"THERE IS SOMETHING IN ALL THIS VERY LIKE DEMOCRACY":
CULTURES OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

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I examine a strain of Victorian novels that I call "novels of discussion" and their imaginings of various models of political discussion in the public sphere. In their aspiration for the liberal ideals of a "free and equal discussion (15)," to use John Stuart Mill's phrase, these novels articulate a variety of such blueprints that compete with and build on one another. Analyzing the potentialities and internal contradictions of these models, I intervene in three areas of scholarly interest: Victorian liberalism, the form of the novel, and public sphere theory.

I focus on Victorian liberalism's investments in the formal organization of political discussion in the public sphere and suggest that the changeability and free play among discussion models lie at the heart of liberalism's project, calling for on an ongoing revision of *how* to discuss ideas and exchange opinions. I argue that Victorian liberal culture had high stakes in conceiving of the individual's agency in terms of an active discursive presence in the public arena and a collaborative pursuit of "truth" through face-to-face discussion. I seek to show the limitations of a commonly held view among Victorianists that nineteenth-century liberalism privileged privatized interiority and individuated reflection and conceived of social agency through the processes of inward cognition. In contrast, I show that novels often cultivated the argumentative energy and the intersubjective collaboration in discussion as a means to grapple with socio-economic and cultural issues. While I refrain from reading novels as instruments of disciplinary power, I also do not view them as texts that simply propagate a "free and equal discussion." Rather, my close-readings reveal how the novels showcase the progressive

potentialities of various discussion models, while also exploring these models' dangers, impracticability, ambivalences, and internal tensions. In an attempt to strive for social justice and inclusion, the novels gesture specifically to face-to-face discussion as a process that facilitates a sincere exchange of opinions, ensures equality based on mutual respect and recognition, and so lays the foundation of democratic sociality.

As an artifact of print culture that created a mediated relationship with its anonymous faceless readership, the novel becomes a seemingly paradoxical site of advocating for a face-to-face unmediated political discussion. I do not view this phenomenon as Victorians' nostalgia for the golden age before print. Rather, novelistic representation of face-to-face discussion was a way for Victorian novelists to bring it into full relief. They often self-consciously contrasted face-to-face discussion with the very medium through which it was represented.

The project is arranged chronologically, spanning the late 1820's to the Edwardian period of the early twentieth century. The chapters focus on Harriet Martineau's tales of political economy, Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil*, Charles Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place*, Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, George Gissing's *Demos*, and Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. While these novels at one time enjoyed widespread popularity, they are no longer staples of Victorian literature today. However, these novels' past popularity suggests that their preoccupation with political discussion reflects crucial facets of Victorian culture. Similar preoccupations, perhaps in less explicit ways, surface in more canonical authors such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and others.  In what Walter Bagehot called the "age of discussion," the novels operated as an experimental ground for Victorians' ideals, hopes, and competing views about the public sphere.

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INTRODUCTION

"Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the
reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds
sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an
approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a
struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners" (J. S. Mill
"On Liberty" 54).

"There may be some method yet unknown by which the interests of all
may be reconciled; if so, by union we must discover it. But if, indeed,
interests must continue to be opposed, if bread must be fought for, and the
discord of men must for ever be contrasted with the harmony of nature, let
the battle be as fair as circumstances will allow" (Harriet Martineau
"Manchester Strike" 168)

"It is easy to see why the common discussion of common actions or
common interests should become the root of change and progress" (Walter
Bagehot *Physics and Politics* 141).

[I]f we choose only to expose ourselves to opinions and viewpoints that
are in line with our own, [. . .] we will become more polarized and set in
our ways. [. . . ] But if we choose to actively seek out information
that challenges our assumptions and our beliefs, perhaps we can begin to

understand where the people who disagree with us are coming from.

(Barack Obama *Michigan Graduation Speech* 2010)

In William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, the time-traveler William Guest discovers a future society transformed by a Socialist Revolution. His guide Hammond explains that in their society there are no politics or "serious difference of opinion" (269) because all questions in a community are decided through discussion at meetings, or Motes:

> Well, at the next ordinary meeting of the neighbours [. . .] a neighbor proposes the change, and of course, if everybody agrees, there is an end of discussion, except about details. [. . .] if a few of the neighbors disagree to it, [. . .] they don't count heads that time, but off the formal discussion to the next Mote; and meantime arguments *pro* and *con* are flying about, and some get printed, so that everybody knows what is going on; and when the Mote comes together again there is a regular discussion and at last a vote by show of hands. If the division is a close one, the question is again put off for further discussion; if the division is a wide one, the minority are asked if they will yield to the more general opinion, which they often, nay, most commonly do. (271)

In response to this, Guest asks: "But do you know [. . .] that there is something in all this very like democracy; and I thought that democracy was considered to be in a moribund condition many, many years ago" (272). "Many, many years ago," of course, takes us from this futuristic utopia back into the Victorian era whose democratic discussion practices Morris laments as "moribund." Like many Victorians, Morris believes in the importance of public discussion on political and socio-economic questions of his time and is eager to think of practices and ideals that would nurture political discussion from its "moribund" state into a bright democratic future.

