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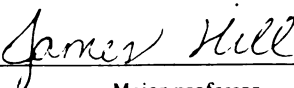
She "Had Made Up Her Mind to Suffer":  
The Ethics of Female Renunciation In  
Five Nineteenth Century Novels

presented by

Suzanne Arnette Magnuson

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in English

  
Major professor

Date 8/5/94

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**SHE "HAD MADE UP HER MIND TO SUFFER":  
THE ETHICS OF FEMALE RENUNCIATION  
IN FIVE NINETEENTH CENTURY NOVELS**

**By**

**Suzanne Arnette Magnuson**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Department of English**

**1994**

**ABSTRACT**

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**By**

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Time and again the subject of women renouncing their lovers was taken up by Nineteenth Century authors. The pervasive belief in the ethical correctness of such action is the subject of this thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The renunciation of love and of lovers by female characters has long been addressed by writers of fiction. Often these choices are presented by the author as a matter of course, made out of duty, desire for material gain, "over-niceness" (as in Samuel Richardson's, Clarissa), and a host of other reasons. While anyone who reads fiction can think of a number of examples of this plot device, there are far fewer examples of the female characters' reasoning behind their decisions. I would like to examine five, spanning the Nineteenth Century, to show an ethical evolution in the renunciation plot and in the battles waged by the heroines between the conflicting forces of egotism and altruism.

I would like to declare at the outset that I feel the authors speak best for themselves and so most quotations in this study will be from original source material, with secondary sources added only where particular insight into the works is justified.

The famous "woman question" of which the renunciation plot is an integral part has been addressed by some of the most prominent writers of the Nineteenth Century, but this plot has been largely ignored in contemporary criticism in

favor of the specific questions of marriage, law, religion and science which all play a part in the ethics of renunciation put forth by all the authors in this study. Renunciation of one's lover, however, was obviously much on the minds of Nineteenth Century authors, as the frequency and breadth of its use as a plot or sub-plot in contemporary novels will attest. Unfortunately, there seems to be a great lack of discourse on this important subject in current writings on writing, which I hope this study can take the first few steps at remedying.

That women must give up their lovers for a "moral" purpose is taken for granted by Nineteenth Century authors, if not as a true imperative, then at least as within the popular perception of the proper scope of a well-brought up woman's duty. (Well-brought up, being almost exclusively a middle-class phenomenon, at least for the purpose of this study.) The writers, for all the allowances of literary license, weren't inventing this problem out of whole cloth in some sort of established formula for "romantic" or tragic plots, they were reacting to or expressing the cultural notions of their own times and causing their characters to react to or express them as well.

As we will see, the use of the renunciation plot extends throughout the century, with each author responding to it in her or his own fashion. But the fact that all of them chose the same plot to treat, demonstrates its hold on the popular

imagination and how important this thinking was in the lives of women.

The notion of female self-sacrifice in Western culture has its origin as far back as the development of Christianity and is so one of the most pervasive and enduring "reasons" given for women to renounce love or a lover of their choosing. They must be ultimately self-sacrificing and obedient because God, the ultimate Father figure, desires them to, not merely because it is convenient to enable mortal men to preserve the status quo. Religion, because of its didactic and indoctrinary properties, was considered one of the only safe outlets for women's energies during the entire century and became for many, including some of the women in the novels used in this study, almost an obsession.

Even the famous John Ruskin agreed that religious study could be a safe outlet for female energies: "She is to be taught somewhat to understand the nothingness of the proportion which that little world in which she lives and loves, bears to the world in which God lives and loves" (Millet, 129). In his study, Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict Peter T. Cominos outlines the extremes to which this feminine self-effacement in religion could be taken.

In Femina Sensualis the sense of I-ness, of individuality, of apartness was thwarted in its development. "Women don't consider themselves as human beings at all," proclaimed Florence Nightingale in an impassionate denunciation of the Evangelicals for what she thought was their role in the idolatrous "fetish"

worship of the family. So very much in Victorian life was designed to promote womanly self-effacement and absorption into family life. "All the moralities tell women that it is their duty," wrote John Stuart Mill, "and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature to live for others; to make complete abnegations of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections." (161)

Cominos goes on to describe the ways in which the saintly, sexless woman of the Victorian ideal sublimated her sexual desires through extreme forms of religious devotion in an attempt to feel real love.

While gentlemen were encouraged to conquer their sexual instincts by complete sublimation through work, genteel women, barred from work and confined to the family circle, sublimated through religion, "the only channel" through which the sexual emotions could be expressed "freely and without impropriety." Women realized ideal-love in the religious sense...

It was not without justification that Geoffery Mortimer wrote about self-deception as the source of much pietistic emotion... The innocent and pietistic woman, as Mortimer pointed out, "imagines she has subjugated the instinct of her sex; but in reality her emotions have a sexual origin." (164)

This religious zeal concealing the deeper sexual desires has definite applications to several of the novels in this study, especially in the cases of Esther Summerson, Maggie Tulliver and Sue Bridehead. It was obviously a subject of which the authors were more or less aware, and each treats it with skill and sympathy as a fact of life for the middle-class English girl.

But it was not merely from religious writings that women and men were receiving these ideas about women's role in society. A number of essayists were widely read and their prescriptions for women were absorbed into the culture and

reflected in the literature. (While it is important to note that these ideas existed before the essays were written, it was through the dissemination of such essays that the notions became even more popular, especially among the literate middle-class - the class producing the most writers of the time.) Acton's widely quoted notions about female sexuality were believed (Calder, 88), and Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens" and Sesame and Lilies, outlined the paranoid, romantic notions of modest women many tried so desperately to perpetuate.

Ruskin's classist and sexist arguments included the outlining of the "kingship" and "queenship" of the middle-class over the "illguided and illiterate" (Millet, 124) proving that the written word itself was vastly instrumental in popularizing the notion of the morbidly self-sacrificing heroine. Ruskin was influenced by Thomas Carlyle and the longing for the romantic Age of Chivalry and determined to resurrect those "ideal" notions in his own time (Millet, 125). His outline of the proper "sphere" for women is based on biology. He described them as follows:

Now their separate spheres are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest... But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle and her intellect is not for invention or recreation, but sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is praise; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. **By her office and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.** The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial - to him therefore must

be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error; often he must be wounded or subdued, often mislead, and always hardened (Millet, 126). [Bold Mine]

Ruskin also has decided views about the proper education of women, outlined by Kate Millet in her 1968, Sexual Politics:

"We cannot consider how education may fit them for any widely extending duty until we are agreed what is their true, constant duty." Translated (it is continually necessary to translate chivalrous sentiment), this only means that women should not be educated in an real sense at all, least of all for the sake of education itself. Instead they should be indoctrinated to contribute their "modest service" to the male...

But Ruskin also furnishes definitive propositions about female education; it is to be directed toward making women wise, "not for self-development, but for self-renunciation."... "A man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly: while a woman ought to know the same language or science only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends" (128-29). [Bold Mine]

Women's whole education, obviously, is designed to fit them to please men - only. There is to be no thought of doing anything simply for themselves. Millet's analysis of Ruskin makes his attitude very clear, his obvious fear of women in intellectual pursuits, his idealized notions of what should be based on his readings of poetry, especially the pseudo-Medieval past and his insistence on self-sacrifice and self-renunciation in all women if they are to be ruling (a contradiction, of course) "queens".

Along with the literary stereotypes that were being perpetuated by essayists and authors from the 1850's on, science itself helped to reenforce the stereotypes of femininity until new discoveries pointed to the real ways of

transmitting sexual characteristics. (Conway, 140) Herbert Spencer's and Patrick Geddes' work helped to reduce the role the female played in biology and reenforce the notion of her innate passivity. Their work in regards to sexual differences mostly consisted of finding biological "reasons" for already accepted ideas of the "nature" of women.

Such ideas as male cells being "katabolic" and females as "anabolic" were integral to Geddes' theory. As Jill Conway wrote in Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution:

"Male cells had the power to transmit variation along with their tendency to dissipate energy. Female cells by contrast had the power to conserve energy, support new life, and to maintain stability in new forms of life..."

By making sperm and ovum exhibit the qualities of male katabolism and female anabolism **Geddes was able to deduce a dichotomy between the temperaments of the sexes which was easily accommodated to the romantic idea of male rationality and female intuition...** In fact the entire evolutionary progression from the lowest organism up to man rested upon these male and female qualities... Male and female sex roles had been decided in the lowest forms of life and neither political nor technological change could alter the temperaments which had developed from these differing functions (144). [Bold Mine]

Geddes further asserted that if women abandoned their proper spheres for "masculine activism" it would be dangerous. "What was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa, can not be annulled by act of parliament" (Conway, 146). He also denied that politics or social institutions had subjugated women, pointing to the roles of women in traditional cultures, "primitive societies" around the world to justify the present power structure.

Geddes was influential beyond his own publications by lecturing in Edinburgh to such notables as William James, at The International School at the Paris Exposition of 1900, (Jane Addams was one of his converts) and the London Sociological Society (Conway, 150-152). He, and others like him, perpetuated the notions of biologically determined gender-specific roles well past the turn of the century.

With so many well thought-out systems of ethics and science arrayed before them, it is no wonder that women of the Nineteenth Century, and consequently the authors interested in presenting them more or less realistically, were concerned with the "woman question" or the more eloquently put "woman problem". That it was, indeed, a problem, is more than evident by the quantity of ink spent debating it.

Women were being perceived as if not already so, then in danger of going out of control, so it was necessary to implement systems of ethics to keep them within their "proper sphere"; the reasons for this perception were many, but one of the most important were the "extra or redundant" women and the prostitute, who was really another form of the same.

While there has been debate as to the reading of the population statistics of the time, and as to whether or not there actually were a large number of "redundant" women about during the century, there is no question as to whether or not people perceived that this was so. From the 1851 census on, articles appeared with great regularity on this very subject

with titles such as "Why are Women Redundant?" by W.R. Greg, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women" by Jessie Boucherett. (Kanner, 184) Even in the art of the period, the problem was taken up by such painters as Richard Redgrave, George Frederic Watts and George Smith (Roberts, 55-63). With all of this attention being paid to extra women, it became an even greater challenge to erect philosophical and social barriers to keep them from leaving their "proper sphere" even though there was no place for them there.

Related to this problem was the "social evil" of prostitution, despite its being intertwined in the fabric of the proper Nineteenth Century marriage, as a wife with no sexual desires could not hope to satisfy the "natural" desires of her husband. Prostitutes being the most visible form of extra women, writers and the law courts combined to try to keep them in control and also used their existence to help perpetuate the mythos surrounding their "better" sisters, J.C. Whitehorne estimated in 1858 that one in six of unmarried women between 15 and 50 were prostitutes - 83,000. The reason for this? In his opinion it was because "...Young gentlemen and young ladies cannot and dare not marry without ceasing to be gentlemen and ladies..." (Sigsworth and Wyke, 78, 86). So the problem of "redundant" women was largely a product of the economic climate of the time, but something had to be done with them. They could not all become wives or governesses, the only legitimate occupations open to them, so many women

had merely a long life of waiting ahead of them - living within an extended family with no family of one's own and waiting for death to end their "redundancy". It was an incredibly bleak prospect even without a code of ethics to support it, but several competing ones were in the air at the time, and how the extra women reacted to them was also of much interest to contemporary novelists.

In reality, all of the women in this study fall into this class, either by virtue of being older and unmarried or in being middle-class and still having to work for a living. While some authors choose to sentimentalize their plight, most treat it realistically and give serious thought to the systems of ethics required to both buoy them up and keep them in their proper self-sacrificing mindset. For sacrifice is necessary for "redundant" women, as they are not fulfilling the biological imperative that was popularly regarded as their only "proper" role. Each of these treatments is unique and comes from the ethical standpoint of the individual author. Together, they give us an interesting map of opinion throughout the Nineteenth Century.

