate a stage further: supposing women attain positions of power, would they be capable of filling them and how would they incorporate their worldly aspirations in their marriages? Eliot's powerful women, Dorothea Brooke and Daniel Deronda's Catherine Arrowpoint, are both eager to give up the power that their money brings in order to marry the men whom they love. In the 1830s, Dorothea tells Will, "I hate my wealth . . . We could live quite well on my own

fortune--it is too much--seven-hundred-a-year--I want so little--no new clothes--and I will learn what everything costs" (Ch. 83, p. 870). This sentence is her proposal. By Daniel Deronda, marriage, which Will had spoken of as "belong[ing] to each other" (Ch. 83, p. 868) has become in Catherine Arrowpoint's proposal less institutionalized; it is now "the passing of our lives together" (Ch. 22, p. 287).

The men who accept these increasingly unconventional women become increasingly unconventional themselves. Will, unacceptably foreign himself, gives way to Klesmer, who is "nobody knows what--a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth" (p. 289). Speaking thirty-five years later and from the freer position of a bit part, Catherine Arrowpoint is more defiant than Dorothea, but we are still told that her proposal "was something like the leap of a woman from the deck into the lifeboat" (p. 287). Whereas the responsibilities of Dorothea's money produce anxiety, the responsibilities of the Arrowpoint money produce disgust in Catherine. The heroine of Daniel Deronda's unequal marriage is more confidently independent, just as its hero is more decidedly critical of the society into which he marries. Although this suggests in Eliot a growing ease in depicting independent women, on neither occasion is the man's response to the woman's proposal given. Just as Jane Austen evades the sight of passion in her heroine Emma ("What did she say? Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does."),³⁰ George Eliot apparently could imagine a declaration of independence by a woman but not a satisfactory male response.

In order for Dorothea to be able to propose, Eliot has to resort to the melodramatic device of a thunderstorm which not only brings Will to her (rather than her having to go to him) but reduces them both to the state of childlike innocence in which shabby social strictures disappear. Though V. S. Pritchett correctly calls this "a crude storytelling device . . . for making the difficult climax of a very complex novel work,"³¹ Pritchett too

readily perhaps passes over the appropriateness of a storm to the representation of passion. In Jane Eyre, the whole of nature is an expression of Jane's passion. Everything is governed by her desire. We know the cosmic proportions of Jane and Rochester's love partly through its external effects on both story and landscape. We also know that it, like the storm, is a natural force that will override the social--even the religious--prohibition against it. Storms rage, oaks rend in two. But in this final scene of Middlemarch, the storm seems to grow out of the necessities of the plot rather than out of passion. The narrator--ironic even in this scene--stresses its convenience. The melodramatic nature of the device, like the silences and sleights of hand, point to the improbability of this union. Pritchett does not fully account for why this complex novel should end in simple melodrama, why the subtle exploration of human relationships should end in staginess. If the scene cannot be rendered realistically, then something within the scene expresses wish rather than reality. Here the wish might be for women eagerly to renounce power but to do so to a man who does not require that of them.

The pattern of action and denial that I have traced in the treatment of Casaubon's death, the piling on of metaphors to defend an assertion by multiplying examples and creating an ironic distance,³² the placing of opinions that are empirically true or ones that the novels generates into false mouths (often Mr. Brooke's) all serve the impartiality which the realist novel claims and which the promotion of the sympathetic imagination demands. The disadvantage of these strategies (which Daniel Deronda acknowledges by abandoning some of them) is seen in the dissatisfaction of the readers' responses to the resolution. Will's emblematic function as the answer to a maiden's prayer creates two problems--one in the narrator's presentation of Will's character and one in Dorothea's attitude to Will.

Critics who find Will to be the problem complain that he is not "there," (Leavis) that he is "not inevitable in the Middlemarch terrain," (Eilmann), that he is, in short, a fantasy.³³ This refusal to believe in Will may be the result of his function as a solution to existing social problems; Eliot had to invent him. He is not recognizably masculine (like Lydgate) because he is something different from men (like Lydgate) whose attitudes are responsible for the limited nature of women's lives. Yet because he does not exist "out there," (and "out there" is what the realist novel is committed to) George Eliot is left with the problem of fitting an idealized character (who is necessary to perform one of the functions of the realist novel--the exposure of what is wrong with social reality) into a realist novel; she does so by covering him in irony. George Eliot, as George Levine notes, sets about "affectionately diminishing" Will, but as Henry James noted, "the impression once given that he is a dilettante is never properly removed" and Dorothea is asked to endorse through matrimony a character whom she has collaborated with her author, it appears, in diminishing--"But you leave out the poems" (Ch. 22, p. 256), she replies to Will's dilettantish arabesque on what it is to be a poet.³⁴

The technical solution to Will's idealization, his diminishment, also, however, acts to reinforce a principle that has become axiomatic within Middlemarch: all actions must be beneficent, because to do as one wishes might be to unleash a murderous will (Mme. Laure, Rosamond, Casaubon, Bulstrode, and Featherstone serve as examples). By undercutting Will, the narrative can give at least some credence to Dorothea's attempt to claim her marriage to Will as a self-sacrificial act. "If I love him too much," she says, "it is because he has been used so ill" (Ch. 83, p. 865). Celia's response to her sister's marriage also supports this claim, "I suppose it is because you must be making yourself uncomfortable in some way or other" (Ch. 84, p. 879). There are further reminders of how

"heavily . . . the world weigh[s] on" (Ch. 62, p. 684) Dorothea, implying how much she might be hurt by society's disapproval. This social subservience, however, is attached only to Will: Dorothea finds no problem in believing in Lydgate's innocence even when others suspect him of murder. To permit herself to marry Will, whom she passionately wants, Dorothea has to get up a sense of "doing something defiant for his sake." And of course her creator helps her by thoughtfully providing that codicil, which makes this action not only defiant but gives Dorothea something tangible to sacrifice.

In this novel in which Eliot advocates the sympathetic imagination by exercising it herself, the Finale not only acts as a last shift of the candle, but it also removes the narrator from the competing claims of her characters and permits her to take up the advantage which setting the story back in time provides. By allowing the wisdom of hindsight, the Finale provides an opportunity for authoritative comment from a safe, ironic distance. A further excuse for Will's idealization, for instance, is offered by restoring him to "those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days" (p. 894). Eliot's use of this further opportunity, however, gives a further example of her uneasiness in her role of Wise Woman. The manuscript version of the Finale, written in Homburg and sent off to Blackwood on 2 October 1872,³⁵ in its emphasis on egoism teaches the lesson of the sympathetic imagination:

Among the many criticisms which passed on her first marriage nobody remarked that it could not have happened if she had not been born into a society which smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age, and, in general, encouraged the view that to renounce an advantage to oneself which might be got from the folly of ignorance of others is a sign of mental weakness.³⁶

On 8 October 1872 (according to G. H. Lewes' diary), George Eliot returned the corrected proofs of the Finale. During that short time, the passage was changed to point a different moral, which looks back to the Prelude in its emphasis on society's attitude to women's education:

Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society in which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age--on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance--on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly-asserted beliefs.

But in the 1874 edition, both assertions are deleted and Dorothea's "determining acts" (p. 896) are blamed on "the conditions of an imperfect state," in a sentence which in comparison to the two other versions is strikingly evasive in its vagueness:

They were the mixed results of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect state. (p. 896)

Preferring "to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings," George Eliot, as she tells Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor, the feminist campaigner, could never say, "This step, and this alone"--at least, not directly.³⁷

Part Two

What She Ought Not To Do: Rosamond Vincy's Silly Novel

I

There is a sense in which George Elliot's web, like the tangled web of Scott's maxim, is the product of deception. Her aim of being an "aesthetic teacher" (rather than a "doctrinal teacher") of moving her "readers . . . towards the ends I seek by my works as wholes," combined with her determination to appear sympathetic rather than prescriptive requires the screen of multiple plots. Yet Elliot's purpose is not Keats's, say, but highly moral: "the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right."³⁸ This purpose and her recognition of a wrong must include at least a suspicion of where a desire for right might lead. Elliot's aesthetic and moral purposes might seem here to conflict. Because she is committed not to reveal--in large matters--so that it might be called preaching, what that suspicion is, the history of the Casaubons' marriage cannot reveal it either. Elliot therefore presents beside the Casaubons' courtship and marriage, the histories of the courtship and marriage of Rosamond Vincy and Lydgate and of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, which each repeat the triangle and the conflicts of the Casaubons' marriage. She gives a further kaleidoscopic rearrangement to her teaching through the inclusion, with ironic asides, of the Cadwalladers, the Chettams, the Garths, and the Vincys.

Just after Lydgate has met Rosamond Vincy for the first time, the narrator tells the story of Mme Laure, in order, so it is claimed, that "it may stand as an example of the fitful swerving of passion to which [Lydgate] was prone, together with the chivalrous kindness which helped to

make him morally lovable." Mme Laure, an actress with whom Lydgate is in love, kills her husband while acting opposite him in a play in which as the heroine she mistakenly kills her lover. The reason that the narrator gives does not prevent the story from at the time seeming for some readers "both melodramatic and irrelevant."³⁹ These three pages (which seem more because they encompass a whole story) stand out from the everyday occurrences of the novel up until this point, in much the same way as the picture of the dead face and fleeing figure that cause Gwendolen to scream stand out in Daniel Deronda; both episodes seem to offer themselves as symbolic images. Like other melodramatic moments in the novels of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, the story of Mme Laure expresses a wish--here an evil one--that cannot be expressed in more realistic terms. Mme Laure's terrifyingly matter-of-fact "confession," suggests in general terms the destructive force of the human will. Her story, however, also has a specific function; it is an example of "operative irony," as Suzanne Ferguson writes (using a term from James) that "implies and projects the possible other case."⁴⁰ For Ferguson, the "other case" is Rosamond and the story highlights Lydgate's self-deception. The melodrama of the story overwhelms Lydgate's role in it; instead of being an example of his "fitful swerving of passion" and "chivalrous kindness," the nightmare figure of Mme Laure makes the story a warning of the horrifying consequences of egocentricity. The story points towards Rosamond as the subject of Lydgate's next delusion and through her to all women who claim a right to do as they like.

Mme Laure's story comes as part of the history of Lydgate's career at a point at which, it is stressed, he is "hopeful of achievement" (Ch. 15, p. 171), "could do anything he liked," and intended to be "one of those who shape their own deeds and alter the world a little" (p. 174). The chapter, then, is a juxtaposition of a story of the hopeful beginnings of a male career and that of a female career of "great success" (p. 181). As an

actress, Mme Laure is, I think, "the literal counterpart of the image pattern" that as Harvey notes George Eliot habitually employs.⁴¹ She is a woman who criminally seizes control of her own life in a novel in which Dorothea wishes to guide her own life and Rosamond effectively does. Like the Princess Halm-Eberstein in Daniel Deronda, Mme Laure seems a nightmare image of the moral dangers of acting, of following one's own will. Acting is particularly associated in Eliot's work with women's careers; in order to earn her own living, Will's mother, too, has to go on the stage. While the customary passivity of women's lives makes Laure horrific, these figures suggest that to want to act might be a destructively egocentric wish.

The immorality of Laure's activity is further suggested by the French setting. Just as Rochester's picture of the villa in Marseilles makes vivid to Jane the immorality of her own temptation, the French setting of Laure's story automatically suggests a perversion of English values. While the foreign background of Eliot's and Brontë's heroes represents a liberation from British constraints, such a setting for a woman implies her immorality.⁴² The striking emphasis on Laure's "virtuous reputation" and her "sweet matronliness," combined with the comment that it is her acting--not she--that is "'no better than it should be'" (Ch. 15, p. 180), transfers the immorality to the notion of acting itself. Mme Laure enjoys an even greater success as an actress without her husband--and without him she can live where she wishes. But in order to do so, Laure has had to kill her husband. Domesticity is killed in the interests of her career. Through destroying Lydgate, Rosamond also ends up living where she wants.

Laure's story is sufficiently complex in its implications to be interpreted both as a warning to aspiring women and to restrictive men, but its effect on the reader is to educate him into an awareness of the

difficulties of the conflicting claims of men and women. By offering this variation on her theme, George Eliot hinders a too easy interpretation of the Casaubons' and the Lydgates' marriages. Yet, by choosing a melodramatic interlude in which a woman kills her husband in order to live a free life, Eliot--under cover of a short story set abroad and in the past, and further screened by its "apparent" irrelevance--tips the scale against women's activity. The history of Mme Laure is the nightmare image of what the female will might do.

George Eliot's chief strategy for preserving an appearance of impartiality in her outlining of the debate over women's right to lead active lives and women's right to an education is evident in the depiction of Rosamond: Eliot offers a simultaneous depiction of both sides of the question. Rosamond is both villainess and victim and plays a dual role. While critics have noted a consequence of this method--that the characters with whom Eliot appears to sympathize are often those whom she also destroys--the method itself has not been noticed. The rest of this section will discuss in detail this specific application of Eliot's technique in order to demonstrate how it enhances the realism of the novel. Because the method accommodates more than one point of view, as a shift of the candle makes the lines fall differently, then differently again, characters and their actions more nearly resemble the opacity of real life. One proof of the effectiveness of this technique is the somewhat perverse reading of Rosamond Vincy that recent feminist criticism has proposed. In part three of this chapter, I shall suggest in more theoretical terms how this strategy might be a consequence of the changing role of women.

While readers are urged to hate Rosamond and sympathize with Lydgate, information that would require the opposite response (of turning on Frankenstein, that is, and not his monster) is cunningly inserted. After unravelling the web, we will find that Lydgate's attitudes turn out to be

responsible for Rosamond's nature. George Eliot excludes all possible sympathy for Rosamond (while the narrator nevertheless asks for it) by presenting her as a stock figure.

Rosamond, whom Mary Garth describes as "just the sort of beautiful creature that is imprisoned with ogres in fairy tales" (Ch. 14, p. 166), is the stereotypical heroine of romantic fiction; hers are the fantasies that George Eliot condemns in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists."⁴³ Rosamond is both the creator of and the leading actress in her own silly novel: her view of her own life is identified by the narrator as her "preconceived" (Ch. 16, p. 195) "social romance" (Ch. 12, p. 145). Her plans for Lydgate in her own future are plots typical of the romantic novels that George Eliot lambasts.

Rosamond Vincy can be seen then as an author: her "shaping activity" (Ch. 27, p. 305) is a plotting activity, and her way of seeing other people in Middlemarch is the way an author of a romantic novel (or a dreamer like Jane Eyre) might see her characters. Other people, we are told, are "material to cut into shape by her own wishes" (Ch. 78, p. 834); the shapes they fall into are those of the romantic novel. Gilbert and Gubar see in the portrayal of Rosamond Vincy "clues that align the author with her blonde temptress," (they use this identity of author and character-author to counter the traditional assumption that Rosamond is a "vindictive portrait impelled by Eliot's tormented jealousy of pretty women"⁴⁴). Rosamond for them becomes Eliot's representative in the novel, a character of whom she secretly approves. Though Rosamond perhaps shares some of her creator's authorial ambitions and this, I think, affects Eliot's final disposal of her character, Rosamond's role as author has a wider application; it refers generally to the solipsistic tendencies of the individual, the need to construct a world according to one's wishes.