By means of political discussion Victorians negotiated between interests and perspectives to arrive if not at consensus, at least at a compromise in a society that was fast changing under the pressures of modernity. Walter Bagehot in *Physics and Politics* referred to the nineteenth century as the "age of discussion." With the gradual extension of franchise, the growth of the urban working classes, and the new communicative dynamics brought about by the rise of mass society, there emerged in Victorian imagination new and contesting perspectives on how political discussion should be organized. The tension between the traditional paternalistic modes of social relations and forces of democratization generated a range of new blueprints for the public sphere. The ideals of liberal discussion of the eighteenth-century coffee-houses and periodicals retained their appeal for Victorians but were revised to conceptualize a public sphere whose boundaries were redefined by the new arrivals on the scene: the working classes, women, and colonial subjects. The urgency of political discussion as a basis for social cohesion was accounted for by the unprecedented changes in the notions of community. Raymond Williams remarks on the nineteenth century: "this is the period in which what it means to live in a community is more uncertain, more critical, more disturbing as a question put both to societies and to persons than ever before in history" (*The English Novel* 12). Victorian anxieties and hopes about old forms of sociality disappearing and new forms emerging translated into a keen interest in models of discussion that could potentially transform and improve communal networks.

In this dissertation I concentrate on a strain of nineteenth-century novels that I term "novels of discussion." With this term, I bring into focus a subcategory of novels that, being preoccupied with discursive practices in the public sphere, promoted certain ways of discussion to effect social change as they grappled with social, political, and economic issues of the time.

To be sure, the genre of the novel in general heavily relies on dialogues among characters. As novelistic devices, discussions are essential to the formal organization of the novel and to its content because dialogues are important vehicles for the unfolding of the plot. However, what differentiates a "novel of discussion" from a novel that utilizes dialogues among characters as generic narrative devices is the former's view of discussion as a vehicle of political change and the former's acute interest in experimenting with modes of discussion to achieve such democratic ideals as justice, inclusion, and freedom. In other words, novels of discussion treated of discussion not as a conventional organizing device, but as a practice that acquired new political potentialities along with newly formed anxieties during the Victorian period. What unites these novels is this view of discussion, although formally they may dedicate various amounts of narrative space to depicting discussions per se. That said, I explore the ways in which the shared conceptual preoccupation with discussion inevitably puts pressure on the novelistic form. The challenges to the novelistic form posed by discussion range from Martineau's control over her character's dialogues that thwarts the development of her illustrations into novelistic prose to Robert Tressell's attempt, several decade later,  to envision an ongoing open-ended political discussion that causes his lengthy novel to struggle with the limitations imposed by the novelistic form and to represent something that is by definition unrepresentable in the finite form of a novel. Thus, novels of discussion foreground questions of face-to-face versus mediated interactions in the public sphere, of the political implications of novelistic devices and the novelistic form, and by doing so, shed a new light on the study of the novel in general as all of these questions are germane to the entire genre.

While it is not my intent to view discussion models as mere products of their historical contexts, it is my view that to a large degree these models were responding to the social and

economic conditions of the Victorian era. The 1832 and 1867 Reform Bills expanded the voting

pool on such a scale and so rapidly that it triggered anxiety among many, including cultural

critics like Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold. Anxieties about the riotous crowds, the strikers

and the newly minted voters called for certain modes of discussion that would produce a social

equilibrium. And for some, the harmonizing forces of political economy were just such a

remedy. Mid-Victorian novels grappled with the ways to reform an economically polarized

society. Their aspirations to bring different classes of people and opposing voices together into a

shared forum crystallized into a project of what Pam Morris calls "imagining inclusive society."