## DUTY

The first of these is Jane Austen's last published novel, Persuasion, in which the heroine, Anne Elliot, breaks her engagement with the young naval officer Frederick Wentworth because of the disapproval of her vain and foolish father, Sir Walter Elliot ("he thought it a very degrading alliance" <55>) and on the advice of Anne's friend and surrogate mother, Lady Russell. Lady Russell objects to Wentworth for very practical reasons and believes that Anne would be "throwing herself away" because Wentworth "had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes in attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in that profession" (55). As Lady Russell truly loves Anne and Wentworth cannot guarantee her a secure life, Lady Russell exerts great pressure to break up the match and finally,

"Such opposition, as these feelings produced, was more than Anne could combat. Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will, though unsoftened by one kind word or look on the part of her sister; - but Lady Russell, whom she had always loved and relied on, could not, with such steadiness of opinion, and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain. She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing - indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it. But it was not a merely selfish caution, under which she acted, in putting an end to it. Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up. The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for his advantage, was her chief

**consolation, under the misery of a parting - a final parting (56). [Bold Mine]**

In the passage above, Austen clearly outlines Anne's thinking at the time of her renunciation of her fiance. It is all perfectly conventional for a woman of her time: filial duty, though more to her surrogate parent than her natural one, who is, Austen assures us, too foolish to be much relied upon for good counsel (Though later, Anne's "sense of personal respect to her father" keeps her from defending her friend, Mrs. Smith, from his attack on her social position [170]); common-sense, always a large factor with Austen and her heroines (Austen was, after all, a product of the Enlightenment); and self-denial, giving up her personal happiness for the good of another.

Later, Anne regrets her decision to be persuaded from making the match by Lady Russell, but Austen states that "she did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for being guided by her" but that "she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it" (56-57). But despite this feeling, Anne, whom Austen once described as being "almost too good for me" (Gard, 63) carries on and we see it is her habit to be self-denying generally for the good of others, altruistic in the moral sense.

When her father overspends and must pay off creditors, it is Anne who "considered it as an act of indispensable duty to clear away the claims of creditors, with all the expedition

which the most comprehensive retrenchments could secure, and saw no dignity in any thing short of it. She wanted it to be prescribed, and felt as a duty." (43) She goes to stay with her hypochondriac sister, Mary, because "To be claimed as a good, though in an improper style, is at least better than being rejected as no good at all; and Anne, glad to be thought of some use, glad to have any thing marked out as a duty... readily agreed to stay." (61) There, she puts aside her own depression at having to leave her home and "cures" Mary by "A little farther perseverance in patience, and forced cheerfulness" (66). She takes care of Mary's son when he is injured so Mary can attend a dinner party (80-83), because "She knew herself to be of the first utility to the child" (83) despite the fact that the man she loves and really longs to see, Frederick Wentworth, will be at the party. When Anne, herself, attends parties she spends the evening playing the piano rather than dancing (95-96); the list is endless. She is everybody's nurse, confidante, entertainer and steadfast friend and she is absolutely certain it is her "duty" to be so, as dictated by her conscience, despite the fact that from the first mention of her in the novel we are assured she "was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;- she was only Anne" (37).

It makes one wonder how such an exemplary person could be seen as "nobody", and Austen is quick with an explanation -

the other characters are all fools. Anne has "an elegance of mind and a sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with people of real understanding" (37) and Anne knows it. When comparing herself to the Musgrove sisters she admits "but still, saved as we all are by some comfortable feeling of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange, she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments" (67). And still she remains self-sacrificing and dutiful despite her own recognition of her worth. Why should she be this way, or rather, why should Austen choose to make her this way?

There are numerous clues to be found in the book, itself. Anne Elliot is greatly concerned with duty as dictated by her "own conscience" (43) and sees a clear duty in almost every aspect of her life. Specific instances of Anne's duty are mentioned over a dozen times in the course of the novel (43, 56, 61 etc.). That duty is to be sweet and obliging and at everyone's service, to help where possible and never hinder or criticize; at heart, the Christian ideals of love and charity. And while many feminist critics would see this as Austen's bowing to patriarchy in the form of established religion, any book which contains an exchange such as the one between Anne and Captain Harville over the capacity of steadfast devotion in men and women and in which the manifestly Christian heroine declares: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher

a degree: the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing." (237) is hardly written by someone who blindly accepts the patriarchal system in which she lives. Nor is Mrs. Croft's taking her brother to task for sexism and hypocrisy when he says women don't belong on board ships because of his "rating the claims of women to every personal comfort high." (92) Taken as a philosophical system on which to order one's life, Christianity and the virtues of love and charity have no gender. However, the outward manifestations of Anne's devotion to those virtues are gender specific, as defined by the society in which she, and Austen, lived.

As a woman in the early Nineteenth Century, Anne was expected to be the "angel of the house" - a perfect paragon of Christian and domestic virtue, despite her "redundant" state, and the psychic cost of this role was high. Anne is often affected by depression, or Austen's other term "lowness", in the course of the novel (45, 58, 69, 85, 95 & etc.) and she feels guilty for having these or any feelings that aren't other-directed. "She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous, so overcome by such a trifle" (104). Anne is also outwardly affected by her mental stress and her "faded and thin" or "haggard" appearance (37-38) is remarked by Austen from her first introduction onward. But despite these side-effects of duty, Anne Elliot never questions that duty itself; and it is this lack of questioning of her place

in the universe that allows her to be the best adjusted of any of the heroines of the renunciation plot.

Jane Austen's father was a clergyman and all the Austens appeared fairly sincere Christians. In his book, The Religious Dimension of Jane Austen's Novels, Gene Koppel prints a portion of a prayer attributed to Jane, underlining her notion of Christian duty.

Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and in mercy **make us feel them deeply**, that our repentance may be sincere, and our resolution steadfast of endeavouring against the commission of such in future. **Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls.** May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil. Have we thought irreverently of thee, have we disobeyed thy commandments, **have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being?** Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity...

Above all other blessings oh! God, for ourselves and our fellow-creatures, we implore thee to quicken our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world, of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not, by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou hast given us, **nor be Christians only in name...** (7) [Bold mine.]

Koppel sums it up by saying "To serve God and one's fellow man in every significant phase of daily life, was, then, a major goal of Jane Austen's religion; the immense difficulty of such an ideal clearly makes itself felt both in her prayer and in her fiction. (8) It is safe to say that Anne Elliot is the only heroine of an Austen novel that nearly always reaches the

ideal, Fanny Price in Mansfield Park being far too spiritless to ever be tempted to sin, even by the strict standards of Austen's prayer.

While Austen was deeply committed to the tenets of her religion, she rarely felt the need to concentrate on religion as the main subject of her novels; instead, she put it into practice, showing her characters grappling with real moral dilemmas encountered by everyone in the course of their lives. I am certain that this is one of the main reasons for her enduring popularity. Through her manipulations of her characters her readers can see how or how not to react in the same situation, how to deal charitably with difficult people, and how to be good Christians in the philosophical sense. The reader is drawn into the moral action of the novel as well as the action of the plot. We watch Austen's characters choose and evaluate those choices, often from the standpoint of the turmoil of their thoughts. The moral content is as integral a part of the novels as is the dialogue or description. And while Jane Austen's Christianity is not obtrusive in Persuasion, Anne Elliot does prescribe to Captain Benwick the reading of:

...a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances (122).

and criticizes Mr. Elliot for, among other things, "Sunday-

travelling" (172).

It is clear that, to Anne and Austen, being a good Christian absolutely required suffering, if not absolute martyrdom on the altar of usefulness to others. It is obviously a psychological adjustment necessary to reconcile one's place as an "extra" woman in a society where the norm was considered to be one of a couple. If one is useful despite one's redundancy, then that redundancy can't possibly be as great an evil. And suffering or martyrdom often substituted for the human relationships lacked by extra women (Cominos, 163-64).

However, it is also clear that the foundation of Austen's form of Christianity is in putting others before ones' own desires or altruism. Anne is a clear-cut altruist, and while her altruism takes on peculiarly feminine forms of extreme submission and self-denial because of the society in which she lives, her duty is clearly spelled out by all she has been taught. She clearly doesn't question this duty as being morally correct, and neither does Austen, though she obviously understands the different actions expected of women than of men in her society. In several instances Anne even remarks on her satisfaction with herself at not feeling moral qualms about her actions. In her reconciliation with Wentworth she states:

"I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in place of a parent... But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I

had done otherwise, I would have suffered more in continuing the engagement that I did even in giving it up, **because I would have suffered in my conscience.** I have now, as far as such as sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, **a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion"** (248). [Bold mine.]

The three highlighted portions of the passage illustrate: Anne's moral reason for her submission to Lady Russell's authority, her self-justification of her submission, and her (and Austen's) recognition of the necessity of that submission in the standards of female behavior set by the society in which she lives.

Austen does not let the men off the hook, however, and in contrast to Anne's near-selflessness of action (though she does, admittedly, have motives as well as the altruistic in many of her actions ie. staying behind with hurt baby Charles to avoid Wentworth as well as taking care of the invalid [79-84]) Mr. Elliot's total self-serving egotism, Mary's selfishness and self-importance, Elizabeth's vanity of position and Sir Walter's vanity of his appearance - "the Elliot pride" - are all arrayed. While the Musgroves and Crofts are simply benignly vapid, the Elliots, with the exception of Anne, are evil in their selfishness and Austen spares no ink in delineating their abuses of Anne and others. Pride being the first of the seven deadly sins, the Elliots are completely imbued with it, and through Anne's superior morality, the readers see the contrast all the more. And all characters, no matter how stupid, are held up to Austen's

strictly Christian moral code.

As Gene Koppel argues in his book, "Jane Austen helps the reader become aware of a spiritual reality which exists with and intensifies the realities of psychology and morality; mainstream Christianity (of which the Church of England is certainly a part) considers that, with the help of God's grace, every human being possesses the ability to choose between good and evil" (12-13). The characters are endowed with free will and Anglican religious instruction; therefore they have all the tools necessary for unquestioning obedience to authority at the very least. The more intelligent actually have to grapple with morality (especially in the case of Emma Woodhouse), but even they, like Anne Elliot, know their clear duty in this time before the death of God.

Mr. Elliot especially comes under Austen's moral guns. Through the paragon, Anne, we are told "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (214). And Anne's suffering friend, Mrs. Smith, declares:

"Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black (206)!

Nearly all of chapter 21 is devoted to careful scrutiny of the

evils of egotism as embodied by Mr. Elliot. It obviously much concerned Austen, as she could as easily have had Anne decline to marry him from simple, virtuous fidelity to Wentworth, rather than turning him into the monster of egotism he is.

Even Frederick Wentworth, himself, doesn't evade Austen's critical eye when it comes to the evils of thinking too much of oneself and pride. While she praises his "sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind" and his "genius and ardour" (56-58), Austen points out that Wentworth, too, is guilty of egotism, though his stems more from honest knowledge of his worth than false pride or selfishness. His treatment of the Musgrove sisters, for example, which Anne criticizes for the pain it causes Henrietta's suitor, Charles Hayter, is merely simple thoughtlessness, but it is not overlooked for comment on its morality. "He was only wrong in accepting the attentions-(for accepting must be the word) of two young women at once" (105). His near rejection of a chance to see Anne in a snit over her sisters' foolishness and rudeness is, however, much more prideful and hurtful to Anne and is made to look much more stupid by Austen. "Anne caught his eye, saw his cheeks glow, and his mouth form itself into a momentary expression of contempt, and turned away, that she might neither see nor hear more to vex her" (231). His own admission of having been "weak and resentful" (240) in his letter of proposal shows Austen's opinion of his actions.

Wentworth's problems with Anne stem from his misjudgment

of the extent of her Christian goodness, but his recognition of his culpability in them is his redemption in Austen's eyes, "He had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry; and he had been unjust to her merits, because he had been a sufferer from them" (244), proving that for some men selflessness in women can backfire when it comes to the men achieving what they desire. Wentworth does come to understand her devotion to self-denial and to accept it as being part of a "character [that] was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness" (244). He admits that he was "proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice" (248).

The Christian ideals of love and charity bear all before them in Austen's universe. Everyone must love someone or there is no society. Love is necessary and ordinary. Everyone does it. However, charity, the greatest of the Christian virtues preached by Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 13:13), is what is truly needed to be a good Christian and is the foundation of Austen's morality. As Koppel says in his book, "We cannot enter the consciousness of another person, and we often misunderstand what he is trying to communicate, but charity can prevent our filling in every gap in our understanding of others with hostility, fear, or contempt (99). It is also the main bastion against egotism,

as Koppel goes on to explain, "Self-awareness is a paradoxical quality. If its intensity increases past a certain point it will destroy the very qualities - such as complexity, sensitivity, and the ability to love and to respond to love - that nourish it. Only an outwardly directed charity and concern for others can prevent the occurrence of this self-destructive process" (105).