Eliot's need, after all, is not the only one. At the same time as Rosamond Vincy's "authorial" pretensions represent egocentricity, her role as the product of expectations of what women should be is emphasized through her depiction as a romantic heroine. Not only does she imagine that part for herself (the subject of her plots), but she is associated with romantic fiction by her reading of it. Though "she did not readily commit herself by admiration . . . [being] alive to the slightest hint that anything was not, according to Lydgate, in the very highest taste" (Ch. 27, p. 304), Rosamond does admire L. E. L. and Lady Blessington, a silver fork-novelist; she reads "the best novels, and even the second best" (Ch. 16, p. 196). Her favourite work, taken together with Lydgate's fantasies, even predicts their differences. The heroine of "Lalla Rookh,"⁴⁵ a domestically produced Oriental tale, is told tales by the poet Feramorz, who turns out to be the King of Bucharria, whom she is on her way to marry. Lydgate's fantasy of domestic life, on the other hand, is from the Arabian Nights, in which the king is told tales by Scheherazade. (His reference is naturally taken from "high" culture.) Both imagine themselves at the centre of another's efforts to please. Lydgate's view of women turns out to be darkly predictive. Like the clever Scheherazade, who saves herself from the fate of the king's other wives (who are killed immediately after their wedding night) by telling tales, Rosamond saves herself from the annihilation of the will that is the stereotypical fate of wives on marriage in the nineteenth-century: she forces her romance on Lydgate. Lydgate becomes neatly trapped in his own analogy. Like Casaubon, Lydgate has become "entangled in metaphors, and [has] act[ed] fatally on the strength of them" (Ch. 10, p. 111). Ironically, he is condemned by the very genre that he condemns in criticizing The Keepsake.

Rosamond has a due appreciation of her own part; she feels the feelings promulgated by the romantic tradition (the books that she reads).

"If I loved, I should love at once and without change," said Rosamond, with a great sense of being a romantic heroine, and playing the part prettily" (Ch. 31, p. 331). The perniciousness of her attitude comes not just from Rosamond's seeing herself in this part, but from Lydgate's seeing her in it also, in his confusion of her with romance, "of the kind known in the Arabian Nights" (Ch. 36, p. 385). In this tale of delusions, however, there is no Sancho Panchez to call a windmill by its right name. Lydgate's fantasies are tested by reality. To the extent that Lydgate's image of the ideal woman resembles that of Rosamond, men, as we shall see, are responsible for what women are. Rosamond is responsible for indulging her egomania (when other subservient women do not); but Lydgate is (generically responsible for producing it.

Rosamond Vincy, "imitating Femininity to perfection,"⁴⁶ represents the worst type of "female," education, just as Mr. Casaubon represents the worst type of "male" knowledge. She is the "flower of Mrs. Lemon's school, the chief school in the county" (Ch. 11, p. 123). Rosamond is one of those flowers who, Gwendolen Harleth says, "have got poisonous" from having nothing to do (Ch. 13, p. 171), so poisonous that she turns into Lydgate's basil plant, a plant that "flourish[es] wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (Finale, p. 893). Rosamond is an "accomplished female," held up to others as an example of "mental acquisition" and "propriety of speech." But like the authoresses and heroines of the silly novels that George Eliot describes, Rosamond's knowledge--like Mr. Casaubon's--"remains acquisition instead of passing into culture."⁴⁷ Just as Mr. Casaubon knows the details of the history of Cupid and Psyche but has no imaginative experience of the myth, Rosamond plays the piano (a feminine accomplishment) with "the precision of an echo" (Ch. 16, p. 190). Rosamond's music is like Casaubon's scholarship: a false knowledge that fools their spouses.

Whereas Mr. Casaubon endeavours to enslave Dorothea to his will of which the Key to all Mythologies is the sign, his text, Rosamond Vincy succeeds in enslaving Lydgate in her romance.

Rosamond imposes her text on all around her. As her own author (she is "her own standard of a perfect lady" [Ch. 16, p. 196]), Rosamond casts her acquaintance in supporting roles in a solipsistic script. The men are people who "might, could, would be or actually were in love with her" (p. 196), and the women are seen only in terms of usefulness: "Her sewing is . . . the nicest thing I know about Mary" (Ch. 36, p. 379); therefore, Mary sows for Rosamond. Because Henrietta Noble is a poor spinster, powerless in society, she is ignored. When Rosamond meets Lydgate, he is merely the "stranger [who is] absolutely necessary to [her] social romance" (Ch. 12, p. 145), a romance that has already been conceived, and the scene is only "the necessary beginning" to a "little future" which she has already woven.

Rosamond has remarkable success in imposing her plots on others: Lydgate has only to be chosen for her lover and he becomes it; and up until the time of Lydgate's bankruptcy, which removes the conditions necessary for the romantic heroine to flourish, Rosamond's father always does what she says. Only Fred, who has had a life-long experience of "the circumstance called Rosamond" (Ch. 36, p. 379), and Will (though only because in a sense she permits him) resist Rosamond. In a piece of post-Oxford semantic juggling, Fred describes Rosamond's solipsistic method. Accused of being disagreeable by his sister, Fred replies:

"I don't make myself disagreeable; it is you who find me so. Disagreeable is a word that describes your feelings and not my actions." (Ch. 11, p. 127)

Particularly in her relationships with men, Rosamond is characteristic of her genre: In "Silly Novels,"

the men play a very subordinate part by [the heroine's] side. You are consoled now and then by a hint that they have affairs, which keeps you in mind that the working-day business of the world is somehow being carried on, but ostensibly the final cause of their existence is that they may accompany the heroine on her "starring" expedition through life. (p. 302)

Because Lydgate is only a set of "airy conditions" (Ch. 64, p. 711) for her, Rosamond does not have to imagine "much about the inward life of the hero" (Ch. 16, p. 195). Like her precursors, she finds it unnecessary to think of Lydgate's "serious business in the world" (p. 195), seeing his talent as a prestigious token of his superiority--"a man of talent . . . whom it would be especially delightful to enslave" (p. 145). And Lydgate later comes to realize that his talent is for Rosamond "like an order in his button-hole or an Honourable before his name" (Ch. 58, p. 628); he is the domestic equivalent of the "amiable duke" and "irresistible younger son of a marquis" who are the lovers in the foreground of the silly novels.

The connection between Rosamond Vincy and the heroines of Eliot's article brings into play the argument that Eliot makes in her essay. In that argument, I suggest, Eliot takes the same strategy of simultaneously presenting both sides of the argument as she does in her presentation of Rosamond. She condemns the fantasies of the lady novelists but she also exposes the part that critics play in encouraging such productions. Similarly, Rosamond Vincy's vagaries are linked to male tastes. Rosamond's attitude is merely the product of her education--a male construct: the representative Lydgate holds it, for example, "one of the prettiest attitudes of the feminine mind to adore a man's pre-eminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in" (Ch. 27, p. 301). Claimed as a sign of pre-eminence, his talent must be treated as a mere sign if the man who has it believes that women "are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question" (Ch. 10, pp. 119-20).

Shut out from participation in the "working-day business of the world," women, Eliot implies, will be doomed to see themselves as "the final cause of [men's] existence" ("Silly Novels," p. 302). And Rosamond sees herself not only as the final cause of Lydgate's existence, but of all men's; she is "one of those women who live much in the idea that each man they meet would have preferred them if the preference had not been hopeless" (p. 809). She envisions absolute power: marriage is for her "a throne . . . with a husband as crown-prince . . . himself in fact a subject--while the captives look up for ever hopeless, losing their rest probably, and if their appetite too, so much the better" (Ch. 43, p. 475). Will, the New Man, is alone capable of appreciating the difference between Dorothea and Rosamond; he becomes almost an instrument of revenge. When marriage loses "its charm of encouraging delightful dreams" (Ch. 64, p. 711) and becomes "spoiled for her imagination" (Ch. 75, p. 310), Rosamond begins to construct "a little romance" around Will, interpreting even his admiration for Dorothea as a plan "to pique herself." She casts him as "a bachelor . . . always to be at her command" (p. 810). When Will refuses the part, her "dream world" is shattered; it is "in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness" (Ch. 81, p. 854). Founded on a belief that she has only to imagine something for it to be, Rosamond's identity is threatened when another character follows his own script instead of hers. Will's victory--Eliot's belief in her own creation--however, is uncertain. While his anger threatens Rosamond Vincy's existence, he nevertheless has a "foreboding . . . that his life might come to be enslaved by this helpless woman" (Ch. 78, p. 836).

Just as Rosamond's identity is threatened by Will's stepping out of her script, so is it threatened by the removal of the objects that surround

her and of which she is the "exquisite centre" (Ch. 43, p. 470). When the stage-set of her romance is taken away--the plate and furniture and Jewellery--and the audience gone--no-one will accept her invitations--then her motive for life goes and she drifts into a state of listless ennui. In her mind, the narrator says, "there was not room enough for luxuries to look small in" (Ch. 69, p. 754). Rosamond's mind, however, is the creation of an education in accomplishments for "the refined amusement of man" (Ch. 27, p. 302). Rosamond defines others as objects, seeing them as "airy conditions," because she herself is merely a collection of conditions:

a combination of correct sentiments, music dancing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness. (Ch. 27, p. 301)

She even treats herself as an object of display: her first thought when Dorothea comes to see her is of the satisfaction of being studied. ("What is the use of being exquisite if you are not seen by the best judges?" [Ch. 43, p. 470]). She is the creation of a society which classes women with flowers and music (Ch. 16, p. 193) and gives adornment "the first place among wifely functions" (Ch. 11, p. 122). Lydgate's assessment of his domestic misery neatly captures its irony: "What can a woman care about so much as house and furniture? a husband without them is an absurdity" (Ch. 64, p. 706).

While Lydgate is treated sympathetically in the narrative, Eliot nevertheless underscores his role in his own tragedy. Lydgate's annihilation is a consequence of his own attitudes. The reader is simultaneously asked to sympathize with Lydgate and provided with information that will identify Lydgate as the representative of approved social values, the maker of the doll. Just as he knows by "natural affinity" (Ch. 27, p. 300) what clothes and furniture a gentleman should have, Lydgate also feels confident in his ability correctly to choose a

wife: "He felt himself amply informed by literature, and that traditional wisdom which is handed down in the genial conversation of men" (Ch. 16, p. 193). As we focus on Lydgate, Rosamond changes from villainess to symbol: she becomes--like Rosamund Oliver--the Rose of the World. In attacking its rose, Eliot is also attacking society. Rosamond's function is in this way more complex than recent critics give Eliot credit for. Even as she criticizes Rosamond, Eliot criticizes not her but the society that creates her.

11

Lydgate encounters three of the major female figures: Mme Laure, Dorothea, and Rosamond Vincy. Lydgate's eligibility brings these character types into competition; his early criticism of Dorothea sets up, in an admirably understated way, a comparison between Rosamond and Dorothea. Of the two other young female characters (Celia and Mary), Mary Garth is in a sense hors de combat, "a dreadful plain girl--more fit for a governess" (Ch. 11, p. 129) than money or marriage. Her story, however, functions as a parable in much the same way as Mme Laure's functions as moral fable. Though socially undervalued, Mary Garth becomes the happy wife of a happy husband; they are both successful, both producing books as Lydgate and Casaubon wished to do. Mary Garth is also loved by Farebrother, who is in this and in his limited support of Dorothea's defence of Lydgate, a fair brother in a patriarchal society. Farebrother in effect practises Eliot's meliorism.

Lydgate is society's doomed man. The three women whom he encounters represent three different versions of womanhood. All three are tested in marriage, whose "terribly inflexible relation" (Ch. 65, p. 711) makes it their most stringent test. Though the test that the women are given is

still marriage--and not like that given Gwendolen Harleth, the necessity of standing alone--this is not simply because male approval is the ultimate gauge of woman's worth (in Daniel Deronda's phrase "women's test is man's taste" [Ch. 10, p. 132]). Rather, the emphasis is the other way round: the test shows what happens to men who fail to recognize the right qualities in women.

Blinded by the received idea of womanhood, Lydgate is incapable of distinguishing appearance from reality. As we have seen, Lydgate falls in love with a character (Mme Laure), while she is acting a part. Similarly, he falls in love with Rosamond Vincy, a woman who is "by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique, [who] even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (Ch. 12, p. 144), whose dresses are costumes, and whose lines adapt to the requirements of her audience. Just as Lydgate is fooled by Mme Laure's appearance of "sweet matronliness," the "divine cow" (Ch. 16, p. 188) exterior that hides a murderer,⁴⁸ he will discover that Rosamond Vincy's "sylph-like form" conceals a different type of murderer. Rosamond is Mephistopheles to Lydgate's Faust ("he left the house an engaged man, whose soul was not his own" [Ch. 31, p. 336]); she will become Lydgate's "basil plant." Symbolically, when Lydgate marries Rosamond, her father insists that Lydgate take out insurance on his life; he is thus, in economic terms, more useful to Rosamond dead. Lydgate recognizes this truth when he says "I may get my neck broken, and that may make things easier" (Ch. 69, p. 711). This insurance policy, together with the fact that Rosamond cares for Lydgate's circumstances (which she acquires through marriage) rather than Lydgate as he sees himself, makes her envy of Dorothea's likely widowhood ominous. Lydgate is deceived by two actresses, both of whom are social idols. He is a willing audience to each, and therefore implicated in their success.

Dorothea is what Rosamond pretends, wishes, or seems to be. Brought together by both Lydgate and Will, they are from the first linked through imagery. Both Dorothea and Rosamond in moments of crisis, abandoned by their men (Dorothea is figured in the epigraph to Chapter 20 as a "child forsaken"), are compared with the abandoned Ariadne. Though Naumann discerns in Dorothea an "antithesis to the sensuous perfection of Ariadne," he remarks that she has a "form, not shamed by Ariadne" (Ch. 19, p. 220). She can stand side by side with Ariadne, and as she does so she is linked with the classical Ariadne. Rosamond, on the other hand, looks artificial, "as forlorn as Ariadne--as a charming stage Ariadne left behind with all her boxes full of costumes and no hope of a coach" (Ch. 31, p. 334). Dorothea is unaffected even when posing for the artist Naumann, having an "absence from her manner and expression of all search after mere effect" (Ch. 10, p. 114), while Rosamond Vincy's behaviour is steered by "wary grace and propriety" (Ch. 27, p. 301). Dorothea is a queen, called one by Sir James, Will, Lydgate, and the narrator; Rosamond only imagines herself to be one.⁴⁹ By opposing Rosamond and Dorothea, the imagery demonstrates the falseness of society's "perfect lady"; it also reveals how counterproductive distrust of Dorothea-like women might be. Eager to learn and speaking what she thinks, Dorothea is the opposite of Rosamond Vincy. Rosamond abandons her accomplishments on marriage; her statements are "no direct clue to fact" but "among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please" (p. 301). Theatrical imagery is used to show how men are duped by the creations of their own wishes. Cast in parts by the will of men, women will act those parts, but acting here means pretence, a façade that screens actions which are inimical to men.

Named by George Eliot as "the doomed man of the day" to Rosamond's "irresistible woman" (Ch. 27, p. 301), Lydgate lives a cautionary tale.

