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**Sympathy and the ‘Fallen Woman’  
in the Victorian Novel, from  
Elizabeth Gaskell to Thomas Hardy**

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2022

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the significance of sympathy in representations of the ‘fallen woman’ in the Victorian realist novel. Beginning with Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853) and ending with Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), I explore the ways in which authors sought to encourage their readers to feel sympathy towards the fallen woman, and moreover, how the nature of sympathy is shaped by the writers’ narrative strategies and prevalent cultural attitudes towards women and their sexuality. Critics have typically argued that Victorian novelists adhered to Adam Smith’s model of sympathy – which understands sympathy as essentially self-reflexive – and are thus sceptical of sympathy leading to acts of kindness. However, this thesis argues that ‘fallen woman’ novels present a more complex case. In their fascination with the *difficulty* of sympathy, such texts evoke the reader’s sympathy in the act of struggling to understand the ‘fallenness’ of these characters.

The thesis examines novels that are notable for the diverse ways in which the fallen woman is placed within their narratives. Gaskell’s *Ruth*, Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), and Moore’s *Esther Waters* (1894) are centred on their fallen woman heroines, while in Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), and Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *Jude the Obscure*, the fallen woman is a minor or secondary character. In doing so, I reveal how these novels function to extend the reader’s sympathy to those outside of their familiar group, drawing upon Raymond Williams’s concept of the ‘knowable community’. The concluding chapters explore how the transition at the end of the nineteenth century from the ‘fallen woman’ to ‘New Women’ fundamentally reshapes the dynamics of sympathy: Moore complicates questions of agency, morality and choice, while Hardy challenges the reader to engage with one of the period’s most challenging fictional characters, Sue Bridehead.

## Table of Contents

### Introduction

Sympathy and the Fallen Woman Novel .....	7
Defining the Politics of Sympathy .....	10
History of Ideas: Sympathy from the Stoics to Adam Smith.....	24
Style and Sympathy, Form and Feeling .....	30
Sympathy and the Fallen Woman Novel.....	35

### Chapter One

#### The Beautiful Risk of *Ruth*: Communication and Cooperation of Sympathy

Introduction .....	41
A History of the Cooperative Movement and Cooperative Reading .....	48
Communication in <i>Ruth</i> : Characters' Responses to the Fallen Woman .....	54
'Do not judge, or you too will be judged' .....	57
Communication through <i>Ruth</i> : Cooperation between Gaskell and her Readers.....	59

### Chapter Two

#### Sympathy for a Flawed Fallen Woman in *Adam Bede*

Introduction .....	70
Section One: Philosophical influences of Eliot's Sympathy.....	76
Spinoza's Sympathy – Equality and the Extension of Knowledge .....	76
Smith's Sympathy – 'Not made up of the same stuff as you and I' .....	81
Immanence and Transcendence – A Third Way .....	84
Section Two: Realism and Sympathy .....	86
Who is Hetty? – An Ethical Encounter with 'the Other' .....	86
Eliot's Ethics of Realism .....	91
Section Three: The Narrator as Teacher .....	100
The Omniscient Narrator .....	101
Exploring Eliot's Narrator as Teacher.....	104
Conclusion.....	113

### Chapter Three

#### Sympathy in Distance: Fanny in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Introduction .....	114
The Centrality and Decentrality of Fanny.....	121
Connecting with the Stranger.....	123
Impressions and Delayed Judgement .....	128
The Unsympathetic Mechanic.....	130
Sensitivity to Organic Emotions .....	132
Conclusion.....	135

### Chapter Four

#### The Plurality of Purity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Introduction .....	137
The Multi- 'Languages' in <i>Tess</i> : Dialect, Discourse and Sympathy.....	142
The Ambiguity of Tess's Sexuality as a Function of Sympathetic Representation .....	147
Purity in being 'Natural': Tess and Nature .....	152

Darwinian Nature and Social Evolution.....	158
Plural Classes and Plural Morals.....	162
Angel Clare’s Change of Vision .....	165
Conclusion.....	172
Chapter Five	
The Muddy Waters of Moral Luck in <i>Esther Waters</i>	
Introduction .....	174
Bad Moral Decisions or Just Unlucky? Deciphering the Moralities of Christianity and Natural Instinct .....	180
Neutral Decisions: Accommodating Nature and Instinct.....	189
Moving on from ‘Falleness’ to Morality’s Muddy Waters: Betting, Drinking and Livelihood .....	194
<i>Esther Waters</i> , ‘Moral Luck’ and Empathy .....	200
A Case Study on Sympathy for a Minor Character: Sarah Tucker .....	208
Conclusion.....	214
Chapter Six	
Sympathy for Sue’s Conflicted Sexuality in <i>Jude the Obscure</i>	
Introduction: Jude and the Fallen Woman?.....	217
Breaking the Social Code with Narrative Code .....	222
Engaging with Sue .....	224
Narrative Point of View and Dialogue .....	224
Sue’s Elusiveness Towards Romance and Sexuality .....	226
Further Complications, a Stronger Sympathy .....	237
Sympathy For the New Woman in their Social Environment.....	243
Coda .....	247
Bibliography .....	252

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## Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other institution. The work is solely that of the author, Yurie Watanabe, under the supervision of Professor Stephen Regan and Dr Fraser Riddell.

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## **Introduction**

### **Sympathy and the Fallen Woman Novel**

Thomas Hardy copied the following words of a fellow Victorian novelist, Anthony Trollope, into his literary notebook: 'No novel is anything, for comedy or tragedy, unless the reader can sympathise with the characters. If the author can thus touch his reader's heart, & draw his tears, he cannot be too sens[ational]!'<sup>1</sup> Trollope's belief in the importance of sympathetic representation in the novel must have been in accord with Hardy's. While some like Oscar Wilde may complain that Victorian novelists were too sentimental (Wilde's famous assertion that 'one must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing'<sup>2</sup>), this thesis argues for the political significance of the Victorian novel in its interest and engagement with sympathy. As D. A. Miller has observed, no novel tried to "make a difference" in the world more than the Victorian novel'.<sup>3</sup>

This study focuses on the ways in which Victorian novels have 'made a difference' in reshaping ideas of the so-called 'fallen woman'. By looking at *Ruth* (1853), *Adam Bede* (1859), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), *Esther Waters* (1894) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), we will see how the novelists Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and George Moore have portrayed fallen women characters with sympathy to change their implied readers' prejudices against them, to persuade readers into feeling sympathy for them, and to recognise and accept human experiences outside of the readers' own. The texts covered span a period of fifty years, and this thesis takes a historical approach

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* Vol. 1, ed. by Lennart A Björk (Macmillan, 1985), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> qtd by Marcia Muelder Eaton, 'Laughing at the Death of Little Nell: Sentimental Art and Sentimental People', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 26.4 (1989) 269–82 (269).

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (University of California Press, 1988), p. x.



considering how social attitudes towards ‘fallen women’ have shifted over the period and thus the literary representation of them and techniques of eliciting the reader’s sympathy as well. The thesis also takes a formalist approach to examine the relationship between sympathy, realism and subjectivity in mid- to late-nineteenth century novels of the fallen woman. Specifically, it is concerned with how the pursuit of realism has led to sympathetic representations of fallen women, while also emphasising the subjectivity of that point of view.

Victorian sympathy stands in a unique position. Notions of sympathy were highly popular during the eighteenth century, but due to social upheavals towards the end of the century, exclusive faith in sympathy declined.<sup>4</sup> While sympathy has been identified as a frequent theme in Victorian novels, many critics agree that Victorians were more reflective and self-critical of sympathy.<sup>5</sup> Rachel Ablow has effectively summarised the Victorian fascination and engagement with the concept of sympathy, outlining the changes in society during the late eighteenth century, namely the French revolution and industrialisation, which led to a public fear (what Raymond Williams would call the ‘structure of feeling’) that morality was on the decline, which then led to the need to nurture sentiments, feelings and sympathy.<sup>6</sup> The education of feelings thus became a popular idea, to which the novel lent itself well because narratives can give the reader personal insights into the characters, thus leading to feelings of intimacy.<sup>7</sup> The education of feelings was mainly limited to domestic novels, in particular the marriage plot, because feelings and emotions were gendered in philosophical and political debates. At the same time, sympathy was utilised in the ‘Condition of England’ novels. Narrative form was used to give readers personal experiences of others’ and to close the gap between people, especially between lower and upper classes. However, Rachel Ablow notes that there is a close line between

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<sup>4</sup> See Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Pickering and Chatto, 2009); Ryan Hanley ‘The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant’ in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 171–96; Rachel Ablow, ‘Victorian Feelings’, in *Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 193–210.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Rachel Ablow, ‘Victorian Feelings’; Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (John Hopkins University Press, 2013); Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Clarendon Press, 2018); and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (Ohio State University Press, 2011). On the other hand, critics who take the opposing view that Victorian writers were genuinely earnest about sympathy are Brigid Lowe and Martha Nussbaum.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Ablow, ‘Victorian Feelings’; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Penguin, 1963), p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Lenard argues that while ‘sentimentalism’ has been a derogatory word for feminist writing, women are seen to ‘taking culturally determined roles and turning them into strengths’, in *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (Peter Lang, 1999), p. 5.

novels eliciting the reader's sympathy and pure self-absorption in sentimentalism. This balance, which is highlighted by Hardy's and Wilde's quotes above, has been central to recent debates on whether there are social benefits of reading novels, or whether reading only gives self-pleasure that does not lead to altruism. There is also discussion about the discrepancy between Victorian writers' abundant self-proclamation of the importance of sympathy, and textual examples that portray the limitations and failures of sympathy. This is an essential question which will be addressed fully later in this introduction, in which I argue that such limitations are signs of novelists having reached beyond their own social group to sympathise with others outside of it.

The fallen women novels chosen for this study are situated between the two categories of domestic and social-political. Firstly, the plot of fallen woman novels is largely placed in a domestic sphere, and yet is subversive to the conventional marriage plot. Fallen woman narratives are stories of women who fail to follow the conventions of marriage and morality. A conventional reading of a fallen woman narrative would be to assume that the reader should learn what *not* to do from the woman's fall. However, sympathetic readings encourage the reader to see virtue in the fallen woman characters, whether that be their honesty, love, devotion, hard work or maturity. In fact, the novels redefine 'purity' to show that virtue lies in more than a woman's sexual purity. Secondly, fallen woman novels share much in common with industrial 'Condition of England' novels, not only because the fallen woman character is often from the working class, but also because the novel tries to close the wide gap of difference between the fallen woman character's experience and the implied middle or upper-class reader's moral point of view. This is found, for example, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, about which Audrey Jaffe argues, 'in addition to being concerned with the fate of fallen women, *Ruth* expresses Gaskell's general interest in sympathy as a solution to divisive social problems'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the fallen woman novel is a rich and diverse text to explore not only sympathy but also the politics of Victorian sympathy.

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<sup>8</sup> Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 78.

### Defining the Politics of Sympathy

When engaging in debates of ‘sympathy’, there are often other similar words thrown together. The basic terms sometimes used as synonyms include ‘empathy’, ‘pity’ and ‘compassion’. This thesis defines each as distinct from each other, although they are all aspects of sympathy. ‘Empathy’ is the quality of being in the other’s shoes and feeling *with* them, ‘pity’ means to feel sorry or tenderness for the other’s plight, and in ‘compassion’ a person is not only moved by the distress of the other, but also by a desire to help.<sup>9</sup> Other terms sometimes used to bring out further nuances include ‘cognitive empathy’ which suggests sympathy is achieved in the mind and imagination; ‘bodily empathy’ and ‘emotional contagion’ which in contrast emphasise feelings shared instinctively and have less to do with reflection and evaluation; ‘empathetic concern’ focuses on the side of sympathy leading to compassion and action; in contrast, ‘personal distress’ is when sympathy results with the failure to reach out to others because they are overburdened by their feelings, or because they are satisfied by simply feeling moved. While some scholars have tried to define ‘sympathy’ by distinguishing their chosen definition from others, in this thesis, I try to see how most, if not all, of these are attributes of a highly complex and rich ‘sympathy’. Narrowing down sympathy to a single aspect provides an efficient tool for thoroughly understanding sympathy in the Victorian novel. However, considering only that particular aspect often leads to inadequate conclusions that sympathy is either impossible or too easy, didactic or amoral. If we insist on detaching each aspect of sympathy, we lose the complexities of sympathy, as well as the complexities of their characteristic narrative techniques. Rather than establish an external vision of sympathy, it is more useful to focus on the dynamics of the text in order to fully understand the richness of sympathy.

Ways of conducting research on sympathy and the novel are diverse, from historical and philosophical, to ethical and formalist approaches. John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* (1990) is a pioneering work on the history of emotions in literature, looking at how eighteenth-century novelists, namely Laurence Sterne (1713–68) and Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), along with their contemporary

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<sup>9</sup> This definition of ‘compassion’ is based on the OED definition which was used up to the late nineteenth century (last reference, 1875). Interestingly, the first early definition given, cited from 1340 to 1633, incorporates the various aspects of sympathy, with emphasis on the quality of empathy: ‘Suffering together with another, participation in suffering; fellow-feeling, sympathy’

philosopher David Hume (1711–76), were preoccupied with creating a language of sociability, through the expression of feelings. For them, sociability was ‘not only of opinions, but of harmoniously organized feelings’.<sup>10</sup> In *Scenes of Sympathy* (2000), Audrey Jaffe focuses on emotions in the nineteenth century and finds that the relationship between sympathy and spectatorship is a key distinguishing feature. Based on Adam Smith’s influential statement in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) that ‘we have not immediate experience of what other men feel [. . .] it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations’, Jaffe argues that sympathy in the Victorian novel is a projection by the sympathiser.<sup>11</sup> Jaffe’s method of analysis involves seeking to identify the Victorian ‘scene’ which gives meaning to sympathy portrayed in various novels. For example, in Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), the ‘scene’ is the middle-class Victorian anxiety towards fallen women crossing class boundaries and the effect it has on their identity. While Hume had celebrated sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), by the Victorian period the understanding of sympathy had been altered by Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which sympathy is understood in close relationship with the differentiated spectator.<sup>12</sup> To have sympathy is a ‘projection’; it is an ‘imagined exchange’ meaning that the sympathiser can only imagine themselves in the position of the other.<sup>13</sup> Jaffe argues overall that Smith’s concept of sympathy had become a ‘paradigmatic form in Victorian fiction’.<sup>14</sup> The sympathy that we see in Victorian novels is as much about the Victorian spectator, as it is about the sympathetic object. Jaffe argues that in scenes involving characters showing sympathy for each other in Victorian fiction, sympathy ‘is inseparable from issues of visually and representation because it is inextricable from the middle-class subject’s status as spectator’.<sup>15</sup> Looking widely at texts from Charles Dickens’s ‘A Christmas Carol’ (1843) and George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) to Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), she finds that in scenes of the novel which express sympathy are self-representations of the middle-class sympathiser’s mind, feelings, and identity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> qtd in Jaffe, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Jaffe, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Jaffe, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Jaffe, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Jaffe, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Jaffe, p. 8.

Meanwhile, other literary critics have also identified a decline of faith in sympathy as a connection with others, in later Victorian novels. In *The Marriage of Minds* (2007), Rachel Ablow defines sympathy ‘as broadly possible, as the expression of entering imaginatively into another’s thoughts or feelings’, but specifically examines marriage plots in texts such as *David Copperfield* (1850), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *The Woman in White* (1859), to discuss her concept of ‘marital sympathy’, which takes into historical account of how legal marriages during the nineteenth century deemed husband and wife to be ‘one person’, that person being the husband.<sup>17</sup> After 1870, this notion of ‘marriage of minds’ lost its legal status, but remained a romantic and literary ideal.<sup>18</sup> Because such notion is no longer held today, it is easy for us to miss the narrative techniques of sympathy in Victorian fiction, but Ablow traces a trajectory from Dickens’s ‘enthusiastic embrace of marital sympathy’ to ‘Trollope’s anxieties regarding the consequences of the Married Women’s Property Act’, thus showing the Victorians’ gradual disillusion about the power of sympathy to solve issues of human connection.<sup>19</sup> Similar to Jaffe and Ablow, Rae Greiner, in *Sympathetic Realism* (2013), finds that sympathetic realism characterises ‘the legacy of Enlightenment scepticism and the resultant moral urgency of making-do’.<sup>20</sup> Greiner’s main argument is that ‘sympathy produces realism’, that is while realist novelists often thematise sympathy, it is not ‘merely a matter of content but a defining feature of novelistic form’.<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Mitchell also argues in *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (2011) that in the attempt to be realistic about life, writers such as Dickens, Eliot and Hardy have faithfully portrayed the difficulties of sympathising with the other, and the limitations of understanding the other: ‘British realist works demonstrate that empathic relationships are the result of an awareness of alterity, of the limitations of one’s subjectivity and the other’s lived experience that rests wholly outside and not simply the result of identification or similarity’, writes Mitchell.<sup>22</sup> Sophie Ratcliffe’s *On Sympathy* (2008) also views sympathy in relation to the

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<sup>17</sup> Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (John Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Greiner, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (Ohio State University Press, 2011), p. 26.

difficulties of achieving it.<sup>23</sup> Her research differs in that it focuses on poetry from Robert Browning (1812–89) to W. H. Auden (1907–73) and Samuel Beckett (1906–89), specifically examining the dramatic monologue form, which had been associated with the opacity of the narrator’s mind, and therefore with empathy between the reader and the narrator. However, Ratcliffe argues that the poets ‘are interested in the way in which they are unable to conceive, let alone sympathize with, another mind’.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Kirsty Martin distinguishes the modernists from the Victorians by arguing that modernist writers viewed sympathy in strong relation with their bodies, and often only indirectly connected to reflection, judgement and morality.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it seems to be the trend in recent scholarly work that literary approaches to sympathy emphasise the difficulty and impossibility of sympathising with the other, and separate sympathy from acts of compassion and altruism. However, there is an alternative line of research which argues that novels might indeed help the reader to share the emotions of others and to feel compassion for them. For example, Suzanne Keen writes that ‘the novel as a world-making device possess inherent advantages in inviting reader to enter imaginatively into strange realms and to meet their characters unlike any persons of their lived experience’.<sup>26</sup> In her case study of Thomas Hardy, she finds him employing ‘all three models of strategic empathy’: ‘bounded’, ‘ambassadorial’, and ‘broadcast’. Hardy’s texts not only ‘stimulates readers’ feeling for *familiar* others’ (bounded strategic empathy), but also ‘distant others’ such as ‘needy strangers’, ‘the disenfranchised, despised, or the misunderstood among us’, and even animals, inanimate objects, or the dead (ambassadorial strategic empathy).<sup>27</sup> A ‘broadcast’ strategy allows for later readers, such as ourselves in the twenty-first century, to also overcome the boundaries of time, and empathise with the feelings, hopes and vulnerabilities of an earlier historical moment.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Brigid Lowe points to the novel’s positive attitude towards sympathy, and the scenes of genuine, successful sympathy. In *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* (2007), Lowe argues that Jaffe uses the word ‘sympathy’ in a modern way, which has

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<sup>23</sup> Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Clarendon Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Ratcliffe, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Kirsty Martin, *Modern Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Keen, ‘Novels and Readers’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 138–51 (p. 143).

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Thomas Hardy’s Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy’s Imagination* (Ohio State University Press, 2014), pp. 190–92.

<sup>28</sup> Keen, *Thomas Hardy’s Brains*, p. 192.

‘drifted away from the wide eighteenth-century conception of a general faculty of affective communication, towards an implication of a particular moral or emotional attitude – probably because of the coining of “empathy” in the early twentieth century took over much of the earlier meaning of sympathy’.<sup>29</sup> The understanding of sympathy as self-critical and interpellative, Lowe argues, is a post-Althusserian, modern understanding which does not fit with the Victorian way of understanding fiction. Responding to Ablow, Lowe writes that ‘[w]ith a strangely self-reflexive dynamic, glimpses of the past’s visions of “sympathy” as entering imaginatively into another’s thoughts or feeling are cancelled out by our own familiar twenty-first century theories about the formation of the self’.<sup>30</sup> One key difference in Lowe and Ablow’s understanding is the extent to which Victorians continued to be influenced by David Hume’s *Treatise*, which celebrated the spontaneity of one’s ability to share emotions with the other, or had moved onto Adam Smith’s theory that sympathy is an activity in one’s mind and imagination. It can be the case that while Smith’s model significantly altered their understanding of sympathy, it did not completely supplant previous ideas. Indeed, in the chapter on *Adam Bede*, I will discuss how seventeenth-century philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77), is another crucial influence on Eliot’s form of realism and sympathy for the working-class and fallen women, and complicates the Hume-Smith dichotomy of the sympathy debate.

Although working with antebellum American literature, Marianne Noble’s definition of sympathy incorporates the two main strands of argument on sympathy: whether sympathy is a genuine experience of shared emotions or an imaginative one. By breaking down what sympathy is in two bare, basic and ambiguous terms, ‘contact’ and ‘truth’, she is able to reconstruct a definition that captures the multi-dimensions of sympathy:

Sympathy of the sweet skeptical variety is a path to human contact not because it works as some kind of affective technology of truth (“I know it’s true”), but as an attitude that accepts the heart’s unknowing knowing, that approaches the other with wonder, care, and imagination.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (Anthem Press, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Brigid Lowe, ‘The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot (Review)’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 25.1 (2008), 55–58.

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Noble, *Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Hawthorne, Douglass, Stowe* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 3.

She also lists the various practical forms of sympathy, such as directly asking for information about the other, listening to the other, 'actively imagining oneself in another's situation and feeling what one would feel oneself', and also 'promot[ing] other-understanding when two people feel and think the same about things by virtue of like-mindedness', and so forth.<sup>32</sup> These examples she gives show the different degrees in which sympathy involves imagining and sharing feelings, acknowledging differences and being one with the other.

One way to approach the different forms of sympathy is to see them on a spectrum of where the person sympathising stands: in their own shoes or in others'. Suzanne Keen's important monograph, *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) skilfully explains the difference, although in doing so she insists on a clear divide between 'sympathy' and 'empathy'.<sup>33</sup> According to Keen's definition, 'sympathy' is to feel *for* the other, while 'empathy' means to feel *with* the other. With sympathy, one imagines what the other is feeling whilst simultaneously sustaining his or her own point of view, whereas in 'empathy', one feels what the other is feeling, and in some effect becomes the other. Applying her definitions to Hardy, Keen explores the various ways in which Hardy's novels and poems invite the reader to take the perspective of people, animals and inanimate objects.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Keen's main interest lies in 'empathy' which is 'the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling,' and is different from sympathy 'the more complex, differentiated feeling for another', also known as *empathic concern* in psychology.<sup>35</sup> In empathy, the feeling shared is raw, whereas sympathy is reflective and involves assessment.

Like Keen's 'empathy' and 'sympathy' dichotomy, philosopher Martha Nussbaum makes a similar comparison and contrast, but with 'empathy' vs. 'compassion'.<sup>36</sup> For Nussbaum, 'empathy' is 'an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, without any particular evaluation of that experience'. The phrase 'imaginative reconstruction' invites questions of how much cognition is involved over feeling, but the key information is that empathy is 'without any

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<sup>32</sup> Noble, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> See her article, Suzanne Keen, 'Empathetic Hardy: Bounded, Ambassadorial, and Broadcast Strategies of Narrative Empathy', *Poetics Today*, 32.2 (2011), 349–89, which is incorporated into Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy's Imagination*.

<sup>35</sup> Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 301.



particular evaluation'. In Nussbaum's usage, 'sympathy' is a synonym for 'compassion', although it implies a slightly less emotional concern. Most scholars refrain from using 'pity' as a synonym of 'sympathy' because, as Nussbaum explains, it 'has recently come to have nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer that it did not have when Rousseau invoked *pitié*'.<sup>37</sup> As Noble finds, sociologist Brené Brown's popular talks have cemented the general public's conception of 'sympathy as an unfeeling mere expression of concern and empathy as a generous willingness to feel what another feels through perspective-taking, imagination, and attention'.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile those such as Suzanne Keen, Lauren Wispe, Martin Hoffman and Paul Bloom, understand the moral roles associated with the words to be opposite.<sup>39</sup> In brief, opinions differ on how distinctly one stands apart in relation to others when sympathising with them, and to what degree that distance is associated with condescension.

Contrasting 'sympathy' and 'empathy' can be helpful in understanding the significance of the point of view of the sympathiser, and his or her identity in relation to the other. But when it comes to understanding sympathy in Victorian literature, such contrasts can be too explicit and lead us to overlook the richness and complexity of sympathy. While Keen is correct in her division of 'empathy' and 'sympathy', it is important to understand that 'empathy' is a relatively new word in the English language, only coming into common use in the twentieth century, and originally meaning something very different. When the term 'empathy' was first used by the early twentieth-century art critic and writer, Vernon Lee, 'empathy' was a technical term for our unconscious mirroring movements when responding to an art object; it is a translation of the German word 'Einfühlung' meaning 'feeling into'.<sup>40</sup> This is the kind of empathy, 'the connection of one's energy and the energy of the world', which Kirsty Martin explores in modernist literature.<sup>41</sup> Martin's project begins with

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<sup>37</sup> Nussbaum, p. 301.

<sup>38</sup> Noble, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*; Lauren Wispe, *The Psychology of Sympathy* (Springer, 1991); Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy* (Penguin Random House, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Some opinions differ on who first introduced 'empathy' to the English language; some critics name the psychologist Edward Titchener (1867–1927) in 1909, and others, German philosophers, Theodor Lipps (1851–1914), or Robert Vischer (1847–1933) (See article 'Empathy' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Kirsty Martin writes, 'Vernon Lee was the first English novelist to use the word "empathy"' in her 1912 collection of essays, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (p. 30).

<sup>41</sup> Martin, p. 74.

analysing Vernon Lee's novels, and finds that although Lee explored 'empathy' in her works, Lee's vision of it is still underdeveloped and tied to Victorian values of morality, whereas later Modernist writers portray empathy as understanding through bodily gesture and movement. The role of the body is also prominent in the fallen women texts examined in this thesis, and the close readings in the subsequent chapters will demonstrate the corporeal and affective dimensions of sympathetic response. But unlike the modernist's bodily 'empathy' as investigated by Martin, I find that the bodily functions in Victorian literary sympathy have an ethical emphasis on individual awareness and self-change. Looking at the OED, 'sympathy' in the nineteenth century has both the meaning of our modern sense of 'empathy' and 'sympathy'.<sup>42</sup> In order to fully understand sympathy in Victorian literature, especially the politics of sympathy in fallen woman novels, a historically situated use of the term is needed.

It is also important to gesture here to the prominent and rich field of affect theory. As Elisha Cohn has summarised, affect enables us to describe the way 'the self is an "intimate public" absorbing what is outside of it' and to understand disciplinary knowledge as being produced 'collectively' as well as individually.<sup>43</sup> While affect theory has limitations in its scientific and political claims, affect has been especially effective for Victorian literary critics, such as Rachel Ablow and Zachary Samalin, who have historicised affect, showing how the Victorians themselves were thinking about affect even before the theory was coined.<sup>44</sup> 'Given many Victorians' interest in theorizing the physical basis of mind both scientifically and in the arts themselves,' Cohn writes, 'it makes sense to see Victorian literature as theorizing what recognizably looks like affect's precursor'.<sup>45</sup> Affect also offers a way in which we can consider how literary form and style correspond with feeling. In the exploration of how Victorian texts extend the reader's sympathy for the fallen woman, this thesis will explore works of the nineteenth century fiction as arguments in affect theory themselves.

Exploring and understanding sympathy in fallen woman novels is not a question of selecting either 'empathy' or 'sympathy' or 'compassion' or whichever

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<sup>42</sup> 'sympathy, n.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2021. [accessed 22 January 2022].

<sup>43</sup> Elisha Cohn, 'Affect', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46. 3-4 (2018), 563-567, p. 563.

<sup>44</sup> See Rachel Ablow, *Victorian Pain* (Princeton University Press, 2017); Zachary Samalin, *The Masses Are Revolting: Victorian Culture and the Political Aesthetics of Disgust*, (Cornell University Press, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> Cohn, 'Affect', p. 565.

term one chooses to use. Keen's research is focused on empathy which is morally neutral, and acknowledges that there are times when empathy leads to sympathy and other-directed concern, and at other times 'over-aroused empathic response that creates personal distress (self-oriented and aversive) causes a turning-away' from those in need of help.<sup>46</sup> Keen's conclusion is that reading novels call upon the reader to be empathetic, but their empathy does not always, in fact rarely does, lead to acts of compassion and altruism. As Talia Schaffer has recently argued, sentimental sympathy and biased empathy hardly ever lead to constructive political action, (something that George Eliot, writing about political commitment in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), was acutely aware of).<sup>47</sup> Schaffer's work stands as a useful corrective to readings that over-emphasise the benefits of empathy and the apparent role of the novel in nurturing better citizens.<sup>48</sup> Yet, this neutral outlook of empathy does not always do justice to the politics of sympathy in the Victorian fallen woman novel, and these texts' energy to 'make a difference'.

Literary critics in the field of Victorian studies tend to focus on how sympathetic feelings are shared between characters, narrator and reader in a distanced and reflective relationship. The Victorian's idea of a 'distanced' and reflective sympathy is largely argued to be the influence of the eighteenth-century philosopher Adam Smith and his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1795).<sup>49</sup> However, focusing only on the distanced narrator's sympathy or the limits of cognitive empathy and imaginative sympathy have led to readings of Victorian texts which merely highlight the failures of sympathy in the text. While the types of readings pursued by Rae Greiner, Sophie Ratcliffe, Audrey Jaffe and Rachel Ablow are acute and indispensable, Brigid Lowe is also right to argue that Victorian sympathy is not only about disclosing the limits of sympathy.<sup>50</sup> Lowe rejects the model of Adam Smith's impartial spectator, and instead posits David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) as the framework of sympathy in Victorian novels. Hume's ideas

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<sup>46</sup> Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Talia Schaffer, *Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 127. For more on biased empathy, see Bloom; Anna Lindhé, 'The Paradox of Narrative Empathy and the Form of the Novel, or What George Eliot Knew', *Studies in the Novel*, 48.1 (2016), 19–42.

<sup>48</sup> Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism*; Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*; Rachel Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings'; and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference*.

<sup>50</sup> <sup>50</sup> Greiner; Ratcliffe; Jaffe; Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings'; Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*; Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*.

are optimistic, believing that humanity shares a common core, and understanding that enables us to access knowledge of and sympathy towards each other.<sup>51</sup> Lowe uses the term 'sympathy' in a way that is similar to 'empathy' in Keen and Nussbaum's definition. Lowe's work is a crucial contribution to critical discussion because it questions whether Victorian studies' insistence on 'interpellation' is a modern, post-Althusserian approach which does not do Victorian novels justice. Lowe argues that in being occupied with uncovering ideologies of the nineteenth century, literary critics have missed textual examples of genuine sympathy and the warmth of characters' relationship being portrayed by Victorian novels.<sup>52</sup>

However, this view of reading 'genuine sympathy' can also be one-sided and exclusive. As Tom Sperlinger points out, in some situations suspicion can also be beneficial to human relationships, for suspicion is another form of curiosity about the other.<sup>53</sup> In opposition to Audrey Jaffe's exclusive focus on 'vertical sympathy' between the rich and the poor in Dickens, Lowe points out that Dickens more often portrays sympathy in a genuine feeling of warmth between the working-class characters. However, as Sperlinger notes, an in-group and intimate sympathy necessarily means that there is an excluded group.<sup>54</sup> In terms of this study's interest in how sympathy reaches out to other groups and builds bridges between differences, a focus on sympathy within in-groups does not capture the whole picture of Victorian sympathy. Lowe is right to say that by holding a text at arm's length with suspicion, one can miss a lot in the reading, but focusing only on sympathy within in-groups can also mean missing out. Thus, it is not about choosing between 'empathy' or 'sympathy', but understanding how both are essential in Victorian sympathy.

This thesis will explore how the representation of the 'fallen' woman changes drastically from *Ruth* to *Jude the Obscure*, both in the representation of the principal characters' fates, and in the narrator's confidence in understanding them. The unity with which Gaskell represents Ruth marks a striking contrast to Hardy's fragmented and elusive representation of Sue Bridehead. In *Ruth*, Benson, acting as a mouthpiece for Gaskell, soundly advocates on behalf of Ruth's purity and virtue. In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue eloquently speaks for herself on her rights – yet her actions contradict

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<sup>51</sup> Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*, p.10.

<sup>53</sup> Tom Sperlinger, 'Quite Argumentative', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37.2 (2008), 258–63 (262).

<sup>54</sup> Again for more similar views on how empathy can create bias, see Schaffer, p. 127; Lindhé, p. 25; Bloom, p. 9.

her words, and the narrator often appears to have no more understanding of her than Jude.

The lack of Hardy's narrator's ability to sympathise with Sue is relatable to sympathy defined by Plotinus (204/5–70 AD), the founder of the late ancient variety of Platonism. On a rare occasion Plotinus discussed a case of *sympatheia* between persons. As Eyjólfur K. Emilsson summarises:

[P]erson A notes that person B is suffering or that person B is rejoicing and A for that reason suffers or rejoices. This kind of *sympatheia* is not merely a biological function but involves A's judgment: A has to see and note that B suffers or is joyful in order to become similarly affected himself.<sup>55</sup>

Plotinus deeply influenced early Christian thinkers, and this idea of sympathy involving judgement is seen respectively in the moral theories of David Hume and Adam Smith.<sup>56</sup> For Hume and Smith, sympathy played a crucial role in making moral judgments, as Geoffrey Sayre-McCord writes, 'sympathy is essential, as they see it, as our capacity to *approve* (or disapprove) of actions, motives, and characters as moral or not and, because of that, our capacity to *judge* actions, motives, and characters as moral or not'.<sup>57</sup> Smith explains in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that, '[t]o approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them. If the same arguments which convince you convince me likewise, I necessarily approve of your conviction'.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, this also applies to when we feel sympathy for the other: 'this is equally the case with regard to our approbation or disapprobation of the sentiments or passions of the others'.<sup>59</sup> Sympathy is part of the process of making moral judgements. When you sympathise with the other, it signifies that you approve of this person as a moral being.<sup>60</sup> Therefore if one is to feel sympathy for the fallen woman, one is acknowledging that she is inherently good. That is the principle

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<sup>55</sup> Eyjólfur K. Emilsson, 'Plotinus on Sympatheia', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 36–60 (p. 43).

<sup>56</sup> Emilsson, p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 'Hume and Smith on Sympathy, Approbation, and Moral Judgment', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 208–46 (p. 210) italics in original.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Penguin, 2010), p. 22; also qtd in Sayre-McCord, p. 228.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Hume and Smith also explain that there is a difference between thinking someone is right, and you actually being right in that judgement.

according to which sympathy functions in *Ruth*. It is also seen in her first novel *Mary Barton* (1848), when Gaskell has to distance herself and tone down her sympathy when her original hero, John Barton, working in desperate conditions, murders the son of his employer.<sup>61</sup> While the philosophical study of emotions fell out of fashion during much of the twentieth century, recent work by Antonio Damasio and others has placed questions of affect central to many areas of intellectual inquiry.<sup>62</sup> The overlap in the logical function of emotions and sympathy, the logic of sympathy argued by eighteenth-century philosophers, is once again being recognised by twenty-first century theorists.

However, while sympathetic judgment for Ruth is logically functional in Gaskell's novel, by Hardy's time, the nature of sympathy had changed: it is no longer possible to make a reasonable judgement, because the other remains always to some extent a mystery. So now sympathy is a leap of faith: sympathising with a character even when you are not sure why.

This thesis draws attention to 'the politics of sympathy' because it finds that sympathy in the fallen women novels is more than feeling sentiment, but 'political' with a lowercase 'p'. I argue that in the act of reading and feeling sympathy for (or even *struggling* to feel sympathy for) the fallen woman, one is engaging in a political act. Sympathising with others and sharing their feelings, both of pleasure and pain, can come naturally at times – especially so for others who are close to us, who look like to us, or have similar backgrounds and experiences to us. But it is harder when the other is different, and in the case of fallen woman narratives middle-class readers often struggled to sympathise with the fallen woman character who broke serious moral rules of sexuality, which they believed were unforgivable. (Such attitudes are represented in this study by Gaskell's Mr Bradshaw and Hardy's Angel Clare). It is also the case with the fallen woman figure that she has potential capacity to be fetishised or arouse a variety of emotions in the reader other than that of sympathy or compassion, and thus the participatory role of the reader is at greater risk. Censorship of the representation of female sexuality may have to some extent assisted writers in safely restricting the reader's range of emotional response. However, as the later

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Shirley Foster (Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Raymond Williams' discussion of *Mary Barton* in *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Penguin, 1963), p.100–01.

<sup>62</sup> See for example Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Revised ed. (Penguin, 2005); Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (Harcourt, 1999).

writers, especially Hardy and Moore, refuse to limit their fallen woman characters, it shows that achieving sympathy inevitably involves mistakes, misunderstandings, and self-conscious re-efforts. It is in the struggle to sympathise that sympathy is political and is able to ‘make a difference’. Although American novelist and essayist Leslie Jamison, uses the term ‘empathy’, her concept of it is significantly similar to my concept of political sympathy: ‘Empathy isn’t just something that happens to us – a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain – it’s also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves’.<sup>63</sup> Her emphasis that empathy, or in my understanding *sympathy*, requires a conscious effort, as well as our natural sentiments, captures what sympathy should entitle.

Sympathy as a conscious and continuous effort, and thus having political capacity, is also explored by the philosopher of education, Gert Biesta. In *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (2006), Biesta discusses this idea of sympathy, though with a different set of terms: ‘tourism’, ‘visiting’ and ‘empathy’. Tourism is ‘to ensure that you will have all the comforts of home even as you travel’, while empathy is a form of ‘assimilation’, ‘forcibly to make yourself at home in a place that is not your home by appropriating its customs’.<sup>64</sup> Although different, the common issue with tourism and empathy is that they both tend to erase plurality. Set in contrast to this is the act of ‘visiting’. To define ‘visiting’, Biesta first cites Hannah Arendt that it is ‘being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not’. Biesta then adds a quotation by the political theorist Lisa Disch that, in visiting one permits the ‘disorientation that is necessary to understanding just how the world looks different to someone else’.<sup>65</sup> This definition of ‘visiting’ is important to this thesis in understanding ‘sympathy’ for the fallen woman in Victorian novels: it involves sharing others’ point of view, but admitting that it can be ‘disorienting’ at times because one does not lose one’s sense of self as different from the other. Biesta elaborates:

The innovating character of visiting lies in the fact that it provides an alternative for empathy. To my mind the main problem with empathy is that it assumes that we can simply (and comfortably) take the position of the other, thereby denying both the situatedness of one’s own seeing and thinking and that of the other’s. Visiting is

<sup>63</sup> Leslie Jamison, *Empathy Exams* (Granta, 2014), p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Gert Biesta, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (Paradigm, 2006), p. 91.

<sup>65</sup> qtd in Biesta, *Beyond Learning*, p. 91.

therefore not to see through the eyes of someone else, but to see with your own eyes from a position that is not your own – or to be more precise, in a story very different from one's own.<sup>66</sup>

What Biesta adds to this discussion of the politics of sympathy is that 'visiting' (/ sympathy) invites plurality – and importantly plurality is not 'an obstacle to overcome so that our common action can become possible, but where this fact is seen as that which makes our being with others possible and real in the first place'.<sup>67</sup> In popular opinion today, empathy, it seems, is deemed more pleasingly democratic, but we should question, as Jesse Cordes Selbin does, whether or not democracy thrives in plurality, diversity and inclusivity, which is better achieved through 'sympathy', that is feeling for the other while seeing them as other.<sup>68</sup> 'Democracy does not seek to turn its citizens into the same subject; rather, it balances obligation and needs between crucially different subjects' writes Selbin.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Selbin argues that 'an ethically inclined sympathy would also be an immensely time- and labour-intensive one. Sympathy thus raises major questions about whether we are willing to take the time to get it right'.<sup>70</sup> Thus while in the modern usage of 'sympathy' (feeling *for*) verses 'empathy' (feeling *with*), 'empathy' has largely been viewed as more ethical, kinder and understanding of the other, there are other views that remind us not to forget the benefits of 'sympathy'. Moreover, revisiting the Victorian idea of sympathy can help us to explore the potentialities of 'sympathy': sharing other's emotions while retaining awareness of oneself and reflecting on the difficulties of understanding the other.

Critics of Victorian literature such as Rae Greiner, Audrey Jaffe, Sophie Ratcliffe and Rebecca Mitchell, who have argued that Victorian realists were concerned with representing the limitations and failures sympathy, have hit upon a very vital feature in Victorian engagement with sympathy. However, rather than conclude that Victorians were sceptical or suspicious about human beings' ability to connect with each other, we must understand fully what it means for the authors to be able to push right up against the very limits of their ability to sympathetically

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<sup>66</sup> Biesta, *Beyond Learning*, p. 91.

<sup>67</sup> Biesta, *Beyond Learning*, p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> Jesse Cordes Selbin, 'Sympathetic Distance and Victorian Form', *Qui Parle*, 22.2 (2014), 163–75.

<sup>69</sup> Selbin, p. 170.

<sup>70</sup> Selbin, p. 170.



represent the other in literature. As Cordes believes, because we will not always succeed in understanding the other correctly and many times it will be ‘guesswork’, it is ‘sympathy’s tendencies toward fission, rather than empathetic fusion, [which] cause society to move forward past a point of stagnation or paralysis’.<sup>71</sup>

The ethical pursuit of knowing the other is further discussed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973). Williams defines ‘known’ and ‘knowable communities’ in literature, contrasting those of Jane Austen and George Eliot.<sup>72</sup> He finds that Austen’s communities are small and close-knit, and the narrator is at ease in commenting on the characters and passing judgement on them. Whereas in George Eliot, her communities extend beyond her own middle-class, and her narrator hesitates at times when representing working-class characters. On the one hand, we might read this as Eliot’s failure in representing people outside of her community and class with which she was familiar. Yet Williams does not devalue Eliot for her inability to represent the other, but praises her efforts to reach beyond experiences and lifestyles that she is comfortable in representing. It is remarkable that Williams should choose the rather ambiguous term ‘knowable’ communities as the contrast to ‘known’ communities. Why did he not say ‘unknown communities’? The word ‘knowable’ suggests that although the community is not known yet, there is potential that one day it might be. Failure to represent does not matter so much as the novelist’s courage to represent the knowable community to the utmost ability they can, even if it means the language of their text will fracture and break, losing its ease of readability. It is in the attitude of desiring and yearning to know the other, and not assuming that they have achieved it, which I believe is at the heart of the politics of sympathy.

### **History of Ideas: Sympathy from the Stoics to Adam Smith**

The politics of sympathy cannot be understood without knowledge of how sympathy as a concept has changed and developed over time. Only then can we understand the

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<sup>71</sup> Selbin, p. 171.

<sup>72</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Vintage, 2016), p. 241.

richness of the concept and its diversity of meanings.<sup>73</sup> Sympathy, which we may think to be self-evident, is like anything else, to some extent culturally conditioned. Ideas and discussions about sympathy go far back into ancient philosophy. The Stoics regarded sympathy in its broadest term, a feature of the cosmos itself: the soul permeated all substances thus ensuing an interconnection between objects and beings.<sup>74</sup> Although it is far from our modern understanding of sympathy as having to do with feelings and emotions, the Stoics would inspire generations of thinkers – from Benedict Spinoza, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Adam Smith, to Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and others – until we arrive at where we are now. The concept of sympathy has changed drastically over the centuries – while ‘connection’ has been kept as its very essence, the discourse of sympathy has developed in various contexts, and been incorporated with qualities of emotions and morality.

The English word for ‘sympathy’ is derived from the Greek ‘sympatheia’ [συμπάθεια], which combines ‘fellow’ [συν] and ‘feeling’ [πάθος]: the state of feeling together. The Latin translation ‘*compassio*’ has sometimes led our definition of sympathy to be narrowly associated with ‘compassion’. However, the original concept of ‘sympathy’ stretches as far as the ‘all-too familiar social phenomena’ of simultaneous yawning or contagious giggles, to the mysterious co-affective bonds between one’s mind, body and emotions, as well as physical interconnections such as the vibrations of musical strings, the spread of contagious diseases, and the pull of magnets.<sup>75</sup> In *Principles of Philosophy* (first published in Latin in 1644), René Descartes (1596–1650) goes from discussing magnetic force (Part V, articles 152–182) to the attraction in amber, wax, resin (art. 184), and glass (art. 185), then concluding that in these various attractions ‘there are, in rocks or plants, no forces so secret, no marvels of sympathy or antipathy so astounding’ (art. 187). In the heading of article 187, Descartes attributes the mysterious effects of sympathy with occult qualities. When Isaac Newton’s *Principia* (1689) was published, his new law of universal gravity was compared to a quality of sympathy, and one of Newton’s

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<sup>73</sup> For example, Isobel Armstrong believes that the notion of sympathy as it was during the Victorian period ‘has completely lost its richness and dense moral weight for us’, in *Victorian Scrutinies* (Athlone Press, 1972), p. 9. See also Sophie Ratcliffe, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> René Brouwer, ‘Stoic Sympathy’, in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 15–35 (p. 22).

<sup>75</sup> Eric Schliesser, ‘Introduction: On Sympathy’, in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3–14 (p. 3).

readers, John Locke (1632–1704), treated its sympathetic nature as a quality superadded to matter by God.<sup>76</sup> While sympathy has not been the ‘mainstream’ attraction of post-Cartesian natural philosophy, Eric Schliesser emphasises that influential figures such as William Gilbert and Newton have ‘flirted’ with Descartes’ sympathy in their work on physics.<sup>77</sup>

During the eighteenth century the discourse of sympathy flourished. Because the period is called the ‘Age of Reason’, it is often overlooked that the eighteenth century was also significant in its development of principles in emotions.<sup>78</sup> Three meanings were associated with ‘sympathy’ at that time: firstly, sympathy as ‘mechanical communication of feelings and passions’; secondly, as the ‘process of imagination, or of reason, by which we substitute ourselves for other’s’; and, thirdly, as ‘our delight in the happiness and sorrow in the misery of other people’.<sup>79</sup> Ryan Patrick Hanley has suggested that sympathy flourished in the eighteenth century mainly out of ‘a new and creative philosophical response to the practical political problem of human connectedness in an increasingly disorienting world’. As the foundations of Christianity were being replaced by science and a new social order, sympathy became the secular solution to sustaining social bonds.<sup>80</sup> Of course, it must be noted that, as Hanley himself is aware, Christianity still took part in shaping the discourse of sympathy, but an example of the key development of sympathy with a secular approach is Benedict Spinoza (1632–77). As will be discussed in Chapter Two, Spinoza influenced George Eliot who was looking for alternative ideas outside of Christian ethics. Spinoza’s view of the world founded on the notion that ‘each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persist in its own being’ is, as Ryan Hanley explains, a ‘pronounced shift away from traditional theological definitions of love in the context of the divine or transcendent toward an understanding of love grounded in the perspective of the self’.<sup>81</sup> If love and hatred are ‘merely pleasure or

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<sup>76</sup> Schliesser, p. 10. See also, John Locke, ‘Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester’ (1699), in *The Works of John Locke*, Vol. 4, p. 467, qtd in Hylarie Kochiras, ‘Locke’s Philosophy of Science’, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Salta (Fall 2013 ed.) [accessed 29 March 2022].

<sup>77</sup> Schliesser, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Penguin, 2010), pp. 171–72.

<sup>79</sup> Luigi Turgio, ‘Sympathy and Moral Sense 1725–1740’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7.1 (1999), 79–101 (79).

<sup>80</sup> Ryan Patrick Hanley, ‘The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant’, in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 171–98 (p. 174).

<sup>81</sup> Hanley, p. 175.

pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause', Spinoza explores in sympathy why we 'love or hate some things without any cause known to use, but merely from sympathy and antipathy'.<sup>82</sup> Spinoza saw sympathy as 'action motivating', capable of urging social changes, because seeing distress in others causes distress in oneself; in wanting to rid of one's distress, one tries to rid the other's distress.<sup>83</sup> Questions regarding the relationship between sympathy and egoism, and between sympathy and acts of kindness are incorporated in his discussion. The debate between self-interested motivations and altruism in sympathy is also a concern for Adam Smith. His *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) have led to scholars being long occupied with the battle between self-interest and other-directed moral psychology, but Hanley argues that this is a false dichotomy, and that there is a need for better understanding of Smith's 'own insistence on the action-motivating aspects of sympathy',<sup>84</sup> which was in fact the most common understanding of sympathy during the century.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, while we see the concept of sympathy as a self-interested action motivator passed down from the seventeenth-century to the eighteenth, from Spinoza to Smith, during that period we can also see the concept of sympathy being developed as a self-check to our ego. Rachel Ablow explains that Smith, Hume and others reacted against Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) claim that people are by nature self-centred, and in response they pointed to sympathy as 'proof that man is instead naturally social'.<sup>86</sup> As another example, moral philosopher and Anglican Theologian, Joseph Butler (1692–1752) argued for the interdependence of human beings and of compassion, and that although compassion may not necessarily move one to bring about the happiness of others, it 'prevents' one 'from doing evil'.<sup>87</sup> Butler influenced not only his contemporary David Hume, but also others such as Adam Smith, showing how self-interest and self-check are both found in the Smithian concept of

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<sup>82</sup> Hanley, p. 175.

<sup>83</sup> Hanley, p. 176. Spinoza's quote is taken from *Ethics* cor. 3, pr. 27, III.

<sup>84</sup> Hanley, p. 178.

<sup>85</sup> Hanley, p. 176.

<sup>86</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 194. She writes, 'Hobbes's claim that man is naturally selfish and that society is merely the compromise we make to ensure out relative security, philosophers and social theorist such as Lord Shaftesbury, David Hume and Adam Smith pointed to sympathy, in particular, as proof that man is instead naturally social'.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Butler, 'Upon Compassion' (sermon 5), in *Fifteen Sermons*, in *The Works of Joseph Butler* (William Tegg, 1867; reprint, Adamant Media, 2006), pp. 45–56 (p. 49), qtd by Hanley, p. 178.

sympathy.<sup>88</sup> Hanley additionally names Lord Kames (1696–1782), who called sympathy ‘the cement of human society’,<sup>89</sup> and French philosopher, Sophie de Grouchy (1764–1822).

Sophie de Grouchy’s *Letters of Sympathy* (1798) is significant because it gives us an insight to how sympathy was understood, valued and treated at the close of the eighteenth century. Her text highlights two functions of sympathy and its values: firstly, that sympathy checks our self-interest, and secondly, leads to altruism and helping others.<sup>90</sup> Hanley points out that these two aspects give shape to a structure of feeling: a fear that social benevolence was becoming a thing of the past, replaced by a new society driven by self-interest.<sup>91</sup> Ablow similarly discusses the shift of sentiments during the eighteenth century, and names the influence of the French Revolution and its excessive violence on late eighteenth-century Europeans’ loss of confidence that fellow-feeling is guaranteed and results in a kind society. In British literature, the trend becomes apparent in the display of ‘restraint, self-control and stoical, wry acceptance’ towards sentimentality.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, industrialisation and urbanisation changed relationships between employer and employee and the nature of communities, for reasons why people felt that they were losing connectivity with others, becoming isolated and driven by their self-interest.<sup>93</sup> As Raymond Williams writes, the period is marked by ‘an increasing skepticism, disbelief, in the possibility of understanding society’.<sup>94</sup>

Late eighteenth-century philosophers believed that sympathy and kindness are at the heart of human nature, but it also became clear to them that natural sentiment alone was not strong enough to survive in an ever increasingly self-interest driven world, and that a cultivation of the natural sentiments of sympathy was highly vital.<sup>95</sup> De Grouchy played an important role in the education of sentiments for bettering society. She believed that our natural sentiments must be cultivated to produce better results. Such ideas were shared by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) who wrote,

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<sup>88</sup> Aaron Garrett, “Joseph Butler’s Moral Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, (Spring 2018 ed.), 18 February 2018, [accessed 10 March 2022].

<sup>89</sup> Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. by Mary Catherine Moran (Liberty Fund, 2005), pp. 19–20, qtd by Hanley p. 181.

<sup>90</sup> Hanley, p. 183.

<sup>91</sup> Hanley, p. 183.

<sup>92</sup> Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (Methuen, 1986), p. 131, qtd by Rachel Ablow ‘Victorian Feelings’, p. 195.

<sup>93</sup> Ablow, ‘Victorian Feelings’, p. 195.

<sup>94</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence* (Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 15.

<sup>95</sup> Hanley, pp. 188–89.

'natural affection, as it is termed, I believed to be a very weak tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of the mutual sympathy'.<sup>96</sup>

It is here that literature, especially novels, lends itself well to the education of sympathy. As Ablow observes, novelists and readers alike identified the novel as a space for 'training' the emotions.<sup>97</sup> Because the philosophical and political discussions of emotions and sentiment were gendered, and 'mothers, wives, and daughters were often assumed to be more naturally emotional, a quality only intensified by their role in childbirth and rearing',<sup>98</sup> educational novels of emotion were for the majority set within a domestic narrative, most commonly the developmental marriage plot.<sup>99</sup> For these educational novels on marriage, such as *David Copperfield* (1849), *Middlemarch* (1871), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Woman in White* (1860), Ablow points out that the writer and readers' attitude towards the novel as educational is 'wholly benign; novels use characters simply as a way to instruct us in what to expect from a lover and how to behave towards her or him'.<sup>100</sup>

A second branch of educational novels also developed in the Victorian period: 'Industrial novels' or 'Condition of England novels', which are concerned with issues such as poverty and raising awareness of the widening gap of wealth between classes. As readers were mainly from a middle or upper-class background, writers aspired to relay to such readers the unfamiliar experiences of the working class. Writers sought to change and reform society through individual and personal change by appealing to the reader's feelings and moralities. They believed that the gap of understanding and trust between classes could be bridged through the novel form, 'insofar as fiction commonly claims to be able to represent both a wide variety of situations and a range of interiorities and subjective experiences'.<sup>101</sup> As George Eliot famously wrote, 'a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment'.<sup>102</sup>

Sympathy and understanding of others, however, is neither easy nor comes naturally, and as critics such as Rebecca Mitchell, Sophie Ratcliffe and Rae Greiner

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<sup>96</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Norton, 2009), qtd by Hanley, p. 186.

<sup>97</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 198.

<sup>98</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 197.

<sup>99</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 198.

<sup>100</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 200.

<sup>101</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 202.

<sup>102</sup> Ablow, 'Victorian Feelings', p. 202.

point out, Victorian novelist were aware of that fact. In opposition to our image of Eliot championing the novel as a great education of our sentiments and morals, her peculiar novella, 'The Lifted Veil' (1859), is about a character who has supernatural abilities to enter into the thoughts of others, and shows its unpleasant, uneasy and even horrifying results.<sup>103</sup> Yet, as this study argues, Victorian writers who sought to liberate women from fallen narratives embraced the difficulty of sympathy, because in the struggle, sympathy takes on an ethical significance.

### Style and Sympathy, Form and Feeling

As we have seen, in the debate over defining sympathy there is discussion of whether one shares feelings with the other while aware that the other is the other, or whether that distance is eliminated by fellow-feeling. When it comes to analysing novels, this difference is to some extent recognisable in the form of the novel: free indirect speech, for instance, gives the impression that the reader has direct access into the character's mind. In these cases, the narrator steps down from his pulpit and lets the character's voice take over. This style of narration shows traits of empathy, of feeling the character's emotions directly as if in first person. On the other hand, if the narrator tells the reader how to feel for the fallen woman, the style more closely mimics compassion. An example of this, as we will see in Chapter Two, is the proclamation made by narrator in *Adam Bede*: 'My hearts bleeds for her'. As Garrett Stewart has noted, such direct address to the reader by the narrator is common in early Victorian novels, and becomes less and less common towards the end, especially in socio-novels.<sup>104</sup> Sophie Ratcliffe focuses on the dramatic monologue in poetry, such as by Robert Browning and W. H. Auden, to access important questions of sympathy. While previous critics have made the 'association of the dramatic monologue with a transparent sympathetic understanding, in its simplistic relationship to moral judgement', Ratcliffe is interested in more recent ideas by Noel Carroll, Murray Smith and Gregory Currie that challenge the assumed relationship between sympathy

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<sup>103</sup> For more discussion see, Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>104</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

and 'identification', and explore how dramatic monologue can be read as 'the location for the "tension between sympathy" [...] and "judgement"'.<sup>105</sup>

Analysing style shapes our understanding of sympathy in the Victorian novel, and throughout this thesis, I will argue that novelists elicit the reader's sympathy for characters through the ways in which the formal and stylistic aspects of their texts shape our perceptions of the world. If the narrator is looking in sympathy, then the reader by reading, also takes the narrator's sympathetic point of view. In Hardy, especially, we see his preoccupation with the visual technologies of representation. Interestingly, for Hardy, it does not mean to simply visualise characters with the utmost clarity possible. Often times, his sympathy manifests in the half-shadows and ambiguities. Rae Greiner's monograph is interested in a method of looking at sympathy in the novel without involving feeling, to explain sympathy in purely cognitive terms.<sup>106</sup> She argues sympathy often results in feelings, but sympathy itself is an imaginative exercise of understanding the situation of the other and reflecting on it. In the novel, through reading and understanding the character's situation, one can have sympathy for the character. Greiner's approach to the novel is understandably not only an intriguing method but also a practical one, because dealing with feelings can often produce more questions and ambiguity than answers. However, as Greiner herself admits, feeling and thinking are intertwined, as recent scholars of other fields have also been exploring, for example the works in neuroscience led by Antonio Damasio.<sup>107</sup> This thesis explores how the fallen woman texts vitalise style for evoking the reader's cognitive and emotional sympathy.

The very recent publication of *On Style in Victorian Fiction* (2022) can be seen as a testament to how a formalist methodology is useful and timely in nineteenth-century studies. On the one hand, Victorian literature has long been known for its transparent style, but on the other, Victorian literature reveals that it is 'aware of its verbal artistry, and indeed its artifice'<sup>108</sup> While writing styles may come in and go out of fashion, it is the expression through which the novel's meaning is created. The collection of essays in this book edited by Daniel Tyler show that careful attention to verbal detail unveils the full 'breath of imaginative vision' in Victorian

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<sup>105</sup> Ratcliffe, p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Greiner, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> Greiner, pp. 2–3

<sup>108</sup> Daniel Tyler, 'On Style: An Introduction', *On Style in Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Daniel Tyler (Cambridge University Press, 2022) pp. 1–20, p. 4.



fiction – ‘the complexity, the multiplicity, of the imagined reality and the response to it’.<sup>109</sup> For example, Mark Ford’s chapter explores how Hardy’s stylistic habits, often accused of being ‘transgressions against literary good breeding’, are attributes of the ‘power’ of his novels.<sup>110</sup> As Tyler asserts, ‘[s]tyle does not simply deliver the content of a novel; it is itself part of that work of imagination, representation, scrutiny and suggestion’.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in this thesis’s project of examining sympathetic representation of the fallen woman in Victorian novels, it is imperative that we look to the text’s formal features to fully understand its creative capacity of evoking sympathetic emotions in the reader.

As we previously touched upon the physiological effects of the novel, it is essential to note how style, physiology and affect can work together. Nicolas Dames’ *Physiology of the Novel* (2007), for example, presents how style for the nineteenth-century reader was seen to have a physical effect on the body.<sup>112</sup> Other critics such as Kirstie Blair also find the connection between Victorian poetic form and bodily experience due to the advancement of medical science during that period.<sup>113</sup> Jason Rudy finds that, more so than eighteenth-century readers who ‘privileged the mind’s interpretive role’, Victorian readers ‘gave credit to the body as the arbiter of poetic truths’.<sup>114</sup> It was also the Victorians who ‘realize the full political potential of poetic form’ and the ‘necessary connection between bodily sensation and poetic experience’.<sup>115</sup> The reader’s bodily participation was vital in the Victorian period, as Rachel Abow tells us, ‘reading was commonly regarded as at least as valuable as an affective experience as it was a way to convey information or increase understanding’.<sup>116</sup>

When advancing affective reading in Victorian literary sympathy for the fallen woman, I find it important to also emphasise the individuality of the writers’ creativity and the readers’ responses. Waves of literary theories have prescribed literary subjectivity as ‘an effect of historical discourses; or as a position within the

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<sup>109</sup> Tyler, p. 14.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Ford, ‘Hardy and Style’, in *On Style in Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Daniel Tyler (Cambridge University Press, 2022) pp. 263–77, p. 266.

<sup>111</sup> Tyler, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Nicholas Dames, *Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

<sup>113</sup> See Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>114</sup> Jason R. Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Ohio University Press, 2009) p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Rudy, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Rachel Abow, ‘Introduction: The Feeling of Reading’ in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature* ed. By Rachel Abow, (University of Michigan, 2010) pp.1–10 (p. 2)

ideological apparatus', which is valuable criticism. But John Hughes champions affective reading as an alternative approach to examine how literary writers produce individuating effects, through stylistic, lyrical, or formal configurations'.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Soitiros Paraschas argues that 'the moral impact of [Victorian realist] fiction depended precisely on the recognition of the author and his proprietary relation to his text'.<sup>118</sup> In other words, the affective emotions and bodily sensations which are evoked by the fallen woman text – both in the characters responding to the fallen woman and in the implied reader – are designed and created by the writer. Thus this thesis also incorporates a philosophically and biographically informed criticism in order to investigate the style and form through which the novels evoke sympathy for the fallen woman.

Given that this thesis reflects on the readerly feeling, it is appropriate to discuss the difficulties and limitations of writing about the nineteenth-century reader/critical allyship. Matthew Bradley and Juliet John's *Reading and the Victorians* helpfully gives us the view that all reading history is party conjecture, and how little we know about the reader. As Phillip Davis raises the issue in *Real Voices on Reading* (1997), the study of texts in academia is not the same as the 'real' experience of reading.<sup>119</sup> The discipline called 'history of reading' takes a macro perspective on the culture of reading during a particular period and of the broader movements of how a text was consumed by the public. One might evaluate the growth of literacy during the nineteenth century, or find patterns in borrowed books from libraries. However, the approach cannot pick up the 'singular reading', which becomes lost in statistical data.<sup>120</sup> In the foreword to *The History of Reading: A International Perspective* (2011), Simon Eliot remarks that much of our reading activity is non-transformative: as a literate society, we read, not just books and poetry, but various materials for various reasons, and most of the time the things we read reassure our worldview.<sup>121</sup> *The History of Reading* is focused on these ordinary and commonplace acts of reading.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, as Bradley and John write, the

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<sup>117</sup> John Hughes, *'Affective Worlds': Writing, Feeling & Nineteenth Century Literature* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011) p. 2

<sup>118</sup> Soitiros Paraschas, *Realist Author and Sympathetic Imagination* (Taylor and Francis, 2017), p. 137

<sup>119</sup> Phillip Davis, 'Introduction: Not On The Run', in *Real Voices on Reading*, ed. by Phillip Davis (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) pp. xiii–xvii (p. xiv)

<sup>120</sup> Dames, 'On Not Close Reading', p.11

<sup>121</sup> Simon Eliot, foreword to *The History of Reading Vol. 1: International Perspectives c. 1500–1900*, eds. by Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. xiii–xv (p. xiv)

<sup>122</sup> Simon Eliot, p. xiii.

ordinary reading help to ‘contextualise more thoroughly the more exceptional readers and acts of reading in which literature and literary criticism are chiefly interested’.<sup>123</sup> In this thesis’ examination of sympathetic representation of the fallen woman, we are primarily interested in the ways the texts radically change preconceptions of women and extend the reader’s sympathy. However, the history of reading is also dispensable in the ways they inform us how, for example, literature was written and read by Victorians for educational and social purposes, or read with an appreciation of sensual and emotional effects. Acknowledging the difficulties of writing about the subjective experience of reading, the discussions about readerly response in this thesis will be inferred from contemporary reviews, formalist readings, and appearances of fictional readers within the novels themselves as models and guides to authorial intention. For example, the first chapter discusses the nineteenth century ‘cooperative movement’ as an example of a social response which successfully addressed the class and economic tensions which preoccupy Gaskell’s novels. We also look to George Holyoake’s use of literary novels for his own purposes of bridging the middle and working classes. The example illustrates not only how the reader is free to interpret and adapt a literary text, but also how the text invites the reader to do so. The second chapter explores George Eliot’s philosophical influences to examine the realist from and her authorial relationship with the implied reader. The chapter on *Esther Waters* includes Moore’s critique of literary censorship, and his dual relationship with Protestant and Catholic Christianity. Fictional characters in the texts covered by this study also offer an insightful understanding of the diversity of acts of reading, from Ruth’s pious reading of the bible, to Tess’s horror at reading the red slogans, and Esther’s illiteracy. These possibly guide the way we are meant to read the text.