Anne is highly intelligent, contemplative and prone to depression, but she charitably turns her perceptions outward toward others rather than dwelling on her own importance, thus allowing her to find contentment and even, eventually, happiness within the society in which she lives, rather than becoming a martyr to its abuses of her through self-absorption and self-pity - the ultimate forms of egotism. Through her forced unconsciousness of her self and her own desires, Anne can even find a certain contentment in knowing she is morally "right".

But, for Austen, self-denial and renunciation are situational and motivated by duty, and once the objections to the match are removed in the course of time and Wentworth's success, there is no reason for Anne to defer her wishes for the good of others. She does not accept Mr. Elliot, though her family would welcome it because "If I was wrong to yield to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In

marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated" (246) and takes back her lover, previously rejected out of duty because the duty no longer exists. She is then free to follow her own desire, her duty having been done, the only time one is allowed to please oneself in Austen's strictly Christian universe.

## DELUSION

When Charles Dickens' Bleak House was printed in 1852, the ordered, religious views of Jane Austen's time had begun to be shaken by the writings of such men of philosophy as Auguste Comte, George Henry Lewes, Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill and such men of science as T. H. Huxley and Charles Darwin. While Dickens, himself, never fully rejected Christianity as did these scientists and philosophers, he was certainly writing in and to a generation concerned with discovering a more secular basis for morality as all of his criticism of charity and religious institutions attest. It is one of the problems addressed in Bleak House and goes hand in hand with the problem of renunciation in the novel.

It has been said that Dickens wrote three autobiographical novels, David Copperfield, Great Expectations and Bleak House. While I think Esther is a bit too good to be a true representation of Dickens or anyone else, it is important that she has been called autobiographical because it is indicative of Dickens' level of concern with and sympathy for her, equal to David or Pip. The fact that her narration is nearly half the book (only one chapter shorter than the omniscient narrator), shows the importance her perspective on the events of the novel had to Dickens.

Esther's narrative, as Joseph Gold points out in Charles

Dickens: Radical Moralist provides a subjective perspective on events in contrast to the omniscient narrator's more objective one. (186) Thus she acts as the everyman surrogate with a limited perspective on events, and gives us a different vision of the characters than the omniscient narrator's. In fact, the entire story of Ada and Richard is seen through her eyes, allowing the reader a greater sense of sympathy for them, perhaps, than we would have had from the more objective, and in this novel, more cynical narrator's point of view.

Unfortunately, Dickens moral perspective of what Esther is and what she ought to be also colors the events of the novel. Unlike David and Pip, whom Dickens allows to have their failings in regards to vanity and uncharitable thoughts, Esther is never allowed such normal, human feelings, even when confronted with the horror of a Mrs. Jellyby or a Horace Skimpole. Dickens makes her so thoroughly idealized that many critics have accused her of being a flat or static character. But Dickens was too clever a creator of character to have one so central to any novel be either flat or static. Esther is, however, symbolic in various ways and that does cause Dickens to make her react in a certain, set fashion to similar situations as a symbolic function. This function is one firmly grounded in Dickens' morality.

As Dennis Walder writes in Dickens and Religion:

In orthodox Christian terms, there is much that is missing, or at best negatively expressed, in Dickens' works. The role of priest and church is minimal, and certain kinds of chapel-going and sermonizing are

typically represented as ludicrous and reprehensible. The Bible is drawn on more than any other source, but not as a literally inspired text, nor even always with veneration - although it is treated as a guide to those elements in the Christian ethic (largely from the New Testament) which Dickens most admired. Prayer, or other overt manifestation of the religious spirit, is more often shown to be hypocritical and self-seeking than a genuine attempt to communicate with the deity. Dickens shows little sympathy with missionaries, at home or abroad. Puseyism, the workings of the Calvinist conscience and any attempt to indoctrinate anybody (but especially the young) with stern views of man's reprobate nature are all abhorred. Intolerant of intolerance, the novelist is at the same time frequently blind in his prejudice on the subject of Jews and Roman Catholics, as he is on the views of other races (2).

Walder goes on to assure us that Dickens' religion was New Testament based and that his art was largely concerned with the creation of a "social gospel" based on broadly Christian doctrines (4). In this Dickens shares much with Comte, though it is evident that Dickens doesn't thoroughly reject the mystic aspects of Christianity or its authority as does that philosopher. He was, however, fully dedicated to the notion that it was good works, not faith, that would redeem a person and that nothing could be done for anyone's soul until they were fed and clean (10). In his reaction to the writings of Thomas Arnold, Dickens' biographer, Forster, was certain they appealed to him "above all for their stress on "meaning by Religion what the Gospel teaches us to mean by it", namely "a system directing and influencing our conduct, principles, and feelings, and professing to do this with sovereign authority, and most efficacious influence" (11-12).

Dickens didn't, therefore, question the authority of God

or Christianity, but merely its outward forms as practiced by hypocrites and egotists. Precisely what he thought of as the essence of religion was made abundantly clear in this excerpt from The Life of Our Lord, which he wrote for his children:

Remember! - It is christianity TO DO GOOD always - even to those who do evil to us. It is christianity to love our neighbour as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them Do to us. It is christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them, or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to shew that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything. If we do this, and remember the life and lessons of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to act up to them, we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in Peace (Walder, 13).

So while Dickens was an admittedly liberal Christian, sometimes allied with the Unitarians and sometimes belonging to mainstream Anglicanism, he didn't question the fact that its teachings were correct and that is more than evident in Bleak House.

Esther, as a child, is the victim of just the extreme form of Evangelicalism that Dickens most hated (Walder, 9). She asks on her birthday "Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault" (Dickens, 19)? And she is told by her aunt, who she knows only as her "godmother":

It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born!.... Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers.... For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited on your head, according to what is written....**Submission, self-denial, diligent work**, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born,

like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart (19). [Bold Mine]

Causing Esther to resolve:

I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent), and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted, and do some good to some one, and win some love for myself if I could. I hope it is not self indulgent to shed these tears as I think of it. I am very thankful, I am very cheerful, but I cannot quite help their coming to my eyes (19-20). [Bold Mine]

This is obviously a psychologically damaged child who grows up to be an equally damaged, though functional, woman. Esther is willing to do anything to be perceived as good, despite the personal cost to her.

Dickens gives us countless examples of self-denial and resulting good works in Esther, sitting up all night while Caddy Jellyby sleeps on her lap the very first day they meet (45), to her nursing Jo when he arrives ill at Bleak House (383), and most especially in her whole relationship with Allan Woodcourt.

Esther notices him from the first time they meet, but is psychologically unable to admit her feelings for him, though Dickens as creator of her entire narrative allows in all sorts of revealing slips. Often her silences about Woodcourt are as revealing as her statements. She waits until the end of both chapters XIII and XIV to mention even his presence at events, claiming them as omissions or forgetfulness (163, 182). She seems to forget him a very great deal, indeed, and adds things

such as: "He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything" (214). When he leaves for India to make his fortune she spends the day being "very busy indeed" (215) her usual reaction to emotional stress, and Caddy Jellyby brings her flowers Woodcourt has left for her, allowing both Caddy and Ada to tease her about her lover (216). Esther saves these flowers like a holy relic, even after her disfigurement "as a remembrance of what was irrevocably past and gone" (445) because she "could have loved him - could have been devoted to him" (445) as she obviously already is.

When Esther hears of Woodcourt's actions in the shipwreck, she writes "I felt that no one - mother, sister, wife - could honor him more than I. I did, indeed" (442)! She then speaks of her "little secret":

I had thought, sometimes, that Mr. Woodcourt loved me; and that if he had been richer, he would perhaps have told me that he loved me, before he went away. I had thought, sometimes, that if he had done so, I should have been glad of it. But how much better it was now, that this had never happened! What should I have suffered, if I had had to write to him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me, and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!

O, it was so much better as it was! **With a great pang mercifully spared me**, I could take back to my heart my childish prayer to be all he had so brightly shown himself; and there was nothing to be undone: no chain for me to break, or for him to drag; and I could go, please God, **my lowly way along the path of duty**, and he could go his nobler way upon its broader road; and though we were apart upon the journey, I might aspire to meet him, unselfishly, innocently, better far than he had thought me when I found some favour in his eyes, at the journey's end (443). [Bold Mine]

Here we see Esther's attempt to pretend Woodcourt's love was all in her own mind and that she had been spared "a great pain" as she is in the very act of feeling it. Esther willfully forces herself to be deluded about her feelings, turning every feeling for herself, no matter how just and deserved, outward into feeling for others. She totally denies any depression she feels, and she often is depressed and cries, as when Jarndyce asks her to marry him, not because "I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much" (538), but because she loves Allan Woodcourt and is convinced she must renounce him. In her willful self-delusion she writes of going into Ada's room and then burning Woodcourt's flowers:

It was weak in me, I know, and I could have no reason for crying, but I dropped a tear upon her dear face, and another, and another. Weaker than that, I took the withered flowers out, and put them for a moment to her lips. I thought about her love for Richard; though, indeed, the flowers had nothing to do with that. Then I took them into my own room, and burned them at the candle, and they were dust in an instant (539).

Esther sublimates all of her natural, sexual feelings for Woodcourt and turns them, not quite successfully, into Christian duty. Esther's (and Dickens') system of ethics demands that she feel only a general love of her fellow man and save her specific love for her Creator, or the one acting in place of God in the novel, John Jarndyce. Her feelings for Allan Woodcourt deny that ideal so Esther must deny them in turn to be the good girl redeeming the sin of her mother that

Esther so longs to be.

In addition, this total denial of any feeling for herself is a portion of her function as the symbolic ideal of love in the novel. As Bert Hornback writes in Noah's Architecture, "Esther is in part another version of that "principle of Good" or "principle of Love", along with Oliver and David" (92) (The principle that Dickens expressed as the goal of humanity in his novels.) Hallmarks of that ideal are good acts and moral duty as outlined in the Bible, in Esther's case, to her guardian, protector and surrogate father, John Jarndyce. She resolves "To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for only the other night but some new means of thanking him" (538)? Declaring to herself in the mirror, which should normally help one see more clearly, but here allows Esther to attempt to perfect her self-delusion, "When you are mistress of Bleak House, you are to be as cheerful as a bird. In fact, you are always to be cheerful; so let us begin for once and for all....And so, Esther, my dear, you are happy for life. Happy with your best friends, happy in your old home, happy in the power of doing a great deal of good, and happy in the undeserved love of the best of men" (538). She accepts Jarndyce's proposal though she hides this fact from everyone for some time, as she senses the wrong in it, though she can't admit it. When she finally does tell Ada, Ada objects (606), but Esther doesn't allow that to shake her resolve, though she reports it as she does

everything, and becomes depressed again and cries.

Her self-delusion is so complete, that when they meet again, she totally misreads Woodcourt. She had been "afraid of his recognizing me. I had been unwilling that he should see my altered looks" (548). When he finally catches sight of her she imagines, "And I saw that he was very sorry for me" (549) when he is merely taken aback to see her and at her strange, too-talkative behavior. Her oversensitivity to her appearance is apparent at her reaction when they are talking of Richard and Woodcourt remarks: "'He is changed," he returned, shaking his head. I felt the blood rush into my face for the first time, but it was only an instantaneous emotion. I turned my head aside, and it was gone" (550). She entrusts Richard to his care and he seizes on it "as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!" because he loves her and would do anything she asked. She responds with: "God bless you," said I, with my eyes filling fast; but I thought they might, when it was not for myself" (550). But, of course, the emotions here are for herself, though she must displace them onto others to keep her ideal of being a selfless paragon intact. She still loves Woodcourt and sees that he wishes to please her though she forces herself to deny it, concluding the incident with the same refrain: "And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me" (551). It isn't sorrow, but Esther can't allow it to be anything else. She knows he loves her, not for her general goodness as

Richard, Ada, Caddy and the others do, but specifically as a lover and she can't let herself know that, especially as she has already promised herself to Jarndyce out of duty.