When he first meets Dorothea, whose conception of what a wife should be would make her the best wife for him (and whose presence in Middlemarch and actions on his behalf act as a continuous, ironic comment on his choice), Lydgate says of her:

She is a good creature--that fine girl--but a little too earnest . . . It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste. . . . The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven. (Ch. 10, p. 120; Ch. 11, p. 122)

By rejecting substance for decoration, Lydgate colludes in holding women permanently in the second form. His egoistic wish for pleasure guarantees his future isolation: a child can neither participate in his interests nor understand his sorrows.

Despite his caring nature and his fine words, Lydgate's character rests chiefly on his spots of commonness, which affect his judgment not only of furniture but also of women. In W. J. Harvey's view, "the fact that Lydgate marries Rosamond and Dorothea marries Will"⁵⁰ prevents us from relating Lydgate and Dorothea to "a single thematic centre." One might argue, however, that Dorothea also marries Casaubon. In marriages to pathological partners, both Lydgate's and Dorothea's humanity is by contrast stressed; despite authorial declarations, there is no equivalent interest in their spouses' equivalent centres of self. If Dorothea and Lydgate were married to each other, it might be more difficult to tell which would seem the more flawed. Though Dorothea is given a reprieve (and marries Will) and Lydgate is sacrificed for the moral, both Dorothea and Lydgate learn the lesson of imaginative sympathy. Yet that is not the only lesson that taken together Lydgate and Dorothea teach. Though Lydgate

forms no part in Dorothea's education, Dorothea is part of his. Linked together in this way, they point to the thematic centre of men's responsibility for women's inadequate education.

III

Eliot's tactic of turning the victim of social injustice into the villainess, of making that villainess into a stock character who has only one moment of humanity (when Will's anger almost forces her into recognizing her role for what it is), and of sympathizing with Lydgate when all the evidence points towards his complicity in his fate, indicates Eliot's reluctance to attack established society directly. She masks her criticism with sympathy and screens her assertions with denials. Each of the plots in Middlemarch suggests the murderous force of the will--within the book there are even two murders. Each of the plots I have discussed further stresses the dangers to men of female activity--even Mary Garth unwittingly harms Fred. Like her character Latimer in "The Lifted Veil," George Eliot perceives the will behind women's passivity, where others find perfect silence. Even Farebrother takes Rosamond to be "docile" and "compliant" (Ch. 63, p. 690). But like Latimer's wife Bertha, Rosamond plots and acts in secret; her machinations make men powerless. Recognizing the potential destructiveness of all desire, Dorothea eagerly subsumes hers in those of others. Within the parameters of socially acceptable behaviour, Rosamond, as Mary Ellmann writes, is "the worst (as Dorothea is presumably the best) which the subordinated can make of their subordination." Mme Laure is presumably the worst without, "the demoniac center of the book," rather than Rosamond.⁵¹

Rosamond's hidden actions differ critically, however, from those of Shirley's heroines. For Shirley and Caroline, their subordinate positions

require subterranean action. But their actions, as we saw, are metaphoric and designed to balance power rather than counteract it. In Middlemarch, however, none of the marriages includes passion (even for first readers). The sado-masochistic collaborations of Charlotte Brontë's heroines and heroes are therefore impossible. But then each partner chooses the other on the basis of "circumstantial fascination." In Jane Austen's world this would be a guarantee of marital felicity). Circumstances are character; manners are morals. In Brontë's equally--though differently--regulated world, passion is a reliable guide. There is no such instinctive system in Eliot. In this sense, Eliot's vision is more anarchic than Brontë's. Disruptive elements are not conveniently located in one certifiably mad character or kept segregated in the third-story of a house.

In Middlemarch, "the perfect lady" will resort to stratagem in the face of assertions of absolute power (such as Lydgate's). She will make a weapon out of her perfection, just as Caroline Helstone does by turning her passivity into the weapon of a decline. But Rosamond's subversive actions--like taking a house off the market--are literal and designed to frustrate male power. She turns her perfections and her powerlessness into an unanswerable challenge: her question, "What can I do, Tertius?" (and the narrator outlines the possible tones and meanings of this remark, identifying Rosamond's as "neutral aloofness" [Ch. 58, p. 640]), becomes a taunt. Her conviction "that she was not the person to misbehave "whatever others might do" (Ch. 64, p. 709) and her sense that "no woman could behave more irreproachably than she was behaving" (p. 643) are on the surface unassailable. Though she tells Lydgate he can return what he likes of the plate and her jewels, she has, nevertheless, declined to look at Lydgate's list. Dorothea, on the other hand, patiently ticks off Casaubon's list, though it is a list of items which have given her only pain. Though formally correct, Rosamond's attitude is not collaborative.

When the conventional and socially approved Rosamond "intrench[es] herself in quiet passivity" (Ch. 65, p. 715), she exhibits a pathological assimilation of the female situation. An early exchange between Mary Garth and Rosamond (relatively free from the distortions of sexual politics) marks Rosamond's tactics as those of passive aggression:

"Mary, you are always so violent."
 "And you are always so exasperating."
 "I? What can you blame me for?"
 "Oh, blameless people are always the most exasperating."
 (Ch. 12, p. 143)

Rosamond uses her passivity and her perfection as both weapon and camouflage. In seeing Rosamond Vincy as a study in "female rebellion" (p. 514), Gilbert and Gubar miss the point. Rosamond, who "from morning to night is her own standard of the perfect lady," is a study of female conformity. Since desires will always seek gratification, the comparison of Dorothea and Rosamond implies, that it is better that the wish for an active life be acknowledged. In its insistence on passivity, the ideal of womanhood promotes covert action. Whereas Dorothea appears to be socially threatening but is not, Rosamond does not but in fact is threatening to society. Dorothea does not achieve her ambition; she considers herself a failure. Rosamond, on the other hand, succeeds; she speaks of her final situation (married to an elderly physician and owning a carriage to display herself and four daughters) as "a reward" (Finale, p. 893).

In painting this Rosamond, "Rose of the World," and her marriage to Lydgate, George Eliot is perhaps performing an "act of creative correction" on Charlotte Brontë's Rose of the World, Rosamond Oliver, and her relationship to St. John Rivers.⁵² According to Jane Eyre, Rosamond Oliver

was very charming, in short, even to a cool observer of her own sex like me; but she was not profoundly interesting or thoroughly impressive. A very different sort of mind was hers from that,

for instance, of the sisters of St. John. Still, I liked her almost as I liked my pupil Adèle. (Ch. XXXII, p. 470)

The terms might be those Farebrother, "a cool observer," would use in a comparison of Rosamond to Mary Garth. Rosamond, for him, is "rather uninteresting--a little too much the pattern-card of the finishing school" (Ch. 63, p. 690). Like Rivers, Lydgate is an "aspirant," and is in a sense a missionary. Like Rosamond Oliver, Rosamond Vincy knows her power, and pouts like a disappointed child. But whereas Rosamond Oliver is "coquettish, but not heartless; exacting, but not worthlessly selfish . . . vain . . . but not affected" (p. 470), Rosamond Vincy is coquettish, heartless, exacting, selfish, vain, and affected. Q. D. Leavis believes that George Eliot "arrived at the Lydgate-Rosamond marriage out of interest in what would happen if a man with a vocation for a profession did thoughtlessly take the course rejected by the clear-sighted St. John Rivers."⁵³ As her publisher said, Eliot drew Rosamond Vincy "with a vengeance,"⁵⁴ as if the romantic heroine had got off too lightly in the twenty-five years since Charlotte Brontë wrote. All men are not ascetic and therefore safe like St. John Rivers; some missionaries will marry, as the passionate Lydgate does. In George Eliot's "real" world, a character will not be guided (through better sense) to Jane or the Rivers sisters or to India, but towards the real world's rose, Rosamond Vincy, the "best girl in the world" (Ch. 16, p. 196).

In Middlemarch, the final decisions of the plot are governed not by the heroine's triumphant will, as they are in Jane Eyre, but by society. Dorothea fails and Rosamond succeeds even though George Eliot has seemed to act on behalf of her heroine Dorothea (by killing off Mr. Casaubon) and against Rosamond (by inducing Lydgate's bankruptcy). During the novel, Dorothea's intended actions are presented as right actions (building phalansteries, reinstating Will, helping Lydgate). Rosamond's performed

actions, on the other hand, are if not wrong in themselves, at least go wrong: when Rosamond defies Lydgate by riding, she miscarries; when she defies him by writing to his uncle, she cuts him off from that source of help.

This weighting of Providence against Rosamond has led recent critics to accuse Eliot of the vindictive sabotage of the independent actions of women. Patricia Beer, for example, contends that Rosamond's actions "seem stupid because they fail, but might have succeeded." Beer, like other feminist critics of Eliot, mistakes an effect for a cause. It is a question of presentation: one might just as easily say that Rosamond's actions "fail because they are stupid." Rosamond has indeed been set up by her author. The signs are everywhere. The appalling coldness of Rosamond's response to Lydgate's trouble, for instance, is achieved partly by having Lydgate declare in advance what a correct response might be: "If she has any trust . . . she ought to speak now" (Ch. 75, p. 814). Similarly, the narrator reports Lydgate's warning to Rosamond--"Take care you don't drop the faintest hint . . ." (Ch. 59, p. 646); and then recounts Rosamond's saying to Will, "A little bird told me . . ." Yet this method is too obvious to have as its purpose the exposure of Rosamond. That would be as if the purpose of Latimer's vision were simply to expose Bertha's wretched soul. Eliot insists on our seeing how the light falls on the place where the candle has been. Just as in studying Gertrude and Ophelia we are studying Hamlet, in observing Rosamond we are studying Lydgate. The sympathy that we give Lydgate has throughout been the qualified sympathy that we give Hamlet. Eliot, it seems, makes her criticism too subtly: the failure within the novel of Rosamond's actions exposes not Rosamond but the frustration and isolation that Lydgate's ideal of womanhood, that society's perfect woman engenders.

IV

I began this chapter by briefly comparing Charlotte Brontë's most "realistic" novel Shirley with Eliot's Middlemarch, usually thought of as a classically realist novel, because Middlemarch includes Shirley's theme. A comparison illuminates a critical difference between Brontë's and Eliot's conception of the novel; it can be seen in the role each author plays within her work. In Middlemarch, Eliot aims at being a detached onlooker, observing human life from an armchair at the proscenium. Brontë, as the lectures that interrupt the narrative of her novels testify, is very much a part of her book; furthermore, she is--as it were--out of her own vision. She does not appear to question--sometimes even to acknowledge--the remedies that she invents for the bitter exclusion which women endure that she depicts. One might imagine Eliot in her armchair looking at Brontë looking at the world, questioning the effects of Brontë's prescriptions. She is also of course revising her own: Dorothea's suppression of her own interests is very different from Milly Barton's suppression of hers.

The difference, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, in the nature of Brontë's and Eliot's participation is evident in the use each makes of metaphor. For Brontë, metaphor is sometimes a language through which she confides in the reader; sometimes it is a secret means of getting her own way. Eliot cracks the code and opens up the metaphor. She looks to see where the wish for power, for a life of activity, and for self-determination in the context of a world that includes other selves might lead. Brontë uses metaphors to facilitate the covert activity of her heroines; Eliot uses metaphors of acting to discriminate between "beneficent activity"--in which personal aspiration coincides with social good--and the egoistic wish for self-display.

Brontë's remedies--Jane Eyre's revenge and Caroline's and Shirley's sado-masochistic marriages would not be acceptable to George Eliot. Though to do so is to go against current feminist criticism, one could argue that Eliot's handling of the theme of women's lot is more progressive than Brontë's: it tests Brontë's answers within the reality of human relations. Rosamond's response to a husband's dominance is not, for instance, Shirley's: Rosamond coldly evades Lydgate. Similarly, Dorothea's wealth does not, like Jane Eyre's, give her independence of action. Eliot too, as we have seen, also resolves the realistic conflicts that she delineates through means that seem less real. In preaching the creed of the sympathetic imagination, she is, like Brontë, prescriptive. But her sleights of hand and evasions of plot arise from her effort to extrapolate the consequences of claiming rights. Eliot asks the next question.

The critical consensus that Eliot fails because she does not advocate a life for women such as she herself led underestimates Eliot's achievement. Mary Ellmann, for instance, concludes that Middlemarch "hardly more than . . . dramatiz[es]" the difficulty of human relationships. In Middlemarch, I have argued, Eliot confronts the rage that "passive" women are capable of experiencing and finds it to be more destructive than exhilarating. Similarly, Lloyd Fernando contends that there is "tentative quality in the expression of her views."⁵⁵ While this is true of the surface of her work, the lesson implicit in Eliot's complicated interplay between Lydgate and Rosamond is the necessity of educating women. Despite this, from the feminist point of view, the painful consequences of Dorothea's subscription to the sympathetic imagination brands Eliot as a collaborator and her thinking as reactionary. I have based my analysis so far mainly on a close reading of the text of Middlemarch; in this final section, my approach will be more speculative.

It is difficult to distinguish the depiction of the "imperfect social

state" demanded by realism from concurrence in its imperfections. Because Eliot's departures from the real seem to serve the continuance of women's subjection, it is tempting to suspect that her realistic ending is as acceptable to her as it is to society. During the course of the novel, Eliot has mixed genres: she has married realized human beings to parodies; employed a romantic figure as the solution to a realistic problem; proved the feasibility of self-sacrifice with sleights of hand; and shaped her plots with improbable coincidences. All facilitate the maintenance of the status quo. Yet Middlemarch persuades us of its reality. A village for Dorothea and poverty for Rosamond are after all as unlikely as some of the measures that inhibit these outcomes.

Eliot's refusal in Middlemarch to counter reality, an aesthetic principle, coincides with her reluctance to make assertions of other sorts. She is a hesitant supporter, for instance, of women's rights. Her association with the cause is more ambiguous than Basch, for example, allows.⁵⁶ Despite her long list of friends who were feminist activists, George Eliot would only support wholeheartedly projects that spoke directly to the poverty of women's education. She willingly gave £50 to Girton, but only circulated the petition for the Married Women's Property Act because she felt it might be a "counter-active to wife-beating and other evils"; and she wrote to Sara Hennell on the subject of women's rights "Why should you burthen yourself in that way, for an extremely doubtful good."⁵⁷ In Middlemarch, this has a happy effect. By arguing two points of view simultaneously, Middlemarch reproduces the ambiguity of experience: it permits contradictory interpretations--allows, that is, my world and yours. But this hesitation is reminiscent, I think, of Dorothea's when confronted by wise men who know Greek yet do not consider cottages to be for the glory

of God. Eliot is especially tentative in the open enjoyment of her talent and career.