Sympathy in Victorian fiction, especially in representations of the fallen woman, is complex and manifold. It takes an eclectic combination of methods to approach the subject: affect is useful to examine the emotions and feelings which are evoked by the text; formalist methodology enables us to understand how style and form links to our emotional and bodily responses to the text. A historical approach to these methods further enhances the effectiveness of our readings. These hope to bring understanding about the implied reader, as well as the author’s intent, and allow us to

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<sup>123</sup> Bradley and John, p. 8.

analyse how and to what extent the texts evoke and extend sympathy for the fallen woman.

### **Sympathy and the Fallen Woman Novel**

The well-known Victorian term, 'the fallen woman', takes its allegorical symbol from the biblical fall in the Garden of Eden. Eve is interpreted as a seducer and thus her fall overlaps with the loss of sexual purity. The fact that the term comes from an ancient story of religious and moral significance corresponds to the way in which the fallen woman narrative is established and fixed. Expectations, stereotypes and narrative plot devices around the rhetoric of the fallen woman are pre-set by tradition. The nineteenth century was so strongly imbued with the rhetoric of the fallen woman that even feminists advocating equality for women in marriages and in the public sphere relied heavily upon 'women living up to the strict sexual morality enshrined in the term "social purity"'.<sup>124</sup> As Jennifer Somerville writes, '[w]omen themselves were the fiercest guardians of the moral code, and the penalties for transgression were very severe, underlined by the outcast figure of the age – the Unmarried Mother, the Divorced Woman and above all the Prostitute'.<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, feminist criticism of the last four decades has explored the multiplicity of interpretations of the fallen woman, and how it has changed during the Victorian period. Critics such as Lynda Nead, Judith Walkowitz, and Linda Mahood have led a Foucauldian approach to show Victorian 'fallenness' as a fluid category, meaning that women of all kinds of backgrounds and ways of living were clumped together under the term 'fallen women': from adulterers and prostitutes to victims of seduction.<sup>126</sup> It was part of the Victorian status quo to preserve the absolute nature of two groups of women: the pure and the fallen. For the purpose of this study, we will focus, at least initially, on the seduced working-class woman who is abandoned by her upper-class lover. Gaskell's *Ruth*, for instance, endeavours to rescue its eponymous victim from shame,

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<sup>124</sup> Jennifer Somerville, *Feminism and the Family: Politics and Society in the UK and USA* (St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 50.

<sup>125</sup> Somerville, p. 50.

<sup>126</sup> See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality* (Basil Blackwell, 1988); Linda Mahood, *Policing Gender, Class And Family In Britain, 1800–1945* (UCL Press, 1995)

condemnation, and association with delinquent forms of self-seeking and lewd prostitution, by showing that she is vulnerable not only because of her gender, but also because of her economic position.

The time frame covered by this study is from 1853 to 1895, from the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Each of the novels examined reveals its own understanding of the fallen woman, and ways of representing their character with sympathy and of 'educating' the reader, and this thesis combines both formalist and historical approaches to understand the distinctiveness of each novel's mode of representation. Multiple literary studies of the fallen woman narrative have focused on authors and texts from the early to mid-Victorian period, but this study begins from mid-century and extends up to the end of the century, because of my interest in the historical background of female sexual politics and how that is reflected in the novel. Amanda Anderson's *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* (1981) looks at Dickens, Gaskell, D. G. Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her compelling book states that one of her reasons for selecting the time period 1840–1860 is that she wanted to focus on the rhetoric of the fallen women 'when prostitution did not yet occupy the political center stage'.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, this study is interested in precisely that change of social awareness, and one of the main aims is to provide a study of Thomas Hardy's portrayal of 'transgressing' women in his late novels. In order to fully understand the literary context in which Hardy produces his work, the opening chapters of this thesis are dedicated to Elizabeth Gaskell's second novel *Ruth* (1853) and George Eliot's first, *Adam Bede* (1859). It would be very difficult indeed to have a discussion about the fallen woman without these texts. In *Woman and the Demon* (1982), Nina Auerbach also selects these two novels because they were 'widely read and influential', and they provoked contrasting reader attitudes. *Ruth* caused controversy and scandal, while *Adam Bede* was acceptable as 'wholesome' for its 'spectrum of possible attitudes towards "fallen" heroines'.<sup>128</sup> *Ruth* was scandalous because the novel is openly sympathetic towards the fallen woman, a young girl and single mother who had, in many reader's eyes, 'sinned' beyond redemption. Gaskell endows Ruth with traditional virtues, which no Christian reader, however adverse to the fallen woman they may be, could deny, such

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<sup>127</sup> Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 168.

as kindness, meekness, unselfishness, and above all, a mother's devotion to her child. By the use of persuasive narrative techniques, such as inner character representation, scenes of debate between characters, and a dramatic event which illustrates the character's change of heart, Gaskell worked around implied readers' conservative views to win them over to the fallen woman's side. Her methods of engaging the reader falls in line with the cooperative movement of the 1840s, which emphasised the importance of two-way relationship between those involved, rather than a top-down charity.<sup>129</sup> While Gaskell's novel has a strong moral lesson which runs through the narrative, it requires the reader's cooperation and participation in re-evaluating their judgement of the fallen woman character.

George Eliot's fallen woman character in *Adam Bede*, Hetty, is a minor character who temporarily acts as a foil to the hero Adam, distracting him from finding a worthy wife. *Adam Bede* can be read as an educational marriage plot: the reader follows the story of the titular character and his journey to maturity, and learns to tame one's sentiments. In *Adam Bede*, the narrator acts as a spokesperson, dictating what the reader should feel about the characters. However, in terms of the fallen woman character, Eliot's narrator generally portrays Hetty as a flawed, self-centred and vain simpleton, and it would seem that Eliot endorses the negative stereotypes of the fallen woman. Nevertheless, the text offers complications when Eliot devotes a large section to Hetty's journey, a section which can be argued to constitute the most emotional chapters of the whole novel, leading readers and critics to speculate whether or not the sentiment was intended by the author. Regardless of Eliot's intention, the exclusive chapters on Hetty break away from the rest of the structure and pattern of the text. Raymond Williams states that the text 'breaks' because Eliot extends sympathy beyond her 'known community'. Incorporated into Eliot's sympathy is her commitment to realism, and her refusal to dilute or idealise offensive reality in order to please the reader. In other words, the implied middle-class reader is challenged to sympathise with a fallen woman character who could not be more different from their middle-class ideas.

The third chapter acts as an interlude and introduction to the second half of the study. Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), the novel which effectively established his career as a writer, hinges upon the fallen woman plot. The

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<sup>129</sup> Casie LeGette, 'Cooperative Quotation: George Eliot and George Jacob Holyoake', *Victorian Studies*, 59.4 (2017), 585–608.

heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, discovers that her husband, Sergeant Troy, has a lover with a child out of wedlock. The implications are massive, but the characterisation of the fallen woman, Fanny Robin, is minute. She appears only fleetingly in a few scenes at the beginning and end of the novel, and much of the time she is a figure in obscure shadows and weak light. That Fanny is merely a plot device, however, is an understatement. Alex Woloch and Anna Lindhé examine how Victorian texts show an unfair distribution of sympathy towards main and minor characters.<sup>130</sup> However, reading *Far from the Madding Crowd* in relation to *Adam Bede* enlightens us of Hardy's own endeavour to write with sympathy even further outside of the 'known community' than Eliot had ventured, by his creation of a character on the very margins of the narrative.

By contrast, in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), arguably the most famous fallen woman narrative, the fallen woman stands centre stage, and the narrator's sympathy is explicitly for her. However, it is intriguing that while the novel's moral purpose seems to be similar to that of Gaskell's *Ruth*, Hardy could not have been more different in his portrayal of the fallen woman. Whereas Gaskell made it clear that Ruth was fully ignorant and fully exploited, Hardy's writing is more allusive, inviting various debates as to whether the heroine was seduced or raped, even allowing feminist critics to praise Tess's ownership of her sexuality. Nevertheless, and most importantly, all the while, the narrator is sympathetic to Tess. This is a significant indication that the moral rhetoric around female sexuality is changing, and also the way in which the reader's sympathy for the fallen woman is evoked.

However, one contemporary and rival writer is said to have found Hardy's representation too sentimental.<sup>131</sup> George Moore instead portrayed the fallen woman as a single mother and working woman who has no time for sentimental pity. Esther's determination to survive despite her social disadvantages invites the reader's admiration rather than tears. Moreover, *Esther Waters* (1894) is significantly the first fallen woman novel of this study in which the fallen woman does *not* die. The fallen woman narrative, hitherto 'fixed', has had its breakthrough. Moore succeeds in

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<sup>130</sup> Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 41; Lindhé, p. 25.

<sup>131</sup> Shanta Dutta, "'I Am One of a Long Row Only': Contemporary Retellings of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, 34 (2018), 67–76 (67).

writing a fallen woman story on his own terms, redefining 'goodness' outside the constraints of traditional morals and values.

While critical material on the fallen woman has generally tended to focus on the early to mid- nineteenth century, George Watt's *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (1987) covers not only Dickens and Gaskell but also Gissing and Moore. While Watt has been accused of selecting the novels somewhat 'arbitrarily',<sup>132</sup> in his defence, Watt explains his choices reflect his intention to present a wide range of 'differing social and aesthetic perspectives'.<sup>133</sup> He shows the expanse from Dickens's Nancy as 'first in a long line of sympathetic creation which clash with many prevailing social attitudes' to Moore's Esther as an 'important contribution' to fallen woman fiction which has been established by earlier Victorian novelists.<sup>134</sup>

This thesis does not stop with *Esther Waters*, but goes one step further to look at Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Hardy's late and controversial work is not so much a fallen woman novel but (among other things) a New Woman novel. However, as this study will show, the social attitudes regarding both types of women are similar, and sympathy towards outsiders of the 'known community' is taken to further limits. While Sue Bridehead tries to break away from conventional moral expectations of women, she is still subject to cold-hearted criticism very similar to those the fallen women characters of previous novels suffered. On the other hand, moral circumstances have changed, and there is less scandal and indignation towards the 'fallen woman'.<sup>135</sup> *Jude the Obscure* is significantly *not* a story of abandonment, possibly signifying the end of the fallen woman genre. However, it does not mean that the writer's work in extending his reader's sympathy for outcast women is done. Sue's elusiveness is one of the central features of the novel. The fact that the reader cannot understand Sue frustrates and hinders sympathy, in an unprecedented way. Has sympathy itself changed, becoming more complicated, more tested and stretched? This thesis will show that sympathy has various kinds and shades. Earlier novels,

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<sup>132</sup> Vineta Colby, 'George Watt, "The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel" (Book Review)', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 39.3 (1984), 334–48 (347).

<sup>133</sup> George Watt, *Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth Century English Novel* (Croom Helm, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> George Watt, p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> For example, Victorian essayist Mary Jeune believed that fallen women 'could be helped while New Women were destined for disappointment'. It exemplifies an anti-New Woman view which is accommodating towards the fallen woman. See William A. Davis Jr., 'Mary Jeune, Late-Victorian Essayist: Fallen Women, New Women, and Poor Children', *ELT*, 58. 2 (2015), 181–208 (192).



those by Gaskell and Eliot, have demonstrated sympathy deriving from Christian and liberal humanitarian influences. Moore's sympathy is one of commitment to survival and admiration for strong character. And when we include *Jude the Obscure* as well as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, we see where fiction seems to go with the end of the nineteenth century. Hardy's literary works do not cease to create female characters who elude understanding, and to show that the reader's ongoing struggle to bridge the distance is an act of sympathy.

## Chapter One

### The Beautiful Risk of *Ruth*: Communication and Cooperation of Sympathy

‘That baby-touch called out her love; the doors of her heart were thrown open wide for the little infant to go in and take possession’ (*Ruth*)

#### Introduction

It is hard to imagine that Elizabeth Gaskell did not know what a scandal it would cause among many middle-class Victorian readers when she wrote *Ruth* (1853), the redemptive story of a fallen woman. While Victorians were familiar with the fallen woman figure, Gaskell’s project was something radical and completely new.<sup>1</sup> ‘One feels that the mid-nineteenth century in its fiction could stomach fallen women [and] illegitimate children provided that certain rules were observed’, W. A. Craik observes.<sup>2</sup> However, Gaskell did not follow those rules. Firstly, she chose the fallen woman as the main character of her novel, and the fallen woman’s experience to be the main content. It was a great shock to many, both those who read the book as well as those who refused to read it. Secondly, *Ruth* is presented as not fallen, but innocent

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<sup>1</sup> George Watt, *Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth Century English Novel* (Croom Helm, 1984), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the Provincial Novel* (Menthuen, 1975), p. 48.

and pure, one whom the novel's narrator shows deep sympathy for. In our time, we might consider *Ruth* to be a stereotypical fallen woman narrative: one of exposure, rejection, and death.<sup>3</sup> But George Henry Lewes wrote of its newness: '[t]he author of *Ruth* has wisely done what few authors see the wisdom of doing – opened a new mine instead of working the old one'.<sup>4</sup>

*Ruth*'s newness is still being discovered over a century and a half after its publication. Marina Cano Lopez argues against critics, namely Craik, Auerbach, Jaffe and Stoneman, who have accused *Ruth* of being a passive female character. Lopez demonstrates how the 'self-same passivity, far from consolidating conventional power and gender hierarchies, exposes and unsettles them'.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on the work of Jack Halberstam, and comparing *Ruth* with Yoko Ono's art performance 'Cut Piece' (1965), Lopez explains how *Ruth*'s meekness has the active force of revealing the brutality of those who condemn her, making them rethink their condemning view of the fallen woman.<sup>6</sup> Lopez's most prominent example is her analysis of Sally cutting *Ruth*'s hair to complete her disguise as a widow:

While Sally had initially imagined this hair-cutting as an act of punishment and penance (a symbolic castration, perhaps) for what she considers to be *Ruth*'s sexual debaucher, by the end of the passage, she shows mercy, pity and compassion.<sup>7</sup>

*Ruth*'s inaction powerfully causes Sally to rethink her opinions. Rethinking one's attitude towards *Ruth*, and fallen women more generally, is one of the central themes of the novel. *Ruth* hopes to teach a moral lesson that we should have sympathy for the fallen woman, to educate readers who may have conservative and prejudiced views to see such women, not as fallen but victims (and in a more modern reading, agents). This chapter further explores the specific ways in which the 'lesson' is

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<sup>3</sup> For George Watt, *Ruth*'s death is a necessity in the novel: 'I cannot imagine the novel without it, and even though its presentation is somewhat melodramatic I cannot help but be moved. *Ruth*'s death is a return to the world of her innocence and youth' (p. 39).

<sup>4</sup> Watt, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Marina Cano Lopez, 'This Is a Feminist Novel: The Paradox of Female Passivity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*', *The Gaskell Journal*, 25 (2011), 30–47 (p. 30).

<sup>6</sup> In 'Cut Piece', Ono sits silently as spectators and participants cut pieces of her clothing away, until she is half-naked. However, it is not only Ono's body which is becoming exposed: Ono's silent act 'draws out' aggressive manner of some of the (male) participants. 'The action of cutting away works both ways: not only is Ono left 'naked' by the end of the piece, but, to a certain extent, so are those around her' (Lopez, p. 34).

<sup>7</sup> Lopez, p. 37.

communicated, and we will examine how the text evokes sympathy in the reader by involving them in (re)shaping their moral judgement of the fallen woman. Gaskell gently teaches her readers to foremost be cooperative with the narrative with the hopes that the act of reading will draw out a sympathetic response.

It is appropriate, here, to turn to the philosopher in education Gert Biesta, and his discussion of 'communication' in his book, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (2013).<sup>8</sup> While his ideas remain abstract, the book provides a framework to analyse the nature of Gaskell's *Ruth* and its moral agenda. According to Biesta, a successful communication is not the mere transmission of information from one to another – the original message remaining intact, unchanged and unaltered. Communication is an interactive activity which relies on the recipient's response to create meaning, as well as the sender's consideration of how their message will be received. This makes it 'radically open and undetermined – and hence weak and risky'.<sup>9</sup> What Biesta means by 'risk' is that when two people are working together to create something new, the activity cannot be controlled. But risk should be welcomed, because this is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire. The risk is, moreover, 'beautiful', because it insists that communication is an encounter between human beings, not robots; in communication others should not be seen as 'objects to be molded and disciplined but as subjects of action and responsibility'.<sup>10</sup> Fitting with Biesta's idea of the 'beautiful risk' is John Dewey's philosophy of communication. According to Dewey, communication is 'the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership'.<sup>11</sup> He defines communication as the process in which 'something is literally made in common in at least two different centers of behavior'.<sup>12</sup> In a communication between person A and person B, B does not only see the message or thing being communicated, but also sees the thing 'as it may function in A's experience'. In the same way, A 'conceives the thing not only in its direct relationship to himself, but as a thing capable of being grasped and handled by B. He sees the thing as it may function in B's experience'.<sup>13</sup> Although neither Dewey nor Biesta use the word

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<sup>8</sup> In his book, Biesta explores the 'weak character of education' through various key elements, one of them being 'communication' (p. 26).

<sup>9</sup> Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Dover, 1958), p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Dewey, p. 178.

<sup>13</sup> Dewey, p. 178.

‘sympathy’ (that is, seeing alternatively from the other’s perspective), their key words, ‘cooperation’ and ‘participation’, are used in a very similar sense. The ‘cooperative’ behaviour vital for successful communication is explained as ‘that response to another’s act [which] involves contemporaneous response to a thing as *entering into the other behavior*, and this upon both sides’.<sup>14</sup>

Yet as we remember, the difficulty that Gaskell and other authors of sympathetic fallen women narratives faced was seeking the sympathy of their readers. While sympathy is difficult to achieve in general, these authors were writing for an audience that was in particular resistant to the idea of sympathising; writers knew that their heroines would receive little understanding and welcome from their readers. In a letter Gaskell wrote, ‘[o]f course I knew of the great difference of opinion there would be about the book before it was published. I don’t mean as to its merely literary merits, but as to whether my subject was a fit one for fiction’.<sup>15</sup> And in another letter she wrote that ‘[t]he only comparison I can find for myself is to Saint Sebastian, tied to a tree to be shot with arrows’.<sup>16</sup> These hardly give an example of ‘cooperation’, and suggests very little sympathy, much less ‘communication’ from her readers.

That awareness of the difficulties of reading is reflected in reading habits of Gaskell’s characters. For example, Mr Bellingham takes Ruth for a holiday to Wales – the same location he had visited three years ago on a reading party (53). For the ‘weather-bound tourists’, reading seems to be an activity to combat boredom on rainy days (51), and Mr Bellingham prefers to play cards instead (53). The lack of sincerity for reading may suggest the delinquency of Mr Bellingham’s character. But virtuous characters also struggle. Ruth similarly reads the bible on Sundays to pass the time (29-30). Old Thomas reads the bible: it gives him ‘satisfaction’ and ‘peace’ even though ‘perhaps [the holy words] were not fully understood’ (39). These acts of reading may be to reflect the character’s piety, they also demonstrate how good reading does not necessarily promote good communication and understanding. When Old Thomas tries to warn Ruth of Mr Bellingham, the only language in which he can express his concerned feelings is in the language of the bible (42-3). But his words fail to register in Ruth’s mind: ‘The words fell on her ear, but gave no definite idea’ (43).

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<sup>14</sup> Dewey, p. 179, emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester University Press, 1966), no. 154, p. 227.

<sup>16</sup> *Letters*, no. 148, p. 221.

However, despite the difficulties, despite what modern critics have said about the inevitability of failed sympathy, writers such as Gaskell had not set themselves up for an impossible task.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, one need not start with fellow-feeling and understanding in order to connect with the other, but common understanding is born out of successful cooperation. Biesta argues:

[C]ommon understanding is *not* seen as a condition for cooperation. It is not that we first need to come to a common understanding and only then can begin to coordinate our actions. For Dewey, it is precisely the other way around: common understanding is produced by, is the outcome of successful cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, the relationship between oneself and the other is already established, even before one recognises the other, or thinks to have an interaction: it is 'neither a knowledge nor a willful act of the ego'.<sup>19</sup> This is a radical idea. According to Emmanuel Levinas, a key figure in Biesta's argument, the relationship exists; it is not made, it simply is.<sup>20</sup> One is always in an ethical relationship with the other, in a relationship of responsibility, whether they have the sympathy or not.

Equipped with this philosophy of communication, this chapter will revisit *Ruth* with the intention of analysing how Gaskell takes the 'beautiful risk' of allowing meaning to be created in cooperation with her readers. While *Ruth* is a didactic text, the novel, by its nature, treats communication as a process, open to modes of interpretation and inviting cooperation prior to established common understanding. It passes its 'moral lesson' to its readers who are subjects of action and responsibility, not objects to be molded. Finally, the text renders visible the ethical relationship that the Victorian reader holds with the fallen woman.

Some critics such as Audrey Jaffe would say that the meaning of sympathy in *Ruth* is in a circular deadlock. The sympathy for the fallen woman which Gaskell wished to narrate stops short at being a reflection of middle-class Victorian anxiety of

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Jaffe writes that, '[t]he invention of Mrs Denbigh might be read as a sign of Gaskell's awareness of the difficulty, even impossibility, of gaining sympathy for her heroine: an implicit acknowledgement that sympathy for the fallen woman as fallen woman is impossible to achieve' (*Scenes of Sympathy*, p. 92).

<sup>18</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 30 (italics in the original).

<sup>19</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, (Martinus Nijhoff, 1981)

class and identity.<sup>21</sup> *Ruth* replicates the middle-class Victorian anxiety towards fallen women crossing class boundaries and the effect it has on their identity. *Ruth*, Jaffe writes, ‘embodies the cultural anxieties evoked by the very possibility Gaskell wished to dramatize: that of sympathy for the fallen woman’.<sup>22</sup> In Jaffe’s interpretation, then, the ‘communication’ between Gaskell and her readers has failed, because in the Victorian ‘scene’, which Jaffe identifies as giving meaning to the sympathy, the spectator of the sympathised object is so predominant that there is no room for open-ended dialogue and exchange. Gaskell herself is embedded in that ‘Victorian scene’.<sup>23</sup>

However, Brigid Lowe responds to Jaffe with a different opinion; she sees something else in the Victorian scene: ‘Dickens’s characters grow hot, laugh and eat out of sympathy. It is hard to accommodate these bodily manifestations of sympathy within Jaffe’s conception of it as a spectral circulation of representations consolidating individual identity’.<sup>24</sup> ‘Sympathy, as we shall,’ Lowe writes, ‘is never just a mode of understanding it is, by definition, *a spar to action*’.<sup>25</sup> It is illuminating to see Lowe use words such as ‘understanding’ and ‘action’, which we cannot help but to link back to Biesta’s definition of ‘communication’. Lowe goes on to say that, ‘[s]ympathetic understanding is a matter not of objective examination but of subjective participation’.<sup>26</sup> Her research offers a new, positive way of looking at Victorian literature and sympathy in the novel, which is closer to Biesta’s vision of successful communication, and is applicable to Gaskell’s *Ruth*.

Thus far from being a mere reflection of cultural sentiment of fear and anxiety, *Ruth* invites the reader’s reaction to and cooperation with the meaning of the text to create a way forward. ‘Cooperation’, one of Dewey’s key words, is timely for Gaskell’s composition of *Ruth*: it may link with the ‘Cooperative Movement’ which was taking off with the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844. Various social groups, often overlapping, such as the Owenites, Christian Socialists and Chartists worked to ameliorate the inequality of wealth by raising awareness, providing charity and drafting bills. However, too often it resulted in working-class riots, and in the middle-class becoming even more fearful, tense and distanced. Meanwhile, in a lesser-known

<sup>21</sup> Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Jaffe, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Jaffe, pp. 9, 21, 78, 88.

<sup>24</sup> Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (Anthem Press, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*, p. 17, emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*, p. 120.

history, the cooperative movement emerged in Lancashire, where a handful of working-class men established their own community shop, selling good quality products at affordable prices. It was a friendly protest against mill owners' shop, hereto the single market; it was a non-violent protest fought in the everyday, and it spread nationwide. As we have seen earlier that *Ruth* is concerned with the social political as well as the domestic plot, it is insightful to consider how cooperation in among the working class is linked with Gaskell's techniques of eliciting the reader's response.

It would be difficult to say incontrovertibly whether Gaskell was conscious of the 'Co-operative Movement' or not. Neither *Ruth*, *Mary Barton* nor *North and South* use the specific words 'cooperation' or 'cooperative'. However, although she does not explicitly allude to the Cooperative Movement in her novels, many of her ideas, and her involvement with Christian Socialism and Chartism could easily link her to the Cooperative Movement.<sup>27</sup> Although Gaskell sympathised with Chartism, she could not bring herself to support the violent means that the working class often had to resort to. In this respect, *Ruth* presents an alternative to the violent forms of resistance in *Mary Barton*: self help in difficult times through peaceful 'cooperation'. While the association between the industrial novel and Chartism is clear, the relevance of the fallen woman narrative to cooperation is perhaps less obvious. To bring this into sharper focus, we will look at how the fallen woman narrative has many similarities with trade unionists, a link which Gaskell herself makes in *Mary Barton*, when she portrays Mary's aunt Esther with a sad back story of being seduced by a rich man and having to turn to prostitution. The socio-historical context should highlight the striking *absence* of prostitution in *Ruth*, such as in how is it that Ruth managed to *not* fall into prostitution. At the same time, we do need to remember that in Victorian tradition, Ruth would have been implicitly read as a prostitute. By taking the narrative into the domestic sphere, Gaskell is writing the heart of the cooperation movement. The lack of destitution and vengeance in *Ruth*, especially felt when read in relation to Gaskell's industrial novels, does not mean the lack of seriousness of the matter. Rather it testifies the success of cooperative self-help. Although *Ruth* is the earliest

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Gravil writes, 'All in all, it is rather hard to believe Gaskell's famous proclamation in the novel's preface, 'I know little of political economy'. She had certainly read Adam Smith's famous work on *The Wealth of Nations*', in *Elizabeth Gaskell: Mary Barton*, (Humanities E-books, 2007), p. 15.



fallen woman novel subject to this thesis, we will find that such cooperation is rare even in later texts, for neither Hetty, Fanny, Tess, nor Sue find such means of help.<sup>28</sup>

### **A History of the Cooperative Movement and Cooperative Reading**

During the rise of urbanisation and industrialisation in the nineteenth century, wealth was distributed unfairly – from the poor to the rich – and poverty among the working class became an alarming concern. A surgeon investigating an epidemic in a hamlet near Rochdale reported women having to give birth standing up, because they had no change of bed clothing. How ironic it was that in Lancashire, the centre of the weaving and cotton industry, ‘the very people who had spent their lives weaving clothes and blankets for the world had come down to this, rags on their backs and no blankets on their beds’.<sup>29</sup>

As portrayed in Victorian industrial novels, such as those by Gaskell and Dickens, working-class people were living in desperate situations and often seemed to have no way out. Whatever action one took, it had to be taken carefully, because authorities were still shaken by having witnessed the French revolution, and they could act ‘swiftly and without mercy’ as they did in the Peterloo Massacre of 16 August, 1819.<sup>30</sup> Gaskell was certainly concerned about the violent means that were being taken, as she portrayed the working class not only with sympathy, but also with anxiety, in *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854). Both novels endorse Gaskell’s ideas and hopes of different classes coming together in mutual understanding and building an economic society of compromise and care.

Indeed, alternative routes were being taken — not of tearing down, but of building up. ‘Revolts grow from the anger of the people; movements grow out of their hopes’ begins Jack Bailey, the National Secretary of the Co-operative Party, in his account the British Co-operative Movement.<sup>31</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s various places started to establish their social systems based on mutual assistance rather than competitive individualism. Such actions were led by thinkers such as the visionary

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<sup>28</sup> Esther is an example of self-help in the most extreme way – for most of her story she is alone in fighting to survive. An exception being Mrs Lewis, who looks after Jackie which she works, and postpones her bills during hard times.

<sup>29</sup> Johnston Birchall, *Co-op: The People’s Business* (Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 36–37.

<sup>30</sup> Birchall, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Jack Bailey, *The British Co-Operative Movement* (Hutchinson & Co., 1955), p. 9.

factory owner, Robert Owen (1771–1858), also known as the founder of the cooperative movement; William King (1786–1865), a physician and philanthropist in Brighton; and George Holyoake (1817–1906), a secular journalist, also known for (deliberately mis)quoting Dickens and Eliot in his pamphlets.<sup>32</sup> There were many beginnings, and many failures to set up an economic system of the working class.<sup>33</sup> However, in 1844, the first shop to use its profits to pay its members dividends was founded.<sup>34</sup> It was set up by the 'Rochdale Pioneers', a group of 28 founders, including William Cooper (1822–68), a hand-loom weaver; and Charles Howarth (1814–68), a warper at Hoyle's cotton mill,<sup>35</sup> both whom were Owenites. Rochdale, located ten miles northeast of Manchester, was a town in 'which all the evils of the industrial system were rampant in the 1840s. Wages were low, strikes and lock-outs were frequent, unemployment was rife, people incurred debts in obtaining the poor quality and often adulterated food they ate'.<sup>36</sup> The co-operative shop was run by the working class for the working class and made sure that their customers were charged ethical prices for good quality products. In return, the customers were loyal to the shop because they were given a share of the shop's profits. The cooperative movement quickly spread, and by 1851 there were 130 shops of a similar kind, and by 1862, 450.<sup>37</sup> Following this, 'the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Industrial and Provident Society Limited, later renamed the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) was launched in Manchester by 300 individual co-operatives in Yorkshire and Lancashire during 1863'.<sup>38</sup> By 1875, Newcastle and Sunderland societies were

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<sup>32</sup> Casie LeGette, 'Cooperative Quotation: George Eliot and George Jacob Holyoake', *Victorian Studies*, 59.4 (2017), 585–608 (586).

<sup>33</sup> Many failed because the receipts from the sale of goods had not covered operating costs' (Bailey, p. 21)

<sup>34</sup> Robert, Crowcoft, 'Co-operative movement' in *The Oxford Companion to British History*. (Oxford University Press, 2015), [accessed 13 March 2022].

<sup>35</sup> 'Howarth and the Co-op', *Manchester Evening News*, 12 January 2013, [accessed 11 March 2022]. Martin Purvis, 'Howarth, Charles (1814–1868), co-operative movement activist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), [accessed 9 March 2022]; Martin Purvis, 'Cooper, William', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), [accessed 9 March 2022]; It is documented that the first 'cooperative' shop was established in 1794 in Mongewell, Oxfordshire. However, while it had an important element of cooperation – the elimination of profit – it was a 'patronage' shop, relying on the rich philanthropist. As Holyoake put it, 'it did nothing to teach the customers the principles of . . . self management' (qtd in Birchall p.3; also see Eric Hopkins, p. 185).

<sup>36</sup> Bailey, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Birchall, p. 77.

<sup>38</sup> 'Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS)' *Grace Guide*, 31 March 2021 <[https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Co-operative\\_Wholesale\\_Society\\_\(CWS\)](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Co-operative_Wholesale_Society_(CWS))> [accessed 9 March 2022].

'Who We Are: Commercial with a Clear Conscience', *Co-operative Group* <<https://www.co-operative.coop/who-we-are>> [accessed 11 March 2022].

formed.<sup>39</sup> Durham mining villages, especially ‘saw a spectacular growth of co-ops’, and there were 39 in County Durham.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the cooperative movement became an entrance point of communication between the working and middle classes. Christian Socialists were interested in the cooperative movement. ‘[T]hey wanted to ally Christian values with progressive social reform and [thought] they had found in Co-operation a way of both improving the moral character of the working class and helping them to prosper’.<sup>41</sup> J. M. Ludlow (1821–1911), a barrister who led Christian Socialism, was educated in Paris where he was influenced by French Socialism. He attracted F. D. Maurice (1805–72), an Anglican theologian and another founder of Christian Socialism, to his cause, as well as the novelist Charles Kingsley, author of *Alton Locke* (1850) a novel sympathetic towards the Chartist movement.<sup>42</sup> Together in 1850, the three men established the Society for Promoting Working Men’s Association in London.<sup>43</sup> The previous year, in April 1849, Charles Kingsley praised Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* ‘for its achievement of promoting the ideas in Carlyle’s *Chartism* (1840).<sup>44</sup> In his review for *Fraser Magazine*, he declared, ‘[i]n or out of Parliament, darkness, neglect, hallucination must contrive to cease in regard to [the condition of England]; true insight into it must be had. [. . .] a genuine understanding by the upper classes of society what it is that the under classes intrinsically mean’.<sup>45</sup> *Mary Barton* provided that interpretation of the working-class hearts. Kingsley wrote to middle-class members who wondered why the working-class men turn to Chartists:

[L]et them [the middle and upper class] read *Mary Barton*. Do they want to know why poor men, kind and sympathising as women to each other, learn to hate law and order, Queen, Lords and Commons, country-party, and corn-law leaguer, all alike – to hate the rich, in short? Then let them read *Mary Barton*. Do they want to know what can madden brave, honest, industrious North-country hearts, into self-imposed

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<sup>39</sup> Gaskell lived in Newcastle in 1829.

<sup>40</sup> Birchall, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Birchall, p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> *Waterbabies* (1863) is another noteworthy children’s novel by Kingsley because of its representation of child labourers.

<sup>43</sup> Birchall, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup> Jan-Melissa Schramm, “‘Standing for’: Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Professional Representation in 1848”, in *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 106–39 (p. 134).

<sup>45</sup> qtd in Schramm, p. 134.

suicide strikes, into conspiracy, vitriol-throwing and midnight murder? Then let them read *Mary Barton*.<sup>46</sup>

According to Jan-Melissa Schramm, although the Chartists were 'organised, articulate, literate, and active in their self-representation', this rich Chartist literary culture 'rarely reached a middle-class audience'.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the middle class censored it, representing Chartist writing as violent and demonic.<sup>48</sup> Instead, it was texts such as *Mary Barton* and *Sybil* which redeemed an orality 'degraded' by Chartist practices, converting 'dissident and threatening utterance' (often masculine) into ideologically 'preferable representations of voice' (predominantly feminine): 'they represented these healing voices as emanations of a private, expressive self speaking to a private listener enclosed in a domestic space'.<sup>49</sup> The classes were divided, but it was Gaskell's novel that provided a place of contact. As we will explore in detail later on, her novel opened up space for the reader to reflect on, rather than simply reject, the social issues which she created through storytelling. The ways in which the novel invites the reader to contemplate the text resonates with Dewey's theory in how successful communication is built on participation and cooperation.

There is another interesting example of literature being used for gaining the cooperation of people of both working and middle class. In this case, it was not only the literary texts which communicated cooperation, but the way in which the texts were shared was also in itself an act of cooperative communication. George Holyoake (1817–1906), author of the widely read, two volume *The History of Co-operation in England* (1875–79), used quotes from George Eliot to promote the Cooperative Movement across class borders. Holyoake played a unique role in the movement, working 'ceaselessly to unite the interests of the middle-class intellectuals like George Henry Lewes with those of working men'.<sup>50</sup> As his early biographer records,

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Kingsley, 'Recent Novels', *Frazer's Magazine* (April 1849), 429–32 (430).

<sup>47</sup> Schramm, p. 135.

<sup>48</sup> Schramm here cites, Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Schramm, p. 135; See also Mary Lenard who shows how women writers of that era took 'culturally determined roles and turn[ed] them into strengths', in *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (Peter Lang, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> LeGette, p. 586.

Holyoake had a ‘persistent wish for union instead of divisions’.<sup>51</sup> Casie LeGette writes:

The complexity of Holyoake’s politics owns much to his lifelong effort to build consensus among diverse and distinct political groups [. . .] Quotations traveled across class lines thanks to Holyoake’s redeployment of them in new contexts, and helped knit together the political projects of different groups otherwise divided by class.<sup>52</sup>

Holyoake was imprisoned for atheism in 1842; he was then an outcast, a stranger, and a threat to the state. In the decades that followed, however, Holyoake changed his tactics and ‘worked to replace militant, exclusive atheism with an alternative system that might encompass both atheistic and religious elements’.<sup>53</sup> Holyoake’s ‘big tent movement’ is noteworthy in the way he engaged religious and secular people, as well as people of different social class.<sup>54</sup> He is an example of drawing the cooperation of peoples of diverse backgrounds, values and understanding, from ‘artisan-based freethinkers’ to ‘middle-class skeptics, literary radicals, and liberal theists’.<sup>55</sup>

Holyoake’s linking of different audiences began with his review of George Henry Lewes’ *The Life of Maximilian Robespierre* (1849) in the *Reasoner*. Lewes responded to the review and it opened up their acquaintance. When Lewes and Thornton Leigh Hunt started the *Leader* in 1850, Holyoake was invited to be an editor, opening up more acquaintances, such as with George Eliot.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile Holyoake continued editing the *Reasoner*, which was more directed towards the working-class. LeGette explains, ‘Holyoake used the *Reasoner* to convince his readers that the middle-class radicals at the helm of the *Leader* were on their side. He often praised the *Leader* in the pages of the *Reasoner*, and he used his paper to reproduce ideas he found particularly compelling from the *Leader* in an attempt to

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph MacCabe. *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake* Vol. 1, (Watts & Co., 1908), pp. 1–356 (Note 1, p. 148).

<sup>52</sup> LeGette, p. 586.

<sup>53</sup> LeGette, p. 588. She also explains that ‘This was Secularism, a word Holyoake himself coined in 1851 in his freethought journal the *Reasoner*’.

<sup>54</sup> LeGette, p. 588.

<sup>55</sup> LeGette, p. 588. She explains that Holyoake’s success of Secularism comes from his ability to manage people of diverse ideas and beliefs.

<sup>56</sup> LeGette, p. 288.

broaden the audience for those ideas'.<sup>57</sup> By reviewing Eliot's novels in the *Reasoner*, Holyoake attempted to 'transfer Eliot's work from its expected upper- and middle-class audience to working-class readers'.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, quoting novels in the *Reasoner* prompted the middle-class authors to read his working-class journal.<sup>59</sup>

In her conclusion, LeGette acknowledges that 'Co-operation' referred to a very particular economic and political project,<sup>60</sup> but '[w]ith apologies both to him and to my readers for stretching the term', LeGette considers the 'idea of cooperation more broadly as a way to understand both Holyoake's political strategies and his use of passages from Eliot's novels and poems'.<sup>61</sup> Holyoake quoted Eliot in his writings to promote his political ideas, but, as LeGette correctly points out, 'Holyoake's use of Eliot is not, I think, one of accommodation. It would be insufficient to see Holyoake as "cooperating" in that sense of the word, as "going along with" instead of resisting. Rather than reframing his politics to match Eliot's, Holyoake instead remakes Eliot in his own image'.<sup>62</sup> It might seem almost arrogant of Holyoake to use novels in this way for his own purposes. However, LeGette frames it from a different point of view:

Holyoake's quotations of Eliot are active and purposeful. To consider his citations as passive, as simple repetitions of Eliot's words, would be to miss what makes them most intriguing. Holyoake uses Eliot – the author and her words alike – in a dual project of transformation and connection. Holyoake isn't working against Eliot, certainly; *he is instead working with her, working with and upon her language in order to build relations*. He is engaged in a project that I think might be best called cooperative quotation.<sup>63</sup>

What is significant here is the communication between Holyoake and Eliot. Eliot wrote novels with her own purposes, but Holyoake took it and created something new. That he 'misquoted' Eliot's text illustrates Dewey's concept of communication as risky because of its unpredictability and lack of control over meaning. However,

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<sup>57</sup> LeGette, p. 589.

<sup>58</sup> LeGette, p. 589.

<sup>59</sup> LeGette, pp. 586–87.

<sup>60</sup> Holyoake defines it as such: 'Co-operation, in the industrial sense of the word, means the equitable division of profits with worker, capitalist, and consumer, concerned in the undertaking.' (Holyoake, *History of Co-Operation*, Chapter 1)

<sup>61</sup> LeGette, p. 604.

<sup>62</sup> LeGette, pp. 604–05.

<sup>63</sup> LeGette, pp. 604–05, emphasis mine.

without the openness to risk, Holyoake could not have utilised the novel in his unique way, which has enabled healthy communication built upon cooperation between the giver and receiver. As Biesta explains, this type of communication is a ‘generative process of participation through which things in the widest sense of the word are made “in common”’, and as in Holyoak’s example, it is effective in engaging groups of people who are different.<sup>64</sup> This model is prevalent in how Gaskell anticipates the reader’s open participation in her novel, regardless of their attitude towards the fallen woman before reading *Ruth*. The communication model in Gaskell’s text does not aim to ‘transport[] chunks of information’ to the reader, but to invite them to cooperate in reflecting and creating meaning.<sup>65</sup>

### **Communication in *Ruth*: Characters’ Responses to the Fallen Woman**

One way communication is found in *Ruth* is in Gaskell’s portrayal of characters coming into contact with the fallen woman. *Ruth* is a narrative which revolves around the fallen woman who is also the heroine. She comes into contact with various people in her life: Jenny, a fellow seamstress at Mrs Mason’s; Mr Bellingham her rich seducer; Mr Benson, Miss Benson and Sally, her guardians; Jemima Bradshaw, her student; Mr Farquar, her suitor; the formidable Mr Bradshaw. Each character responds to Ruth in a different way. Some accept her from the beginning, others gradually open their hearts to her, and others reject her. The novel almost seems to function as a multiple-choice personality quiz: ‘If you meet a fallen woman, how would you treat her?’

- A. Welcome her into your home and be her moral enlightenment. (Mr Benson)
- B. Be suspicious of her at first, but after knowing her innocent character, come to support her. (Miss Benson and Sally)
- C. Be shaken about it, and spend some time feeling repulsed, but trust your heart and believe in her present, not past. (Jemima)

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<sup>64</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 43.

D. Reject her outright and shun her from your household and society. (Mr Bradshaw)

We imagine Gaskell herself would choose A, but B and C are also desirable to her and she hopes her readers might fall into these categories. D is the worst-case scenario. Each character embodies a response to Ruth, which acts as a model for the reader. In this respect, at least four different implied readers can be detected in the text. Firstly, as Mr Benson as a mouthpiece, Gaskell writes in her most preaching tone. Through Benson's conversation with Mr Bradshaw, she strongly argues and tries to persuade people 'that not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many – how many the Great Judgment Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore, penitent hearts on earth'.<sup>66</sup> However, preaching is perhaps an imperfect model for productive 'communication'. The two men's conversation ends with Mr Bradshaw deciding to sever his ties with Mr Benson and his chapel. It is a decision that Mr Bradshaw appears to have made prior to the confrontation between the two, and not as a result of it. Mr Bradshaw's mind is set, but so, too, is Mr Benson's. Mr Benson's speech contains cues such as 'I wish God would give me power to speak out convincingly what I believe to be His truth' or 'I state my firm belief'. His words dominate the conversation in substantial paragraphs, while Mr Bradshaw responds with short inserts. The imbalance in communication, which is seen visually on the page, signifies a lack of cooperation. Similarly, Mr Bradshaw's 'obstinate mind' is already set; his sentence structure also reflects this. The use of 'when' as a conjunction, ('when I see [ . . . ] I am disinclined') stresses how the following clause has a set route (*Ruth* 284). Although Mr Benson and Mr Bradshaw stand on opposite sides of Ruth, looking at their mode of communication, we see that they are similar: closed and defensive.

As an alternative mode of communication, we see Mr Benson trying to convince his appalled sister to help him take care of Ruth. It is not his persuasive words which change Miss Benson's heart, but her coming in contact with Ruth. Miss Benson is first opposed to her brother's idea; her opinion is made up before she has met Ruth, and she says, '[i]t would be better for her to die at once, I think' (*Ruth* 92). However, a glimpse of Ruth asleep changes her heart: 'such deathlike quietness

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<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. by Tim Dolin (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 284. Hereafter cited in the text parenthetically.



startled Miss Benson – startled her into pity for the poor lovely creature who lay thus stricken and felled. When she saw her, she could no longer imagine her to be an impostor, or a hardened sinner; such prostration of woe belonged to neither’ (*Ruth* 93). Afterwards, Miss Benson suddenly has an interest in Ruth’s health, and in Ruth herself:

‘Quite a child, poor creature! When will the doctor come, Thurstan? Tell me about her; you have never told me the particulars’

Mr Benson might have said, she had never cared to hear them before, and had rather avoided the subject; but he was too happy to see this awakening of interest in his sister’s warm heart to say anything in the least reproachful. (*Ruth* 93)

If once was not enough, Miss Benson goes through a further transformation of the heart, when Ruth learns of her pregnancy. Miss Benson is appalled that Ruth rejoiced at the news and ‘took it just as if she had a right to have a baby’. Just as she was ‘beginning to have a good opinion of her’, Miss Benson is ‘afraid [Ruth] is very depraved’ (*Ruth* 96). In her opinion, the child should be mourned as ‘this disgrace – this badge of her shame!’ (97). Mr Benson tries to make her see that a child could be a chance of ‘purification’ for Ruth, but his sister is not convinced: ‘These are quite new ideas to me’ Miss Benson says coldly, ideas of ‘rather questionable morality’ (97). The debate between the brother and sister continues for another page; Mr Benson asserts that Miss Benson is ‘confus[ing] the consequences with the sin’, to which Miss Benson replies, ‘I don’t understand metaphysics’ (98). Mr Benson immediately denies talking metaphysics. ‘Metaphysics’ could be simply a derogatory statement about Mr Benson’s lofty ideas, but it is a key word, vitally enlightening the nature of their debate, and the wider debate of subjectivity. Like Mr Benson, Emmanuel Levinas, too, avoided ‘talking metaphysics’. Rather than understanding human subjectivity in ‘essential terms, that is, as a metaphysical essence,’ Levinas was concerned about it in ‘ethical terms, that is in terms of being made responsible and taking up one’s responsibility’.<sup>67</sup> The question is not what *is* one’s subjectivity or what is its *essence*, but *how* it exists, in other words, what is *the situation*? In *Ruth*, Mr Benson is also looking, not at essence, but at the situation: ‘I am not aware I am talking metaphysics. I can imagine that if *the present occasion* be taken rightly, and

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<sup>67</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 20, emphasis mine.

used well, all that is good in her may be raised to a height unmeasured but by God' (98–9). Although Miss Benson's views are shaken, she is not wholly convinced, yet. 'Metaphysics' was a debate about changing ways of looking and understanding, but Gaskell returns once again to demonstrating that steps of action, without prior understanding, are the most powerful heart opener:

Miss Benson had a strange reluctance to see him [. . .] over the baby there hung a cloud of shame and disgrace. Poor little creature! her heart was closed against it—firmly, as she thought [. . . .] Taking one of Miss Benson's reluctant hand, [Ruth] placed one of her fingers in his grasp. . . That baby-touch called out her love; *the doors of her heart were thrown open wide* for the little infant to go in and take possession. (*Ruth* 133, emphasis mine)

In this passage, it did not matter that Miss Benson has 'a strange reluctance' to see the illegitimate child, and that she does not understand her brother's philosophy. She takes a step, even a reluctant one, and by doing so, the doors of her heart open up to the baby. Cooperating with Ruth, letting her take her hand and touch the baby, results in Miss Benson's sympathy and love. Gaskell demonstrates this, several times through various characters' change of heart after 'cooperating' with Ruth. As mentioned earlier, Biesta believes that 'common understanding is not a precondition for human cooperation but should rather be seen as the outcome of it'.<sup>68</sup> Biesta's statement echoes in *Ruth*, as well as in a January 1853 letter by Gaskell: 'I felt almost sure that *if people would only read what I had to say they would not be disgusted* – but I feared & still think it probably that many may refuse to read any book of that kind'.<sup>69</sup> This excerpt seems to touch upon Gaskell's belief that common understanding between herself and her readers could be established if they would only cooperate on their part in reading the novel.

### **'Do not judge, or you too will be judged'**

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<sup>68</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> qtd in Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 322, emphasis mine.

In Gaskell's portrayal of characters interacting with Ruth, we saw the characters' responses to the fallen woman. Mr Benson embodied Gaskell's ideas, and spoke her arguments most clearly. Miss Benson and Sally demonstrated Gaskell's hope that people would open up to the fallen woman after meeting Ruth, and from there gain common understanding. Even their strict moral views soften after seeing Ruth. Most of all, it was not Mr Benson's arguments, but direct contact with Ruth, which softened their hearts.

Mr Bradshaw resembles the implied reader that Gaskell was most concerned with: representing the group of people who refused to accept the fallen woman, who too tightly held on to their beliefs. Gaskell wrote in a letter to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth about her awareness of those who 'were likely to be disgusted at the plainness with which in one or two places I have spoken out a small part of what was in my mind'.<sup>70</sup> Even having known Ruth for several years and taken pride in her as the governess of his children, Mr Bradshaw could not accept Ruth as anything but a 'fallen woman'.

However, by connecting Ruth's lie with Mr Bradshaw's own son's deceit, Gaskell strategically links Ruth and Mr Bradshaw together. The ethical relationship has always been present, but here it becomes apparent. Gaskell creates the situation or 'scene' in which her characters are called to respond, and their responsibility is put to the test. When Mr Bradshaw discovers that his son, 'his pattern son, his beloved son', had committed forgery, he is shocked and dismayed. He goes to tell Mr Benson, and they have a conversation which significantly mirrors the earlier one concerning Ruth's 'lie'. Mr Bradshaw is heartbroken but stern that he is 'always resolved to disown any child of mine who was guilty of sin. I disown Richard. He is as a stranger to me' (*Ruth* 326). He may have been cruel to reject Ruth, but he keeps his standards towards his own son. Mr Benson, as he did for Ruth, argues that Richard needs to be given a second chance. His belief reflects the Non-Conformist belief that a one-time 'sin' does not make the person thoroughly evil: Mr Benson's knowledge of Richard,

[. . .] determine[s] me against doing what would blast his character for life – would destroy every good quality he has.'

'What good quality remains in him?' asked Mr Bradshaw. 'He has deceived me – he has offended God.'

'Have we not all offended Him?' Mr Benson said, in a low tone. (*Ruth* 327)

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<sup>70</sup> *Letters*, n. 154, p. 227.

After his disgrace, Mr Farquar helps Richard to find an honest working position in Glasgow, where he can work off the money he had cheated. But secretly, what would have been Richard's income is being kept aside for him, until that time 'when the prodigal should have proved his penitence by his conduct' (*Ruth* 339). Richard's exile is less about punishment, than it is about forgiveness and readiness to reaccept him into his family and society. A year since Richard's crime was discovered and four years since Ruth's past was discovered, Mr Bradshaw is seen once more in Mr Benson's chapel: 'From this day, Mr Benson felt sure that the old friendly feeling existed once more between them, although some time might elapse before any circumstance gave the signal for a renewal of their intercourse' (*Ruth* 341). While the passage is not explicit, Mr Bradshaw's return invites our understanding that he has forgiven his son, his old friend Mr Benson, and the fallen woman Ruth. He does this because they have been connected through experience, and are now finally sharing common understanding.

One last thing to note is the following statement about 'the little circumstance', that is, Mr Bradshaw's return to the chapel: 'It was on the Sunday after this that the little circumstance to which I have alluded took place' (*Ruth* 341). How striking it is that the narrator's 'I' should protrude in this sentence; the direct address by the narrator is a reminder of Gaskell's presence behind the novel, and that having narrated events in their temporal sequence, hopes that her reader might read meaning into them.

### **Communication through *Ruth*: Cooperation between Gaskell and her Readers**

In this section, we will continue to explore how *Ruth* takes the form of Dewey's 'philosophy of communication' focusing on the level of the text and its readers. As we have analysed how 'communication' is made tangible between the fictional characters, our next endeavour is to survey how the novel itself acts as a 'communication' between the author, Gaskell, and her implied readers. I will argue that while Gaskell envisions her reader's experience, the text also leaves a space for interpretation on the reader's part, opening up to risk, but thus ensuring a 'successful

communication'. Much of the textual materials which will be analysed for this purpose are concerned with formal aspects of the text, such as how metaphor or imagery are used by Gaskell to deepen the reader's understanding of Ruth, by giving them access of her inner emotions. However, firstly, let us start by looking at an example of how Gaskell, on her part as the author, carefully took account of her contemporary readers' position and accommodated her message to them so that it might be received as smoothly as possible – aware, of course, that her novel was destined for a bumpy reception.

Gaskell, a Unitarian Christian herself, would have been aware that many of her readers might be Evangelicals and hold differing views on morality. Much of Gaskell's view of the fallen women reflects that found amongst dissenting chapels. There was, as Lorretta Tollefson explains, a 'continuing suspicion of other denominations towards Unitarian doctrines' – possibly a reason why Gaskell never overtly stated her religious beliefs in her novels.<sup>71</sup> *Ruth* is never explicitly Unitarian, and by making the novel's religious standpoint ambiguous, Gaskell was able to better engage a wider audience which included Evangelicals. For instance, Tollefson points out that death is a familiar Evangelical trope, as 'the greatest sacrifice a sincerely repentant sinner can make'. She explains that '[t]he Evangelical focus emphasized death, particularly as a payment for sin [. . .] Unitarian theology, on the other hand, focused on the sinner's penance as a spur to personal spiritual developments'.<sup>72</sup> Tollefson argues how these key differences were 'disguised and elided', and as a result Gaskell moved her 'Evangelical readers towards a more Unitarian reading'.<sup>73</sup>

A key belief in Unitarians was that of innate goodness: that 'men and women were not sinful from birth, but were made so by environment and by circumstance'.<sup>74</sup> We saw this earlier in the dialogue between the Benson siblings on Ruth's purity; in that instance and throughout the novel Gaskell repeats the idea that 'only a person's actions, not their innate characteristics, can be identified as sinful: and even then, sin is not a static and irrevocable state'.<sup>75</sup> Therefore Gaskell 'presents Ruth's death as the ultimate demonstration of her spiritual progress', using an Evangelical trope of death to demonstrate a Unitarian belief. In a way, Gaskell is calculating ways of common

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<sup>71</sup> Loretta Miles Tollefson, "'Controlled Transgression": Ruth's Death and the Unitarian Concept of Sin', *The Gaskell Journal*, 25 (2011), 48–62 (49).

<sup>72</sup> Tollefson, p. 48.

<sup>73</sup> Tollefson, p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Tollefson, p. 50.

<sup>75</sup> Tollefson, p. 53.

understanding that she hopes to create with her readers. Tollefson eloquently sums up her argument:

However, these Unitarian themes would not necessarily have been evident to Gaskell's Evangelical readers, because Gaskell does not explicitly identify her perspective as Unitarian anywhere in the novel. Indeed Ruth's death would seem at first glance to reflect the requisite downward trajectory of the fallen woman death, rather than as an opportunity to demonstrate her Christ-like qualities. In addition, Gaskell dwells at length on themes to which Unitarians and Evangelicals could agree, such as the importance of education and early spiritual training of children, the mother's role in such training and the necessity of self-sacrifice in one's relation to others. Where the two views differed significantly, Gaskell uses religious imagery or terms common to Evangelical discourse, and then recasts them to suit a Unitarian perspective.<sup>76</sup>

Gaskell is known as a thoughtful writer who cares about finding an unbiased middle-ground. While she never shirks from writing the message she believes she must write, she is open to accommodating her reader's views and beliefs, and does so cleverly. For example, after her first novel *Mary Barton* (1848) was criticised for being biased towards the working-class, she makes another attempt in *North and South* (1854) to present equal representations of the views of the employers and employees. Although she still has the same agenda of extending middle-class Victorians' empathy and compassion towards the poorer working-class people, she has the ability of sympathising with both classes, and finding common ground on which all people can stand together. Therefore, just as we have seen with George Holyoake, Gaskell is another literary figure who took special concern to write to audiences across religious beliefs and classes. Moreover, as well shall see, her form of communication thrived because it engaged the readers to reflect meaning for themselves.

Our previous analyses of Mr Benson and Mr Bradshaw signified what seems to be Gaskell's understanding that a one-way, strong, persuasive preaching is not the solution to 'successful communication'. In the same way, as strongly as she may believe in Ruth's innocence, that meaning of her message is incomplete without her reader's participation and cooperation. U. C. Knoepfelmacher, acknowledging a

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<sup>76</sup> Tollefson, p. 60.

participatory quality in Victorian Fiction, writes that ‘only a novelist’s readers could lend full meaning to his imaginative rearrangements of reality.’<sup>77</sup> Therefore Gaskell’s *Ruth* invites readers, as she does herself, to ‘participate in an experience attended implacably by both intensity and risk’.<sup>78</sup> In the following discussions, this chapter will explore how Gaskell’s vivid descriptions of Welsh landscape, Mrs Mason’s drawing-room, and Ruth’s dream are three examples of the narrator inviting the reader to participate and create meaning, and ultimately, to sympathise with Ruth.

The passages of landscape and nature in *Ruth* have been a frequent point of interest to many critics. Jenny Uglow, for instance, states that ‘[w]hile Ruth has a vivid inner life, she is not, to begin with, self-aware. In the first two volumes Gaskell therefore evokes her emotions and sensuality by embodying them in the natural world outside. Her story is structured by the pattern of seasons’.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Tim Dolin writes that *Ruth* paints:

a series of natural settings that are coloured with an almost Pre-Raphaelite vividness, and are highly symbolic and often dangerously erotic, religiously and poetically charged, or otherworldly and weird. These are Romantic landscapes, intensely present to Ruth’s hyper-alert senses and at the same time outward signs of the ‘world within her heart’.<sup>80</sup>

Both critics highlight how the landscape is used to represent Ruth’s inner feelings and her heart. Landscapes often seem to carry emotions in themselves, and we frequently associate their colour, warmth or wetness, with a state of feeling. Thomas Hardy famously wrote on William Turner’s watercolours that ‘each is a landscape *plus* a man’s soul’.<sup>81</sup> Landscape invites the viewer to participate emotionally. The reader might be ‘disgusted at the plainness with which in one of two places [Gaskell had] spoken out a small part of her mind’ and therefore may not sympathise with Ruth’s expedition to Wales and her ‘fall’.<sup>82</sup> However, by Gaskell’s use of vivid imagery and landscape, they are invited to share in her experience regardless of their own opinions and feelings.

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<sup>77</sup> U. C. Knoepflemacher, *Laughter and Despair* (University of California Press, 1971), p. x.

<sup>78</sup> Janet Freeman, ‘Ways of Looking at Tess’, *Studies in Philology*, 79.3 (1982), 311–23 (312).

<sup>79</sup> Uglow, p. 329.

<sup>80</sup> Tim Dolin, ‘Introduction’, in *Ruth*, ed. by Tim Dolin (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. viii.

<sup>81</sup> Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, 1965), p. 216.

<sup>82</sup> Gaskell, *Letters*, n. 154, p. 227.

When Mr Bellingham suddenly falls ill in Wales, Ruth's anxiety is expressed through the image of an open window (a re-appearing motif in the novel). Ruth goes to an open window and sees:

Out beyond, under the calm sky, veiled with a mist rather than with a cloud, rose the high, dark outlines of the mountains, shutting in that village as if it lay in a nest. They stood, like giants, solemnly watching for the end of Earth and Time. Here and *there a black round shadow reminded Ruth* of some "Cwm," or hollow, where she and her lover had rambled in sun and in gladness. *She then thought* the land enchanted into everlasting brightness and happiness; she fancied, then, that into a region so lovely no bale or woe could enter, but would be charmed away and disappear before the sight of the glorious guardian mountains. *Now she knew the truth, that earth has no barrier which avails against agony.* It comes lightning-like down from heaven, into the mountain house and the town garret; into the palace and into the cottage. (*Ruth* 68, emphasis mine)

While describing the view outside the window, the narrator also describes the things that go through her mind: the shadow reminds her of the 'Cwm' where she spent happy times with Mr Bellingham. A time when she had thought that their happiness would last forever; that she would be shielded by the mountains.<sup>83</sup> The cwm, the giants and guardians, the happiness and woes are associations which Ruth makes in her mind; they are not physically part of the landscape. The narrator has played with perspective-taking, and through landscape leads the reader to see through Ruth's eyes as Ruth longingly gazes out of the window.

The passage continues as the sky begins to turn to dawn, and with it, the narrative starts to pick up: the mountain tops 'spring' into heaven, and the fiery red sun 'bounds' above the horizon. The description is beautiful because of the movement and changes. While the passage is merely an indication that morning has finally come, it does more than tell the reader the passage of narrative time, or Ruth's reminiscence of the past:

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<sup>83</sup> In Mrs Mason's workroom, Ruth also found pleasure in the snowy view outside, because it reminded her of the times she went to see the icicles hanging from the mill, when her mother was still alive (*Ruth* 6).



Just above the horizon, too, the mist became a silvery grey cloud hanging on the edge of the world; presently it turned shimmering white; and then, in an instant, it flushed into rose, and the mountain-tops sprang into heaven, and bathed in the presence of the shadow of God. With a bound, the sun of a molten fiery red came above the horizon, and immediately thousands of little birds sang out for joy, and a soft chorus of mysterious, glad murmurs came forth from the earth; the low whispering wind left its hiding-place among the clefts and hollows of the hills, and wandered among the rustling herbs and trees, waking the flower-buds to the life of another day. (*Ruth* 69)

The passage seems to have a different quality of agency to it, in which the landscape itself incites the emotion rather than being a recollection of another landscape or time from Ruth's memories. The landscape is 'simmering' and 'flushed': the vocabulary shares the immediate feelings of Ruth's anticipation of hearing the outcome of her lover's health. However, at the same time, references to 'mysterious, glad murmurs' and 'low whispering wind' seem to have a larger, cosmic scale, which summons an immediate, sensory reaction to the landscape. The pure enjoyment, the sheer fascination of the changing morning sky, captures both Ruth and the reader.

Gaskell's portrayal of the Welsh mountains and sky does more than represent the landscape. The landscape reflects the viewer's – Ruth's – inner emotions, and the literary technique of description used here invokes the reader's empathy, that is fellow-feeling of putting oneself into another's shoes, for Ruth. The perspective of narration lies very close to Ruth's own on two levels: her reflection of emotions onto the landscape, and the landscape's impression on Ruth. In reading the passage, the reader is invited to see the landscape through Ruth's eyes, and to share her emotions of happiness, loneliness and awe.

On the other hand, the implied reader's perspective does not necessarily become dominated by that of Ruth's: the text does not erase the reader's individuality and self-identity. While the landscape passage clearly involves empathy and the sharing of emotions from Ruth's point of view, there is also space in the text for readers to maintain their own perspective, which is important in order for the reader to be able to cooperate in Dewey's model of 'communication'. For if readers become one with Ruth, merging their perspective completely with hers, they lack the space to

reflect and to bring their own reading to the novel.<sup>84</sup> While one may argue that such a full and complete empathy is impossible in the first place, I point out the significance that the novel does not pretend that it is achieved, and instead takes the time to illustrate two characters looking out in the same direction, having different opinions, yet sharing sympathetic compassion. We might remember in one of the earliest scenes of the novel, there is an old window at Mrs Mason's workplace, and Jenny, Ruth's friend and fellow seamstress, comes to stand at Ruth's side even though she is 'not persuaded into admiring the winter's night' (*Ruth* 7). Jenny's act of cooperation, without common understanding, is a tangible illustration of 'successful communication'. While Ruth is alone at the window in Wales, there is room for the reader to stand next to her. The reader does so – whether they understand and sympathise with Ruth's 'fall' or not – by the act of reading the novel.