However, each novel articulated its own model of discussion and added it to the competing arena

of models that all wanted to address the shared social problem. Late-Victorian era influenced the

form of political discussion due to the new dynamics of mass society. Mary Poovey describes the

consolidation of the social domain in the early-Victorian period that produced an image of the

British population as an aggregate of "similar, self-regulating individuals" (*Making the Social*

*Body* 22). According to Poovey, the emergence of the social domain and its disaggregation from

and inter-dependence with other domains (social, economic, political, psychological, etc.)

prepared the ground for the rise of mass culture. The advent of mass culture and mass politics

transformed the public sphere into an arena dominated by the representational register of images

where charismatic politicians emerged in a new status as celebrities to circulate their ideas and

images for mass consumption.[1] As an alternative to a capitalist society of mass consumption,

socialist ideas began to command influence at the end of the Victorian era. Along with the

socialist critique of social conditions, some novels, as I will show, revised the old Victorian

[1] William Ewart Gladstone, leader of the Liberal party (1868-1875) and four times British Prime
Minister, is a representative figure of the emergent image-dominated mass politics. That he
successfully capitalized on the visual power of images is evidenced by the fact that "plates, trays,
mugs, and other consumer goods sported his visage" (Hadley 292).

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frameworks and offered new possibilities for discussion. While acknowledging connections between the social contexts and the discussion models, I think it is important to interpret these competing models as getting to the heart of the project of liberalism and to examine the ongoing "free play" among discursive alternatives that it prescribed.

I focus on face-to-face discussions as sites of agency in response to a recent Victorianist approach of placing an individual's privatized self-reflection at the center of the liberal culture. Elaine Hadley's work is an instance of this prevailing attention to "a distinct region of privacy, the private realm of liberal cognition" (46-47) where agency is anchored in the free play of ideas. This understanding of liberalism as an ideology of privatized and individuated reflection has been linked to the genre of the novel. It has become commonplace to think of novels as a genre that cultivated readers' interiority and mobilized modes of private imagination, private identification, and inward reflection. Nancy Armstrong's influential argument that the project of the novel was "to produce an individual" (3), a reproducible model of a subject, has centered scholarly approaches to the novel around the link between the novel and inner complexities and forms of subjecthood. The link between the novel genre and privatized subjectivity can be further supported by the fact that the act of novel-reading itself was predicated on individualized privacy. Michael Warner, for instance, has contrasted the "active participation of citizens" (173) presupposed by the "republican print discourse" (170) and a "liberal-national imaginary" (*Letters of the Republic* 170) which was produced through novels and which substituted active citizenship for imaginary participation in the public sphere. To be sure, the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century modified the relationship between an individual and the public sphere and revised the notion of participatory agency within it. However, I argue that novels were very invested in promoting "active participation of citizens," as Warner puts it, through offering

various models of face-to-face political discussion. Without downplaying the fact that novels encouraged their readers to cultivate private subjectivity, I argue that novels were just as preoccupied with mechanisms of "active" participation in the public sphere, i.e. discussion.

To be sure, one can argue that these two projects are intimately connected to one another in a sense that the novels tended the private realm of cognition as a *basis* for face-to-face interaction and active participation. In my view, however, novels of discussion focus on intersubjective agency precisely because they harbor anxieties about the fact that individuated cognition tragically lacks the social aspect and does not necessarily translate into an inclusive deliberative community. They warn against the hubris of the privatized cognition to consider all points of view, including the opponents', and pass judgments without a social dialogue. They critique the insulating tendencies of privatized cognition that entails a threatening form of detachment that does not take the others' needs, interests, and opinions seriously enough. Instead of a democracy that seeks the "truth" through the aggregate of individual opinions, novels of discussion offered an alternative democracy based on collective deliberation. They saw face-to-face discussion as a means to this end, even though they promoted it, paradoxically, through the power of novelistic imagination and by means of the print medium rather than unmediated agency. If even the notion of unmediated discussion can only be introduced through mediation, it raises the question of whether "unmediated" agency is at all possible in the public sphere. My dissertation sidesteps this question and substitutes it with another line of inquiry. My goal here is not to prove whether face-to-face discussion is always already mediated. I think a more germane question is to inquire why the notion of face-to-face discussion (regardless of whether it was indeed "unmediated") had some political appeal within the public sphere and was defined against the modern mediated public sphere. In my chapters I trace the meanings that novels attributed to

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this notion, what it signified as a mode of interaction in the public sphere, and what it was defined against.