When George Eliot first started writing, she did so anonymously. (Haight sees in her "an eagerness to serve others anonymously.")⁵⁸ Her earliest articles, published in the Coventry Herald, appeared as the writings of a man (similar in voice and genre to the Impressions of Theophrastus Such). Furthermore, her reviews for the Westminster Review were again offered in the male voice of an essayist, and her editing of it was also anonymous (for a time, Chapman was only its nominal editor). Her fiction was initially sponsored by G. H. Lewes, already an influential and famous literary critic, in that he not only encouraged her to write but also arranged for the publication of her writing. It was published, of course, under a male pseudonym, which had not only the advantage of male anonymity, but could also be changed or disposed of. "If George Eliot turns out a dull dog and an ineffective writer--a mere flash in the pan," Mary Ann Evans wrote, "I, for one, am determined to cut him on the first intimation of that disagreeable fact."⁵⁹

G. H. Lewes, himself an author of novels and essays (as well as a critic and editor), testifies to George Eliot's "extreme diffidence which prevented her from writing at all, for so many years and would prevent her now, if I were not beside her to encourage her."⁶⁰ He writes that she is

unusually sensitive, and unlike most writers is more anxious about excellence than about appearing in print . . . He is consequently afraid of failure though not afraid of obscurity . . . I tell you this that you might understand the sort of shy, shrinking, ambitious nature you have to deal with.

Lewes wrote this to Blackwood at the start of Eliot's career. Yet even during the year that Middlemarch was published and her authority and wisdom were being celebrated in the publication of Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings, Lewes wrote to its compiler Alexander Main, of Eliot's

"extraordinary diffidence and self-questioning," noting that her "habitual tone of . . . mind is distrust of herself." Lewes's encouragement gave her, as it were, permission to write; his shielding her from most reviews (good and bad) enabled her to continue.⁶¹

The history of the publishing of the Impressions of Theophrastus Such reveals George Eliot's fear of appearing in public and of having her work judged by literature's male arbiters. This collection of essays is written in the first person, a voice that has the freedom of being the assumed voice of an individual as opposed to the wise, world-sized voice of the third person. Yet the first person also has the disadvantages of the conflation of the "I" and George Eliot by both reader and writer. The first essay of the collection, "Looking Inward," is a looking inward into the neuroses of authorship; it articulates the fears that manifested themselves in the headaches, ill-health, and the flights to Europe on the completion of each book throughout George Eliot's career. The narrator's strategies in this essay reveal the conflicts of assertion.

The narrator first insists on placing himself among the audience to whom he is speaking:

Dear blunderers, I am one of you. I wince at the fact, but I am not ignorant of it, that I too am laughable on unsuspected occasions; nay in the very tempest and whirlwind of my anger, I include myself under my own indignation.⁶²

He follows this by insisting on his lack of presumption; (not that I feel myself aloof from you). This apologetic stance develops into an obsessional awareness of his audience--his friends and readers--and of their probable construction of his behaviour. He moves from self-deprecation--"Why should I expect to be admired, and have my company doated on?" (p. 10)--to a confession of his dreams of a "French heaven of having

the laughs on my side" (p. 12) till he builds up into a crescendo of paranoia when he comes to describe the process of writing:

I imagine a far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage, as in a picture of Paradise, making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which I myself particularly enjoy the writing. The haze is a necessary condition. If any physiognomy becomes distinct in the foreground, it is fatal . . . it stares at my presumption, pities my ignorance, or is manifestly preparing to expose the various instances in which I unconsciously disgrace myself. (p. 15)

The narrator feels that his condition is unusual:

Other persons, I am aware, have not the same cowardly shrinking from a candid opinion of their performance, and are even importunately eager. (p. 16)

George Eliot was unusual as a writer partly in the fact of her sex. Women's performances were mostly in the private sphere. Because of her previous life as a critic, each novel Eliot wrote must have seemed doubly presumptuous. In her male persona of reviewer, she had attacked female novelists, just as she was meditating writing novels herself, on the grounds that such productions would "confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women." She was, therefore, perhaps scourged not only by the ideals promoted in her books (by her portraits of "those who want nothing for themselves" as she tells Sara Hennell) but by the intellectual and literary judgments of her criticism.⁶³

Just when George Eliot had completed the essays--assertive both in voice and genre, G. H. Lewes died; his last act--Blackwood thought that "there is something solemn and fit in it"--was to send off her manuscript of Theophrastus.⁶⁴ With George Henry Lewes no longer mediating between her and her audience, George Eliot succumbs it seems to her doubts. She tells John Blackwood to delay publication of her manuscript, because, she says, "it would be intolerable to my feelings to have a book of my writing

brought out for a long while to come." The phrasing of her letter suggests that this novelist, whose theme is the egoism of all action and the tyranny of the will, is consumed by her fear of the effect of assertion. To publish at this time would be to assert herself in the face of death. Eliot eventually consents (in an example of one anxiety cancelling out another) to the printing because of "a scruple about occupying the type." Her hesitation, however, surfaces in her inability to decide between "By George Eliot" or "Edited by George Eliot"--the more distant acknowledgment which the essay form permits.⁶⁵ Three days later, she decides to call off publication. She writes to William Blackwood:

I am so dissatisfied with 'Theophrastus' on reading the revise, that I have proposed to suppress it in this original form, and regenerate it whenever--if ever--I recover the power to do so.
"To William Blackwood," 25 March 1879, VII, 122

The form her publisher's reassurance takes suggests that the pre-publication anxiety common to all authors is made nearly unmanageable for George Eliot by the belief that her aspiration is improper. Theophrastus, John Blackwood writes, had Lewes's "full sanction," and

apart from that I can vouch from his own fervent expressions how thoroughly he who knew you best felt that your works were above criticism and incapable of being made better by the assistance of any human being.

"To George Eliot," 1 April 1879, VII, 125

George Eliot then assents to the publication, because, she tells Blackwood: "If you had at all suspected that the book would injure my influence you would not have wished me to give it forth in its present form."⁶⁶ For Eliot, the egoistic wish for a public life is only justified by a beneficent purpose.

Authors in Eliot's fiction fare worse than pretty women. Each of her characters who needs an audience seems to inscribe Eliot's guilt, fears,

and paranoia. George Eliot writes of Casaubon, who displays in all their grotesqueness the vanity and egoism of authorship, that she "lived much in him." She was pleased when the reviews that she did see sympathized with him. He seems to figure in the family's jokes on authorship: Lewes writes to Blackwood of George Eliot's "suffering (silently, as Mrs. Casaubon would) under an oppression of marital m.s. with no permission to 'omit the second excursus on Crete.'" Blackwood writes of Lewes's book: "If the lamented Casaubon had written it I should have insisted on his publishing at his own risk."⁶⁷ While Casaubon's paranoid construction of an audience in his mind prevents him from publishing, Lydgate and Brooke are deprived of a public. Similarly, Will's "indeterminate loftiest thing which he had once dreamed of as alone worthy of continuous effort" (Ch. 46, p. 501) is reduced for a time to eating dinners. In fact, Middlemarch seems to thwart all aspiration. In Daniel Deronda, however, Mordecai eventually finds an audience in Daniel and Daniel--although Henry James maliciously suggests it is a tea-party--finds his. Yet Gwendolen is denied her audience and Hans Meyrick finds buyers only for portraits rather than for the allegorical representations that he prefers to paint. Klesmer's audience is unsatisfactorily Philistine, and Mrs. Arrowpoint's is derisory. Even the beloved Mirah's audience shrinks from the theatre to the drawing-room, while Princess Halm-Eberstein's disappears altogether.

In Middlemarch, Mr. Brooke, who has been advised against such a vain and dangerous proceeding, addresses his audience face to face. Not only is his image, his book, spattered with broken eggs, but so is he. His audience mimics him and (like some of George Eliot's contemporary critics) yell "Blast your ideas" (Ch. 51, p. 548).⁶⁸ Even if a character succeeds in writing a book, he inevitably goes unrecognized. Uncle Gascoigne's articles, which are published anonymously, are either attributed to others or unread by those who know them to be his. Similarly, Middlemarch

attributes Fred's book to Mary and Mary's to Fred; this means "that there was no need to praise anybody for writing a book, since it was always done by somebody else" (Finale, p. 891). The Fred-Mary idyll is consequently preserved from the hubris of successful authorship.

In these jokes (and Nietzsche defines jokes as "epigrams on the death of a feeling") Eliot displays her uneasiness in her role of author. This anxiety erupts, as Dorothea's does, not only in jokes but in paradoxical and self-deprecating claims. Pleased with the cottages that she is at pains to tell Chettam she copied, Dorothea tells her sister, "I shall think I am a great architect, if I have not got incompatible stairs and fireplaces." Middlemarch, we are told by its author, is not epic but home-epic, is not the history of tragedy's mythic figures but the tragic history of ordinary human lots. The heroine is not Antigone but Dorothea; and the author speaks not from Fielding's arm-chair but from a camp-stool, and not in a theatre but in a parrot-house. Clearly the author does not wish to be accused of the self-display that the theatre in Middlemarch's system of acting metaphors has come to signify. Yet this home-epic has become epic; Dorothea has become a heroine of mythic status; and the ordinary human lot has become our tragedy. We "awaken the dead," Marx says, for "the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old, of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality."⁶⁹ In the same pattern of assertion and denial, of claim and counter claim in which the text is woven, Eliot implies the revolutionary nature of her enterprise. Middlemarch's description of itself points to Eliot's transforming conception of the novel's territory. Its success is determined in part by the narrative strategy; and the narrative strategy is a consequence of her subject--women's aspiration and women's education--and perhaps its nearness to Eliot's personal concerns. Having achieved this

balance of conflicting views, to which the variety of interpretation testifies, Eliot decides in Daniel Deronda to upset it. In Daniel Deronda, Eliot's competing arguments break the novel in two.

Notes

- 1 "The Lifted Veil," Blackwood's Magazine, 86 (1859), p. 35.
- 2 Middlemarch, ed. W. J. Harvey, (1871-1872); Harmondsworth: The Penguin English Library, 1965. All references will be given in the text.
- 3 In an early scene in The Mill on the Floss, Eliot depicts a squabble between Tom and Maggie Tulliver over a jam puff, using food, much as Charlotte Brontë did in Shirley, to show the dynamics of control (Bk. 1, Ch. 6, p. 99).
- 4 A contemporary reviewer wrote that "George Eliot's novels are not novels in the ordinary sense of the term--they are really dramas: as the word is understood when applied to 'Hamlet', or the 'Agamemnon'." Westminster Review, 86 (1866), 200. Stang suggests that this remark indicates that the term "novel" is still disreputable, but given the journal and the date, it expresses, I think, a sense of Eliot's technique and power (Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England 1860-1870 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 47).
- 5 The Mill on the Floss (Book II, Ch. 1, pp. 208-209).
- 6 "Chapter 85, Middlemarch," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 35 (1980), p. 453.
- 7 Gilbert and Gubar use this similarity between Rosamond's and Dorothea's positions to argue that when Rosamond acts, she enacts Dorothea's anger (p. 516). In this chapter, I will show that it is Eliot who acts out Dorothea's anger through her plots--though she could not be called Dorothea's double, as she also acts against her.
- 8 Neil Hertz makes the point in "Recognizing Casaubon," Glyph 6 (1979), that "certain recipients of moral generosity don't fare well in the world" (p. 29).
- 9 Poirier, p. 452.
- 10 "Mr. Collins has my gratitude for feeling some regard towards Mr. Casaubon, in whose life I lived with much sympathy." "To John Blackwood," 19 September 1873, V, 441.
- 11 "To Dr. Joseph Frank Payne," 25 January 1876, VI, 216.
- 12 This reflects George Eliot's "meliorist" position. See J. W. Cross, George Eliot's Life, III, 309 (New York: Harper, n.d.).
- 13 Shirley, Gwendolen, and Dorothea all pose a threat to society, and must be restrained in marriage. Gwendolen: "The point is to get her well married. She has a little too much fire in her" (Ch. 7, p. 111). Dorothea: "It will be well for her to marry again as soon as it is proper . . . I see clearly a husband is the best thing to keep her in order" (Ch. 54, p. 587).

14 Although Gwendolen's observations of marriage had led her to think it rather a "dreary state" (Ch. 4, p. 68), she tells her mother, "Mamma, I see now why girls are glad to be married--to escape being expected to please everybody but themselves" (Ch. 9, p. 130).

15 During Mr. Casaubon's convalescence, Dorothea shuts up the library (for practical reasons) but also, perhaps, because knowledge is dangerous. As Celia remarks, "it is very shocking that Mr. Casaubon should be ill" (Ch. 29, p. 318).

16 Poirier, p. 452.

17 While one experience may not justify a conclusion, Casaubon is only one of a collection of disappointing men--Mr. Brooke and Sir James Chettam.

18 Carroll notes that this is a characteristic image of disenchantment in a characteristic movement of Eliot's characters from "illusion through disenchantment to regeneration." ("An Image of Disenchantment in the Novels of George Eliot," Review of English Studies, 11 [1960], 29.)

19 Dorothea's home makes another of Shirley's metaphors literal. Her home becomes a prison, with Casaubon as its strict jailor.

20 This is similar to Ruskin's view of women's role. See "Of Queens' Gardens," Sesame and Lilies, in Vol. XVIII of The Works (1865; London: George Allen, 1905), pp. 109-44.

21 While Barbara Hardy in The Art of the Novel (London: Athlone, 1964), contends that "sensibility acts as a surrogate for sensuality" (p. 125) and that Dorothea's reaction to Rome is full of "vague sensual implications" (p. 127), she says that these are "not picked up in the ensuing debate with Will." Laura Emery, on the other hand, agrees with Hardy that sensibility represents sensuality but sees in the debate with Will a representation of the primal scene, George Eliot's Creative Conflict: The Other Side of Silence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 155. Even if this is so, on the manifest level the political explanation of Dorothea's reaction to Rome, which I have described, links Rome with the debate with Will.

22 Christ, "Aggression and Providential Death in George Eliot's Fiction," Novel, 9 (1976), 130.

23 Impressions of Theophrastus Such (1879; Chicago: Belford Clarke, 1889), p. 11.

24 This would agree with Barbara Hardy's finding that Eliot's scenes "often provide . . . a visual resting-place which may cover a subterranean movement of the action" (p. 185).

25 To Charles Bray," 11, June 1848, I, 268.

26 Mary Garth, on the other hand, like Jane, acts decisively.

27 Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," p. 296; Eliza Lynn Linton, quoted in Richard Ellmann, "Dorothea's Husbands," in Golden Codgers (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 36; F. R. Leavis, The Great

Tradition (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), pp. 92, 94. Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot (London: Athlone, 1959), pp. 127, 108, Ellmann, p. 38.

28 Bessie Rayner Parkes, In a Walled Garden (London: Ward & Downey, 1895), p. 15; Mary Carruthers, "Imagining Women: Notes towards a Feminist Poetic," Massachusetts Review, 20 (1979), 281-307.

29 Zelda Austen, "Why Feminists Are Angry with George Eliot," College English, 37 (1976), pp. 552-53. See Nina Auerbach, "Women on Women's Destiny," Massachusetts Review, 20 (1979), 329-30.

30 Emma (1816; Boston: Riverside Edition, 1957), p. 418.

31 V. S. Pritchett, "The Pains of Others," New Statesman, 70 (12 November 1965), 738.

32 Cf. U. C. Knoepfelmacher comments that "The narrator modulates our responses through accumulation. His effects are additive, incremental" (Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971], p. 188).

33 Ellmann, p. 29.

34 George Levine, "The Hero as Dilettante: Middlemarch and Nostromo," in Smith, p. 157.

35 See "G. H. Lewes to William Blackwood," 2 October 1872, V, 313, and 313n.

36 Text given in Susan Meikle, "Fruit and Seed: The Finale to Middlemarch," in Smith, pp. 182-83.

37 "To Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor," 18 July 1878, VII, 44.