When the Bellinghams leave Ruth behind in Wales, once again, landscape is a powerful emotional image through which the reader is invited to see and feel with Ruth:

Wave above wave of the ever-rising hills were gained, were crossed, and at last Ruth struggled up to the very top and stood on the bare table of moor, brown and purple, stretching far away till it was lost in the haze of the summer afternoon; and the white road was all flat before her, but the carriage she sought and the figure she sought had disappeared. There was no human being there; a few wild, black-faced mountain sheep quietly grazing near the road, as if it were long since they had been disturbed by the passing of any vehicle, was all the life she saw on the bleak moorland. (*Ruth* 76–77)

Words such as 'bare', 'lost', 'haze', and 'flat' both mirror and evoke Ruth's despair. Repetition of words such as in '[w]ave above wave' and 'the carriage *she sought* and the figure *she sought*' enact the movements of her frantic, dazed chase, in a way that the reader can also share a bodily experience. The 'as if' conjunction imagines the undisturbed sheep to be unaware and uncaring about Ruth's plight, accentuating her sense of isolation and helplessness. Finally, when Ruth stands still and surveys the

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<sup>84</sup> Talia Schaffer highlights the significance of Sara L. Maurer's study on the evangelical tracts of the 1820s and 30s for understanding sympathetic reading during the Victorian times. These tracts 'discouraged sympathetic affiliation' in order for the reader to practice 'solipstic self-reference'. See Schaffer, 'Response: Reading Outward', *Victorian Studies*, 61.2 (2019), 248–54 (pp. 249, 252).

nearly lifeless ‘bleak moorland’, the reader is also invited to stretch their eyes into the empty horizon.

Viewing and observing is a frequent event in *Ruth* as a way to invite the reader to participate in Ruth’s story and to respond with sympathy. The novel, in fact, begins with the curious introduction of ‘an assize-town in one of the eastern counties’ to the eyes of ‘the modern traveller’ (*Ruth* 4). The detailed description its streets is a way for the reader to step into the fictional worlds which Gaskell creates as if a character themselves, but the term ‘traveller’ brings us back to the concept of sympathy as ‘visiting’, that is ‘being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not’.<sup>85</sup> Gaskell invites the reader to be visitors and travellers in Ruth’s tale, to be sympathetic to the fallen woman, but also to be reflective and creating their own interpretations. Thus the communication agenda in Gaskell’s text depends upon the reader’s participation and involvement. In *Ruth*, communication between the reader and text goes two ways. The reader’s sympathy for the fallen women begins with the reader’s cooperation in being an external observer of the narrative who open-mindedly accepts the feelings and emotions of others.

The narrator invites the implied reader to enter the narrative as a traveller would, to be fresh and new to the environment and open to unexpected ‘surprises’ (*Ruth* 3). This old town was once grand and noble, a hundred years ago. The old houses, temporary residences of country aristocrats, looked rich and noble with their gables, stacks of chimneys, balconies and window. However, the narrator directs the viewer’s eyes downwards to where ‘the streets suffered from all these projections and advanced stories above, they were dark, and ill paved with large, round jolting pebbles, and with no side-path protected by kerb-stones; there were no lamp-posts for long winter nights’ (*Ruth* 4). The upper class eventually gave way to the middle class, who converted the mansions into smaller flats and shops. However, the dark highstreet was a consistent issue, and finally the ‘whole front of one side of the street was pulled down, and rebuilt in the flat, mean, unrelieved style of George the Third’ (4). Meanwhile, the interior of the original grand houses were ‘too solidly grand to submit to alteration’, hence one is ‘occasionally surprised’ to step into a ‘common-place-looking shop’ to see grand staircases and stained-glass windows. Upstairs in one of those houses is where Ruth and the other girls work for Mrs Mason, labouring

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<sup>85</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, it is a concept by Hannah Arendt (1977) and Lisa Jane Disch (1994) used by Gert Beista in *Beyond Learning*, p. 91.

deep into the night. In the old drawing-room, Ruth's favourite place to sit is opposite the wall 'on which was a remnant of the beauty of the old drawing room, which must once have been magnificent' (7). The description that follows is truly magnificent: the wall is painted with 'the most lovely wreaths of flowers, profuse and luxuriant beyond description, and so real-looking that you could almost fancy you smelt their fragrance, and heard the south wind go softly rustling in and out among the crimson roses – the branches of purple and white lilac – the floating golden-tressed laburnum bough' (7). These grandeurs, which gives the town its unexpected 'degree of importance', can only be discovered by 'passing through' the common-looking buildings.

In a similar way the reader is invited to enter into Ruth's narrative to discover her on a more personal and intimate level. One of Gaskell's methods is the use of dreams to portray Ruth's inner mind. The return of Mr Bellingham after many years causes great stress to Ruth, and once again the narrator uses the language of landscape to convey her emotion: 'the expanse of grey, wild bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky, seemed only *an outward sign of the waste world within her heart*' (*Ruth* 247, emphasis mine). However, not long afterwards, Gaskell tries a different technique. Ruth has a dream of her son being taken away from her:

She dreamed that she was once more on the lonely shore, striving to carry Leonard away from some pursuer – some human pursuer – she knew he was human, and she knew who he was, although she dared not say his name even to herself, he seemed so close and present, gaining on her flying footsteps, rushing after her as with the sound of the roaring tide. Her feet seemed heavy weights fixed to the ground; they would not move. All at once, just near the shore, a great black whirlwind of waves clutched her back to her pursuer; she threw Leonard on to land, which was safety; but whether he reached it or no, or was swept back like her into a mysterious something too dreadful to be borne, she did not know, for the terror awakened her. (*Ruth* 251–2)

The significance of this dream as another mode of communication lies in its way of revealing the interior of Ruth's mind. The reader may use their imagination to guess what Ruth is feeling, but in its vividness, the dream illustrates Ruth's thoughts even as she herself discovers them, for they are in her unconsciousness. Even in her dream, Ruth will not name the pursuer. The narrative leaves realism, and enters into an almost gothic world of black pursuers. However, as Ruth wakes and 'full

consciousness' returns, 'the roaring of the relentless sea, creeping swiftly on to seize its prey' is revealed to be the humming and buzzing of the boiling kettle (*Ruth* 253). The gush of relief that the vision had been a dream cause her lips to move 'in accordance with her thoughts'. Miss Benson notices but does not catch Ruth's low voice:

'I only said,' replied Ruth, timidly, 'thank God! I have so much to thank Him for, you don' know.'

My dear, I am sure we have all of us cause to be thankful that our boy is spared. See! he is waking up; and we will have a cup of tea together.' (*Ruth* 252–53)

Miss Benson only sees the outward appearance of Ruth – that is of Ruth murmuring in her state of just having woken up. Ruth only replies timidly, so Miss Benson interprets Ruth's meaning as her concern over Leonard's illness. She is correct to an extent, but the dream which caused Ruth's lips to move is hidden from her. Ruth's fears of being pursued by Mr Bellingham are unnoticed by Miss Benson. However, it is not so with the reader, who is given access into Ruth's deepest, most repressed thoughts – an intimacy which is kept even from Miss Benson. In fact, the reader is given a highly privileged viewpoint, perhaps comparable to 'God, to the All-knowing, who read her heart' (*Ruth* 171).

In passages such as these, Gaskell is exploring the representation of her heroine's heart through dreams, but these dreams are unknown to other characters around her. In the previous section of this chapter I have shown how various characters' responses provide different models for the reader to learn from. However, if representations of Ruth's inner mind through her dream do little to influence the responses of other characters, what purpose does the dream have in the novel? These instances of intimacy are written for the reader's eye, so that they may know Ruth, but not as distanced spectators but as participants. Dreams are a space which *invite* an active reader to interpret – thus encouraging a form of 'communication' between the text and reader.

In writing *Ruth*, Gaskell took a 'beautiful risk'. She cannot control her reader's response to her text, as she could her fictional characters' responses. However, in reading *Ruth*, no matter what their response may have been, the readers have participated in the situation. 'Cooperation' is what Gaskell desired, and she

believed it to be a large step forward. Many people read *Ruth*, discussed it, and participated in it. Each reader's connection with Ruth is unique, and their responsibility – the ability to respond – is brought forward. Accordingly, this chapter ends with Gaskell's own words:

But from the very warmth with which people have discussed the tale I take heart of grace; it has made them talk and think a little on a subject which is so painful that it requires all one's bravery not to hide one's head like an ostrich and try by doing so to forget that the evil exists.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gaskell, *Letters*, n. 154, p. 227.

## Chapter Two

### Sympathy for a Flawed Fallen Woman in *Adam Bede*

‘The greatest benefit we owe to the artist. . . is the extension of our sympathies’  
(‘Natural History of German Life’)

‘My heart bleeds for her as I see her toiling along on her weary feet . . .’  
(*Adam Bede*)

#### Introduction

When we read George Eliot’s representation of the fallen woman in her novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), in comparison to Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*, we realise the extent to which the politics of sympathy can work in diverse ways. Formal style and sympathetic representation work closely together, and as we will explore, Eliot’s literary realism sits at the heart of representations of the fallen woman.

George Eliot was well aware of Gaskell’s *Ruth*; her response to it – especially its style – however, was mixed. In a letter dated 1 February 1853, George Eliot writes to Mrs Peter Taylor:

Of course you have read “Ruth” by this time. Its style was a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fulness. How women have the courage to write, and publishers the spirit to buy, at a high price, the false and feeble representations of life and character

that most feminine novels give, is a constant marvel to me. "Ruth," with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction – will it? Mrs. Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts – of "dramatic" effects. She is not contented with the subdued coloring, the half-tints, of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not secure one's lasting sympathy; her scenes and characters do not become typical.<sup>1</sup>

Eliot, who would later be known as one of the greatest realist novelists, is here already seen to be preoccupied with style such as dramatic effects and subdued colouring. *Ruth* gives 'refreshment'; unlike many other female writers and publishers who dare to produce books with 'false and feeble representations of life and character', Gaskell revises the literary discourse around the fallen woman as she cuts open a fresh surface in order for healing – a bold move. Yet *Ruth* has only begun the healing work, which Eliot takes upon herself to pick up and continue with subtler labour. On reflection, *Ruth* falls short of the realistic virtues that Eliot wants from fiction. *Ruth*'s style is praised for its 'finish' and 'fulness', which can be understood respectively as 'quality of being perfected' and 'complete'.<sup>2</sup> However, Eliot disapproves of the 'dramatic' aspects, that of being 'melodramatic', 'overdone', or 'sensational'. That part is easily identifiable in the character of Ruth, in both her self-sacrificial act of caring for the sick, and her subsequent death.

Yet despite her criticism of *Ruth*, at heart, Eliot shares the same concerns and moral purpose as her fellow novelist – that of sympathy. Eliot is on the same mission, and it is significant that her first novel, published six years after this letter, is to be about the fallen woman. But as the refiner of realist fiction, her understanding of sympathy, her methods and political strategies of compassion, and her narrative style are polemically different. As Gillian Beer writes, 'George Eliot set out to revise a powerful female text, that of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*. Her enterprise had delicately to distinguish itself from common assumptions as well as to question Ruth's idealisation'.<sup>3</sup> Gaskell radically challenged her readers to have sympathy for fallen yet innocent Ruth, and building upon that, Eliot challenged readers to extend their sympathy even further. While it is difficult enough to ask middle-class readers to

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters* Vol. 2, ed. by Gordon Sherman Haight, Yale ed. (Oxford University Press, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> 'Finish, n.', 'Fullness, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, [accessed 29 November 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 59.



sympathise with a fallen woman – just see how much trouble it gave Gaskell’s *Ruth*, even with her purity and gentleness – Eliot endeavours to ask middle-class readers to feel sympathy towards a vain and cold-hearted one. It could be said that Gaskell’s character Ruth is too pure and too perfect to be a real person, someone we might know in our neighbourhood. We may perfectly accept her as a fictional character, but nothing more. Her self-sacrificial death is beautiful, but on a figurative level: Ruth, our heroine, is given a dramatic end which suits a novel designed to draw the reader to tears, but the reader’s emotions are contained in the pages of the book. On the other hand, Hetty, while also a fictional character, seems to come out the pages of the novel. Her faults, and vanities, her moral imperfectness is what makes her a tangible figure. No one is perfect, no one is without fault – as we all know and should admit – and precisely because of that, there is something in Hetty that makes her a challenging character to sympathise with as it often is in real life.

This chapter explores how Eliot’s text invokes the reader’s sympathy for the fallen woman character, Hetty Sorrel. Eliot invites the reader to experience a kind of sympathy which is sympathetic from a distance yet empathetic. The text does not champion the fallen woman by endowing her with Christian morals, but shows her as a mean human being, at worst, low-minded and contemptible. And yet, significantly, the text shows compassion and pity for her. This chapter examines the ethical philosophy behind Eliot’s sympathetic representation of the fallen woman, beginning with an exploration of two philosophers Spinoza and Adam Smith. I argue that the key to Eliot’s acute balance between empathy and sympathy lies in her reading of both thinkers and incorporating both into her own work of art. In *Ethics* (1677), which Eliot spent years translating,<sup>4</sup> Benedict de Spinoza writes of pursuing adequate knowledge in order to be able to act ethically towards others, and in the meantime refraining from judging others and circumstances with the only partial information we possess. These resonate with the ways in which Eliot’s narrator persuades the reader to exercise careful observation before reaching hasty conclusions, and most significantly, the desire of her narrator to connect with all characters – rich and poor, clever and dim, moral and immoral. However, as Carlisle states, ‘[i]t is probably a mistake to look to Spinoza’s works for a philosophical template for her novels, as if these stories were, in any straightforward sense, “translations” of Spinoza’s thought

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<sup>4</sup> See also Clare Carlisle, ‘George Eliot’s Spinoza. An Introduction’, in *Spinoza’s Ethics*, ed. by Clare Carlisle (Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 1–60.

into poetic and narrative form'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is necessary to also introduce another philosophical thinker, Adam Smith (1723–90). Brian Fay points out a fundamental difference between Spinoza and Smith, and points to Smith as being Eliot's template;<sup>6</sup> Spinoza believed that humans were all of the same substance, existing in God, while Smith understands that the other is different from oneself, and one can only try to imagine what the world looks like for the other. Fay concludes convincingly that through Casaubon's failed *Key to All Mythologies* – a project that aimed to show that there was a single source which linked all human kind together and could help to solve divisions – Eliot criticises the simplicity of such a belief and praises the diversity and plurality of humanity. In this sense, the line of argument stemming from Spinoza seems to reach a dead end, but in fact, it highlights our reading of Eliot's sympathetic fiction, and draws attention to the crucial problem at the heart of her fiction. How can one connect with the fallen woman, who is clearly so different from the narrator and the reader? The precise point on which Spinoza and Smith differ has preoccupied many literary critics, and rightly so, for it sits poised on the thin line between 'fellow-feeling' and 'feeling for'.

Secondly, we will inquire into Eliot's own writings on realism – starting from Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, as well her essays 'Art and Belles Lettres' (1856) and 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856) – to see that for Eliot, realist literature is moral because it portrays life as it is, without disguising ugliness which we rather not see.<sup>7</sup> It enhances our reading of Hetty when we understand that Eliot is committed to represent Hetty's inward flaws in order that the reader may know her with truth and reach of with empathy for her sorrows. Furthermore, Eliot's commitment to realism and truth is so strong that it refuses us an easy reading of the text. The narrator intervenes in the text frequently with comments on the characters, but there is often a noticeable sense of the middle-class narrator talking down to the working-class characters. However, despite that, the sympathy is clearly present and explicit: the narrator's exclamation, 'Poor wandering Hetty [. . .] My heart bleeds for her', brings

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<sup>5</sup> Clare Carlisle, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Fay, 'What George Eliot of Middlemarch Could Have Taught Spinoza', *Philosophy and Literature*, 41.1 (2017), 119–35.

<sup>7</sup> George Eliot, 'Art and Belles Lettres', *Westminster Review*, 65 (July 1856), 625–50; George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Westminster Review*, 66 (April 1856), 80–112; see also Thomas Albrecht, *The Ethical Vision of George Eliot* (Routledge, 2020) pp. 30–1.

this sharply into focus (*Adam* 349).<sup>8</sup> The narrator seems to face the dilemma of wanting to pursue knowledge and a non-judgmental position which intimately seeks to understand Hetty, but in the endeavour revealing that he is distant from her. Some critics see this as the limits of representation and sympathy. The realist form, the means with which Eliot sets to pursue her goal, seems to set limits and hinder Eliot from going further. However, as Raymond Williams believes, the textual limitations are the most vital part of her writing.<sup>9</sup> The apparent ‘failure’ to fully represent Hetty indicates the extent to which Eliot went to represent her: to reach the limit is in itself an admirable achievement. Meanwhile, Colin MacCabe and Catherine Belsey have defined classic realism as a ‘fixed’ form of representation, naively premised on the idea that the narration is transparent and exact recording of reality, but in fact is heavily tainted with Victorian ideology.<sup>10</sup> This idea of realism as a ‘transparent’ and ‘faithful’, they claim, has generally been accepted by readers and critics, and to some extent it is a conventional framework in which the expectations of the author and reader can meet. However, as we will see, Eliot’s realist project for inciting the reader’s sympathy for the fallen woman is sophisticated in its awareness of the complex and changing nature of the world, and also acknowledges a surprisingly fluid mode of representation.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, we will discuss the role of the narrator in *Adam Bede*, and how he takes an instructive approach in teaching the reader to have sympathy. As Eliot commends Ruskin in ‘Art and Belle Lettres’, Ruskin ‘teaches truth’ in a way that ‘compels men’s attention and sympathy’.<sup>12</sup> To analyse the meaning and value of instruction and teaching, we will once again turn to Gert Biesta and *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. In this study’s previous chapter on *Ruth*, we applied his theory of communication and cooperation to the reader’s role of bringing meaning to the text. However, that on its own can be inefficient, for the meaning which the reader/student creates is limited to the experiences and knowledge that pre-exists in him or herself.

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<sup>8</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Carol A. Martin (Oxford University Press, 2008). Henceforth, citations to the novel will be given in the text.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Vintage, 2016), p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (Palgrave, 1978); Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (Routledge, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> George Lewis Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (University of Chicago Press, 1981); David Lodge, “‘Middlemarch’ and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text”, in *New Casebooks: Middlemarch*, ed. by John Peck, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 45–64; Matthew Beaumont, ‘Introduction: Reclaiming Realism’, in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Blackwell, 2007), pp. 1–12.

<sup>12</sup> George Eliot, ‘Art and Belle Lettres’, *Westminster Review*, 65 (Apr. 1856), 625–50 (627).

Thus Biesta explains the importance of the teacher who has the role of giving information to students, which they would otherwise be unable to obtain. That kind of attitude is seen in the narrator of *Adam Bede*: his extension of knowledge gives him authority to comment on the characters, and also to guide the reader's understanding of them. However, Biesta complicates his discussion by balancing 'teaching' with 'emancipation'. While it is true that the teacher gives knowledge to the student, education should also encourage the student to become independent, to 'be able to think for themselves, to make their own judgments, and to draw their own conclusions.'<sup>13</sup> The degree of the reader's freedom sets Eliot's work apart from Gaskell.

In the previous chapter, we analysed how *Ruth* invited the reader to respond for themselves; in that sense, Eliot is no different. But paying attention to the writers' mode of narration alerts us to the difference in their styles by which they invite the reader's sympathetic response. Gaskell portrayed various characters responding to Ruth, that is, setting up examples for the reader of the various responses they could take, but ultimately leaving the choice up to the reader. The moral led to the fact that readers must respond; the fate of a fallen woman is a personal matter to them. However, Gaskell's difference with Eliot lies in the fact that, while different characters had differing views of Ruth, the text's representation of Ruth stays consistent throughout: Gaskell's narrator is unchangingly sympathetic, tirelessly advocating for Ruth's innocence. Meanwhile, Eliot's text portrays Hetty differently: externally and internally, judgmentally and sympathetically.<sup>14</sup> The narrator's role in invoking the reader's sympathy is different. Ultimately, the teacher does not teach us what to think. In Eliot's realist novel, the presentation of Hetty is multidimensional: both intimate and distanced, internal and external, judgmental and neutral, and importantly, never fixed or static. But the reader is hoped to have been given sufficient material to extend his sympathy. As Eliot writes:

The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. [. . .] Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of

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<sup>13</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> In *Distance and Desire*, J. Hillis Miller argues similarly for Hardy's Tess, as well as other characters, but I believe in *Adam Bede*, the narrator's fundamental opinion of Hetty changes depending on the passage.

amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.<sup>15</sup>

## Section One: Philosophical influences of Eliot's Sympathy

### Spinoza's Sympathy – Equality and the Extension of Knowledge

Eliot's language of striving to understand all of Nature's intricacies takes us to her reading of Benedict de Spinoza.<sup>16</sup> Eliot was familiar with Spinoza in the 1840s and worked on translating *Ethics* between November 1854 and February 1856. Her personal notebook is full of casual references about working on the translation in the morning and so forth, (which Sophie Frazer calls her 'daily ritual'<sup>17</sup>), that it is hard to believe that her Spinoza reading had not come to influence her writing during the composition of *Adam Bede*.<sup>18</sup> Claire Carlisle notes how Eliot would revise a Part before moving on to the next, a sign that Eliot was not only translating Spinoza's work linguistically, but also engaging philosophically.<sup>19</sup> However, Eliot's association with Spinoza has been until recently largely overlooked, partly to do with the fact that her translation was never published during her lifetime, due to a dispute between Lewes and the publisher over the pay. Studies have prioritised the influence of Feuerbach, Comte, Mill and Adam Smith on Eliot, but Isobel Armstrong's chapter on Spinoza in *A Companion to George Eliot* (2013) indicates the rise of interest,

<sup>15</sup> Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Various critics have shown various philosophers to be influential to Eliot's work, the main stream had been to link her with Feuerbach, Comte, Mill and Adam Smith (Arnett, p. 834). Her link with Spinoza has been opened up to exploration, promisingly by Armstrong's essay in the *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. While Nemoianu cautions that 'Eliot's agreement with Spinoza is not a passive reproduction of his thought,' they are 'mutually illuminating' (65, qtd in Arnett, p. 834).

<sup>17</sup> Sophie Alexander Frazer, 'George Eliot and Spinoza: Toward a Theory of the Affects', *George Eliot–George Lewes Studies*, 70.2 (2018), 128–42 (129).

<sup>18</sup> See Dorothy Atkins, *George Eliot and Spinoza* (University of Salzburg, 1978); Virgil Martin Nemoianu, 'The Spinozist Freedom of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda', *Philosophy and Literature*, 34 (2010), 65–81; Isobel Armstrong, 'George Eliot, Spinoza and the Emotions', in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 294–308; James Arnett, 'Daniel Deronda, Professor of Spinoza', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44.4 (2016), 833–54; Ted Zenzinger, 'Spinoza, Adam Bede, Knowledge, and Sympathy: A Reply to Atkins', *Philosophy and Literature*, 36.2 (2012), 424–40; Sophie Alexander Frazer, 'George Eliot and Spinoza: Toward a Theory of the Affects', *George Eliot–George Lewes Studies*, 70.2 (2018), 128–142; Clare Carlisle 'George Eliot's Spinoza. An Introduction' in *Spinoza's Ethics* ed. by Clare Carlisle (Princeton University Press, 2020), 1–60.

<sup>19</sup> G. H. R. Parkinson, 'Spinoza and British Idealism: The Case of H. H. Joachim', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 1.2 (1993), 109–23.

followed by Eliot's translation of *Ethics* published in 2020 edited by and with an introduction by Clare Carlisle.<sup>20</sup> While critics such as Ted Zenzinger, Sophie Frazer, Virgil Nemoianu, and Clare Carlisle all caution that Eliot's texts are 'not a passive reproduction of his thought',<sup>21</sup> nevertheless Spinoza certainly highlights key concepts of emotion and sympathy in her novels.<sup>22</sup>

Spinoza's concept of 'immanence' explains that all things exist in God: all things are modes of one unified substance, God. As materialist beings, all human beings strive to survive – a drive which Spinoza calls 'conatus'. ('The mind strives, as far as it can, to imagine those things which increase or support the power of action of the body'.<sup>23</sup>) However, while all people share the same goal, because there are many of us and each are acting individually, sometimes we make the wrong decisions, and inhibit not only ourselves, but also others from achieving the goal. It is out of lack of comprehensive knowledge of the world which leads us to taking wrong actions. However, better knowledge of the world will enable us to act more wisely and better towards ourselves and others.

According to Spinoza, there are three orders of knowledge, and we are always acting on one of them: 1. cognition from vague experience, opinion and imagination, 2. intuitive cognition and 3. adequate cognition of the essence of things.<sup>24</sup> The first leads to falsity because it is based on our senses, impressions, rumors or hearsay.<sup>25</sup> The second is based on reason and 'adequate common notions and ideas'.<sup>26</sup> Of the third, Spinoza writes, '[h]e who has a true idea at the same time knows himself to have a true idea, and cannot doubt of the truth'.<sup>27</sup> James Arnett puts it, as 'the knowledge of the world as it really, essentially is. [. . .] It is something we will know when we have it',<sup>28</sup> and Dorothy Atkins explains this 'knowledge of the third type is

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<sup>20</sup> Isobel Armstrong, 'George Eliot, Spinoza and the Emotions', in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 294–308; Benedict de Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics Translated by George Eliot*, ed. by Clare Carlisle (Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Virgil Martin Nemoianu, 'The Spinozist Freedom of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda', *Philosophy and Literature*, 34 (2010), 65–81 (65).

<sup>22</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by George Eiot, p. 16. See also Clare Carlisle, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by George Eiot, III, Prop. XII, p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> *Ethics* II. Prop. 40, Schol 1–3, (pp. 145–46).

<sup>25</sup> *Ethics* II. Prop. 41, Dem, (p. 146).

<sup>26</sup> *Ethics* II. P40. S2, (p. 145).

<sup>27</sup> *Ethics* II. P42, (p. 147).

<sup>28</sup> James Arnett, 'Daniel Deronda, Professor of Spinoza', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44.4 (2016), 833–54 (836).

not attached to the intellect; it is intuited, directly felt'.<sup>29</sup> On the process of achieving the desirable order of knowledge, Arnett explains,

We must seek to augment and refine our knowledge and *we must work to clarify and remedy our mistaken ideas*. In doing so, we progress, at least to rational thought – and from rational thought, we can engender actions that empower us; and from these actions, we learn to recognize that which is not just good for us, but good for others – and good for others in a way that is also good for us.<sup>30</sup>

Improving our understanding of the world (with reason and intuitive cognition) equips us to respond better to others, such as by not pre-judging others, and of being an inclusive society. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Spinoza was infamous for pulling down 'the hierarchal divide between the realism of the transcendent (God and the mind) and the immanent (Nature and the body)'.<sup>31</sup> His vision of the world was non-hierarchal, not only in areas of religion, but also in politics and ethnic groups. He saw 'temporality as a non-hierarchical, gradual development of diversity out of and within a common substance of interconnectedness and interdependence'.<sup>32</sup> For example, in comparing Descartes and Spinoza, the latter lacks 'binary opposites' in formula. Michael Mack writes, '[Spinoza] does not play off the mind against the body, nor does he oppose the particular with the universal', and 'his version of reason is more inclusive of what is considered lowly, bodily or even irrational than any other philosopher in the rationalist tradition'.<sup>33</sup> This is applied by Gillian Beer in her reading of *Daniel Deronda*, in which she points out that Eliot finds common ground between the English and the Jewish, not polarity.<sup>34</sup>

Recent studies have built on and developed the research Dorothy Atkins began in *George Eliot and Spinoza* (1978), one of the earliest works in the field. Atkins contemplates how Spinoza's three levels of knowledge – inadequate, adequate and intuitive cognition – are mirrored in *Adam Bede*'s three iconic characters Hetty, Adam

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<sup>29</sup> Atkins, p. 60. Note that Spinoza's 'immanence' and third knowledge goes against Biesta's model of teaching because 'immanence' and 'intuitive cognition' suggests that one has all one needs within themselves and it is a matter of drawing it out.

<sup>30</sup> Arnett, p. 837.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Mack, *Spinoza: Aspects of Modernity* (Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Mack, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Mack, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.182; also quoted by Mack, p. 8.

and Dinah, respectively, and also how Adam makes the journey from inadequate knowledge to adequate knowledge. She also argues that Spinoza's concept of bondage is characterised in Hetty and Arthur, and freedom in Adam (eventually) and Dinah.<sup>35</sup> While the application is convincing, the overall result can sometimes appear rather too calculating and mechanical. Atkins' discussion on Spinoza's 'affect' is primarily concerned with the irrationality of one's emotions. For example, Spinoza explains; say one were to feel happy affections towards an object A, if person B were to break A, then one would feel displeasure towards B. If one disliked object A, and person B were to break A, then one would feel pleasure towards B. Sometimes affect can make us feel two opposite feelings at once. Thus, in this way our emotions are indirectly affected by external things, often in purely irrational and unreasonable ways.

It is true, as Atkins states, that Eliot 'found [Spinoza's] doctrine emphasizing the importance of reason and knowledge in human morality most compatible with her own view of ethical problems', yet as we have seen, twenty-first century scholars now typically assume that Eliot never merely mirrors Spinoza's philosophy or recreates it in novel form.<sup>36</sup> This has diversified our understanding of Eliot's philosophy, and deepened the discussion on Spinoza. Two recent discussions on Eliot and Spinoza are of particular interest. First, Ted Zenzinger directly responds to Atkins, arguing that Eliot does not merely represent the ideas of Spinoza in *Adam Bede*, but expands his definition of sympathy. Indeed, Spinoza does not discuss sympathy extensively in *Ethics*, but only touches upon it in Book III, when he explains about feeling two different emotions at the same time. The problem with Atkins' argument is that she simply classifies Hetty as an embodiment of the first stage of knowledge as stipulated by Spinoza, that is, the type of inadequate knowledge which is easily swayed by irrational emotions. But such an interpretation fails to discuss the role of sympathy in the narrative regarding Hetty.<sup>37</sup>

The second significant article is by James Arnett because he looks at Spinoza as an educator and explores the eudaimonistic aspects of Spinoza's *Ethics*: 'how does

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<sup>35</sup> Mack, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Atkins, *George Eliot and Spinoza* (University of Salzburg, 1978), pp. 94–96.

<sup>37</sup> However, I also differ from Zenzinger in that although it is true that Spinoza only uses the term 'sympathy' in that limited passage, the following Propositions in essence do argue for the extension of one's sympathies towards 'men'. Significantly, Carlisle adds a footnote in George Eliot's translation of *Ethics*, regarding this term 'men': citing Spinoza as the source, Carlisle writes, 'Here and in the succeeding proposition must be understood men towards whom we have hitherto felt no emotion'. (*Ethics*, ed. by Carlisle, p. 185)



he encourage us to go about increasing our knowledge, and so improving our lots and the lots of others?'.<sup>38</sup> Spinoza was never an educator, yet Arnett finds his educational concern, not in content, but in form, the 'geometric structure': in sequential reading, Arnett writes, *Ethics* 'enacts in its formal relationship to the reader the education of the reader, and in educating the reader in the ethics, is begetting a ethical subject'.<sup>39</sup> For Eliot, he argues, the purpose of realism is to create the novel as a pedagogic space.<sup>40</sup> Arnett then draws from Megan Watkins in *The Affect Theory Reader*, that 'affect' should be understood as 'a pedagogic process, whereby a sense of self is formed through engagement with the world and others'.<sup>41</sup> Ethics, Arnett observes, 'is communicated in the pedagogic relationship between the educator and the student'.<sup>42</sup> Arnett argues that Eliot 'believes that in order for education to occur [ . . . ] there must be an encounter between a subject and a stimulus (a knowledge, an experience, a revelation, and idea, an educator). But more than that, the subject must be willing to receive, process, or internalize the knowledge conveyed'.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Arnett believes that 'in Eliot's application of Spinoza, sympathy is not about *an unknowable, absolute other* nor a pre-Freudian mechanism of projection, but rather about a phenomenological orientation towards, and responsiveness towards, others'.<sup>44</sup> He continues:

Sympathy, insofar as it is the recognition of "equivalent centers of self," is the burgeoning knowledge of the mimetic literary of the other – that the other, like us, is a mode of expression of the same substance (in Spinoza's terms) but is also an other, not us but copresent.<sup>45</sup>

However, these assertions about Eliot's application of Spinoza raises further philosophical questions on our mode of existence; as fellow beings of one substance the other is not 'unknowable'. This concept comes under the term 'empathy' as Keen defines it, 'fellow-feeling', that is feeling the other's emotion as if one's own. And yet Arnett also introduces another idea as the 'other' being separate from oneself: the

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<sup>38</sup> Arnett, p. 838.

<sup>39</sup> Arnett, p. 837.

<sup>40</sup> Arnett, p. 837.

<sup>41</sup> Megan Watkins, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 269–70.

<sup>42</sup> Arnett, p. 838

<sup>43</sup> Arnett, p. 837.

<sup>44</sup> Arnett, p. 838.

<sup>45</sup> Arnett, p. 838.

other is 'not us', he writes. The term 'copresent' captures a vital concept, but what exactly does it mean? The idea of responding to the other, is also an interesting idea to ponder. Can one respond to someone if they are essentially of the same substance? Is distance and separation needed in order to yearn to know the other?

There have been backlashes to Spinoza-driven readings of Eliot. Brian Fay points out that Eliot is also aware of the difference of individuals, and to her, it is by recognising that others are different that sympathy is made possible, not believing that we are all one unified substance. He finds Spinoza's philosophy to be 'sighting of individuality'.<sup>46</sup> This is crucial to Eliot's idea of sympathy, which he defines in this way:

[. . .] unless perceptible differences are noticed between you and me, I have no basis to feel sympathy for you in the sense of appreciating and responding with kindness and consideration *to the particular needs that you have* as the concrete individual that you are.<sup>47</sup>

Spinoza's model makes sympathy impossible, for '[w]hen I know that you are in pain in the *particular way* you suffer pain, my heart goes out to you. If you were essentially like me, then my feeling for you would in fact not be sympathy but a type of self-feeling'.<sup>48</sup> Fay also makes the excellent point that Casaubon's project, *Key to All Mythologies* was destined to fail by principle; it is no coincidence that his research aimed to discover the single source from which all human culture came.<sup>49</sup> As a matter of fact, it sounds similar to Spinoza's project. Finally, Fay points out the crucial difference in form: Eliot's novel is not Spinoza's treatise. Nonetheless, it is vital that we keep Spinoza in mind as we look to Adam Smith as a second source to understanding Eliot's concept of sympathy.

### **Smith's Sympathy – 'Not made up of the same stuff as you and I'**

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<sup>46</sup> Arnett, p. 838.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Fay, 'What George Eliot Could Have Taught Spinoza', *Philosophy and Literature*, 41.1 (2017), 119–35 (126).

<sup>48</sup> Fay, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> Fay, p. 128.

Thus we have seen the insights which Spinoza's philosophy gives to our reading of sympathy in *Adam Bede*, as well its limitations. Going in a different direction, are studies of Eliot which use Adam Smith as a model for her realist sympathy. I introduce them here because Eliot's realist sympathy cannot be understood without considering both the influences of Spinoza and Smith.

'Imaginative' is a key word in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which many literary critics have picked up. For example, in her research on realism, Rae Greiner states that *Theory of Moral Sentiments* 'provides its nineteenth-century realist inheritors a compelling paradigm for sympathy production through narrative'.<sup>50</sup> She makes a 'formalist claim' that Smithian sympathy lives in realist fiction, dedicated to 'fostering fellow-feeling through form'.<sup>51</sup>

Smith's writing on sympathy is clear from the outset, that we are *not* of the same substance as the other: 'As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, *but by conceiving* what we ourselves should feel in the like situation'.<sup>52</sup> Again, '[i]n every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he *imagines* should be the sentiments of the sufferer'.<sup>53</sup> These passages indicate that for Smith, it is impossible to be the same as the other; one can only try to imagine what it must feel like for the other. As Rae Greiner has argued, this idea strips sympathy of any emotions or passions, as well as knowledge. Unlike Spinoza's model, Smith believes that we cannot have adequate knowledge of the other, and therefore our sympathy for them is generated by the mental activity of situating ourselves in the other's position. ('[T]he spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, *to put himself in the situation of the other* [ . . . ]'<sup>54</sup>). Smith's sympathy, as well as the realist novel, Greiner argues, is an 'imaginative labour, endowed with ethical force'.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, we can never fully feel the same as the other; 'the emotions of the spectator will still be *very apt to fall short* of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, *never conceive*, for what has befallen another, that degree of

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<sup>50</sup> Fay, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Rae Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel', *Narrative*, 17.3 (2009), 291–311 (294).

<sup>52</sup> Smith, p. 13, emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, p. 28, emphasis mine.

<sup>55</sup> Greiner, 'Sympathy Time', p. 294.

passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned', and 'compassion can never be exactly the same with the original sorrow'. It is 'but imaginary'.<sup>56</sup> However, Smith does not say that it is a failure of 'the harmony of society': 'Though there will never be unisons, they may be concord, and this is all that is wanted or required'.<sup>57</sup>

Greiner not only argues that 'concord' is required for sympathy, but also that 'unisons' hinder sympathy. She writes, '[a]s it tends to do in real life, sympathy regularly fails to develop in *Middlemarch* and it is, perhaps, in charting these failures that Eliot's novels do their most ethical work'.<sup>58</sup> If we were to take Spinoza's model of adequate knowledge, such a position is equivalent to that of the omniscient narrator. However, Greiner finds that omniscient knowledge takes away the ability to sympathise. This is found in flawed characters such as Rosamond, whose 'colossal ego' is 'a lot like omniscience, a totalizing view that just won't quit'.<sup>59</sup> Omniscience kills sympathy because it knows all already: there is no need to learn from the other. Greiner writes, 'there are no strangers in Rosamond's world: everybody is what she makes of them, every story one she already knows'. For example when she meet and falls in love with Lydgate, the narrator says that it 'was just what Rosamond had contemplated beforehand'.<sup>60</sup> Kate Flint similarly asks, 'If sympathy toward others is a desirable thing, is it only possible to express this sympathy when we do not know as much as it would be possible to know about the other person?'.<sup>61</sup> The idea that all-knowing omniscience kills the capacity for sympathy is thought-provoking. It seems to permeate in Eliot's fiction. In *Middlemarch*, Rosamond's single-mindedness is 'totalizing in its refusal to imagine other minds', while in 'The Lifted Veil', Latimer's mind for the opposite reason is also 'total and unimaginative: he cannot imagine what others are thinking because he *already knows*'.<sup>62</sup>

Yet before we say that Spinoza's model of adequate knowledge and sympathy is misleading and we replace it with Smith's, let us also consider that Spinoza, too, engages with imagination and wonder. In Part III, Prop. XXIX Spinoza states, 'We try to do that which we imagine men will look at with pleasure, and on the contrary, we

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, p. 28, emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, pp. 28–29, emphasis mine.

<sup>58</sup> Greiner, 'Sympathy Time', p. 303.

<sup>59</sup> Greiner, 'Sympathy Time', p. 303; See also Smith, pp. 28–29.

<sup>60</sup> Greiner, 'Sympathy Time', p. 303.

<sup>61</sup> Kate Flint, 'Blood, Bodies, and The Lifted Veil', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 51.4 (1997), 455–73 (456).

<sup>62</sup> Greiner, 'Sympathy Time', p. 304, italics in the original.

are averse to do that which we imagine they will dislike'.<sup>63</sup> Spinoza's original Latin text uses the term 'imaginamur' (the plural passive indicative of 'imaginor' – to picture, imagine).<sup>64</sup> That Spinoza uses the word 'imagine' rather than 'know' makes a crucial difference because it tells that there is a process of having to think about and explore the other's feelings. Spinoza defines 'wonder' as 'that state of mind in which we remain fixed in the imagination of a particular object. The mind remains fixed, because this single imagination has no connection with any other'.<sup>65</sup> 'Fixed' is a rather misleading word, but Spinoza is here contrasting wonder with the mind's usual state in which it automatically links a thing with the idea of another in accordance to pre-established coordination and associations. Meanwhile, 'wonder' is the state in which the mind pauses because no rails have yet been laid out from this new encounter. For all the mathematical rhetoric and reasoning which fits various emotions like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the heart of *Ethics* seems not to be the contented sense that one has attained complete and perfect knowledge, but the ongoing, never ending process to gain a better understanding of the world. This energy can be found in the imagination and creativity of Eliot's heroines, such as Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1871). On the other hand, Hetty's narrow-mindedness and self-centredness lacks this ability to reimagine the world outside of her narrative. That being said, the novel itself invites the reader to respond to Hetty imaginatively and with sympathy.

### Immanence and Transcendence – A Third Way

Thus, contrary to Fay's argument, Spinoza's influence *cannot* be so easily discarded. For example, Roger Scruton, in *The Very Short Introduction to Spinoza*, supports an alternative reading of 'immanence' as, two things which are *not* 'identical' but being

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<sup>63</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by George Eliot, p.184. Michael Silverthorne's translation also runs thus: 'We shall also endeavor to do whatever actions we *imagine* people view with joy, and conversely we shall be averse to doing actions that we *imagine* people are averse to' in *Ethics*, ed. by Matthew J. Kisner, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 117, emphasis mine. Likewise, Edwin Curley translates it: 'We shall strive to do also whatever we *imagine* men to look on with joy, and on the other hand, we shall be averse to doing what we *imagine* men are averse to' in *Ethics*, ed. by Edwin Curley (Penguin, 1996), p. 85. Whereas, Robert Harvey Monro Elwes (1853–92) translates: 'We shall also endeavor to do whatsoever we *conceive* men to regard with pleasure, and contrariwise we shall shrink from doing that which we *conceive* men to shrink from' in *The Ethics* (Alex Catalogue, 2001), p. 74, emphasis mine.

<sup>64</sup> In the original Latin: 'Nos id omne etiam agere conabimur, quod homines cum laetitia aspicere imaginamur, et contra id agere aversabimur, quod homines aversari imaginamur.'

<sup>65</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by George Eliot, III, p. 210.

in the 'same system'.<sup>66</sup> If this is the case, Spinoza does register the diversity and 'concord' of individuals, which can be seen in Eliot's fiction. Also interestingly, Mack emphasises the same ethical principles in Spinoza as Greiner does in Adam Smith: that of becoming more adaptable to plurality and inclusion.<sup>67</sup> Spinoza's radical philosophy broke down traditional metaphysics and created a possibility for a non-hierarchical society; Eliot's realism, while never questioning the existence of hierarchical social classes, can be seen to intellectually bridge the gap between the middle and working classes. There is probably a limit to what one can do with identifying a philosopher as a single source of Eliot's professed moral ideas. However, it is the combination and the author's original model which arises from them which make such research unique to a text.

Thus, rather than having to choose between either Spinoza or Smith as the strongest departure point for understanding Eliot's realist fiction, we can see how both philosophers, despite having opposing ideas of one's relation to the other, engage with a shared question of how to sympathise with the other who is unknown. For Spinoza it is a matter of pursuing adequate knowledge, but although people are of the same substance the journey to complete knowledge is long and complicated, and in between there is plenty of room for discovery, learning, wonder, imagination, diversity and plurality. On the other hand, Smith begins with the premise that the other is fundamentally different, that complete knowledge is impossible, and therefore the most that one can do is try to imagine the other's situation, but that still leaves practical question of how do we sympathise with others who are not ourselves. Greiner's exploration of omniscience in realist fiction has raised awareness of how complete knowledge can kill rather than help sympathy, but so far her discussion has been limited to characters who take on omniscient attitudes. In the following section we will further explore Eliot's attitude towards faithfully representing characters who are not of her group, and her narrator's role as the omniscient instructor of the reader's sympathies.

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<sup>66</sup> Roger Scruton, 'Man', in *Spinoza: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 56–74.

<sup>67</sup> Mack, p. 33.

## Section Two: Realism and Sympathy

### Who is Hetty? – An Ethical Encounter with ‘the Other’

As we have touched upon earlier, Raymond Williams praises how Eliot extends the ‘knowable community’ of her novel beyond her area of comfortable representation. When we explore the character of the fallen woman, Hetty, we can observe how the paradoxical responses to her – as a flat stereotype, and yet as the centre of the reader’s heart wrenching compassion – show the instability of the textual representation of her. As we explore the critical scholarship around the Hetty, we discover how Eliot’s call for sympathetic response by the reader on the fallen woman’s behalf is not meant to be from a place of comfort, but with a struggle to understand one’s sympathetic emotions which act without the usual logic. The key to that sympathy is the narrator and reader’s positioning and point of view in regards to Hetty. While the scene of Hetty on her burdened journey have been called the most emotionally compelling parts of the novel and the reader’s heart aches at the fallen woman’s fate, mostly throughout the novel, Hetty is portrayed to the reader from a distant outsider’s view. Keeping in mind the significance of the blend between ‘feeling with’ and ‘feeling for’, as shown in the discussion of Spinoza and Smith, we now look to the novel to see Eliot’s ethical claims at work, especially in her artistic style of realism.

In *Adam Bede*, we are told that Hetty Sorrel is a ‘distractingly pretty girl of seventeen’, an orphan taken in by her uncle and aunt who run a dairy farm (*Adam* 75). As with Gaskell’s Ruth, Hetty is aware that she is beautiful, but in a way that demonstrates her vanity:

Hetty blushed a deep rose-colour when Captain Donnithorne entered the dairy and spoke to her; but it was not at all a distressed blush, for it was inwreathed with smiles and dimples, and with sparkles from under long, curled, dark eyelashes. (*Adam* 76)

As we remember, Ruth is always presented as innocent, pure, ignorant but virtuous, caring and loving. Ruth is also conscious of the fact that others think her pretty, but it does not mean anything to her; she remains meek and humble. Hetty, on the other hand, is introduced as admiring her reflection in gleaming objects in the Poyser’s house (*Adam* 67). When she churns the butter in the presence of Arthur and the Poyser, ‘Hetty tossed and patted her pound of butter with quite a self-possessed,

coquettish air, slyly conscious that no turn of her head was lost' (76). Ruth's motherly love for her illegitimate son, Leonard, was one of the main ways Ruth proved her innate goodness to the people around her as well as the readers, but Hetty dislikes children, especially her niece, Totty: 'Hetty would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again; they were worse than the nasty little lambs' (140). Hetty's lack of sympathy towards her child, leaves her to abandon the baby to certain death, because she is only able to think about herself and her own miseries. On the surface, there seems little in Eliot's text which seems to advocate for the fallen woman.

Some critics have shown disapproval for Eliot's harsh judgment and condemnation of Hetty.<sup>68</sup> Others have contributed to 'a more redemptive discourse',<sup>69</sup> noticeably feminist readings which have interpreted *Adam Bede* as a radical or subversive critique of masculine society.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, despite the narrative creativity of *Adam Bede*, Miriam Jones sums up, '[Eliot] does not escape from her culture's underlying main assumption about the "infanticidal woman": that *she is not made of the same stuff as you and I*'.<sup>71</sup> The title of Jones's article 'The Usual Sad Catastrophe' alone suggests the negative take on Eliot for repeating the fallen woman tropes of her time.<sup>72</sup> 'Just exactly what is the reader being told in *Adam Bede* about the infanticidal woman?' Jones asks rhetorically and answers, 'She is limited, vain, unintelligent, venal, narcissistic, manipulative, lacking in spirituality, and exceptionally attractive physically'.<sup>73</sup> While I disagree with Jones about the results of Eliot's representation of Hetty, the points she raises are highly interesting and crucial

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<sup>68</sup> Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Polity, 1985), pp. 45–57; Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone, 'Self-Disorder and Aggression in "Adam Bede": A Kohutian Analysis', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 22.4 (1989), 59–70; Judith Weissman, *Half Savage and Hardy and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), pp. 164–66.

<sup>69</sup> As Miriam Jones summarises the critical views: 'For example, Showalter maintains that Eliot was in effect "forced" to toe the moral line (p. 164); Nina Auerbach claims Hetty as a subversive site; Elaine Lawless reads the novel as a critique of patriarchy (pp. 249–50; 253); and Susan Morgan writes that Hetty's real crime is that she "rejects the masculine." Even Judith Weissman, who strongly characterizes Eliot as "anti-woman," appears to excuse Eliot's "Victorian" treatment of working-class women as realistic in light of the author's personal knowledge of the price of sexual nonconformity (164)' (Miriam Jones, pp. 315–16)

<sup>70</sup> See Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*; Elaine J. Lawless, 'The Silencing of the Preacher Woman: The Muted Message of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*', *Woman's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18.2–3 (1990), 249–68 (249–50); Susan Morgan, *Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in Nineteenth Century British Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>71</sup> Miriam Jones, "'The Usual Sad Catastrophe': From the Street to the Parlor in "Adam Bede", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32.2 (2004), 305–26 (323, emphasis mine).

<sup>72</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 322.

<sup>73</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 322.



to my argument. That Hetty ‘*is not made of the same stuff as you and I*’ only reveals how radically different Eliot’s sympathy is from conventional expectations. Eliot is exploring the philosophical ideas of extending sympathy towards someone who is unknown and different. Eliot clarifies that there is a boundary between the narrator/reader and the fallen woman, but not to say ‘this is as far as I will go’, but to endeavour to cross over the boundary and extend the limits of sympathy.

Mary Ellen Doyle also sees Hetty as a character with minimal textual representation and limited depth in portrayal. *Adam Bede* is centred on Adam: through the story he learns to sympathise with others, forgive people, and romantically love Dinah. Therefore, other characters are devices to lead Adam to his happy ending and maturity.<sup>74</sup> Doyle first discusses how Arthur is used effectively, to guide the readers to understand him just enough to sympathise with Adam when he forgives him. ‘[T]he narrator is most in control when dealing with him’, Doyle writes.<sup>75</sup> However, for Doyle, Eliot loses some of that skill when it comes to her portrayal of Hetty. That Hetty has received various responses from readers, is as Doyle sees it, a failure on Eliot's part to keep Hetty as an effective narrative device. She tried to achieve too much. Eliot needed to ‘portray Hetty so as to keep the reader interested in her but relatively detached’.<sup>76</sup> At the beginning of the novel, the narrator’s descriptions of Hetty are ‘seldom sympathetic and never without a note of warning’.<sup>77</sup> However, perhaps the narrator goes too far, so that by the end the reader will all but despise Hetty. (This creates a problem for the novel, for if readers despise Hetty, they cannot sympathise with Adam for falling in love with her.<sup>78</sup>) So in order to compensate, we have two chapters that ‘offer [. . .] a close analysis of her shock and despair in a tone of restrained pity’.<sup>79</sup> Doyle writes, ‘[Hetty] is incapable of any breadth of vision or feeling for others, but in this universal context we can feel for her pain without being engrossed by it’.<sup>80</sup> Doyle continues:

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<sup>74</sup> This is similar to Atkin’s reading of *Adam Bede* in which Adam makes the journey from ‘inadequate knowledge’ to ‘adequate knowledge’ and ‘intuitive cognition’. Hetty stays as a prototype of ‘inadequate knowledge’. She herself is not given a lively characterisation and growth into maturity.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Ellen Doyle, *The Sympathetic Response: George Eliot’s Fictional Rhetoric* (Associated University Presses, 1981), p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Doyle, p. 36.

<sup>77</sup> Doyle, p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> As a passing comment, the way our approval of Adam is affected by his thoughts of Hetty and how we think of Hetty, is reminiscent of Spinoza’s *Ethics*

<sup>79</sup> Doyle, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Doyle, p. 40.

There can be little doubt that the two chapters of Hetty's journey (chaps. 36, 37) are *in themselves* some of the best portrayal of character and event in the novel, powerfully effective for reducing the unsympathetic distance between Hetty and the reader. Comment is reduced to a minimum; we are isolated with the solitary girl, forced to share her repulsion from crass onlookers. [. . .] We enter deeply into her experience through George Eliot's depiction of small, telling actions. [. . .] George Eliot came very close to stream-of-consciousness; distance is annihilated and we are unbearably enclosed in Hetty's tormented brain.<sup>81</sup>

However, what are the results for the novel as a whole? Doyle writes, 'one is forced to question whether these obviously well-done chapters are not too elaborated for Hetty's function in the whole novel [. . .] We hear all we need of Hetty, enough, perhaps too much, for our proper sympathy with Adam'.<sup>82</sup> Tim Dolin echoes her point: 'Hetty's pain [. . .] eclips[es] Adam's righteous suffering'.<sup>83</sup> Janice Carlisle likewise writes that '[a]t this point George Eliot's imaginative sympathy for Hetty has gone as far as, perhaps farther than, she herself intended'.<sup>84</sup> In brief, according to this interpretation, *Adam Bede* creates sympathy for Hetty in a way that is more than Eliot herself had bargained for. She intended to write a novel about Adam, but readers are engrossed in Hetty's anguish.<sup>85</sup> We cannot escape the fact that readers are drawn to sympathise with Hetty on her journey to Windsor, which Doyle herself says are '*in themselves* some of the best portrayal of character', being of 'absorbing fascination'.<sup>86</sup> There is a sense of uneasiness with regards to how one is to understand Hetty, because on one hand she is not 'particularly convincing' as an individual,<sup>87</sup> and yet on the other, there is a strong pull of emotion towards her.

The uneasiness, which Doyle feels in her reading of Hetty, the strong pull of sympathy despite Hetty's slighted textual representation can be explained by Raymond Williams's analysis of the fabric of Eliot's text. He presents the tension in terms of contrast between 'analytic idiom' and the 'overwhelming emphasis of

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<sup>81</sup> Doyle, pp. 40–41, emphasis in the original.

<sup>82</sup> Doyle continues, 'It only creates an absorbing fascination with the suffering girl for her own sake – which ought not to be' (p. 41).

<sup>83</sup> Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 156.

<sup>84</sup> Janice Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience* (University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 209.

<sup>85</sup> Doyle, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> Doyle, p. 42.

<sup>87</sup> Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 77.

emotion'.<sup>88</sup> Eliot's text 'breaks' when she crosses the border between the 'known community', that is the educated, middle class in which she belongs and the 'knowable community', the working-class people who are still to be fully comprehended. The conventional form of the novel, as well as the limitations of her own experience, does not allow for her to accommodate both, at least not easily. The 'disturbance' which Eliot creates, Williams argues, is the most vital part of her writing.<sup>89</sup>

That Eliot reached her limits of imaginative representation should not to be considered a failure. She succeeds in pushing on until she reaches as far as she can possibly go. It is a great feat in writing, extending the breadth of community, and her work paves a way for others to come. According to Gillian Beer, 'Many critics have found fault with George Eliot's presentation of Hetty, seeing it as ungenerous and rebuffing in its insistence on her small scope, her paucity of love, her vanity. But the treatment of Hetty is also a radical challenge to stereotypical portrayals of virgins and fallen women. Hetty demanded of George Eliot a *considerable imaginative reach* [. . .]'.<sup>90</sup> Beer's use of the word 'imaginative reach' echoes that of Williams discussing Eliot straining to beyond the limits of representing people familiar to her social group. Beer continues that Eliot 'certainly never ascribes to her [Hetty] the kind of absolute unknowing innocence that is attributed to the heroine in [. . .] Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*'.<sup>91</sup> Williams also contrasts Eliot to Gaskell who uses 'functional emigration' as a way of guiding 'loved characters to a simpler and happier land'.<sup>92</sup> We remember the ending of *Ruth*, and her self-sacrificial death, which in a sense is a kind of spiritual emigration – a fault in Gaskell's novel which, Eliot writes, 'agitates one *for the moment*, but she *does not secure* one's *lasting* sympathy'.<sup>93</sup> Indeed it puts readers at ease to find innocence in the heroine, but Eliot's text has another priority. Gaskell, like Eliot, does 'agitate' and disturb the reader, but Eliot separates herself from *Ruth*, because Gaskell's agitation is fleeting. In her letter Eliot emphasises 'secure' and 'lasting'. The spiritual emigration which *Ruth* gives the heroine may reconcile sympathy for the fallen woman and society's prejudice against her; it is done with

<sup>88</sup> Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 80.

<sup>89</sup> In contrast to Eliot's 'disturbance', Williams points out Trollope's 'ease'. (Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 84.)

<sup>90</sup> Beer, *George Eliot*, p. 69, emphasis mine.

<sup>91</sup> Beer, *George Eliot*, p. 70.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 89.

<sup>93</sup> George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters* Vol. 2, ed. by Gordon Sherman Haight, Yale ed. (Oxford University Press), emphasis mine.

fullness and richness, and dramatic effect. However, Eliot's text elicits the reader's sympathy for the fallen woman, but in a way that the reader does not understand the logic and coherence in their sympathy. Eliot pushes farther towards the limit. She chose 'the subdued coloring, the half-tints, of real life', so that the innocence of the fallen woman is diminished; but Hetty's open flaws connect her better to readers by their extension of sympathies towards those who prior to encountering the text, may have seemed beyond the imagination of ever connecting with. Polishing her art of realism, Eliot portrays the complexities of her society and the politics of sympathy.

### **Eliot's Ethics of Realism**

Eliot's means of pushing her imaginative representation of the fallen woman to its limits is an essential feature of her realist form. It is not a coincidence that *Adam Bede* contains her most famous passages on realism. In Chapter 17, titled 'In which the story pauses a little', Eliot, through her narrator, explains why her character is at fault, yet why she refuses to alter the truth:

These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—amongst whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire—for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice.

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were [. . .] (*Adam* 160)

In this passage, Eliot lays down her manifesto of realism. It is impossible to summarise realism in a few words, but to outline a certain crucial aspect exemplified above: for Eliot, realism had the potential to extend the reader's understanding of, and

therefore sympathy for, the working-class people. It is not that the working class was utterly unknown to her readers; but the middle class had their own images – often romanticised ideals – of country life. However, for Eliot, understanding of the realities of working-class life is crucial for a genuinely sympathetic response.

Eliot's desire to expand not only the breadth of community that is represented in literature, but also the unadorned state in which the middle class and working class coexist, has deeply political significance. Later in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Eliot uses the phrase 'emphasis of want' to capture the basis of high and affluent society sustained by factories and the working class, which is central to her works.<sup>94</sup>

But good society, floated on gossamer wings of light irony, is of very expensive production; requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories, cramping itself in mines, sweating at furnaces, grinding, hammering, weaving under more or less oppression of carbonic acid, or else, spread over sheepwalks, and scattered in lonely houses and huts on the clayey or chalky corn-lands, where the rainy days look dreary. (*Mill*, 270–71)<sup>95</sup>

In this passage when Eliot talks of the 'wide [. . .] national life', she widens and deepens the reader's breadth of knowledge about their community. The text gives a sense of desire to lift the irony of the 'good society' running without acknowledging the working class, and to connect all people of both societies together, in its gritty, daily, commodity and labour, employer and employee relationship. Furthermore, Eliot's sympathy for the working class extends also to the fallen woman, a young girl who was taken advantage of by an aristocrat: it is a sad reality, which mars the view of pastoral country life, but it is a tale that Eliot cannot shrink from telling.

Many critics have praised Eliot's representation of country life through the characters of Adam and Dinah, but it must be also noted that her sympathy extends to the fallen woman character and especially Hetty. While some critics tend to separate Adam and Dinah with Hetty in terms of characterisation, Williams groups them together when he writes, 'What *Adam or Dinah or Hetty* say when they are acting as individuals is not particularly convincing'.<sup>96</sup> The content of Williams' somewhat surprising statement will be discussed later in context, but here, note that Williams,

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 251.

<sup>95</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 77, emphasis mine.

who has pioneered the argument of Eliot's extension of sympathy to the working class and coined the term 'knowable community', includes Hetty as part of the country landscape just as much as the protagonists. Furthermore, Williams writes that in the backdrop of the emphasis of want, Arthur is seen interacting with his tenants with the 'crude facts of economic power'. It is in the 'essentially same spirit' Arthur hires Adam to manage the woods that Arthur 'takes up Hetty Sorrel as his girl and succeeds in ruining her'.<sup>97</sup> Therefore in the social relationship, which Eliot encompasses in her writing, Hetty is embedded economically; she is not a stand-alone character, separated from the other country people. The sympathy Eliot writes of is meant for the working class, among whom Hetty is included. In the passage above from Chapter 17, the narrator's moral emphasis is clear: that people are flawed, yet need to be tolerated, pitied and loved. Whose description fits more so than Hetty? If this statement of realism is to be manifested in her work, its utmost establishment would be achieved through Eliot's portrayal of Hetty.

Ostensibly to some readers, Eliot's language of this passage above may seem difficult to accept or even controversial. The patronising narrator is revealed in phrases such as 'these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people' (*Adam* 160). Clearly, the narrator and the reader are not of that group. Yet, at the same time the passage contains a sense of desire for a deeper and wider connection, found in the phrases 'These fellow-mortals, every one' and 'the real breathing men and women'. The latter erases all differences between people, only looking at the things we all share: breath and a limited lifespan. Again similarly, the text stresses the contrast between 'lofty minded people' and the country people, which the narrator calls 'my fellow mortals' (161), and a desire for sympathy to provide a bridge between them. The sympathy is deeply felt, but at the same time the deep sense of divide between 'us' and 'them' is jarring. It is in passages such as this that we see the powerful combination of Spinoza and Smith's model of sympathy. Williams argues that because Eliot represents characters outside of the comfortable 'known community', the fabric of the text exhibits hesitation in the way it portrays the characters who are different from one's familiar social group; characters who lead different lifestyles, have different ways of speaking and moral or religious values.

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<sup>97</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 243.

Several critics have claimed that Williams deals out criticism that is too negative towards authors such as Gaskell and Eliot, by his statements that novelists could not overcome the limits of representation due to their social embeddedness, and that they did not represent country people as ‘active bearers of personal experience’. For example, Harry Shaw argues:

Eliot doesn’t depict Hetty as an active bearer of personal experience because she believes that someone in Hetty’s historical situation wouldn’t have been an active bearer of personal experience. Eliot wants to explore the possibility that there have been times and places in our own tradition that have produced rural folk who simply don’t think in the ways her implied readers do (which is what Williams objects to).<sup>98</sup>

Shaw’s argument is that Eliot *deliberately chose not* to portray Hetty as a fully developed character, because historically, a girl like Hetty of that social class would not have been. By saying so, Shaw is trying to posit that everything that Eliot represented and the way she represented it was deliberately and intentionally done. She did not ‘fail’ to reach her realist goal at any point. But why does Shaw strongly emphasize the intentionality of successful achievements? By insisting on Eliot’s accurate representation of ‘rural folk’, Shaw’s argument seems to suggest the novelist’s condescension more than her knowledge.

In contrary, it may appear somewhat provocative for William to argue Eliot ‘does not get much further than restoring them [Adam, Dinah or Hetty] as a landscape’,<sup>99</sup> but it is important to read on to see that he does not view this as negative: ‘I would not make this point bitterly, for the difficulty is acute’.<sup>100</sup> If Eliot had comfortably portrayed Hetty and others as independent and lively characters – having nothing to do whether she intended it or not, was capable of it or not – as a text, *Adam Bede* would have had a different meaning. The text that we have ended up with, regardless of the author’s intention that may be behind it, demonstrates how the moral of realism contradicts its form. An excerpt from the *Saturday Review* gives an example of the middle-class reader’s expectations of rural life depictions:

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<sup>98</sup> Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 226.

<sup>99</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 244.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 244.

The degree of horror and painfulness is also out of keeping with the calm simplicity of rural life. Of course, every one know that every sin under heaven is committed freely in agricultural villages, and if any one choose to insist that pretty dairymaids are in danger of being seduced, he at least keeps within the bounds of fact. But that is no reason why a picture of village character and village humour should be made so painful as it is by the introduction into the foreground of the startling horrors of rustic reality.<sup>101</sup>

The 'technical strategy of unified narrative and analytic tones' is at odds with the society and people it tries to represent because the 'moral bearings have been extended to substantial and conflicting social relationships'.<sup>102</sup> Eliot's novel discloses the 'difficulty of coexistence' to the extent that '[t]here is a new kind of break in the texture of the novel'.<sup>103</sup> However, the key point in Williams' argument is this: for a realist novel to fail in representation proves the impossibility of what the novel endeavours to do.