My dissertation examines the novelistic imaginings of political discussion and traces evolving elements of discussion models, along with Victorian optimism and anxieties about them. All the novels that I focus on share a striking interest in a face-to-face dialogue and its everyday language as crucial for negotiating between conflicting interests of class. I read such discussion scenes not only as a symbolic encounter between the rich and the poor classes, but as an embodied everyday encounter among human beings. While George Lukács's valorization of realist characters as representing "social trends and historical forces" (*The Historical Novel* 33) does much for defining the project of the nineteenth-century novel, I want to carve out room for the novel's valuation of face-to-face discussion as a context for intersubjective understanding. Dialogues in the novels not only point beyond themselves, to large social and cultural classes and "historical forces," but also present us with a local community of individuals whose discussion is of a piece with the democratic culture of a Greek *polis*. Novels turn to the ideal of unmediated discussion inasmuch as they share anxieties about the advent of the world of strangers and anonymous publics, the most obvious one being these novels' readership. In this very embodied context they locate a possibility of mutual understanding, transcending power relations, making decisions in the interest of all, and as such a possibility of a new just society. What these works also share is an effort to link together the descriptive and prescriptive modes: not only to sketch out what discussion should look like, but to realize this blueprint in the social context. This challenge informs all novels of discussion because their imaginative power to construct a public sphere beyond a given reality depends on their meticulous documenting of the disheartening communicative distortions that make ideal communication ever more appealing. I have aimed to

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trace the novels' changing perceptions of the existing public sphere and blueprints for a new one in order to complicate the existing historical and theoretical *linear* accounts of the dissolution of rational-critical debate and the rise of class politics and mass society in the course of the nineteenth century. I hope to show that the novels tell a non-linear and more nuanced story of the Victorian imaginings of political discussion. My project interprets the Victorian public sphere as not only a sphere where one discursive paradigm succeeds the other, but also as a bursting arena where alternative paradigms intersect, complement, and contest one another. As we register the patterns that underpinned the Victorian public sphere, we can uncover the general workings of public spheres across historical ages and cultures.

My examination of Victorian discussion models draws on a number of political theorists and Victorian scholars who have illuminated important mechanisms operating within the public sphere. In my study of the Victorian era, I argue against Jürgen Habermas whose historical account of the bourgeois public sphere views the nineteenth century as a period of decline of the "ideal" public discussion that flourished in the late-eighteenth-century coffee-houses. At the same time, I have found that novelists shared some ideals about discussion that are akin to Habermas' communicative rationality. A good example of this would be Harriet Martineau's preoccupation with "plain speaking" that she believed could reconcile conflicting economic interests. In order to describe how the novels devised to negotiate conflicts of power, I turn to Michel Foucault's insights into the dynamics of power which can be "exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free'" ("The Subject and Power"). After all, while Martineau's "plain speaking" may be a model of bracketing private interests out of discussion, it is inevitably acting as a power in pursuit of certain interests in the public sphere. I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin as I examine how novels integrated dialogic and monologic forms of discourse

into their vision of a democratic public sphere that promotes social change. Bakhtin's insights into the polyphonic nature of the novel and the dialogic nature of understanding among individuals help me develop my argument about how the novel *form* itself intersects with the plot-driven project of devising models of discussion in the public sphere.

Recent works by Victorian literary scholars have illuminated important aspects of Victorian ideals and sensibilities that shaped Victorian imaginings of discussion in the public sphere. Lauren Goodlad has shown the ways in which Michel Foucault's term "pastorship" aptly describes Victorian liberalism that negotiates between the contradictory elements of governance and individual freedom. The notion of "pastorship" underlies my analysis of the selected authors as they are caught, in varying degrees, between promoting equal inter-class dialogue and engrafting middle-class views onto the lower-class minds. Amanda Anderson has shown the centrality of the "ideal of critical distance" (4) and the cultivation of detachment to Victorian culture. As I build on her ideas, I trace a genealogy of a "stranger" from Disraeli's *Sybil*, to Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* and Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and think about the stranger as precisely the figure that artfully, at times theatrically, manipulates with modes and degrees of detachment. My analysis of sympathy in discussion scenes is informed by the recent work of Carolyn Betensky. Betensky explains how the social problem novels, in cultivating bourgeois sympathy for the poor, constructed a bourgeois consciousness in which feeling became an end in itself and a kind of moral justification for the dominant class. While I agree with Betensky on how sympathy operates and to what end it is employed in the novels, I am also interested in examining alternatives to sympathetic "solutions." Finally, Pam Morris has provided me with a useful framework of two major coordinates in the Victorian age: first, an 1840's shift toward inclusiveness in the public sphere (in other words, "imagining

inclusive society," as the study's title suggests) and, second, a rejection of this ideal in the 1860's that led to a "permanent division of the public sphere into the popular sphere and a sphere of cultural distinction" (17).