38 "To Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor," 18 July 1878, VII, 44.

39 See, for example, Patricia Beer, p. 199; or Michael Irwin, "Readings of Melodrama," in Reading the Victorian Novel, "the incident is a miscalculation and garish" (p. 24).

40 Suzanne C. Ferguson, "Mme. Laure and Operative Irony in Middlemarch: A Structural Analogy," Studies in English Literature, 3 (1963), 509.

41 W. J. Harvey, The Art of George Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 237.

42 Shirley's uncle, for example, attributes her "free thinking" to her reading of French novels. "Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles" (Ch. XXXII, p. 625); and Mrs. Mompert, whom Gwendolen is threatened with as an employer, "is a woman of taste and also of strict principle, and objects to having a French person in the house" Daniel Deronda, Ch. 24, p. 312; the immorality of Rochester's suggestion that Jane and he live together is reflected in his proposal of a villa in Marseilles.

43 "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, 66 (1856), 442-61. Rpt. The Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 300-324. References will be to Pinney's edition.

44 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 520.

45 "Lalla Rookh," by Thomas Moore (published in 1817); it is also quoted in Jane Eyre (Ch. XXXIII, p. 468), and Villette (Ch. XIX).

46 This is how Martha Vicinus summarizes Rosamond Vincy. See her introduction to Suffer and Be Still (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. xi.

47 See "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," p. 316.

48 Patricia Beer implies that Mme Laure is not exactly a murderer, comparing her participation in her husband's death to Gwendolen's in hers. Her discussion focusses on the criminality of intention.

49 There are one or two comments on Dorothea's regality that are either confusing or insufficiently distanced, or both. Lydgate thinks that "It was as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down . . . at the poor mortals who pray to her" (Ch. 76, p. 826); and Dorothea thinks of Lydgate, Will, and Rosamond as "suppliants bearing the sacred branch" (Ch. 80, p. 846). Laura Emery finds in George Eliot an "uncritical participation" in "Dorothea's intense need to give relief" (p. 167).

50 Harvey, p. 160.

51 Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 194; Gillian Beer notes that Bertha and Rosamond share "the same calculating constriction of personality which seems decorous compliancy to the man they marry." "Myth and the Single Consciousness: Middlemarch and 'The Lifted Veil.'" In This Particular Web: Essays on Middlemarch. Ed. Ian Adam (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 93.

52 Harold Bloom's term. The Anxiety of Influence (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). There are many other signs of Eliot's debt to Brontë. Coincidentally, Jane Eyre and Mary Ann Evans adopted similar pseudonyms.

53 Q. D. Leavis, "'Dora' from a Woman's Point of View," in Dickens the Novelist (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 107.

54 "John Blackwood to George Eliot," 29 July 1872, VI, 293.

55 Ellmann, p. 195; Lloyd Fernando, "George Eliot, Feminism, and Dorothea Brooke," Review of English Literature, 4 (1963), 86.

56 Relative Creatures (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 95.

57 "To Sara Hennell," 12 October 1867, IV, 390.

- 58 George Eliot, George Eliot: A Biography (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 91.
- 59 "To John Blackwood," 14 March 1857, II, 309-310.
- 60 "G. H. Lewes to Sarah Hennell," [12 September 1862], IV, 58.
- 61 "G. H. Lewes to Alexander Main," 20 December 1871, V, 228.
- 62 Impressions of Theophrastus Such, p. 8.
- 63 "To Sara Hennell," 23 August 1863, IV, 104.
- 64 "John Blackwood to Charles Lee Lewis," 9 December 1878, VI, 88.
- 65 "To John Blackwood," 25 February 1879, VII, 109; "To John Blackwood," 25 February 1879, VII, 119.
- 66 "To John Blackwood," 5 April 1879, VII, 126.
- 67 "G. H. Lewes to John Blackwood," 25 November 1872, V, 332; "John Blackwood to G. H. Lewes," 17 January 1873, V, 369.
- 68 For example, Leslie Stephen, "George Eliot--Obituary," Cornhill, 43 (1881), 152-68: "She is convicted upon conclusive evidence of having indulged in ideas"; Allott, p. 467.
- 69 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Marx and Engels, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (New York: Anchor, 1959), p. 322.

Chapter Five

Broken Fragments and the Ties that Bind:

"George Eliot's New Story of English Life--DANIEL DERONDA"

I said, I will take heed to my ways,
That I sin not with my tongue:
I will keep my mouth with a bridle
While the wicked is before me.

I was dumb with silence, I held
my peace, even from good;
And my sorrow was stirred.

My heart was hot within me;
While I was musing the fire kindled:
Then spake I with my tongue.

Psalm 39, vv. 1-3

Daniel Deronda speaks Middlemarch's silent lesson: "Look on other lives besides your own," he says; "Try to care for what is best in thought and action" (Ch. 36, p. 501); look "beyond the small drama of personal desires" (p. 507). Middlemarch's "aesthetic" teaching has turned into doctrine; the lesson that was taught through implication and negation has become statement. In Middlemarch, George Eliot brought issues that Charlotte Brontë had expressed in metaphor and indirection to the surface. The novel examines the self's will to assert; it does so in terms of plot. Middlemarch, however, uses metaphors of acting to bring out a distinction between self-display and "beneficent activity" in its female characters. Daniel Deronda now brings to the level of plot Middlemarch's metaphors. Its female characters actually perform on the stage: Mirah and the Princess Halm-Eberstein sing, and Gwendolen, the star of private theatricals, wishes to act for her living rather than marry.¹ Yet, Mirah (whose "theatrical training had left no recognizable trace" [Ch. 20,

p. 266]) hates to act and goes onto the stage as a singer only to show up the staginess of her audience:

It was like a new kind of stage-experience for her to be close to genuine grand ladies with genuine brilliants and complexions, and they impressed her vaguely as coming out of some unknown drama in which their parts perhaps got more tragic as they went on.
(Ch. 45, p. 621)

In Daniel Deronda, actions themselves have figurative purposes, revelatory of character. The characters act (Mirah performs but does not like doing it); Gwendolen gambles (as she gambles with her life).

Gwendolen Harleth's history, which begins with her acting the part of Hermione in a tableau, ends when acting has been turned back into metaphor, when Gwendolen has become a "black-robed figure" who "doesn't show to visitors" (Ch. 69, p. 870). At the beginning of the novel, Gwendolen is always in motion, even revising the conventional immobility of the traditional tableau to allow herself, through movement, an additional moment of self-display; by the end of the novel, Gwendolen has been turned back into "a melancholy statue" (Ch. 65, p. 841). The single girl who was "not going to do as any other woman did" (Ch. 13, p. 168) has been turned into a widow who wishes to be "one of the best women" (Ch. 70, p. 882). The novel undertakes the "uneasy transforming process" (Ch. 35, p. 477) of turning "doing" back into "being."² Dorothea's question, "What shall I do, what ought I do?", which changes on Gwendolen's lips to, "I shall do as I like" (Ch. 57, p. 764), becomes by the end of George Eliot's last novel not even a self-assertive question or demand but an obedient response. "I have remembered your words--that I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born" (p. 882).

Daniel Deronda takes up the questions raised by Middlemarch's teaching. It explores the furthest consequences of the "peremptory will"

(Ch. 12, p. 162) and discovers it to be "murderous" (Ch. 57, p. 763). It also examines the ethos of the sympathetic imagination, seeking its proper limits. Drifting in his boat, as he is drifting in his life, Daniel is described as

forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape. (Ch. 17, p. 229)

At this point, Daniel finds an answer in his discovery of Mirah and of Judaism. His "many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action" (Ch. 32, p. 412), rests on Mirah, and through her he discovers decisive action. Because of Mirah, he seeks Mordecai and learns that "the blasphemy of this time" is to say, "I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me" (Ch. 42, p. 598). In his dedication to his Zionist mission, Daniel discovers the limits of his ability to meet Gwendolen's need. Daniel's dread of "the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own with imploring dependence" (Ch. 56, p. 754) is Will's dread of Rosamond and Dorothea's of Casaubon. His rejection of her marks the limit to which others' claims should inform action. And in Daniel Deronda, George Eliot finds the limit of her aesthetic of the sympathetic imagination--realism: for in Daniel Deronda, Eliot is no longer the exemplary realist novelist, whose narrator is an "onlooker"; she is a preacher. Daniel Deronda speaks out.

The success of Middlemarch permitted Daniel Deronda to be outspoken, as if Middlemarch's lesson had become part of culture; and to be innovative, as if Middlemarch were the culminating masterpiece of its genre. Middlemarch taught the sympathetic imagination by employing it. Its point of view shifted from self to equivalent centre of self; doctrine and aesthetic coincided. The two aims of realism, instruction and

representation, break the novel in two. Within Daniel Deronda, the English realist novel becomes something else. Both halves of the work, acting together, force the novel in new directions. What makes this daring experiment in art possible for George Eliot, I think, is primarily the subject of the Jewish Question, which brings into the novel, as Eliot said, a "new element." The strategies that Eliot employed to accommodate this "new element," I shall show, had as their consequence another "new element," the psychological realism of "Gwendolen Harleth" (as Leavis called the half of the novel he admired).³

Eliot's last novel is an experiment not only in life--an investigation into whether "the gains from past revelations and discipline . . . can be something more than shifting theory";⁴--but also an experiment in fiction. In the "Jewish" half of the novel and through Daniel (the "Jewish" half's representative in the other half) George Eliot speaks out. But in "Gwendolen Harleth," George Eliot brings within realism "the double-consciousness," the "experiment in fiction and in psychology" that she had previously undertaken years before in her anonymously-published and non-realistic short story, "The Lifted Veil."⁵

Though for clarity's sake, I shall use the names that are usually given to each part of the work--calling one part "Jewish" and the other "Gwendolen Harleth"--these labels seem unsatisfactory without some definition, which this essay will undertake. For now, it is enough to say that the "Jewish" part usually denotes all those elements that would not belong in Middlemarch. As we shall see, one could also describe the part in which the Jews figure as an idyll or a romance, or call it visionary or prophetic.⁶

The cast list for the "Jewish" part consists of Daniel, Mirah, and Mordecai, and the characters--such as the Meryricks, the Cohens, and

Mirah's father--who subserve the central drama by endeavouring to anchor it in the real world. The cast list for "Gwendolen Harleth" includes Gwendolen, Grandcourt, Lush, Mrs. Glasher, Gwendolen's mother, and the many characters who fill out the social world, such as the Arrowpoints and the Gascoignes. These characters seem to exist in ways that, despite their bustle, the "subordinate ministers" to the "Jewish" half do not.⁷ The two parts are held together by Hans, Mirah, Klesmer, and Anna Gascoigne who visit each other's halves, and by Daniel who commutes between.

For the author who had taken domestic realism to its limits (a genre defined by its dependence on facts and rooted in English rural and landed society), the Jews, a rootless, alien, and urban people, united by inspiration, must have seemed a way out of an aesthetic impasse.⁸ Though it was set back in the era of Reform, Middlemarch had nevertheless been concerned with the here and now, grounded in modern actuality. After visiting a synagogue in Amsterdam in 1866, Eliot writes to Sara Hennell:

The chanting and the swaying about of the bodies--almost a wriggling--are not beautiful to the sense, but I fairly cried at witnessing this faint symbolism of a religion of sublime far-off memories. The skulls of St. Ursula's eleven thousand virgins seem a modern suggestion compared with the Jewish Synagogue.

10 August, 1866, IV, 298

George Eliot's interest in the Jewish Question, however sincere, was necessarily an "impersonal historic interest" (as she calls it in a letter to the editor of the Jewish Chronicle) in a way--besides the obvious one--that the struggles of Gwendolen Harleth are not. Its impersonality permits the preaching it contains. Yet, Daniel Deronda is not simply an argument for the social acceptance of the Jews: the transcendent aspects of Judaism appealed strongly to Eliot.

Even before she wrote Middlemarch, George Eliot (according to Emily Davies' account) felt the constraints of realism. Emily Davies gives the

following report of George Eliot's views on fiction (the letter was written on the same afternoon that the conversation took place):

Then we got to talk of fiction, and she was eager to explain the difference between prosaic and poetical fiction--that what is prosaic in ordinary novels is not the presence of the realistic element, without which the tragedy cannot be given [shown]--she herself is obliged to see and feel every minutest detail--but in the absence of anything suggesting the ideal, the higher life.

"Emily Davies to Jane Crow,"
21 August [1869], VIII, 465

George Eliot names the Jews a "new element" in the novel; what she was naming in calling it Jewish was a change of direction for fiction. Daniel Deronda, to many readers' regret, takes on the universal and the transcendent. Because the "present" for the Jews (described as a race rather than as individuals) is a matter of keeping the past alive and putting one's hope in the future, the Jews provided a "realistic" means of incorporating "non-realistic" elements within the novel.

For the artist George Eliot, the crucial advantage of writing about the Jews, then, is that the subject permitted experimentation. The Jews provided Eliot with an excuse for including the idealism that she worked hard to suppress in Middlemarch. The narrator of Daniel Deronda abandons the stance of "ironic contemplation" that was kept up in Middlemarch even (according to some critics) in the final love scene between Will and Dorothea.⁹ Instead, Deronda, Gwendolen's "supercilious mentor," catches the irony of his position before it might be used against him. His own ironic reflections on his behaviour (towards his "many-sided sympathy," towards his fascination with and dread of Gwendolen, towards his reverence for Mordecai) work to make that narrative irony unnecessary. Deronda knows his faults--though perhaps not soon enough for many readers who think of him as a "prig."¹⁰ After reflecting on the "painful collision" between his duty to Mordecai and his duty to Gwendolen, Deronda concludes

That he had been falling into an exaggeration of his own importance, and a ridiculous readiness to accept Gwendolen's view of himself, as if he could really have any decisive power over her. (Ch. 45, p. 625)

The narrator is then free to engage in a different form of defence: to persuade the reader through Deronda that idealism, and even prophecy, (figured in Mordecai and the Jews) has a place in society and therefore in the realist novel:

Imagine the conflict in a mind like Deronda's, given not only to feel strongly but to question actively, on the evening after that interview with Mordecai. To a young man of much duller susceptibilities the adventure might have seemed enough out of the common way to divide his thought; but it had stirred Deronda so deeply, that with the usual reaction of his intellect he began to examine the grounds of his emotion, and consider how far he must resist its guidance. The consciousness that he was half dominated by Mordecai's energetic certitude, and still more by his fervent trust, roused his alarm. (Ch. 41, p. 568)

This insistence on Deronda's questioning mind (and the many demonstrations of it) combined with his witty exchanges in social conversation (on Caliban, for instance, or on Buddha) permits Deronda to teach. The Princess Halm-Eberstein tells Daniel, "You speak as men do--as if you felt yourself wise" (Ch. 53, p. 726). Through Daniel and Daniel's growing interest in Jews and Judaism, George Eliot can also speak as if she felt herself wise. In *Deronda*, perhaps, Eliot also achieves a reconciliation between "female" sympathy and "male" intellect.¹¹

The Jews may be the subject of the "Jewish" part, but they are not, I shall argue, its object: the "Jews" are a way of talking about English society, an objective correlative for what is wrong with society. This is the way in which "everything in the book . . . relate[s] to everything else."¹² The Jews are warm, responsive, reverent, enthusiastic, purposeful, dutiful, and alive when the English are cold, egoistic, indifferent, cynical, aimless, and worn out. Daniel, for example, has a

"calm intensity of life" (Ch. 15, p. 200) whereas Grandcourt is a "remnant" without "vital energy" (p. 456, 370); Daniel has sympathetic curiosity; Grandcourt will not exert himself even to the extent of calling "things" by their distinct names, rarely asks a direct question, and requires his orders to be carried out in dumb show.¹³ The Jews are cosmopolitan, knowledgeable, and talented, while the English are chauvinist and accomplished rather than knowledgeable. The relationships between the Jews are vital: Jewish family bonds are honoured (Mirah even urges her despicable father to live with her). English family ties seem important only as they determine the passing of property (the Arrowpoints recognize their daughter's marriage chiefly, it is suggested, because of the inconvenience of being without an heir). Jewish rites are invested with meanings, meanings which are strong enough for the Princess Halm-Eberstein to resist and so inspiring that Mr. Cohen is transfigured in his celebration of the Sabbath. For the English, social forms, from conversation to marriage, are kept up, but are empty.