The turbulence of class relations of the decades leading up to the 1832 Reform Act is reflected in the narrative style of *Adam Bede*, which is set sixty years before its publication year. The social condition changed, becoming more aware of the ways in which the middle and upper-class lifestyles were being sustained by the working class, thus widening the scope of human connections and complicating them. In Jane Austen's time, Raymond Williams writes, 'speech and narrative and analysis [. . .] are connected by a literary convention'.<sup>104</sup> The authorial narration deals with its characters 'without hesitation', because all characters, the narrator and readers live within the same 'known community'. In contrast, Eliot's novels extend the sense of community so that it reaches to characters of unfamiliar class and backgrounds. And while the text endeavours to bridge the gap between our 'known community' with the 'knowable community', characters are dealt with hesitation, because by nature they are not (yet?) 'known' to us'. The 'problem of knowing a community' is 'of finding a standpoint from which community can be known'.<sup>105</sup> The text nevertheless attempts it, and we can recognise the conflict.

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<sup>101</sup> *Saturday Review*, (26 February 1859), 250–51.

<sup>102</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 244.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 245.

<sup>104</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 245.

<sup>105</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 2.3 (1969), 255–68 (225).



Williams lays out several types of collisions. Firstly, Eliot gives ‘her own consciousness, often disguised as a personal dialect, to the characters with whom she does really feel; but the strain of the impersonation is usually evident’. It is ‘analytic’, but of ‘ironic power’.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, Eliot gives ‘a kind of generalising affection’, but is also self aware that there is no such thing as a complete generalisation which can cover all. Eliot offers to make characters who come from a different background from herself and the implied reader ‘knowable’, but it results in a ‘deeply inauthentic but socially successful way’.<sup>107</sup> For example she uses endearing terms such as ‘fine old, ‘dear old’ to make working lives more familiar to the reader, but in doing so it also highlights the author’s patronage, and the social and economic gap between the narrator and the characters. The third way is this compromise between the two types outlined above, between the ‘ironic power’ and ‘either disturbed intense feelings or a position of moral strength’.<sup>108</sup> It also becomes clear that the ‘three idioms’, as Williams calls them, are indeed ‘combined’, but in such a way that the lines between them are blurred. Indeed, we see the language constantly shifting from one to another, as it accommodates the sheer diversity of community.

Similarly in *The English Novel*, Williams speaks of how Eliot’s text mixes positions: the intensity of isolated need and desire; the inherited sympathy of general observation; and the analytic consciousness. He writes, ‘[i]n the very texture of her writing, in the basic construction of her novels, she has to resolve a conflict of grammars: a conflict of “I” and “we” and “they”, and then of the impersonal construction that in a way inevitably come to substitute for each’.<sup>109</sup> It rings true in one’s sense of reading Eliot’s text, in considering the ambiguity of the representation of Hetty. Even scholars who criticise Eliot for utilising Hetty as a mere narrative device, speak of the emotional intensity of Chapters 36 and 37. Despite Hetty’s fading out of the plot, she does have a lingering presence in the reader’s mind, which is inconvenient to anyone who wishes to read *Adam Bede* with an absolute and fixed interpretation. The richness of Hetty’s character lies in the openness to interpretation, and in the ways the text itself shifts in ways of seeing her. Miriam Jones writes that Eliot ‘wants to retain as much authorial power to fix textual meaning as possible’, but

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<sup>106</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 246.

<sup>107</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 246.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 246.

<sup>109</sup> Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 79.

the text of *Adam Bede* proves otherwise.<sup>110</sup> It is not the nature of realism to 'fix' meaning, but to capture the diverse nature of it, and in doing so it pushes up to the limits of traditional narrative form.

It may be that critics sceptical of Victorian realism, such as Colin MacCabe, write that realism is 'incapable of exploring reality in its contradictoriness'. Realism as they understand it is flawed and outdated because the subject is portrayed as static and 'it fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious'.<sup>111</sup> Jones, who is critical of Eliot for her narrow and socially embedded representation of infanticidal women, cites Gunn and Berger to reinforce her point that Eliot's painterly model – 'bourgeois' in itself – is used to 'neutralise any class threat',<sup>112</sup> an attempt to address social issues but only ending in self-satisfaction. Gunn comments how paintings are 'static' rather than telling of a narrative, which Jones extrapolates into Eliot's wish to 'retain as much authorial power to fix textual meaning as possible'.<sup>113</sup> Taking Catherine Belsey's statement that realism's literary structure is defined by its 'movement towards closure' which precludes the reader from confronting any contradictions,<sup>114</sup> Jones considers how in *Adam Bede*, Hetty's exile and death, as well as the epilogue, ties up the loose plot ends efficiently, but in a way that one sweeps inconveniences under the rug.<sup>115</sup>

Jones is right to observe that 'contradictions arise from forced enclosure'.<sup>116</sup> However, it can be argued that *Adam Bede* is not dismissive of the contradiction. In contrary to Jones, Williams praises the text's acuteness to the difficulty of the narrator's position in relation to the characters it portrays and carries sympathy for.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, as George Levine holds, realism is 'richly suggestive' and 'dialectical':

Realism exists as a process, responsive to the changing nature of reality as the culture understood it and evoking with each question another question to be questioned, each

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<sup>110</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 387.

<sup>111</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', *Screen*, 15.2 (1974), 7–27 (16).

<sup>112</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (BBC/Penguin, 1977), p. 103; Daniel P. Gunn, 'Dutch Painting and The Simple Truth in *Adam Bede*', *Studies in the Novel*, 24.4 (1992), 366–80 (366).

<sup>113</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 14.

<sup>114</sup> Belsey, p. 82.

<sup>115</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 318.

<sup>116</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 318.

<sup>117</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 244–45.

threatening to destroy the quest beyond words, against literature, that is its most distinguishing mark.<sup>118</sup>

Realism is an undertaking, ever changing according to the subject it portrays, evoking questions rather than answers, and risking breaking the pre-established and cultural framework of understanding. This fluid nature of realism cannot be more explicitly laid out than in the opening paragraph of *Adam Bede*. Eliot uses the Egyptian sorcerer to say how the narrator will show the reader the society and people of 1799:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. (Adam 5)

There are many things to be said about this revealing passage, but first of all is the initial contradiction Eliot seems to be making. It is curious that while Chapter 17 declares a manifesto of realism, here the narrator begins his tale by invoking the image of an exotic sorcerer and far-off, mystical 'visions'. It would seem to weaken his aim of realism, of being observant and recording precisely, not shying away from the ordinariness of provincial life sixty years ago. An archaeologist or a historian may be thought to be a more appropriate analogy. However, such an understanding of realism is MacCabe's understanding of 'fixed' realism. In fact, that Eliot uses the Egyptian sorcerer to say how the narrator will show the reader the society and people of 1799, 'is remarkable for its self-reflectiveness', Beaumont writes, 'It emphasizes the materiality of writing; it foregrounds the illusionistic character of representation; and it directly, playfully addresses the reader'.<sup>119</sup>

In realism as Eliot conceives it the subject is not fixed: it is a living thing. Therefore it is fitting that the Egyptian sorcerer should be chosen as the image of the work of the narrator. It is not a scientific gaze which dissects the dead past and analyses it. The past is alive and the narrator and reader are participating in it. As Eliot writes: 'One word stands for many things, and many words for one thing; the subtle shades of meaning, and still subtler echoes of association, make language as instrument which scarcely anything short of genius can wield with definiteness and certainly'. If one were to invent a universal language of rational precision, 'your

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<sup>118</sup> Levine, p. 22.

<sup>119</sup> Beaumont, p. 6.

language may be a perfect medium of expression to science, but will never express life, which is a great deal more than science'.<sup>120</sup> Realism is self-conscious of itself as a mode of representation.

In *Adam Bede*, Hetty is seen looking at her reflection on numerous occasions: one of the first glimpses we have of her is in Hall Farm, where 'Hetty Sorrel often took the opportunity, when her aunt's back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces' (*Adam* 67). As one who cares about her appearance, it is characteristic of her to dislike the mirror in her bedroom; it is vintage and handsome, even with an air of aristocracy:

But Hetty objected to it because it had numerous dim blotches sprinkled over the mirror, which no rubbing would remove, and because, *instead of swinging backwards and forwards, it was fixed in an upright position*, so that she could only get one good view of her head and neck, and that was to be had only by sitting down on a low chair before her dressing-table. (*Adam* 135, emphasis mine)

Hetty's infatuation with herself is illustrated in this short passage. As the narrator says, 'she had only to brush her hair and put on her nightcap' (135), Hetty is vain to want more than 'one good view of her head and neck'. Such an interpretation of the text is possible.

However, Hetty's objection to the mirror is appropriate and dignified. She objects to the looking-glass's fixity, as well as its blotches. In the wider world, do we not seek to view things from multiple dimensions? Hetty's objection, then, can be interpreted as a strong symbol of the text as a whole objecting to a fixed view of fallen women. Shaw writes that, 'Hetty, then, is never depicted as a fully active bearer of personal experience'. However, it could be argued to the contrary that far from 'Eliot want[ing] to explore the possibility that there have been times and places in our own tradition that have produced rural folk who *simply don't think in the ways her implied readers do*',<sup>121</sup> the text is a protest against those who view fallen women from a fixed position, and the text is against the narrow concept of realism which, as MacCabe has defined, 'fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', p. 69.

<sup>121</sup> Shaw, p. 226.

<sup>122</sup> MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', p. 16.

The ever-shifting moral perspective of Hetty reflects Eliot's endeavour to represent the fallen women with sensitivity to the complexities of realities and of human relationships. By engaging with philosophical thinkers who present differing concepts of how we connect with others – by knowledge and imagination – Eliot's text struggles with the impossibility of the task of sympathy with Hetty, for whom the narrator maintains deep empathy and also acknowledges the significance of her being outside of his known community. Eliot's realist form extends the reader's sympathies because of the narrator's unrelenting efforts to connect with Hetty – in all her shortcomings and narrow-mindedness – at the sacrifice of a comfortable and cohesive narrative.

### **Section Three: The Narrator as Teacher**

In the first section we have seen the philosophical ideas of Spinoza and Smith, and followed the literary discussion around them in relation to Eliot's work. I have argued that the combination of the two philosophical thinkers emerges in Eliot's writing, in the way her texts approach 'the other' with intimating and strong desire for connection, while on the other hand acknowledging 'the other' is different from oneself. In Section Two, we have looked at Raymond Williams's discussion on 'the known' and 'knowable' community, and how Eliot's realist vision reaches beyond her familiar, 'known' community, and extends to representing the working-class, who lies outside her knowledge and understanding but who she strives to know. Our concern was to rethink our conception of sympathetic representation through observing in Eliot's text how extends representation of the 'knowable community' to the point where the fabric of the text 'breaks'. Using Williams as a departure point, I have explored how the concept of 'knowable community' also applies to the fallen woman, Hetty in particular. The abundance of critical commentary of Hetty, and the fact that even those who argue that Hetty is unkindly employed by the author as a plot device, do not deny the emotional power of the scenes when Hetty journeys to seek Arthur at Windsor. I have argued that the diversity and controversies in opinions and critical debate of Hetty illustrate the way Hetty embodies Eliot's idea of creative sympathy which is a combination of being aware of the fact that the other is a distance away, and at the same time being in a diligent pursuit of adequate knowledge of the other.

In this third and final section, we will consider the narrator's role in sympathetic representation of the narrator. Exploring Eliot's omniscient narrator is important to this chapter because as we have seen, the question of sympathy lies in the way the narrator tries to find a position from which to understand the other. It is the fluidity of the narrator's view of Hetty, both critical and emotional which brings together Spinoza's yearning for adequate knowledge and Adam Smith's understanding that the other is fundamentally different from oneself. By mediating between the two influences, we will see how they add deeper insight to the text by the way both philosophical ideas have been equally identified in Eliot's moral texts in a way that does not involve contradiction or the negation of one or the other.

It is important how the narrator's shifting position encourages the reader to find that position also. The narrator's intervention into his own narrative is seen to be his role in educating the reader. We shall return to Arnett's question of how did Spinoza go about encouraging us to pursue adequate knowledge: in other words, how does the text educate the reader? Because of the narrator, the novel is a 'pedagogic process', ultimately teaching us not to judge the fallen woman, Hetty Sorrel.

### **The Omniscient Narrator**

In order to fully account for the complexities of the text's representation of the fallen woman and the dynamics of sympathy, it is necessary to attend closely to the place of the omniscient narrator in Eliot's model of novelistic realism. We have seen earlier that Rae Greiner argues that complete knowledge over the other eliminates the possibility of having sympathy for that person. Jonathan Culler also writes that if we take time to pry apart the over-used term 'omniscient narrator', we will find that it is actually very rare to find a narrator who is fully 'God-like' in knowledge and has no human limitations. More often, we will find a mixture of degrees between divine qualities and human short-sightedness. Even Victorian 'omniscient narrators' of traditional realism, who come nearest to the being fully extradiegetic-heterodiegetic, who act as 'spokespersons of authority who judiciously sift and present information, know the inner secrets of the characters, reveal what they would keep hidden, and offer sage reflections on the foibles of humankind', do not transcend the world.<sup>123</sup> For

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<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'Omniscience', *Narrative*, 12.1 (2004), 22–34 (31).

example, the narrator of *Middlemarch*, a self-proclaimed ‘belated historian’, declares that ‘I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven’.<sup>124</sup> Culler points out that ‘[u]nravelling and exploring are not the operations of the omniscient’.<sup>125</sup> While a historian surveys and reflects, ‘an omniscient God should not need to reflect at all: he simply knows’.<sup>126</sup> Critics such as J. Hillis Miller and Elizabeth Ermarth have similarly argued that generally in Victorian fiction, the narrator’s judgment does not come from a position outside of the world but is a social consensus.<sup>127</sup> Victorian omniscient narrators more often have ‘persuasive presence’ than ‘transcendent vision’.<sup>128</sup>

It is precisely this ‘persuasive presence’ of the narrator of *Adam Bede* that we are interested in because he acts as a focalisor who draws the reader’s attention to Hetty from the particular view of Eliot’s ethical realism. We have seen how the narrator ‘pauses’ his story in Chapter 17 to lecture the reader on realist art (159). There are other times when, in making the scene tangible to the reader the narrator ushers the reader into the room where the characters are, but in doing so, the narrator too becomes a presence (‘Let me take you into that dining-room [. . .] we will enter very softly and stand still in the open doorway’ *Adam* 49). Concerning Hetty, the narrator often intervenes with his own comments, and tells the reader how to respond to her:

Oh, the delight of taking out that little box and looking at the ear-rings! Do not reason about it, my philosophical reader, and say that Hetty, being very pretty, must have known that it did not signify whether she had on any ornaments or not; and that, moreover, to look at ear-rings which she could not possibly wear out of her bedroom could hardly be a satisfaction, the essence of vanity being a reference to the impressions produced on others; you will never understand women’s natures if you are so excessively rational. Try rather to divest yourself of all your rational prejudices, as much as *if you were studying the psychology of a canary bird, and only watch* the movements of this pretty round creature as she turns her head on one side with an unconscious smile at the ear-rings nestled in the little box. Ah, you think, it is

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<sup>124</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 132.

<sup>125</sup> Culler, p. 31.

<sup>126</sup> Culler, p. 31.

<sup>127</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (University of California Press, 1968), pp. 63–67; Elizabeth Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 65–66; Culler, p. 31.

<sup>128</sup> Culler, p. 31.

for the sake of the person who has given them to her, and her thoughts are gone back now to the moment when they were put into her hands. No; else why should she have cared to have ear-rings rather than anything else? *And I know that she had longed for ear-rings from among all the ornaments she could imagine. (Adam 226–7, emphasis mine)*

The narrator rides over the implied reader's excessive rationality. Unlike the time when the implied reader complains that Mr Irwine is 'little better than a pagan!' (159), the reader here is in fact looking favourably at Hetty, believing that she is pretty without her ear-rings, and that her delight for them comes from her feelings for Arthur. However, the narrator corrects this by bluntly saying that Hetty, in fact, cares only for possessing ear-rings. If anything, the narrator seems to be setting the reader against having sympathy for her. However, that is not the case: the narrator is taking the long way of setting up the reader's genuine sympathy for Hetty. In Chapter 17, the narrator replies why he did not put 'admirable opinions' in the Rector's mouth to make the novel read like a good sermon. His priority is to give a faithful account of people, not to present 'as they never have been and never will be' (*Adam 159*). Here, the reader's initial sympathy with Hetty is founded on false and inadequate knowledge. Such sympathy will not last, because when Hetty 'falls' and her image clashes with the pretty image the reader has made for themselves, there will be incongruence. Real sympathy for Hetty is forged when she does not act or think as we do. In Chapter 17 Eliot describes how idealised, inadequate knowledge can result in the reader's coldness and prejudice when encountering people in life:

And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice. (160, emphasis mine)

In this passage above, the narrator refuses to idealise the objects of his narrative because it would heighten the expectations of the reader, who would then expect the real world to be rose-tinted and delightful, the people, perfect without faults or errors.



The gap between the fictional and the everyday real world would cause disappointment, dislike, prejudice and disdain. But moreover, the prejudice arises from the fact the reader has forgotten that the people s/he sees are ‘real breathing men and women’. Eliot describes that sort of gaze as a ‘harder, colder eye’ and significantly, the effect that such a gaze can have on its subject is a feeling of chilliness. Eliot not only portrays the gaze one-sidedly, but she also focuses on the receiving side of the gaze. But most importantly, Eliot advocates through realist writing that the right kind of observation, would result in ‘fellow-feeling’, ‘forbearance’, and ‘outspoken, brave justice’. Eliot’s narrator guides the reader in unlearning their prejudices and viewing the fallen woman with an open mind.

### **Exploring Eliot’s Narrator as Teacher**

As we found that the narrator’s act of intervention in the novel is the key to Eliot’s identifying the amalgamation of Spinoza’s and Adam Smith’s concepts of sympathy because of his unique perspective as both empathetic yet distantly sympathetic. Through both her fiction and essays, Eliot argues that such sympathetic engagement is taught by the realist artist. While in the previous chapter we have looked at *Ruth* and education through ‘communication’, here I introduce Gert Biesta’s definition of education through ‘teaching’. Biesta explains that the communication model, if believed to be sufficient, puts limitations on education, because the new knowledge acquired is limited to what can be drawn out from what it already in the student. Therefore, there is the need for the teacher to be a transcendent figure in the classroom, sparking knowledge that can only come from without, a process also called ‘revelation’. The process I argue is similar to the narrator’s intervention that we have seen in Eliot’s text.

The background of Biesta’s argument to ‘give teaching back to education’ is against the recent ‘learnification of education’. Constructivism, which emphasised student activity, ‘was based on the assumption that students have to construct their own insights, understanding and knowledge, and that teachers cannot do this for them’.<sup>129</sup> The popularity of constructivism in the classroom has ‘given lecturing and

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<sup>129</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 45.

so-called didactic teaching a really bad name'.<sup>130</sup> We could also say the similar to novels. Novels we find as 'lecturing' are considered to be bad writing and not worthy of being called art. Eliot writes on art:

Appeals founded on generalisations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.<sup>131</sup>

This excerpt on its own may seem to advocate the 'communication' model of education: instead of giving 'sympathy ready-made', Eliot desires art to be 'raw material'.<sup>132</sup> It could be argued that Gaskell packages *Ruth* for the reader's sympathy, whereas in *Adam Bede* sympathy for the fallen woman requires some searching after.

However, 'teaching' can be subtle as well. Although the constructivist model of education favours Dewey's concept of 'communication' and 'cooperation', it comes across a crucial question which has been addressed in Socrates' dialogue model:

The learning paradox is the predicament posed by Meno as to how one can go looking for something when one doesn't know what one is looking for, and how one can recognize that one is looking for if one doesn't know it? Meno poses the question as follows, "And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know [. . .]"<sup>133</sup>

Eliot does well in addressing this issue of education which is entirely *maieutic*, that is 'bringing out what is already there'.<sup>134</sup> As we have seen in earlier passages, by using the implied reader, Eliot reveals how the reader's opinion of the characters are based on their idealised image of country people. The narrator thus intervenes to correct the reader's understanding, by highlighting the grim bits of reality.

However, the un-idealised realities of working-class lives are not given so that the reader may become disheartened and disillusioned: the faithful representation of

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<sup>130</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 46.

<sup>131</sup> Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', p. 54.

<sup>132</sup> LeGette's article shows that George Eliot was aware of the Cooperative Movement.

<sup>133</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 47.

<sup>134</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 47.

the working class equip the reader with knowledge and understanding with which they can extend their sympathies to the everyday realities of working-class people, not in a way that suits their middle-class vision of the world. But it is more than a matter of the teacher/narrator telling the student/reader how to think or feel. Biesta points out that Søren Kierkegaard, as well as Emmanuel Levinas, have spoken on how the teacher not only gives the information, but also the context in which it can be understood. This is called ‘double truth giving’.<sup>135</sup> Eliot, too, writes, ‘We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his course apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness’.<sup>136</sup> The sympathy she wants her art to teach is a specific kind towards others whom it is not the most obvious. She continues:

We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character – their conception of life, and their emotions – with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution. Art has ever made to the wakening of social sympathies.<sup>137</sup>

The repetition of ‘their’ puts weight upon the fact that the other is different, and we want to know the other in their difference.

Thus Biesta explains the importance of the teacher who has the role of giving information to students, which they would otherwise be unable to obtain. That kind of attitude is seen in the narrator of *Adam Bede*: his extension of knowledge gives him authority to comment on the characters, and also to guide the reader’s understanding of them. However, Biesta complicates his discussion by balancing ‘teaching’ with ‘emancipation’, which from its Roman roots means to ‘give away ownership’.<sup>138</sup> While it is true that the teacher gives knowledge to the student, education should also encourage the students to become independent thinkers who reach their own judgements and conclusions.<sup>139</sup>

Similarly, Immanuel Kant defines enlightenment as ‘man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage’, but believes that in order for one to ‘make use of his

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<sup>135</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 50.

<sup>136</sup> Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, pp. 54–55.

<sup>137</sup> Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, p. 55.

<sup>138</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 79.

<sup>139</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 78.

understanding without the direction of another', education is needed. The teacher's role, here, is to encourage the student to use their reason and knowledge.<sup>140</sup> Emancipation is not merely about the maieutic method, about obtaining knowledge, but about being able to *use* one's knowledge. 'The only thing that is needed', Biesta writes, 'is to remind people that they can see and think for themselves and are not dependent upon others who sees and think for them'.<sup>141</sup> Again, 'emancipation is not about learning. Emancipation is about using one's intelligence under that assumption of equality of intelligence'.<sup>142</sup> Thus emancipation is not 'given' by the teacher, nor is it 'claimed' by the student, but it is practiced and verified. But such an environment, where the students apply their knowledge, needs to be designed and facilitated by the teacher.

When Eliot's realist novel teaches the reader to sympathise, emancipation is a vital aspect of her method of teaching. In 'Art and Belle Lettres', Eliot writes, 'It is not enough simply to teach truth; that may be done as we all know, to empty walls, and within the covers of unsaleable books; we want it to be so taught as *to compel men's attention and sympathy*'.<sup>143</sup> In light of Biesta's argument, I understand this passage as saying that it is not enough to give knowledge, if it does not compel men and women to act with sympathy. The concept of emancipation becomes more relevant as Eliot writes:

We value a writer not in proportion to his freedom from faults, but in proportion to his positive excellences – to the variety of thought he contributes and suggests, to the amount of gladdening and energizing emotions he excites. Of what comparative importance is it that Mr. Ruskin undervalues this painter, or overvalues the other, that he sometimes glides from a just argument into a fallacious one, that he is a little absurd here, and not a little arrogant there, if, with all these collateral mistakes, he teaches truth of infinite values, and so teaches it that men will listen? The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism – the doctrine that all truth and beauty are attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms

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<sup>140</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 79.

<sup>141</sup> Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, p. 94.

<sup>142</sup> On equality, Biesta cites Rancière that 'there is no hierarchy of intellectual capacity' but only 'inequality in the manifestation of intelligence' (Rancière 1991: 27; see also Biesta, p. 94).

<sup>143</sup> Eliot, 'Art and Belle Lettres', pp. 626–27, emphasis mine.

bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite substantial reality. The thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our life.<sup>144</sup>

Eliot, while revering Ruskin as a good teacher, acknowledges her equality with him. Ruskin does not transcend her.<sup>145</sup> She shows her independent thinking by evaluating him: ‘that Mr. Ruskin undervalues this painter, or overvalues the other, that he sometimes glides from a just argument into a fallacious one, that he is a little absurd here, and not a little arrogant there’.<sup>146</sup> But she finds value in him in this, that his teaching should ‘remould[s] our life’, again an emphasis on how art should be moved to use our knowledge.

What she speaks of Ruskin as a teacher applies very much to her own narrator as a teacher. For one thing, her narrator, like Ruskin, also announces his fault to the world: ‘The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is’ (*Adam* 159). Far from being a ‘God-like’, all-knowing omniscient narrator, Eliot’s narrator is a fellow human being. This has been established by various literary critics, but Biesta adds another level to our reading: *why* it is vital that the narrator is not purely omniscient. If the narrator knew all, and the reader was expected to learn sympathy from him, looking to him for directing our feelings, we would end up confused, precisely in the way that multiple critics have debated over the representation of Hetty. The text’s representation contradicts itself: indifferent at times, passionate at others. Guided by Raymond Williams’s reading, we have also seen how the narrator himself is not at ease with his representation. The narrator, too, is a human being, part of the social consensus, seeking to obtain adequate knowledge of Hetty. The narrator equips the reader with his doctrine of realism, intervenes occasionally when the reader is apt to draw sympathy from within his own expectations, and makes sure that our sympathies are never easy and comfortable, in order that we might be prompted to use our knowledge for ‘fellow-feeling’, ‘forbearance’, and ‘outspoken, brave justice’ (*Adam* 160).

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<sup>144</sup> Eliot, ‘Art and Belle Lettres’, p. 626.

<sup>145</sup> Before diving into the context of *Modern Painters*, Eliot praises Ruskin’s writing for the ‘highest rank of English stylists’: the ‘vigour and splendour of his eloquence’, the ‘fine *largo* of his sentences’, although ‘his tendency to digressiveness is another and less admirable point of resemblance to the English Opium-eater’ (‘Art and Belle Lettres’, p. 627).

<sup>146</sup> Eliot, ‘Art and Belle Lettres’, p. 626.

Catherine Neale writes on Eliot's authorial voice that '[s]ympathy with characters goes hand in hand with a superior moral knowledge'.<sup>147</sup> But rather, as David Lodge writes, 'the authorial commentary, so far from telling the reader what to think, or putting him in a position of dominance in relation to the discourse of the characters, constantly forces him *to think for himself*, and constantly implicates him in the moral judgements being formulated'.<sup>148</sup> John Mullan echoes this point: 'Eliot uses her omniscience to unsettle us from the comfort of easy allegiance or antipathy'.<sup>149</sup> To sum up, Eliot's narrator instructs the reader, helping them with adequate knowledge, but ultimately valuing the emancipation of the reader.

Let us now look closely at the text to analyse how the fallen woman character, Hetty, is represented with sympathy by the narrator. After Hetty recovers from her shock that Arthur has moved to Ireland, she leaves Windsor with a quiet and resolute air. The narrator states confidently, with understanding, that 'There is a strength of self-possession which is the sign that the last hope has departed. Despair no more leans on others than perfect contentment, and in despair pride ceases to be counteracted by the sense of dependence' (*Adam* 344). This is another instance of the narrator's large overview of human emotion. It is followed with a detailed look into Hetty's thought process:

Hetty felt that no one could deliver her from the evils that would make life hateful to her; and no one, she said to herself, should ever know her misery and humiliation. No; she would not confess even to Dinah: she would wander out of sight, and drown herself where her body would never be found, and no one should know what had become of her (344).

The narrator speaks in diegesis, reporting 'Hetty felt' and how 'she said to herself'; but then he lets that drop and enters free indirect discourse: 'No; she would not confess even to Dinah'. The excerpt above exemplifies the narrator's confidence in knowing Hetty's feelings. However the following passage begs to differ:

When she got off this coach, she began to walk again, and take cheap rides in carts, and get cheap meals, going on and on without distinct purpose, *yet strangely*, by

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<sup>147</sup> Catherine Neale, *Critical Studies: Middlemarch* (Penguin, 1989), p. 146.

<sup>148</sup> Lodge, "'Middlemarch' and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text", p. 58 emphasis mine.

<sup>149</sup> John Mullan, *How Novels Work* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 66.

some fascination, taking the way she had come, though she was determined not to go back to her own country. *Perhaps* it was because she had fixed her mind on the grassy Warwickshire fields, with bushy tree-studded hedge grows that made a hiding place even in this leafless season (344, emphasis mine).

The terms, ‘yet strangely’ and ‘perhaps’, contrast sharply with the narrator’s earlier confident voice. The text hesitates to decipher Hetty’s motives behind her actions, which go against her resolution to end her life. True, it could be that the narrator is using dramatic irony to show that even though Hetty believes that she has made her decision, in her heart she is still wavering. However, it does not exactly answer the question why the narrator would declare the human state of despair in his distinctly strong authorial voice, rather than a voice which aligns better with Hetty’s. The narrator continues to report Hetty’s movements northward in detailed fashion, for another several pages.

She chose to go to Stratford-on-Avon again, where she had gone before by mistake; for she remembered some grassy fields on her former way towards it – fields among which she thought she might find just the sort of pool she had in her mind. *Yet* she took care of her money still; she carried her basket: death seemed still a long way off, and life was so strong in her. (344–45)

Hetty continues her journey, staying at decent lodgings, dressing neatly, and acting as if ‘she had a happy life to cherish’ (345). ‘And yet’, the narrator repeats, ‘yet’ Hetty cannot bring herself to face death. Of the passages that follow, numerous critics have said to be the most emotional in the whole novel. Even Doyle, critical of Eliot’s representation of Hetty, writes that distance between Hetty and the narrator is diminished, and the reader is ‘unbearably enclosed in Hetty’s tormented brain’.<sup>150</sup>

Our interest lies at the end of the chapter, when we have the narrator’s famous exclamation of sympathy: ‘Poor wandering Hetty [. . .] My heart bleeds for her’ (349). However, note that this statement is once again in the narrator’s authorial voice. Despite the intense sympathy there, we cannot deny that the distance between narrator and Hetty is once more accentuated. However, let us consider, that in the final ‘And yet’ of this passage, the narrator says:

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<sup>150</sup> Doyle, p. 41.

And yet – such is the strange action of our souls, drawing us by a lurking desire towards the very ends we dread – Hetty, when she set out again from Norton, asked the straightest road northwards towards Stonyshire, and kept it all that day. (349)

Indeed, it is interesting to notice that as this intervention of the authorial voice takes place, the narrator's message is clearly desiring to link us with Hetty by giving us all a common soul which acts strangely against our will, and yet it is also designed so that reader separate themselves for Hetty, that is stop being enclosed in her emotions, but being ourselves again and seeing them in relation to our own. It is evident that in the minute description of Hetty's thoughts and actions, which Jones has called 'realistic psychological detail',<sup>151</sup> the repeated 'yet's illustrate the not so much the narrator's own puzzlement over Hetty's irrational motives, but him going along with her in her uncertainty, for the reader to empathise what the journey feels like for Hetty. However, after the final 'And yet', the narrator makes the link between Hetty and us, 'such is the strange action of *our* souls', he says 'drawing *us* by a lurking desire towards the very ends *we* dread', the narrator calls upon us to sympathise with Hetty, but perhaps we can only do so by recognising Hetty's alterity. We can grasp the deepness of narrator's sympathetic exclamation, only if we understand how different he and Hetty are, and that despite the great gulf, the narrator reaches towards her.

However, the narrator states, 'I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, *as if I were in the witness-box*, narrating my experience on oath' (*Adam* 159, emphasis mine). In the courtroom, various people witness their account of Hetty; the narrator's story is also there. However, their accounts are starkly different from the narrator's. For one, John Olding ends his statement with 'She'd got a big piece of bread on her lap' (390), an observation which to many in the audience must have sounded like a fragmented piece of information, somewhat ludicrous. Yet to the narrator and the reader, the piece of bread has incredible meaning: Hetty's desire to still live. The narrator's privileged account shows how we have gained a fuller and rounder understanding of Hetty than many other characters. Those at the trial confirm their judgment by their observation that Hetty seems unnaturally unmoved by the gruesomeness of her crime. Yet the narrator, as well as those in closest proximity, catches the slight movement of Hetty trembling. While the

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<sup>151</sup> Miriam Jones, p. 306.



‘philosophical reader’ we saw earlier, tends to notice Hetty’s prettiness and make assumptions based on her features, the narrator insisted on ‘only’ watching her ‘movements’ (226). Here again, it is not how Hetty appears, but a study of her body language which enables us to ‘divest’ from ‘rational prejudices’ (226). ‘Trembling’ is not only something one can visibly notice, but also something that is felt through physical touch and intimate closeness. The sympathetic gaze does not ever lose sight that the person is a ‘real breathing’ being. Moreover, as the teacher the narrator’s intervention and nuggets of wisdom have taught us, if anything, to *not* judge:

After all, I believe that the wisest of us must be beguiled in this way sometimes, and must think both better *and worse of people than they deserve*. Nature has her language, and she is not untruthful; but *we don’t know all the intricacies* of her syntax *just yet*, and in *a hasty reading* we may happen to extract the very opposite of her real meaning. (139, emphasis mine)

Finally, where is the narrator when he abandons Hetty, and lets her quietly fade out of the story? While Hetty disappears from the story after the trial, it is significant that she is the final topic in the novel. In the Epilogue, Adam, Seth and Dinah are seen in the summer sunlight surrounded by the children; it is a perfect pastoral setting. Seth falls silent after their conversation turns to women preachers; Dinah, wanting to ‘quit’ the silence, changes the topic to Arthur (481). Adam begins recalling his recent meeting with him and Arthur’s response to the news of Hetty’s death. However, the conversation is not concluded, as Seth cuts it short by noting the arrival of Mr and Mrs Poyser. Dinah follows the cue, and tells Adam to come in and rest. ‘It has been a hard day for thee’ Dinah tells him, but it could also be a response to a troubled look on Adam’s face as he remembers Hetty (482). The lack of closure on the account of Hetty, reminds us of a letter by Eliot in which she explains the ‘germ of *Adam Bede*’:

The story, told by my aunt with great feeling, affected me deeply, and I never lost the impression of that afternoon and our talk together; but I believe I never mentioned it, through all the intervening years, till something prompted me to tell it to George in December, 1856, when I had begun to write the “*Scenes of Clerical Life*.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters* Vol.2.

Her aunt's story of an encounter with a young condemned girl, which Eliot was told in '1839 or 1840', stayed with her for over a decade, and moreover, Eliot was silent about it, that is until one day in 1856. The conversation at the end of the novel on Hetty is unfinished. It may be silenced for now, but nevertheless one has been affected deeply and never to lose the impression, keeping it until one day the knowledge might be used by the one who owns it, used to extend one's sympathy.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen how in Eliot's writing, there is a desire to connect as well as acknowledge the difference between Hetty and the narrator. Through our combined understanding of Spinoza and Smith, we explored how these contrasting factors can complement each other in an ethical pursuit of sympathy. Furthermore, we examined how Eliot's manner of educating the reader to sympathise with the fallen woman values not only in 'teaching', but also 'emancipation', for the reader to use their knowledge. Thus the narrator, while giving the reader new information with a confident authorial voice, also offers his narrative as an account from the witness-box. The reader is given the 'the raw material of moral sentiment' in an inconclusive form because Eliot's ethical message of extending sympathy is to not judge. The conclusion reached makes us think differently about the nature of sympathy because the fallen woman is not required to be a perfect figure who redeems herself and reclaims the reader's sympathy. Through Eliot's realist form, the reader's sympathy is evoked for a fallen woman character who lives and behaves outside the reader's moral expectations and understanding. The challenge which Eliot sets up in *Adam Bede* is a milestone for the fallen woman narratives that follow, as the fallen woman is represented more ambiguously and harder to read using traditional values of female purity and narrative sympathy. In the following chapter, we will consider the ways in which the reader is invited to sympathies with a fallen woman character who is even less of a minor character than Hetty, only given the briefest and minimal textual representation.

## Chapter Three

### Sympathy in Distance: Fanny in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

‘[H]e had felt himself in the penumbra of a very deep sadness when touching that slight and fragile creature’ (*Far from the Madding Crowd*)

#### Introduction

In the 1974 New Wessex edition of Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), John Bayley praises the novel for being ‘central in every way’.<sup>1</sup> Hardy’s later novels would ‘give place to the darker and more demoralised picture’, but in the meantime Bayley is pleased with *Far from the Madding Crowd* in the way we can be ‘wholly at home with Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene’. In response, Terry Eagleton criticised Bayley for ‘repeating the gestures of Hardy’s contemporary critics’, that is of wanting to read Hardy comfortably. For Eagleton, Literature is, if anything, ‘the untidy refuge from an increasingly “uniform” and “ideological world”’.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Bayley’s opinion that Fanny’s ‘fate does not seem at odds with the self that she had to be in her world, or with the nature of that world itself’, this chapter explores how

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<sup>1</sup> John Bayley, ‘Introduction’, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, New Wessex ed. (Macmillan, 1974); For this thesis, I will be using the Oxford World Classics 2002 edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, edited by Suzanne B. Falck-Yi. All quotations from the novel will be referenced in-text, with the shortened title *Far* and page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain* (Verso, 1986), p. 47.

Fanny's presence subverts the novel structure in drawing the reader's sympathy for a minor, outcast character.

Fanny may be only a minor character, a plot device, kept in the margins – only later in his writing career will Hardy explicitly and radically represent the fallen woman. For now, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, his first successful novel that set his writing career on track, Hardy treats the fallen woman topic with sensitivity and subtlety, neither making Fanny the heroine, nor using her name in the title, nor stating she is a 'pure woman' as he would in his later novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). In fact, in much of the novel, the descriptions of Fanny are kept to a distanced observer's point of view, and the narrator rarely mentions her by name. However, despite these narrative features which structurally push Fanny to the margins, this chapter argues how sympathy for Fanny Robin is an underlining presence in the novel. Moreover, narrative takes a form which treats Fanny with distance, because that distance is crucial to Hardy's sympathy. Distance challenges readers to feel for a character with whom they lack personal and intimate contact; to sympathise with a character who is almost never mentioned by name, and who readers are given very little psychological insight into. In Gaskell's *Ruth*, the fallen woman is the flawless and perfect protagonist; in Eliot's *Adam Bede*, although she may not be the main character, Hetty is in a way central, by undeniably and irresistibly dominating the attention and emotions of the narrator and reader in the scenes of her journey. In comparison, Fanny is a thoroughly minor character, and thus Hardy's challenge for his readers to sympathise with the fallen woman is an immense leap in difficulty from what his predecessors presented in their challenge to the reader. It is the common assumption that, the more we know about the other personally, the more intimacy, the more understanding, and the more sympathy we feel for someone. However, as we have explored in the previous chapters, Gert Biesta's model of sympathy, which he calls 'visiting' and which does not require understanding as a starting point, is effectively used by Gaskell and Eliot. Moreover, this model of sympathy which requires reflection and participation is effective for encouraging readers to have sympathy for fallen women and those who are outside of their familiar social group. We often fail to have sympathy and connection because we fail the prerequisite: to overcome the barrier between them and us. If that is so, through *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy challenges readers if they can have sympathy for a fallen woman while also being held at a distance.

When we include Fanny's story in the community of Hardy's Wessex our reading of *Far from the Madding Crowd* becomes an act of political sympathy. As John Goode (1988) writes:

Fanny is not incidental – she is made incidental, but the price we pay for the exclusion is the recalcitrant horror that dogs (precisely) the denouement. For she is the victim of an oppressive world who cannot be included in the world Gabriel is about to negotiate. The recovery of unity is at the cost of leaving this impression behind, of moderating it (which means both actively changing it and making it more moderate.)<sup>3</sup>

Goode importantly points out the difference of Fanny being 'incidental' and being 'made incidental'. To read Fanny as 'incidental' is what Bayley does, saying that she 'does not seem at odds' with Wessex or the novel's conventions. However, to develop a richer understanding of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, it is vital to examine how Fanny's existence is excluded from the unified and cohesive world of Wessex, and how the text invites the reader to become unsettled because her state of being 'incidental' is against our sympathy. As Goode writes '[a]s soon as we frame it one way, it insists on another perspective', this chapter will suggest in particular how it actively engages readers into sympathising with Fanny.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, critics such as Nafiseh Salman Saleh and Pyeaam Abbasi present Fanny as a 'conventional portrayal of the fallen woman', while on the other, critics such as Sally Mitchell and George Watt overlook Fanny entirely in their accounts of Hardy's fallen women.<sup>5</sup> This suggests how Fanny is easily disregarded as a simple fallen woman stereotype, seemingly without much depth. In *Woman and Sexuality* (1988), Rosemarie Morgan notes that conventional Victorian literary representation feared or were ashamed of the female body, but Hardy presents the physicality of women characters to an unusual degree. Even so, in her chapter on *Far from the Madding Crowd*, she makes no mention of Fanny. This is understandable, because of the lack of substantial, tangible material on Hardy's representation of

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<sup>3</sup> John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Goode, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Nafiseh Salman Saleh and Pyeaam Abbasi, 'Thomas Hardy's Notion of Impurity in *Far from the Madding Crowd*: The Tragic Failure of a Ruined Maid or The Blessed Life of a Fallen Lady', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 5.3 (2014), 59–62; Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading 1835-1880* (Bowling Green University Press, 1981); George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth Century English Novel* (Croom Helm, 1984).

Fanny. The heroine Bathsheba is portrayed with full awareness of her body and sexual desire (for example in her first meeting with Troy and their first kiss). As Morgan observes, 'for many readers the sheer delight of the moment must have passed without a single twinge of shame or guilt'.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, Fanny lacks that kind of physicality, vitality and intense sensuality. Penny Boumelha writes that Hardy's women are marked with '[i]ntense physical response to mental or emotional conflict',<sup>7</sup> such as is seen in how Bathsheba's relationship with Troy is 'marked by instruments of violence'. The reoccurring images of violence which Boumelha gives are: the spurs, the sword, and Troy's life 'ended by the gun', Oaks accidentally nipping an ewe in the groin when he is distracted from work by jealousy, and finally, Fanny's corpse. Boumelha writes, '[t]he stress on the humiliation to which [Bathsheba] is subjected by Troy culminates in his repudiation of her before the dead bodies of Fanny Robin and her child'.<sup>8</sup> Thus in this reading, Fanny is merely an instrument for representing *Bathsheba's* physical and emotional sexuality, rather than representing her own character. However, the function of Fanny is not without suggesting her own physicality. Boumelha writes that by introducing a second female character, the text puts emphasis on Bathsheba's 'blood to blood' and her motivation of choices. Taking this statement, we can argue that Fanny's sexuality is to be read in her affects on Bathsheba. In order for Bathsheba to respond physically, Fanny too must have equal physicality. Indeed, Boumelha writes on how Fanny's status becomes equal to Bathsheba's:

While Fanny is obviously and straightforwardly a victim, the situation is rendered more complex by the counterpointing of her life with Bathsheba's [. . .] which leads eventually to a temporary reversal of their status. [. . .] Fanny's physical sufferings are balanced against Bathsheba's grief as she gradually realises the truth about her husband [. . .] The two women are made equal [. . .].<sup>9</sup>

The few critics who do focus on Fanny are often struck by Hardy's energy behind the character. John Goode, quoted above, writes most extensively on Fanny, arguing for the political force which inheres in her existence. Similarly, while many

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<sup>6</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Routledge, 1988), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Harvester, 1982), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, pp. 44–45.

contemporary reviews tended to focus on Bathsheba, Oak, Troy and Boldwood, the *Saturday Review* noted of Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* that 'inside the main stream and eddying as it were, there runs a sad episode, the episode of Fanny Robin. She appears only three times', but the 'author has put out his whole force in the description'.<sup>10</sup> The review's use of the metaphor of a stream is useful for this chapter's argument. While the image of Fanny being pushed by the current suggests her powerlessness, that she is a current within the stream suggests her own energy and force. Fanny, the unlucky victim of Troy's seduction and abandonment, is a minor character, but there is a quality attributed to her that, while she is overshadowed by the other four main characters, she cannot be forgotten.

While Fanny is often excluded from discussions of women and sexuality in Hardy, this is not to say that Fanny lacks a physical portrayal. On the contrary, Hardy materialises Fanny and portrays her through her physical existence in his world of Wessex. The scene of Fanny and her baby in the coffin, for example, is one of Hardy's most unsettling representations of the materiality of the female body (likely the reason that it was subsequently excised from the serial publication).<sup>11</sup> Yet it must be noted that the 'power and taste' of Hardy's portrayal of Fanny – to borrow the phrase used by the *Saturday Review* – is nevertheless eccentric and in many respects unexpected, especially from a text which encourages readers to sympathise with the fallen woman character. This chapter explores Hardy's unusual manner of portraying Fanny and argues that Hardy's unconventional methods of representing the fallen woman, which at times seems distanced and unsympathetic, in effect provoke the reader to respond with strong emotions. Importantly, these emotions are not initially that of pity or compassion, but feelings of agitation or repulsion. While these feelings can be seen to be negative responses, they work positively for eliciting the implied conventional reader's moral response for the fallen woman. The reader's repulsion in reading Fanny's coffin scene is a physical kind which is a reaction the human body makes in response to a physical experience. It is not the repulsion or shock that one feels from being conventionally and culturally trained to accept or reject types of social behaviour.

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<sup>10</sup> 'Far from the Madding Crowd' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 39. 1002 (9 January 1875) 57–58.

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism and the Melodramatic Mode* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p. 110.

The literary method of shocking the reader would not have been unfamiliar to Hardy. Victorian physician, W. B. Carpenter coined the term 'unconscious cerebration' to explain the state of mind 'when governing will [i]s suspended'.<sup>12</sup> At such moments the mind works in 'largely reflex or habitual action'. In Hardy, we see him using those moments of suspended moral judgement to break through the reader's pre-established view of the fallen woman. An extension to the idea of unconscious cerebration is the state of shock: when we are made aware of our nerves and sensations but in a way that is not cognitive and does not involve mental processing. The feeling of shock is separate from conscious awareness. Vanessa Ryan shows that Carpenter's theory in psychology had considerable influence on Victorian literature, especially in sensation novels such as Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868), which 'seized upon the potential concept of nervous shock'. It was increasingly popular to read novels for the sensations produced in the readers.<sup>13</sup> Hardy's fiction, which Richard Nemesvari extensively argues are valuable works of sensational and melodramatic fiction, certainly utilises the emotional effects literary narratives can thrust upon the reader.<sup>14</sup> The suspension of 'governing will' can allow room for other emotions to motivate responses such as sympathy. Indeed, Nemesvari states how it was not uncommon for sensational novels to have a social agenda, such as by producing the feeling of anger in the reader towards neglected poverty. In the scene of Fanny suffering journey, Nemesvari writes that 'Hardy's fusion of sensationalism and melodrama here provides an almost archetypal example of how sensation fiction works to embody abstract issues of female oppression in order to generate an emotive response'.<sup>15</sup>

In order to make this argument that the physicality of Fanny provokes a bodily emotional response in readers which leads to their sympathy for the fallen woman, this chapter focuses on four vital scenes which display Hardy's technique of narrative sympathy and the ways in which the text takes the reader into viewing the narrative world from a very different perspective than he or she has. First, it will be shown how the novel, through character conversations, minimalises the impact of Fanny, making her less memorable. Despite the amount of information we can gather about Fanny

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<sup>12</sup> Vanessa L. Ryan, *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (John Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ryan, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Nemesvari, p. 10.



scattered among various scenes, the way in which it is told diminishes her story. Upon understanding how the text makes Fanny 'incidental', we will then analyse Hardy's impressionistic description of Fanny, often portraying her in the shadows or as a blurred figure. In the scene of Fanny's first appearance and her meeting with Gabriel Oak, Fanny is kept in the shadows as a mysterious figure, yet her physical presence is enough to arouse Gabriel's sympathies. When Fanny visits Troy's barracks in the snow, they are again portrayed as a visually odd combination of objectification. Similar impressionistic technique is used in Fanny's final journey to Casterbridge. In the culmination of drama for the fallen woman, we see how Hardy's impressionist portrayal, also mixed with delayed decoding, refreshes the reader's point of view. The narrative voice is emotionally distanced so that the reader's view is not distorted by moral judgement; instead, the physicality of the character's experience is enhanced for the reader. Inevitably, from this objective style of representation, the narrator's distance can be read as cold and unsympathetic. However, we will explore how the narrator's distance can be a technique for eliciting the reader's sympathy, in a paradoxical way. We will analyse the scene of Fanny's missed wedding ceremony, and Hardy's focus on the clock in the church. The personification of the quarter jack is eerie and sinister, working in two ways: to reflect the congregation's uneasy feelings about the missing bride, as well as to dominate those uneasy feelings in the reader. I argue that in the personification of the jack accentuates the unsympathetic presence of the mechanical object, yet in doing so, the reader becomes more aware of their own sympathetic feelings towards Fanny and her tragic mistake.

Lastly, we will examine the scene of Fanny in the coffin with her baby. Hardy's use of metaphors and allusions to describe the physicality of the corpses are not what we might expect from a text which sympathises with the fallen woman. Instead, the reader's emotions are channelled into feelings of repulsion. However, the argument established on Hardy's impressionistic way of seeing will hopefully guide our reading of the scene in understanding that our instinctive response of repulsion is different from the repulsion one might feel towards others who have broken social codes. It is a feeling of repulsion that is free from cultural and moral prejudice. Hardy's style of writing sympathetically for the fallen woman uses our physical instincts to feel emotion, as a way to break through the wall of culturally biased emotions built on judgement and prejudices.

Although there is not so much description of Fanny, or her inner voice and perceptions, and she is for the many months absent from the novel, we nevertheless feel this 'full force' in her characterisation. When we attend carefully to the margins of Hardy's text, Fanny emerges as the hidden centre of the reader's sympathy – an effect achieved through Hardy's skilful utilization of various narrative techniques to direct the implied reader's sympathy towards the fallen woman character.

### **The Centrality and Decentrality of Fanny**

Hardy's investment in the character Fanny is made apparent in his revisions for the theatrical adaptation of the novel. In 1880, Hardy worked with J. Comyns Carr, a critic and novice dramatist, to adapt *Far from the Madding Crowd* into a play called *The Mistress of the Farm*. As Rosalyn Gregory has shown, a considerable amount of the changes that were made were around the plot line of Fanny.<sup>16</sup> For example, Boldwood was cut from the story and Troy's murderer was replaced by a new character, Fanny's half-crazed brother Will, who killed Troy in revenge of his sister. Carr suggested that Fanny's death should be suicide by drowning, which troubled Hardy who did not feel comfortable with the changes.<sup>17</sup> Gregory writes, 'Carr's failure to preserve anything of the novel casts aside Hardy's investment in Fanny's plight'.<sup>18</sup> Hardy's 'investment' in Fanny, Gregory argues, provides insight into Fanny's consciousness, and is what makes the novel difficult to adapt onto stage. Gregory explains:

Fanny's journey towards the Casterbridge workhouse is untranslatable in theatrical terms because the narrative inhabits Fanny's consciousness. Such interior is a deliberately sprung shock; Fanny has previously been little more than a name on people's lips.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Nemesvari, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Rosalyn Gregory, 'Far from the Madding Crowd and the Dissipation of Dramatic Potential', *The Thomas Hardy Society Journal*, 25 (2009), 25–47.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory, p. 29.

The process of adapting the novel for the stage and the barriers Hardy and Carr had to overcome in relation to the character of Fanny, thus provides some evidence of the ‘full force’ with which Hardy breathed life into his fictional character.

However, an initial reading of the novel may not suggest Fanny as a fully described character. It is only when one looks closely at the scenes that one can gather background information about her before she disappears. It is interesting to see how much information about Fanny is scattered in the novel, but how it is easily missed due to it being presented in an off-hand, marginal way. Take the first mention of her by Susan Tall’s husband, who returns with this news:

‘Fanny Robin – Miss Everdene’s youngest servant can’t be found [. . .] They wouldn’t be so concerned if she hadn’t been noticed in such low spirits these last few days, and Maryann d’t think the beginning of a crowner’s inquest has happened to the poor girl!’ (*Far* 70)

That Fanny’s disappearance is generally not something to be ‘so concerned’ about, shows Fanny’s lack of importance, although people do care enough about her to have noticed that Fanny had not been herself recently. Yet the way the information is presented alongside ‘the trouble about the bailey’ suggests again that Fanny’s wellbeing is not as of interest as the scandal concerning her (*Far* 70). The general assumption is that Fanny has run away with a young man, and the fact that Bathsheba wishes the search parties to go out quietly, suggests the tinges of shame and scandal already involved.<sup>20</sup> When Mr Boldwood also comes to Bathsheba’s house to inquire about Fanny we learn that Fanny was without friends during her childhood, that Boldwood took her in and sent her to school, and that he was the reason she found a job with Bathsheba’s uncle (76). This is more information on Fanny, which gives us a deeper understanding of her situation and should result in more sympathy. However, this information is half-hidden by Bathsheba’s little drama of having a respectable man come knocking while she is in the midst of dusting bottles. Again in this scene, as it was earlier, news about Fanny is juxtaposed with something else – whether it be the bailiff’s theft or Bathsheba’s girlish fit – and both times Fanny is handled with the lesser interest to the implied reader.

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<sup>20</sup> Bathsheba addresses her workers: ‘To-morrow morning I wish two or three of you to make enquires in the villages round if they have seen such a person as Fanny Robin. Do it quietly; there is not reason for alarm as yet. She must have left whilst we were all at the fire’ (*Far* 71).

Thus the text is seen to deliberately make Fanny incidental. Her story is there, but she is pushed aside as insignificant in relation to the concerns of the main characters. However, the text does not marginalise Fanny without the awareness that society and people marginalise and exclude the fallen woman from their daily narratives. In Chapter 39, when Troy and Bathsheba see Fanny, Bathsheba is concerned for her state of poverty and weak health, but does not recognise Fanny as her missing servant. Troy keeps his wife away from her, and denies he knows the woman.

‘Who is she?’

He suddenly seemed to think that frankness would benefit neither of the women.

‘Nothing to either of us,’ he said. ‘I know her by sight.’

‘What is her name?’

‘How should I know her name?’ (*Far* 257)

Fanny is a minor character, but it is the other characters themselves who shun her, stop thinking about her, and do not name her. Hardy writes a Wessex society which marginalises the fallen women, and instead of championing the forgotten woman as a central heroine, he presents her in her marginalised state even in the narrator’s eyes. However, working within those constraints, Hardy portrays her with an energy which insists that readers respond to Fanny and have sympathy for the fallen woman.

### **Connecting with the Stranger**

The first appearance of Fanny is significant, because of its briefness. Hardy presents a way of seeing the other sympathetically despite lack of clear perception and intimate knowledge. Gabriel only greets Fanny as a stranger, but in the brief moment, Hardy writes in a deeply powerful sympathy. Because the text does not allow the reader to access in Fanny’s inner mind, the external description of the environment is the key to the sympathy which Hardy writes into the scene. External observation may give the impression of being a distanced narrator, but as Hardy wrote in ‘The Profitable Reading of Fiction’ (1888), ‘[t]ruly has it been observed that “the eyes sees that which

brings with it the meaning of seeing”<sup>21</sup>. In other words, seeing is never an isolated and objective activity of the eyes. What is perceived is processed through the viewer’s mind, with its experiences, values and culture, and meaning is brought into what is seen. This holds substantial meaning to this study, as we consider how the way Fanny is shown gives insight into the narrator’s sympathetic portrayal for her.

Hardy’s style of writing exhibits his interest in visual perception and the ways of seeing.<sup>22</sup> Looking at the opening scene of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, much of the presentation of Bathsheba is shown through the eyes of Gabriel, with added emphasis on words such as ‘beheld the sight’, ‘gazed’, ‘surveyed’, ‘looked’, ‘observed’ (*Far* 11–2). Bathsheba is presented in the framework of Gabriel’s sight, and from what he observed, Gabriel judges: ‘But she has her faults [. . .] Vanity’ (13).

In contrast to the rather straightforward opinion that Gabriel forms through his observation of Bathsheba, the rest of the novel shows how seeing and understanding are filled with misperception, misunderstanding, and different, even conflicting ways of seeing. For example, many of our main characters choose actions depending on what they see, but on many of those occasions the characters are blinded by love or cannot see clearly. Even Gabriel initial perception of Bathsheba is not complete. As Stephen Regan states, ‘[w]hat Gabriel infers from the picture he has observed is “Vanity” (p. 12) but this is only one perspective among many possibilities, and what Hardy’s novel repeatedly suggests is the fallible, tentative nature of human perception’.<sup>23</sup> A substantial number of major events happen at night, when light is scarce and the characters’ vision is physically blocked; such scenes include Boldwood looking at the valentine card on his mantle piece, and Bathsheba’s first encounter with Troy. Regan continues, ‘[s]o many crucial scenes, including decisive moments of judgment and confrontation, take place at night or in the half-light, when clear vision is difficult to obtain’.<sup>24</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Fanny Robin should make her first appearance in the dark, and it should alert us that Hardy intends to make a statement about the implied reader’s prejudice towards the fallen woman. A young woman travelling

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘The Profitable Reading of Fiction’, *Forum* (Mar. 1888), 57–70, in *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings*, ed. by Harold Orel (Macmillan, 1966) pp. 110–25 (p. 125).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Gregory, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford University Press, 1986); Stephen Regan, ‘The Darkening Pastoral: Under the Greenwood Tree and Far from the Madding Crowd’, in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Keith Wilson (Blackwell, 2009), pp. 241–53.

<sup>24</sup> Regan, ‘The Darkening Pastoral’, p. 249.

alone would have likely raised the suspicions;<sup>25</sup> Fanny notices Gabriel's gaze on her bundle and uncomfortably asks him to keep her secret. However, far from passing moral judgment on her, Gabriel, the narrator, and thus the reader seems to have clarity in terms of understanding her need for help. Hardy manoeuvres around the problem of knowing very little about Fanny, by showing how adequate light is not required for Oak to recognise Fanny's tragedy. In the night gloom, Oak's hand brushes upon Fanny's hand while handing her a shilling:

In feeling for each other's palm in the gloom before the money could be passed, a minute incident occurred which told much. Gabriel's fingers alighted on the young woman's wrist. It was beating with *a throb of tragic intensity*. He had frequently felt the same quick, hard beat in the femoral artery of his lambs when overdriven. It suggested a consumption too great of a vitality which, to judge from her figure and stature, was already too little. (*Far* 54)

Gabriel Oak exemplifies the ability to sympathise without close understanding of the other's circumstances. He does not know Fanny, who she is, where she is coming from and where she is going. Yet in that brief encounter, 'he had felt himself in the penumbra of a very deep sadness when touching that slight and fragile creature' (*Far* 55).<sup>26</sup> The two are in physical proximity to each other, so close that they touch, and Oak catches her shivering in the dark. This intimacy shares a similarity with *Adam Bede* discussed in the previous chapter, when during Hetty's trial, proximity – 'those who were near her saw her trembling' (*Adam* 482) – is a key factor of sympathy towards her. The understanding that comes with simply being right beside a person, shakes off the rational thoughts and opinions one may have already formed against the other. When one is close by, the response becomes instinctive and without forethought.

More than Eliot, however, Hardy emphasises the effect of instinctive sympathy results in the character's reflection and delay of moral judgement: afterwards, Gabriel 'remained musing and said nothing for he was in doubt' (*Far* 83). Unlike his earlier opinion of Bathsheba's vanity, which may be accurate but is not her full personality, Gabriel here is undecided about his thoughts of Fanny. Being 'in

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<sup>25</sup> In *Adam Bede*, it is observed that Hetty does not wear a ring (*Adam* 376).

<sup>26</sup> For a similar opinion on the text's sympathy for Fanny despite the briefness of her appearance, see Regan, 'The Darkening Pastoral', p. 249.

doubt' implies the absence of Gabriel's judgement, and in this case it opens up space for his sympathy. Lawrence Jones compares and contrasts Fanny and Hetty, and finds that Eliot remains at heart, uncompromisingly judgmental towards her characters. In the end, Hetty Sorrell is 'judged as an egoist'. On the other hand, '[t]he pathos of Fanny is quite a simple effect compared to that. A much slenderer character, she is presented chiefly as a victim, the object of our sympathy rather than of our judgment'.<sup>27</sup> Sympathy is a 'simple effect', compared to that of judgment. It is insightful that Jones calls Fanny the 'much slenderer character', thus linking the simplicity of sympathetic pathos with the simplicity of Hardy's representation of her as a victim.

Minimal insight of textual information of a character and identification grounded only in brief narrative attention and a small number of episodes can still result in sympathy for the other, which Hardy utilises for representing Fanny. Suzanne Keen asserts that 'character identification and empathy felt for fictional characters requires certain traits (such as a name, a recognizable situation, and at least implicit feelings) but dispenses with other requirements associated with realistic representation', but '*may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization*'.<sup>28</sup> In this example Keen primarily refers to the ways in which children may recognise and empathise with a character by just having the character named.<sup>29</sup> In Keen's study, it works with well-known and well-loved characters, but it may be applied widely to more types of characters, including socially misunderstood and alienated individuals.<sup>30</sup> Fanny and Gabriel initially open up to each other by something as basic as hearing each other's voice: Fanny's dulcet tone and Gabriel's cheerfulness ('She seemed to be won by Gabriel's heartiness, as Gabriel had been won by her modulations', *Far* 53). Additionally, Fanny carries certain traits which are easily identifiable: lonely, lost, young, small, fragile, delicate, gentle, in need. Throughout *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy experiments in taking away even the 'minimal elements of identity' of Fanny, and yet how he can create sympathy for her.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Jones, 'George Eliot and Pastoral Tragicomedy in Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd"', *Studies in Philology*, 77.4 (1980), 402–25 (424).

<sup>28</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 68, italics in the original.

<sup>29</sup> Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> To also explain the context of this statement, Keen discusses this unexpected feature of empathy in her discussion of the reader's empathy. I acknowledge that I am currently discussing Gabriel's sympathy for Fanny, but our discussion inevitably includes what the reader feels for the character Fanny.

One of the ways Gabriel is able to connect with Fanny is through his experience of caring for sheep. To look again at the passage quoted above, we note that Gabriel instantly recognises the pulse in Fanny's wrist as that he has felt many times in overdriven sheep. 'Gabriel's fingers alighted on the young woman's wrist. It was beating with a throb of tragic intensity. He had frequently felt the same quick, hard beat in the femoral artery of his lambs when overdriven' (*Far* 54). Ivan Kreilkamp argues that Hardy's sympathy involves the act of 'creaturing' the other; seeing Fanny as a fragile creature breaks down social biases, and enables us to reach out instinctively.<sup>31</sup> Kreilkamp writes:

Sympathy, it is implied, requires a capacity for tactile receptivity to the "throb[bing]" organic life of others – to bodies that, whatever species they may be, share many of the same physiological responses and processes. This is a key idea for Hardy, that the quality of sympathy is most directly manifested in care for and attention to vulnerable bodies, which may or may not be human ones. When Hardy describes Fanny Robin as a "slight and fragile creature," he is in a sense "creaturing" the human, situating the human subject in a broader category of animality.<sup>32</sup>

Animal suffering is a repeated motif in Hardy's novels. We remember the bleeding pheasants which Tess puts out of their misery, and the starving birds which young Jude feeds.<sup>33</sup> In both these examples, the character's sympathy for the animals channels the reader's sympathy towards the characters who seem to share a similar fate. When Fanny cannot make her journey any longer, she is helped by a dog, who supports her for the rest of the way, only to be turned away at the door of the workhouse. In *Adam Bede* also, Hetty sees a trembling spaniel sitting on the wagon and feels 'fellowship with' the 'helpless timid creature' (*Adam* 335). In all these cases, helpless animals are used because they are easy to identify and sympathise with. Hardy, as with Eliot, evokes the apparently universal human natural instinct of caring for small, helpless creatures in order to try to evoke sympathy in the reader for the fallen woman.