The above accounts are germane to understanding the kinds of discursive practices the novels promoted and how they organized the mechanisms of discussion. I am exploring how and why novels configured the elements of sympathy, rational debate, liberal individualism, abstraction and embodiedness, spaces, perspectives, and rhetorical tactics into blueprints that were continuously revised by succeeding and co-existing alternatives. Rather than tracing the evolution of a particular Victorian cultural ideal such as detachment, rational discussion, sympathy, or aspirations for inclusion, I suggest a different approach to the Victorian public sphere. The chapters that follow show that Victorian notions of political discussion did not support one single discursive ideal but rather competed with one another in pursuit of yet better alternative models. For Victorians, a democratic public sphere could not be expressed in any one of these models more fully than in others; it is the ongoing competition among these diverse models as a whole that spurred emancipatory discussion. As soon as one model seemed to claim supremacy, authors contemplated yet better alternatives. These novels encouraged active participation and immersion in political discussion among their readers, yet also encouraged them to view any discursive model at a critical distance. Novels taught their readers to carry out political discussion as well as critically reflect on and revise its own premises. After the boom of eighteenth-century periodicals, the Victorian novel became a contested arena for negotiating not only the issues of the day but the form of discussion in the public sphere itself. Following the pattern of Catherine Gallagher's inquiry into the interrelation between the tensions of the condition-of-England social discourses and the "formal paradoxes in the industrial novels"

(*Industrial* xv), I interrogate how novels of discussion incorporated the concerns about the public sphere into both their thematic content and their narrative form. I take this line of inquiry further by refusing to reduce the project of the novels of discussion to a mere reflection or re-working of social tensions that resonate with the novels' "formal paradoxes." Rather, I argue for a function of these novels not only to thematize certain social tensions, but to promote critical reflection on the existing and alternative ways to discuss these social tensions in the first place.

I use the term "cultures of discussion" to supplement the term "sympathy" that prevails in Victorian studies, especially in the studies of social-problem novels. The notion of sympathy merely cannot account for the entire variety of techniques configured in the novels as models for solving economic and political tensions. That said, sympathy does have a place within Victorian cultures of discussion and is an important agent within the Victorian novels. Middle-class sympathy for the poor is not only an object of representation in Victorian social problem novels, but a sensibility that shares its fundamental structures with the realist narrative itself. According to D. Rae Greiner, sympathy, which operates through metonymical alignment of self and other without ever fusing them, "is built into the structure of (and not merely thematized by) realism" (418). The work of sympathy and that of realist narrative are predicated on the same mechanisms because metonymy being "the dominant trope of narrative" (Jakobson in Greiner 420) also underpins the notion of sympathy as an act of calibrating "one's adjacency to or distance from others" (421). Sympathy is central to social problem novels in yet another way: Victorian sympathy is implicated in the hierarchical relations of power between the dominant and the dominated classes. Social problem novels employ sympathy in a contradictory gesture of both eliminating and reinforcing the class hierarchy. In her work *Feeling for the Poor*, Carolyn Betensky argues that the act of reading by the middle classes about their own sympathetic

feelings was a kind of social action, an end in itself, and in a way an attempt to re-validate the class hierarchies, i. e., the dominant position of the *feeling* bourgeois. The novels, she writes, unfolded the project of "the promotion of bourgeois feeling as a response to the suffering of the poor and working classes" (2). Victorian sympathy operates with a conservative social agenda because the middle classes redeem themselves by merely sympathizing with the poor whereas the *status quo* remains unchallenged. As sympathy becomes complicit with the power relations of domination, it increasingly loses its potential to be a basis for a democratic society or even a catalyst of social change. I suggest that novels often turn to the promotion of political discussion that goes beyond the limits of sympathy to envision new ways of negotiating contentious aspects of socio-economic justice. Instead of objectifying spectatorship and subject-centered affective response that often underlie sympathy, discussion mobilizes new practices and puts sympathy in the service of intersubjective recognition and reciprocal discursive exchange.