In fact, when Woodcourt finally proposes she assures him:

"Mr. Woodcourt," said I, "you will be glad to know from my lips before I say Good night, that in the future, which is clear and bright before me. I am most happy, most fortunate, have nothing to regret or to desire... From my childhood I have been," said I, "the object of the untiring goodness of the best of human beings; to whom I am so bound by every tie of attachment, gratitude, and love, that nothing I could do in the compass of a life could express the feelings of a single day" (732-733).

She goes on at such length about Jarndyce's goodness that it is obvious she is trying to convince herself as well as Woodcourt. When he leaves, she cries:

But they were not tears of regret and sorrow. No. He had called me the beloved of his life, and had said I would be evermore as dear to him as I was then; and I felt as if my heart would not hold the triumph of having heard those words. My first wild thought had died away. It was not too late to hear them, for it was not too late to be animated by them to be good, true, grateful, and contented. How easy my path; now much easier than his (733)!

It is Dickens' choice that she behaves in this way. As the exemplar of true Christian love, charity and duty in the novel, Esther cannot be allowed a single selfish feeling. She must turn every one outward and into a feeling for others, even if this creates conflict and self-deception in her character. This is the reason she's accused of being flat and passive, because of her symbolic function as love and charity, neither of which are uniformly exciting, either. Dickens was smart enough to know that no person could live up to those

ideals without being self-deceived, as Anne Elliot also must be when she reproaches herself for "lowness", so he gives us countless examples of Esther's self-delusion to show the mental adjustments necessary if one is to conform to the Christian ideal. It is, perhaps, fair to argue that Esther is excessively good, but she also conforms to the ideal of Victorian womanhood and Dickens is a known dealer in stereotypes as Barbara Hardy tells us in The Moral Art of Dickens (29). John Kucich also points out in Repression in Victorian Fiction that Dickens demanded an extreme form of selflessness for his characters to be considered truly good:

For selfishness is not simply a moral crime in Dickens; as a form of desire, it is antithetical to another kind of desire that Dickens valued more highly. We can also begin to understand why affirmed experience in Dickens always revolves around self-reflexiveness; Dickens' protagonists always hope to know and to purge the deepest recesses of the self of an interest in its own preservation (206-207).

But because Dickens is who he is, he can't allow Esther to suffer for making the correct, moral decision and he arranges the plot so that she can marry Woodcourt without giving up her resolve to "do the right thing". Esther's choice is removed by John Jarndyce, himself, the man to whom she owes her obligation. And whom Hornback claims is Dickens' true surrogate in the novel (92).

After seeing her true love for Woodcourt expressed in her manic behavior and efforts to be perfectly cheerful (604-606), so cheerful, in fact, that Jarndyce tells Mrs. Woodcourt later that she "will sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and

affection, and will sacrifice it so completely, so entirely, so religiously, that you should never suspect it though you watched her night and day" (752), Jarndyce then gives her outright to the younger man. "Allan," said my guardian, "take from me, a willing gift, the best wife that ever a man had. What more can I say for you, than that I know you deserve her" (753)! Regardless of the sexist implications of such an action, Dickens the creator can't help but reward real, sincere virtue, especially virtue at such a psychic cost. But while he rewards Esther and her altruism, acting as the God in his own miniature universe, he also can punish when he finds that altruism lacking.

In the story of Richard and Ada, we see what a lack of renunciation can bring. In becoming engaged and then married without Jarndyce's consent, in fact, against his express wishes (303) Richard and Ada cut themselves off from the protection of that benevolent benefactor. In his absorption with the demonic lawsuit and its servants; the Lord Chancellor, Vholes and all of the other court parasites, Richard sends himself to hell and takes Ada with him as he provokes her willful disobedience to the guardian to whom she owes her loyalty. As "the wages of sin are death" what else could happen to Richard? Thus Dickens rewards dutiful renunciation with happiness and contentment (as even Jarndyce is part of the happy family group at the end of the novel) and punishes the failure to renounce with poverty, suffering and

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death, in many ways more like the avenging God of the Old Testament than the forgiving one of the New Testament, whose values he enforces.

## DECISION

By the time we reach George Eliot and The Mill On The Floss, the ideas about evolution and humanity's place in the universe, only anticipated at the time of Bleak House had emerged full-blown with Darwin's publication of The Origin of Species and in the works of Herbert Spencer and his developmental theory of evolution (Paxton, 16) Eliot was very much concerned with the various debates scientific and philosophic of her time and throughout her life had contact with leading contemporary theorists, among them her "husband" George Henry Lewes and Spencer, a personal friend for many years. Unlike these men, however, she chose to make her commentaries upon society, philosophy, science and the place of humans in the universe in the form of fiction, thereby creating believable characters to act out the various theories of her contemporaries in a realistic and everyday way, as well as to react against them.

In The Mill On The Floss, one of the many things with which she concerns herself is the matter of female renunciation, and unlike Austen and Dickens, she portrays it as stemming from her central character's own moral choice rather than as simple "duty" imposed from above. In Maggie, we see the flounderings of the first generation to grapple with the problems of making ethical choices in a world where

God is absent. In Eliot's work, this lack of absolute duty makes the idea of renunciation and self-sacrifice harder to support, but not unsupportable, as many modern novelists seem to find it.

George Eliot, who had gone through a severe religious phase in her youth, similar to the one Maggie experiences in Mill, eventually replaced religion in her life with a complex, philosophical system of her own with portions borrowed from the ideas she'd heard and read in her lifetime. There has been much written about where she garnered these ideas and where the people she adopted them from had got them in the first place, so much so that it would take a graduate-level reading course in eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophy to cover it all. For the sake of brevity, I will not attempt to do so, and it isn't particularly important to Eliot's work to be aware of every philosophical theory behind each character's moral choices. Eliot speaks for herself and we do not need to read our own or anyone else's theories into works that present their own. Each revision in trendy critical thought gets you farther from the novel and what the novelist was attempting to communicate to his or her readers. Thus, when Felicia Bonaparte claims Eliot is an existentialist (11) or John Kucich sees everything as a function of libido (3) they are disregarding Eliot's argument to prove a point of their own. While acknowledging the experience of the reader in coloring the reading of any novel, I do believe that an

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author has something in mind when they sit down to write, especially moral novelists such as those I've chosen for this study.

Eliot was very much concerned with viewing a person holistically, or creating "rounded" characters. She wanted her readers to experience the character's whole reasoning process, armed with knowledge about the character's nature. What K. M. Newton calls "continuity of the self" based on memory, which gives "a source of authority for feeling" (102), Maggie's past means everything to her future development and she is constantly looking into it to decide to whom she owes her loyalty and moral "duty". Newton and Eliot both attest it is her feelings, based on her knowledge of the past, that must be used to control her other feelings. "That the claims of the past, preserved by memory, constituted a body of feelings she could choose to obey and so control the more impulsive feelings which were also a part of her nature" (113). Newton also says that "for George Eliot, an individual with a clear sense of continuity of self intuitively knows when an impulse stems from his whole self and when it is the product of a purely temporary state of feeling" (66).

For her the continuity of self which memory makes possible is a solution to the problems of identity in a world devoid of immanent order or meaning. Even if there is no order to which the self can relate and which can act as an external support for continuity, such continuity must be created, either through memory or through a social ideal which provides the self with a sense of stability and direction. It should be emphasized that George Eliot does not see the past as standing in a static relationship to the self, as some

critics have implied in referring to the "authority" or the "worship" of the past and the "doctrine of continuity" in her work. Continuity does not involve passive or mechanical submission to the past; it is memory and choice that are fundamental in the creation of a sense of continuity. The psychological need to achieve a sense of whole self is what is important, not obedience to a past that stands apart from the self (100 - 101).

While this is certainly a part of the morality Eliot outlines in The Mill On The Floss, I must disagree with Newton in that I think there is a certain amount of self-denial required in Maggie's renunciations, certainly in her renunciation of Stephen, not just "whole self" affirmation. While being true to one's conscience is certainly what Eliot outlines as Maggie's struggle in The Mill On The Floss, "whole self" as the only source of moral authority is still much closer to the "egotistical Romanticism" Newton claims Eliot rejects (11), than to the "community of feeling" Eliot, herself, wanted to foster.

Maggie grapples with her self and her egotistical desires and ultimately defeats them in her renunciation of Stephen, and while in doing so she remains true to her best, moral self, her "whole self" certainly suffers. It is necessary for her to suppress parts of herself that are as natural and a part of being human as morality (some would argue, more natural). Maggie, in fact, suppresses her need to be loved, "the greatest need in poor Maggie's nature" (Eliot, 37), and sexual desire for a philosophical goal, thus elevating a portion of herself above the others - the moral, reasoning

self, not alienated from feeling, but empowered by it to consider others and choose altruism.

At the first mention of Maggie in the novel, her father remarks that "she's twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid" (12) and her mother that she has "a brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter" (13), and complains about her dark, straight hair and dark eyes, setting Maggie up as unconventional and intelligent in one fell swoop. Both of these serve to alienate her from the conventional society at St. Ogg's, and mark her out as a future "redundant" woman almost from her birth. She is clearly one who will have to make her own way and clearly, her own decisions as well. Maggie is somewhat indulged by her father, but suffers the constant disapproval of all the other members of her family and threats such as "I'll tell your aunt Glegg and your aunt Pullet when they come next week, and they'll never love you any more" (27-28). This treatment causes her to desire love and approval more than anything else because of her great lack of it.

When she is little, conformity is all that is requested of her, and against arbitrary conformity Maggie rebels, ducking her head in a basin of water to prevent her hair being curled (27), refusing to wear her bonnet (13), and eventually cutting all her hair off because she desired "her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her

mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action; she didn't want her hair to look pretty- that was out of the question - she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl, and not to find fault with her" (64). However, as soon as this is done Eliot describes the consequences of pleasing oneself and being different in Maggie's world, contrasting her to her brother, Tom, the model of conformity.

She could see clearly enough, now the thing was done, that it was very foolish, and that she should have to hear and think more about her hair than ever; for Maggie rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse, and then saw not only their consequences, but what would have happened if they had not been done, with all the detail and exaggerated circumstance of an active imagination. Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened, that though he was much more wilful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty. But if Tom did make a mistake of that sort, he espoused it, and stood by it; he "didn't mind". If he broke the lash of his father's gig-whip by lashing the gate, he couldn't help it - the whip shouldn't have got caught in the hinge.

If Tom Tulliver whipped a gate, he was convinced, not that the whipping of gates by all boys was a justifiable act, but that he, Tom Tulliver, was justifiable in whipping that particular gate, and he wasn't going to be sorry. But Maggie, as she stood crying before the glass, felt it impossible that she should go down to dinner and endure the severe eyes and severe words of her aunts, while Tom, and Lucy, and Martha, who waited at table, and perhaps her father and her uncles, would laugh at her, - for if Tom had laughed at her, of course every one else would; and if she had only let her hair alone, she could have sat with Tom and Lucy, and had the apricot pudding and the custard (65)!

It is clear in this passage that it is Tom who is actually the egotistical one, justifying his every act to himself and not being sorry for any of them. Here, as throughout the novel, Maggie's acts of egotism are accompanied by feelings of

remorse and a recognition of their innate selfishness and how they displease others.

Eliot, however, believes Maggie deserves to be loved. Her constant additions of new, hurtful experiences and threats of the withdrawal of affection as motivating factors and ways of easily manipulating Maggie prove she deserves, or at least needs, affection by the appalling lack of it in her life. As love is not given to her freely, as she gives it to others, Maggie is from the first morally superior to the other characters in the novel.

George Eliot was a clear believer in the "Religion of Humanity" espoused by Comte, in which "loving our neighbors as ourselves" is the most important law. As Suzanne Graver points out in George Eliot and Community:

This phrase and related ones concerning brotherhood and fellowship appear so regularly in their work as to constitute a leitmotif whose dominant theme may be heard in these words from Comte: "When the morality of an advanced society bids us love our neighbors as ourselves, it embodies in the best way the deepest truth" (Positive Philosophy, p. 501) From this "sublime precept" it was a short step to the altruism they were all committed to furthering. Indeed, the French word *altruisme*, which opposes against selfishness and egoism an ideal of living for others, was coined by Comte, and the word *altruism* was introduced into English in the early 1850's by his translators and expounders, among them Lewes. In his 1852 *Leader* articles on Comte, Lewes explains that the normative tags of "good" and "bad" are commonly applied to people depending on whether the altruistic or egotistic impulse predominates (56).