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<sup>31</sup> Ivan Kreilkamp, 'Pitying the Sheep in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.3 (2009), 474–81 (477).

<sup>32</sup> Kreilkamp, p. 477.

<sup>33</sup> *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. by Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 298; *Jude the Obscure*, ed. by Patricia Ingham, Revised ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.



Hardy goes a step further in widening the reader's sympathy outside of the text. By minimalising the particulars of Fanny, he represents her as an 'everywoman'. For the entire chapter of Fanny's struggle to make it to the Casterbridge union workhouse, her name is never once mentioned; she is referred to as 'the woman', 'the crouching woman', 'the pedestrian', 'the wayfayer', 'the girl' (*Far* 259), 'the sick and weary woman', 'the suffering woman', 'the prostrate figure', 'the overcome traveller', and 'the small and supple one' (263). The sheer variety of references to Fanny gives the impression that the narrator is trying all but to use Fanny's name, and the style can be seen to keep the reader at a distance from her. The anonymity of the passage invites the reader to only observe without an immediate entering into of the mind of Fanny. At the same time, the anonymity accentuates the feeling of isolation and loneliness, as well as by presenting Fanny as an indistinguishable figure. Yet she is clearly identifiable as the fallen woman – a literary type which readers can easily recognise as a figure in society who is in need of help. In this respect, the sentiments which are produced in the reader do not stop at Fanny. If she were a character whose presence dominated the imagination of the reader as an individual person, their sympathy for her would be directed to her only. If they met a second woman, they would have to build up their knowledge and intimacy with her anew. However, Fanny's *universal* identity allows the reader's sympathy to extend to all women whom she represents, to more easily shift the knowledge they have to apply to others. We need to be aware when this becomes a stereotyping of others, but Hardy's example of Gabriel's care for sheep suggests that sympathy works not in putting people in labelled boxes, but un-labelling them by showing that on a fundamental level we are all fellow animals, thus helping us be receptive to our humane animal instincts, our instinctive urge to help those in need.

### **Impressions and Delayed Judgement**

Returning to Hardy's statement of seeing bringing meaning, let us consider how in particular, Hardy's text directs the reader to perceive Fanny through delayed meaning. While we have seen her represented as an everywoman who is able to be a type for many women of her circumstance, Hardy also writes passages of her being nothing but a 'spot' in the snow. In Chapter 11, Hardy leaves the familiarity of Gabriel and

Bathsheba, to describe a new setting. As an observer in an unfamiliar place, the narrator is attentive to the 'characteristics' and 'features' of the scene, such as how the signs of winter have become unmistakable when snow falls. This scene takes place in the dark when sight is obscured by the night, and the narrator and the 'close observer' must look carefully to distinguish that there is an approaching 'form' who appears to be a human: 'Not long after a form moved by the brink of the river. By its outline upon the colourless background, a close observer might have seen that it was small. This was all that was positively discoverable, though it seemed human' (*Far* 86). Passages such as this are examples of the narrator's impressionistic vision of events; he does not immediately describe what actually is, but what it appears to be at each given moment: 'Here the spot stopped, and dwindled smaller. The figure was stooping' (*Far* 86). The technique used here might remind us of Ian Watt's term 'delayed decoding' which he coined to describe a scene in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) when the protagonist does not immediately realise that the 'sticks' flying through the air are arrows being shot at the party.<sup>34</sup> Watt defines delayed decoding as a

narrative technique which was the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly. Conrad presented the protagonist's immediate sensations, and thus made the reader aware of the gap between impression and understanding: the delay in bridging the gap enacts the disjunction between the event and the observer's trailing understanding of it.<sup>35</sup>

Hardy also illustrates the disjunction between what Fanny and Troy look like to the narrator (snow and a wall talking to each other) and who they actually are (a young woman and man). However, while Watt's definition emphasises the moment-by-moment portrayal of cognitive process, convincingly mimicking how the narrator's cognition eventually catches up with what his eyes are seeing, in Hardy's use the narrator too heavily insists on referring to the two as inanimate objects even after he recognises Fanny and Troy. Thus the instances "'Is it Sergeant Troy?" said the blurred spot in the snow, tremulously' and "'Fanny!" said the wall, in utter astonishment' almost invites a sense of childishness or the ludicrous (*Far* 87). There

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<sup>34</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp. 177–78.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Watt, pp. 176–77.

is evidence in the statement ‘This person was so much like a mere shade upon the earth, and the other speaker so much a part of the building that one would have said the wall was holding a conversation with the snow’, that the narrator is now aware of what he is seeing, that his understanding has caught up with his impression (87). And yet, he still refers to Fanny and Troy as a spot and a wall, respectively. Rather than ‘delayed decoding’, in this passage we sense that the narrator ‘refuses decoding’. The extremity of the narrator to delay to his and therefore the reader’s perception draws attention to the fact of the text’s insistence to view the scene in a way which not only delays the process of receiving information, but also refuses it. The way of seeing in this passage hinders the implied reader’s ability to process information and to judge according to it. This style of writing is crucial to understand the sentence to which it leads up to, the statement alluding to the ‘fall’ of Fanny: ‘There was something in the woman’s tone which is not that of the wife, and there was a manner in the man which is rarely a husband’s’ (*Far* 87). While the narrator observes that Fanny and Troy are not married, the syntax of ‘[t]here was something [. . .] which is not that’, combined with the narrator’s delayed processing of visual information, conveys a sense that the narrator remains open-minded about his observations rather than passing comment or judgement onto the characters.

### **The Unsympathetic Mechanic**

Turning to the key episode of Fanny’s missed wedding ceremony, we will see that Hardy’s vision of sympathy is one that is organic and develops from people’s natural instincts, which he believes exists in our hearts and flesh. We have seen how he therefore alludes to small animals and creatures to appeal to our sympathies and focuses on physical perceptions over cultural references and logical debate. In contrast to the warm feeling of people connecting in sympathy, Hardy also portrays the non-sympathetic presence of automatons, which is embodied in the church clock. The absence of sympathy in the mechanical enhances the reader’s awareness of their own feelings. Fanny’s misfortune hinges on her mistake of going to the wrong church for her wedding ceremony; it is a comical situation, but the consequences are severe. Hardy’s depiction of this scene hinges on the balance between irony and tragedy, and

it is because of that unstable perspective the reader is given a double vision of sympathy and apathy. In the absence of warmth and care, one becomes more acutely aware that they are emotionally gripped by the narrative, and that those emotions are acts of concern for Troy and Fanny's happiness.

The point of view in the wedding scene is a peculiar one, focalising not on the characters getting married but the unnamed crowd who happened to observe the event. There is a small congregation about to disperse after the service, but seeing a soldier striding up the aisle and being led up the chancel steps, they recognise that a wedding is about to take place and stay to witness the events. The scene is once again framed by the outsider's perspective, and the narrative is sensitive to the visual evidence of Troy's impatience: 'A young cavalry soldier in a red uniform bearing the three chevrons of a sergeant upon his sleeve, strode up the aisle with an embarrassment marked by the intense vigour of his step, and by the determination upon his face to show none' (*Far* 115).<sup>36</sup>

As they wait for the bride to show up, the clock strikes half past eleven and 'some of the young ones turned their heads' (*Far* 115). The people's attention being diverted thus, the narrator goes on to describe the 'grotesque clockwork' in detail. The church clock serves several functions in the narrative, such as illustrating the passing of time, and increasing tension within the sanctuary. Hardy gives a description of an inanimate object to capture the emotions of the waiting characters in a way that appeals to the sensual. The movements of the jack, its 'egress', 'blows' and 'retreat', are contrasted to the stillness of the church; the clock, being a mere object, has no regard to the congregation's distress, and goes on being 'fussy' and 'painfully abrupt' by ringing its bell every fifteen minutes. These adjectives which personify the quarter jack show how the perspective of narration is from a specific emotional viewer: the agitated church goes and Troy. When the jack strikes next, it is described that '[o]ne could almost be positive that there was a malicious leer upon the hideous creature's face, and a mischievous delight in its twitchings' (*Far* 116). The clock is distorted by the tension and emotions of those hearing the clock. But simultaneously, the sinister clock and the dull silence that follows have their effect on the people; it 'impresses' the women and they do not giggle; those that do 'innocently enough' feel its 'strange

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<sup>36</sup> This statement is in an odd position in whether a narrator 'tells or shows', because though the narrator *tells* the reader that Troy is embarrassed, but at the same time it is not by telling us his thoughts, but in demonstrating his gait and facial expression.

weird affect' (116). Thus the personification of the clock goes both ways; the inanimate object personifies the characters' emotions, and the characters' emotions are checked by the personified object. The clock is perceived to be sinister because of its mechanical and unsympathetic demeanour towards the situation. When Fanny finally arrives and explains she had confused the two churches, it is too late, and she is left by Troy who throws the last words of 'light irony' at her (117). The mix-up has the potential to be comical, yet the unsettling image of the clock determines the mood of how the scene should be read. Because of the clock's lack of humane sympathy, readers are more aware that they identify with Fanny's expression of 'terror' at how the mistake has cost her; they can recognise that it is not 'incidental' despite the external perspective of random witnesses and its potentiality to become a humorous anecdote. The reader's emotions are involved in this reading; unsettled by the lack of emotion in the quarter jack, readers are drawn into feeling sympathy for Fanny.

### **Sensitivity to Organic Emotions**

Hardy relies on his reader's natural abilities to respond emotionally to physical experiences to challenge the reader to sympathise with the fallen woman. Reading a novel on the fallen woman would provoke a conservative reader into having a strong emotional reaction; the fact that Hardy had to tread gingerly on sensitive issues to avoid censorship shows this. It was not that conservative middle-class readers were incapable of responding emotionally to texts; the issue lay in the fact that prejudices led readers to feel emotions which did not lead to sympathy for the fallen woman. Thus the task which Hardy faced was not only to evoke emotions in the reader, but also to evoke emotions which could override culturally embedded opinions which regarded the fallen woman as abhorrent and not deserving of sympathy.

Hardy jolts the reader out of their way of relating which has been normalised, and estranges them to confront new ways of feeling. By writing descriptions which appeal to the readers' senses, he heightens their sensitivity to feelings such as disgust and shock, which come from a bodily reaction rather than from morals and values which are culturally and artificially embedded. The prime example is Hardy's description of Fanny and her baby in the coffin:

[. . .] a miniature wrapping of white linen – with a face so delicately small in contour and substance that its cheeks and the plump backs of its little fists irresistibly reminded [Bathsheba], excited as she was, of the soft convexity of mushrooms on a dewy morning. (*Far* 289)

The description is not only visual in taking up the size and shape of the baby (its small face and little fists), but conveys the texture of the baby's soft and plump skin. The grotesque combination of a dead baby and wet mushrooms creates an unsettling sense of the body as merely decaying organic matter. The passage quoted above was not included in the *Cornhill* serialisation, because the editor Leslie Stephen requested Hardy to leave it out, to treat Fanny's seduction 'in a gingerly fashion'.<sup>37</sup> Hardy still being early in his career as a writer, showed willingness to follow Stephen's advice.<sup>38</sup> Several recent critics have agreed that, while such censorship is regrettable not all of Stephen's omissions necessarily harmed Hardy's writing. Michael Millgate writes, 'there was sufficient aesthetic grounds for omitting the baby'.<sup>39</sup> Mark Ford also states, 'the case can also be plausibly advanced that Stephen's editing improved the novel, and that even those cuts that were made – like that of the description of the corpse of Fanny Robin's baby beside its dead mother in the coffin – to ward off the "Grundian cloud" (L 101), can be justified aesthetically'.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Leslie Stephen preferred to leave the description out strongly suggests that Victorians would have found it disagreeable to their taste. Even now, modern readers may still find it disturbing and question its acceptability. Millgate and Ford above both welcome the deletions on 'aesthetic' grounds, but it is more to say that Hardy's representation goes against decorum and what is acceptable and expected in novel presentations. We are shaken by this image of a child's hands eerily portrayed as mushrooms on a dewy morning. As Stephen Regan states, 'the episode also contains stylistic flourishes which even now seem calculatedly perverse, as if challenging conventional moral and aesthetic ideals though a triumphant display of bad taste'.<sup>41</sup> Hardy had a different agenda when it came to morality; rather than give

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Watt, pp. 177–76.

<sup>38</sup> Millgate, p. 147; Mark Ford, *Thomas Hardy: Half A Londoner* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 156; Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Macmillan, 1984), p. 101; *The Life of Thomas Hardy* Vol. 1, ed. Florence Emily Hardy (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.130.

<sup>39</sup> Millgate, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> Ford, p. 156.

<sup>41</sup> Regan, 'Darkling Pastoral', p. 252.

readers what they want and expect, his text arouses strong, gut-wrenching emotions which are beyond one's rational control. These emotions were the way into viewing the fallen woman with eyes which are receptive and open-minded.

Hardy's so-called 'bad taste' plays a curious part in unsettling readers into being receptive of emotions one might morally censor. Bathsheba, when, with eager eyes, peers into the coffin dreading what she will find inside, and does discover the child, despite her excitement, is 'irresistibly reminded' of mushrooms by the baby's small, plump fists (*Far* 289). The word 'irresistibly' exemplifies the force with which her instinctive perception overrides her other feelings such as agitation over her marriage with Troy, and her jealousy of another woman in her husband's life. The narrator tries, by inserting a few lines of Charles Lamb's poem, 'On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born', to rationalise and distance himself from the scene. The poem can also be an attempt to universalise the death of illegitimate children. But the image of the infant to follow is so jarring that it cannot be anything but Bathsheba's raw and unfiltered impression.

The eerie substance of the mushroom also brings out Hardy's interest in decadent writing.<sup>42</sup> The decay of nature is heavily linked with the death of Fanny and her child. It associates their death with Nature's cruel process of consuming life in spite of its fertility. Although Nature's decay is an organic form, its inevitability takes on an uncaring and unsympathetic automaton, not unlike that which we saw in Hardy's representation of the quarter jack. The mechanic quality of nature raises the reader's sensitivity to the absence of care and sympathy.<sup>43</sup> And it is with that fresh, unabated responsiveness that the narrator carries on to view and describe the mother, Fanny. Framed in golden hair, Fanny appears 'rounder in feature and much younger', her hands 'acquired a preternatural refinement', 'marvellous hands and fingers which must have served as originals to Bellini' (289). In *Life and Work*, Hardy notes from January 1886 that 'my art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by

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<sup>42</sup> For discussion on decadence and Hardy, see Ford, p. 156. However, while Charles Bernheimer describes Hardy the decadent as 'find[ing] comfort in the opportunity to "stamp out" the Female', I argue that Hardy's use of decadence provokes the outcry of the reader at the injustices of natural and social law. See Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin De Siècle in Europe*, ed. by T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Lowe writes of a similar absence of sympathy in *Tess* stimulating the 'imaginative possibility' of sympathy in the reader: 'This movement of indulgence, withdrawal, and continued, silent enactment of the imaginative possibility of an all-embracing sympathetic attention pulses through the novel'. See Brigid Lowe, 'Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)', *Victorian Review*, 35.1 (2009), 56–60 (59).

Crivelli, Bellini, &c. so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible'.<sup>44</sup> True to his claim, Hardy describes Fanny with a force which looks beyond the social prejudices against fallen women. The passage continues:

The youth and fairness of both the silent ones *withdrew from the scene all association of a repulsive kind – even every unpleasant ray*. The mother had been no further advanced in womanliness than had the infant in childhood; they both had stood upon the threshold of a new stage of existence, and had vanished before they could well be defined as examples of that state. They struck upon the sense in the aspect of incipiency, not in that of decadence. They seemed failures in creating, by nature interesting, rather than instances of dissolution, by nature frightful. (*Far* 289, emphasis mine)

This is a deeply singular perception of Fanny and her baby, one that deliberately views them as 'withdr[awn] from [. . .] all association of a repulsive kind', standing upon on 'a new stage of existence'. This is Hardy presenting his readers with a view of Fanny in her 'incipiency', without her history, scandal, shame, or condemnation. Just a raw, vivid, and intuitive perception of her. Just as Bathsheba weeps 'tears of a complicated origin, of a nature indescribable, almost indefinable except as other than those of simple sorrow', the reader is also incited to respond to Fanny's tragic death with plain and bare feelings (290).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion we have seen the ways in which *Far from the Madding Crowd* shows sympathy for Fanny, despite a distanced style of writing, both in the briefness of her appearances and the minimal textual information for identification with the character. This is radical because Hardy demonstrates how we can sympathise with others despite there being a distance between us. He shows how physical contact and responding instinctively can melt away prejudice and biases. Such an attitude is summed up in the novel as follows:

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Michael Millgate (Macmillan, 1984) p. 183.



Oak showed a mastery of every turn and look he gave – among the multitude of interests by which he was rounded those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst. (*Far* 287)

Oak's altruism of caring for others is represented in his way of seeing, by 'every turn and look he gave'. He has mastered the way of looking upon the horizon and meditating that what is important in his eyes may differ from those around him. Whilst he sets aside his own standpoint, his fellow feeling is procured through an imaginative and meditative process, of seeing beyond his personal standpoint to vantage points that are not his own.

As a final note, I emphasise how reading a deep and underlining sympathy for Fanny changes the way we understand *Far from the Madding Crowd* as a whole. Unlike Hardy's subsequent fallen woman novel, *Tess*, Fanny's name is not in the title.<sup>45</sup> *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a line taken from Thomas Gray's poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. But in the novel, who is the character who for eight months walked far away from the rest of the action, and in the end is buried in Weatherbury churchyard? Perhaps the title can be attributed to the character with whom lies the most narrative distance, but she is, in fact, not to be forgotten and lies central in the novel's sympathetic concern.

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<sup>45</sup> When Leslie Stephen first approached Hardy for a story, Hardy 'had thought of making it a pastoral tale with the title of *Far from the Madding Crowd* – and that the chief characters would probably be a young woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant of cavalry. That was all he had done.' (*The Life of Thomas Hardy* Vol. 1, ed. by Florence Hardy, p. 125)

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Plurality of Purity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles***

'Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a fieldwoman pure and simple' (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*)

#### **Introduction**

In contrary to Fanny in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and the argument previously made that the reader's understanding for the fallen woman is possible with minimal textual representation, in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) we find that our understanding of the fallen woman, despite the fullness of her representation, is deliberately made complicated and difficult. Delayed judgement is, again, the key to sympathy. Since this study's first chapter on Gaskell's *Ruth*, for the first time we again look at a novel in which the fallen woman is the central character, not just a minor character. Thus *Ruth* and *Tess* make good material for comparison, but in doing so, it is not the similarities, but the differences, which come to mind. The most striking and fundamental difference is how Hardy's novel provocatively presents the question, what does it mean to be a 'pure' woman? Gaskell proves that Ruth is 'pure' by repeatedly demonstrating her ignorance, as well as her passive sexuality, which goes well with the ideal woman figure of Victorian morals. On the other hand, it

comes as some surprise and wonder that Hardy's text invites open interpretations of Tess's agency in her sexuality.

These open interpretations of Tess's sexuality can be explained in part by the historical context in which the novel was written. Between the publication of Gaskell and Hardy's novels lies forty years, during which the discussion of female sexuality changed, as we have seen in the representation of the fallen woman in Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Also by the 1890s, female sexuality was no longer a taboo but had entered the political debate, reaching a substantial victory in the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886.<sup>1</sup> The law scapegoated women, forcing them to undergo medical examination on suspicion of prostitution. Josephine Butler (1828–1906), who dedicated the 1870s to running campaigns against it,<sup>2</sup> was in her mid-twenties when *Ruth* was published. Butler was then the wife of a lecturer in Oxford, and she records an uncomfortable conversation she had with unmarried dons in their response to *Ruth*; they believed the heroine was more immoral than Bellingham (the seducer and offending protagonist of the novel).<sup>3</sup> Up until the 1880s, there was a set of moral conventions about sexual purity, which Michael Mason calls 'classic moralism', which was never officially classified – in fact, sex was considered not to be a matter for inquiry, thought or discussion – yet was generally accepted by 'a amorphous middle- to upper-class male social group'.<sup>4</sup> Classic moralism endorsed the 'double standard', which allowed for the Contagious Diseases Act (first passed in 1864, then extended in 1866 and 1869). This moral ideology had some medical influences but it was largely religious modes that shaped its perception of sexual activity as 'either sinful or sacred'.<sup>5</sup> Later, women's positions were improved; such as by the Married Women's Property Act in 1882, as well as Butler's successful repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1886.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the publicity these movements gave increased the discussion around sexual issues. Hitherto, '[j]ust talking about sex was, of course, a radical and rather dangerous act, especially if undertaken in mixed-sex gatherings', Lesley Hall writes, but groups,

<sup>1</sup> For an outline of late nineteenth-century novels entering the political debate, see Penny Boumelha, 'Introduction', in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. by Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. xiii–xxvii (p. xiv–xv).

<sup>2</sup> Her account of her political activism is found in *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896)

<sup>3</sup> Josephine Butler, *Recollections of George Butler* (Arrowsmith, 1892), pp. 95–96.

<sup>4</sup> Mason in *Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (1994), qtd in Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Macmillan, 2000), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, pp. 31–32.

circles, and societies were established as places to hold such discussion in an open-ended way.<sup>7</sup> Issues around marriage, sexual pleasure<sup>8</sup> and prostitution were open to debate; hypocrisies were revealed, and moral rules questioned. It is this change of values and morals, which Hardy captures in his work, which intensifies the tragedy of his stories.

*Tess* was not radical when it was first published because of its subject: the fallen woman was a common figure in Victorian literature, and as Hardy's fellow writer Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) scorned, '[t]he situation is one which is as old as poetry'.<sup>9</sup> Neither was Hardy's concentrated and sympathetic portrayal of the fallen woman new, as we have seen in the course of this study. However, it is the nature of Hardy's sympathy which is original. The decade in which Hardy wrote *Tess*, when rigid views of women were shifting, was ripe for him to explore an open, dialogic approach to the women question which allowed him to negotiate how the fallen woman is not only a victim of rape, but also has agency in her own sexual desires; to present two contrasting moral views of the fallen woman. In general terms, the moral views of typical middle- and upper-class Victorians on female sexuality belonged to a single-minded and unified narrative: women are either angels or fallen. Hardy counteracts this view with one of his own: the novel's subtitle 'A Pure Woman' explicitly suggests a cohesive argument in defence of Tess.<sup>10</sup> However, as readers quickly find, details of the text, especially those concerning the heroine, are ambivalent, and this ambivalence has invited decades of critical debate over interpretation.

What Hardy does then is to extend the definition of female 'purity' beyond the narrow Victorian idea of sexual purity, and even suggest that her 'purity' is inseparable from her feelings of sexual desire. The purity of Tess is found in her personality, that is, the part of the representation of Tess which the text is unable to

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<sup>7</sup> Hall, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> On sexual pleasure see Ornella Moscucci, 'Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain', in *Sexualities in Victorian Britain* (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 60–78.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Oliphant, *Blackwood's Magazine*, March 1892, cli, 464–74, in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R. G. Cox (Routledge, 2003) p. 222; Jean R. Brooks also writes, 'The plot is simple and unoriginal' in *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure* (Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 233.

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the titles of the Phases outline the typical fallen woman narrative: 'The Maiden' 'Maiden No More', 'The Consequence', and so forth. Adrian Poole writes, 'This is where the notorious sub-title set readers of the time a deliberate conundrum. Tess "must" be one or the other, pure woman or prostitute' in 'Men's Words and Hardy's Women', *Essays in Criticism* 31.4 (1981) 328–45 (339).

rationalise because it is 'not merely thematic or symbolic'.<sup>11</sup> Tess's purity is found in how she feels emotions, not only of love, but also of jealousy, pride, shame, kindness, and sexual desire, and how she acts truly in response to those feelings.

In this chapter, we will consider two questions in particular. Firstly, what are the qualities of 'purity' that Hardy puts forth in *Tess*? We will explore how being 'in touch with Nature' is one aspect of purity which Hardy values, and therefore makes him a follower in the tradition of earlier Romantic poets. However, we must also consider the late nineteenth-century, post-Darwinian world, where Nature is not seen as the benevolent creation of a divine being as she was to the Romantics. This is a view point which Tess's narrator shares. The second question is, how does the narrator play a role in guiding the reader's sympathy for Tess? The narrator's interest in close empirical descriptions of the world is explicit, and that worldview heavily influences the sympathy that pervades the pages of the novel. The narrator's point of view is so distinguishable that some critics have identified the narrator as almost a character himself: Tess's third suitor.<sup>12</sup> This raises the question of how Tess is represented, and whether the only impression the reader is able to access from the novel is the impression of Tess by others. Critics, such as Linda Shires and Rebecca Mitchell, have argued that the text's meta-fictionality critiques one's ability to ever fully know the other.<sup>13</sup> However, that a character is beyond the narrator's understanding is not necessarily a negative thing; it does not signify the writer's limitations. Raymond Williams searches texts for those times when a character seems outside of the writer's comfortable scope of understanding and applauds the writer for venturing to represent life far from the familiar.<sup>14</sup> Then it is significant to what extent Tess remains a mystery to us. This is suggested in the ways critics have long debated whether what happened in the Chase was rape or seduction; the text gives a plenitude of passages of ambiguity, especially regarding Tess's sexual passion. Hardy himself wrote a letter about his anxiety in not being able to represent Tess in her fullness and

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<sup>11</sup> Dale Kramer writes, 'The point is that Tess's behaviour here is not merely thematic or symbolic, but emblematic of the impossibility of defining in a straightforward way her personality' in *Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Linda Shires, 'The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy* ed. by Dale Kramer (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 145–63 (p. 155).

<sup>13</sup> See Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (Ohio State University Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (Penguin, 1963).

what she means to him.<sup>15</sup> Tess is certainly unknowable, in a way that exceeds the previous fallen women novels we have discussed. However, that is not the end of Hardy's novel, but the means by which the reader's sympathy is extended further for the fallen woman character, that is to value her as a holistic individual, embracing her class, background and gender, both socially and biologically, and her complicated feelings (including sexual) and choices which make Tess who she is. These details do not by any means fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to uncover a full and complete picture of Tess, but they provide the means for the (morally conservative Victorian) reader to see Tess more than an ignorant victim or an unwomanly threat to society.

In order to explore the nature of Hardy's writing it is useful to borrow the Russian philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia'.<sup>16</sup> Hardy's sympathetic representation of the fallen woman is created through the text's multiple 'voices' and 'languages' (not only of the speeches of different characters but also those generated by the narrator). Such is not unique in novel writing, but I argue that Hardy in particular makes use of varied 'languages' in order to engage the reader with ethical pluralism. After all, he writes in *Tess*, 'Every village has its idiosyncrasy, its constitution, its own code of morality' (*Tess* 70),<sup>17</sup> and when Angel visits his family, his slip into Talbothay's expression – 'pretty tippie' – shocks and disgusts his narrow-minded brothers (179). The idea of plurality and diversity is popular in today's ethical philosophy (as in the work of Mark Fagiano<sup>18</sup>) but also originates as early as Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), a key intellectual figure in the development of moral sentimentalism. As Michael Frazer summarises, '[r]ather than insisting on the universal authority of a single set of mature moral sentiments, Herder argues that the reflective refinement of our moral sentiments leads us to a conception of justice that can be shared by those with otherwise divergent values and

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<sup>15</sup> Hardy to Thomas MacQuoid, 29 October 1891, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 1 ed. by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Clarendon, 1978), pp. 245–46. Hardy writes: 'I have not been able to put on paper all that she is, or was, to me.'

<sup>16</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> For this thesis, I will be using the Oxford World Classics 2002 edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, edited by Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell. All quotations from the novel will be referenced in-text, with the shortened title *Tess* and page numbers.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Fagiano, 'Pluralistic Conceptualizations of Empathy', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 30.2 (2016) 27–44.

worldviews'.<sup>19</sup> In response to the single view held by conservative readers, Hardy presents multiple and contradictory viewpoints of Tess: middle-class, working-class, religious, scientific, distanced and intimate. This leads us to the discussion of how Hardy presents narrative perspectives which explore the different and contrasting values of 'purity' depending on class standards or nature's own doing. By doing so, he expands the narrow definition of 'purity' beyond sexual morality, to Tess's embodied nature, emotional and sexual sensitivity, and human kindness.

### **The Multi- 'Languages' in *Tess*: Dialect, Discourse and Sympathy**

Narrative writing is an effective tool which Hardy uses for advancing his politics of sympathy. Bakhtin draws attention to a phenomenon in language, an existence of 'forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world'.<sup>20</sup> The forces 'impos[e] specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity – the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language'.<sup>21</sup> He sees 'language as a worldview, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life'.<sup>22</sup> The uniqueness of the novel form, however, is that multiple 'languages', that is 'world views', are able to co-exist and hold an interrelationship with each other. One obvious example is in dialogue and conversation. Each character might have a unique style of speaking, whether that be in dialect or family jargon, with its 'special vocabulary and unique accentual system'.<sup>23</sup>

It is significant that only a few pages into the novel, we are told about Tess that: 'The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school' (*Tess* 21). Tess is able to switch between her family dialect and standard English due to her schooling, which is symbolic of her separation from her mother's generation: 'Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National

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<sup>19</sup> Michael L. Frazer, 'Herder's Pluralist Sentimentalism', in *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 139–67 (p. 139).

<sup>20</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, p. 270.

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin, p. 270.

<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin, p. 271.

<sup>23</sup> Bakhtin, p. 291.

teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood' (29). Tess's modernity allows for her social mobility. By her passing between the working and middle classes, Hardy reveals the subjectivity and hypocrisy of middle-class sexual morals.

Tess's language is further diversified in the way she can take on other forms of speech. In the scene in which Tess baptises her baby, she speaks 'Sorrow, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (*Tess* 107). This language – the lexicon and the syntax – is familiar to those who have been to a Christian baptism. They are not of Tess's language, but rather the language of Christianity, specifically one that is meant for the vicar. However, Tess takes on the role of the vicar in his absence and leads her young siblings in the service. Tess 'duly' leads the Lord's Prayer, to which the children lisp in a 'thin gnat-like wail' (107). That Tess's siblings raise their voices to a 'clerk's pitch' emphasises how in the ritual, they, too, take on the language or discourse of religion. Rosemarie Morgan writes that Tess 'cannot logically fulfil both roles' of fallen woman and minister because '[t]he one invalidates the other'.<sup>24</sup> However, as Morgan rightly argues, through the paradox Hardy openly vindicates Tess by empowering her to self-cleanse her 'sin' and subverting church ritual and dogma.<sup>25</sup>

Tess's voice, nevertheless, clashes with the actual voice of the cleric. She desperately hopes that her baby born out of wedlock is equal in the eyes of God as any other. According to the liturgy, the baby is not. However, the way in which Hardy portrays the vicar being emotionally and empathetically swayed by Tess differs from his previous depiction of the artisan writing with vermilion paint: "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT" (*Tess* 91). The language here stands out from other languages because these words are physically written on the stile. The quote is taken directly from the bible (2 Peter 2:3), capitalised and punctuated, and has a glaring 'star[e]' that leaves Tess unable to respond but only to have 'her eyes fixed on the ground'. Only later, away from the man, she 'contemptuously' says: 'Pooh – I don't believe any of it!' (*Tess* 92).

In contrast, the conversation between Tess and the vicar on her baby's burial is a two-way dialogue:

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<sup>24</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, pp. 101–02.



‘I should like to ask you something, sir.’

He expressed his willingness to listen, and she told the story of the baby’s illness and the extemporized ordinance.

‘And now sir,’ she added earnestly, ‘can you tell me this – will it be just the same for him as if you had baptized him?’ (*Tess* 108).

Unlike the crude slogan, this is a two-part conversation which invites an ambiguity of responses. It is also useful to point out that following *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy again uses light to illustrate the delay of judgment: ‘In the gloom she did not mind speaking freely’, we are told (*Tess* 108). In contrast to the vermilion letters glaring in the daylight, the lack of light in Tess’s meeting with the vicar reminds us of Oak’s meeting with Fanny as we noted in the previous chapter. The light of the shadows is subtle, visually symbolising the grey areas of morality.

Tess’s request is followed by a description of the effects of Tess’s words on the cleric:

Having the natural feelings of a tradesman at finding that a job he should have been called in for had been unskillfully botched by his customers among themselves, he was disposed to say no. Yet the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses – or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism. The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man. (*Tess* 108–09)

The passage quoted above portrays the inner debate within the cleric. Words such as ‘tradesman’, ‘job’, ‘unskillfully botched’, ‘disposed’, and ‘technical’ evoke the sense of a confident professional with a long career, who knows how things are to be done, and executes his work with little sympathy for people, whom he views as his ‘customers’ rather than individual members of his community. However, the second sentence introduces a completely different set of feelings, which the narrator seems ironically to imply, are his ‘natural’ feelings, which have faded during his ten years of being a cleric. The first sentence is complex but rigidly structured; at the introduction of the second sentence, the syntax loosens up by the way the two features of Tess are listed with only a comma to separate them, rather than have an ‘and’ between them for grammatical accuracy. The rhythms of the repeated ‘g’ sounds in ‘the dignity of

the girl', and the repeated soft 's' sounds in 'strange tenderness in her voice' are almost invitingly soothing to the ear.<sup>26</sup> Therefore the narration carries the two languages or worldviews in the cleric, those of the ecclesiastical and those of the man, which is not only made apparent by the content, but also by the form of discourse.

The narration considers the vicar's point of view, such as in the excerpt above, or when the vicar 'felt himself cornered' (96). It also has its limitations of understanding him, as when the narrator says, 'How the Vicar reconciled his answer with the strict notions he supposed himself to hold on these subjects it is beyond a layman's power to tell, though not to excuse'. On one hand, the narrator may point out the hypocrisy of the vicar, but on the other, the narrator shows the emotional responsiveness the vicar has which can even win over long-established teachings. Critics such as Margaret Higonnet focus on the vicar's attempt (along with other males such as Alec and Angel) to silence Tess' female voice: 'Don't talk so rashly',<sup>27</sup> but the meaning of the vicar's sympathetic choice to bend the rules for Tess to feel at peace, though we may criticise its meagreness, is still significant. The vicar's sympathy and hypocrisy are incongruous, but they can co-exist in Hardy's text, each complicating the existence of the other, and that complicated entanglement of 'languages' is exactly what delays the reader's moral judgement of the characters. Through the vicar's inner struggles and his act of privileging the sympathetic and feeling man over the cold and judgmental 'ecclesiastic', the text's juxtaposition of different textures of language and discourse invites the reader to also recognise how Tess's purity exists outside of conventional sexual purity.

The narrator also uses varying styles of language to create the effect of multiplicity, thus making judgement of the fallen woman ambivalent. After the vicar states, 'It will be just the same', immediately a new paragraph begins with 'So the baby was carried in a small deal box [. . .]' (*Tess* 109). The conjunction 'so' indicates the degree of influence that the vicar's words had, but not with a proper conjunctive adverb, such as 'therefore', 'thus' or 'consequently', giving it a fairy tale or childlike essence, which mimics the simplicity and honesty of Tess. The sentence is also a fragment, and there is casualness in the way the narrator speaks of God's 'shabby corner' for those unwanted by society. The paragraph is multi-voiced, and we can

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<sup>26</sup> This is opposed to the variety of consonants in 'endeavour to graft technical belief'.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet, 'A Woman's Story: Tess and the Problem of Voice' in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet (University of Illinois Press, 1993). pp. 14-31(p. 18).

readily identify a tone that is concerned with details such as the cheapness of the coffin's wood and the price of the burial. The narrative voice is also descriptive in Tess' homemade items for the burial: the cross made out of two laths tied with a piece of string, the upcycled Keelwell's Marmalade jar, and plain flowers – all details that undermine the sentiment of loss and mourning. However, the sympathetic, single insertion of the adverb 'bravely' enables the reader to have double vision. These pragmatics of the burial are described with the 'eye of mere observation' which may scathingly find the situation ironical, but these humble materials can also contribute to the sincerity and solemnity with which one understands Tess's untoward situation; the details speak of them, and thus the eye is sympathetic towards Tess, by recognising her 'eye of maternal affection'. It is the co-existing, contrasting languages through which Tess is represented.

As a final note, adding plurality of Tess's purity does not simply mean that Hardy shifts his reader's attention away from Tess's sexuality to show her purity in other areas of her life, such as her hard-working labour and love of nature. Tess's purity is intertwined with her sexuality, and Hardy diversifies the way in which the implied reader sees female sexuality. Even as we speak of Tess's dialect, it is significant how her way of speaking is linked to her sexuality:

[. . .] the characteristic intonation of that dialect for this district being the voicing approximately rendered by the syllable UR, probably as rich an utterance as any to be found inhuman speech. The pouted-up deep red mouth to which this syllable was native had hardly as yet settled into its definitive shape, and her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upwards, when they closed together after a word. (*Tess* 21)

In describing the unique features of Tess's dialect, which is symbolic of the novel engaging the reader with multiple 'languages' and thus perspectives, the narrator focuses on Tess's pronunciation of 'ur' which, coincidentally or not, features prominently in Tess's family name 'Durbeyfield', as well as that of her ancestors, the 'd'Urbervilles'. Moreover, making the 'ur' sound in her dialect shapes her mouth in a pout, we are told by the narrator; this is the second time Tess's mouth is mentioned within two pages of her first appearance in the novel. Kaja Silverman writes that

Tess's mouth is the 'most privileged feature of her physical appearance',<sup>28</sup> and Adam Gussow observes that Hardy focuses on Tess's mouth like a 'disembodied vulva filmed close up'.<sup>29</sup> The fact that in the *Graphic* serial version, 'mouth' was toned down as 'cheeks'<sup>30</sup> demonstrates how Tess's mouth, the instrument of her dialect and speech, also functions as a metonymy for her sexual attractiveness, which is repeatedly noticed by Alec and Angel.<sup>31</sup> In claiming Tess's purity in plurality, Hardy points to the various aspects of Tess which make her a simple, pure woman – showing that Tess is more than her moment of 'fall'. Meanwhile, Hardy also focuses in on Tess's sexuality to the multiple perspectives on her sexual desires to further invite the reader to exercise the ethics of plurality and sympathy.

### **The Ambiguity of Tess's Sexuality as a Function of Sympathetic Representation**

Hardy's sympathetic representation for the fallen woman involves adding plural meanings to the word 'purity'. He does this through increased ambiguity and ambivalence in the way he represents Tess's victimisation and consent to Alec's sexual advances. In contrast to earlier literary presentations, most notably Gaskell's *Ruth*, in which the woman's ignorance of sexuality is emphasised as constituting her pure nature, what happened that night in the Chase remains a mystery, hidden by the fog. It is without question that Hardy could not provide more details of the incident because of censorship from his publishers, circulating libraries and readers. However, the text leaves us to speculate whether Tess gave Alec her consent or not. Firstly, Mowbray Morris, who wrote to Hardy that he was unwilling to publish *Tess* in *Macmillan's Magazine*, called it 'the girl's seduction', as did Margaret Oliphant's

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<sup>28</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *Novel*, 18.1 (1984), 5–28 (6).

<sup>29</sup> Adam Gussow, 'Dreaming Holmberry-Lipped Tess: Aboriginal Reverie and Spectatorial Desire in "Tess of the d'Urbervilles"', *Studies in the Novel*, 32.4 (2000), 442–63 (447).

<sup>30</sup> *Tess*, Penguin edition footnotes, p. 404

<sup>31</sup> See for example, 'in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in' (I Chp. 5, p. 42); '[. . .] she said blushing; and in making the accusation symptoms of a smile lifted her upper lip gently in the middle, in spite of her, so as to show the tips of her teeth, the lower lip remaining severely still.' (III. Chp. 19, p. 122); 'that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening' (III Chp. 24, p. 165).

notorious review of *Tess*.<sup>32</sup> More recently, some critics such as Linda Shires, use the two terms rape and seduction interchangeably.<sup>33</sup> Tony Tanner most clearly states that it was rape; Leon Waldoff believes it was seduction; Kaja Silverman and Ian Gregor explain it as both rape *and* seduction.<sup>34</sup> Still others, such as Kristin Brady and Ellen Rooney, argue that it is impossible to say.<sup>35</sup> Either way, these differing views of what happened that night in the Chase show the very ambiguity of the missing, yet crucial, scene in Tess's life.<sup>36</sup>

Such ambiguity over a woman's fall may be, even in the twentieth century, at odds with what we may believe to be a sympathetic representation of the heroine. Elissa Gurman's article, which finds striking similarities between Tess and the 2015 trial of Brock Allen Turner and the question of consent, brings attention to the crucial task of deciphering whether the victim was raped or seduced; on it depends justice and the preservation the female victim's purity.<sup>37</sup> Accused of raping an unconscious woman, Turner hired a powerful attorney and private investigator to probe into the victim's personal life to use against her, to prove that his sexual assault was a misunderstanding influenced by drink.<sup>38</sup> If the victim failed to prove she was raped, it was her character that was compromised. On the other hand, clearing Tess's name by clarifying that she was raped does not seem to be a priority of Hardy's; he seems to have another agenda in mind. Of course, one should consider how the Victorian

<sup>32</sup> Mowbray Morris, qtd in 'A History of the Text', *Tess*, Penguin edition, p. xlvi; Margaret Oliphant, Review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Blackwood's Magazine* (March 1892), in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, p. 222.

<sup>33</sup> Pointed out by Arthur Efron in 'Experiencing Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles": The Issues Raised'. See Linda Shires, 'Introduction' to *Tess*, New Riverside edition (Wadsworth, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Tanner, 'Colour and Movement' pp. 221, 222, 223; Waldoff, 'Psychological Determinism', p. 238; Silverman, 'History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', p. 136; Gregor, *Great Web*, p. 182; Daleski, *Paradox of Love*, p.158. See also Larson, *Ethics and Narrative*, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Kristin Brady, "Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?" in *Thomas Hardy Annual* 4 (1986), 127–47 (131); Ellen Rooney, "'A Little More than Persuading': Tess and the Subject of Sexual Violence," in *Rape and Representation*, ed. by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 87–114 (p. 97).

<sup>36</sup> See Brady, pp. 133, 144–45.

<sup>37</sup> Elissa Gurman, 'Sex, Consent, and the Unconscious Female Body: Reading *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Alongside the Trial of Brock Allen Turner' *Law & Literature*, 32.1 (2020), 155–70; see also, William A. Davis, Jr. 'The Rape of Tess: Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.2 (1997), 221–31 (229).

<sup>38</sup> The Stanford victim's impact statement: 'I thought there's no way this is going to trial; there were witnesses, there was dirt in my body, he ran but was caught. He's going to settle, formally apologize, and we will both move on. Instead, I was told he hired a powerful attorney, expert witnesses, private investigators who were going to try and find details about my personal life to use against me, find loopholes in my story to invalidate me and my sister, in order to show that this sexual assault was in fact a misunderstanding. That he was going to go to any length to convince the world he had simply been confused.' (Will Gore, 'Why Brock Turner is not actually a rapist: around the world outraged headlines have referred to the 'Brock Turner rape case' *The Independent*. 2 Sep. 2015, [accessed 10 March 2022])

double standard would crudely have made no distinction between rape, seduction, or prostitution, which is what Gurman criticises as causing harm to raped victims even to this day. The only distinction relevant to Victorian morals was whether the sex took place within or outside of marriage, and rape within marriage was not considered a criminal offence.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, William Davis Jr. argues that Hardy's notebook shows his awareness of rape cases reported in the newspaper.<sup>40</sup> Hardy may have been familiar with the English law relating to rape, which he could also have expected his readers to draw upon.<sup>41</sup> It is intriguing to think that in this study, *Tess* is the only text which leads to discussions of rape; for even in *Ruth* which adheres most to traditional moral rules, the heroine is seduced by Bellingham, but she is innocent because of her ignorance: Ruth genuinely loved Bellingham and thought their love was mutual. Both Hetty and Fanny were abandoned by their lovers. However, Hardy's ambivalence between rape and seduction seems to have more purpose than simply reflecting the ideologies that not only dominated his time but have also left traces in our current times.

Critics have noted how Hardy's changes to the manuscript, in fact, *increase* the difficulty faced by readers wondering if Tess was raped.<sup>42</sup> Hardy deleted negative adjectives around Alec, and added Tess's line: 'My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all' (*Tess* 89), which produces the impression that Tess herself felt a degree of sexual passion. In addition, H. M. Daleski points out that Tess's self-loathing after the Chase implies 'passionate response on her part'.<sup>43</sup> Finally, as Tess

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<sup>39</sup> Joanna Bourke, 'Sexual Violence, Marital Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology', *Victorian Studies* 50.3 (2008), 419–36 (421)

<sup>40</sup> See William Davis, Jr., 'The Rape of Tess; Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 52.2 (1997), 221–31 (224–5). Davis writes that in the 1891 version, Alec drugs Tess. Hardy noted a similar 1826 rape case in his notebook, from which he may have gotten that idea (p. 226).

<sup>41</sup> Davis believes that Hardy's readers would have understood Tess as raped according to the law, 'If the woman is asleep when the connection takes place, she is incapable of consent, and although no violence is used, the prisoner may be convicted of rape, if he knew that she was asleep'. (qtd in the Earl of Halsbury, et al., eds., *The Laws of England: Being a Complete Statement of the Whole Law of England*, 31 vols. (Butterworth, 1907–17), IX, 612; English law in the nineteenth century defined rape as "the offence of having unlawful and carnal knowledge of a woman by force, and against her will." See also Nevill Geary, *The Law of Marriage and Family Relations: A Manual of Practical Law* (Adam and Charles Black, 1892), p. 480; John Mews, ed., *The Digest of English Case Law, Containing the Reported Decisions of the Superior Courts: and a Selection from Those of the Irish Courts to the End of 1897*, 16 vols. (Sweet and Maxwell, 1898), IV, 1, 548–49.

<sup>42</sup> See for example, Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell, "General Introduction," in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, eds. Grindle and Gatrell (Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> He writes, 'Moreover, when she says she would not so loathe herself if she had "ever sincerely loved" him or if she loved him "still", that ambiguously suggests that she has had some genuine feeling for him' (Daleski, p.163)

leaves Trantridge, she allows Alec to kiss her one last time: she stands marble cold and still 'while he imprinted a kiss upon her cheek – half perfunctorily, half as if zest had not yet quite died out'. Daleski finds that in an earlier manuscript Hardy had inserted immediately afterwards, 'for only a month had elapsed since she had ceased to defend herself against him'. This was deleted from the text, possibly because it was too specific about how long Tess stayed with Alec as his mistress, but the wording strongly suggests Tess's submission, which Daleski argues was the reason that Alec and Tess fell apart – Alec was attracted to Tess's rejections.<sup>44</sup> Arthur Efron further finds that the responses of Tess's mother and Angel after Tess's confession do not suggest that they heard anything of rape.<sup>45</sup>

Hardy's shifting narrative voice is another crucial aspect of his ambiguous representation, which denies the reader of a single, unified perspective. Daleski explains that within the narrator there are two divergent views, which he calls the 'seer' and 'see-er'. The seer's voice laments that Tess' guardian angel is absent, and his tone 'insists' that Alec is sinister and capable of violence and rape. On the other hand, the 'see-er', the 'meticulous render of concretized action', neutrally describes moments when Alec is concerned and even acts tenderly towards Tess, making it hard for the reader to see Alec as a rapist.<sup>46</sup> Daleski holds that there is nothing before the Chase scene to suggest that Alec would rape Tess. Daleski's account of the split narrator assists our Bakhtinian reading of Hardy's use of multiple voices, even though it may be a slight over-simplification of the diversity of the moral debate. To differentiate between rape and seduction is crucial and yet Hardy's style hangs on a brink of representation and even suggests that we need to move beyond the distinction.

In the end, while readers and critics alike have long argued whether Tess was raped or seduced, Hardy's sympathetic representation relies on his literary style of ambivalence in which we can understand Tess as both a victim and an agent over her own sexuality. Tess is open to seduction, which makes her vulnerable to what David Lodge calls the "'mad" passionate, non-ethical quality of her sensibility'.<sup>47</sup> We must remember that Hardy, in all the deliberate ambiguity, calls Tess a 'pure woman', and

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<sup>44</sup> H. M. Daleski, *Thomas Hardy and Paradoxes of Love* (University of Missouri Press, 1997), p. 164.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Efron, 'Experiencing Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles": The Issues Raised', *The Hardy Society Journal*, 3.2 (2007), 25–33 (28).

<sup>46</sup> Daleski, p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> Lodge, 'Tess, Nature and Voices of Hardy' in *Language of Fiction*, p. 185.

the opening in his representation where the reader may glimpse Tess as a woman with awareness of her body and sexuality, as well as her feelings, increases the diversity of her person. As Penny Boumelha writes, 'Hardy tries to preserve a narrow balance between her awareness of this sexual force (for if she remains wholly unaware, she is merely a passive and stupid victim) and her refusal deliberately to exploit it (for that would involve her too actively as a temptress)'.<sup>48</sup> William Davis Jr. who argued that Hardy had adequate material to present Tess as a rape case but kept 'Tess away from an apparently sympathetic judicial system',<sup>49</sup> concludes that '[s]eduction has mainly moral implications, while rape has mainly legal ones. Hardy, I believe, wanted Tess's sexuality and the matter of her purity to be considered in the minds of his readers rather than argued (with perhaps predictable results) in a fictional court of law'.<sup>50</sup> His continuing point echoes the opinion of this study:

To have Tess's status as "pure" victim following the rape amplified in a court scene would perhaps settle the question of her purity too easily, and Hardy does not want that. Instead, he uses the expansiveness afforded by the novel form (rather than a single scene) to argue for a definition of female purity that includes Tess's sexual nature and her sexual responses to men.<sup>51</sup>

Hardy's contemporary readers were also aware of this point. Richard le Gallienne's favourable 1891 review of *Tess* declared '[t]he motive of Tess is one of those simple (and yet how cruelly tangled) sexual situations round which "the whole creation moves", and in which Mr. Hardy delights to find "the eternal meanings"'.<sup>52</sup> Clementina Black in *Illustrated London News* wrote that '[i]ts essence lies in the perception that a woman's moral worth is measurable not by any one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature'.<sup>53</sup> Both critics insightfully make the contrast between the 'simple' and the 'whole creation', between the 'one deed' to Tess's 'whole [. . .] life and nature'. Hardy's expansion of representation results from the ambiguity of languages regarding Tess's rape/seduction by Alec, and can be seen as to effectively

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<sup>48</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, p. 124.

<sup>49</sup> Davis, p. 227.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, p. 228.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> Richard le Gallienne, Review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Star*, 23 December 1891, in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 190–01.

<sup>53</sup> Clementina Black, Review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Illustrated London News*, 9 January 1892, in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 201–02.



adding plurality to the definition of Tess's purity.

Hardy identifies Tess as a 'pure woman'. Yet 'pure', being a subjective term, does not hold meaning unless we understand what Hardy meant by purity, and his notion of purity is different from the conventional sense. The rape/seduction debate we have seen observed female purity from sexual and legal points of view, but Hardy moves beyond its boundaries to define purity of womanhood as that of one who is true to her feelings, by portraying Tess being at home in a natural environment, and embracing rather than rejecting sexual desire as it is felt in the body.

### **Purity in being 'Natural': Tess and Nature**

In the presentation of Tess as a pure woman, Hardy invites the reader to see her purity through her nature as a woman. He represents her sexuality as a wonderful potential, not as a flaw to be removed. A scene equally debated by critics over interpretation as the Chase scene is the one in which Tess walks through the overgrown garden at Talbothays, enticed by Angel's harp playing. The overgrown foliage is sticky and slimy, almost erotic. The scene can be used to discuss the sexuality of Tess, by arguing that the garden symbolises sexual passion, noting that the scene is filled with sensual descriptions of 'profusion of growth', 'crackling snails', thistle milk and slug-slime, which stain Tess's 'naked arms'. The scene begins when she hears Angel playing his harp. While previously, she had heard only the sounds coming from his room, 'constrained by their confinement', now in the open air the harp sounds 'with a stark quality like that of nudity' (*Tess* 138). Even Angel's harp playing seems symbolic of the 'natural' vs. 'constrained' existence of their relationship. The garden scene marks the moment in which Tess listens to her feelings and lets herself be drawn nearer to her heart's interest.

However, again, reading the garden scene with regard to Tess's sexual purity is full of ambiguity. On one hand critics, such as Robert Liddell and Dorothy Van Ghent, read the scene symbolically, noting how the natural features of the garden 'stain and slight and blight' the heroine, foreshadowing how Angel will violate Tess.<sup>54</sup> However, David Lodge argues that the garden is clearly not a negative

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Liddell, *A Treatise on the Novel* (Jonathan Cape, 1974) p. 245; Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function*, (Harper & Row, 1953), p. 201

presence to Tess: 'There is a kind of sensuous relish, enforced by the rhythm and alliteration, in the sensuous relish,' he writes, 'enforced by the rhythm and alliteration, in the thickening consonants of "cuckoo-spittle", "cracking snails", "thistle-milk", and "slug-slime", which are strangely disarming'.<sup>55</sup> Lodge recognises the difficulty in producing satisfactory evidence for his argument, but he states, 'it must be conceded, I think, that if Hardy intended to stress the unpleasantness of the garden, he has gone about his task in a curious way'.<sup>56</sup> In his opinion, 'Even if the reader recoils from the overgrown garden, there is no suggestion that Tess does. She seems at home in it'.<sup>57</sup> Lodge seems right when he focuses on the rhythm and alliteration; the language is oddly enticing and luring.

However, on the other hand, it can also be said that if Hardy intended to stress the at-home-ness of the garden he also goes about his task in a curious way, that is, in an unconventional way. The garden is not in any way a familiar English garden, nor a Garden of Eden. It is not idealised, but it is a strange mixture of experience. For example, the 'blooming weeds' are yellow and purple: complementary colours which create maximum contrast and complement each other. Together with the red (which Tony Tanner has established is Tess's colour<sup>58</sup>), they form 'a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers' (*Tess* 138). At the same time, the weeds (and they are only weeds, not cultivated garden flowers) are 'emitting offensive smells'. Then follows the sentence about 'cracking snails' which is part of the string of pleasant, alluring alliteration, but when we stop to consider what it looks like in reality, the 'cracking' very ominously suggests stepping on and breaking the snails 'underfoot' – a far from pleasant thought. It is extremely difficult to find a word which adequately describes the garden: it is 'pleasing' or 'pleasurable' to those who like this sensual kind of experience, while others may find the slime and smell 'repulsive', or to use Mowbray Morris's phrase, evoking 'too much succulence'.<sup>59</sup>

Notwithstanding, the remarkable thing about how Hardy has portrayed this garden is that whatever one's opinion of the garden may be, whether one finds it offensive or pleasing, it is still possible to see how it can also be the other. In other

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<sup>55</sup> Lodge, 'Tess, Nature, and the Voices of Hardy', p. 182.

<sup>56</sup> Lodge, 'Tess, Nature, and the Voices of Hardy', p. 182.

<sup>57</sup> Lodge, 'Tess, Nature, and the Voices of Hardy', p. 182.

<sup>58</sup> Tony Tanner, 'Colour and Movement in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles', *Critical Quarterly*, 10.3 (1968), 219–39.

<sup>59</sup> Mowbray Morris, letter to Hardy on 25 November 1889; qtd by Tim Dolin, 'A History of the Text' in *Tess* ed. by Tim Dolin (Penguin, 1998) p. xlviii.

words, the garden is controversial because some of our most intense pleasures are also bound up with feelings of disgust, yet the garden is neutral, and above all fascinating. Like the Dutch still-life flower paintings, which capture flowers in each moment – budding, in full bloom, wilting, insect eaten and brown<sup>60</sup> – Hardy's garden also captures profusion and decay. Through scientific, meticulous attention to the details of nature, art and beauty are born. The difficulty of evaluating the garden runs parallel with the difficulty of evaluating Tess, but the message here is to not judge 'good' or 'offensive' but to be awed by the fullness of nature, both in its beauty and decay.

More diversity of languages comes into play. The second half of the description of the garden flows into a kind of unreality, where the metaphorical becomes indistinguishable from the literal features of the garden: the 'mists of pollen' become the embodiment of the notes from Angel's harp; the dampness of the 'juicy grass' become the 'weeping of the garden's sensibility'; 'the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close, for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound' (*Tess* 139). The description of nature here is that of pathetic fallacy, a heavily emotionally tinted perception. It is the language of one letting herself be lost in time, space and feelings, and it invites readers to empathise with her experience, and lose themselves as well.

In contrast, once the spell is broken, the languages of Angel and the narrator intermingle with their analytical perception of Tess. Angel is impressed by Tess's 'shaping such sad imaginings', which are 'expressed in her own native phrases – assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training'. Note that Tess's style of utterance, her dialect and schooling are brought up again, which, unlike in the poetical passage of Tess walking through the garden, hinders empathy and instead suggests the foreignness one feels in Tess's words. Angel's musing illustrates Bakhtin's argument:

Within these points of view, that is, for the speakers of the language themselves, these generic languages and professional jargons are directly intentional – they denote and express directly and fully, and are capable of expression themselves without mediation; but outside, that is for those not participating in the given purview, these languages may be treated as objects, as typifications, as local colour.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See for example, Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750) and her painting 'Flower Still Life' (1726)

<sup>61</sup> Bakhtin, p. 289.

The narrator occupies Angel's point of view, through Hardy's use of free indirect discourse: 'Still, it was strange that they should have come to her while yet so young; more than strange; it was impressive, interesting, pathetic' (*Tess* 40). This, then, is immediately checked by the narrator, who with superior knowledge of Tess, says, 'Not guessing the cause, there was nothing to remind him that experience is as to intensity, and not as to duration'. Angel is attracted to Tess when he discovers more and more that Tess is different from other dairymaids her age, but he is still imagining her under his ideas of what Tess should be. Using a mathematical rhetoric, the narrator gently reminds us that one must consider 'intensity' of experience as well as 'duration' of experience. Angel only considers the duration of Tess' young years, but the narrator adds a pluralistic dimension of Tess by giving us the intensity of her experiences – her past which make her who she is at present: 'Tess's passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest' (140). To Angel, as well as potential readers who are interested in a woman's spirituality and intellect, the narrator makes it clear that Tess's 'corporeal' experience played a part in shaping her 'mental' attractiveness. The word 'harvest' is strongly suggesting in an affirmative way that her affair with Alec ('blight' is used ironically) were part of the 'natural' process of her growth into maturity and womanhood, and that one cannot have her as she is without her past.

In redefining the purity of instinct, Hardy also had to wrestle the term 'instinct' from contemporary readers. Victorian reviewer, R. H. Hutton wrote that Tess's course of action in leaping onto Alec's horse to get away from her peers, 'was not due to an instinct of purity, but to an instinct of mere timidity and disgust'.<sup>62</sup> For other actions Tess takes, again he repeated, 'Though pure in instinct, she was not faithful to her pure instinct'.<sup>63</sup> Hutton, who disagreed with what he called Hardy's 'pantheistic philosophy', believed 'every Christian would admit' that 'if fine natures will not faithfully adhere to such genuine instincts as they have, they may deteriorate, and will deteriorate, in consequence of that faithlessness'.<sup>64</sup> It is interesting that Hutton repeats the key words, 'pure', 'instinct' and 'faithful', which frequently appear in Hardy's writing. As with 'purity', Hardy expands the meanings of these terms as well and questions what it means to be 'faithful to pure instinct'. In Hutton's

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<sup>62</sup> R. H. Hutton, Review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Spectator* (23 January 1892), 121–22, in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, p. 207.

<sup>63</sup> Hutton, p. 209.

<sup>64</sup> Hutton, p. 208.

definition of pure instinct, there is no room for timidity, disgust, personal pride, or 'the strange and horrible mixture of feelings'; such feelings are repressed, and passion is met with duty.<sup>65</sup> However Hardy argues that being pure is accepting weaknesses and flaws: 'And it was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity' (*Tess* 166). Immediately following this quote, Hardy with humour illustrates how Clare's excitement for Tess's beauty develops into a sneeze. Being faithful to pure instinct is like a sneeze. It is spontaneous and unrepressed, a moment of weakness, but not scandalous; it's just a sneeze. In Hardy's text, purity is linked with one's body, and the organic nature of it.

Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? she would ask herself. She might prove it false if she could veil bygone. The *recuperative power which pervaded organic nature* was surely not denied to maidenhood alone (*Tess* 112, emphasis mine).

The passage above strikes one as something of a post-Darwinian view of nature. By the time Tess leaves her family for the second time, it is clear that her decision to move forwards is urged by something within her, which is heavily linked with the changing seasonal environment, that prompts her to begin life anew. 'A particularly fine spring came round, and the *stir of germination* was almost audible in the buds; it moved her *as it moved the wild animals*, and made her passionate to go' (112, emphasis mine). Yet again, '[. . .] some spirit within her rose automatically *as the sap in the twigs*. It was unexpended youth surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and *the invincible instinct towards self-delight*' (113, emphasis mine). Again, the narrator repeats, '[t]he irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess' (119). The passage celebrates a Darwinian view of Tess as a creature of nature, a young woman free to follow where her instinct and feelings lead her.

It is with a similar logic that the narrator describes nature and the inevitability of Tess and Angel falling in love with each other. As the spring season develops, and matures, noiselessly and invisibly, so too does Tess and Angel's relationship: 'All the while they were converging, under the irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one

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<sup>65</sup> Hutton, p. 209.

vale' (144). Then summer comes with the heat, and nature intensifies and becomes overpowering:

Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate. The ready bosoms existing there were impregnated by their surroundings. (164)

In this passage, the narrator's focus is on the fertilization and impregnation of nature, and Var Vale is portrayed sensually. These images link the growing 'passionate' love between Tess and Angel to the valley's 'bosoms'.

'Bosom' is a noteworthy word. It is sensual in that it refers to a woman's breast, but that is a colloquial and recent definition. OED records the first entry in 1959 which given noticeably focus on the bodily and sensual women's breasts.<sup>66</sup> During the Victorian era, however, 'bosom' pointed to the breast of a human being more generally, and even extended, in poetic use, to a bird's. (See, for example Tennyson's *Princess* in 1847: 'Doves that sun their milky bosoms on the thatch'). Further, 'bosom' could be used to describe the physical features of landscape such 'a concave or curve applied to the surface of the sea, a lake, a river, or the ground', or even the arch of wind-filled sails. George Eliot writes in *Silas Marner* (1861) of a place 'Deep in the bosom of the hills', which fairly similar to the way Hardy uses it in the *Tess* quote above. However, the word 'bosom' was more than a neutral signifier of an object. It held *feelings*. John Keats's poem 'To Autumn' (1820) begins with the lines, 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, / Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun'. The first stanza of the poem describes how the autumn season 'conspires' with the sun on how to 'load and bless' the vines with ripe fruits, to 'swell the gourd', and to 'plump the hazel shells'. The use of 'bosom' in the second line, runs effectively with the verbs emphasised above. The curved shape of the bosom overlaps with the image of swelling and plumpness of the overripe (and sensuous) fruits. At the same time, the 'bosom-friend' implies a deep friendship and affinity.

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<sup>66</sup> Late twentieth-century use of the term 'bosom' according to the OED: e. *plural*. In recent colloquial use, a woman's breasts. 'bosom, n. and adj.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2022, [accessed 29 March 2022].