Nevertheless, sympathy between classes ties in with many novels' ideas about social improvement and progress: if only the rich and the poor could learn to sympathize with one another, class antagonism would cease and social relations would be ameliorated. Many Victorian authors shared in the belief that sympathy is a fundamental principle of sociality. In this respect, they echoed the eighteenth-century accounts of sympathy by David Hume and Adam Smith. Hume and Smith describe the sympathetic relationship between subjects somewhat differently. In Hume's universe, passions run free and uncontrolled and sympathy does not recognize any boundaries between the self and the other: "The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*; Book III "Of Morals" 605). In contrast, Smith constructs his notion of sympathy based on the indelible distance and difference

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between the self and the other. The "spectator's" sympathy for the "sufferer," in Smith, is always an approximation of one's feelings to the feelings of the other: "That imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary" (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 21). Smith concludes, "what they [the spectators] feel, will, indeed, always be, in some respects, different from what he [the sufferer] feels" (22). In opposition to Hume's free-ranging passion that fuses hearts together, Smith claims that sympathy arises only from the right dosage of the sight of the other's passion: "If the passion is too high, or if it is too low, he cannot enter into it" (27). Social problem novels borrowed from both Hume's and Smith's insights. One can see Smith's notion of sympathetic distancing at work when the novels cultivated middle-class sympathy at the same time as they reaffirmed a safe distance from the working-class social other. Smith's insights also crop up in the novels' careful calibration of sympathetic feeling. Novelistic representations of working-class sufferings seem to reveal a mastery with which Victorian writers engineered the "perfect" pitch of the passion that would be most agreeable to cultivate a sympathetic middle-class spectator/reader. Thinking about sympathy along Hume's lines as a contagious passion, the novels anticipated a kind of spontaneous spread of sympathetic attitudes (among the middle classes) to ameliorate the condition of the poor. On the other hand, it was Hume's notion of the contagious feelings that filled the novels with anxiety about the political sentiments brewing among the working classes and, if uncontrolled, threatening to undercut the middle-class notion of progress.

Despite the novels' progressive aspirations to create a more sympathetic society, Victorian sympathy is inextricable from the class structure in which it operates and which it perpetuates. Sympathy is organized by hierarchical relations that include a sympathetic middle-class observer and a lower-class object of sympathy. Scholars like Betensky and Audrey Jaffe

have concentrated on the figure of the sympathetic middle-class spectator and reader to suggest that sympathetic feeling is in fact a feeling that does not reach out to the sufferer but first of all shapes and cultivates the subjectivity of the sympathizer. The sympathetic feeling is ultimately a feeling about one's own self. Betensky argues that through the promotion of sympathy for the poor social problem novels shaped, first of all, the "bourgeois social conscience" (2). Similarly, Audrey Jaffe points to the hierarchal dynamics of sympathy when she suggests that Victorian sympathy is "inextricable from the middle-class subject's status as spectator and from the social figures to whose visible presence the Victorian middle-classes felt it necessary to formulate a response"(8). Sympathy, for Jaffe, "takes shape as a constellation of images in which a threat to individual identity is both imagined and, theoretically, overcome, with the spectator's identity emerging as an effect of the sympathetic encounter itself" (11). Because the spectator feels sorry for his imaginary self in the other's position at the same time as he contemplates how the other would view him, the spectator, Jaffe suggests that "the result is the transformation of sympathy with the other into sympathy with the self—a self already figured as representation" (4). Jaffe goes on to point out the power structures within sympathy by stating that scenes of sympathy perform "the construction of subjectivity in a hierarchal but increasingly mobile society in which the middle-class self exists in a perpetually vexed relationship with the figures of social difference that surround it" (11). Current scholarship sheds light on the subject-centered rather than inter-subjective mechanisms of sympathy. Although sympathy was often offered as a solution to class polarization in the public sphere, its own hierarchical structures failed to reconsider the public sphere on more democratic terms. Ironically, the work of sympathy in Victorian social problem novels is a response to injustice insofar as it is also a means by which

social inequality seeks to naturalize itself. Rather than questioning social stratification, Victorian sympathy becomes complicit with it.

But aside from questioning whether democratic potentialities are inherent or alien to sympathy, it is important to note that sympathy was losing its ground as a force in the public sphere because it became more frequently cast as "a woman's issue" (Jaffe 17) and confined to the private sphere. As Rachel Ablow writes, "in the context of the nineteenth-century turn to institutional solutions to social problems, sympathy was increasingly identified with the private sphere" (3). If sympathy forecloses on its agency to mediate and reconcile social and political crises, it can no longer be considered a viable large-scale instrument of social improvement. I suggest that the novels responded to this process not so much by registering the political bankruptcy of sympathetic sensibilities, but rather by supplementing sympathy with alternative ways to organize discussion in the public sphere. I am interested in exploring the new mechanisms of social mediation that cannot be reduced either to government measures, sympathetic fellow-feeling, or the ideal of rational-critical debate that carried over from the golden age of periodicals in the eighteenth century. To be sure, the models of discussion that I examine in the following chapters rely on all of these forces that shape the public sphere, from Harriet Martineau's faith in a rational dialogue and vertical inter-class sympathy in Walter Besant, to Benjamin Disraeli's statesmanship role that is inextricable from his fiction. However, I argue that the novelists' attempts to (re)configure and critique these elements gave rise to a vibrant and competitive conversation about what political discussion should look like in the public sphere. I hope to complicate the linear accounts of the dissolution of rational-critical debate, the privatization and feminization of sympathy, and the growth of bureaucratic measures of control with what, in my opinion, is a messier and non-linear trajectory of the re-invention of

discursive norms and practices across the novels. Being a major agent in the nineteenth-century public sphere and commanding influence on public opinion over controversial issues, the novel was also a tool for a reflexive examination of public discussion itself.