Maggie, then, is clearly good and Tom bad.

What Maggie predicts about her hair indeed becomes the case and she is humiliated. This humiliation and many more

like it scar her permanently, and Maggie, who was a naturally kind-hearted, moral and loving person to begin with, becomes even more impressed with the necessity to please others rather than herself, rather than be labelled "wild" or "unnatural".

When she grows older and Mr. Tulliver is "ruined", it is Maggie who retains compassion for him in the midst of public censure, and also for herself, as Eliot attests.

Maggie had witnessed this scene with gathering anger. The implied reproaches against her father - her father, who was lying there in a sort of living death-neutralized all her pity for griefs about table-cloths and china; and her anger on her father's account was heightened by some egoistic resentment at Tom's silent concurrence with her mother in shutting her out from the common calamity. She had become almost indifferent to her mother's habitual deprecation of her, but she was keenly alive to any sanction of it, however, passive that she might suspect in Tom. Poor Maggie was by no means made up of unalloyed devotedness, but put forth large claims for herself where she loved strongly. She burst out at last in an agitated, almost violent tone, "Mother, how can you talk so? as if you cared only for things with your name on, and not for what has my father's name too - and to care about anything but dear father himself!- when he's lying there, and may never speak to us again. Tom, you ought to say so too - you ought not to let anyone find fault with my father."

Maggie, almost choked with mingled grief and anger, left the room, and took her old place on her father's bed. Her heart went out to him with a stronger movement than ever, at the thought that people would blame him. Maggie hated blame; she had been blamed all her life, and nothing had come of it but evil tempers. Her father had always defended and excused her, and her loving remembrance of his tenderness was a force within her that would enable her to do or bear anything for his sake (204-205). [Bold Mine]

As the highlighted portion suggests, Eliot, like Austen, but unlike Dickens, acknowledged the place of self interest in moral decision-making. Contrary, however, to Felicia Bonaparte's argument in Will and Destiny, she is definitely

not the patroness of egotism.

Eliot comes down fully on the side of altruism, though Maggie's moral grappling with self-interest is much more profound and muddled than Anne Elliot's regret over the loss of Wentworth. This is largely because she has no clearly outlined conventional moral "duty" as does Anne; at least not one that Eliot sees as legitimate. Using Austen's and Dickens' ideas of duty, Maggie would be obligated to people who don't much deserve it, not decent people like Lady Russell or John Jarndyce. Instead, Maggie must be guided by her feelings. She must decide whether her feelings toward others are stronger and of more worth than her feelings for herself and weigh them in the moral balance. This is a much more serious kind of moral soul-searching than any done by Anne Elliot or Esther Summerson, both of whose strongest feelings and loyalties lay in the same, clear direction.

Maggie's first attempt at renunciation is a fine example of Eliot's carefully thought-out philosophy. In the other works, renunciation has been uniformly noble and good; Maggie's is an exercise in egotism. She rebels against the empty religion practiced by her family, the "revering whatever was customary and respectable" (273), and turns to Thomas a Kempis, who preaches renunciation in a passage quoted by Eliot.

Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more  
than anything in the world...if thou seekest this or  
that, and wouldst be here or there to enjoy thy own  
will and pleasure, thou shalt never be quiet nor free

from care; for in everything somewhat will be wanting and in every place there will be some that will cross thee...On this sin, that a man inordinately loveth himself, almost all dependeth, whatsoever is thoroughly to be overcome; which evil being once overcome and subdued, there will presently ensue great peace and tranquillity...Though oughtest therefore to call to mind the more heavy sufferings of others, that thou mayest the easier bear thy little adversities.  
(289, my selections from the passage)

In practice, however, Maggie uses these lessons to feed her ego.

With all the hurry of an imagination that could never rest in the present, she sat in the deepening twilight forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness; and, in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived - how could she until she had lived longer? - the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow bourn willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it (291).

Her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility in being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight, and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud. For example, she not only determined to work at plain sewing, that she might contribute something towards the fund in the tin box, but she went, in the first instance, in her zeal of self-mortification, to ask for it at a linen-shop in St. Ogg's, instead of getting it in a more quiet and indirect way; and could see nothing but what was entirely wrong and unkind, nay, persecuting in Tom's reproof of her for this unnecessary act... That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism - the path of martyrdom and endurance, where the palm-branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance, and self-blame, where there are no leafy honors to be gathered and worn (292-293).

Here in the highlighted sections, Eliot outlines the

difference between true renunciation and egotistical self-mortification, proving that she believes there can be true renunciation and is not the goddess/patron of egotism. She sees this concentration on the self as wrongheaded.

But here, too, we see reflected the common absorption in religion experienced by many Nineteenth Century girls, including Eliot herself. Since Maggie is a loving, healthy girl and doesn't receive the attention she needs from those around her, she turns to God to provide a place on which to fix her affections. Her devotion to "martyrdom" approaches that described by Annie Besant (Cominos, 163), especially in her longing to experience martyrdom or religious vision.

The suffering itself, however, ultimately becomes the goal, because it masochistically makes Maggie feel clean and good. It is Philip Wakem who "wakes" her up, proving the appropriateness of his name, and though his reason for doing so is not purely altruistic, it is certainly far more so than her renunciation, and his explanation of her deification of a Kempis, hits the nail on the head.

"Yes Maggie," said Philip, vehemently; "and you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation; resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed - that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is not resignation; and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance - to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. I am not resigned; I am not sure that life is long enough to learn that lesson. You are not resigned; you are only trying to stupefy yourself" (327-328).

Maggie, of course, succumbs to Philip's prompting and reenters life, as his love, but still with the marks of her egotism upon her. "She had a moment of real happiness then - a moment of belief that, if there were sacrifices in this love, it was all the richer and more satisfying" (337). But then, Eliot has already excused this as a sign of youth and it is not until she is grown up that we see mature grappling and defeat of egotism. However, Maggie is trying even now, though she was self-deluded about her bout of renunciation, she is at least attempting to become a better person, unlike the total self-satisfaction of Tom or the Dodsons.

Tom discovers Maggie's relationship with Philip and he bullies her into a second renunciation. Maggie only succumbs because "It was for my father's sake...he couldn't bear it" (346). When Tom continues to bully her, even after getting his way, she answers him with one of the cornerstones of Eliot's humanist philosophy as presented in the novel:

"I know I've been wrong - often, continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them. If you were in fault ever - if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you; I should not want punishment heaped on you. But you have always enjoyed punishing me - you have always been hard and cruel to me;... you have no pity; you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. It is a sin to be hard; it is not fitting for a mortal - for a Christian. You are nothing but a Pharisee. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues- you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a vision of the feelings by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness (347)!"

And it is here that we clearly see that Maggie, though she struggles with self-indulgence and egotism, always comes down firmly on the side of altruism in her real caring and feeling for others and her attempts to do what is best despite the personal costs.

It is Maggie who stops her father from killing Mr. Wakem, she insists that he forgive Wakem on his deathbed, and she strives to be independent of the Dodsons, acting as the moral bellweather in the novel. Maggie has become conscious of her egotism and actively attempts to control it, unlike most of the other characters who are either unaware, like Tom, or simply don't care to control it, like Stephen Guest.

When Maggie first returns to St. Ogg's from her teaching position, we see that this conscious self-control is the hallmark of the grown-up Maggie. "No, Lucy," said Maggie, shaking her head slowly. "I don't enjoy their happiness as you do - else I should be more contented. I do feel for them when they are in trouble; I don't think I could ever bear to make anyone unhappy; and yet I often hate myself, because I get angry sometimes at the sight of happy people. I think I get worse as I get older - more selfish. That seems very dreadful" (373). Immediately after this statement, however, Maggie is introduced to Stephen Guest, and though she recognizes his egotism from the first (377) she is attracted and must balance her own inclinations with her keenly felt obligations to Lucy and Philip. The obligations always win

out. Eliot says of Maggie, "But there were things in her stronger than vanity - passion, and affection, and long deep memories of early discipline and effort, of early claims on her love and pity" (436).

She weakens at times and can't help what she feels for Stephen, as when they walk in the conservatory at Park House, but she is always conscious of the feelings of the others involved. "The hovering thought that they must and would renounce each other made this moment of mute confession more intense in its rapture" (441). Throughout Stephen's pleading and argument for her to elope with him, Maggie reminds him of their obligations, granting him the credit for a moral nature he clearly doesn't have, and explaining Eliot's idea that it is moral feelings that are the foundation and binding of human society. "You feel, as I do, that the real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds. Else all pledges might be broken, when there was no outward penalty. There would be no such thing as faithfulness" (449). Stephen's egotism is so advanced, that he remains unconvinced bringing on further explanation.

O it is difficult- life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; - but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us - the ties that have made others dependent on us - and would cut them in two. If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards whom....I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other. But I see - I feel it is not so now: there are things we must renounce in life; some of us must

resign love. Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly - that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned. Don't urge me; help me - help me, because I love you (449-450).

Eliot doesn't, like Dickens, make Maggie a saint, however. Her conflict with egotism isn't at an end. It is clearly delineated in the following passage:

There were moments in which a cruel selfishness seemed to be getting possession of her; why should not Lucy - why should not Philip suffer? She had had to suffer through many years of her life; and who had renounced anything for her...But amidst all this new passionate tumult there were the old voices making themselves heard with rising power, till from time to time the tumult seemed quelled. Was that existence which tempted her the full existence she dreamed? Where, then, would be all the memories of early striving - all the deep pity for another's pain, which had been nurtured in her though years of affection and hardship - all the divine presentiment of something higher than mere personal enjoyment, which had made the sacredness of life...And then, if pain were so hard to her, what was it to others (458)?

Immediately thereafter, she contemplates Stephen's suffering, and this affects her even more than her love for him, a truly altruistic example of fellow-feeling. It is this sympathy and her love that allow Maggie to be taken out in the boat by Stephen in the daze where memory and thought were excluded. Even when she comes to herself and demands to be taken back, it works on her:

"Maggie was paralyzed: it was easier to resist Stephen's pleading, than this picture he had called up of himself suffering while she was vindicated - easier even to turn away from his look of tenderness than from this look of angry misery, that seemed to

place her in selfish isolation from him. He had called up a state of feeling in which the reasons which had acted on her conscience seemed to be transmuted into mere self-regard. The indignant fire in her eyes was quenched, and she began to look at him with timid distress. She had reproached him for being hurried into irrevocable trespass - she, who had been so weak herself.

"As if I shouldn't feel what happened to you - just the same." she said, with reproach of another kind - the reproach of love, asking for more trust. This yielding to the idea of Stephen's suffering was more fatal than the other yielding, because it was less distinguishable from that sense of others' claims which was the moral basis of her resistance (466).

Eliot is showing us a person with a different group of moral claims to be sorted out, the one, however, which has already been discarded is Maggie's ego.

Maggie allows herself to be led by Stephen, caught in the paralysis of two conflicting obligations. It takes her some time to put them in perspective, but she realizes her feeling for Stephen has more egotism in it, thus she rejects him. But, "the irrevocable wrong that must blot her life had been committed; she had brought sorrow into the lives of others - into the lives that were knit up with hers by trust and love...she had rent the ties that had given meaning to duty" (470-471). She begins true renunciation now, putting others before herself, learning truly the lessons of a Kempis. This is, however, the renunciation Stephen also should make and is really not gender-specific, though Maggie might be at advantage in knowing how to give things up because of her position as a woman and as one who is so strongly influenced by Christianity.

While she does her best to hurt Stephen as little as possible, and though he continues to appeal to her pity and sympathy "Maggie had made up her mind to suffer" (474). Stephen makes an argument for the supremacy of their feelings of attraction and love, but it is obviously bound up with selfishness and egotism. Maggie argues for a higher sort of moral love based on faithfulness and constancy, the ties of the past ("being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives"), and the desire to never have committed a willful sin, the willfulness of egotism (475-477).