In this respect, Hardy's use of 'bosom' ostensibly has less to do with female sexuality, and more to do with the 'heart' and thus with emotions.<sup>67</sup> To Hardy's contemporary reader's 'bosom' likely recalled '[t]he breast considered as "the seat of thoughts and feelings"', and Tennyson's *Amphion* (1842) is recorded for utilising the word in association of 'emotions' and 'desires'.<sup>68</sup> In *Tess* the word 'bosom' triggers its double meaning, and acts as a bridge that links the physical landscape of the Vale with the romantic emotions growing between Tess and Angel. The 'bosom' signifies both the dip in the valley landscape, as well as in its metaphorical position as the seat of abundant feelings, emotions and desires. Yet it is, at the same time, suggestively sensual: in this text the heart's emotions are closely linked to passionate and sensual attraction and love. The 'oozing fatness' of a pastoral summer day on a farm is another uniquely Hardy-esque phrase which combines the landscape with romantic and sensual feelings.

### **Darwinian Nature and Social Evolution**

Not only Tess, but also the other dairymaids, her fellow young female workers, are oppressed by the stirrings of sexual desire: 'The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law – an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired' (*Tess* 162). Note here, that the language regarding nature has turned negative: 'hopeless', 'feverish', 'oppressive', and 'cruel'. Nature is wonderfully inspiring and also death giving. It is summarised by Hardy in the phrase 'a killing joy', which is bursting with paradox. However, while in the garden scene we discussed earlier the co-existence of bloom and decay was a form of beauty, in this passage, the life that nature gives is sickly. This is because another language has mixed with the language of evolutionary nature: the language of social law. The Darwinian language of evolutionary nature was heavily influential to Victorian society. On one hand, it diversified understanding of nature and humans,

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<sup>67</sup> For example, clasping one's bosom, is in effect clasping one's heart and is often done so when feeling strong emotion.

<sup>68</sup> 'bosom, n. and adj.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2022, [accessed 29 March 2022].

unsettled traditional thinking and set new problems,<sup>69</sup> but on the other, it merged with existing languages and reinforced society's oppression of the socially disadvantaged, such as women and the working class.

Gillian Beer writes of the collaboration of Nature's law with the institutional conventions of the marriage market. In *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Charles Darwin remarks how human beings differ from other species in that the male dominates the choice of their partner. Men select whom they deem ideal and to be the vessels which bear their children, when in nature, usually it is the female sex who has that power.<sup>70</sup> Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy react to this, by emphasising 'the discordance between a woman's individuality and her progenerative role'.<sup>71</sup> In *Tess*, oppressed by their infatuation with Angel, the dairymaids at Talbothays are reduced to a 'portion of one organism called sex' (*Tess* 162). The girls are helplessly controlled by the natural law of sex which knows no boundaries of class, but living in a world of social conventions, they are victims to unrequited love. Thus, the Hardy-esque outlook on sexual selection is bleak:

There was so much frankness and so little jealousy because there was no hope. Each one was a girl of fair common sense, and she did not delude herself with any vain conceits, or deny her love, or give herself airs, in the idea of outshining the others. The full recognition of the futility of their infatuation, from a social point of view; its purposeless beginning; its self-bounded outlook; its lack of everything to justify its existence in the eye of civilization (while lacking nothing in the eye of Nature); the one fact that it did exist, ecstasizing them to a killing joy; all this imparted to them a resignation, a dignity, which a practical and sordid expectation of winning him as a husband would have destroyed. (*Tess* 162)

The agony of the dairymaids stems from their awareness that they have no chance in winning Angel's affections. Their passions, which they are powerless to suppress, only arise naturally according to their biological design – 'lacking nothing in the eye of Nature'. However, in society's eye, they, being of working class, do not qualify for the selection process, or in other words, they are not acceptable to enter the middle-

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<sup>69</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 199. Also, Eliot is aware that sexual selection assists patriarchal rule. Beer notes that Eliot's 'women in unhappy marriages rarely have children' (p. 209).



class marriage market.<sup>72</sup> Tess is no exception. While she is advantaged by her old ancestry and beauty, both important criteria in sexual selection,<sup>73</sup> social insistence on virginity disqualifies her for the marriage market. 'The proper action of sexual selection, undistorted by social pressures and the male dominance peculiar to humankind,' Beer writes, 'would result in the union of Angel and Tess'.<sup>74</sup> However, social law's emphasis on virginity prevents the course of unity.

According to Beer, this social value of virginity 'cannot be naturalised' and can only lead to humanity's extinction, as writers such as Hardy and Grant Allen were aware.<sup>75</sup> 'Hardy's passionate depiction of Tess's purity and fitness runs directly counter to the punitive tautology which exalts the survivors as necessarily those proper to survive'.<sup>76</sup> Beer correctly points out the conflicting voices of the natural and social law, but the emphasis of this study is the state of their co-existence. Bakhtin writes that languages opposed to one another in novels are not just contrasted with each other, they are also in dialogue: 'This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intention to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point of the work'.<sup>77</sup> Hardy takes the dominant social discourse of his time and separates the Darwinian language of nature, which celebrates life but also the survival of the fittest, from the Darwinian language of society, which justifies the status quo of the wealthy and poor, showing how closely linked they are, and the ideologies they produce. Darwin's insight into nature, rather than bringing a different point of view, strengthened the prevailing language of society, especially that of oppressing the socially disadvantaged.

Nature and society are again contrasted in Phase V to show the extent to which the laws of society damages those who are socially weak, but especially the

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<sup>72</sup> In an essay on the *Woodlanders*, David Lodge notes how Giles and Marty's moral superiority is emphasised by their 'rapport with the natural life of the woodland', in 'The Woodlanders: A Darwinian Pastoral Elegy' in *Working with Structuralism* (Routledge, 1982), pp. 79–94.

<sup>73</sup> See Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 196–9. See also Elliott B. Gose Jr. on old families and 'long time' in 'Psychic Evolution: Darwinism and Initiation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 18.3 (1963), 261–272.

<sup>74</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 200.

<sup>75</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 200.

<sup>76</sup> Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 200. She writes, 'Hardy's passionate depiction of Tess's purity and fitness runs directly counter to the punitive tautology which exalts the survivors as necessarily those proper to survive. He suggests that it may be, at least among women and the poor, that those fit for their environment must be less perfect than those who go under, and that sexual selection according to the oppressive criteria of current society will set us, in Grant Allen's words, "on the high-road to extinction"'.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Bakhtin, p. 314.

fallen woman. When Tess travels to Chalk Newton on her way to find work at Flintcomb Ash, after spending a cold and lonely night outdoors, Tess wakes to find wounded pheasants in agony (297–8). The reader's sympathy for Tess is extended through the symbolic meaning of the birds. Tess and the birds, both 'fellows in Nature's teeming family' and 'kindred sufferers', are victims to 'quite civil persons save during certain weeks' (297). Hardy criticises the hypocrisy of society which at times turns brutal and makes it its purpose to destroy life. However nature and society are not merely contrasted, but shown to exist in a tense and complicated relationship. Firstly, the birds have never had pure, natural freedom because they were 'brought into being by artificial means solely to gratify these propensities' (298). Secondly, Tess realises, that unlike the birds, her sufferings are 'based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature' (298).

On this passage, Tim Dolin footnotes that Hardy was undecided about what is the correct opposite for the 'arbitrary law of society', and had put 'the moral nature of man' in the manuscript, and 'the moral nature' in the *Graphic*, after which settling for 'Nature'.<sup>78</sup> The eventual erasure of 'moral' suggest that Hardy could not use the term 'moral' without it being distorted by readers, because they each have their own understanding of what 'moral' looks like. The changes also suggests that Hardy was considering the plural meanings of 'nature': '[t]he innate or characteristic disposition of a particular person', '[t]he inherent or essential quality or constitution of a thing', and '[t]he phenomena of the physical world collectively'.<sup>79</sup> The capital initial of 'Nature' usually indicates the female personification of 'the creative and regulative power of which is conceived of as operating in the material world'. However, here, as he has been throughout the novel, rather than narrowing meaning for clarity's sake, Hardy instead opens up the numerous meanings which 'nature' holds, including the one used by Geoffrey Chaucer, Robert Burns and Lord Bryon: 'sexual urge; sexual desire.'<sup>80</sup> To reread the passage again with an open mind to the plural kinds of nature we discern the complexities of Tess's suffering 'under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature' (298), and the manifold ways in which Tess is pure, including her sexuality.

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<sup>78</sup> Dolin, 'Notes' to *Tess*, Penguin edition, p. 447

<sup>79</sup> 'Nature, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, [accessed 19 December 2021].

<sup>80</sup> 'Nature, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, [accessed 19 December 2021].

### Plural Classes and Plural Morals

The unnatural 'social law' is not a general one which applies to all humans, but one that is narrowly middle-class, as Hardy is aware, and what differentiates his writing from that of Gaskell and Eliot in terms of morals.<sup>81</sup> Using examples of Tess's mother insisting Tess not to 'trumpet' her trouble when others don't (*Tess* 210), or the humorous story of Jack Dollop (148–49), Hardy suggests that sexual purity, which heavily occupies the mind of the middle-class reader is, in fact, hardly shocking among the working class. It is important to recognise as Rosemarie Morgan writes, Tess 'has not earned but, rather learned the guilt and sorry'.<sup>82</sup> In her biography of Hardy, *The Time-Torn Man*, Claire Tomalin points out how sex outside marriage reoccurred very close to Hardy's personal life, not only between Hardy's grandparents, but also with his parents. Hardy's mother married Hardy's father because she became pregnant.<sup>83</sup> Although she was a good mother to Hardy, her marriage was not part of her original plans: before her marriage, Hardy's mother worked as a servant for a wealthy Dorchester family, and she dreamed of one day working in London as a servant to the upper class. Post-marriage she moved into a working-class cottage with her husband, which was a downgrade of lifestyle for her, although the Hardys were not the lowest of the working class. It is quite easy to imagine that in the country among the working class, having sex before marriage was a common and even a 'natural' occurrence.

When it comes to writing *Tess*, however, things were different for Hardy, because he was writing to a middle-class and urban audience, who knew little of working-class values and morals.<sup>84</sup> For the middle class, premarital sex was shocking and unforgivable (turning a blind eye to the double standard). Although Hardy kept his fiction writing separate from his personal views, when it came to *Tess* and *Jude*

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<sup>81</sup> For more on Hardy's class background, see Merryn Williams and Raymond Williams, 'Hardy and Social Class' in *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and His Background*, ed. by Norman Page, (St Martin's, 1980) pp. 29–40; Rosemary Jann, 'Hardy's Rustics and the Construction of Class', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.2 (2000), 411–25.

<sup>82</sup> Morgan, p. 103.

<sup>83</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man* (Penguin, 2007), pp. 3, 4, 13; See also Millgate who describes how Jemima found she was pregnant in late 1893, and then the marriage was arranged (p. 20).

<sup>84</sup> For more discussion of Hardy as a writer in-between classes, see Raymond Williams's chapter 'Wessex and the Border' in *The Country and the City*, pp. 284–308.

*the Obscure*, he became more open to polemical debate.<sup>85</sup> The challenges of writing *Tess* can be estimated as such: by the time Hardy wrote *Tess*, he was an established writer, known in London and included in the intellectual elite groups. From a position of belonging yet not belonging to the working class, he wrote to the middle class, whom he moved amongst but not fully integrating. As Rosemary Jann writes, 'Hardy's rise from village boy to famous writer obviously contributed much to his understanding of the injuries inflicted by the class system and to his sympathies with meritorious characters struggling as he had to overcome these.'<sup>86</sup> Elliott Gose Jr. writes that 'Hardy emphasizes [Tess] no longer having a peasant mentality like her mother's and her having lost contact with the real meaning of natural processes. In fact at the end of chp xiii he rebukes her for the Victorian moral conscience with which her modern education has provided her'.<sup>87</sup> Because Hardy was writing for a middle-class audience, who had different and very rigid moral standards, the heroine is accosted by guilt and peer pressure, living up to the expectations of middle-class morals. Yet through that, *Tess* attempts to show the middle class that there exists a possibility of an alternative moral to the one they hold on to so tightly.

Upon her return to Marlott, rumours about Tess' seduction spread in her working-class community, 'if rumour be not too large of a word for a space of a square mile', the narrator says somewhat light heartedly (95). Her schoolfellows come to visit Tess in their best clothes to hear about her adventures. Their excitement affects Tess and she become 'even gay' answering their questions with 'a manner of superiority' (95). Again, Dairyman Crick's story of Jack Dollop, a former milker who cheated on a young Melstock woman, ends happily when the girl's mother gets her revenge by beating Dollop to pulp in the butter churn. The mother refuses to let him out until he 'makes amends for ravaging her [daughter's] virgin innocence', and angrily shouts, 'You call me old witch, do ye, you deceiver [. . .] when ye ought to ha' been calling me mother-law these last five months!' (149). The girl's lost virginity and five-month pregnancy are so similar to Tess's own experience that she turns pale, but to the other workers at Talbothays, it is but a humorous anecdote. Later, when Tess is about to marry Angel, Joan writes to her daughter advising that, 'Many a woman – some of the Highest in the Land – have had a Trouble in their time; and why

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<sup>85</sup> Boumelha, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>86</sup> Jann, p. 412.

<sup>87</sup> Elliot B. Jr. Gose, 'Psychic Evolution: Darwinism and Initiation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 18.3 (1963), 261–72 (265).

should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a Fool, specially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all' (210). Why then does Tess feel shame and guilt, that she cannot stay with her family, and that she tries to resist Angel's marriage proposal?

One of the complications of the relationship between Tess and Angel lies in their different social classes. I have mentioned before how the text emphasises the suffering that distinctions in social class inflict on the other dairymaids. We are led to believe that Angel is a good and liberal man who can overcome the social hierarchy and chose a marriage partner for love over social status. However, when the sexual morals of the middle class come into play, they prove to be a barrier which he cannot cross. Moral differences can be kept when relationships are confined to those with similar class backgrounds who share the same sexual morals. Cross class means cross morals, as Angel finds out.

Not only did the Victorian middle- and upper classes have apparently stricter moral standards, but also they tended to apply them more severely to their social inferiors.<sup>88</sup> During the Victorian social purity movement, attention and concern were turned towards working-class girls, and among the various agendas was the 'wish to extend to the vulnerable daughters of the working classes the protection enjoyed by the sheltered girls of the middle classes'.<sup>89</sup> However, as Lesley Hall points out, even then working-class victims were perceived differently from middle- and upper-class victims:

While much social purity rhetoric positioned these girls as vulnerable, those who worked to 'rescue' lower-class girls often perceived them as wild and out of control, addicted to cheap flashy finery and dangerously independent in their ways (and any girl who had had sexual intercourse, whatever the circumstances, was defined as 'corrupted' and 'fallen') There was thus also an agenda of controlling this unruly group. Some social purity campaigners advocated an age of consent as high as 21.<sup>90</sup>

Somehow, judgement and criticism towards the working-class young women was harsher than those towards their middle-class counterparts, and thus the agenda worked to 'control' such 'unruly' young women.

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<sup>88</sup> Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Macmillan, 2000), p. 33.

<sup>89</sup> Hall, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> Hall, p. 33.

Having understood this context, we are perhaps better able to see why Angel would react so strongly to Tess's confession. Angel's failure to live according to his forward, liberal thinking is backed up by an especially strong prejudice towards lower-class women. He was willing to cross class boundaries and marry beneath his class, but when it came to 'sexual transgressions' by a working-class woman, the prejudices prove to be too strong and deep-seated that he is repulsed by the associated images of 'corruption' and 'fallenness'.<sup>91</sup> When Tess pleads to Angel, she uses the counsel of stories from home. However, as the narrator says, she perhaps said 'things that would have better left to silence' (*Tess* 251). Her argument makes it worse for her because it only accentuates their class differences: 'O Angel – my mother says that it sometimes happens so – she knows several cases when they were worse than I, and the husband has not minded it much – has got over it, at least. And yet the woman has not loved him as I do you' (251–52). To that Angel replies, 'Different societies different manners. You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things. You don't know what you say' (252).<sup>92</sup>

We understand the social conventions which shaped his moral standards, and how they coloured the way he saw Tess. His double standard is openly laid out for criticism by the text. But we can see how strongly the society in which he lived was biased and prejudiced towards 'fallen' working-class women.

### **Angel Clare's Change of Vision**

Hardy portrays the paradigm shift from a mono perspective to a plural perspective through the character of Angle Clare. Although David de Laura has convincingly argued that Hardy 'disparaging[ly]' portrays Angel Clare as the representative of a whole generation of "advanced" but misdirected thought,<sup>93</sup> it must also be said that Hardy represents Angel as a highly complex character. As George Watt writes:

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<sup>91</sup> Kramer writes, 'because Angel - although thinking himself an enlightened man who has rejected society, sophistication, religious hypocrisy, and materialism for a rural retreat - is so conventional concerning sex that he cannot bear to live in the same country with Tess and her still-living former love' (p. 4).

<sup>92</sup> Tess's famous retort then comes: "I am only a peasant by position, not by nature" (252). But then how does one account for Angel's dislike of the d'Urberville paintings?

<sup>93</sup> David J. de Laura, "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels", *ELH*, 34.3 (1967), 380–99 (358).

In this rejection of Tess [Angel] is not a type after [Gaskell's character] Bradshaw, in the sense that he expels what he sees as a polluting figure who threatens the very being of the Christian moral world he knows. Bradshaw might be very wrong, but he knows what he is doing. [. . .] Angel lives in no-man's land with one foot in one part of his culture, and one foot in another. He has rejected the outward conventions of his father's church, though like Hardy himself, and others like Matthew Arnold, he can never fully reject the nostalgia which he feels for the cultural/historical aspects of the institution.<sup>94</sup>

While Angel embodies liberal ambiguity and confusion, he is not represented as a flat stereotype. What David Kramer has said about Tess's character inconsistency preventing her from being merely symbolic, also applies to Angel,<sup>95</sup> as Watt writes about Angel that '[i]t is difficult to characterise Angel's philosophy or to refine it to an exact definition'.<sup>96</sup> It is the reader's partaking to understand or struggle to understand Angel. Unlike Mr Bradshaw, he is not an adversary to debate with and overcome, but a character to journey with as he changes his views and attitude towards Tess. This final section of the chapter will focus on Hardy's poetical structure in dramatising Clare's paradigm shift and how it can be seen in Hardy's peculiar use of narrative perspective, a metaphorical reference to the microscope, and an impressionistic way of narration. The significance of Angel's drastic shift in perception, and thus his attitude towards Tess, deepens our understanding of Hardy's sympathetic narrative, and the thrust of energy in portraying the possibility of individuals to change their prejudiced views against the fallen woman.

Angel's inner struggle is portrayed through his sleep-walking dream when 'he had instinctively manifested a fondness for her of which his common sense did not approve' (*Tess* 270). Much of the passage is narrated from Tess's perspective, and the text is woven with free indirect speech ('If they could only fall together, and both be dashed to pieces, how fit, how desirable', 267). Tess's outside perspective into Angel's mind invites the reader to also eagerly try to discover his true emotions and

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<sup>94</sup> George Watt, p. 150.; note that Watt's opinion differs from that of de Laura in the following way: Watt believes Hardy identifies with Angel as well as Matthew Arnold, whereas de Laura believes that Hardy modelled Angel on Mill, Arnold and Paters's imperfect modernism, from which Hardy distanced himself.

<sup>95</sup> See Kramer, p. 38.

<sup>96</sup> George Watt, p. 150.

feelings for Tess underneath his consciousness. Using Angel's 'mental distress' (266) and 'mental excitement' (269), Hardy explores the pull of genuine feelings in Angel which is repressed during the day. As Suzanne Keen writes, 'Clare's mind closes to Tess and the reader, but his actions and sleep-talk speak plainly'.<sup>97</sup> When Angel awakes, he has no memory of the night before but for 'during those few moments in which the brain, like a Samson shaking himself, is trying its strength he had some dim notion of an unusual nocturnal proceeding' (*Tess* 269–70). Using the metaphor of Samson, Hardy portrays the conflicting feelings within Angel's brain as if it has a mind and life of its own. Furthermore, in accordance with the Old Testament story so much depends on Samson shaking himself free. Although, or perhaps because of, the tragic ending of the Samson, the reader's sympathy is guided towards wanting to believe that Angel still has warmth towards his loving wife.

Focusing on Angel's sleepwalking dream further reveals his character's sympathy for Tess. Despite suggestions that Hardy's knowledge of the brain is founded on scientific knowledge,<sup>98</sup> the emotional force suggests that Hardy is trying to move beyond logic and into the poetical and passionate. Unrepressed in his half-sleeping state, Angel's feelings are expressed with a deeply emotional energy. The whole scene is exaggerated – and the language strays away from the realist form into the realm of the gothic.<sup>99</sup> The motifs are there: the moonlit night, the rushing river, the abbey, the coffin and the lure of death. It is not through logic that Hardy tries to convince the reader. It is when Angel is most under the influence of the unconscious, that it occurs to Tess 'to try persuasion' (*Tess* 269), gently leading him back into bed. The 'hard logical deposit' in Angel gives way to the Samson, chained but still powerful.

When Angel's mind is working in consciousness, his logic and reason is contrasted with Tess's nature and instinct. Earlier in the novel, logical dialogue between Tess and Angel takes place, but reason favours social prejudices against unconventional marriages and their children. Angel convinces Tess that they have no future together by arguing that their children, the 'wretches of our flesh and blood', would grow up 'under a taunt' (262–63). This argument goes against their true

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<sup>97</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy's Imagination* (Ohio State University Press, 2014), p. 96.

<sup>98</sup> Sigmund Freud read *Tess* and declared Hardy 'knew psychoanalysis', and Hardy could have known Henry Maudsley's *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867). See Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains*, p. 96.

<sup>99</sup> Jean R. Brooks alternatively writes that it is 'the ballad mode, non-naturalistic and poetic' (p. 234).



feelings for each other, because firstly, it implies that they are still so attracted to each other that they would not be able to resist having sexual intercourse, which would lead to pregnancy. Secondly, Angel's proposition is contrasted to Tess's vision of eventual healing:

Tess's feminine hope – shall we confess it? – had been so obstinately *recuperative* as to revive in her surreptitious visions of a domiciliary intimacy continued long enough to *break down* his coldness even against his judgment. (*Tess* 263, emphasis mine)

The phrase 'obstinately recuperative' is a refrain of Tess's earlier 'recuperative power' which gave her the urge to start a new life in Talbothays (112). It signifies that her vision grows out of 'organic nature' (112). The narrator's use of the word 'feminine', here, erases Tess's individuality, making her a type. 'Feminine' is used in the way that Izzy, Retty and Marian are merged into 'portion of one organism called sex' (162), illustrating the overpowering will of Darwinian nature. The phrase 'break down' also alludes to the image of nature decomposing, out of which new life grows. Angel too, feels that natural pull: the 'self-combating proclivity of the supersensitive' (236).

There are heavy-handed descriptions of how Angel's mind is hardened, 'blocked' and immovable, yet dotted throughout the text are also statements that show Angel capable of changing, if only Tess was aware of it and would push a little further. In a heart-breaking moment, the narrator reveals that Angel 'wished for a moment that he had responded yet more kindly and kissed her once at least' (262). The point of view is intricate in these passages, because we have first, Tess's who accepts Angel as unforgiving; secondly, Angel's in which he wavers a little between his principles and feelings; and thirdly, the narrator's, which is strangely too textual (or to rephrase, too metaphorical or imaginative) to be taken without a little disbelief as to its realism: While 'smothering his affection for her', the narrator describes, 'a tear descended slowly upon his [Angel's] cheek, a tear so large that it magnified the pores of the skin over which it rolled, like the object-lens of a microscope' (250).<sup>100</sup> The metaphor of a microscope alludes strongly to the scientific gaze, the kind of hard and cold gaze which does not acknowledge the subject is a human being. Another

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<sup>100</sup> On the microscope and modes of perception, see James Emmott, 'Parameters of Vibration, Technologies of Capture, and the Layering of Voices and Faces in the Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Studies* 53.3 (2011), 468–78.

reading is possible, that is, by understanding the Victorian fascination of the microscope.<sup>101</sup>

Although the microscope had been around since the seventeenth century, it was during the nineteenth century that the instrument gained more accuracy and became affordable. Laura Forsberg points out the interesting fact that nineteenth-century guidebooks on using the microscope instructed 'the reader not for the careful empirical work of the laboratory, but rather for the imprecise, imaginatively stimulating exploration of the natural world'.<sup>102</sup> The microscope, like other instruments associated with vision and eyesight, drastically changed one's perspective, but the microscope in particular opened up ways of seeing objects that have always been in one's daily life at a close proximity.<sup>103</sup> Edwin Lankester's guidebook, *Half-Hours with the Microscope* (1859), encourages readers to go off with the microscope to explore nearby gardens and the country to see ordinary objects transformed beyond their imagination.<sup>104</sup> James Emmott similarly argues due to microscopy, the very idea of perspective was diversified, 'spatially, the action of enlarging decomposes simplicity into complex multiplicity'.<sup>105</sup> Mid- to late-century Victorians 'witnessed a paradigm shift: from the presumption of static persistence of forms [. . .] to a framework of understanding that assumes the capacity to describe a kind of dynamic persistence'.<sup>106</sup> Read in this context, Angel's teardrop, which acts like a microscope, is a symbol of the text's desire for a paradigm shift, for Angel to see Tess before him more deeply than what his bare eyes can perceive. The motif also refers forward in the plot, to the narrator's microscopic attention to the threads of Tess's attire, in the famous passage in which Tess walks as a working-class woman, a natural part of the rural landscape. Importantly, Angel's change of perception does happen, although it is much later in the novel: 'Viewing her in these lights a regret for his hasty judgment began to oppress him' (360).

Thus it is important to focus on how Angel perceives Tess at Sandbourne to see the significant change in his preconceptions and his acceptance of Tess as she is.

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<sup>101</sup> See Laura Forsberg, 'Nature's Invisibilia: The Victorian Microscope and the Miniature Fairy' *Victorian Studies*, 57.4 (2015), 638–66.

<sup>102</sup> Forsberg, p. 653.

<sup>103</sup> Forsberg, p. 639.

<sup>104</sup> Forsberg, p. 654.

<sup>105</sup> Emmott, p. 475.

<sup>106</sup> Emmott, p. 476.

When Angel arrives in Sandbourne, he looks around to see where Tess could be residing:

Where could Tess possibly be, a cottage-girl, his young wife, amidst all this wealth and fashion? The more he pondered, the more was he puzzled. Were there any cows to milk here? There certainly were no fields to till. She was most probably engaged to do something in one of these large houses; and he sauntered along, looking at the chamber-windows and their lights going out one by one, and wondered which of them might be hers (*Tess* 398).

Angel uses his logic to try and guess where Tess is staying. Because there are no fields she could work as a dairymaid, he believes that she must be a servant in one of the grand houses, and he even initially considers going through the back-door to see her. When the landlady answers and says there is a Mrs d'Urberville, Angel thinks 'Tess, then, passed as a married woman, and he felt glad, even though she had not adopted his name' (399). In these passages, Angel writes and rewrites Tess's story to fit what he views; first he imagines that she would still working as a dairymaid, then coming to Sandbourne, rethinks her as working as a servant. He understands that she may have gone back to using her maiden name, but then is glad that she is passing off as a married woman, although it never entered his mind that she had become Alec's mistress.

The shock of learning the truth from Tess is devastating, and importantly that revelation of truth is portrayed through the act of gazing and looking: 'Clare looked at her keenly, then, gathering her meaning, flagged like one plague-stricken, and his glance sank [. . .]' (*Tess* 401). The emotion between Angel and Tess is also expressed through their eyes and gaze at each other: 'They stood fixed, their baffled hearts looking out of their eyes with a joylessness pitiful to see' (401). In the passage above, not only is the couple looking at each other, but also in the phrase 'pitiful to see' Hardy adds the narrator and reader's gaze into the picture. Thus the reader is also invited in the act of gazing with sympathy. Finally, in a period of shock and numbness, Angel's view blanks out: he does not see the moment Tess leaves; neither does he see the door as he leaves the house, nor the streets as he walks away: 'and a minute or two after, he found himself in the street, walking along he did not know

whither' (401). He reaches his hotel, sits down for breakfast, 'staring at nothingness' (406).

Angel's sight recovers after walking across a valley to the first train station. It is the first mention of him in the act of looking: 'Then, pausing for breath, he unconsciously looked back. Why he did so he could not say, but something seemed to impel him to the act' (406). The act is not deliberate but one done 'unconsciously'; his mind still in a dazed state, perceives that landscape with open and receptive eyes. In an impressionistic portrayal of Angel's perception, Tess is seen as moving spot in the landscape, who is then gradually recognised as a human being:

The tape-like surface of the road diminished in his rear as far as he could see, and as he gazed a moving spot intruded on the white vacuity of its perspective.

It was a human figure running. Clare waited, with a dim sense that somebody was trying to overtake him.

The form descending the incline was a woman's, yet so entirely was his mind blinded to the idea of his wife's following him that even when she came nearer he did not recognise her under the totally changed attire in which he now beheld her. It was not till she was quite close that he could believe her to be Tess. (406)

While the narrator says that Angel's 'mind [was] blinded to the idea of his wife's following him' that he could not recognise her until she came quite close, this blindness is clearly a different kind of blindness he had two years earlier after her confession when he could not see Tess as his loving wife. Angel's blindness in this passage is a kind of delayed decoding, or refusal of decoding. In contrast to his mind earlier which was constantly working to rewrite Tess's circumstances to fit his logical understanding, his mind here stands still in puzzlement, and his look at her is one of 'inquiry' and 'amazement', rather than of judgement. While his mind does recover some of its analytic acumen and Angel tries to logically explain how Tess could have murdered Alec, ('thinking from the strangeness of her manner that she was in some delirium' 407), overall Angel's own feelings are one of 'confusion' and excitement', and it leads to his 'tenderness' dominating all other feelings:

There momentarily flashed through his mind that the family tradition of the coach and murder might have arisen because the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these

things. As well as his confused and excited ideas could reason, he supposed that in the moment of mad grief of which she spoke, her mind had lost its balance, and plunged her into this abyss [. . .] It was very terrible if true; if a temporary hallucination, sad. But, anyhow, here was this deserted wife of his, this passionately-fond woman [. . .] Tenderness was absolutely dominant in Clare at last. He kissed her endlessly [. . .] (*Tess* 408)

While it is said of *Tess* that ‘no novel of Hardy’s [. . .] focuses more exclusively on its central character’,<sup>107</sup> I believe it can also be said no other fallen woman novel focuses more exclusively on the character who rejects the fallen woman and illustrates the complexity of a radical change in perception. The characterisation of Angel is crucial to Hardy’s discussion of sympathy, which he advocated through the ethics of pluralism. After declaring that Tess is a ‘Pure Woman’, Hardy’s novel explores the transformation of seeing purity, and recognising the pure woman for who she is.

### Conclusion

This chapter ends with asking ‘what is purity?’, because in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, this reflective, non-assuming attitude leads to sympathy for the fallen woman. The following passage from the novel provides ample material with which to discuss the question:

Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a fieldwoman pure and simple, in winter guise; a gray serge cape, a red woollen cravat, a stuff skirt covered by a whitey-brown rough wrapper, and buff-leather gloves. Every thread of that old attire has become faded and thin under the stroke of raindrops, the burn of sunbeams, and the stress of winds (299–300).

In this passage, which is accentuated by the rare use of present tense, the narrator presents a picture of Tess’s purity. The narrator paints Tess as taking part in the natural landscape, and the details of her clothes signify her social class. But the description is kept ‘pure and simple’: that is, the eye is open-minded and there is no indication of judgement. Tess is ‘pure and simple’ because she is viewed as any

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<sup>107</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 117.

working woman that one might chance to see in a Dorset landscape; there is nothing to expose her affair with Alec, or her abandonment by Angel. However, at the same time the narrator's microscopic point of view, focusing on 'every thread', feels the raindrops, sunbeams and winds on the fabric, and with those faded threads we too feel each passing season which Tess has experienced. Through the novel, Hardy represents Tess from multiple perspectives so that the reader may share in the plurality of her purity.

## Chapter Five

### The Muddy Waters of Moral Luck in *Esther Waters*

‘One doesn’t do the good that one would like to in the world; one has to do the good that comes to one to do’ (*Esther Waters*)

#### Introduction

George Moore’s 1894 novel, *Esther Waters*, moves away from the traditional fallen woman narrative; as Nina Auerbach puts it, Esther is a fallen woman who with resilience is able to ‘fall up’.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, *Esther Waters* is the first novel in this study in which the fallen woman character remains alive at the conclusion of the narrative, as well as nurturing a child to adulthood. With great artistic energy, Moore depicts the day-to-day struggles of a young, working-class single mother raising her baby in London. Yet interestingly, despite all that, Esther’s son, for whom she lived so passionately, grows older, goes on to boarding school and eventually fades away from the story, and Esther quietly returns to Woodview. Moore’s representation of the fallen woman reaches to imagining her life after the ‘fall’, which may determine her social and economic position but does not have any effect on her moral position. However, though recognising the heroism of Esther’s survival, the novel does not give her an unquestionable moral triumph, such as seen in Ruth’s self-sacrificial death. This chapter explores this unique nature of Moore’s acceptance of the fallen woman’s story, and argues that he endorses a kind of subtle sympathy which

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 158.

gradually accommodates other's differences, and understands that at times, people's moral decisions are based on luck.

The novel's lack of satisfactory closure is ambivalent, and some may question whether the novel suggests the futility of Esther's hard work. This reading is supported by the way the novel's opening paragraph describing the train station is repeated almost word-for-word at the beginning of Chapter 45, the only difference being the 'pale evening' and the 'grey evening' (*Esther* 3, 311).<sup>2</sup> Anthony Farrow notes that Esther's return to Woodhouse is a 'symbol of the ineffectiveness of human action'.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Rachel Bowlby, for whom Esther's 'fading of parental attachment' is an example of such human futility, argues of its significance because it 'consciously challenges contemporary moral expectations' of women and motherhood and 'touches on a new strain'.<sup>4</sup> I argue this 'fading' is also part of the novel's challenging contemporary moral expectations of sympathy. In the portrayal of a woman who moves on with her life with all its complications, Moore calls for a form of sympathy from the reader that is not made of the reader's distantly reflective pity and sorrow, but is an absorption *into* her story. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, a delay of judgement is a crucial aspect of the reader's sympathy, but in Moore's case, that delay of judgment is less aimed at drastically replacing one's values for another, but a gentle and gradual development of finding a harmonious middle way that accepts the factual ways of life – synthesising moral values and livelihoods with integrity. Harmonising and synthesising can at times overlap with compromising, and thus the novel's anti-climactic ending can be read as a dissatisfactory compromise: Esther grows into a middle-age woman, a widow, whose adult son is mostly away as a soldier. While earlier she protested against injustices suffered by fallen women and illegitimate children, later in life she seems more complacent. While there are triumphant moments in her rise above poverty, there are ethical questions left unanswered regarding her husband's reliance on betting for means of income. However, it is vital in Moore's challenge to the reader to simply accept Esther and move on, as she herself does.

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<sup>2</sup> For this thesis, I will be using the Oxford World Classics 2012 edition of *Esther Waters*, edited by Stephen Regan. All quotations from the novel will be referenced in-text, with the shortened title *Esther* and page numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Farrow, *George Moore* (Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Bowlby, *A Child of One's Own: Parental Stories* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 178



Accepting Esther's experience, from her fall to rise and retreat, as a picture of the way in which the world we live in operates, is a key challenge in Moore's vision of sympathy for the fallen woman. Where Esther's experience does not fit our expectations we must widen our borders, not try to accommodate Esther's story into our moral perspective of the world. Moore's stylistic techniques for his sympathetic portrayal of the fallen woman match up with his journey to find a form that suits his needs. Heavily influenced by French naturalist authors, such as Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola,<sup>5</sup> Moore was moved by the naturalists' strong gaze on the world, which did not look away from the grimmest, most miserable corners of society, and by their determination to describe everything as it is and not taint it with fancy or ideals. Critics are also well aware that by the time Moore wrote *Esther Waters*, in fact as early as 1886, he had moved on from a pure naturalist style.<sup>6</sup> Moore, although initially astonished by the writers' skill and worldview, later writes that he is 'sick of' Flaubert's 'odious pessimism' which 'never ceases'.<sup>7</sup> While 'avoiding vulgar sentiment', Moore's novels 'touch that note of pathos' which disqualifies it from a pure naturalist tradition. Moore evolved the ironic narrative style into one in which 'the play of ironies is analytical yet creative and life-enhancing'.<sup>8</sup> Critics have also noticed that the influence of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev on Moore came partly as a reaction against Flaubert and Zola.<sup>9</sup> 'I love art because it is not nature', wrote Moore in a letter to a Dutch naturalist writer, Frans Netscher, in August 1886. As Stephen Regan sums up, '[b]y this stage in his career, Moore is clearly searching for a mode of writing that will answer his demands for truthfulness but also satisfy his desire for poetry and beauty'.<sup>10</sup>

Moore wrote in 1891 that 'I desire above all to tell the story of a life in grave simple phrases, so grave and simple that the method, the execution, would disappear, and the reader, with bating breath [sic], would remain a prey to an absorbing

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<sup>5</sup> Out of the French naturalist writers, Flaubert and Zola, especially, are least merciful in their works. (See Richard Allen Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore* (Smythe, 1978), p. 16).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Regan writes that there is 'compelling evidence' to suggest this. 'Introduction', *Esther Waters*, by George Moore, ed. by Stephen Regan (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. vii–xxxii (p. xxii).

<sup>7</sup> qtd in Cave, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Cave, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Moore wrote in an essay about Turgenev (in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1888) that unlike naturalists who are recorder of 'mere facts', Turgenev wrote facts that were always 'tempered and purified in thought' (qtd in Regan, 'Introduction', *Esther Waters*, p. xxii). See also Cave, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Regan, 'Introduction', *Esther Waters*, p. xxii.

emotion',<sup>11</sup> to which Adrian Frazier adds, '[t]here isn't a better description of the stylistic virtues of *Esther Waters*'.<sup>12</sup> Possibly written in 'passionate contestation' to Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,<sup>13</sup> Moore's story of a working-class single mother is a familiar fallen woman narrative and yet radically different from preceding works. One significance of the novel is that the presence of the narrator recedes as events are presented from Esther's perspective. Siobhan Chapman analyses how Moore uses 'internal focalisation' with Esther as the focaliser and 'free indirect speech' to express her thoughts. When *Esther Waters* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are juxtaposed, the difference in style is clear. Tess is often described from an external point of view: 'the reader is offered a much more detached, although perhaps no less sympathetic, view of Tess's story; her experiences are more obviously interpreted by the narrator'.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, in *Esther Waters* 'the narrator seems to be "attached" to the character [. . .] and thus holds the same spatial position as the character'.<sup>15</sup> While Chapman does not refer to emotion in her article, the distinction between points of view in *Tess* and *Esther Waters* shows how Moore's narrator, rather than speaking on behalf of the character, encourages the reader to have as direct and unmediated experience of Esther's life as much as possible. Unlike Hardy's use of strong emotions such as pleasure and disgust to arouse readers' awareness of their own feelings, Moore's naturalistic and pragmatic stylistic arouses the readers' emotions to feel as Esther feels. These feelings are less about self-reflecting one's own opinions of the fallen woman and more about simply identifying with her. Esther's hardworking spirit may even encourage the reader's admiration for the heroine, inviting the reader to feel they are like or want to be like her. Even in the most sympathetic moments of Gaskell, Eliot and Hardy, it is hard to say that the implied readers are expected to identify themselves in the fallen woman character; in these earlier works, our sympathy more likely takes the form of that of a patron.

Literary criticism has explored the modernist development of a type of empathy which is irrational, unconscious, and an intuitive, bodily response not based on ethical reasoning or judgement – it is a development which Moore's writing points

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Louvre Revisited – II', *Speaker*, 3.76 (13 June 1891), pp. 700–01; Adrian Frazier, *George Moore, 1852–1933* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 209.

<sup>12</sup> Frazier, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Frazier, p. 229.

<sup>14</sup> Siobhan Chapman, "'From Their Point of View": Voice and Speech in George Moore's *Esther Waters*', *Language and Literature*, 11.4 (2002), 307–23 (321).

<sup>15</sup> Boris Upensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, trans. by Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig, (University of California Press, 1973); qtd in Chapman, p. 311.

to.<sup>16</sup> As Adrian Frazier writes, ‘Moore had no moral intention; his intention was to write a great novel, and one illustrating the Schopenhauerian theme that the life-instinct overrules all other proprieties and moralities’.<sup>17</sup> However, it is worth considering to what extent Moore uses a neutral and amoral empathy. Indeed, the novel is driven with a sympathetic purpose: in a very rare moment, the narrator intervenes and states, ‘Hers is an heroic adventure if one considers it’ (*Esther* 143). As Stephen Regan points out, this passage significantly reveals that the novel is sympathetic at heart, reminding us of its ethical and political functions.<sup>18</sup> Rachel Bowlby too writes that ‘Esther’s story will educate the novel’s readers, [who] are still presumed to be ignorant of lives like Esther’s’.<sup>19</sup> Moore had no intention to write a novel that was ‘moral’ in a narrow and conventional sense which many Victorian readers would have expected. For Moore, this ‘life-instinct’ was a higher, broader and more humanely ‘moral’. As Frazier states, the novel is ‘written with unique restraint: the narrative is meant itself to do the work of analysis, commentary, and atmosphere. He hoped to be a pen though which life would tell its story’.<sup>20</sup> The so-called ‘amoral’ style of the novel promotes the humane response of the reader. Part of the power of *Esther Waters* is, as Moore himself has put it, the pure ‘absorbing emotion’ of the character, which stimulates the reader’s instinct for sympathy. Annette Federico puts it this way:

*Esther Waters* is a naturalistic achievement, a truly ‘modern’ novel, but it is still embedded with the values of nineteenth-century realism, [which Levine defines as] the ‘self-conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth-telling and *extending the limits of human sympathy*.’ This is exactly what Esther understands as a story, exactly why she wants to tell her story: to tell the truth, to elicit sympathy, to create relationships, to affirm connection’.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Kirsty Martin, *Modern Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence*, (Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Frazier, p. 235.

<sup>18</sup> Regan, ‘Introduction’ to *Esther Waters*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>19</sup> Bowlby, p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> Frazier, p. 235.

<sup>21</sup> Annette Federico, ‘Subjectivity and Story in George Moore’s *Esther Waters*’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 36.2 (1993), 141–57 (153, emphasis mine); See also George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 234.

*Esther Waters* still keeps in time with the Victorian tendency to have a moral purpose behind a novel, but it is by no means limited to the norms set by previous fallen woman narratives. It is bold and takes full advantage of the path that other authors have paved to go further in its sympathetic representation of Esther. Anthony Farrow's remark captures the essence of *Esther Waters*: 'George Moore makes a clear choice for human goodness, as distinct from goodness defined by codes of conduct or theoretical principles, which are often alienating and inhuman'.<sup>22</sup> There is something in the portrayal of Esther and her 'goodness', which is different from the way in which, for example, Elizabeth Gaskell argues that her heroine is 'good'. Goodness in *Ruth* is structured around the Christian ideals of humility, repentance and self-sacrifice. Ruth is perfect in each of these, but because of the social constraints that this definition also carries, her story must nevertheless end in death. Meanwhile Moore does not take up the already established concept of what is 'good', and fit Esther into it. Instead he redefines goodness through *Esther Waters*, and by doing so commits to a more generous social vision of female life and labour than was previously the case in narratives of the fallen woman.

This chapter explores the nature of sympathy in George Moore's serious moral inquiry. In his redefinition of what it means to have 'human goodness', Moore rejects the idea of narrowly prescriptive morals of those who cede authority and eschew complexity. Firstly, Moore explores the 'muddy waters' of morality through the motif of Christian religion, using the Plymouth Brethren faith that Esther herself holds and develops. Although her actions and decisions sometimes go against the Brethren's ideals, the novel remains partial in that respect, that is, not judging Esther for compromising or lowering her moral standards, and focusing rather on Esther's ability to adjust her ideals with the realities of her circumstances. In other words, Moore is less interested in the fallen woman's repentance or the condemner's radical conversion of heart, than in the way people gradually absorb and accept other people's values and choices without compromising their own. Secondly, Moore approaches the idea of 'moral luck': how chance influences the way we morally evaluate a person. Esther is in particular unlucky, but nevertheless she never falters to

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<sup>22</sup> Farrow, p. 71.

make the best of her situation, thus refining her inner goodness.<sup>23</sup> The themes of religious morality, class, luck and chance are scattered throughout the novel, embedded in the text by motifs associated with the Plymouth Brethren and horserace betting, two factors which heavily influence Esther's character and life. Attending to Moore's sympathy with his heroine in her circumstances allows for a more generous understanding of Esther's predicament as a fallen woman, and a fuller appreciation of her persistence, her will to live, and the innate human goodness that inheres within her. Furthermore, as we will see in the final section of this chapter, the idea of moral luck in *Esther Waters* is extended to the minor character, Sarah Tucker, the fallen woman story on the margins of Esther's story. Yet Moore's representation of Sarah is sympathetic, showing that she falls into bad luck at moments where Esther herself is lucky. Thus Moore shows that moral goodness is relational to one's situation which is distributed by chance, and through this sophisticated understanding of the complexities of our world, readers are equipped to recognise and sympathise with human goodness which extends beyond biased and hypocritical moral values.

### **Bad Moral Decisions or Just Unlucky? Deciphering the Moralities of Christianity and Natural Instinct**

When expanding and opening up opportunities of the reader's sympathy for Esther, Moore works with the religious institution and illustrates how individuals can accept different styles of life without compromising their faith and morals. Christianity, as a basic presence in Victorian culture, tends to play a largely negative role in fallen woman narratives. We have seen how in *Ruth*, Gaskell writes satirically of the hypocrisy of some church-goers such as Mr Bradshaw, and shows that true Christian compassion is found in the less dogmatic Christianity of the Bensons and Sally, who value Ruth as an individual rather than a stereotype. In *Tess*, Hardy illustrates the inner struggle of those who could be kind but are still slaves to narrow Christian conventions which reject those who fail to meet their rigid moral standards: the parish priest who refuses to give Tess's child a church burial; and Angel who rejects Tess after her confession. Furthermore, with the use of Stonehenge, Hardy explicitly associates Tess with paganism, to show something deeper in humanity which comes

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on moral luck in the works of Hardy, see the fourth chapter in Jill Larson, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel 1880–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 64–92.

before the current social institutions. The hypocrisy of Christianity and Victorian propriety is unmercifully, satirically and ironically revealed in *Ruth* and *Tess*. *Esther Waters*, too, criticises conventional religion.<sup>24</sup> For example, when Esther is refused a job because of her 'fallen' status, she goes away thinking 'It's a strange thing that religion should make some people so unfeeling' (*Esther* 142).

However, in other ways, Moore's treatment of Christianity is more complex: Esther does not reject her faith nor does she go through 'repentance', but rather develops a more sophisticated understanding of it.<sup>25</sup> Moore highlights the hypocrisies of religion, but he does more than condemn it – he also shows an alternative possibility of reform and synthesis. There is something to be said regarding Moore's interesting relationship with Christianity, in particular the institutions of Irish Catholicism and English Puritanism, which differed in their practices of applying the teaching of the Bible to their modern, daily lives. Moore maintained a dual relationship towards Catholicism and Puritanism, which gave his novel a distanced yet sympathetic point of view. Frazier states that '[t]here is no time on record when [Moore] was certainly a believer of God', and his relationship to Christianity was further complicated by the way '[n]either Protestant nor Catholic, he is devoted to inquiry into Christianity, speculatively exploring the experience of faith from the position of faithlessness'.<sup>26</sup> Even so, Moore was no mere neutral bystander. In October 1887, Moore published in the *Times* that it is '[t]he English I love, and with a love that is foolish – mad, limitless [. . .] England is Protestantism, Protestantism is England. Protestantism is strong, clean, and westernly; Catholicism is eunuch-like, dirty, and Oriental'.<sup>27</sup> Then, not many years later, Moore apparently changed his mind: Catholicism was 'more human' while Protestantism was too moral.<sup>28</sup> However, in spring and summer of 1893, when he was deeply devoted to writing *Esther Waters*, Moore returned to his fondness for Protestantism, a fondness which is remarkable for its sympathy. In a letter to his brother Maurice, he expresses, 'I have a great literary project – I want to paint the portrait of the Saxon of his habit of instinctive hypocrisy'. And yet Moore speaks of the English with endearment. He sees their 'habit of

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<sup>24</sup> Brian Nicholas, 'The Case of Esther Waters', in *The Man of Wax: Critical Essays on George Moore*, ed. by Douglas A. Hughes (New York University Press, 1971), pp. 151–84 (p. 175).

<sup>25</sup> Compare it to *Tess*, who rejects the church when it refuses to accept her: "Then I don't like you!" she burst out, "and I'll never come to your church no more!" (*Tess* 109)

<sup>26</sup> qtd in Frazier, pp. 201, xvii.

<sup>27</sup> qtd in Frazier, p. 162. In this publication, Moore talks of his hate of his native country and of the religion he was brought up it.

<sup>28</sup> Frazier, p. 201.

instinctive hypocrisy’ – ‘the Bible in one hand, then gin bottle in the other’ – but dull and thick-witted as they are, Moore still says they are the ‘people I love and understand’. ‘Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone’ he further calls them and says, ‘how I love that thick-witted race’.<sup>29</sup> This sympathy expressed by Moore is founded on his acceptance the shortcomings of the other, and moreover him seeing their so-called faults as what makes them human and endearing.

Significantly, this personal passion for the two groups of Christianity can be seen to drive his writing of *Esther Waters* and its strong advocacy for the ‘fallen’ woman’s case. Brian Nicholas views Moore’s double perspective as an unforgivable paradox: ‘this hostility to conventional religion and puritanism brings us back to the central problem of Esther’s presentation as a girl with a “pure religious mind” who never disowns the strict moral views in which she was brought up’.<sup>30</sup> Nicholas states that *Esther Waters* is an ‘anti-puritan novel with a puritan heroine’ which not only leads to ‘psychological curiosities but [also] to inevitable ambiguities and waverings in the writer’s own attitude’.<sup>31</sup> However, I suggest that this very paradox also brings about Moore’s portrayal of ‘human goodness’. Moore’s writing is sympathetic towards working-class individuals who in difficult circumstances synthesise their religious and moral beliefs with their means of livelihood. Moore is aware of the struggles they have in trying to compromise their religious and ethical values while still having to support the means to earn their daily bread. Thus his representation of such individuals is understanding and non-judgmental.

*Esther Waters* fully explores the journey of a fallen woman and the ways in which her faith is developed by her experience of life. In doing so, Moore shows that not all discrepancies between faith and actions are indications of hypocritical ‘waverings’, but can reveal a deeper, more meaningful human goodness. The Plymouth Brethren is an important backdrop for Moore to explore characters coming in contact with secular ways of living, and their gradual acceptance and adjustments in becoming more inclusive of others. Esther is one of the Plymouth Brethren, a sect of Christianity which broke away from the Anglican church in early 1800s. The founders, including law student John Nelson Darby, met in Dublin, Ireland originally, but it was the 1832 gathering in Devon, England which gave the sect its name. The

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<sup>29</sup> Frazier, p. 227.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas, p. 179.

Plymouth Brethren were Bible focused and emphasised having a personal relationship with God. They were, and still are, fundamentalists, deliberately keeping away from secular influences. The narrator describes Esther's early years growing up in a religious home: not only is their chapel bare of materials, but Esther's 'knowledge of life was strictly limited to her experience of life; she knew no drama of passion except that which the Gospels relate [. . .]' (*Esther* 20). Because of her upbringing, Esther is inexperienced and naive, but is not ignorant and has a strong sense of morality in sexual relationships.

At Woodview, however, a fellow servant, Sarah Tucker is an avid reader, and for the first time in her life Esther hears a thrilling and passionate love story. It is the new experience of life which above all influences Esther, and she cannot help but consume it as part of her own experience:

[. . .] this story in the *Family Reader* was the first representation of life she had met with, and its humanity thrilled her like the first idol set up for worship. The actress told Norris that she loved him. They were on a balcony, the sky was blue, the moon was shining, the warm scent of the mignonette came up from the garden below, the man was in evening dress with diamond shirt studs, the actress's arm was large and white. The strangest events had happened for the purpose of bringing them together, and, fascinated against her will, Esther could not but listen. (*Esther* 20)

While in describing the Plymouth Brethren's chapel where Esther grew up, the narrator used the negative 'no's and 'nor's to cut away any excess, but here the narrator creates run-on sentences only connected with a comma, as if one could barely keep up with the vivid objects and images piling on top of each other. The strategic placement of the two conjunction 'and's (completely absent in the previous chapel passage), connects the story with Esther's response. It also breaks the monotone structure and adds a variety of speed and flow to the sentence. As the language of the text appeals to the reader's ears, the excitement of the magazine story is an experience in itself for Esther, and she absorbs this aspect of 'humanity' with a 'thrill'.

However, Esther's upbringing in the Plymouth Brethren has taught her to stay away from worldly stories, which are compared to forbidden 'idols'. Esther's 'racial instinct forced reproof from her' and she says to her fellow workers, 'I am sure it is wicked to read such tales' (*Esther* 20). Moore, of course, had experience of readers



like Esther who believed his fiction was immoral, but as Esther is drawn to the representation of sensual experience that opens up her small world, Moore strongly advocates provocative novels. He had many battles with circulating libraries on literary censorship and wrote of Mr Murdie's 'singularly obtrusive way you both have of forcing your moral and religious beliefs upon the public'.<sup>32</sup> In his 1885 pamphlet, as exasperated as he sounds, Moore expressed understanding for parents' need to feel that young girls have access to books which are age appropriate for them.<sup>33</sup> However, as a realist writer, Moore requests material with which to analyse humanity, material that is not all idealistic and agreeable. 'To analyze,' he writes, 'you must have a subject; a religious or sensual passion is as necessary to the realistic novelist as a disease to the physician'.<sup>34</sup>

That these young people should be provided with a literature suited to their age and taste, no artist will deny; all I ask is that some means may be devised by which the novelist will be allowed *to describe the moral and religious feeling of his day as he perceives it to exist*, and to be forced no longer to write with a view of helping parents and guardians to bring up their charges in all the traditional beliefs. [. . .] That the nineteenth century should possess *a literature characteristic of its nervous, passionate life*, I hold is as desirable'.<sup>35</sup>

Through *Esther Waters*, Moore has written literature that exquisitely captures 'nervous, passionate life'. *Esther Waters* would be the type of novel which Puritans would have called 'wicked', and it is ironic that the heroine would call other stories so. This meta-textual reference draws our attention to the acts of reading in Moore's fiction. It seems significant to the novel's design that Esther cannot read at all. Her illiteracy comes with emphasis on her unfortunate childhood and the detail can evoke the reader's acute pity for Esther. However, it can also be said that Esther's illiteracy is an over-simplification – a lazy representation – and it may suggest a potential *lack* of sympathy to represent Esther as a figure for us to 'read', but who cannot 'read' for herself. Esther's son grows up learning to read and write, but Miss Rice reminds

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<sup>32</sup> George Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, ed. by Pierre Coustillas, (The Harvester Press, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Esther may have grown up ignorant of passion and stories, but Moore presents her early religious life as being a happy; although '[s]he had been brought up in the strictness of the Plymouth Brethren' and her life was 'narrow', it was a 'peaceful family life' (*Esther* 20).

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, pp. 21–22, emphasis mine.

Esther that 'there's much besides reading and writing' (171). Miss Rice is an intriguing character, a novelist who is often seen reading or writing. But it is significant the way she listens to Esther's story: 'And Miss Rice had laid her book she was reading on her knees, and had listened to Esther's pleasures as if they had been her own' (164). This description potentially has two divergent views: the first is how Miss Rice stops reading her book in order to 'read' Esther, suggesting her investment in Esther also involves a personal interest as a story writer. The second view is how her reading is set aside, in order to fully engage with the living individual in front of her. Miss Rice's kindness is opposite the example of the medical students who engage in a discussion of a shilling novel they had read, while showing no sympathy for Esther who is in labour. Esther cannot read popular novels, letters, job ads, and newspapers which tell the results of the horse race – that which we might categorise as 'commonplace' reading materials. Meanwhile, Esther takes reading lessons of the bible from Mrs Barfield and has adequate understanding of the Scriptures to develop her own personal religious views. Perhaps it can be said that Moore distinguishes between the transformative and non-transformative reading activities, and in his critique of literary censorship fights for creative space to write stories which *do* transform worldviews.

Moore's interest in representing the 'moral and religious feeling of his day', that is the development of practically applying one's faith in a secular environment, is further exemplified in the side story given early on in the novel of Esther's late father John, who was converted to the Plymouth Brethren in his early youth. The anecdote provides the means for readers to sympathise with John by understanding how keeping moral rules can clash with means of livelihood. After ending up in the hospital from too much drink, John's heart was touched by the Brethren's message of God, and he changed his way of living. However, while a distinctive line may be drawn between the follies of drinking and the Brethren's temperance, not all things which the Plymouth Brethren abstain from can be accommodated within one's livelihood. John married Mary Thornby, and as the conditions set by his father-in-law, he started working in his shop, for it was safer than his previous job as a house-painter. However, John's new trade did not fit in with the Brethren, who approached him on the subject often:

‘Of course this is between you and the Lord, but these things’ (pointing to the old glass and jewellery) ‘often are but snares for the feet, and lead weaker brethren into temptation. Of course, it is between you and the Lord.’ (*Esther* 21)

The tension between his faith and his means of livelihood tormented John for a while, but in the end, his scruples were overruled by his health conditions as well as his wife’s gentleness, and he stayed a dealer – although making compromises of not selling items which were most strongly objected by the Brethren. By including such details of the characters’ livelihoods and economical circumstances, Moore’s text helps the reader to be sympathetic towards character because they have better understanding of how their environment influences their actions.

Moore’s theme of synthesis of different beliefs and morals reoccur throughout the novel, and he shows how the act of reprioritising one’s morals can be a sign of human goodness in natural growth. Mrs Barfield, like John and Esther, is yet another Plymouth Brethren character who learned to live with practices outside of her faith. Even before she learns to sympathise with Esther’s ‘fall’, Mrs Barfield has her own experiences of changing her moral views. In her early life, she had fallen in love with the squire, and they were married after the squire promised to become a Plymouth Brethren and never bet again, but his commitment did not last long. Mr and Mrs Barfield learn to accept each other’s habits, pleasures and values, and as the narrator states as general wisdom aimed to all readers, ‘Tears there were, and some family disunion, *but time extorts concessions from all of us*’ (*Esther* 27, emphasis mine). Mrs Barfield never fully accepts or becomes indifferent to the horse-racing which goes on at Woodview: ‘it was clear to what cause Mrs Barfield attributed the demoralisation of her household’ (28). Yet it is significant that she is able to continue attending prayer meetings and read the Scriptures as she pleased. The text does not suggest that Mrs Barfield is a hypocritical Brethren. With the use of a garden as a metaphor, Moore illustrates how her religious practices changed, but at its heart her devotion remained the same: ‘Circumstances had effaced, though they had not obliterated, the once sharply marked confines of her religious habits. Her religion was like a garden – a little less sedulously tended than of yore, but no whit less fondly loved’ (*Esther* 32). These small incidents in the novel, of characters adjusting to others’ needs, often gradually over time, being easy going and willing to compromise morals is one of the

ways in which Moore illustrates sympathetic connection with each other at the heart of human goodness.

Mrs Barfield's discovery of Esther's pregnancy proves to be another chance for her to change her moral opinions and extend her sympathy. Mrs Barfield initially disapproves that Esther has lost her virginity, and that Esther was dishonest in not telling her about it. However, through their conversation Mrs Barfield acknowledges the evils of horse racing and betting which play a part on Esther's misfortune. Once learning that Esther tried to keep her position for as long as possible for her baby's sake, Mrs Barfield is convinced that Esther did right in keeping her pregnancy a secret. The narrator describes that '[t]here was in Mrs. Barfield's look something akin to admiration, and she felt she had not been wholly wrong in her estimate of the girl's character' (*Esther* 74). That her look was 'something akin to', rather than simply being admiration, suggests that her expression is somewhat difficult to catch perhaps because Mrs Barfield's feelings towards Esther are in the process of shifting. The narrator tells us that 'she felt she had not been wholly wrong in her estimate of the girl's character' (74), indicating that Mrs Barfield's insight to Esther's point of view changed the way she evaluated Esther's choice to hide her pregnancy. Mrs Barfield also recognises that Esther was more honest than herself when it came to practical procedures. She confesses, 'Perhaps you are right Esther, I couldn't have kept you on, on account of bad example to the younger servants' (74). In her ideal world, Mrs Barfield may have kept Esther on, and perhaps even given her something akin to maternity leave, two decades before maternity grants were issued by chancellor, David Lloyd George in 1911. However, Mrs Barfield does what she can, which is to address Esther's material and spiritual needs before sending her home.

The compromise which Mrs Barfield reaches, that is trying to bridge her need to dismiss Esther in order to maintain the moral standards of the house and her desire to help Esther, is different from the type of compromise which was reached by the vicar in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The difference is explicitly felt in Moore's representation of the equal relationship between the 'fallen' woman and 'the Saint'. After praying together, '[t]he women rose from their knees and stood looking at each other' (*Esther* 77). The reference to Esther and Mrs Barfield, 'the women', is a powerful indication of the bond between the employer and employee; a bond of equality and kinship. Esther is more often referred to as a 'girl', but here the hierarchy in social status, age, experience and morals are abolished and they look at each other

in mutual understanding and affection. It is out of this moment of connection that Mrs Barfield writes a recommendation letter for Esther:

‘One word more, Esther. You asked me just now for a character; I hesitated, but it seems to me now that it would be wrong to refuse. If I did you might never get a place, and then it would be impossible to say what might happen. I am not certain that I am doing right, but I know what it means to refuse to give a servant a character, and I cannot take upon myself the responsibility’ (77).

Indicated by her words, ‘it seems to be *now*’ (emphasis mine), Mrs Barfield has had a change of heart, and breaks one of her own moral rules – while still being uncertain that it is the right thing to do, but nevertheless believing that it is her responsibility that she must take. It is possible that Mrs Barfield is later written harshly to by the Trubners who discover Esther’s past (‘I think that the lady who recommended her ought to be written to very sharply’, 142). However, Mrs Barfield too can say that though she hated being deceitful, she is unable to think only of herself. In the character of Mrs Barfield, we can read Moore’s interest in an individual’s change of heart towards the fallen woman. It is less a dramatic rejection of previous beliefs, but an opening up of beliefs to include different ways of life.

Moore further explores the clash between working-class livelihoods and middle-class moral and religious standards later on in the novel through Esther’s married life. Esther faces a moral dilemma over her choice to work in the public house, despite her awareness of the damage drinks and betting can bring on people, including those whom she personally knows. From her time at home with her stepfather to her time working at Woodview, Esther has repeatedly witnessed the damaging effects of alcohol, yet now she is in the position of those providing the drink. Initially, Esther is comfortable with supporting her husband’s business and still attending church. When Fred Parson sees her at the race, he tells her that ‘This is not innocent pleasure, Esther; this is drunkenness and debauchery’. Yet, significantly, he also invites Esther into the Brethren tent to worship together:

[A] harmonium began to play a hymn, and, standing side by side, Esther and Fred sang together. Prayer was so inherent in her that she felt no sense of incongruity, and

had she been questioned she would have answered that it did not matter where we are, or what we are doing, we can always have God in our hearts (*Esther* 231).

As seen earlier between Esther and Mrs Barfield, Moore again stresses the egalitarian relationship between Fred and Esther. They are no longer 'preacher' and 'sinner' but Brethren fellows as they stand 'side by side' singing the hymn together. This passage is a significant moment when Esther feels 'no sense of incongruity' and confirms that her life choice with William, her life working in the public house, and her participation in horse racing events need not be a compromise of her faith. Moral evaluation should not judge the external aspects of one's lifestyle, but the inner motives of the heart.

### **Neutral Decisions: Accommodating Nature and Instinct**

So far, we have seen that Moore portrays individuals developing their moral views; Esther and Mrs Barfield both come to accept betting as a daily presence in their lives, and that re-prioritisation of moral values happen out of their devotion and sympathy for their husbands, not out of religious hypocrisy. Such synthesis of faith and practices, which we may hereto consider impermissible, can in fact be achieved without incongruity. Mrs Barfield's reference letter for Esther is especially relevant to our exploration of sympathy for the fallen women, as it shows how her change of mind exhibits a higher moral, which has been defined as 'human goodness' because it extends beyond religious and institutional morality.