Even the Jewish characters, unequal to this ideal, can claim compensatory virtues that the Gentile sinners lack. Mirah's father is deceitful and manipulative. But he is also talented, a polyglot who is capable of translating Daniel's manuscripts; he belongs to the Jewish ideal in spite of himself. Daniel's mother may have abandoned the baby Daniel in favour of her grand career and to save him the stigma, as she saw it, of being born a Jew, but eventually she is subject to conscience, proving again that the Jewish ideal is stronger than any individual representative of it. Gwendolen's egoism is, by contrast, narrow and petty. Furthermore, the very staginess of Lapidoth and the Princess Halm-Eberstein makes their sins less serious for the reader than those of Grandcourt and Gwendolen. The higher life that is demonstrated in Middlemarch only through negation

and unachieved aspirations is embodied in these "non-English" characters. One half of the novel criticizes the other.

Mirah is a way of talking about Gwendolen. Each, as Gezari points out, is a "'princess in exile,' experiences poverty, and has a splendid offer."¹⁴ Both are rescued by Daniel, Mirah from a literal drowning and Gwendolen from a metaphorical one: "It was as if he saw her drowning while his limbs were bound," he says when she confides in him (p. 509). Both are wanderers: Mirah is a "poor wanderer" in a literal sense but, like Daniel, she carries her home with her; for Gwendolen, her home is merely a background, and she is a lost and restless spirit. The contrasts are strongest at the beginning of the novel, where we see the premises from which the characters develop: Gwendolen feels "ready to manage her own destiny" (Ch. 4, p. 70) and "equipped for the mastery of life" (p. 69). But "it is not in [Mirah's] nature," so Mrs. Meryrick tells Daniel, "to run into planning and devising: only to submit" (Ch. 20, p. 265). Rather than work for Mrs. Mompert, Gwendolen marries Grandcourt for a life of luxury and ease; Mirah is "anxious not to eat the bread of idleness, but to work," and not only works but saves her money. Gwendolen imagines herself as a goddess or a great actress; the actress Mirah "has no notion of being anybody but herself" (Ch. 20, p. 253). Gwendolen feeds off the thought of pre-eminence; Mirah "never liked the praise I had" (p. 253). Mirah already is what Gwendolen will learn she must become, "one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born" (p. 882). Gwendolen, so Bonnie Zimmerman argues, is "The Girl of the Period";¹⁵ Mirah, as it were, is the domestic angel incarnate. Yet a problem for many readers is that idealized Mirah is not flesh and blood, and Gwendolen is. In this, the sentimental Mirah typifies the Jewish part; she belongs to an ideal and idealized world which comments on the real world that we recognize in Gwendolen.

Mirah becomes a way of talking about what is wrong with Gwendolen

without having to talk about it directly. The Woman Question, therefore, need enter only tangentially into Gwendolen's story, and only because the will under dissection is female. Mirah becomes a silent norm by which Gwendolen's behaviour is judged; later, Daniel's conversation with his mother brings the issues to the surface. In Middlemarch, it was the Woman Question that was under dissection, worked out in terms of the destructive consequences of all forms of assertion. Gwendolen's "egoistic desire," unlike Dorothea's, has "no disturbing reference to the advancement of learning or the balance of the constitution" (Ch. 4, p. 69); Gwendolen's problems have little to do with the fact that "women can't go in search of adventures--to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East" (Ch. 13, p. 171). This merely reduces the scale of her ego's operations. Whereas it is suggested that Grandcourt would be expert in governing a difficult colony (Ch. 48, p. 655), Gwendolen is only expert in governing her own "petty domestic empire." In a sense, the women in Daniel Deronda do the petty domestic equivalent of petty male adventures like hunting tigers: they gamble and gallop (as Gwendolen does) and they make money by drawing, singing, and acting. Women can even act on a universal scale: Alcharisi (the Princess Halm-Eberstein) has an international reputation and Lady Hester Stanhope (whom Gwendolen mentions) sets up as a queen in the east. Because Mirah incarnates womanly virtues, Daniel Deronda is largely freed from rehearsing the pros and cons of correct feminine behaviour; the story focusses instead on Gwendolen's tortured consciousness. Eliot confronts the issue that she evaded in Middlemarch. Having imprisoned Gwendolen (as she did Dorothea) in marriage, Eliot allows Gwendolen's rage to take its course. Gwendolen contemplates murder, the ultimate act of wilfulness. Mirah's history, meanwhile, proves the benefits of submission.

The "Jewish" half may be all that its most hostile critics claim it to be: its "nobility, generosity, and moral idealism" may be "modes of self-indulgence"; its "wastes of biblicality and fervid idealism" may be signs of "the exaltations and fervours" that the "Dorothea in [Eliot] craves,"¹⁶ but Eliot abandons her characteristic defence of irony in this call to righteousness because that part is played by the other half of the novel. Sir Hugo, for instance, deflates Daniel's pretentiousness. But then because of the size and scope of the vision of the Jews, his realism is criticized by their idealism; his worldly wisdom rebounds. In one half, George Eliot may write as if she believed herself to be the Prioress of the Priory (as one of her visitors ironically called her),¹⁷ but the realistic half of the novel, "Gwendolen Harleth," mediates her sibylline utterance.

Within Daniel Deronda, George Eliot has not abandoned her purpose of being an "aesthetic" teacher rather than a "doctrinal" one. Daniel Deronda's construction embodies its lesson: "matter" and "form" are still an "inseparable truthfulness,"¹⁸ only the substance of the matter of Daniel Deronda is the lack of ideal, belief, or a vision beyond the self; and that lesson is rendered structurally by a separation in the novel between the ideal, fervid, visionary half and the other half, which is in need of the visions that feed the world. The gap results, in the terms of James's Pulcheria, in the novel's broken fragments. Daniel articulates the lesson when he calls attention to the fragmentary nature of his "English" life. He looks to Mordecai's mind to receive

the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after but not traceable by divination.
(Ch. 41, p. 571)

Eliot's guard against chaos (seen in Maggie Tulliver's case working against the indulgence of passion) is social duty--the ties that bind.

Speaking as Constantius, Henry James argues that the "artificial" Jewish half (the other is "spontaneous") was written by George Eliot "because it [was] expected of her." The "Jewish" half, he feels, is "at bottom cold."¹⁹ The testimony of contemporary Jews to Daniel Deronda's accuracy might seem to testify to its warmth and to suggest that it is engaged in the depiction of the Jews for its own sake. Freud, for instance, writing to Martha Bernays in 1882, was "amazed by [Daniel Deronda's] knowledge of Jewish intimate ways that 'we speak of only among ourselves'" and "Jews and Jewesses both at home and abroad" sent George Eliot many "delightful communications."²⁰ Yet Henry James's judgment, I think, points towards the functional role of the Jews within the novel. James speculates that the Jewish element in the novel may have been designed to give its tragic force to the moment when Deronda rejects Gwendolen--that is the moment when Gwendolen is reduced by Daniel's vision "to a mere speck" (Ch. 69, p. 875). The Jewish part, however, also allows George Eliot advantages of great artistic significance.

The "separateness" of the Jews allows this novel of English society to fall into two parts. George Eliot takes advantage of the division to separate the inherently conflicting aims of the realist novel, the depiction of the world as it is and the vision of how it should be. Through the one half Eliot teaches a lesson, allowing Mordecai's vision to influence the rest of this section, turning it into an idyll; in the other half, she depicts the society in need of the lesson. By choosing a subject which would make the parts of the book that dealt with it conspicuous, George Eliot gains a new freedom in the other half of the novel. She no longer has to reaffirm social values in its ending: because Daniel marries Mirah and they sail off to Dorothea's "New Jerusalem," Gwendolen can be left in an uncertain future. Eliot's insistence on her idyll in one half of the book means that she can allow her realistic heroine to "escape into

liberated futurity."²¹ The realist novel of "Gwendolen Harleth" can become open-ended, and Eliot can make new admissions about the troubled human soul. These depictions of agony and conflict are Eliot's songs. Eliot, however, manifests Gwendolen's characteristic defence; they both are assertive in order "to talk down the singing in [their] own ears" (Ch. 48, p. 664).

The endings of Jane Eyre, and Shirley fulfill the traditional prescription described by one contemporary critic. Their morals can be read in

the terrible last chapter, when the good used to be gathered together and be respectably married, while the bad were cast out into single-lived perdition.²²

While the end of Middlemarch does not underscore its morality in a simple handing out of rewards and punishments, the Finale suggests by the narrator's survival into the present that the world is manageable, that the condition of England in 1872 (two Reform bills later) is improved (if only slightly), and that one has cause, if not for certainty, at least for optimism about the future.

George Eliot's previous novels had also tidied up life in the approved way: in Adam Bede, for instance, the socially disruptive and hedonistic Hetty is shipped off to Australia while the earnest Dinah and the hard-working Adam marry; and in The Mill on the Floss, the ties to home and family are reinforced by Maggie's union in death with her brother Tom, although Maggie's renewed appreciation of those ties remains conveniently untested. That George Eliot was under pressure as the unofficial prose laureate of Victorian society to tell optimistic tales is evident in the reception of "The Lifted Veil." This "wofully [sic] sombre" piece, as

James called it, undercuts the optimism of its era; George Eliot and her publisher were both uneasy.²³

In Daniel Deronda, Mirah and Daniel's marriage masks the novel's doubts. It endeavours to occlude the uncertainty of Gwendolen's fate. Had the book ended where Leavis ended "Gwendolen Harleth," the novel would have taken another step away from romance and towards incompleteness: it ends

after the death by drowning, leaving us with a vision of Gwendolen as she painfully emerges from her hallucinated worst conviction of guilt and confronts the daylight fact about Deronda's intentions. (p. 144)

Paradoxically, Daniel Deronda takes that step by including a romance within a realistic novel. Dickens was dissuaded from ending Great Expectations on such a note. His revised ending included a vision of a happy future.

Daniel Deronda's ending proposes a more revolutionary ending, a woman--not a man--facing the world alone. Such an ending to a novel requires that an "ideal," all's-right-with-the-world ending is present somewhere else. By having two plots which share a hero, George Eliot can present, as it were, the two endings of Great Expectations simultaneously. The ending of the realist part is, as Hans Meyrick says of his series of pictures depicting the history of Berenice, "chipped off, and passes with a ragged edge into nothing." It ends, as it began, in Homeric style. The heroes' two heroines become doubles: the real Berenice, Gwendolen, "nobody knows what became of her," but the Berenice of Hans' pictures, Mirah, a figure "of pure imagination" goes to the ruins of Jerusalem for "That is what ought to have been--perhaps was" (Ch. 37, p. 514)

In Daniel Deronda, "what ought to have been" is described in romance; but we normally associate romance, as we do in Jane Eyre, with the gratification of the will. In Jane Eyre, romance is used to describe all that is wrong with reality from Jane's (and Charlotte Brontë's) point of

view; the romance completes the world by compensating for reality's defects. But Daniel Deronda, through its use of romance and realism separates the world, making it fall into two. The romance criticizes the reality but the criticism does not involuntarily grow out of reality; it is imposed on it.

If we equate reality with the ego, Jane Eyre's romance, we might say, would express and gratify the id; Daniel Deronda's romance would fulfill the demands of the super-ego. Daniel enters Gwendolen Harleth's story precisely in this way: he becomes "In some mysterious way . . . a part of her conscience" (Ch. 35, p. 468):

her eyes met Deronda's, and, instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested--how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that . . . he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict.
(Ch. 1, p. 38)

Gwendolen's spiritual progress is marked by her changing attitude to Deronda, which affects his attitude to her, promising a reconciliation between Gwendolen's warring selves. Her reluctant notice of him ("I object to any eyes that are critical" [Ch. 35, p. 462]) turns to "an uneasy longing to be judged by Deronda with unmixed admiration" (Ch. 29, p. 377), and this becomes a willingness to look at him and "take the deep rest of confession" (Ch. 35, p. 464) and to find in him "some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her." From this moment, Gwendolen lives for glimpses of Deronda whom she sees as a rescue from herself. Gwendolen's initial determination to shut out her conscience (by stifling fear in action) gives way in the course of the novel to an acceptance of its guidance--"Take your fear as your safeguard" (Ch. 36, p. 509), Daniel tells her. Gwendolen accepts Daniel's guidance even in the matter of

keeping her inheritance. The splitting of the book in two becomes part of the moral lesson.

II

"We . . . say this unit did little,--might as well not have been. . . . But in this way we might break the sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted with."

Felix Holt, Ch. 16, p. 276

Daniel's response to Mordecai acts as a critique not only of English society but of the novel form that must observe society's apparent conditions. In his role as the character who holds (or fails to hold) the two plots together, Daniel mediates between them. His reflections on Mordecai's visions become reflections on realism. When Daniel's English, social, self reacts against Mordecai's "energetic certitude" and "fervent trust," Daniel muses:

Why should he be ashamed of his own agitated feeling merely because he dressed for dinner, wore a white tie, and lived among people who might laugh at his owning any conscience in the matter as the solemn folly of taking himself too seriously.
(Ch. 41, p. 567)

And George Eliot asks why--because her characters dress for dinner and wear white ties--must she always hedge the solemn and the serious with irony. Charlotte Brontë, feeling the constraints of the realist mode, turned first to romance. By playing with the notions of appearance and reality--using inflated language to depict everyday reality and drawing on myths within the narrative of realistic occurrences, but treating the romance as prosaic event--Jane Eyre pretends that the romance is the reality (as in a way it was). Told by critics that this would not do, Brontë then turned in Shirley to the clumsy device of copying out her heroine's homework--a visionary myth of Eve. George Eliot's strategy is more sophisticated: she

locates her vision in a visionary character, Mordecai, and tries to accommodate her visionary character within the social world. But she then has to dress Mordecai (quite literally--he puts on "fine grey flannel shirts and a dressing-gown" in Chapter 47 [p. 639]) to suit his realist surroundings.