When Maggie chooses to renounce Stephen, she does so for the same sense of obligation to others than motivated Anne Elliot and Esther Summerson, but from a different philosophical basis, though that one did certainly borrow from Christianity. While Eliot's position is a more complicated one because of the lack of an absolute rule such as Christianity, her organicist humanism leads her characters to the very same conclusions about what is morally correct. Eliot's focus on Maggie's struggle to come to that conclusion, however, demonstrates that nineteenth century moral conventions are truly not static. Egotism makes a greater and greater claim as the Victorians became more preoccupied with the development of the self. While Anne and Esther do not undergo much character development, Maggie does; and as the self grows in importance, altruism becomes more and more difficult to attain.

## DELIVERANCE

George Gissing's The Odd Women, in 1893, specifically takes up the problem of the extra or "redundant" woman in society, though, in reality, all of the novels discussed so far have treated this subject in a much less obvious way. Both Anne Elliot and her sister Elizabeth are aging spinsters in a society where women who do marry usually do so between the ages of 20 and 25 (Branca, 4-5). Esther Summerson, in her position of housekeeper and companion is clearly one of the genteel working woman who had responsibility but no salary for their services. Maggie Tulliver, too, is expected never to marry and works as a teacher for almost no pay to enable her to support herself. While all three of these heroines ultimately receive proposals, it doesn't alter their position as "redundant" women until they actually die or do marry and become accepted as wives, both Esther and Anne merging their identities with those of their husbands in traditional fashion.

In June 1893, Gissing wrote:

My demand for female "equality" simply means that I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women. The average woman pretty closely resembles, in all intellectual considerations, the average male idiot - I speak medically... I am driven frantic by the crass imbecility of the typical woman. That type must disappear, or at all events become altogether subordinate. And I believe that the only way

of effecting this is to go through a period of what many people will call sexual anarchy. Nothing good will perish; we can trust the forces of nature, which tend to conservation. (Poole, 185)

While the similarity to his "hero" Everard Barfoot is remarkable, Gissing is setting himself up as a radical reformer when it comes to the position of women in society and in novels.

In The Odd Women, Gissing offers an alternative to death and marriage in work - and not merely work, but work traditionally reserved for men. Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn train young women for work as typewriters, stenographers and other secretarial jobs previously held only by men. Because of the low or nonexistent pay in traditional female occupations such as nursing or teaching, Gissing actively presents an alternative and a chance for independence from the entire Ruskin/Acton supported system, by encouraging women to obtain decent wages on their own.

But Gissing's picture is not rosy; a Social Darwinist, he presents the struggle necessary for change and the evolution of a social system. As John Goode points out in George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction:

...in each of the novels the female protagonist is placed at the ideological frontier of the text's representativeness. This is partly because of the relative lack of mobility of women who are not therefore faced with a choice of action, so that while the male protagonist battles with circumstances, the female internalizes the battle as an ideological drama. This has the effect of making them seem stronger and more decisive and at the same time more incapable of altering anything except by self-sacrifice (143).

Gissing offers in his many characters the entire spectrum of female experience in the working middle-class. The book begins by introducing us to the Madden sisters, six genteel, unattractive daughters of an improvident father who raised them traditionally, and educating them for their proper "role" - pleasing men:

The one duty clearly before him was to set an example of righteous life, and to develop the girls' minds - in every proper direction. For, as to training them for any path save those trodden by English ladies of the familiar type, he could not have dreamt of any such thing. Dr. Madden's hopes for the race were inseparable from a maintenance of morals and conventions such as the average man assumes in his estimate of women (3).

Dr. Madden dies, leaving his daughters 800 pounds, a small inheritance that was not enough to live on. By the second chapter we are informed that three of the Madden sisters are dead, two are unemployed genteel laborers of the traditional type and the youngest, who works at a draper's shop, is "sure to marry. Thank Heaven, she was sure to marry" (12)! It is the one hope her family entertains in their traditional mindset.

But the two eldest know that they will have to work, but that their outlook is grim. They discuss it in the same chapter:

"Surely," Alice began by murmuring half absently, "I shall soon hear of something."

"I am dreadfully uneasy on my own account," her sister replied.

"You think the person at Southend won't write again?"

"I'm afraid not. And she seemed so **very** unsatisfactory. Positively illiterate - oh, I couldn't

bear that." Virginia gave a shudder as she spoke.

"I almost wish," said Alice, "that I had accepted the place at Plymouth."

"Oh, my dear! Five children and not a penny of salary. It was a shameless proposal."

"It was, indeed," sighed the poor governess. "But there is little choice for people like myself. Certificates, and even degrees, are asked for on every hand. With nothing but references to past employers, what can one expect? I know it will end in my taking a place without salary" (13-14).

Genteel, traditional women had only such employment to look forward to.

Through the Madden sisters we are introduced to Misses Rhoda Nunn (the ethical heroine of the novel) and Mary Barfoot, who run a school to train women for work in the business world. One of the first comments we hear from Rhoda Nunn is that "Self-sacrifice may be quite wrong, I'm afraid." (21). However, she intends to devote her life to educating women to enter business occupations, partially through being, herself, an example of a useful sort of "odd woman". And later, Rhoda claims this is, "Because one of the supreme social needs of our day is the education of women in self-respect and self-restraint" (56). She sees herself as the exemplar of both virtues.

Rhoda is actively against the idea of marriage, stating, "I would have girls taught that marriage is a thing to be avoided rather than hoped for. I would teach them that for the majority of women marriage means disgrace... Because the majority of men are without sense of honor. To be bound to them in wedlock is shame and misery" (99). Because of her

decided low opinion of men, she hasn't been in love since she was fifteen, happily dedicating herself to furthering the cause of women's emancipation, going so far as to tell her lover,

[Marriage] would interfere hopelessly with the best part of my life. I thought you understood this. What would become of the encouragement I am able to offer our girls... To scorn the old idea that a woman's life is wasted if she does not marry. My work is to help those women who, by sheer necessity, must live alone - women whom vulgar opinion ridicules. How can I help them so effectually as by living among them, one of them, and showing that my life is anything but weariness and lamentation? I am fitted for this. It gives me a sense of power and usefulness which I enjoy. Your cousin is doing the same work admirably. If I deserted I should despise myself (182-83).

Here we see Rhoda's ethical position and the choice that is going to be laid before her. Should she desert all she believes in for the love she could not otherwise have, put her personal happiness before the example she could be (and it is assuredly the only chance she will ever have to be married), or should she choose the life of asceticism and self-sacrifice for a cause she truly believes in? Rhoda claims she's "fitted for" such a life, but through the course of the novel we learn she is not as fitted for it as she may have once believed.

When Rhoda meets Mary's cousin, Everard Barfoot, his similar ideas and contempt for stupid women combined with his desire to educate them (much like Gissing's), interests her in intellectual companionship. While Rhoda clearly enjoys talking with him, Barfoot (despite the fact that Rhoda is not beautiful), soon puts a sexual spin on their social

encounters. "...he was tempted to make love to her as an interesting pastime, to observe how so strong-minded a woman would conduct herself under such circumstances...A contest between his will and hers would be an amusement decidedly to his taste" (126-27). So, in the spirit of conquest Barfoot determines to make Rhoda fall in love with him. But by the end of the same conversation with her, he is already entertaining thoughts of the reverse. "But if his intellectual sympathy became tinged with passion - and did her discern no possibility of that? An odd thing were he to fall in love with Rhoda Nunn" (130-31). And by a short time later, his fantasies have become overtly sexual, "It would delight him to enrage Rhoda, and then to detain her by strength, to overcome her senses, to watch her long lashes droop over the eloquent eyes. But this was something very like being in love, and he by no means wished to be seriously in love with Miss Nunn...In this humour she seemed more than ever a challenge to his manhood...Yet he saw her as a woman, and desirable" (142-43).

Despite Barfoot's view of the entire relationship as being about getting Rhoda to submit to his will, Rhoda is genuinely charmed by him and sincerely falls in love with him despite her resolutions to the contrary.

"As a girl she had dreamt passionately, and the fires of her nature, though hidden beneath aggregations of moral and mental attainment, were not yet smothered...Everard Barfoot's advances surprised her not a little. Judging him as a man wholly without principles, she supposed at first that this was merely his way with

all women, and resented it as impertinence. But even then she did not dislike the show of homage; **what her mind regarded with disdain, her heart was all but willing to feed upon, after its long hunger...** Certainly she thought with much frequency of Barfoot, and looked forward to his coming (142). [Bold Mine]

However, she retains enough of her suspicions of men in general and enough respect for herself to expect Barfoot to be equally above-board. But Rhoda has the added complication of having to contemplate marriage's effect on her chosen life's work.

"What was her life to be? At first they would travel together; but before long it might be necessary to have a settled home, and what then would be her social position, her duties and pleasures? Housekeeping, mere domesticities, could never occupy her for more than the smallest possible part of each day. Having lost one purpose in life, dignified, absorbing, likely to extend its sphere as time went on, what other could she hope to substitute for it?

Love of husband - perhaps of child. There must be more than that Rhoda did not deceive herself as to the requirements of her nature. Practical activity in some intellectual undertaking; a share - nay, leadership, in some "movement"; contact with the revolutionary life of her time - the impulses of her heart once satisfied, these things would again claim her. But how if Everard resisted such tendencies? Was he in truth capable of respecting her individuality? Or would his strong instinct of lordship urge him to direct his wife as a dependant, to impose on her his own view of things? She doubted whether he had much genuine sympathy with woman's emancipation as she understood it. Yet in no particular had her convictions changed; nor would they change. She herself was no longer one of the "odd women"; fortune had - or seemed to have - been kind to her; none the less her sense of a mission remained. No longer an example of perfect female independence, and unable therefore to use the same language as before, she might illustrate woman's claim of equality in marriage - **If her experience proved no obstacle** (269-70). [Bold Mine]

However, in the same chapter, we have already learned that Barfoot has no intention of allowing her to continue her work.

He views their relationship as "a long, perhaps bitter, struggle for predominance" (268). But Rhoda is entirely unaware of this, her love has grown and become real, but she cannot give up her altruistic ideals for mere personal happiness.

At first, when he proposed love to her, Rhoda answered quite honestly, "I don't love you in the least. And if I did I would never share your life" (181). Rhoda refuses to lie about her intentions as Barfoot does, but through his persistent wooing, she succumbs to real love, even becoming jealous when suspicion is planted in her mind about Everard's fidelity (254). "She loved with passion, allowing herself to indulge the luxurious emotion as never yet. She longed once more to feel his arms about her" (264). She is willing to enter into whatever sort of an arrangement Everard may desire. He proposes a "free union", which Rhoda does not reject, in fact, "it seemed to her an easier and nobler thing to proclaim her emancipation from social statutes than to announce before her friends the simple news that she was about to marry" (264). But Barfoot uses his proposal as an opportunity to test her,

The hour had come for his last trial of Rhoda, and he felt some confidence as to the result. If her mettle endured his test, if she declared herself willing not only to abandon her avowed ideal of life, but to defy the world's opinion by becoming his wife without forms of mutual bondage - she was the woman he had imagined, and by her side he would go cheerfully on his way as a married man. Legally married; the proposal of free union was to be a test only. Loving her as he had never thought to love, there still remained with him so much

of the temper in which he first wooed her that he could be satisfied with nothing short of unconditional surrender. Delighting in her independence of mind, he still desired to see her in complete subjugation to him, to inspire her with unreflecting passion... She must rise far above the level of ordinary intelligent women. She must manifest an absolute confidence in him - that was the true significance of his present motives (261). [Bold Mine]

Rhoda feels "able to dare everything - as far as the danger concerned herself; but she perceived more strongly than hitherto that not only her own future was involved. How would such practical heresy affect Everard's position" (264)? Again, her altruistic tendencies put her in conflict with Everard's desire. She thinks of him, he thinks only of his test. Everard assures her that "free union" is what he really desires.

She believed him entirely serious. Another woman might have suspected that he was merely trying her courage, either to assure himself of her love or to gratify his vanity. But Rhoda's idealism enabled her to take him literally. She herself had for years maintained an exaggerated standard of duty and merit; desirous of seeing Everard in a nobler light than hitherto, she endeavoured to regard his scruple against formal wedlock as worthy of all respect (265).