All of the novels in the following chapters construct scenes of face-to-face political discussion to grapple with the fundamental question of the relationship between the self and the other. The novels address this question on a continuum of scale: from the (potentially embodied) level of individual characters engaged in everyday discussion to the abstract universal norms of a just democratic society. If sympathy necessarily frames the relationship between self and other as a relationship of objectification of the other and of privileging the sympathetic spectator, it seems to me that Victorian novels of discussion were exploring ways to redefine this relationship on more equal terms of recognition, respect, and inclusion. Calibrating the forces of inclusion and distancing from the other, these novels engage in the same theoretical conversation that Jürgen Habermas focuses on as he describes the contemporary democratic public sphere: "The "inclusion of the other" means [. . .] that the boundaries of the community are open for all, also and most especially for those who are strangers to one another and want to remain strangers" (*Inclusion of the Other* xxxvi). The novels of discussion, I suggest, revise the homogeneous and monologic community of the past and envision dynamic discursive practices to usher in a new polyphonic inclusive democratic forum.

My reading of novels is anchored in a conviction that they do not merely illustrate or complement theory, but invent and experiment with new approaches to theoretical questions. In the novels, scenes of political discussion are configured in a way that represents an interconnection between, on the one hand, the economic, historical, and political forces that shape the views of the participants and their *habitus*, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, and, on the

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other hand, the individual agency that is capable of reaffirming, subverting, and modifying these external structures. For instance, in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*, the aristocratic protagonist Charles Egremont "disappoints" his family's expectations of his political career only to find his own way to communicate with the People and articulate a new vision of the union between the Crown and the People in opposition to the Whig regime. His personal transformation in the novel marks a break from the high society of false aristocracy whose established ways are intrigue and gossip. In thinking about the ways in which change can be conceived of and articulated in discussion, the novels illuminate the entanglement of subjective agency and objective conditions. For Victorian writers, these two components of social change could only be thought of together.

The novels' preoccupation with subjective experience and individual agency, on the one hand, and objectively comprehensible social structures, on the other hand, amounts to these narratives' attempt to combine subjectivist and objectivist approaches to social reality. As Amanda Claybaugh argues, a desire to combine the subjectivist and objectivist approaches is characteristic of realism: "For the nineteenth-century realists, it seems, the objective and the subjective view were two parts of the same project" (*The Novel of Purpose* 40). Realism, then, lends itself very well to Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology that aims to combine a subjectivist and objectivist methodology. Loïc Wacquant explains that Bourdieu tries to overcome "the seemingly irresolvable antagonism between subjectivist and objectivist modes of knowledge, the separation of the analysis of the symbolic from that of materiality" (Waquant in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* 3). I use Bourdieu's insights to argue that the novels tried to imagine a discussion forum where it would be possible to pursue objective understanding of issues, yet to take into account individuals' subjective experiences and perspectives. In this endeavor, novels

were well too aware of the pitfalls of an objectivist formula of creating depersonalized universal models of society and of a subjectivist approach that results in a relativity of worldviews.

Notions of objectivity and subjectivity are central to the ways in which the novels think about political discussion. Discussion scenes aspire to gain understanding of issues in a more objective light that would eliminate private biases for the sake of a common good; however, the novels also imply that oftentimes mutual understanding is deeply rooted in subjective, or rather inter-subjective, relationships with the other. Novels like Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* and Charles Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* aspire to anchor objectivity in subjective perspectives that would be mobile and exchangeable. Some works strive for objectivity by upholding a universal ideal (such as Martineau's "plain speaking"), and others refuse the very notion of an ideal and offer a set of practices that would lead to social change (e.g., Tressell's "argyfying about politics"). Yet others, like Gissing, suggest that political movements, even if driven by a unified ideal, are bound to fragment into sub-streams spearheaded by leaders who have their own style and subjective perception of the ideal. All in all, each novel's configurations of objectivity and subjectivity in political discussion underlie a shared project of envisioning how discursive practices can catalyze social change and anticipate a new kind of public for a society that is still to come.