While Moore shows that accepting practices outside of one's moral standards is an act of sympathy and kindness, in terms of Esther's 'fallenness', Moore suggests that Esther's sexual affair with William is itself a neutral act which need not be called into judgmental scrutiny in the first place. In his representation of Esther's moral struggle to resist or submit to William's sexual attraction, Moore also shows that her ultimate decision, is not immoral but a natural one, and it is how she gets on from there that counts to her goodness.

Moore's scene of seduction, which is central to the fallen woman narrative, portrays Esther's inner struggle between her feelings and what she has been taught is morally correct:

The words were delicious in her fainting ears, and her will died in what seemed like irresistible destiny. She could not struggle with him, though she knew that her fate depended upon her resistance, and swooning away she awakened in pain, powerless to free herself.... Soon after thoughts betook themselves on their painful way, and the stars were shining when he followed her across the down, beseeching her to listen. (*Esther* 62)

Unlike previous novels which elude the scene of sexual intercourse, *Esther Waters* gives an account of it, and this not only makes Moore a radical writer, but also shows how the text emphasises the importance of Esther's agency. Despite that 'her will died', the very presence of the night scene suggests that Esther has ownership of her decisions. The narration is not without elusions; Esther 'swoon[s] away', and the sentence trails off to a '. . .'. Yet significantly, the ellipses mimic her loss of consciousness during those moments, and one will notice that the narration focuses on the struggle going on inside Esther: the 'delicious' sensations of William's tender affections against 'her will' to resist (62). Esther's inner debate with herself continues in the following days, because her romantic feelings for William clash with her moral standards of sexual purity. Esther feels that she has broken her religious principle and lost her respectability, and in order to regain her respect, she makes herself inaccessible to William until he too shows remorse for his actions.

However, she does love William, and it is only her religious principles, (or what the narrator calls the 'violence of her virtue', 'her instinct', the 'religion in which her soul moved and lived—the sternest Protestantism', 'the original conviction and prejudices of her race', and her 'stubborn nature',) which restrain her from expressing her 'natural love'. In the narrator's commentary, a rare occasion where his presence is felt more strongly than Esther's consciousness, the two sides of Esther are outlined: the conflict between her 'natural' love for William, and her 'instinct' to repel him (65, 64). Thus Moore structures the two adversary consciousnesses of Esther.

Interestingly, both 'natural' (adj.) and 'instinct' (n) are normally thought of as close synonyms, but the OED brings us two distinguished definitions. 'Instinct' has fewer definitions, and has a stronger relationship to impulse relating to 'organized

beings' or 'species'.<sup>36</sup> This makes sense that the narrator goes on to describe Esther's 'instinct' as part of her 'religion' and 'race':

[. . .] her instinct was that she could only win his respect by refusing forgiveness for a long while. The religion in which her soul moved and lived—the sternest Protestantism — strengthened and enforced the original convictions and the prejudices of her race. (*Esther* 64)

Again, references to 'the Christ of her forefathers', and her sin as the sin 'her race had elected to fight against' strengthens the connection between instinct, race and religion.

On the other hand, the word 'natural' contains definitions such as 'consistent with nature', 'inherent in nature', 'formed by nature'. These definitions are formed around the idea of individual persons (or things), rather than species or groups, 'appropriate to circumstances' or from 'force of circumstances'. Less used definitions are also in particular illuminating:

†a. Theology. Of a person: spiritually unenlightened; unregenerate; having a belief system or world view uninformed by revelation. Obsolete.

b. Philosophy and Theology. Of a system of belief, etc.: derived entirely from experience of the natural world; arrived at by reason and observation rather than through revelation or enlightenment.

†c. Having only the wisdom given by nature; not educated by study. Obsolete. rare.<sup>37</sup>

The meaning of being 'natural' connotes belief and wisdom that is untouched by religion, study and institution. This also fits in with our knowledge that Moore 'opted for a self-taught education. It was personalised, extensive, progressive, not restricted by social or religious prejudices; it was an education which was rooted in the use of reason, which did not ignore creativity as an expression of inventiveness, and which fostered the natural evolution of the personality'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Esther's conflict between 'natural love' and 'instinct' is understandable. It is similar to the well-phrased concept of 'nature' versus 'nurture'.

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<sup>36</sup> 'Instinct, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, [accessed 24 December 2021].

<sup>37</sup> 'Natural, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, [accessed 24 December 2021].

<sup>38</sup> María Elena Jaime de Pablos, 'George Moore: The Committed Feminist' in *George Moore: Artistic Visions And Literary Worlds*, ed. by Mary Pierse (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 184–96 (p. 191).



However, Moore also illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of the relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘instinct’ when he writes: ‘her natural love of the man was as the sun shining above a fog-laden valley; rays of passion pierced her stubborn nature, dissolving it’ (*Esther* 65). ‘Natural’ and ‘nature’, although sharing the same word root, are used somewhat inconsistently in the sentence. Note also how her love is compared to the sun shining and rays piercing, which are connected to landscape and scenery, have almost an exaggerated feature that one might see in religious imagery of spiritual revelation. Again, Esther is said to have ‘natural piety’ (65), which, depending on the definition, is a curious and ambiguous pairing, for if piety is a religious virtue acquired by contact with religion, can it be natural? Her ‘natural shame’ is also puzzling to define, for Esther’s shame comes from societal and religious influences while her natural feelings are tender towards William. These curious wordings illustrates how difficult it is to separate Esther’s ‘nature’ from her instincts learned from her childhood in the Brethren community. It is not as simple as to throw one away for the other. In fact, Moore’s project is to show how they might co-exist in a way that is not harmful to oneself or others. This understanding is critical to the reader’s sympathy for Esther, so that they might not judge her for compromising or lowering her moral standards, but admire her for her integrity and strength to overcome extreme difficulties.

Esther’s agency in deciding between her nature and instinct is revisited in her choice between marrying Fred Parson, a fellow Plymouth Brethren who forgives her of her past, or William Latch, the biological father of her son and whom she eventually forgives for his abandonment. Esther’s decision to marry William opens up a new kind of redemption for the fallen woman. From a Christian religious point of view, the choice between Fred and William is equivalent to that between a spiritual or worldly life. Marrying William can be seen as returning to her old working-life which is full of temptations. Esther finds she is still drawn to William’s physical attractions, and to the lively life of public house, although she knows that with William, she will be surrounded by betting and drinking, and less likely to go to church regularly and be reminded of her need for repentance. In other words, marriage with William will put her back into the kind of environment in which men and women are prone to fall.

Fred certainly thinks there is a wrong and sinful choice as clearly as black and white. He sees William as evil: ‘It is just like him, low blackguard fellow that he is, to come after you, persecuting you. But don’t you fear; you leave him to me. I’ll find a

way of stopping his little game' (*Esther* 199). And of Esther's choice to marry him, Fred says, 'Esther, that man has tempted you, and you have not prayed' (200). Meanwhile the novel seems to suggest otherwise. Mortlake, the location of the Parsons hometown, ironically has a long history of brewery. The brewery flourished during the Victorian period, and prospered due to government contracts supplying beer to British soldiers, and offered the most jobs in the district.<sup>39</sup> While the novel opens the idea of whether Esther could have chosen Fred and lived happily (both during the visit to Fred's family and later after she is married to William), we should note that the name 'Mortlake' suggests 'mort': death. Indeed, among various ideas of its etymology, one is that '[t]he name of this place has been generally supposed to be derived from mortuus lacus, or the dead lake. In Doomsday Book it is called Mortlage, which in the Saxon language signifies a compulsive law, a derivation which seems to throw little light upon its etymology.'<sup>69</sup> Perhaps Moore is subtly suggesting that Esther's road with Fred would be a dead-end even if none the less the stable and happy one. In regards of her future with Fred, Esther 'could see her life end to end' (197), whereas, '[i]f she took the road to the public-house and the race-course she did not know what might not happen' (198). Thinking back in terms of Mrs Barfield's symbolic garden, Moore is interested in the development of characters' attitude towards life as a greater challenge and moral feat.

The text suggests that the choice that Esther must make as she stands at the 'cross-roads' has neither a right nor wrong answer (*Esther* 197). In many fallen woman narratives, it is a recurring plot device for the initial lover/seducer to, against all odds, reappear in the heroine's life. In *Ruth*, Mr Bellingham returns. In *Tess*, Alec comes back. However, what makes *Esther Waters* different is that she is given the opportunity to forgive William. Ruth also forgives Mr Bellingham, but it is less of a choice of her own, than a plot device of self-sacrifice to the one who wronged her in order to prove Ruth's purity and holiness. Tess marries Alec, but it is only out of desperate financial need, and she does not love him. Esther is not repeating her 'mistake' when she loves William a second time. Significantly, William is not portrayed as an evil character, despite his character flaws. Whatever the reader may feel towards William, through Esther, sympathy is extended towards him: 'Suddenly the boy [Jackie] looked towards his father, and she repented a little of her cruelty'

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<sup>39</sup> 'History', *Barnes and Mortlake History Society*, <<http://www.barnes-history.org.uk/history.html>> [accessed 24 December 2021].

(*Esther* 183). ‘She did not care that Jackie should love his father, and yet she could not help feeling sorry for William’ (183).

Esther blushed and laughed with pleasure, and every trace of the resentment for the suffering he had occasioned her dropped out of her heart. For the first time he was really her husband; for the first time she felt that sense of unity in life which is marriage, and knew henceforth he was the one thing that she had to live for. (230)

This is a passage which makes *Esther Waters* unlike the other novels studied previously: this scene in which Esther is happy with the man who wronged her. This too is the ‘human goodness’ which Anthony Farrow has picked up. Goodness extends further than just the heroine turning away from her ways, or cutting off relationships with her former life. In Esther’s case, she reconciles a relationship.

Esther chooses to marry William, and the narrator makes no judgement-weighted comment about her decision. Once the decision is made, the concern of the narrative shifts away from the moral question of who is the better husband; the event has happened and now the focus is on what happens next. Neither is Esther given a Cinderella ending: life goes on, and in the next phase of her married life, she encounters new trials and more moral questions.

### **Moving on from ‘Falleness’ to Morality’s Muddy Waters: Betting, Drinking and Livelihood**

Moore’s text opens up moral issues which invites the reader to explore morality’s muddy waters. While Moore clearly shows that Esther is not ‘fallen’, because her so-called fall is morally irrelevant to Esther’s goodness, at other times, morality, that is, true morality, is not so easily definable.

One of the ways in which Moore engages the reader in muddy moralities is to reintroduce Fred Parson and the Brethren’s opposition to betting and drink. While Esther’s choice to marry William is not judged – in fact as we have seen it was a defining moment of human goodness – the text does not turn a blind eye to the consequences and responsibilities which come with that life decision. After Esther’s marriage to William, she and Fred meet again when the latter comes to the King’s Head to warn the Latches that they could be prosecuted for illegal betting in their

premises and lose their license. Fred implores Esther to stop the business which is damaging the neighbourhood:

‘You don’t not know what harm you’re doing. Every day we hear of some new misfortune – a home broken up, the mother in the workhouse, the daughter on the streets, the father in prison, and all on account of this betting. Oh Esther, it is horrible; think of the harm you’re doing.’ (*Esther* 250)

Esther is quiet and remains passive, faced with this dilemma which has no easy solution. She has personally seen the ways betting and drink have broken families, including her own. However, what Fred asks means denying her husband his job, which she is reluctant to do, because she desires to be a loving and supportive wife, as well as having the income to give their son a good education. Fred, seeing her hesitation, implores her to go back to her old moral standards:

‘[. . .] I remember you agreeing with me that much good could be done by those who were determined to do it. You seem to have changed very much since those days.’

For a moment Esther seemed affected by these remembrances. Then she said in a low, musical voice –

‘No, I’ve not changed, Fred, but things has turned out different. One doesn’t do the good that one would like to in the world; one has to do the good that comes to one to do. I’ve my husband and my boy to look to. Them’s my good. At least, that’s how I sees things.’ (*Esther* 251)

The key words in Esther’s response are ‘not changed’ and ‘how I sees’. As it was with Mrs Barfield’s garden, Esther argues that circumstances change external appearances, but internally her integrity for human goodness remains the same. On this passage, Regan writes it ‘is remarkable for its clear articulation of Esther’s philosophy of life in her own simple but dignified words. What Esther demonstrates here is not only an affirmation of individual conscience, but also an illustration of the shrewdly discriminating intelligence that has helped her to survive’.<sup>40</sup> The key words which highlight Esther’s perspective, ‘how I sees’, gives the reader double vision. There are

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<sup>40</sup> Regan, ‘Introduction’ to *Esther*, p. xxviii.

two possible ‘good’ courses of action, but they cancel each other out. In presenting the moral paradox, Moore’s text does not give the reader a solution.

One striking thing about the passages is Esther’s ‘low, musical voice’ as she replies to Fred. Esther is affected by her Plymouth Brethren upbringing; she seemed ‘affected by’ the remembrances. But then, her replying voice is ‘low’ and ‘musical’, which is an intriguing combination. For one, ‘musical’ (the more striking word), takes us back to the harmonious Brethren worship at the fair, and suggests once more that that Esther is positive about her philosophy, she is not doubting as she speaks or hesitant. However, ‘low’ prevents one from supposing that Esther is positively lighthearted or bold when she speaks. It would be different if one had spoken in a ‘soft/quiet/gentle’ and ‘musical’ voice. A ‘low’ voice also connotes a solemn and serious attitude. One would not say she doubts the opinion she gives Fred, but possibly she is taking into an account the responsibility she has in her philosophy. At any rate, she is able to recognise the limits of her philosophy: ‘Them’s my good. *At least, that's how I sees things*’ (*Esther* 251, emphasis mine).

The complexity of her philosophy is further suggested by the ambiguous use of the transition word, ‘then’: ‘For a moment Esther seemed affected by these remembrances. *Then* she said in a low, musical voice’ (251, emphasis mine). If the transition word had been ‘but’, then the relationship between Esther’s Plymouth Brethren values and her current values would have been clear: she believed that betting was wrong, but now she believed there were circumstances that allowed it to continue. However, the transition word ‘then’ only suggests the order in which her thoughts and reply took place. The relationship, the logic between the two, is blurred on purpose, because it cannot be so simple as Esther leaving her Brethren values behind, as Esther herself tells William soon afterwards: ‘I come of them that thinks like that, so I know. Betting and drinks is what my folk, the Brethren, holds as most evil’ (*Esther* 253). She tells William that she understands why Fred and the Brethren are against their activities. They being her folk, she thought like them, and she does still: ‘I suppose this betting and drinking will always seem to me sinful and wicked. I should ’ave liked quite a different kind of life, but we don’t choose our lives, we just makes the best of them. You are the father of my child, and it all dates from that’ (255).

Here, Moore is also making the statement clear that the morality of a character is not to be judged by the act alone, but by the way they make the ‘best of’ the

situation which chance flings at them. Esther's line 'but we don't choose our lives, we just makes the best of them' is a repetition of the narrator's earlier statement that '[s]he could not pick and choose where she would live, and any wages above sixteen pound a year she must always accept, and put up with whatever inconvenience she might meet' (*Esther* 143). However, it should be noted that Esther is now leading a more prosperous life than she was previously. While she by no means has the wealth or security of the middle class, she is no longer straining to survive on a day-to-day basis. Moore is aware that the improvement in her life situation makes a need for an adjustment to moral evaluation. Her raised position gives her more moral responsibility. Fred reminds Esther of this:

Fred looked at Esther, and his eyes expressed all the admiration and love that he felt for her character. 'One owes a great deal,' he said, 'to those who are near to one, but not everything; even for their sakes one should not do wrong to others, and you must see that you are doing a great wrong to your fellow-creatures by keeping on this betting [. . .]' (*Esther* 251)

Yet despite his warning that Esther is 'doing a great wrong', Fred feels 'admiration' for Esther all the same. Mrs Barfield once too felt this 'admiration' for Esther when Esther argued that she did not tell the truth in order to keep her position for as long as she could to save up money for her expected baby. That admirable strong character of Esther's, especially concerning her fierce love for Jackie, has not changed over the years. What has changed, however, is Esther's social situation, and now the means with which she earns her living has an impact on others around her, intentionally or not. While Fred greatly admires Esther's character, he cannot fully accept her reasoning that Esther denies responsibility of the wellbeing of others outside of her nuclear family. Esther's main reason for approaching her husband about his illegal business is out of concern for her son's future, but she also has first-hand contact with close friends and acquaintances whose lives were ruined by betting and drink: Mrs Randal; more recently, their regular customers at 'Kings Head' and Bill's abuse of Sarah; Esther might perhaps also remember her stepfather's domestic abuse of her mother.

However, William's side of the argument further complicates the moral question. He cannot consider getting rid of betting, their main source of income: 'It is

the betting that brings the business; we shouldn't take five pounds a week was it not for the betting' (253). Besides, betting is banned only in bars; it is acceptable to bet in clubs and the stock exchange (254). Clearly, the law does not have people's well-being at heart; as William complains, 'one law for the rich and another for the poor' (254). Williams sees such a rule helps only the rich; it takes away access to betting from the working-class people who are limited in time and money, while the rich have the means to go to the racecourses. William sees the hypocrisy of those saying that betting is 'evil' but just so banning it in places so that the poor cannot access it, while the rich enjoy and make profits out of it. It happens to be that when Sarah is sent to trial for having stolen her employer's plates, the authorities also condemn the practice of gambling: 'Poverty, despair, idleness, and every other vice spring from gambling naturally, and in the same profusion, as weeds from barren land. Drink, too, is gambling's firmest ally' (273). However, the court's attitude towards Sarah is dismissive and unsympathetic, punishing the individual rather than addressing the corruption of society as a whole – thus inciting William's anger against the 'the old story, one law for the rich, another for the poor' (274).

In contrast to the court's lack of sympathy for Sarah and the working class, Moore's text is sensitive to the complications of their situation. He does not give the reader an easy moral answer to the issues of working-class illegal betting in the public house, because for him, Esther's heroic act is found in her struggles to make the best decisions in her less than perfect circumstances. The conversations between Esther and Fred, Esther and William, and the trial scene presents the moral debate on all sides, and Esther stands in muddy waters – it seems that whatever her choice is, she cannot win morally. However, while the text gives no answer to these moral questions, it presents the goodness of Esther's character persisting to do the best she can. Moore shows how Esther is dignified in her compromised life, because compromises do not necessarily mean that one is complacent and taking the easier path.

Moore's fictional heroine is an English puritan, but unlike Ruth, Esther's attitude or choices regarding life do not always match her religion's moral principles – such as, her dignity concerning her 'fall' or her married life supporting her husband's public house which makes profit from drinking and illegal betting – and unlike Tess, she does not throw away her faith when it does not. In previous models of 'goodness', such reconciliation was unthinkable; it was a demoralising compromise

of behaviour. Yet this is what Moore was aiming to represent in *Esther Waters*. Here, I want to emphasise that Moore wrote of 'instinctive hypocrisy', and I believe that the 'instinctive' is different from the kind of institutional or conventional hypocrisy of the comfortable middle- and upper-class lives. Moore's sympathy is attuned to the working class, where people seemingly live instinctively on a day-to-day basis according to their needs to survive. Esther stops attending religious meetings because her work takes up all her time; she supports the public house out of devotion to her husband, as well as it being their means of income. Esther struggles with the Christian morals she had been taught in – beginning with a trivial issue of 'wicked' stories, but gradually touching upon more consequential issues, such as falling in love with a man who drinks and bets, living with dignity and raising her illegitimate son despite her 'fallen' status, and choosing to marry the man who will lead her to support illegal activities against her Brethren principles.

In a scene early on in the novel, the narrator takes a peculiar view of the craze for horse race betting that goes on at Shoreham:

So the flood of gold continued to roll into the little town, decrepit and colourless by its high shingle beach and long reaches of muddy river. The dear gold jingled merrily in the pockets, quickening the steps, lightening the heart, curling lips with smiles, opening lips with laughter. The dear gold came falling softly, sweetly as rain, soothing the hard lives of working folk. Lives pressed with toil lifted up and began to dream again. The dear gold was like an opiate; it wiped away memories of hardship and sorrow, it showed life in a lighter and merrier guise, and the folk laughed at their fears for the morrow and wondered how they could have thought life so hard and relentless. The dear gold was pleasing as a bird on the branch, as a flower on the stem; the tune it sang was sweet, the colour it flaunted was bright. (*Esther* 56)

Interestingly, for a novel that is otherwise very precise about the amounts of money earned and spent, in the passage above money is deliberately personified as 'dear gold'. Whilst using exaggerated, fairy tale-like metaphors to describe the winnings flowing abundantly through the town, the narrator is in effect highlighting the realities of the town: 'decrepit and colourless', 'muddy river',<sup>41</sup> 'hard lives of working folk', 'Lives pressed with toil', 'memories of hardship and sorrow', 'fears for the morrow',

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<sup>41</sup> The text's repeated reference to the town's 'muddy rivers' provides a foundation for this study's look into the 'muddy water of morality'.



‘life so hard and relentless’. In the midst the bright colours and merry sounds, it is these grim details which are likely to strike readers as bare-faced materiality. The folktale-like narration distances the narrator from the working-class characters who are portrayed as one large body of ‘working folk’ rather than individuals. And yet the narrator seems empathetic rather than indifferent, perhaps partly to do with the fact that the money is represented through the people’s point of view, to whom the gold is so ‘dear’. And on a deeper emotional surface, the narrator catches a hint of the people’s wistful will to believe that the joys of money are real and lasting – hence the metaphor of ‘opiate’ casts a shadow of doubt.

Moore is neither critical of this gambling working-class life, nor is he indifferent to its damaging consequences. His attitude is empathetic, understanding and accepting of people as they are. On one hand, his empathetic representation offers no solution to the social issues, because by taking the point of view of the working-class, he shows how the situation as it seems to them: inevitably helpless. On the other hand, Moore was aware of the extent to which his project would be one of immense social change: ‘A great project but one of enormous difficulty, I am afraid unrealizable’, he writes.<sup>42</sup> In his serious effort to write a novel that threw light on the truth of human nature, Moore was advantaged by his ability to see the English people externally from an Irish point of view. ‘By keeping this complex of perspectives’, Frazier writes, Moore ‘managed to introduce into the canon of English novels a very deep critique of that Protestant hypocrisy that had for so long infuriated him, along with a fair-minded rendering of what was dear to him in the same religious tradition’.<sup>43</sup> Moore challenges the reader to sympathise with Esther, but the issues he wants the reader to grapple with extend far beyond the narrow moral conventions of fallenness.

### ***Esther Waters*, ‘Moral Luck’ and Empathy**

Esther’s argument that ‘we don’t choose our lives, we just makes the best of them’ leads us to consider how circumstances influence one’s moral decisions, and as Moore shows, much of the time one’s circumstances are a matter of chance (*Esther* 255). For example, Esther would abolish betting if she could, but her affections for

<sup>42</sup> Moore writes in a letter to his brother, Maurice. qtd in Frazier, p. 227.

<sup>43</sup> Frazier, p. 228.

her husband and son make her tolerate it. In this point of the novel, Moore has successfully removed the issue of her 'fallenness' from the moral centre, in order to show that Esther has not fallen to begin with. However, the principles of readers who are inclined to judge her are the same. Hypocritical prejudice against the fallen woman, which Gaskell, Hardy and Moore speak up against, often occurs when people are unwilling to understand the contingencies of life; when people religiously stick to moral principles that are so narrow that they cannot accommodate the diversity of life experiences, which make humans thrive as compassionate beings. Hence, the second barrier which Moore must overcome is the assumption that all people are to be morally evaluated using the same measuring stick. I argue that Moore employs the concept of 'moral luck' to persuade an audience to have sympathy for others, by illustrating that due to the environmental and social circumstances of each individual, morality can be relative.

In contrary to the idealistic assumption – dating from Kant – that morality is protected from 'luck-sensitive' elements, in recent years scholars such as Bernard Williams, Thomas Nagel, and Margaret Urban Walker have asked us to consider how an outcome may influence our moral judgement of the act.<sup>44</sup> For example, say a person leaves a baby unattended in a bath. If the baby drowns, then the adult is guilty and punishable, whereas if the baby is safe, then the adult's neglect is deemed to be less serious.<sup>45</sup> Thus, moral judgement is to some extent down to one's luck, which is defined as 'moral luck'. The example above is 'resultant luck': other types of moral luck include, 'constitutive luck' (how one is born with certain capacities, inclinations, and talents), 'circumstantial luck' (the situations one is put in), and 'casual luck' (how antecedent circumstances influence one's agency).<sup>46</sup>

Although never using its technical term, Brian Nicholas comes to address moral luck in his own way in his reading of *Esther Waters*. The naturalistic nature of the novel, Nicholas explains, is that 'life' – the pressures of instinct, society, and circumstances – demands upon Esther to act against her 'character'. Nicholas's key words are 'life', 'conduct' and 'character', and they are balanced as such: 'life' determines the individual's 'conduct' against their 'character'. Nicholas writes,

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Thomas Nagel, 'Moral Luck' in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 24–38; Margaret Urban Walker, 'Moral Luck and the Virtues of Impure Agency,' in *Moral Luck*, ed. by Daniel Statman (State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 235–50 (p. 245).

<sup>45</sup> Nagel, pp. 30–31; see also Larson's discussion of Nagel, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Larson, p. 67; Nagel, p. 32

‘Esther’s conduct is expressed in terms of conflict and paradox, and “life” is merely the opposite of what one would expect from her character, of what she thinks right, or what she had intended to do’.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Esther’s religion is ‘the most obtrusive aspect of her “character” in the character-life conflict’.<sup>48</sup> In other words, although Esther is ‘good’ in nature, it is impossible for her live out her ‘goodness’ in actions, as defined by Christian principles, because of the naturalistic, anti-moralistic world in which Moore places her.

The aim to abolish the idea of ‘pure agency’ and to embrace ‘moral luck’ as part of our ethics can be observed in Moore’s *Esther Waters*. In considering the nature of Moore’s commitment to a more generous social vision of female life and labour than was previously the case in narratives of the fallen woman, we see that more strongly than ever, Moore shows that ‘[h]ow well we deal with luck is a mark of our goodness’.<sup>49</sup>

Chance in *Esther Waters* may not match Hardy’s dramatic scale of unlucky events which lead to the character’s fall, yet chance has a prominent presence in Moore’s text.<sup>50</sup> While various characters in Hardy symbolically gamble as they decide actions which alter their fate, in *Esther Waters*, chance is explicitly presented in the plot’s backdrop of horse race betting.<sup>51</sup> Various characters’ lives are influenced by the results of the races and suffer heavily of it: Mrs Latch, Mrs Randal, and Mrs Barfield all watch powerlessly as their families are brought down to ruin.<sup>52</sup> Esther’s fate, too, is tightly gripped by the betting. Her marriage with William could have happened soon after their sexual intercourse, if William had been lucky enough to win some money: ‘So he said he would marry you if he won his bet on the Leger? Oh, that betting!’ Mrs Barfield says upon hearing Esther’s story, ‘I have seen it all my life, nothing else, and I have seen nothing come of it but sin and sorrow; you are not the first victim’ (*Esther* 75). Margaret’s light-hearted and warm comment suggests that Esther’s premarital pregnancy is merely a stroke of bad luck: ‘We don’t think any the worse of you [Esther]; why, that’s an accident that might happen to any of us’ (78).

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<sup>47</sup> See Nicholas, pp. 156–59.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas, p. 177.

<sup>49</sup> Larson, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> Characters which instantly come to mind are Tess and Michael Henchard. On the other hand, Hardy also uses unlucky chance to bring out the best in a character, such as Gabriel Oak. As his name symbolises, like a sturdy tree he is not easily blown over by ill fate.

<sup>51</sup> Larson, pp. 78, 92.

<sup>52</sup> ‘The Barfields were all broken up. They had been very unlucky racing, and when the servants go the sack Margaret had come up to London’ (*Esther* 149)

However, as Moore illustrates, the world is shaped by 'moral luck', and Esther falls unlucky.

Again and again, Esther suffers because of events happening out of her control: something as ordinary as a ripped skirt leads to her losing her situation (*Esther* 137–38). Or just when she feels finally financially stable, 'luck would have it Jackie fell ill' (145). When she fails to find a job which can support herself and Jackie, Esther believes 'I'm out of my luck' (150). On the other hand, it is again luck when things get better for her: 'She had had a great deal of bad luck, but her luck seemed to have turned at last' (119); 'What luck!' (133); 'And then Esther was surprised at her good fortune' (140); 'Her luck had mended' (143). The unpredictability and fickleness of fate is perceived as cruel and blind by Esther: 'why should such cruelty happen to her more than to the next one?' (131); 'An idea of the blind cruelty of fate maddened her' (132); 'St George's Place looked out with blind, white eyes' (145). This last personification of St George's Place especially has strong connotations of Hardy's imaginary representation of purblind Doomsters. It is not to say that Esther has no agency over her good character, or that her hard work means nothing. In addition to showing Esther's inner strength and will, the text also shows how there are circumstances which are beyond Esther's control, but how she makes the best of what she can. As Farrow writes, '[a]s with Schopenhauer, chance is very powerful in the world: but in the things that matter – art, personal goodness – it is individual personality that counts'.<sup>53</sup>

'Moral luck' is thus central to our reading of *Esther Waters*, as we explore how Moore promotes sympathy for the fallen women by leading the reader into a deeper and complex understanding of the morality of Esther's life situations. In *Morality's Muddy Waters*, the historian George Cotkin criticises American culture's desire for clarity in a moral structure by arguing that we need 'a healthy dose of befuddlement', because acts of morality are more often achieved when we stop to think about the complexity of morality, our choices and responsibilities.<sup>54</sup> In his introduction, Cotkin writes:

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<sup>53</sup> Farrow, p. 72.

<sup>54</sup> George Cotkin, *Morality's Muddy Waters Ethical Quandaries in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 2.

Alas, we often find that even when we begin with the best of moral intentions, things go awry. Rather than questioning the paradoxes of morality or the reign of contingency (moral luck) in situations, we stubbornly ignore complexity and contradictions, determining to soldier on or to condemn a world that does not bend to our moral principles. Beyond parading our moral presumptions, we come to believe that we act more morally the less we think about it.<sup>55</sup>

Cotkin goes on to explore how engaging with the idea of moral luck helps people to see the circumstances in which others are placed, which then helps them to have empathy and compassion rather than judgement.

In relation to ‘moral luck’, narrative point of view plays an integral part in evoking the reader’s sympathy. Distinguishing the difference between looking down on and belonging with is crucial in employing ‘moral luck’ for sympathetic representations. Moore not only invites readers to understand how ‘moral luck’ is at work in Esther’s circumstances, but also to identify it as if they too were in her place. Even though *Esther Waters* still faces the same challenges as previous fallen women narratives of trying to overcome the distance between the middle-class readers and the working-class heroine, Moore’s use of empathy has opened up a new way of connecting with the fallen woman. Despite its third-person narration, the text more readily gives Esther’s direct speech and mimics her thoughts in free indirect discourse so that the injustices which Esther faces are not observed from a sympathetic distance; the point of view is so close that Esther’s indignation and anger against prejudice becomes the reader’s own emotions. Rather than being shown a ‘fallen’ woman’s experience, the readers identify with a woman who appears to others as ‘fallen’, and so the experience of unfairness becomes real to them. Moore champions the fallen woman by using the literary technique of evoking the reader’s empathy, inviting them to identify Esther in a way that they might even imagine themselves being in her place.

Attention to key passage allows us to think more carefully about how Moore invites the reader to share Esther’s feelings. For example, after Esther runs away from the baby farmer and realises that she has nowhere to go, Moore uses this scene to not only portray Esther’s overwhelming sense of powerlessness but to also engulf the reader in it as well: ‘At last she rested her burden on the parapet of a bridge, and saw

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<sup>55</sup> Cotkin, p. 1.

the London night, blue and gold, vast water rolling, and the spectacle of the stars like a dream from which *she could not disentangle her individuality*' (*Esther* 131, emphasis mine). In this moving passage, the narrator paints the London night scene with bold, dramatic strokes: 'blue and gold', 'vast', and 'rolling'. The 'spectacle of stars' is also dramatic for the city sky. However, the impression is strongly felt to be Esther's perceptions, not those of the narrator. Not only are we told that Esther 'saw' these things, but also because this description leads straight into free indirect discourse – 'Was she to die in this star-lit city' – the narrator's language is indistinguishable from Esther's point of view. It is worth noting that the night of her seduction, she runs away from William while 'the stars were shining' (62); the stars are a reappearing motif which is closely linked with those times in Esther's life when she feels a captive to fate and destiny. Furthermore, the interesting phrase '*she could not disentangle her individuality*' suggests a Darwinian view of the world, in which Esther is only a small being (hence the contrast of herself to 'the spectacle of stars') in a moving world (again, the imagery of the 'vast' and 'rolling' Thames,) in which she can only drift where the natural forces take her.

Having shown Esther's sense of smallness and helplessness in the large world, Moore shows that characters can respond to bad luck with moral actions, and it is one of the empowering characteristics of Esther. When luck is not on one's side, opportunities for human goodness are rich. After the workhouse, Esther finds a job working for the Bingleys, working 'seventeen long hours a day' and unable to see her son for a month because of the lack of financial means to visit Peckham (*Esther* 135). She wrestles with the temptation to 'borrow' a half-crown she finds while cleaning:

Toil crushed all that was human out of her; even her baby was growing indifferent to her. If it were to die! She did not desire her baby's death – the burden would not become lighter it would become heavier and heavier. What would become of her? Was there no hope? She buried her face in her pillow, seeking to escape from the passion of her despair. She was an unfortunate girl, and had missed all her chances.

In the six months she had spent in the house of Chelsea her nature had been strained to the uttermost, and what we call chance now came to decide the course of her destiny. *The fight between circumstances and character* had gone till now in favour of character, but circumstances must call up no further forces against character. (*Esther* 137, emphasis mine)

As the passages above show, Moore diligently illustrates the moral conflict within Esther, emphasising that it is ‘chance’ battering ‘all that was human’ in her. Moore portrays Esther’s weaknesses, which increases her morality because she would never abandon her child and wants him to live well, despite the heavy and overburdening temptations.

In her discussion of ‘moral luck’, Larson writes in depth about the presence of the past which cannot be shaken off.<sup>56</sup> In the case of Hardy, she discusses the past as something that is changeable and determining the future. In Esther’s life, perhaps more so than for Tess, her past comes up again and again that she struggles to keep a situation longer than a year. At the Bingleys, the narrator explicitly points out the play of luck: ‘what we call chance now came to decide the course of her destiny’ (*Esther* 137). A ripped skirt, what seems like a casual occurrence which might happen to anyone, has significant dangers to drastically change Esther’s livelihood because her past luck is still in play. When Esther is unable to buy a new skirt to replace her ripped one, her mistress, unaware that Esther is struggling to support two with wages only suitable for an independent person, accuses her of wasting her money or spending it on something immoral. Mrs Bingley says, ‘It is my duty to know what you do with your money, and to see that you do not spend it in any wrong way. I am responsible for your moral welfare’ (138). However, Esther knows that Mrs Bingley’s lack of imagination to consider how ‘There ain’t much chance of temptation for them who work seventeen hours a day’, meaning that Mrs Bingley’s ‘moral’ responsibility is too narrow to accommodate her story and her child, much less care about her physical health.

Esther’s next situation with the Trubners also unluckily ends when the family learns of Esther’s child. As mentioned above, they are the ones who reprimand Mrs Barfield for her recommendation letter. Like many other important scenes, the confrontation is recorded in dialogue:

‘It has come to my knowledge, Waters, that you have a child. You’re not a married woman, I believe?’

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<sup>56</sup> Jil Larson, ‘When Hope Unblooms: Chance and Moral Luck in *A Laodicean*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess*’ in *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel: 1880–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp. 63–92.

'I've been unfortunate; I've a child, but that don't make no difference so long as I gives satisfaction in my work. I don't think that the cook has complained, ma'am.'

'No, the cook hasn't complained, but had I known this I don't think I should have engaged you. In the character which you showed me, Mrs. Barfield said that she believed you to be a thoroughly religious girl at heart.' (*Esther* 140, emphasis mine)

Esther speaks out rightly, but also naively, that the evaluation of her moral goodness should be free from 'luck-sensitive' factors. However, Mrs Trubner fails to understand Mrs Barfield's generous interpretation of a 'thoroughly religious girl at heart':

'Then don't you think, ma'am, there is repentance and forgiveness? Our Lord said –'

'You ought to have told me; and as for Mrs. Barfield, her conduct is most reprehensible.' (*Esther* 140–41)

The two conversations Esther has between Mrs Barfield and Mrs Trubner are strikingly similar, and yet the results are strikingly different. Both mistresses raise the point that Esther has acted wrongly in keeping her secret. Esther argues that it was necessary in order to survive. This time equipped with more experience, especially of the baby farming system, Esther knows how life is for many other girls in the same situation, and in her simple yet meaningful language, she speaks out for them too:

'Then, ma'am, would you prevent every poor girl who has had a misfortune from earning her bread? If they was all like you there would be more girls who'd do away with themselves and their babies. You don't know how hard pressed we are. The baby-farmer says, "Give me five pounds and I'll find a good woman who wants a little one, and you shall hear no more about it." Them very words were said to me. I took him away and hoped to be able to rear him, but if I'm to lose my situations –'

'I should be sorry to prevent anyone from earning their bread –'

'You're a mother yourself, ma'am, and you know what it is.'

'Really, it's quite different.... I don't know what you mean, Waters.' (141)

Esther is aware that people in positions like Mrs Trubner are also unconsciously taking part in the baby-farming system. Because they withhold opportunities for cast-



off single mothers from earning a living for themselves, mothers are more inclined to ‘do away’ with their babies, and people like Mrs Spires are out there willing to make a profit out of the needs. Esther appeals to Mrs Trubner’s compassionate side, as a fellow woman and a mother. However, Mrs Trubner is unable to see the link. It is not only her physical ‘eyesight’ which has been ‘failing for some years’ (*Esther* 140), but also her sight for sympathy and compassion.

At her next situation, Esther remains strictly closed about her background. She shuns intimacy from her fellow workers that she is treated with animosity, and yet she shoulders it for her son’s sake. By now there should be no questioning on the reader’s part as to whether Esther’s secrecy is a selfish and manipulative act of deceit or not. And it is here that the narrator, in a very rare moment of intervention, spells out his sympathy: ‘Hers is an heroic adventure if one considers it – a mother’s fight for the life of her child against all the forces that civilisation arrays against the lowly and the illegitimate. She is in a situation to-day, but on what security does she hold?’ (*Esther* 143).<sup>57</sup> It is characteristic of the naturalist narrator to distance himself even in this sympathetic statement, by adding a ‘if one considers it’ as a padded cushion between the fact and the speaker. Simultaneously, it also works to raise the fact that moral opinions are never reached automatically, but they are in need of consideration, personal reflections and careful thinking. We come to consider Esther’s heroic act by our sharpened awareness, empathy and compassion.

### **A Case Study on Sympathy for a Minor Character: Sarah Tucker**

Previously on morality’s muddy waters, we have discussed how Esther’s luck finally turns for the better when she marries William, and she has more security than being a single mother. And how her new social position brings with it new moral responsibilities which are difficult and complicated. However, I argued that Moore portrays Esther’s dilemma regarding her means of livelihood, not as a moral failure or hypocritical attitude, but from a deep sympathy which understands that living the moral ideal, set by the upper classes, have no single, correct answer.

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<sup>57</sup> The statement reminds one of George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, when the narrator calls for sympathy for the everyday and mundane lifestyles of working class people.

In this section we will look at another moral responsibility which Esther takes on in her married life. Moore takes the opportunity of introducing a second 'fallen' woman character in the novel, to further explore a new narrative perspective to which we must apply our acquired ideas of moral luck. Unlike Esther, Sarah Tucker is a minor character and the textual amount of her representation is limited. We may recall Hardy's minimal representation of Fanny in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and compare literary techniques of how sympathy for the fallen woman character can be drawn from brief, fragmented appearances. After Sarah leaves the Derby fair with Bill Evans, the opening of the next chapter jumps to a year later. The tone of the narration immediately strikes the reader as different; it has lost the colour and cheerfulness of the previous Derby race scene. Sarah, who had since been living with Bill, has been turned out of the house, and she wanders in London:

[. . .] the city stood up like a prison, hard and stark in the cold, penetrating light of morning. She sat upon a pillar's base, her eyes turned towards the cabmen's shelter. The horses munched in their nose-bags, and the pigeons came down from their roosts. She was dressed in an old black dress, her hands lay upon her knees, and the pose expressed so perfectly the despair and wretchedness in her soul that a young man in evening clothes, who had looked sharply at her as he passed, turned and came back to her, and he asked her if he could assist her. She answered, 'Thank you, sir.' He slipped a shilling into her hand. She was too broken-hearted to look up in his face, and he walked away wondering what was her story. The disordered red hair, the thin, freckled face, were expressive, and so too was the movement of her body when she got up and walked, not knowing and not caring where she was going. There was sensation of the river in her thoughts; the river drew her, and she indistinctly remembered that she would find relief there if she chose to accept that relief. The water was blue beneath the sunrise, and it seemed to offer to end her life's trouble. She could not go on living. She could not bear with her life any longer, and yet she knew that she would not drown herself that morning. There was not enough will in her to drown herself. She was merely half dead with grief. He had turned her out, he had said that he never wanted to see her again, but that was because he had been unlucky. (Esther 238–39)

A large section of the text has been copied here in order to analyse the mode of narration. The repetition of the pronoun 'she' almost erases Sarah's individuality and

gives the sense of a naturalistic account of a general fallen woman experience. The narrator does not mention Sarah's name and for that reason it strongly reminds us of the scene from *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where Oak meets Fanny and gives her a shilling. However, the difference is that Hardy's scene takes place in the shadows of the night while Moore's scene takes place in the 'penetrating light of the morning'. Moore's language has none of Hardy's 'penumbra of a very deep sadness', and instead there is no mystery surrounding Sarah for the reader. With precise detail, Moore's represents the internal thoughts and feelings of Sarah. For example the simile 'like a prison' indicates that prosecution is on Sarah's mind; the '[s]ensation of the river in her thoughts' mingle Sarah's internal worries with her external whereabouts on the Thames. Her suicidal thoughts and emotional suffering are portrayed so powerfully as to be reminiscent to Hetty Sorrel's in Eliot's *Adam Bede*. The narrator uses internal focalisation for invoking Sarah's point of view, and language is an ambiguous tool, that against expectations, using third person can give character insight as if it were told in first person. Another important textual detail that supports a close insight into Sarah's mind is the use of free indirect speech: 'Why was he cruel to her? He never would find another woman to care for him more than she did . . . Esther had a good husband, Esther had always been lucky. Two hours more to wait, and she felt so tired, so tired' (*Esther* 239). The sentence repeats 'so tired' as if to rhythmically mimic Sarah's weary footsteps. Although critics have said the novel is for the most part told 'through Esther's eyes', this is an exceptional scene in which the narrative is a mixture of external observation and Sarah taking the role of the focalisor.

Up till now, *Esther Waters* has been noted for the narrator's attachment to the heroine. This section of the novel may strike us as odd, because the narration leaves Esther for a moment for Sarah Tucker. We may then ask, what does this scene contribute to the portrayal of Esther? It presents her from an external point of view, that of Sarah's, who is seeking Esther's help because she is the only human she trusts. Esther bears a striking similarity with Dinah Morris, the angel-like figure from George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. When Hetty is pregnant and has nowhere to go, she thinks Dinah as the only soul who will not reject her.<sup>58</sup> How significant is it that Esther – a

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<sup>58</sup> See *Adam* 341. However, shortly afterwards, Hetty resolves she will not confess, even to Dinah (344). Later, she again thinks of Dinah's acceptance, but is not willing for everyone else to find out as a result of her confession to Dinah (349).

former 'fallen' woman – now takes on that role of the saviour, and all the while Moore emphasises Esther working in a bar, rather than in a church. The social vision of women has been greatly expanded in this passage, by portraying Esther not only as victim, but also as a helper of other victims.

However, our praise for Moore's *Esther Waters* need not focus only on the narrator's sympathetic representation of Esther. By testing how the text represents Esther's friend Sarah Tucker, who falls in love with Bill Evans, is abandoned, nevertheless loves him, and becomes a thief for him, we can better understand Moore's sympathetic representation of the 'fallen' woman. This narrative within the narrative – Sarah's story of 'fallenness' – reveals another level complexity to sympathy. We will discover the depth to which Moore was committed to a generous social vision of female life, when we see his intricate handling of Sarah's narrative, a creative blend of distanced compassion and fellow-feeling.

While the narrative point of view eventually goes back to our heroine, a close reading of the passage portraying Esther's friendship with Sarah reveals an intricate structure of point of views which invites the reader to identify with Sarah in a surprising way. From Esther's internal point of view, Sarah's companionship can at times be tiresome. Yet, Esther also has sympathy for Sarah, and 'had not the heart to interrupt her', and so she goes along with Sarah to Drury Lane, Sarah's old neighbourhood (*Esther* 257). Drury Lane turns out to be a dreary place, which Moore describes with grim details. On this passage, Stephen Regan points to this passage as 'clearly illustrating the persistence of naturalism': the narrator uses 'repetitive syntax and heaping of unattractive verbal and adjectival diction.'<sup>59</sup> In this picture, people and inanimate objects are described interchangeably; metonyms are used to portray the inhabitants. While fat girls and old women feature in the picture, inanimate things are also attached to verbs which give them a sense of human presence; courts and alleys 'vomited', skipping ropes are 'whirling', 'pennies' are being absorbed. In doing so, the narrator feels distanced from the inhabitants because he sees them only as features of the Lane, and not as individual people.

However, the impersonal landscape is transformed to a personal place when Sarah says, 'That's where we used to live', pointing up to the third floor. 'I fancy our house will soon come down When I see the old place it all comes back to me.' (*Esther*

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<sup>59</sup> Regan, 'Introduction' to *Esther Waters*, p. xxiii

257). When Sarah points to the third-floor window, she is in a manner of speaking taking up the position of the focalisor. From her position, she addresses not only the spatial direction to look, but also the emotional way to see it. It is not a house, but ‘our’ house. As the focalisor, Sarah defines the relationship to the house. On an emotional level, the house is the ‘old place’; Sarah uses an endearing term and the memories that Sarah holds are affective. The pawn shop and the butcher’s are both pointed out by Sarah along with anecdotes, and familiarity is brought upon them. This emotion is affective because Esther’s patience and sympathy is extended. ‘We’ve known each other a long time’, Esther says as an invitation to step into Sarah’s point of view, not only out of friendship and kindness, but also out of a deep understanding and mutual empathy. Before they go home, ‘Esther, who was a little tired of her, held her hand’ (258). This is a beautiful illustration of Esther, while having her own thoughts and impatience, nevertheless reaching out with empathy. To conclude the discussion on this passage, Esther is the focalising point of the narrative, but we see her focalising through Sarah.

When, despite Esther’s help, Sarah goes back to Bill who abandons her for the second time, and this time Sarah ending up in jail, we might wonder whether the fallen woman stereotype as a criminal has returned to Moore’s text. At this point, an important question needs to be addressed. Anne Murphy in her response to George Watt’s *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth Century English Novel* (1984) asks whether Watt ‘seems to accept the fundamental assumptions of this culture, while remaining deeply troubled by its cruelty in scapegoating fallen women’.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, on a 1914 novel called *Sally Bishop*, Lawrence Rainey writes critically, ‘[b]ut it doesn’t really succeed, in part because it juxtaposes Sally with a prostitute and two women who have had extramarital affairs, tacitly accepting their conflation into the category of ‘fallen woman’.<sup>61</sup> In other words, while sympathising with the ‘fallen woman’, one can actually also be accepting the branding of women as ‘fallen’. It seems that *Esther Waters* could also fall into the same trap; that Moore made Sarah play the role of the ‘fallen woman’ in order to lift the part off Esther’s shoulders, to make Esther look better in comparison. However, a close reading reveals that it is not so.

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<sup>60</sup> Anne Murphy, ‘George Watt: “The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel”’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 3.4 (1986), 194–96.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Rainey, ‘From Fallen Woman to Fallen Typist, 1908–1922’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 52.3 (2009), 273–97.

In the latter half of the novel, Esther has a husband, a status, a place to live and an income. She is now in a position to now help others who are less fortunate than her. That puts Esther in a higher position than Sarah. However, in many ways Moore suggests in the text, that Esther and Sarah are equals. As David Alvarez writes, 'Sarah's story is Esther's story; Sarah's man just happened to be worse'.<sup>62</sup> Alvarez's statement is very much a paraphrasing of Margaret Gale's accepting words: 'What nonsense! [. . .] We don't think any the worse of you; why, that's an accident that might happen to any of us' (*Esther* 78).<sup>63</sup> Sarah tells Esther why she went back to Bill: 'I was miserable enough with him; we used to have hardly anything to eat; but I'm more miserable away from him, Esther I know you'll laugh at me, but I'm that heart broken. . . I can't live without him. . . I'll do anything for him' (257). 'I daresay it is very foolish of me. But one can't help oneself. Did you ever really care for a man?' (256). Esther recognises that feeling of being attracted to a man. Esther speaks for both herself and Sarah when she tells William, 'You see she was fond of him that she couldn't help herself. There's many that can't' (264).

When Esther approaches her husband about helping Sarah, there are two things to note. Firstly, that is William's response when he hears that Bill had returned: 'Ah, that blackguard put her to it. I thought she left him for good. She promised us that she'd never speak to us again' (*Esther* 264). Compare it with Fred's earlier reaction to William's reappearance. 'It is just like him, low blackguard fellow that he is, to come after you, persecuting you' (199). Will's response to Bill is nearly identical to Fred's response to William – both calling the other a 'blackguard', which underlines the very similarity in the situation which the two women find themselves. Secondly, as one is aware, the name 'Bill' is short for 'William'. And indeed, Esther calls her husband 'Bill' in this crucial moment:

She's my friend – she's yours too – we've known her all our lives. We can't see her go to prison, can we, Bill, without raising a finger to save her?'

She had never called him Bill before, and the familiar abbreviation touched him [. . .] (*Esther* 265)

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<sup>62</sup> David Alvarez, 'The Case of the Split Self: George Moore's Debt to Schopenhauer in "Esther Waters"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 38.2 (1995), 169–85 (178).

<sup>63</sup> See also Christine Hugeot, 'Charting an Aesthetic Journey: The Case of *Esther Waters*' in *George Moore: Artistic Visions And Literary Worlds*, ed. by Mary Pierse, (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 160–73 (p. 161).

Esther calls William ‘Bill’ on a few other occasions in the novel, when she is feeling particularly affectionate, especially as William draws nearer to his death bed (286, 301, 302). By highlighting the similarities of Esther and Sarah’s situations, the reader is invited to see Sarah’s story through Esther’s story, and not be so quick to condemn Sarah and think better of Esther. Moore implies that once having been through Esther’s life and grown in attachment to her, the reader’s sympathy should be able to accommodate other stories. He shows that the difference in Esther and Sarah’s lives is, to another extent, a matter of luck. While Moore’s text contains passages which clearly have a naturalistic tone, a closer stylistic analysis reveals why it is also powerfully moving: the internal focalisation of Esther’s thoughts merge into the narration, making the reading an empathetic one. However, Moore’s empathy does not stop there at the heroine Esther, but extends also to Sarah. While only a minor character, in the London night scene, she is also given a chance to be a focaliser, and after she returns to Bill, Esther’s empathy allows entry into Sarah’s story. This is Moore’s commitment for a more generous social vision of female life.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen, Moore’s sympathetic representation of the fallen woman works on many levels, but the overarching message is that judging other’s morality is extremely difficult as each individual’s circumstances differ. His texts shows how characters can develop their religious and moral standards to accommodate others’ diversity, an act which is not hypocritical or compromising their beliefs, but revealing true human goodness and sympathy. In addition, the novel demonstrates how readers too can do the same by understanding ‘moral luck’ at work in various areas of people’s lives, an understanding which invites a sympathetic rather than judgemental response towards the characters. We saw how acceptance of others’ livelihoods scattered throughout novel, especially in characters whose moral principles are grounded in Christian belief. For many sympathetic characters, such as Mrs Barfield and Esther, the adjusting and reshaping of one’s practice of moral deeds does not mean rejecting previous beliefs. In fact, it is in the synthesis of ideals and circumstances that heroic acts of sympathetic kindness are found. Again, we have explored how while using the example of betting and drinking to illustrate the ambiguity of moral debate, and

making it more of consequence than Esther's 'fall', Moore reintroduces the fallen woman character through Sarah Tucker and emphasises how the 'moral' issues around the fallen woman are also very much entangled with 'moral luck'. Therefore, although Sarah is a minor character who repeatedly makes life mistakes against her friend's reasoning, the reader also sees how she is unlucky rather than immoral.

At the end of the novel, we are reminded once again that one's morality is difficult to evaluate, and it is especially not to be done by outward appearances alone. Now a widow and aged forty, Esther decides to return to Woodview. Moore repeats the opening scene when Esther arrives at the same train station – inviting the reader to reflect on the two decades covered by the novel. The point, however, is not to evaluate whether Esther's life has been successful or futile, although that may be our inclination. I argue that the very ending of the novel emphasises the inability to judge. Notably, the garden at Woodview has suffered ten years of neglect. However, despite the state of the garden, Mrs Barfield's investment and love in it has not changed:

Esther paused at the broken gate to watch her mistress, who stood superintending the clearing away of ten year's growth of weeds, as much interested in the prospect of a few peas and cabbages as in former days she had been in the culture of expensive flowers. (*Esther* 325)

The garden has lost its elegance, but not its dignity. It still produces peas and cabbages, which may not be as sophisticated as expensive flowers, but is nevertheless a show of the garden's productivity. As Esther and the narrator pause to look at the change in the garden, the reader is also invited to look back on Esther's life of the past decade. Like the garden, much has changed: when Esther first arrived in Woodview she was young and had just left her family to make her own living. Her life turned out to be very different than she imagined then, and while she proved herself hardworking and earnest in extreme poverty, after her marriage her support of the public house was morally dubious. However, like the way one cannot compare flowers to peas, Esther's moral standards have changed but should not be compared. Instead, her journey of life and faith should be seen as a long progress, adapting and adjusting to her everyday environment, and what life chances to bring her. In the final scene, Jackie, now a young soldier, visits Esther at Woodview. After introducing him to her mistress, Esther, Jackie and Mrs Barfield walk towards the house in silence. Thus the novel



ends quietly, in contentment after following Esther for two decades, through the ups and downs of her life. The text is ambiguous as to whether Esther's hard work has been rewarding. The silence in which the novel ends signifies the narrator's reticence in evaluating Esther's life. While it may puzzle the reader in knowing what *Esther Waters* achieves in its place of fallen woman narratives, Moore's text is radical in that it is not so concerned about redeeming Esther's purity, but in depicting her in muddy waters. Moore's sympathy representation of the fallen woman meets her as she is, thus establishing a new narrative for women.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Sympathy for Sue's Conflicted Sexuality in *Jude the Obscure***

'Hardly expected him to kiss her' (Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*)

#### **Introduction: Jude and the Fallen Woman?**

For a fleeting moment, Jude Fawley considers his relationship with Sue Bridehead, and puts themselves in a fallen woman narrative:<sup>1</sup> "I have seemed to myself lately," he said, "to belong to that vast band of men shunned by the virtuous – the men called seducers. It amazes me when I think of it! I have not been conscious of it, or of any wrongdoing towards you, whom I love more than myself. Yet I am one of those men!" ( *Jude* 332).<sup>2</sup> While the couple had followed what they thought was a natural and morally correct course of action, this reflection reveals how in others' eyes they have lived the conventional tale of the fallen woman. But thinking more carefully about the conventions of the fallen woman narrative allows us to see how Jude and Sue's story is not from that tradition. How and to what extent is the novel sympathetic towards Sue, a new type of woman who is not 'fallen' yet still enslaved to the old social conventions by which 'fallen' women suffered? The discourse of the fallen

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. by Patricia Ingham, Revised ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 332; Henceforth, all references to the novel will be referenced in-text, with the shortened title *Jude* and page numbers. The Oxford edition is based on the 1912 version, whereas the Penguin edition is based on the 1895 version.

woman necessitates the woman's abandonment by her seducer. Jude resorting to the only rhetoric available to him at that time, says,<sup>3</sup> 'Yes, Sue – that's what I am. I seduced you ... You were a distinct type – a refined creature, intended by Nature to be left intact. But I couldn't leave you alone!' (332).<sup>4</sup> However the final sentence, 'But I couldn't leave you alone' emphasises that Jude does not leave Sue, as his counterparts for other novels, Mr Bellingham, Arthur, Troy, Alec, and William, have done. In a narrow sense, Jude means that he could not refrain from making love with Sue, even while knowing she wished to remain celibate and independent. However, in another context, Jude highlights the significance of him not abandoning her, as many seducers of fallen woman narratives do. Jude is not a villainous or whimsical seducer, and neither is Sue the ignorant and pure girl. Part of Hardy's contribution to late nineteenth-century fiction is to give us individuals like Jude and Sue who are thoughtful, sensitive, and reflective, and who therefore challenge the simple moral absolutes that have previously governed sexual relations in Victorian England. Jude and Sue's relationship falls apart for reasons far more complicated than those explored in the earlier novels discussed in this study. This chapter explores Hardy's sympathetic representation of a young couple who are intellectual and self-reflective about romantic relationships and sexuality, and are thus self-tortured by the conservative moralities set by social institutions. In Hardy's novel, the moral world of the reader does not exist in a coherent and unified structure. There is not a moment of Sue's 'fall' and a 'redemption' is not applicable in her case. Thus the form of sympathy called for by Hardy is different from his predecessors. In *Ruth*, Gaskell promoted a flexible morality which extended sympathy for women who had sex outside of marriage. We have seen Moore's 'human goodness' which extends sympathy ever further and sympathy is no longer about a fault to be forgiven, but an acceptance. Hardy builds on Moore's idea, but for Hardy, morality itself is only repressive and human goodness is elusive. If we are to look for guidance on the act of reading from Hardy's fictional characters, we may find an example in the young Jude flinging down his books and pulling his hat over his face (25). 'The charm he had supposed in store for him was really a labour like that of Israel in Egypt' (25). Jude

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<sup>3</sup> Ingham writes, "These unexpected worlds reveal in this period of uncertainty the absence of a role for the male feminist: fumbling to find one, Jude paradoxically adopts a Ruskinian viewpoint". Patricia Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', in *Alternative Hardy*, ed. by Lance St. John Butler (St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 49–73 (p. 56).

<sup>4</sup> This line was added in 1895. Hardy also changed the word 'virginal' for 'refined'; see note to the Penguin edition.

wishes 'he had never seen a book, that he might never see another' (25). Perhaps for Hardy, a sympathetic representation of women is not one that gives easy answers, but one that challenges the readers with larger problems.

Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is typically considered to be a New Women novel, rather than a fallen woman novel. Sue does not immediately strike the reader as a fallen woman character (although Patricia Ingham calls Arabella 'a fallen woman who refuses to fall'.<sup>5</sup>) One significant ingredient to that difference is the woman's class position and the educational advantages that often come with it.<sup>6</sup> As Ingham writes, New Women is a 'coding of the privileged few: ostentatiously well-read if not well-educated, and high-mindedly opposed to marriage, which was rigidly defined as legal prostitution'.<sup>7</sup> The social changes occurring in the late Victorian period promoted further mobility between class, and education became more accessible for both genders. Sue comes from a working-class background, but is raised in London and Christminster, and grows to be an intellectual and independent young woman with strong opinions on sexual relationships and marriage.<sup>8</sup> She is 'immediately identifiable as a New Woman', writes Ingham, 'by her explicit awareness of herself as a member of an oppressed sex rightly seeking autonomy'.<sup>9</sup> As John Doheny writes, Widow Edlin and Arabella Donn are comfortable remaining working-class, which is contrasted with Jude and Sue's pursuit of lofty middle-class ideals.<sup>10</sup>

The novel is structured on the ominous marriage failures of Jude and Sue's parents: Jude's great aunt Drusilla says that any marriage attempted by Jude's relations is certain to end in failure. As well as this view being a Darwinian deterministic perspective of evolutionary degeneration, this also reflects the social and historical structure of feeling on legal marriages. Widow Edlin tells the young couple, people did not reflect on the legal binding of marriage so seriously back in her days,

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<sup>5</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 74. It is perhaps similar to the way critics speak of Esther Waters as fallen woman who 'falls up'. In all cases, the female characters defy the traditional myth of the fallen woman.

<sup>6</sup> The question is also applicable to Esther Waters. See Andrzej Diniejko, 'George Moore's Esther Waters as a New Woman Novel' *Victorian Web*. 2 Jul. 2014, <<https://victorianweb.org/victorian/authors/mooreg/estherwaters.html>> [accessed 10 March 2022].

<sup>7</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> In earlier drafts, Sue was the protégée of an Oxford don, thus being a figure of the academic world to which Jude aspires.

<sup>9</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> John R. Doheny, 'Characterization in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: The Function of Arabella', in *Reading Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Charles Pettit (Macmillan, 1998), pp. 57–82.

the early 1830s,<sup>11</sup> but the late nineteenth century brought social changes in people's (in particular to those in the middle-class circle) attitudes towards legal marriage.<sup>12</sup> In the 1870s and 1880s, the law improved for married women. The 1857 Divorce Act was heavily biased in favour of men, allowing them to divorce their wives for adultery, while women could only obtain divorce from their husbands if they were victims to 'incest, bigamy, cruelty or desertion'.<sup>13</sup> Women's rights were gradually improved by the 1870 Married Woman's Property Act (which protected wages and earnings), the 1873 Custody of Infants Act (which gave mothers rights 'in certain circumstances to children up to the age of 16 rather than 7'), the 1882 Married Woman's Property Act (which protected women's rights to obtain, keep and dispose personal property), and the 1884 Matrimonial Causes Act.<sup>14</sup> However, these legal improvements in married women's rights also carried a pessimist side, as Sue, an acute young woman, is aware of. While Arabella encourages her to make use of the legal advantages, Sue sees that the marriage laws and legal protection have a distorting impact on romantic relationships. As in a perfect world with no criminality and exploitation there would be no need to have laws, Sue aspires to live a perfect relationship in which there is no need for marriage laws:

'O, [Arabella] said that when people were tied up you could get the law of a man better if he beat you – and how when couples quarrelled . . . Jude, do you think that when you *must* have me with you by law, we shall be so happy as we are now? [. . .] Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?' (*Jude* 272).

Up until this point in the novel, most of Sue's views on marriage and her actions towards men have been inconsistent and vacillating. Here, significantly for the first time, what she argues makes sense to Jude. ('Upon my word, love, you are beginning to frighten me, too, with all this foreboding! Well, let's go back and think it over' 272). The couple postpone and further postpone the decision to enter into a legally

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<sup>11</sup> Presumably, Widow Edlin was married in 1831. (See 'Appendix III: A Note on the Novel's Chronology,' in *Jude the Obscure*, ed. by Dennis Taylor (Penguin, 1998), pp. 474–76.)

<sup>12</sup> See for example the nineteenth-century feminist, Mona Caird (1854–1932), whom Hardy admired. ('Collection Items: The Morality of Marriage' *British Library*, <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-morality-of-marriage>> [accessed 10 February, 2022])

<sup>13</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 61.

recognised union. In this phase of their lives, the couple seems comfortable and content with each other; they have reached mutual understanding – what Hardy might call a true and natural marriage. Although the happiness does not last for long, and their bubble bursts when Jude and Sue realise that their unconventional marriage is being curiously and disapprovingly looked upon by others, it is an essential part of Hardy's portrayal of New Women that Sue, though a complex and self-conflicting character who shows inconsistent behaviour, does hold human goodness, along with Hardy's plea that if only society would accommodate it and let her thrive. Sue is a near impossible character to read, except for a few rare occasions such as the one above, and yet Hardy's text all the more engages the reader with the difficult task of sympathising with New Women, often revealing how we must discover new points of connection with the other.