However, out of concern for him, she urges conventional marriage, to which Barfoot agrees, but he becomes incredibly resentful and desires to break it off, Rhoda having failed his test - to be his unconditionally. Of course he would take her back, "Even now, perhaps, he would bring her to her knees before him" (273).

When she is presented with documentary evidence of Everard's entanglement with another woman, though it is

actually all a misunderstanding, he refuses to answer it. "In fact, he felt almost glad of a ground of quarrel with Rhoda" (273). Because she refuses to trust him unconditionally and then refuses to accept his offer a second time once his love was proven false and he admits his wish to test her, they part. Barfoot, after a short time, marries another, more traditional and easily dominated, woman.

So Rhoda's story is one of double renunciation. To marry Barfoot she must (and actually is willing to take the chance that she will have to) renounce the work on which she's based her life and her entire world-view. To continue her work, she must renounce the only opportunity of love that she will ever receive. She must give up the only man she's ever loved to retain her selfhood and her beliefs. Gissing offers this choice in a very practical, matter-of-fact manner and it is the spiritual aspect of ethical choice that is lacking in this novel, in comparison with the others. The personal, psychic costs are well-documented, however. You could call The Odd Women a book about ethical choice for cynical people. And unlike the three other heroines we have encountered, Rhoda has managed to free herself from the superstition and encumbrances of her society, though she has retained her sense of obligation and moral duty to her fellows. But the novel also assures us that to be free she must be alone, as others are not so advanced in their thinking. To be free of the burden of "Queen's Gardens", one had to remain an "odd woman".

The story of Monica Madden's disastrous marriage is the other major plot and the other choice presented in The Odd Women. As Goode points out, "[Monica] only marries as an odd woman. That is, she doesn't marry by sexual selection; on the contrary, she marries a man she doesn't love in order to cope with what would otherwise be her superfluity" (145). She weds the much older Edmund Widdowson a Ruskin-type model of the Victorian husband.

"In no woman on earth could he have put perfect confidence. He regarded them as born to perpetual pupilage. Not that their inclinations were necessarily wanton; they were simply incapable of attaining maturity, remained throughout their life imperfect beings, at the mercy of craft, ever liable to be misled by childish misconceptions. Of course he was right; he himself represented the guardian male, the wife-proprietor, who from the dawn of civilization has taken abundant care that woman shall not outgrow her nonage (196-97).

She provides an important contrast to Rhoda Nunn, for Monica makes no choices based on ethics, merely following the ideas of society against her own propensities to the contrary. She actually is an example of a woman who hasn't "outgrown her nonage", though she does, through her contact with Rhoda and Mary Barfoot, have the idea that such a state is wrong. Because of these newfound convictions, she battles her weak, traditional husband to a standstill that proves disastrous to them both, as neither will change their minds. Monica has been in certain ways freed by her contact with new ideas, and Widdowson can never really entertain a new notion at all. She marries and then leaves the bullying, jealous Widdowson because of a flirtation that proves empty. She dies after

giving birth to a daughter, and the book closes with Rhoda Nunn holding it in her arms - the child her ethics would never allow her to have.

Gissing, as a Social Darwinist, simply could not be that optimistic. Rhoda will change the world, but she cannot produce the generation that will inherit her changes. Ethics and sex are incompatible in Gissing's world, as they are in The Mill On the Floss and in Hardy.

## DESTRUCTION

In Thomas Hardy's last novel, Jude the Obscure in 1897, the developing self has become the crucial purpose of the novel, but despite this fact, Hardy, too is not a proponent of the ego. As Virginia Hyman says in Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, his primary motivation in writing his novels was to promote the altruistic ideal of loving/kindness. (9) He ties himself, like Eliot, to philosophers such as Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and Mill, (Hyman, 10) and, ultimately, Comte. He misses the authority of religion and to a certain extent regrets its loss but still believes altruism will prevail without it (11). However, this cannot be done without suffering. As Hyman explains:

For apparently, Hardy, like the later ethical evolutionists, saw the claims of egotism as far more persistent than Comte had. The transition from egotism to altruism would not be, these later writers felt, either as natural or as conducive to happiness as Comte had assumed. On the contrary, since altruism required giving up one's selfish desires, it required the necessary sacrifice of hopes for personal happiness. Unlike Comte, the later English ethical evolutionists believed that you cannot be both selfless and happy; you must choose the one or the other, and be willing to take the consequences of that choice (21-22).

While it may have been possible to be both good and happy in a limited way in simpler times, by the nineteenth century the two values were mutually antagonistic. It was, indeed, no longer a matter of choice. By Hardy's day it was no longer possible for man to achieve happiness, or at least a kind of happiness which required the satisfaction of the ego at the expense of others

(35-36).

It is this view we see operating in Jude the Obscure, especially in regards to the various renunciations that take place in the novel.

In Jude, it is not merely the renunciation of love that concerns Hardy, but also the renunciation of all egotistical desires. For Jude to progress, he must realize the selfishness of his desire to attend the university, his idealization of Sue and the emptiness of religion; for Phillotson, he must realize his desire to possess Sue is wrong; and for Sue, she must recognize the meaning of love, learn to trust, be able to give up her fears for herself and her wish to be totally independent. Only Jude comes close, achieving two out of three. Neither Phillotson nor Sue can seem to fully rise out of their egotistical ruts, though both have their moments of triumph. As this is a paper on the ethics of female renunciation, however, it is Sue who will concern us here.

There seem to be two main camps in Hardy criticism when it comes to Sue Bridehead, one that buys wholly into D.H. Lawrence's assessment of her and one that only accepts some of it. Lawrence seems very quick to judge the women in the novel in terms of their egotism and wishes to excuse Jude everything, I think this is a misreading, and so, I think, would Hardy. Hardy excuses Sue almost everything while condemning her final, self-destructive and Jude-destructive

renunciation. He portrays her as obviously too damaged to be rational from the outset, despite the distorted, idealized picture Jude paints of her in his portion of the narration. This idealization of Sue is the one egotistical renunciation Jude is never able to make, much to his pain and hers.

When Jude first sees Sue, we see his distorted view of her that blights their whole relationship. "But she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams" (73). These dreams are mixed with a sexual desire that is so strong it causes a reaction when he sees her on the street before Sue is even aware of who he is, "His closeness to her was so suggestive that he trembled..." (73).

However, when we first see Sue outside of Jude's perspective she is buying naked statues of Greek gods. We also see that she is feeling guilty about it. Hardy describes this as "They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. Being of a nervous temperament she trembled at her enterprise....But she was still in a trembling state, and seemed almost to wish she had not bought the figures" (78). She immediately hides them from her landlady and we see Sue's overriding motivations in life are a desire to be unconventional and far more seriously - fear. She is so caught up by both that she is unable to sleep (78). Sue's perfection is only in Jude's eyes. She is a flawed, frightened, young woman trying to do something different and

in perpetual fear of being caught at it.

When they first meet, Hardy tells us Jude speaks "with the bashfulness of a lover" and Sue, "with the freedom of a friend" (82). Clearly it is Jude who has selfish designs. He convinces Sue to resume teaching though she declares "I never thought of resuming it; for I was getting on as an art-designer." (85), setting her on the course of her disaster with Phillotson in his own desire to keep her from returning to London.

Throughout the novel Hardy describes Sue as nervous and animated, and so she is, to the point of illness from fear and anxiety, as when the school inspector makes his surprise visit and she nearly faints from fear and stress (88). Afterwards, Phillotson uses her weakness as an opportunity to make advances, placing his arm about her, though she resists at first, "she let it remain, looking quickly round her with an air of misgiving" (89).

It is clear that both Jude and Phillotson are motivated by possessive desire in regards to Sue, but she is quite devoid of any desire other than the human desires of companionship and approval. To satisfy these desires she behaves in two distinct ways, as Rosemarie Morgan points out in Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy:

Hardy perceives that Sue's most characteristic psychological move is to slide instinctively from the little-girl role to the ennobled role when her emotional anxieties are appeased. Both are approval-seeking roles. And although the significance of this alternation of poses is lost on Jude, Hardy makes it apparent to the

reader that this pattern of behaviour must and does maintain Sue in unliberated subjection. Childlike or ennobled, each directional shift gains her momentary personal satisfaction, in that she gains Jude's approval - indulgence on the one hand, reverence on the other - but at the expense of driving an ever thickening wedge of inequity between herself and her lover. Neither to submissive child nor ethereal paragon can he relate in any sexually fulfilling or mutually rewarding way. He would always have the feeling, or would unwittingly generate in her the feeling, that she is either abused and exploited or debased and degraded (117).

This is an incredibly important part of Sue's psychology; to her, nearly any physical contact is degrading and objectifying. She is a true victim of the Victorian notion of women's sexuality as outlined by Acton in 1862 and quoted by Penny Boumelha in Thomas Hardy and Women:

...there can be no doubt that sexual feeling in the female is in abeyance...and even if roused (which in many instances it never can be) is very moderate compared with that of the male...The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel.

As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire for maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions (14).

Sue cannot let herself feel sexual desire because to do so makes her not "a modest woman" but a whore. It is Sue's urgent wish to be taken seriously intellectually, but to both of the men in her life she is alternately an object of sexual desire or a paragon of virtue, not an equal. Hardy is obviously playing with this conventional notion, here. Sue is the perfect Acton-type Victorian woman, but she tries to use the stereotype to free herself, and the fact that she fails

doesn't mean that Hardy finds it the less admirable.

D.H. Lawrence, in his review hypothesized that Sue is totally selfish and only uses Jude for her own profit and comfort. Yet Hardy writes that she nurses Jude in his drunkenness and disappointment and is not judgmental and it is Jude she calls when she is miserable at school and needs someone, both examples of fellow-feeling. When he takes her hand at the inn where they're eating, she betrays her true tenderness for him.

She looked up and smiled, and took his quite freely into her own little soft one, dividing his fingers and coolly examining them, as if they were the fingers of a glove she was purchasing.

"Your hands are rather rough, Jude, aren't they?" she said.

"Yes. So would yours be if they held a mallet and chisel all day."

"I don't dislike it, you know. I think it is noble to see a man's hands subdued to what he works in...Well, I'm rather glad I came to this Training-School, after all. See how independent I shall be after two years' training" (107)!

Sue can't, however, allow this incident to go anywhere and Jude is so wrapped up in his jealousy of Phillotson and guilt over having seen Arabella that he can't act on her cue about her feelings for him. She wants him to free her from her promise to Phillotson, but in his paralysis, he can't. Sue can't ask and Jude can't read her well enough to help her.

They stay out all night and upon returning, Sue escapes from school, running through a river to get to Jude, still as fearful as ever. "Dear, Sue!" he said. "You must take off all your things! And let me see- you must borrow some from

the landlady. I'll ask her."

"No, no! Don't let her know, for God's sake! We are so near the school that they'll come after me" (115)! Jude leaves the room and returns to find her dressed in his Sunday suit, "so pathetic in her defenselessness that his heart felt big with the sense of it" (116). She's embarrassed when he sees her underwear hanging up to dry, betraying her crippling ties to the notions of Victorian modesty. Jude "saw in her almost a divinity" (116).

Sue, herself, defines the reason for her behavior later that evening when Jude calls her learned.

My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them - one or two of them particularly - almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel - to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue; for no average man - no man short of a sensual savage - will molest a woman by day or night, at home or abroad, unless she invites him. Until she says by a look "Come on" he is always afraid to, and if you never say it, or look it, he never comes (118).

So, Sue will never invite molestation through word or deed, and molestation is how she regards any sexual activity whatsoever. She goes on to say:

"I am not particularly innocent....said she, with an ostensible sneer, though he could hear that she was brimming with tears. "But I have never yielded myself to any lover, if that's what you mean! I have remained as I began.

"I quite believe you. But some women would not have remained as they began."

"Perhaps not. Better women would not. People say I must be cold-natured, -sexless- on account of it. But I won't have it (119)!

She knows she is conflicted and inhibited and tries to explain

it to Jude but he simply can't understand, and she also knows she loves Jude and wants him to love her as her later approval-seeking behavior that night attests. She is alternately child or paragon of virtue, as Jude's mood demands because she loves him and needs him to love her. (Morgan, 117) Much has been written about Jude's needing something on which to "anchor his life", but Sue needs that too and they choose one another, crippled by Jude's idealism and Sue's sexual phobias as they are. This is what most critics forget, excusing Jude and blaming Sue for the same needs.