Daniel's progress from scepticism to acceptance of Mordecai leads to passages of homiletic urgency. Through these, Eliot argues for the inclusion within the novel of the "visions [that] are the creators and feeders of the world" (Ch. 40, p. 555). But where Jane Eyre passes off the grossly improbable as an everyday event, Daniel Deronda calls attention to the improbable incidents of the romance. Their difference in strategy is evident, for instance, in their allusions to the Arabian Nights: while Rochester's horse simply is Mesrour and Jane herself Scheherazade leaving her tale half-told, Deronda is compared to Prince Camaralzaman (Ch. 16, p. 224) and Mirah to Queen Budoor (one of Prince Camaralzaman's two wives) (Ch. 20, p. 249). Deronda's and Mirah's life as a romantic invention is emphasized, yet at the same time the reader is asked to believe in their reality. To this end, they inhabit a world stuffed full of the trappings of domestic realism. Gwendolen, as we shall see, does not.

Jane Eyre characteristically introduces the most romantic of events (such as Rochester's first appearance) through a lens of romantic fantasy (it might be a Gytrash) which makes the event by contrast look real (no, it is only a man). After rescuing Mirah, Daniel, on the other hand, goes as he says to himself, on a "strange errand" (Ch. 17, p. 236), that of asking the Meryricks for shelter. He reassures himself (and the reader) that this sort of thing can (or rather should) happen, by comparing the event to Plutarch's story of the Maenads. Similarly, after he has met Mordecai on the bridge, he argues with his reluctant self (and the dubious reader)

that, "If he had read of this incident as having happened centuries ago in Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Cairo, to some man young as himself, dissatisfied with his neutral life . . . it would have appeared to him quite natural that the incident should have created a deep impression on that far-off man" (Ch. 41, p. 568). And when Daniel is worrying about bringing Mirah and Mordecai together (having found Mordecai against the longest of odds), the narrator recalls Agamemnon:

In the heroic drama, great recognitions are not encumbered with these details; and certainly Deronda had as reverential an interest in Mordecai and Mirah as he could have had in the offspring of Agamemnon; but he was caring for destinies still moving in the dim streets of earthly life, not yet lifted among the constellations. (Ch. 43, p. 604)

This "awakening of the dead," like the comparisons to the classics in Middlemarch, is, in effect, a justification for including this "new element" in fiction. The next stage in this argument on behalf of the visionary is conducted through Mrs. Meyrick (whose scepticism stands in for the reader's):

Her mind was anything but prosaic . . . but the romantic or unusual in real life requires some adaption. We sit up at night to read Cakya-Mouni, Saint Francis, or Oliver Cromwell; but whether we should be glad for any one at all like them to call on us the next morning, still more reveal himself as a new relation, is quite another affair. (Ch. 46, p. 628)

These continual allusions suggest both a nervousness and a defiance about the enterprise. The passages of Ideology display a similar wilfulness. Mirah (in her perfect early days) listens to the story of Bouddha giving himself to the hungry tiger, and Daniel defends Mirah's belief in the myth from Mab's scepticism. Mirah maintains that,

"If people have thought what is the most beautiful and the best thing, it must be true." (Ch. 37, p. 523)

and Daniel explains her meaning.

"It is like a passionate word . . . the exaggeration is a flash of fervour. It is an extreme image of what is happening every day--the transmutation of self."

The narrator of Middlemarch would hardly allow to pass without comment Daniel's assertion that the transmutation of self is an everyday occurrence. Daniel's belief, of course, forecasts Gwendolen's conversation: when Gwendolen returns at the story's end to Offendene, now seen not as a background but as a home made dear to her by her mother's and sister's presence, the narrator tells us that:

She was experiencing some of the peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self. (Ch. 69, p. 866)

This assertion (reminiscent of the narrator's reflections in Eliot's early work "Janet's Repentance" on Janet Dempster's return to her husband on his death bed) is immediately followed by a rhetorical question:

Does one who has been all but lost in a pit of darkness complain of the sweet air and the daylight?

which leads to this rhapsody:

There is a way of looking at our life daily as an escape, and taking the quiet return of morn and evening--still more the star-like out-glowing of some pure fellow-feeling, some generous impulse breaking our inward darkness--as a salvation that reconciles us to hardship. Those who have a self-knowledge prompting such self-accusation as Hamlet's, can understand this habitual feeling of rescue.

In Middlemarch, the narrator's tone of worldly-wisdom--the passages in which the narrator addresses his audience--worked because it contained just that--worldly-wisdom. In Daniel Deronda, the narrator, by contrast, often seems didactic, particularly in the presentation of "selflessness."

Towards the end of the demonstration of this ideal of selflessness,

when Eliot in effect asserts that gains from past revelations are more than shifting theory, Gwendolen becomes the good woman or the good self, while Mirah becomes less good. When Mirah listens to another story, this time from the Midrash, which illustrates that "women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing," Mirah interprets the story quite differently. "The Jewish girl," she tells Mordecai, "wanted somehow to have the first place in the king's mind" and so died instead of her rival (Ch. 61, p. 803). There are no interpolations from the narrator: Mordecai tells Mirah "thou has read too many plays, where the writers delight in showing the human passions as indwelling demons, unmixed with the relenting and devout elements of the soul." Eliot's articulation of the approved principles seems to lead to an assertiveness that reveals, "its 'willed' nature."²⁴

Eliot's contention that "poetry and romance should exist very easily in the same room with the microscope and even in railway carriages" (Ch. 19, p. 245) forces her to set about placing her romantic figures against a background of domestic realism. The Jewish half of the novel, where the poetry is, is stuffed with objects and activity. The Meyricks' house is as Dickensian as its owners: books, pianos, and the cat Hafiz are described as if for their own sakes, while the same items within "Gwendolen Harleth" serve the characters' uses. The Meyricks indulge in a festival of music, sewing, reading, and painting--all the pursuits in which Gwendolen has no independent interest. Partly this animation compensates for the visions and partly it compensates for the disappearance of the things and activity that surround Gwendolen. One half of the novel allows the other half to be what it is.

Eliot is so determined to prove the reality of the Jewish cast of characters that her metaphorical description of her own teaching, "that her

formula has to be clothed in some human figure,"²⁵ takes on a literal meaning. Mirah has to be dressed; Mordecai has to be dressed; Mirah has to redress in her own clothes in order to meet Mordecai; Deronda's luxurious life has to be depicted in order to contrast it with the Jewish lives to which he is about to join his; the pawnbroker's shop, with Jacob and his penknives, has to be described in order to render the incongruity of Mordecai's surroundings, and a "suitable lodging in Brompton" has to be found for Mordecai. "Heroes," we are reminded, "have not always had carpets and tea-cups of their own" (Ch. 43, p. 606).

Because the shadowy romantic characters need to be made substantial (for "the romantic or unusual in real life requires some adaptation"), the substantial character Gwendolen can become increasingly "governed by . . . shadowy powers" (Ch. 44, p. 616). As the "Jewish" half of the novel begins to bustle with activity--Daniel finds Mordecai, Mordecai is reunited with Mirah, and their father discovers them both--the Gwendolen half can become increasingly abstract and still.

Gwendolen begins to live in a symbolic landscape early in the novel. While acting an "extemporized 'As You Like It'" in Cardell Chase, Gwendolen meets Mrs. Glasher by the Whispering Stones. The narrator describes the transformation that the novel of domestic realism undergoes within Daniel Deronda.

I am not concerned to tell of the food that was eaten in that green refectory, or even to dwell on the glories of the forest scenery that spread themselves out beyond the level front of the hollow; being just now bound to tell a story of life at a stage when the blissful beauty of earth and sky entered only by narrow and oblique inlets in the consciousness. (Ch. 13, pp. 185-86)

As the objects that surround her become so many reflections of the torment of Gwendolen's mind, domestic realism turns into psychological realism. When we first meet Gwendolen in the gambling "Hell," her clothes turn her

into a "sort of serpent" (Ch. 1, p. 40).²⁶ From the moment that Deronda intervenes in her life by reclaiming the Etruscan necklace from the pawnbrokers, jewelry becomes symbolic. Jewels in Daniel Deronda lead a marvellously suggestive life.²⁷ In a mood of disgust with all men, Gwendolen pawns her necklace, which is a memento of her father. Deronda who will be the only man in her life to provoke any pleasant response in her, retrieves her jewels. She is prevented by Grandcourt from wearing the necklace; instead, Grandcourt insists that she wear the diamonds, "gems/ Sawn from cramped finger-bones of women drowned" (Ch. 14, p. 181). These "poisoned gems" poison all Gwendolen's surroundings. The girl for whom "battlement, veranda, stable, etc." (Ch. 13, p. 176) are "the qualities that would make a husband tolerable" develops a "sick distaste of all things" (Ch. 35, p. 466). "All the things I used to wish for," she tells Deronda, have become "red-hot" (Ch. 56, p. 757). She begins to recognize that articles of luxury are merely "beautiful toys." The only object that is distinctly present for her is the knife with which she wishes to kill Grandcourt, the "thing her fingers longed for . . . small and sharp, like a long willow leaf in a silver sheath" (p. 756). Gwendolen inhabits a landscape which is increasingly the landscape of her mind. The culmination of this process occurs within the boat when her thought is made real: "I saw my wish outside me," she confesses to Deronda.²⁸

III

The unwilling brain
Feigns often what it would not.

Epigraph to Ch. 54--Shelley

"Imagination is often truer than fact," said Gwendolen, decisively, though she could no more have explained these glib words than if they had been Coptic or Etruscan. (Ch. 5, p. 76)

At the same time as Eliot argues for the inclusion of the ideal in literature, she implies another question: "Why perpetuate fiction's lies?" While the "Jewish" half forces the novel to accommodate the poetical and forces society to look beyond itself, "Gwendolen Harleth" turns the comedy of manners into tragedy; it renders an increasingly inclusive view of human nature. Gwendolen is Jane Austen's Emma, revised: Gwendolen Harleth, handsome, clever, and poor, with no fixed home and a superstitious disposition had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with much to distress and vex her. She was the eldest of four daughters of a most affectionate and indulgent mother. The real evils of Gwendolen's situation were the wish of having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too much of herself. Yet when sorrow comes, it is not the gentle sorrow of a governess leaving to get married, but the tragic one of the complete loss of the family fortune. And "Mr. Knightley" really is in love with "Harriet Smith," so the novel does not end "in the perfect happiness of the union" of our hero and heroine. Behind these revisions (George Eliot re-read Emma while she was writing Daniel Deronda)²⁹ is a question similar to that behind the transformation of St. John Rivers and Rosamond Oliver into Lydgate and Rosamund Vincy. What would happen if one were committed to one's mistakes, if one felt with a "violent shock" the "consequences of [one's] own actions" (Ch. 36, p. 494), if interventions were corrective in the sense that they were revelatory rather than curative? Gwendolen must see her mistakes but not be saved from them, and her mistakes must be the size of tragedy (Middlemarch's secret aspiration). Gwendolen will be "spiritually saved, but 'so as by fire.'"³⁰

Yet, George Eliot allows into the novel an even more significant truth about life than the uncertainty of its events and ending. From the very first sentence, Daniel Deronda investigates the "mixed consciousness"

(Ch. 56, p. 760). For half of Daniel Deronda, we live in the world of Latimer's heightened vision. The presence of the idealistic Jewish half of the novel has the effect of allowing George Eliot in the other half to lift the veil on human, and more particularly, female rage and fear, making it her subject. By asserting the domestic ideal in the "Jewish" half, Eliot can depict Gwendolen's haunted world of physical antipathy, dread, and anger. Latimer's "double consciousness," (p. 35) of what people seem and what they in fact are, becomes two halves of one novel.

Because the "Jewish" half of the novel proclaims socially acceptable values, Eliot is able to shed subterfuge elsewhere. Gwendolen lives among the unacceptable desires that have previously been seen only in glimpses (like Dorothea's anger) or at a distance (in Mme. Laure). In this double plot, Bertha Mason, as it were, changes places with Jane Eyre. The violent, angry self inhabits the daylight social world and the ideal of womanhood becomes the romantic invention. (Though Jane might not seem an exemplar--Miss Ribby thought her most improper--Terry Eagleton notes that she is let out of the red-room by assuming the stillness that attracts Rochester.)³¹ The heroine's struggle with the passivity and stillness of her life is no longer the issue: the struggle is with her own impulse to act on her wishes--an impulse which (it is stressed in the third chapter) may be murderous:

There was a disagreeable silent remembrance of her having strangled her sister's canary-bird in a final fit of exasperation at its shrill singing which had again and again jarringly interrupted her own. (p. 53)

Living in a society in which, as we have seen, an active life is possible, Gwendolen Harleth might herself do the thing that Bertha Mason does for Jane Eyre, that the workers do for Caroline Helstone, and that is done through sleight of hand and plot for Dorothea: she might act out her

aggression. Gwendolen's thoughts dwell on murder. Though Deronda reassures Gwendolen that the plot in fact fulfills her wish, and not she, the sleight of hand has been enlisted on the other side. Where Dorothea was moved away from Casaubon's death, Gwendolen is moved incriminatingly near:

"I want to tell you what it was that came over me in that boat. I was full of rage at being obliged to go--full of rage--and I could do nothing but sit there like a galley-slave. And then we got away--out of the port--into the deep--and everything was still--and we never looked at each other, only he spoke to order me--and the very light about me seemed to hold me a prisoner and force me to sit as I did. It came over me that when I was a child I used to fancy sailing away into a world where people were not forced to live with any one they did not like--I did not like my father-in-law [stepfather] to come home. And now, I thought, just the opposite had come to me. I had stepped onto a boat, and my life was a sailing and sailing away--gliding on and no help--always into solitude with him, away from deliverance. And because I felt more helpless than ever, my thoughts went out over worse things--I longed for worse things--I had cruel wishes--I fancied impossible ways of--I did not want to die myself; I was afraid of our being drowned together. If it had been any use I should have prayed--I should have prayed that something might befall him. I should have prayed that he might sink out of my sight and leave me alone. I knew no way of killing him there, but I did, I did kill him in my thoughts."

She sank into silence for a minute, submerged by the weight of memory which no words could represent.

"But yet all the while I felt that I was getting more wicked. And what had been with me so much, came to me just then--what you once said--about dreading to increase my wrongdoing and my remorse--I should hope for nothing then. It was like a writing of fire within me. Getting wicked was misery--being shut out for ever from knowing what you--what better lives were. That had always been coming back to me in the midst of bad thoughts--it came back to me then--but yet with a despair--a feeling that it was no use--evil wishes were too strong. I remember then letting go the tiller and saying "God help me!" But then I was forced to take it again and go on; and the evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted everything else dim, till, in the midst of them--I don't know how it was--he was turning the sail--there was a gust--he was struck--I know nothing--I only know that I saw my wish outside me."

(Ch. 56, pp. 760-61)

In this scene, what we have known only by hints and shadows is defined. This man and woman who are normally separated by social obligations and the largeness of the houses they inhabit are brought together within the

smallest of boats (alone in the turbulent sea where will encounters will). In Middlemarch, a similar moment of isolation (in Rome) is distanced by the narrator; here the reader is made to live within Gwendolen's hell. The difference between Mirah's account of her painful life, given in calm, complete sentences and this jagged transcription of Gwendolen's mind marks the difference between the Mirah ideal and the Gwendolen reality.