To understand the function of sympathy in Hardy's novel, it is necessary to understand his sympathy for the character Sue, a complex character who has prompted a wide range of responses from critics. As Ingham has observed, studies of Jude Fawley have been overshadowed by interest in Sue Bridehead, claiming her to be 'more complex' and 'more significant' despite the title name.<sup>15</sup> The motivating force that underlies these critical readings of Sue is the reader's inability to understand her. Any attempt to 'solve the conundrum' and to come up with 'mathematical equations' which explains all the inconsistencies of Sue has resulted in critics making 'blanket statements'. For Ingham, that the novel portrays Sue's inconsistencies is significant because it fits 'Hardy's own complex of emotional and intellectual attitude to women in his later life'.<sup>16</sup> In a 1908 letter to Helen Ward, a suffragette leader, Hardy writes that 'men should be permissive only, not cooperative' towards women fighting for the vote. He states his reason being that 'I feel by no means sure that the majority of those who clamour for it realise what it may bring in its train [ . . . ] I refer to such results as the probable break-up of the present marriage-system, the present social rules of other sorts, religious codes, legal arrangements on property, &c'.<sup>17</sup> While Hardy's passive stance towards the suffragette movement disappointingly lacks initiative, it is an error to dismiss it as anti-feminist. 'I do not

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<sup>15</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', p. 50. Interestingly, Ingham points out that the 'final title of the volume edition (replacing the earlier, 'The Simpletons', 'Hearts Insurgent' and 'The Recalcitrants') attempts to deflect attention towards the male protagonist', yet critics 'undeterred' prefer to focus on Sue.

<sup>16</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> qtd in Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', p. 52.

myself consider that this [the break-up of social conventions] would be necessarily a bad thing', Hardy writes, adding, 'I should not have written "Jude the Obscure" if I did'.<sup>18</sup> Hardy instead seems to think that women will gain their equal footing with men only to find that the whole social system is a sinking ship. What must be done then is to abandon the ship altogether. In deep sympathy with the New Woman, Hardy represents Sue as a difficult character, not because she is an immoral female, but because society has not yet reached an ethical stage which understands her human goodness. Her good, intellectual and kind motivations are twisted by the confines of society's moral expectations of women, and turns her decisions to destructive actions both to herself and others.

### **Breaking the Social Code with Narrative Code**

Thus in Hardy, we find his need to get rid of moral rules altogether, and as a novelist, this is achieved through his narrative style. Jil Larson writes that 'disruption of stable feminine identity occurs in much of the New Woman writing and is often reinforced by its unconventional narrative strategies'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Ingham argues that in Hardy's final novels, the 'language of prose fragments into poetry', a view that is common among Hardy critics.<sup>20</sup> But Hardy's disruption of conventions goes deeper than that of marriage and sexual relations, although it is part of the tangled web of social institution explored in the novel. Dennis Taylor writes that '*Jude the Obscure* hints at a combination of many things, legal, social, religious, which keeps us searching for the thing itself, the ultimate letter that kills'.<sup>21</sup> He continues, 'Hardy's passionate sense of hurt strikes out like a loose cannon and hits every target, and no target. His novel is a curious combination of definiteness, the scream of the prophet, and ambivalence. Thus critics have critiqued his incoherence, and yet said it allows for great art'.<sup>22</sup> The failures of society are more grievous than what legal amendments can right.

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<sup>18</sup> 'I deem it better that women should take the step unstimulated from outside. So, if they should be terrified at consequences, they will not be able to say to men: "You ought not to have helped bring upon us what we did not foresee".' (*Letters*, 3.360, qtd in Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', p. 52.)

<sup>19</sup> Larson, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy', p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, 'Introduction', p. xxi.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, 'Introduction', p. xxix.

Tobias Wilson-Bates destabilises previous critical readings of *Jude* as a social critique of individual institutions such as marriage, class and systemic education, by instead looking at 'underlying social codes'. Using Bakhtin's concept of speech/counter speech in a close reading of the public meeting scene in which Phillotson is bizarrely defended by a company of carnivalesque characters, Wilson-Bates argues that Hardy illustrates the established social code: Phillotson's argument for the liberation of women is not against the social code, but it is embedded in it – that is, Phillotson's speech 'for the conduct performed along the moral guidelines of universal empathy' is countered by the speech of the 'respectable inhabitants' who respond 'via the moral concerns of specific social situation'. The speech/counter-speech is pre-established and neither side is going to change their mind. However, it is this which Hardy ruptures with his portrayal of the band of the community's misfits, which Wilson-Bates calls 'one of the more suddenly surreal explosions of nonsensical violence in all of Hardy's writing'.<sup>23</sup> Phillotson's bewilderment at this violent turn of events acts on a meta-level where the social logic is disrupted by the narrative logic.

Enlightened by Wilson-Bates on how Hardy figuratively and symbolically fractures the social code which encompasses all social institutions, this study will then focus on the novel's theme of marriage, to observe the effects the fracturing of the social code on a meta-narrative level has on its sympathetic representation of Sue. It is that same force with which *Jude the Obscure* breaks the social code, that breaks the platform of discourse of the conventional. Sue's speech on women's liberty, though extensive and eloquent, is met with counter speech. Like Phillotson's case, there is no way to escape the pre-established cage which is the social code – that is, unless there is an intervention by the writer on a meta-fictional level. The novel, designed by Hardy to shock and bewilder readers, can break the social code. The death of Sue's children, her hysterical return to Phillotson and her submission to sex, are shocking. Jude is bewildered that she could possibly reject him, while she still clearly loves him. However, as this chapter will explore, the character of Sue may be bewildering and evasive of the reader's understanding of her, but this representation is an essential part of Hardy's sympathetic representation of an intellectual yet naive young woman who struggles to live in a society which insists on fitting her into a fallen woman narrative.

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<sup>23</sup> Tobias Wilson-Bates, 'The Circus and the Deadly Child: Ruptures of Social Code in *Jude the Obscure*', *Acta Neophilologica*, 51.1–2 (2018), 127–35 (130).



## Engaging with Sue

### Narrative Point of View and Dialogue

By analysing the narrative techniques of how Sue is portrayed, focusing on point of view and looking for uses of free indirect speech, we can enquire about the nature of the narrator's sympathy. When it comes to the representation of Jude, critics such as Christine Brooke-Rose have said that it is often hard to distinguish whether a passage is told from the narrator's point of view (internal focalisation) or in Jude's point of view (free indirect discourse), so intimate is the narrator with Jude.<sup>24</sup> As for the narrator's perception of Sue, the same principles do not apply; we also must consider how Jude, who is often the focalisor, sympathises or cannot sympathise with Sue. Unlike Tess, Sue is not the subject, but only the object, making it harder for readers to gain an understanding of her. Suzanne Keen notes that despite the evidence from Hardy's notebooks, autobiography and verse that he was interested in introspection, when it comes to character representations in his prose fiction, he is 'remarkably chary about exposing the interior workings' of his character's minds in the mode of free indirect speech.<sup>25</sup> If that is how Hardy is in general, then for his representation of Sue, he seems in particular closed to her inner mind.

When we find moments in the plot where the narrator focuses on Sue, that is, describing her where Jude is absent, Sue's point of view is still rare;<sup>26</sup> even in those passages, the narrator observes her from an external point of view – similar to how Jude observes Sue from a distance when they were not yet acquaintances. This is true of the first 'solo' scene of Sue in which she buys the pagan images. The scene fleshes out Sue's character: a book reader, attracted to classical gods, acts impulsively and boldly but later feels the guilt of having to hide. In this scene the narrator assumes the position of a hypothetical observer, who can only judge by external appearance and body language. This is found, for instance, in the way the narrator describes Sue '[shaking] her head' (87), or focusing on her 'trembling state' (88). Although free indirect discourse might be faintly detected in the sentence 'They seemed so very

<sup>24</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Wit and Sick Tragedy', in *Alternative Hardy*, ed. by Lance St. John Butler (St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 26–48.

<sup>25</sup> Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy's Imagination*, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> Brooke-Rose agrees with me that there are almost no instances of internal focalisation (p. 36).

large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked' (note the repetition of 'so very' which seems to mimic Sue's nervous feelings), this is neutralised by the narrator's denial of knowledge when he says Sue '*seemed* almost to wish she had not bought the figures' (88, emphasis mine).<sup>27</sup>

Thus for the majority of the novel, Sue and her ideas are observed and processed by the narrator, Jude, Mr Phillotson, Arabella, Widow Edlin and others. However, Sue is eloquent, and her speeches are given in full in letters and in extensive dialogue, in which she voices her opinions about love, religion, and marriage. The majority of her views on marriage are expressed by the novel in direct discourse. Brooke-Rose writes that 'Hardy is a master of dramatic form, and *Jude* has perhaps more dialogue than any of his other novels'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, she finds that '[d]ialogue has revealing/concealing structure since we reveal ourselves through utterance, but only to the limits of what can be articulated. It thus draws us IN and keeps us OUT, guessing'.<sup>29</sup> Hardy's use of direct discourse in representing Sue plays a specific and significant role in the novel's presentation of the dynamics of sympathy. Giving the woman character a strong voice does not in her case solve the problem of her being misunderstood. Despite her many words, Sue still remains a mystery, even to herself – especially when her actions do not match her words. There is a barrier between the narrator/Jude/reader and Sue, which is proving to be extremely difficult to cross, even suggesting that the barrier cannot be overcome by the power of words.

Sue is not the first 'hard-to-like' character who elicits the reader's sympathy. Earlier in the study we explored Eliot's representation of Hetty Sorrel, a selfish character who nevertheless gains the narrator, the author and the reader's sympathy. Esther Waters's tendency to lose her temper might also be a hindrance to the reader's immediate liking for this proud heroine. Sue is similar, but she to the extreme as to incite Desmond Hawkins to call her, with misogynistic spite, 'the nastiest little bitch in English Literature'.<sup>30</sup> Hetty's coquettishness is accepted by Eliot's narrator to be part of who she is; Esther's temper is justified by the narrator as arising from the same energy and forcefulness that sustains her sense of self-respect.

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<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, this can be read as an early manifestation of Sue's inability to make up her mind and to know what she thinks and feels.

<sup>28</sup> Brooke-Rose, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Brooke-Rose, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Desmond Hawkins, *Thomas Hardy* (A. Barker, 1950), p. 17.

When it comes to Sue, however, not only are the other characters baffled by her, but also as Rebecca Mitchell argues, ‘the omniscient narrator – ostensibly able to clarify Sue’s motivations or intentions – further fails to offer clarification’.<sup>31</sup> Sue differs from other representations of female characters in this study, because the narrator himself seems not able to understand her.<sup>32</sup>

### **Sue’s Elusiveness Towards Romance and Sexuality**

Sue is undoubtedly one of the most controversial characters in this study, as well as in Victorian literature, and a study in Hardy’s changes in various versions of the novel illuminate his deliberation in representing Sue as a difficult individual. On the surface, the role of Sue may be seen as similar to that of Hetty in Eliot’s *Adam Bede*: that is being a foil for the titular character’s happiness. However, Sue’s part in the narrative is so deeply intertwined with Jude’s and the novel’s central concern of the marriage question, that the reader’s sympathy for Sue’s happiness too is almost taken for granted. And yet, sympathy for Sue is at many times in the novel extremely difficult, because despite her lack of malicious intent, she causes Jude extreme pain, and (for many readers) appears to ultimately drive him to his death.<sup>33</sup> We as readers may question the extent to which we are meant to sympathise with such a character, if at all.

There are certainly more than a few times in the novel when Hardy seems to deliberately confuse the reader’s opinion of Sue. Patricia Ingham states that Sue ‘negotiates alternately an idealised romantic relationship with Jude and a position of authorised sexual tormenter’.<sup>34</sup>

She plays him with a coquetry so volatile that it draws his hostility to a point where he sees her frequently as merciless. She accepts him verbally as a lover but allows possession only under duress; makes a worldly marriage but claims not to have known what marriage really meant.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rebecca N. Mitchell, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca N. Mitchell, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> See Kathleen Blake, ‘Sue Bridehead, “The Woman of the Feminist Movement”’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 18.4 (1978), 703–26.

<sup>34</sup> Ingham, ‘Provisional Narratives’, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ingham, ‘Provisional Narratives’, pp. 50–51.

Ingham argues that the changes made in the 1912 Wessex edition add to the width in which Sue sways from intellectual distance to sensual tenderness, making her even harder to understand, while in earlier versions Sue was 'more linear or diachronic'.<sup>36</sup>

A comparison of the different versions of *Jude the Obscure* gives us insightful results on how Hardy may have wished to represent Sue conflicted by her sexuality, of which she is more aware of than ignorant. The main editions are the MS/serial, the 1895 first book version and the 1912 version.<sup>37</sup> As Ingham observes, '[t]he Sue in the earliest draft of the manuscript has a simplicity captured by her "bright eyes and tender voice" when she encounters Jude. She develops more self-awareness and sophistication in the later version'.<sup>38</sup> Hardy is well known for reinserting parts of his story which were censored by the magazine editor back for the book publication. As it can be seen, Hardy made the changes in the 1895 version, with the intention of making Sue's sensual feelings more explicit. The instances where Sue becomes more inconsistent with her words and actions are understandable when we consider how sensitive the Victorian publication industry was in regards to allusions to sexual relations. In the 1895 book version, Sue becomes more sexually warm, not solely because Hardy wished to confuse his readers, or as Ingham believes, to 'plainly defy attempts to provide formulas for coherence',<sup>39</sup> but because Sue in the book publication is allowed to express a wider range of feelings. The serial version often presents Sue as an innocent and naive woman; in the 1895 version, she has more self-awareness of her relationship with men.

When considering why should Hardy want to present Sue with more self-consciousness and less ignorance in later versions, it is possible that a self-aware woman was more fitting for the times in which Hardy was writing. In 1894, Hardy was part of a symposium on sex education for the young, which was published in the *New Review* under the title of 'The Tree of Knowledge'.<sup>40</sup> Hardy does his part of stating that 'a girl should certainly not be allowed to enter into matrimony without a

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<sup>36</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 51.

<sup>37</sup> To be precise, there are the manuscript, the serialisation in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (December 1894 – November 1895), the 1895 proofs, the 1895 'First Edition' published by Osgood McIlvaine, the 1903 Macmillan edition which is very similar to the 1895, and the 1912 'Wessex Edition' with over 200 changes and an updated Preface. Harpers bought the American rights and Hardy appears to have proof-read the 'Autograph Edition'. He also made changes in his own personal copies of *Jude*. (See Ingham, 'Note on the Text' of *Jude*, Oxford World Classics ed.)

<sup>38</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 51.

<sup>39</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Tree of Knowledge', *The New Review*, 10.61 (1894), 675–90.

full knowledge of her probable future in the holy estate', a statement which reminds one of Sue's tragic marriage.<sup>41</sup> He proposes that 'a plain handbook on natural processes' should be given to young people, and at a later stage one with 'similar information on morbid contingencies'. In the given time, he does not enter 'the question whether marriage, as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be', but does say that marriage 'has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes'.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, what draws our interest about the symposium is the brief comment by the novelist Israel Zangwill (1864–1926), who closes the discussion, saying 'it seems to me that your symposium is a little too late; it is like discussing after the steed is stolen, whether the stable door should be shut or left open. Owing to the circulation of the woman-novel (much greater than mine alas!) and of the modern newspaper, nine girls out of ten must know as much as their parents, and the tenth a great deal more'.<sup>43</sup> This almost comic ending to a serious debate, brings us to the question of how by the mid-1890s, young women were aware of marital sexual intercourse and what was socially expected by them in their relationship with the opposite sex, and therefore so would Sue.

Returning to *Jude the Obscure*, we see that Sue's awareness of her sexuality is delicately portrayed. Shortly after Jude is rejected by the university and becomes disgracefully drunk, Sue moves to Melchester to begin her training as a teacher (124). Their relationship is a riddle to Jude. In her first letter, Sue asks Jude to come because she is lonely in the new place. But when Jude replied that he needs to delay his coming, 'She had acquiesced so readily' that Jude thinks 'she evidently did not much care about him' (124). Jude is elated when another letter arrives from Sue, telling him of her misery in Melchester and asking 'could he come immediately' (125). However, Jude is disappointed upon his arrival to find an emotionally distanced Sue: 'Yet neither was she quite the woman who had written the letter that summoned him. That had plainly been dashed off in an impulse which second thoughts had somewhat regretted; thoughts that were possibly of his recent self-disgrace' (126).

This passage and the following interaction between Jude and Sue have been changed by Hardy between the serialisation and the 1895 book version, arguably

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<sup>41</sup> 'The Tree of Knowledge', p. 681.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Tree of Knowledge', p. 681.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Tree of Knowledge', p. 690.

transforming Sue from an ignorant character to an ambiguous one. In the MS there is not mention of Sue possibly regretting her letter; Sue greets Jude openly:

All her bounding manner was gone; her curves of motion had become right lines. The screens and subtleties of convention had likewise disappeared, & the bare woman was revealed, her face flushed with gladness. Jude was quite overcome with emotion.<sup>44</sup>

In reply to Jude's question whether she thought badly of him for his last drunken conduct, she replies in the serial, 'O no no!' – a straightforward denial of having any doubts about Jude<sup>45</sup> – as opposed to the 1895 version, 'O, I have tried not to!', which suggests more complicated feelings (126). In the MS and serial, Sue is then said to have 'come forward so impulsively that Jude felt sure a moment later that she had half-unconsciously expected him to kiss her'. The serial Sue, here, is reminiscent of Avice the first in *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (serialised in 1892). Avice takes her childhood friend, Pearston, by the hand and kisses him impulsively out of affection, not thinking about how in the years since their last meeting, they had grown into adulthood, and their conduct needs adjusting. Like Pearston, the early version of Jude recognises that Sue's inappropriate affections are out of innocence/ignorance, not romantic interest. The MS focuses on Jude who fights the temptation of 'taking advantage' of Sue, who is ignorant of any of his burning, romantic feelings. Despite her new Melchester appearance ('she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline'), the text emphasises her 'under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach' (126, also same in MS). This reading interprets Sue's 'bounding manner' as having 'boundary', or being 'anti-social',<sup>46</sup> and so with these gone, Sue is a 'bare woman revealed' (only in MS), and her 'screens and subtleties of convention had likewise disappeared' (in MS, 1895 and 1912 version) It might be significant that the MS Sue's motions are described to be 'straightlines'. Compared to the 1895 version's

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<sup>44</sup> Cambridge, The Fitzwilliam Museum, *Jude the Obscure: Autograph Manuscript*, MS 1–1911, p. 134; see also 'Notes', in *Jude the Obscure*, ed. by Dennis Taylor (Penguin, 1998), pp. 409–65 (p. 435).

<sup>45</sup> 'Explanatory Notes', in *Jude the Obscure*, ed. by Patricia Ingham, Revised ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 399–416 (p. 405).

<sup>46</sup> 'Bounding, adj 1.', 'Boulder, n 2.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, [accessed 14 March 2022].

‘subdued lines’, the logic of Sue’s behaviour can be followed in a straight line: Sue greets Jude out of genuine and innocent cousinly affection.

Meanwhile, in the 1895 version onwards, Hardy presents an ambiguous Sue, who proves to be more incoherent the more we try to close read the passages. When Sue greets Jude, she is not a ‘bare woman’ and her social boundaries are subtle: ‘She had come forward prettily; but Jude felt sure that she had hardly expected him to kiss her’ (126).<sup>47</sup> The 1895 changes, then, make Sue more distanced towards Jude, and more in-tune with her new Melchester appearance: ‘she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline’ (126, also in MS). Yet, ironically, the 1895 version also accentuates the contradictions in Sue’s manner, because Sue still has ‘an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach’ (126, also in MS); this description does not fit in as neatly with the 1895 image of Sue as it did with the MS Sue who is described as ‘the bare woman revealed’, openly and innocently glad of her cousin’s visit. The MS focuses on Jude who fights the temptation of ‘taking advantage’ of Sue, who is ignorant of this. The 1895 version, on the other hand, portrays Sue as being more aware of herself and of her relationship with the opposite sex, and signalling to him that she is not expecting to be kissed. It is not that Sue’s opinion of men is different, but rather her understanding of herself.

A similar change is made between the serial and 1895 version when Sue is expelled from teacher training school, and returns to Jude, aghast that others expect her to marry him for her reputation’s sake. In the serial, Sue says that the idea ‘never occur[ed] to me’. In the 1895 version and onwards, she says the opposite: ‘It did just occur to me’ (*Jude* 151). The self-awareness of the 1895 Sue is crucial because it makes it more plausible for her to later develop what D. H. Lawrence writes is ‘their own uneasy sense of wrong, of sin, which they communicated to other people’.<sup>48</sup> The New Women’s burden of guilt comes from putting themselves in the traditional fallen woman narrative of seduction. Sue’s burst of anger at Jude’s ‘betrayal’ is a 2-dimensional perspective on their situation. She plays the part of ignorance (‘I was so blind at first’), and accuses him of acting like a lover, which has misled others to think wrongly of her. Jude answers ‘simply’, assisting her role of ignorance by taking

<sup>47</sup> *Jude the Obscure: Autograph Manuscript*, MS 1–1911, p. 134; See also Ingham, ‘Explanatory Notes’ in *Jude*, Oxford ed. p. 405; Taylor, Note 8 to *Jude*, Penguin ed., p. 435.

<sup>48</sup> D. H. Lawrence, ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’, in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (Heinemann, 1936), pp. 398–516 (p. 506).

all the blame and in this way also simplifying the situation (151). However, whether marriage did 'occur' to Sue or not, according to which version you read, Sue's speech follows in both versions: 'I never supposed you thought of such a thing as marrying me till – the other evening; when I began to fancy you did love me a little. Perhaps I ought not to have been so intimate with you. It is all my fault. Everything is my fault always!' (151). Her speech sounds 'a little forced and unreal' not only to Jude but also to Sue, and 'they regarded each other in mutual distress' (151).<sup>49</sup> Sue's innocence is seen as performance. The 'mutual distress' is key here, and Hardy portrays a couple unable to address their true feelings for each other. The use of the word 'mutual' signifies that even though Jude and Sue disagree in how they desire their relationship to be, they are mutual in the sense that they are trying to address the obstacle together, whether that be social norms or their intuitive emotions. Their relationship could not be mutual if one is ignorant of the other's struggles and desires.

Can it be understood that Sue is fully perceptive about Jude's romantic interest in her? It is at this meeting that Sue tells Jude of her engagement with Phillotson:

Her ever-sensitive lip began to quiver, and her eye to blink, at something this reproof was deciding her to say.

'I know you'll be angry if I tell you everything, and that's why I don't want to!' (*Jude* 127)

Here, Sue frames it so that it is Jude whose feelings are too involved, and she is afraid of agitating him. However, the narrative description of this moment of Sue's 'confession', betrays her earlier emotional detachment. Her lips quiver and her eyes blink; her facial expression is one of mobility. "I shall tell you!" said she, with *the perverseness that was part of her*' (127, emphasis mine); the narrator adds a touch of insight into her personality.<sup>50</sup> And although Sue regards Jude 'passively without moving' and speaks with 'an air of no emotion whatever', the multiple exclamation points in her words seem to suggest otherwise – that she is emotional. It is only the style of her language which suggest it is a prosaic of every day correspondence: 'We had better not meet again; and we'll only correspond at long intervals, on purely

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<sup>49</sup> In the serial, this phrase was written that 'sense of what was dividing them caused them to regard each other in mutual distress.' Taylor writes that the revision of 1895 proofs 'sharpe[n] the insight into Sue's complicated psyche' ('Notes' to *Jude*, Penguin ed., III.v.2, p. 438)

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that the sexual connotations of the adjective 'perverse' is a relatively new addition, its first use recorded by the OED in *N. Amer. Rev.* 1891.



business matters!’ (*Jude* 128). Her statement ‘we had better not’ denotes it is a transactional language rather than the language of two lovers. Yet, here again, another exclamation point suggests heightened emotional intensity, and far from being devoid of feeling, or ignorant, Sue hits exactly where Jude is most emotionally weak: ‘This was just the one thing he would not be able to bear, as she *probably* knew, and it brought him round at once.’ (128, emphasis mine). Jude would rather deny his romantic feelings and stay with Sue as friends, than have to leave her altogether. The narrator suggests that Sue is more aware of Jude’s feelings for her than she will later claim to have been, and yet by the insertion ‘probably’, limits Jude’s apparent knowledge about Sue. I suggest that the narrator engages with several voices, representing of the characters in how they wish to be perceived, as well as disclosing their disguises. Sue’s unemotional state is only ‘an air’ – there is no material proof of it. Jude is also deceptive in his words about how he truly feels: he congratulates Sue for her engagement to Phillotson but when their eyes meet, there is ‘the reproach in his own belying his words’ (128, emphasis mine). Their eyes do not lie, and Sue can see what Jude truly thinks. As earlier when they ‘regarded each other in mutual distress’ (151), Jude is conscious he did not completely suppress his romantic attraction to Sue, and Sue knows that she was aware of his romantic interest to some extent, but by playing ignorance, did not stop discouraging him.

The degree to which Sue is self-aware of the sexual contingencies of her relationship with Jude is open to debate. And it is that confusion which keeps the reader in constant need to adjust their sympathy for Sue. The 1895 awareness that Sue has of Jude as her potential lover, is intricately balanced by the following statement by the narrator: ‘By every law of nature and sex a kiss was the only rejoinder that fitted the mood and the moment, under the suasion of which Sue’s undemonstrative regard of him might not inconceivably have changed its temperature’ (*Jude* 151). On one hand, the hyperbolically generalised theory – ‘by every law of nature and sex’ – suggests the narrator’s irony. Sue is acutely aware that in such a situation, it is the reader’s expectation that she and Jude reconcile with a kiss, and Sue is not willing to confirm to social expectations of romantic narratives. At the same time, the sentence with the hypothetical ‘might’, combined with the double negatives ‘not inconceivably’, is very confusing and unclear in what state of mind and heart Sue is in. Could Sue *just* possibly have responded to a kiss then and there? There is a glimmer of a future, but we will never know because Jude, unlike some men, does not

'cast the scruples to the wind, and ventured it'. This passage casts a thicker mist around the cloud of feelings surrounding Sue, which Jude is unable to read, but in doing so, opens up the many possibilities of Sue. In making her more ambiguous, the narrator also makes Sue open to the possibility of accepting a more-than-cousin relationship, at least more than Jude seems to think. However, rather than plunge into the unknown depths of Sue, Jude 'preferred to dwell upon the recognised barriers between them'. Instead of bestowing a kiss, Jude asks after her fiancé, Mr Phillotson, reminding Sue, that there is a very material and practical barrier to any potential love romance they have (152). Assuming that Sue does not return his feelings of love, Jude is 'perplexed' that Sue is 'piqued at his honest acquisition in his rival' (152). If any, it seems that Jude is the one who is in ignorance. In the full quote of this sentence, the narrator refers to Jude as 'her lover': 'It was very perplexing to her lover that she should be piqued [. . .]'. This is a change made in the 1895 version; in the serial version, the pronoun for Jude is 'cousin'. Hardy, interestingly, makes the same revision in several other passages. Considering that Sue is eluding any romantic interest, and Jude accepts that she does not love him in that way, it is illogical that Sue should be referred to as 'his lover'. However, the fact that the narrator goes ahead to use the pronoun 'lover' over 'cousin' creates the sense of Jude's irrational and uncontrollable feelings for her, as well as the text itself providing the air of a more-than-cousin bond between the two, regardless of how they perceive themselves. On one hand, it may reflect how Sue's school assumed her late night outing with Jude was more than 'just cousins', but on the other it suggest that the couple lack of understanding of themselves, of their desires especially concerning their bodies and sex.

The reading of Sue romantically warming up toward Jude is supported by later versions of the novel. Ingham points out several changes in the 1912 version which introduce a 'mild sexual warmth' to Sue.<sup>51</sup> In the train for Aldbrickham, Jude kisses Sue, to which Sue responds in 1895 with 'I don't dislike you to, very much'. In 1912 she says, 'I didn't dislike you to, I own it' (*Jude* 232). It is an ever so slight change, but Sue admits to the pleasure and enjoyment of the kiss. When Arabella revisits and Sue feels pressured to marry Jude, she declares 'I do love you' (256), an indication of strong feeling which is not written in versions before 1912. These changes, Ingham

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<sup>51</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 51.

argues, extends Sue's character which goes back and forth from a sexless and cold being to one capable of owning warm affections. However, on this occasion I would disagree about the extent to which these changes are meant to be 'resistant to the notion of logical coherence' of Sue's character.<sup>52</sup> In the scene in which Jude and Sue have a conversation at the piano in the Shaston schoolhouse, Ingham notes that in 1895, Jude and Sue 'kissed each other'; in 1912 version, they 'kissed close and long'. However, she neglects to mention the MS and serial version of how they 'clasped each other'. We may be able to say that Hardy allowed the couple to express their passion more strongly than a clasp in the first book edition, and then in 1912 he ventured to create an even more passionate moment, possibly because during the seven years in between the two editions, literary representation of sensual affection had grown more accepting. In that case, it is plausible that Hardy meant the relationship to be passionate from its early creation.

In his essay 'Candour in English Fiction' (1890), Hardy criticised censorship, especially of sexual relations. He writes, 'Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the substitution for such catastrophes as favour the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that "they married and were happy ever after"'.<sup>53</sup> This statement expresses his desire to portray, that which he sees at life's centre, the complicated relationship between a man and a woman, and by a true representation to set free that stifled aspect of humanity. He laments how the publishing industry, magazine serialisation and the circulating library cuts off much potential of English fiction, leaving the writer to 'either whit and scourge those characters into doing something contrary to their natures, to produce the spurious effect of their being in harmony with social forms and ordinances, or by leaving them alone to act as they will, he must bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head'.<sup>54</sup> If Sue can be read more coherently in the early serialisation, it is likely to be her 'harmony with social forms of ordinances' from which Hardy sets her free in the later versions. Her incoherence is found because she goes against social expectations, but as an individual, Sue is wholesome; unique, but not fragmented nor inaccessible. Hardy's text invites readers to be able to sympathise with complex and difficult characters and refuses a

<sup>52</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Candour in English Fiction', in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, ed. by Harold Orel (Macmillan, 1966), pp. 125–33 (pp. 127–28).

<sup>54</sup> Hardy, 'Candour in English Fiction', p. 130.

representation of a woman who is simplified for readability and fitting into conventionality.

Despite the unreadability of Sue, tracing the novel with care and thoughtfulness can to some extent achieve insight into Sue's motivations, her ideas of sexuality and relationships. In regards to Sue's growth in sensual affections for Jude, Mary Jacobus has provided a thorough reading of the character.<sup>55</sup> I argue that the text provides just enough details for the reader to ascertain a gradual, linear development of Sue's warmth toward Jude. According to Ingham, in Sue's motivations and feelings there are '*moments with their own temporary validity* but resistant to the notion of logical coherence'.<sup>56</sup> While for Ingham, Sue's coherence exist in isolated moments, I put forward that the reader's sympathy for Sue is guided by her narrative and by her gradual acceptance of sexual intercourse with her lover, so that when Sue ultimately leaves Jude and returns to Mr Phillotson, the reader understands and feels her self-inflicted pain, along with Jude's. While the Jude is the titular character, Jacobus argues for a sympathetic reading of Sue and an interpretation of Sue as a 'tragic figure in her own right'.<sup>57</sup> She provides a careful reading into the motivations of Sue following her growing closeness to Jude, and through her breakup of their marriage. While doing so Jacobus also navigates the narrator's sympathy; at times it is with Jude, and at other times with Sue. However, there is a pattern, as Jacobus states, 'Hardy is imaginatively generous toward both sides of the struggle, but as always his most intense feeling is for the lower'.<sup>58</sup> Jacobus acutely observes that when 'Sue thus wins the first round at Jude's expense (he, apparently, must love only her, but she need not commit herself to him)', that 'the balance of our sympathy is surely with him'.<sup>59</sup> However, when Sue is distraught that Jude has gone after Arabella, although it is for humane terms, 'Sue's piteous entreaties show her tacit recognition of the sexual threat posed by Arabella'.<sup>60</sup> Jude uses this to his advantage in getting a marriage promise out of her. Jacobus writes:

The blend of pleasure and regret which we feel in her defeat is beautifully caught in the kisses she exchanges with Jude the following day – kisses, Hardy tells us,

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Jacobus, 'Sue the Obscure', *Essays in Criticism*, 25.3 (1975), 304–28.

<sup>56</sup> Ingham, 'Provisional Narratives', p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobus, p. 307.

<sup>58</sup> Jacobus, p. 314.

<sup>59</sup> Jacobus, p. 314.

<sup>60</sup> Jacobus, p. 314.

returned by Sue ‘in a way she had never done before. Times had decidedly changed. “The little bird is caught at last!’ she said, a sadness showing in her smile.’ (p.322) Jude’s reply (“No – only nested”) consoles both her and us; but this time our sympathy is with her.<sup>61</sup>

Understanding Sue’s growth of affections for Jude is crucial in understanding her heartbreak at the end of the novel, and how sympathy functions in this text. Jacobus writes, ‘Hardy subtly conveys the extent of her sexual awakening, and we gain enough sense of a shared sexual happiness to make its betrayal by Sue herself, at the end of the novel a tragic one’.<sup>62</sup> At the scene of the agricultural fair, Sue and Jude, now officially lovers, enjoy the roses with Little Father Time at their side. Jacobus explains, ‘[t]he rose which complements the lily in Sue has been brought into flower by Jude; it is he who gives her the playful push into contact with her own sensuous nature, making her fully and joyously responsive here’.<sup>63</sup> I also want to add that in the happy moment, Sue calls Jude her ‘husband’:

“I should like to push my face quite into them [the roses]—the dears!” she had said. “But I suppose it is against the rules to touch them—isn’t it, Jude?”

“Yes, you baby,” said he: and then playfully gave her a little push, so that her nose went among the petals.

“The policeman will be down on us, and I shall say it was my husband’s fault!”

Then she looked up at him, and smiled in a way that told so much to Arabella.<sup>64</sup>

“Happy?” he murmured.

She nodded.

“Why? Because you have come to the great Wessex Agricultural Show—or because *we* have come?”

“You are always trying to make me confess to all sorts of absurdities. Because I am improving my mind, of course, by seeing all these steam-ploughs, and threshing-machines, and chaff-cutters, and cows, and pigs, and sheep.”

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<sup>61</sup> Jacobus, p. 315.

<sup>62</sup> Jacobus, p. 315.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobus, p. 316.

<sup>64</sup> The significance that this scene is framed by Arabella watching will be discussed subsequently.

Jude was quite content with a baffle from his ever evasive companion. (*Jude* 285–86)

Sue believed that touching the roses was not allowed; that she should not endorse sensual desires. But Jude teaches her that it is okay to find pleasure. Furthermore, though this scene ends with Sue remaining an evasive character, that does not hinder the couple from happiness ('Jude was quite content with a baffle'), nor the reader from feeling sympathy.

### **Further Complications, a Stronger Sympathy**

Meanwhile, Hardy adds further complications to the reader's sympathy for Sue, though the perspective of Arabella Donne and her critical look on middle-class values. The scene at the agricultural fair – the happiest moment in Jude and Sue's relationship – is perhaps a rare moment when the reader can feel most at ease with the cheerful couple. However, Hardy does not only intend the reader to have pure, unchallenged sympathy; the scene is framed by Arabella who watches Jude, Sue and Little Father Time, and her presence somewhat contaminates the reader's full enjoyment of Jude and Sue's happiness. Little Father Time also foreshadows that the happiness will eventually end with his symbolical statement that the flowers will soon fade. Arabella does not affect Jude and Sue, because she is merely observing them: nay, her narrative function here is purely on the reader's behalf. Arabella is contrasted with Sue; the women represent the two different desires of Jude. So far this chapter has looked at a sympathetic reading of New Women, and a reading centred on Sue, which finds Arabella to be an ominous figure who threatens Sue's relationship with Jude. As in the agricultural fair scene, she is often lingering close by, and her appearances frequently destabilise Sue's emotional control. Doheny writes, 'Sue, who is not afraid of Jude because she can twist him into submission to her plan, is frightened by the "soft parts" of the stronger, comfortably sexual female who caused her fall into sexual experience'.<sup>65</sup> However, to present Arabella as only antagonistic does not capture the complexity of Hardy's representation of her character. In fact, the novel is sufficiently open so as to allow for sympathetic readings of a character who is even as ostensibly dislikeable as Arabella. The best known of these readings is by D.

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<sup>65</sup> Doheny, p. 79.

H. Lawrence. In his famous essay which expresses his admiration for Arabella as a rare woman that ‘one does not find in real life’, Lawrence writes that her motivations are ‘explained in the book’.<sup>66</sup> Jude was a monkish character with his books; ‘What had he, passionate, emotional nature, to do with learning for learning’s sake, with mere academics? Any woman must know it was ridiculous’.<sup>67</sup> Lawrence describes Arabella as having ‘from the outset an antagonism to the submission to any change in herself to any development. She had the will to remain where she was, static, and to receive and exhaust all impulse she received from the male, in her sense’.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Arabella leaves Jude, but not before leaving him ‘the stronger and completer’. Doheny takes Lawrence’s argument further, by exploring the text in detail for Arabella’s motivations and discovering her crucial function in the novel.<sup>69</sup> He argues that Arabella acts as a commentary on the middle-class ideals of Jude and Sue, and reveals how unsustainable they are within the social and economic environment in which they find themselves. In the well-cited scene of the pig killing, many critics sympathise with Jude, for his sensitive, humanely compassion for fellow animals.<sup>70</sup> However, Doheny’s sympathy for Arabella’s side of the story reveals how hypocritical Jude is, and how practical Arabella is, and how she might have been a supportive city wife working in a bar while Jude pursued his studies in Christminster.

A sympathetic reading of Arabella is not without strong opposition, as John Goode challenges Lawrence, whom he scathingly references, for his essay on Arabella. The contrast of characters runs thus: Arabella vs. Sue; Nature vs. Culture. However, Goode writes, ‘There is nothing really natural about Arabella, but she uses this term frequently’.<sup>71</sup> Goode argues that Arabella puts on the appearance of nature, her wig and pretend pregnancy, in order to make a ‘trap’ into marriage. ‘Feelings are feelings!’, one of Arabella’s realistic attitudes towards life, which is praised for its departure from the symbolic order, is, Goode argues, actually ‘a return’ to it; ‘It has nothing to do with the loving kindness of Jude’s sympathies in the field’.<sup>72</sup> For

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<sup>66</sup> Lawrence, ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’, pp. 489, 493.

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence, p. 494.

<sup>68</sup> Lawrence, p. 493.

<sup>69</sup> John R. Doheny, ‘Characterization in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*: The Function of Arabella’, in *Reading Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Charles Pettit (Macmillan, 1998), pp. 57–82

<sup>70</sup> See Elisha Cohn, “‘No Insignificant Creature’”: Thomas Hardy’s Ethical Turn’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64.4 (2010), 494–520 (519); Caroline Sumpter, ‘On Suffering and Sympathy: Jude the Obscure, Evolution, and Ethics’, *Victorian Studies*, 53.4 (2011), 665–87 (666–67).

<sup>71</sup> Goode, p. 149.

<sup>72</sup> Goode, p. 150.

example, Arabella expresses that she 'natural[ly]' feels more sorry for the death of her biological son than the other children borne by Sue. However, this 'natural' feeling is according to the symbolic order. Jude and Sue, by adopting Little Father Time as their own have 'already shown us something very different from this natural which serves the social'.<sup>73</sup> In my opinion, Goode's critique of Lawrence's reading of Arabella is more fitting to the text. However, I find Doheny's reading more delicately presented than Lawrence's, that it collaborates with Goode's argument that the novel presents multiple ways of understanding of the text through different characters.<sup>74</sup> Doheny adds another perspective of Arabella. He concludes:

Arabella brings into blinding relief the sheer horror of what Jude and Sue do to themselves and to each other, and thereby she helps destroy the "crystalline orb of the ideal". This, in turn indicates the great importance of this novel for the present since we, as a society, have refined the processes even beyond those of Jude and Sue. [. . .] It certainly show us how not to live, and it makes us see what we are up against more clearly than we could see it without Arabella.<sup>75</sup>

Thus Arabella exposes the framework of Jude and Sue's idealistic aspirations and the futility of it. Once shown this powerful reading, one cannot un-see it.

However, the pragmatic and working-class Arabella does not negate Jude and Sue's intellectual middle-class aspirations; the text's sympathy remains just as strong towards the couple. It is true that other critics have also noticed Hardy's narrative distance towards Jude and Sue's ideals, especially those which reflect on and heighten their sensitivity to suffering around them. Roy Morrell writes, 'We don't exactly admire Jude's weakness; his sense of the suffering of the "little birdies" is disproportionate; and it is just this kind of weakness that Hardy exaggerates and parodies, with a strange mixture of pity and mockery'.<sup>76</sup> Caroline Sumpter argues that in portraying Jude and Sue as a highly sensitive couple, what she calls 'an advanced moral type', Hardy expresses as 'Spencerian concern that excess sympathy is an evolutionary liability'.<sup>77</sup> This concern highlights the narrator's distance from the central couple's aspirations. However, both Morell and Sumpter also emphasise

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<sup>73</sup> Goode, p. 150.

<sup>74</sup> Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (University of Malaya Press, 1969), p. 104.

<sup>75</sup> Doheny, p. 80.

<sup>76</sup> Morrell, p. 103.

<sup>77</sup> Sumpter, pp. 676–77.



Hardy's sympathy with Jude and Sue. 'Not quite all Hardy's sympathy is with Jude, perhaps: but most of it is' writes Morrell.<sup>78</sup> Sumpter concludes with 'Hardy repeatedly casts himself as a figure whose moral sympathies are ahead of his time'.<sup>79</sup> Hardy identifies with some of the defeats faced by Jude and Sue, who are overly self-reflective.

One of the ways in which Hardy presents ideas of morality and sympathy ahead of his contemporaries is in the question of marriage and motherhood. *Jude* is the novel in which Hardy was finally able to put marriage at the centre of the tragedy, writes Penny Boumelha.<sup>80</sup> Marriage is not the traditional material for tragedy, but Hardy wrote that he believed it to be, and moreover shows it in his novel. *Jude the Obscure* has been mistakenly read as an anti-feminist text by critics, such as A. O. J. Cockshut, who understand the ending as Sue's failure to defy 'the inexorable, "natural" limitations of their sex'.<sup>81</sup> However, I agree with Boumelha that Jude 'poses a radical challenge to contemporary reformist feminist thought'.<sup>82</sup> One of the ways in which Hardy explores the themes of womanhood and extends it farther than the discourse of 'fallen woman' is in the portrayal of Sue, not only an independent New Woman but also a mother.

Even within the feminist discourse of sex and marriage, motherhood was taken for granted as a female virtue. One instantly recalls how Ruth proved her virtue through her love for her son. Esther, too, drew strength in her character by her devotion to her son. On the other hand, Hetty is portrayed as selfish and shockingly inhumane by her infanticide. Many feminist appeals against marriage were concerned with its legal binding or inequality; for example in literature, Grant Allan attacks legal marriage, and Sarah Grand exposes the double standard.<sup>83</sup> Only Mona Caird and Hardy, Boumelha finds, 'draw attention to its [motherhood's] coercive role in the reproduction of the nuclear family unit':

The novel [*Jude*] points, too, to the crucial role of parenthood, and so of the nuclear family, in enforcing the marital model, for it is when Little Father Time arrives that

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<sup>78</sup> Morrell, p. 101.

<sup>79</sup> Sumpter, p. 683.

<sup>80</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*.

<sup>81</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 153.

<sup>82</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women* p. 153; see also p. 150.

<sup>83</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 148.

the relationship is forced to adapt, economically and in appearance, to the conventional marital couple.<sup>84</sup>

Hardy then, shows the marriage ideology that is hidden even in the feminist movement, that the family is a protected bubble: the values and virtue we find in motherhood are self-evident. Instead, Jude and Sue face prejudice as a couple, which becomes more humiliating, hurtful and damaging when they enter parentage: the snide comments by the respectable wives at the church, and bullying that Little Father Time receives from his schoolmates. Viewing the tragedy of marriage through the lens of parentage, the meaning of “You shan’t love!” gains another layer of meaning: Boumelha rightly writes that the ‘tragedy follows upon not merely the sexual consummation of their relationship, but Sue’s assimilation, through her parenthood, into a pseudo-marriage’.<sup>85</sup> The horrifying scene when Sue forces herself to sleep with Phillotson refuses to leave the reader’s mind, putting emphasis on the coercion of sexual consummation. However equally gruesome or perhaps even more so is the scene of the children’s death. The two most harrowing scenes of the novel show that there are two sides of tragedy in marriage.

Looking to Arabella also deepens our understanding of the system of motherhood. When Arabella begins her relationship with Jude, she is suggestive of her fertility by keeping the bird’s egg nested in her breast. She ‘traps’ Jude by telling him of her pregnancy. However, throughout the novel, she ‘never plays the maternal role’.<sup>86</sup> Boumelha states, ‘[t]his is crucial, given the way in which this role precipitates Sue into her “enslavement to forms” (p. 405); and there is a hint that it is not simply coincidental that Arabella’s sexual ‘freedom’ is preserved’.<sup>87</sup> In this way, Sue’s morality may be boosted by her role as a mother, and is contrasted with Arabella’s lack of motherly care of Little Father Time. It is possible to consider Sue’s morality is promoted in the text by her children; like Esther who refused the easy way out by giving up her son to the baby farmers, Sue sacrifices her liberty for her children’s sake. However, the outcomes are different. Sue, wanting to be honest, lets her grief and burden made known to Little Father Time who, as an already pessimistic

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<sup>84</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, pp. 150–51.

<sup>85</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 148.

<sup>86</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 152.

<sup>87</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 152.

boy, is overwhelmed. Hardy portrays motherhood as both a blessing and a curse to Sue.

Hardy thus denies the reader an easy sympathy, by portraying Sue as a mother as fragmented, at most. That is, we do not get a depiction of Sue as a mother who devotedly loves her children, as we might expect from reading *Ruth* or *Esther Waters*. True, both the sons of Ruth and Esther are ‘flat’ characters who exist to give the fallen mothers a reason for living. Yet even with a simple sketch, the children morally enhance the heroines. It can only seem deliberate that Hardy does not flesh out Sue as a mother character, but keeps her unchanged as a person and speaking to Little Father Time as an intellectual equal, not giving the protection the child needs from the harsh world, but like the text itself, pushing its harsh reality onto unprepared ears. On one hand, Sue can be seen as triumphing from being coerced into society’s moral vision of what mothers should look like, but the other hand, it is not a triumph at all as she is overcome by grief and ultimately casts all her ideals of sexuality away to enter a sexually coerced marriage with Philloston.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, neither is Sue’s lack of maternal warmth a simple statement of her selfishness and self-centredness, as it is in *Adam Bede*. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Sorrow dies as an infant, but not before Hardy ambiguously represents Tess as a mother sucking the child in the fields:

When the infant had its fill the young mother sat it upright in her lap, and looking into the far distance dandled it with a gloomy indifference that was almost dislike; then all of a sudden she fell to violently kissing it some dozens of times, as if she could never leave off, the child crying at the vehemence of an onset which strangely combined passionateness with contempt. (*Tess* 102)

The question of motherhood, which Hardy gives us a glimpse of in *Tess*, is extended in his representation of New Women. Hardy questions the normative models of the maternal and its political relationship to the reader’s sympathy. Motherhood, rather than being an innate female virtue as it is often assumed, does not fit in with Sue’s character, and the grief with which mourns her children’s death is felt by readers with complicated feelings of sympathy.

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<sup>88</sup> Kathleen Blake writes that ‘Sue’s breakdown is not a judgment on her. It is a judgement on the way things are between the sexes according to Hardy, and that is a war that probably can’t be won’ (p. 726); On Hardy’s sympathy for Sue, see also William A. Davis Jr., ‘Reading Failure In(to) *Jude the Obscure*: Hardy’s Sue Bridehead and Lady Jeune’s “New Woman” Essays, 1885–1900’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26.1 (1998), 53–70.

### **Sympathy For the New Woman in their Social Environment**

Like the novels previously studied in this thesis, *Jude the Obscure* also extends the reader's sympathy for characters who are flawed. However, the nature of Sue's flaw is significantly different. Sue may not have made the wisest decisions in her life and caused great suffering not only to herself but also to others. But the suffering is not a consequence of a mistake which can be pinpointed to a moment in Sue's life. Rather it is a weakness that comes from her intellect and hyper-awareness of her sexuality and the social boundaries in which bind her with certain expectations of how a woman should feel and act. Hardy's balanced representation of character weakness and maintaining the reader's sympathy are not limited to Sue, but she is one of most complicated. Roy Morrell writes that Hardy is 'indeed skilfully balancing the maximum sympathy for Jude's weakness,'<sup>89</sup> but in his analysis of Hardy's representation of character weakness, Morell's main focus is on Tess's fallenness. It is difficult to relate how a girl presented with physical strength and stoic endurance, exhibited especially in working on the threshing machine, fails to live up to the new standard of morality, and against her scruples fails to act and to divert the awaiting tragedy. However, Morrell reads into a deeper meaning in Hardy's sympathetic representation of Tess: 'Hardy may be implying something here about Tess's nature which could not be said more openly in those times without losing the sympathy of too many readers. I mean a certain compliance and weakness that were essential accompaniments of her very warm and passionate womanliness'.<sup>90</sup> It is insightful to consider, too, how Sue's weakness is an important and valuable essence of her character, and how her elusiveness as a character gives her a fuller representation as a New Woman.

An important view which Hardy presents is one of Sue in her social environment. Sue is intelligent and also, as Jude calls her, 'a flirt'. The pain which Sue's inconsistencies cause the men in her life prompt questions about her morals and motivations. The enigma of her curious coquettishness is revealed towards the end of

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<sup>89</sup> Morrell, p. 103.

<sup>90</sup> Morrell, pp. 33–34.

the novel by Sue to indeed be a woman's 'inborn craving' to manipulate men's hearts (*Jude* 341). Larson writes, that Sue, along with other New Women figures:

evade commitment and seek to gain emotional satisfaction from their relationship with men in daring, unpredictable, intellectually self-conscious ways. Their behavior is understandable but also sadistically flirtatious. The novels waver between *evoking admiration* for these New Women, and the new ethics of possibility that they bring to their relationships, and *judging them* for turning their backs on a traditionally feminine ethics of care.<sup>91</sup>

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is indeed ambiguous in its representation of the New Woman. However, I argue that the novel is not so much judging Sue's sometimes inconsistent behaviour as presenting the difficulties of her living according to her emotional intelligence in a restrictive Victorian society. In Jude and Sue's argument about the status of their marriage, by that point of the novel, the maddening attitude Sue displayed early on does not matter to Jude. He may burst out, 'my old reproach to you was, after all, a true one. You have never loved me as I love you – never – never!',<sup>92</sup> and he may fling one of the paired pillows from the bed as a symbolic gesture (342). However, this is overridden by their last kiss: 'He clasped her, and kissed her weeping face as he had scarcely ever done before' (343). The emotion of this passage can only be fully appreciated when one sees that Jude loves Sue regardless, and Sue too loves Jude, and yet she cannot be convinced to stay with him.

Overshadowed by the dramatic change in Sue from an intellectual sceptic to a superstitious believer, is Sue's gradual change from a single woman who valued her independence, to a married woman who is simultaneously both passionately in love and conflicted by her experience of sexual desire. Note, here that I use the term 'married' because Hardy's text shows that although Jude and Sue never married legally, they were a true and naturally married couple. (As we say, Sue had no problem with calling Jude 'my husband' at the agricultural fair. When New Women were opposed to marriage, it was marriage 'rigidly defined as legal prostitution'.<sup>93</sup>) It is when we follow Sue's transformation of feelings towards Jude that we understand her heartbreak of leaving Jude, even if we cannot believe her for doing so. We

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<sup>91</sup> Larson, p. 59, emphasis mine.

<sup>92</sup> This is one of the 1912 altered passages which I will discuss later.

<sup>93</sup> Ingham, *Thomas Hardy: Feminist Readings*, p. 74.

question why the individual's will must be broken by social rules and conventions. What Larson says about Olive Schreiner's New Women character, Lyndall, also applies to Hardy's Sue: 'Schreiner encourages us to recognize Lyndall's burden of guilt but also to question where the New Woman's responsibility begins and ends in a patriarchal society that so circumscribes women's freedom'.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Terry Eagleton writes, '[i]t isn't Sue's fault, not because she is morally innocent, but because Hardy, through his presentation of Sue, is evoking movements and forces which can't be exhaustively described or evaluated at a simply personal level'.<sup>95</sup> As a Marxist critic, it is vital to Eagleton that Sue is a 'representative character', who 'points beyond herself to a confused, and ambiguous structure of feeling which belongs to the period in general'.<sup>96</sup> 'Her opaqueness and inconsistency as a character', Eagleton continues, 'are thus neither merely personal attributes nor evidence of some failure of full realisation on Hardy's part; it is precisely in her opaqueness and inconsistency that she is most fully realised and most completely representative'.<sup>97</sup> Thus sympathy for Sue begins when we understand the social boundaries she is working within: a society constructed so that attempts to live intellectually and freely are interpreted as 'flirting' or immoral. Moreover, Sue's fight is more challenging than Moore's Esther Waters's, because Sue's battlefield is in the middle class. If we see a difference in the coherence of the female characters, it may be because of the result of the differing social structures in which the characters inhabit.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, in this examination of the final novel for this thesis, we have discussed how Hardy's representation of Sue reflects upon the traditional stereotypes of the fallen woman, but in further complicating Sue's awareness of her sexuality, Hardy creates Sue as the New Woman. Hardy shows an understanding of her conflicting degrees of warmth and coldness towards Jude, and sees it not as flirtations, but as good intentions which miss the mark because of the social restraints pressed on her from the fallen woman narrative. In order to sympathise with Sue, readers must adjust the

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<sup>94</sup> Larson, p. 58.

<sup>95</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Thomas Hardy and Jude the Obscure', in *The Eagleton Reader*, p. 42.

<sup>96</sup> Eagleton, 'Thomas Hardy and Jude the Obscure', p. 42.

<sup>97</sup> Eagleton, 'Thomas Hardy and Jude the Obscure', p. 42.

ways in which they understand her female story, and the ways in which the fallen woman narrative can be coercive. Hardy achieves this despite censorship of being too explicit about sexuality. In some ways because of this censorship, his revisions of the text over the years reflect how he could gradually write more about Sue's feelings on sexuality, and importantly reveal how this representation of Sue's nature is a central focus for his sympathetic endeavour to liberate women's behaviour.

While Hardy's sympathy for Sue and New Women is clear in the text, his representation of Sue's femininity is not. Sue is a highly complicated character, and her unreadability stems from various aspects of the novel, such as the limited narrative perspective into Sue's inner thoughts. Through the narrator and Jude's confused view of Sue, the reader too must pay careful attention to Sue in order to try the best one can to understand and sympathise with her. However, the purpose of reading Sue is not to find the correct interpretation but to struggle to understand her, as Sue herself struggles to find her own way of living with her feelings and sexuality. The complicity of Sue is essential for the reader's sympathy for New Women, in order to also fully recognise the difficult environment in which women with middle-class aspirations and tries to thrive but is ultimately choked. As in the way he raises critical questions of women and motherhood or middle-class ethical aspirations, Hardy's text does not present a world in which the solution to sympathy for New Women exists, but in doing so he encourages the reader to struggle with the textual representation of Sue and to extend their capacity to sympathise with others.

## **Coda**

Beginning with Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) and ending with Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), this thesis has examined the sympathetic representation of the fallen woman in Victorian realist novels. By juxtaposing the six novels, it was shown that while various authors all sought to encourage their readers to feel sympathy towards the fallen woman, what that sympathy looks like is an open-ended question. The purpose of the thesis was to examine how the nature of sympathy is fluid according to the writer's style and the cultural attitude towards women and their sexuality.

The Introduction set the scope of this study and the surrounding discussion on sympathy by literary scholars of Victorian studies and by eighteenth-century philosophers whose influence is seen both in nineteenth-century texts and the present. The social changes and upheavals of the eighteenth century, such as the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, led to widespread fears of a decline in morality, and sympathy and compassion were frequently championed as a source for regaining humanity. In this respect, appropriate sentiment became prized as something which must be nurtured through education. However, in general terms, by the Victorian era, dominant views on the socially transformative power of sympathy might be seen as less optimistic. Critics largely agree that Victorians adhered to Adam Smith's model, which understands sympathy as a self-reflective process – the sympathiser's imaginative projection onto the other, rather than directly sharing the feelings of the other. Thus Victorian literature frequently grapples sceptically with the idea that sympathy leads to altruism. As this thesis has shown, the significance of this



fraught question of the work of sympathy comes sharply into focus in realist novels concerned with the fallen woman. Here, the reader's active sympathy is found in the act of dynamically struggling to understand the complexity of the fallen woman character.

It is worth revisiting here the ideas of Gert Biesta, whose reflections on the nature of sympathy are particularly pertinent to the central argument of my thesis. Biesta emphasises the importance of point of view when engaging with others. Using his own term 'visiting', he defines how we can view the other's story from their perspective, but all the while recognising the otherness of it. For those who see the value of 'empathy' as in being able to completely feel and see from the other's point of view, this 'visiting' can be seen to have a compromising barrier to that complete unity with the other. Some may believe that such a complete 'empathy' is naive and impossible to begin with. However, the central point of interest here is the way Biesta frames the act of sympathy as an ongoing process of struggle. The moment we think we have achieved sympathy, Biesta suggests, we are in danger of losing it because we have become complacent. Ease and comfort in sympathy only signifies that our sympathy has not extended very far, only to those who are close and similar to us. There will always be people who are further outside of our familiar group.

In this respect, it makes sense that in the novels examined in this thesis, complete sympathy is never the ultimate goal. Rather, the writers constantly challenge their readers by requiring them to sympathise in new and unsettling ways. The writers themselves struggle to represent their subject of sympathy, though to different degrees and for different reasons. The fallen woman character was chosen for focus because of the extent to which Victorian moral and narrative codes created a deterministic fate for them which allowed little sympathy by the reader. Yet writers found a way for readers to find themselves sympathising with the fallen woman, delaying judgement, rewriting their prescribed notions of them, and discovering these women as individuals. In many respects, this was a difficult task for early writers when the fallen woman narrative was already concretely established and unmovable. Both *Ruth* and *Adam Bede*, for instance are written with considerable tact, fully conscious of how conservative readers would respond to the fallen woman, and aware of the limits of representation writers face when depicting female sexuality and the fallen woman.

At the same time, these novels offer us distinctive approaches to sympathy for the outcast other. Sympathy for Ruth is displayed in the writer's persuasive logic

based on already established Christian morals, showing through character and plot why the fallen woman deserves our sympathy and compassion. This logic is blended with an intimate representation of Ruth's inner feelings, such as her dreams and desires, and Gaskell's characters represent ethical models of how we should reach out to the fallen woman, an innocent, exploited young woman, who is humble, unselfish and repentant. Yet, overall, the greatest accomplishment of sympathy in Gaskell is winning over the likes of Mr Bradshaw by showing the Pharisee's hypocrisy of judging the fallen woman without realising that we are all at fault in the eyes of God. That is achieved the reader's participation in the novel, and bringing meaning to the text. Meanwhile, Eliot's representation of the fallen woman in Hetty Sorrel is based a significantly different logic. For most of the novel, the reader is not invited to sympathise with Hetty, but to judge her personal flaws. However, a careful understanding how Eliot's belief in the realist form is heavily linked with the ethics of sympathy for the lower classes. Here, we see that the final chapters of the novel are the author's expression of deep and genuine sympathy for Hetty. Navigating between the various philosophers who have influenced Eliot's ethical realism, we realise the level of complexity with which Eliot creates sympathy in the implied reader for a character who not only belongs to a different social class, but also does not think or act in terms of accepted moral standards. Paradoxically, in insisting that we feel an illogical pain for Hetty's suffering, Eliot intimately connects the reader to the fallen woman.

From the awkward intimacy of Eliot, my study then turned to Fanny in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), focusing on how the narrative distance between the reader and the fallen woman is further extended by Hardy's invitation to the reader to sympathise with a minor and marginal character. In doing so, this thesis foregrounds the diverse ways in which the fallen woman is placed within these realist narratives. *Ruth*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Esther Waters* (1894) are centred on the fallen woman heroine who takes the name of the novel's title, while in *Adam Bede* (1859), *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and *Jude the Obscure*, the fallen woman is a minor or secondary character. By tracing this range of narrative foci, the thesis demonstrates these texts' concern with how sympathy is extended to those outside of their implied readers' familiar groups. Using Raymond William's concept of the 'knowable community', the thesis demonstrates how the reader is deliberately challenged to sympathise with the fallen woman, staging the struggle of the act of

sympathy itself. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy portrays images of Fanny and her stillborn child that shock the reader with instinctive feelings, which are stronger than the emotional response conditioned by social and moral codes, and thus they delay in the reader's judgement of the fallen woman.

Towards the end of the century when Hardy and Moore were writing, the moral scandal attached to the figure of 'fallen' woman was less pronounced and women's sexuality, in some respects, became relatively open to public debate. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, this by no means simplified the complex dynamics of sympathy in the 'New Women' novels of the century's final decades. George Moore, for instance, presents a strong heroine who is morally unaffected by her so-called 'fall', but further complicates the questions of morality, by introducing the concept of 'moral luck' in the lives of Esther and her friend Sarah. In our analyses of the novel, we found Moore utilising a style of narration which closely resembles an empathetic connection with the heroine. The vivid descriptions of the hard work that Esther endures makes the reader share Esther's indignation at the unfairness with which people reject her for her premarital sex and illegitimate child. Yet the reader's sympathy for the fallen woman is still far from being comfortable. Moore brings up other moral concerns in Esther's life, which unlike 'fallenness' are ethically consequential. While there is no solution to Esther's moral dilemma, Moore is sympathetic to the livelihoods of the working class, and the ways in which Esther strives to do good in the circumstance she is given. Readers may not agree with Esther's decisions, but they are given full knowledge of her situation which leads to an accommodating understanding of her actions. Again, Moore challenges the reader to extend their sympathy to Sarah, showing that though we may have less of a sense of intimacy with this minor character, our sympathy for Esther should not be inclusive but extendable to other 'fallen' women.

Meanwhile, Hardy challenges the reader to engage with one of literature's most testing and opaque characters, Sue Bridehead. She differs from the other fallen woman characters examined in this study, for there is not a moment of Sue's 'fall'. Her character's weakness is extremely complicated, stemming from her sophisticated awareness of her sexuality and social expectations of women which she tries to defy. Hardy gives us a representation of a young aspiring woman who is thoughtful, sensitive, and reflective, and challenges the simple moral absolutes that have previously governed sexual relations in Victorian England. However in liberating

such a female figure, paradoxically, Hardy cannot give us a fully comprehensive portrayal of her. Refusing a representation of a woman who is simplified for readability and fitting into conventionality, Hardy invites the reader to engage with a complex and difficult character. Sympathy in his text is to pay careful attention to Sue in order to try the best one can to understand and feel with her. However, the purpose of reading Sue is not to solve her enigma but to struggle to understand her as she too struggles in a world that is toxic to New Women. While this thesis ends with a bleak novel, it suggests hopefully new ways of thinking about Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. Overall the study contributes detailed examinations of representations of the fallen woman in Victorian literature to provide insightful discoveries about sympathy. In particular, the formalist approach of this thesis presents a new departure in exploring the combined effects of distance and intimacy in sympathetic narration, and the writer's varied techniques to enable readers to extend their sympathy to others far outside their familiarities and comfort.

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*Sympathy and the 'Fallen Woman' in the Victorian Novel*

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