Sue, too, is as deluded as Jude on what a woman should be like. She declares, "But I did want and long to ennoble some man to high aims; and when I saw you, and knew you to be my comrade, I - shall I confess it? -thought that man might be you" (122-123). She, too, sees herself as a symbol of purity and this prevents her from dealing with the whole notion of physicality. Virgin goddesses can't reside in their bodies nor can they enjoy them. Later, she will betray the same detestation of her own physicality under the more acceptable cloak of religion, rather than her strange sort of self-reliance.

When Sue marries Phillotson, she does so in reaction to her realization that Jude is actually her lover, brought on by the suspicions of the people at the school and the revelation that Jude is married (126-127, 133). Her reactions are quite natural jealousy and feelings of betrayal at finding the man

she loves has a wife and hasn't told her. This is the emotion Hardy portrays, but the critics since Lawrence have chosen, to make Sue into a pure egotist because of this, when Jude has the very same feelings about Phillotson and is never criticized for them. She loves Jude, and if she loves herself as well it still doesn't change that fact. Hardy shows her love after she's reproached Jude for not telling her of his marriage:

When she saw how wretched he was she softened, and trying to blink away her sympathetic tears said with all the winning reproachfulness of a heart-hurt woman. "Ah-you should have told me before you gave me that idea that you wanted to be allowed to love me! I had no feeling before that moment at the railway-station, except -" **For once Sue was as miserable as he**, in her attempts to keep herself free from emotion, and her less than half-success (133-134). [Bold Mine]

Sue has to lie to herself and Jude about her feelings, but Hardy gives many clues as to her true emotions, still the critics generally choose to ignore them in favor of condemning her as a harpy, a la Lawrence.

Thus, Sue enters upon her first martyrdom and first renunciation of Jude. As he has made his feelings for her abundantly clear, and their union is legally impossible, she sees the marriage with Phillotson as a way of removing herself as a temptation to him. That is why she makes such a ceremony of it - Jude giving her to Phillotson. Sue's understanding of the power of this act is evident in her note.

I have nobody else who could do it so conveniently as you, being the only married relation I have here on the spot....I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer-book, and it seems to be very

humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal (136).

To free herself and Jude from their impossible love, she has done just what she's always feared, allowed herself to become a possession and she's done this to protect him as well as herself. We are hampered at this point in that the narration is all from Jude, but Hardy mentions that "Sue's manner was something that of a scared child" (137) and betraying her conflict even while she's attempting to do the right thing "she took his arm as they walked through the muddy street-a thing she had never done before in her life" (138). They go up to look at the church and Sue continues to hold on to his arm. They walk up and down the aisle together and Jude is tortured, but Sue is torturing herself, too, seeing what it would have been like with him rather than Phillotson. She even asks, "Was it like this when you were married" (138)? She lies to both Jude and Phillotson about what she was doing, but when Jude leaves on an errand Hardy tells us what it was really all about. "No," said Sue, "I'll go on to the house with him;" and requesting her lover not to be a long time she departed with the schoolmaster (139).

Sue goes to be married and her guilt at it is evident. Jude describes her as "perverse" and prone to martyr herself and him in the same egocentric manner as Maggie's obsession with a Kempis. But this is, of course, Jude's point of view.

Hurt and suffering as he is, he still notes her compassion for him. He fears that: "Possibly she would go on inflicting such pains again and again, and grieving for the sufferer again and again, in all her colossal inconsistency" (140).

But she is not inconsistent, she continually hurts him and herself trying to be what she perceives as strong and self-denying, according to the old, Christian model of Esther and Anne Elliot though she claims at this point to reject Christianity. This does, of course, foreshadow her later regression into religion and its guilt and emphasis on renunciation. Hardy rejects this as being the true path to altruism. As Virginia Hyman tells us; Hardy, along with the ethical evolutionists, believed people were moving from the "theological phase" to the "metaphysical phase" and thence to the "sociological phase" of development in reacting to changes in their environment (19-20). Sue is stuck wavering between the theological and metaphysical, but, as she acts in this novel as an example of the wrong way to go about it, it doesn't mean she's selfish or unethical.

Sue is hideously unhappy with Phillotson and finds him repulsive. She jumps out of the window when he enters her room and hides in a closet with the spiders rather than share his bed. She feels guilty for this.

"Are there many couples, do you think, where one dislikes the other for no definite fault?"

"Yes, I suppose. If either cares for another person, for instance."

"But even apart from that? Wouldn't the woman, for example, be very bad-natured if she didn't like to

live with her husband; merely' - her voice undulated, and he guessed things - 'merely because she had a personal feeling against it - a physical objection - a fastidiousness, or whatever it may be called - although she might respect and be grateful to him? I am merely putting a case. Ought she to try to overcome her pruderies" (167)?

She finally breaks down and tells Jude:

What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! - the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness" (169)!

Rosemarie Morgan makes a very sensible case here for Phillotson being an inconsiderate husband and making Sue feel even more guilty for her feelings toward him, as, of course, his later conversation with Gillingham attests (290). She writes:

There is very little in this behaviour to indicate his sexual responsiveness and a good deal to suggest that Sue is quite justified in thinking him content with celibacy. How had he wooed her after all? "Not kissing me - that I'm certain!" she protests to Jude. (JO, p. 140) Phillotson, even so, feels it incumbent upon himself to exercise his conjugal rights. He assumes this to be an extension of his day-to-day functions and he assumes that Sue's sexual submission to him is a moral obligation. In resisting him, she is not in his eyes simply unresponsive, coldhearted, selfish or unsympathetic, but morally at fault.

"You vowed to love me", he accuses; "you are committing a sin in not liking me" (JO, p. 232) (121).

Phillotson does allow her at last to leave him for Jude, the man she'd loved all along, but she takes the scars of this experience with her - refusing, at first, to be physical with Jude even though she does love him.

When Arabella, in trouble, reappears on the scene does Sue submit to Jude's sexual attentions. She is frantic that

she might lose him and she martyrs herself for him again, this time to love rather than renunciation. Hardy says: "She ran across and flung her arms round his neck. "I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance? I am sure you don't think so! Wait and see! I do belong to you, don't I? I give in" (211)! Thus Sue is willing to subject herself to something she's always detested to please Jude, though she remains conflicted and desirous of controlling her own body and access to it. The next morning, Sue goes to make amends to Arabella. Hardy writes: "There was no limit to the strange and unnecessary penances which Sue would meekly undertake when in a contrite mood" (211). Showing that for all her desire to be a free-thinker, Sue is still hampered by the old, Christian traditions and guilt.

Sue and Jude live on together even though Jude still insists on idealizing her and not understanding her at all. And Sue, who wanted nothing but to be free and love him, takes on Little Father Time and bears Jude children of their own. It is her true and honest devotion to these children that finally sends her over the edge when Father Time kills them. Especially as he blamed her for becoming pregnant again. The last words he says to her are: "I won't forgive you, ever, ever! I'll never believe you care for me, or father, or any of us any more" (264)! She is immediately sure she is the cause of the murder-suicide, "an awful conviction that her discourse with the boy had been the main cause of the tragedy,

throwing her into a convulsive agony which knew no abatement.... She sobbed again. "O, O my babies! They had done no harm! Why should they have been taken away, and not I" (266-267)! In her grief she becomes convinced that her love for Jude has caused the whole tragedy, because she wanted it more than anything and broke her vow to Phillotson to obtain it. "We went about loving each other too much - indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other" (268)! But in her grief, she still doesn't forget Jude. "My poor Jude - how you've missed everything! - you more than I, for I did get you" (268)!

But by the time of the funeral she is clearly out of her mind - crying to have the buried children dug up so that she can see them one last time. She is completely overwrought and Jude takes her home. Hardy writes: "Sue was at once got to bed, and the doctor sent for.

Jude waited all the evening downstairs. At a very late hour the intelligence was brought to him that a child had been prematurely born, and that it, like the others, was a corpse" (270).

This final tragedy and her guilt bring her to one absolute conviction. "We must conform!" she said mournfully. "All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon his, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God" (271)! She is certain that she still belongs to Phillotson because of

the vow made in church and that the deaths of the children are the punishment for her sin. She comes to the conclusion that "I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious, in our courses, you and I. Our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh -the terrible flesh - the curse of Adam" (272)! She at last passes sentence on herself for what she views as her egocentricity. "Self-renunciation - that's everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that's in me" (273)! Because of this terrible, Old Testament, reading of her life, Sue leaves Jude and returns to Phillotson, who takes her back gladly and selfishly, though she is clearly still in love with Jude and ambivalent towards him.

Hardy, while he portrays Sue's regression as incorrect, maintains it as a tragedy of misplaced duty, not the selfishness the critics choose to name it. Sue has simply slipped backward in her psychic evolution to reliance on theology in response to change, rather than advancement to the sociological stage, as Jude has. Sue is absolutely sincere in this and Hardy treats her as sincere, but mistaken, not evil and selfish. Sue, by returning to Phillotson, is not just thinking of her own soul, but of Jude's. She is convinced she is still Phillotson's wife, therefore in living with Jude not only is she committing a mortal sin, but she is causing him to

commit one, hence her encouragement of his return to Arabella (277). She must renounce him or damn them both and concern for others is the first law of altruism.

Sue, whose self-image has always been shaky, now sees herself as "a vile creature - too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings!" (277) but still she thinks of Jude: "I love you as much as ever! Only - I ought not to love you - any more. O I must not any more" (278)! He pleads with her to stay and even resorts to emotional blackmail in threatening to backslide morally into lechery and drunkenness (280), but she still renounces him, even though she says "it breaks my heart" (281), and from her subsequent behavior it is obvious that it has. She is not in her right mind. Even Jude sees it, observing "The blow of her bereavement seemed to have destroyed her reasoning faculty. The once keen vision was dimmed" (286).

Thus Sue Bridehead follows in the footsteps of the heroines before her, but the world has changed. Simple Christian duty can no longer answer all the questions of life. Sue and Jude love and so are meant to be together, and they love one another unselfishly as well as selfishly. Thus, the altruistic tradition of renunciation endures, but the endings can no longer be happy ones. There is no cosmic payoff for being good, as in Austen's and Dickens' novels. Hardy's people exist in a world with very different "divine" laws. Loving/kindness towards one's "true comrade" is worth a

hundred empty, Christian duties, no matter how sincerely believed in, and the price of failure to follow these new rules is suffering, madness and death.

Sue's renunciation cannot bring contentment as did Anne's, Esther's, or even Maggie's, because deep in her soul Sue knows her ties to Jude are stronger than any tie to her own conscience or to God. So, while her act still remains dutiful and selfless, it is not morally correct or completely altruistic because of misplaced loyalty to an outdated authority rather than to a human being, where Hardy feels loyalty is properly placed. As a "New Woman" or an "odd woman" Sue belongs with Rhoda Nunn, but she is too fragile a creature to tread that narrow path, and love derails her as it never does Rhoda. Sue falls back into the old traditions long after they can be psychologically or morally accommodated, she and Jude both knowing this, it destroys them.

So the renunciation plot evolves with the evolution of ethical thought, but it still remains a powerful and selfless gesture to the end of the century. Renunciation itself remains a moral action, regardless of the value system in which it operates. Where Anne Elliot had a simple decision that required relatively little moral anxiety, though at considerable emotional cost, Sue Bridehead must first go mad to arrive at the same decision, as her moral path becomes hazier and hazier. With the loss of the supreme authority of religion, egotism becomes a greater and greater pitfall to

overcome, though the novelists believe it still can be, and renunciation is one of the most powerful ways in which to battle egotism. However, it is not always the only way in which this may be done, as Hardy demonstrates in Jude.

Jude accepts his life and turns to living for others as the best way in which to be selfless. Sue turns to renunciation, giving up all love in order also to be selfless. It is evident which one Hardy sees as preferable and it is also evident that he does not believe they can be combined as did Austen, Dickens and Eliot. That is the principle change the plot from the beginning to the end of the century. When Christianity has merit, both living for others and renunciation can occur in the same individual, but where it is rejected, the two become separated, one as the true path to altruism and the other as obedience to an outmoded value system, empty of meaning in modern society.

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