The struggle between Gwendolen and Grandcourt, we have been told all along, is made unequal by the "ghostly army" that Grandcourt has at his back (Ch. 36, p. 503); Gwendolen's life-long experience of these shadowy powers fills this moment. Her stepfather reappears to explain Gwendolen's hysterical repugnance to men's touch--her "fierceness of maidenhood" (Ch. 7, p. 102). Eliot delicately brings to the fore all the suffering of childhood that makes the terror of the present and that has determined Gwendolen's relentless egoism and its precarious hold on her fear.

All the other parts of Gwendolen, her energy, wit, and vanity, are proved to be like her words, "born on the lip" (Ch. 7, p. 101). What matters is her rage and her fear of her rage. Her energy, which turns to frenzy when she decides to marry Grandcourt, is now understood as the pre-emptive means with which she allays anxiety:

When they had had a glorious gallop, however, she was in a state of exhilaration that disposed her to think well of hastening the marriage which would make her life all of a piece with this splendid kind of enjoyment. She would not debate any more about an act to which she had committed herself. (Ch. 28, p. 361)

When she is on horseback, she tells Grandcourt, "I think of nothing. I only feel myself strong and happy" (Ch. 11, p. 147). Once Gwendolen has received Mrs. Glasher's diamonds, the symbol of her sin (making a gain out of another's loss), then the Furies cross the threshold and take over Gwendolen's part of the book.

Gwendolen's sense of her beauty and the power and luxury of her position, which had seemed the predicates of her existence, gradually diminish into insignificance, so that the reader becomes--and so does she--only dimly aware of her surroundings. Gwendolen's "doubleness" (as Mrs. Arrowpoint calls it [Ch. 44, p. 608]), which is presented in the opening sentence of the book ("Was she beautiful or not beautiful?") begins as a question. The novel makes this mute doubleness increasingly articulate. That Gwendolen's "face and form," which are "among the meanings of a noble music" (Ch. 11, p. 153) might not hold a matching soul (Klesmer's diagnosis) turns into fact. The doubleness that the reader knows of through Gwendolen's double conversations (Leavis's "psychological notations"),³² and her thoughts, turns into the doubleness of alternating anger and guilt, "the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance" (Ch. 4, p. 72).

Latimer's sickness is always to be aware of two-faced human nature and of the difference between kind words and mean thoughts. Gwendolen's sickness is to be aware of her two selves, the good and the bad. "I was like two creatures," (Ch. 56, p. 756) she tells Deronda, with one half struggling "to leap . . . away from myself" (p. 761). After her marriage to Grandcourt, she is forced into contemplation of this internal war, and the novel becomes a process of revealing Gwendolen's unconscious to herself and to the reader both.

Though one of its meanings may be the perils of women's demanding the right to do as they like, Gwendolen's history is more complicated than a formulaic setting of the "avenging powers" (Ch. 28, p. 356) against a woman who attempts to control her own life, even though the men in Daniel Deronda are happy in their own doubleness in ways that the Princess Halm-Eberstein and Gwendolen are not. Though Gwendolen does what she likes, knowing that her actions will harm another, and her history transcribes the consequent

terror of a soul at war with itself, Gwendolen is first of all at war with the world outside. Eliot unobtrusively creates a justification (or at least a set of determining conditions) for Gwendolen's anger. Events outside cause her attitude of "enraged resistance" (Ch. 1, p. 39), just as Latimer's "diseased activity of the imagination" (p. 30) grows (in the story's chronology) from the sense of alienation caused by his education and upbringing. As a weak and younger son, Latimer is, like a girl, very much "at a discount," and the differences in his education stem, as they do in a girl's, from his subservient position. Latimer's sickness is "the horror that belongs to the lot of a human being whose nature is not adjusted to simple human conditions" (p. 30). Gwendolen is similarly at odds with the outward conditions of her life. She blames the disappointments of her life on her mother's second marriage: her stepfather has made her mother scared and melancholy and her family poor. When her stepfather dies, Gwendolen acquires the home to which her mother's wealth (which comes from her grandfather's colonial possessions) entitles them. But her mother's life has already turned for her into a symbol of all women's lives.

In Gwendolen's own marriage, this dreaded stepfather, who has such an ill effect on women's lives, is replaced by Grandcourt. Although Grandcourt restores rather than drains the family fortune, he effectively turns Gwendolen into Mrs. Davilow. Furthermore, his power is linked through Eliot's imagery to the power a ruler has over a colony. Grandcourt's death, like Gwendolen's stepfather's, enables Mrs. Davilow and Gwendolen to live at Offendene. Grandcourt's destruction also guarantees Sir Hugo Malinger's wife and daughters a home. This subterranean plot contains subversive meanings. Though losing Deronda may be Gwendolen's punishment, the marriages within the novel (apart from Mirah's) can hardly be seen as

rewards. Gwendolen's fate (or "punishment") amounts to the fate that Dorothea wished for herself: Gwendolen will use her money to make others happy. By writing the "Jewish" part of the story, Eliot can write the gloomy realistic half. And by presenting it as an unhappy fate, Eliot can depict a woman about to lead a fulfilled life. While one half of the novel preaches to the other, that other half subverts the lesson of the former.

IV

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself;
(I am large--I contain multitudes)³³

The two plots of Daniel Deronda--idyll and "schauderhaft"³⁴--uneasily joined in the figure of Daniel, reproduce in the broad, public sense the conflict of Eliot's position. On the one hand, Eliot was an active and influential woman, with an intellect, as Raymond Williams remarks, that few could match; but on the other, she is a writer who preaches the need for women to remain passive and to be content to influence the world through the "incalculably diffusive" effects of their selflessness. By the end of her career, George Eliot was a national institution, nervously aware of her responsibility to use that position to better mankind.³⁵ That had been her justification for assuming authorship. In Daniel Deronda, Eliot (reinforced by the cause it argues) uses her position to preach. In depicting Mordecai's ethos--that the blasphemy of the time is to say, "I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me" (Ch. 42, p. 598), Eliot is no longer an onlooker herself. In her next project, Eliot will turn to a form in which she can say outright the "things . . . which I want to get said."³⁶

In the "Jewish" half of Daniel Deronda, Eliot writes, as Henry James says, what is expected of her and what she also expects of herself. But in

fulfilling her duty here, she is free in the other half to record an increasingly inclusive picture of the female soul, struggling against "helpless subjection to an oppressive lot" (Ch. 27, p. 346). Gwendolen Harleth's struggle reproduces, perhaps, Eliot's conflicted position in terms of the psyche: the struggle between "the angel in the house" (the internalized representative of the Victorian ideal) and the "fiend" (Ch. 56, p. 758) that the angel self tells the assertive self she is. Daniel Deronda ends with the angel's victory; the two creatures in Gwendolen, it is suggested, are reconciled, but the reconciliation occurs, significantly, off-stage. Yet for Eliot, Daniel Deronda is a victory for the fiend, for it is admired not for the sentimental "Jewish" half, but for its study of a selfish, enraged, and fearful woman.

In describing his own powers, Latimer (whom critics often equate with Eliot)³⁷ distinguishes between the poet who "pours forth his song and believes in the listening ear and answering soul" and the poet, like himself, with the poetic sensibility but no voice, who "finds no vent but . . . in an inward shudder at the sound of harsh human tones" (p. 26). In the "Jewish" part of Daniel Deronda, Eliot speaks to her audience, and in the belief that she will be heard celebrates the Victorian ideal of womanhood. This is the part of the novel that she knew would draw attention to itself. In the other half, she inscribes her "inward shudder." Ironically, it is this part, the history of Gwendolen Harleth, that has found an appreciative audience. Daniel Deronda transforms domestic realism into a landscape of the mind. Under cover of the conspicuousness of the "Jewish" half of the novel, Eliot depicted the world of the tormented female self, the vision to which she painfully returns throughout her career. Fourteen years after writing "The Lifted Veil," Eliot adds this as its motto:

Give me no light, great heaven, but such as turns
To energy of human fellowship;
No powers save the growing heritage
That makes completer manhood.³⁸

Like Latimer's, Eliot's power is her "preternaturally heightened sense of hearing." It enables her to see into the soul and uncover the murderous will and to hear "the roar of sound where others find perfect stillness."

Notes

Henry James's *Pulcheria* describes the novel as "a looking glass which had fallen upon the floor, and was lying in fragments" (p. 285). Lewes suggested that Daniel Deronda be advertised as a story of English life "to correct that absurd rumour about American life" ("To John Blackwood" [18 November 1875] VI, 189). An advertisement based on the sentence I quote as the second part of my title ran in the Athenaeum ("To John Blackwood" [22 November 1875] VI, 192-93).

¹ For an extended (and different) analysis of Daniel Deronda's acting imagery, see Brian Swann, "George Eliot and the Play: Symbol and Metaphor of the Drama in Daniel Deronda," Dalhousie Review, 52 (1972), 91-202.

² Bonnie Zimmermann's essay, "Gwendolen Harleth and 'The Girl of the Period,'" in Smith, pp. 196-215 brings out this aspect of the treatment of the Woman Question. See p. 212.

³ "The effect that one strives after is an outline as strong as that of Balfour of Burley [Old Mortality] for a much more complex character and a higher strain of idea. But such an effect is just the most difficult thing in art--to give new elements--i.e. elements not already used up--in forms as vivid as those of long familiar types" ("To John Blackwood," 25 February 1876, VI, 223); Leavis, p. 103.

⁴ "To Dr. Joseph Frank Payne," 25 January 1876, VI, 216.

⁵ Blackwood's, 86 (1859), 24-48. Page references will be to this edition.

⁶ U. C. Knoepfelmacher summarizes critics' "attempts at classification": Daniel Deronda "has been labeled as a pre-Zionist Tendenzroman, a utopian romance, a satire, a novel of manners, and a Goethean Bildungsroman" (Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965], p. 118).

⁷ Leavis, p. 103. "The Meyricks who, while not being direct products of the prophetic afflatus, are subordinate ministers to it, are among those elements in George Eliot that seem to come from Dickens rather than life."

⁸ In his review, Henry James had asked, "If we write novels so, how shall we write history?" Galaxy, 15 (1873), 424-48; rpt. in Carroll, pp. 353-59. See p. 359.

⁹ See, for example, Quentin Anderson, "George Eliot in Middlemarch." In A Century of George Eliot Criticism. Ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 313-24.

¹⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson called him "the Prince of Prigs," Carroll, p. 33. Dowden (whom Eliot and Lewes admired), however, asserts that "to some readers he has seemed . . . no pallid projection from the author's

imagination, but a veritable creature of flesh and blood" (Contemporary Review, 24 (1877), 348-69; rpt. in A Century of George Eliot Criticism, p. 116).

11 To many critics Daniel is in Pulcheria's words "not a man at all!" (p. 288). He is either effeminate or an idea.

12 Eliot complained of "the laudation of readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there" ("To Mme Eugène Bodichon," 2 October 1876, VI, 290).

13 For John Kearney, Grandcourt is a "slimy reversal of human evolution" ("Time and Beauty in Daniel Deronda," Journal of Narrative Technique, p. 290).

14 Janet K. Gezari, "The Metaphorical Imagination of George Eliot," Journal of English Literary History, 45 (1978), 93-106.

15 Though Zimmermann concludes that "the greatest value of George Eliot as a theorist about women is her final ambivalence, her reading of Daniel Deronda emphasizes Eliot's hostility to the "Girl of the Period" (p. 215).

16 Leavis, p. 103.

17 Lord Lytton, "To George Henry Lewes" (16 March 1875), IX, 148.

18 "It is precisely my ideal--to make matter and form an inseparable truthfulness" ("To Charles Ritter," 11 February 1873, V, 374).

19 "A Conversation," p. 298.

20 See Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud: A Biography (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), I; George Eliot's Journal, 1 December 1876, VI, 314.

21 Gillian Beer, "Middlemarch and 'The Lifted Veil,'" in Adam, p. 91.

22 Westminster Review, 60 (1853), 209, quoted in Stang, p. 74.

23 Blackwood rejected the story for the cheap edition because of its "painful want of light" (21 December 1866, IV, 322). George Eliot declined Blackwoods' offer to print it in their collection of Tales, preferring "to put the story in harness with some other productions of mine, and not send it forth in its dismal loneliness" (28 February 1873, V, 380). James, review of "'The Lifted Veil,'" Nation (25 April 1878), 177.

24 Beaty's contention that the willed part would be the unconscious part and would therefore show fewer revisions underestimates, I think, the complexity of the psyche. (In "On First Looking into George Eliot's Middlemarch," in Levine, pp. 151-76.)

25 "To Dr. Joseph Frank Payne," 25 January 1876, VI, 216-17.

26 Daniel Deronda grew, in part, out of Eliot's visit to the Kursaal which "she calls a Hell" ("To John Blackwood," 4 October 1872, V, 314).

27 Dorothea's ambivalent attitude to her sexuality is also suggested through her rejection of her mother's jewels, followed by her hesitant decision to keep the emeralds. Ellen Moers sees in Eliot's treatment of jewels in Daniel Deronda compared with her treatment of them in Middlemarch a great maturity which characterizes her treatment of Gwendolen (Literary Women, [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976]).

28 If in making his comparison of Eliot with Dostoevsky, Forster had chosen this passage rather than the scene from Adam Bede in Hetty's cell, perhaps he would have come to a different conclusion as to the prophetic strain in Eliot's work. See Forster's chapter on "Prophecy" in Aspects of the Novel (1927; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962). By his definition, the Gwendolen part of the novel might almost be called prophetic.

29 See Letters, VI, 171n. See the opening description of Emma.

30 "To John Blackwood," 18 November 1875, VI, 188.

31 Myths of Power, p. 18.

32 Leavis, p. 122.

33 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Leaves of Grass (1855; New York: New American Library, 1955), p. 96. Unlikely though it seems, Eliot reviewed Leaves of Grass when it was first published and used two lines from Whitman's "Vocalism" for the epigraph to Chapter 29. She removed it, not wanting to endorse a poet whom one journal accused of "nastiness"; it was restored in the Cabinet edition. This hesitation seems typical of Eliot's anxiety in self-assertion (VI, 241n, 421n).

34 Eliot's description of "The Lifted Veil." See Edith's Simcox's Autobiography quoted in Letters, IX, 220.

35 Raymond Williams, "The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels," Novel, 2 (1969), 259. Kinglake described a new novel by George as a "national blessing," ("John Blackwood to George Eliot," 19 November 1875, VI, 91).

36 See U. C. Knoepfelmacher, pp. 129-30, and "To John Blackwood," 5 April, 1879, VII, 126.

37 For a list of such critics, see Gilbert and Gubar, p. 447.

38 "To John Blackwood," 28 February 1873, V, 380. Eliot describes her first imagined author, Macarthy, as having "a preternaturally sharpened vision, which saw knots and blemishes, where all was smoothness to others" (p. 15). In describing his conflict, she also describes, I think, her own. "I know not which would have predominated in him, the bleeding compassion for the sufferers or wild ecstasy at the triumphant fury of the forces of Nature" (p. 16). "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric," Coventry Herald and Observer, 4 December 1846; rpt., Pinney, pp. 13-26, p. 26.

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