The novels' inquiries into the objective and subjective elements of political discussion touch on a somewhat related question of linking everyday (subjective) experiences to universal (and conceivably objective) norms. While current political theory grapples with this problem of linking everyday experiences with universal procedures and norms of justice, I suggest that examining the genre of the novel sheds new light on negotiating between these two levels. Victorian novels in general, and social problem novels in particular, represented unprecedented

injustices on economic, cultural, and political planes and by doing so explored ways of connecting everyday sufferings with abstract principles of justice. These linkages between the particular and the general happen in the scenes of spontaneous everyday face-to-face discussion as when, for instance, in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the workers' conversation about old Jack Linden's loss of his job leads to a general critique of the capitalist marketplace and the "Battle of Life" for employment. By seamlessly connecting the everyday with the universal, novelistic imagination circumvents some theoretical impasses with the facility that is unique to its genre.

My study of discussion models in the novels is motivated by the following questions. Why and how did the novel flourish as an artifact of mass print and cultivate an anonymous readership, while at the same time acknowledge a face-to-face dialogue as a kind of political remedy for modern society? Paradoxically, the novel as a printed text promoted mediated models of political discussion only to undermine its own medium with a message in support of face-to-face discussion. My second question is to what extent did these models open up new critical possibilities of political discussion and to what extent did they reveal their own contradictions or complicity with the *status quo*? And finally, if Victorians' imaginings of political discussion did not form a linear trajectory but were instead an uneven and contested project, is there a democratic element in this plurality? Does this ongoing revision and instability of the form of discussion suggest something essential about Victorian liberalism? Being part and parcel of Victorian print culture, novels surprisingly find promise and political agency in face-to-face discussion. But it seems that the novels' self-conscious zeroing in on this ideal registers it as a part of the past, however appealing, and not of the future. Despite this, the novels seem not to represent this ideal nostalgically, but to employ it as a device to bring about social change and

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reform in the future. These seemingly self-undermining gestures, firstly, of favoring face-to-face discussion on behalf of a print artifact and, secondly, of appropriating an ideal of the past into the affirmative future-oriented mode of the "novels with a purpose" make discussion scenes rich and intriguing. But what seems like a paradox is rather an invitation to a deeper understanding of the project carried on by the novels of discussion. It seems that face-to-face discussion can be represented and crystallized into a model only once it becomes somewhat removed from readily available modern possibilities. Hence, it is not paradoxical but rather intuitive for the novel as an artifact of print to conceive of the notion of face-to-face discussion and to advocate for its transformative power up against the pressures of increasingly mediated and alienating environments.

My study does not compare one discussion model to another in an attempt to find the best or most emancipatory one. Rather, the heterogeneity of the discussion models and the ways they challenge, complement, and build on each other creates the critical possibilities that no single model by itself can create. As I will show, each model should be understood as a part of a complex network of inter-dependent novelistic imaginings. Only then can we see how novels collectively strove to cultivate critical engagement with the mechanisms of discussion. This project of careful calibration of critical distance insured that these models would not become an unquestioned custom or an abstraction detached from lived experience. Critical detachment also instilled a liberating awareness that there were always valid and feasible alternatives to any discursive practice. Perhaps for Victorians, a path toward a truly emancipated and fair discussion lay not in the either/or choice between Harriet Martineau's "plain speaking," Walter Besant's "masquerading," or Robert Tressell's "argyfying about politics," but in a guarantee of an ongoing competition among these discursive patterns. Such attitudes are very much a piece of

what David Wayne Thomas calls "many-sidedness" in Victorian aesthetic and liberal culture (x).

Just as many Victorian novelists called upon viewing a political-economic issue from "both

sides," so, too, did they put value on viewing and reviewing models of discussion themselves

from various perspectives. However, the critical possibilities are located not only in the models

themselves or in the competing variety of models, but in the often complex and ambivalent

unfolding of these models in the novels. The chapters that follow aim neither to raise suspicion

that models of discussion seek to exercise control behind the veneer of appealing ideals, nor to

fully embrace and celebrate such discursive blueprints. Novels are too polyphonic and

ambivalent to be read in a Foucauldian manner as vehicles of discipline and too contradictory

and multi-layered to be read sympathetically, "with the grain" (12), as Brigid Lowe advocates. It

is by looking at the often complex ways in which these models "work" in the novels that we can

put their critical edge in full view.

Representations of face-to-face everyday discussion operate not without ambivalences.

While in certain scenes the everyday and unmediated dialogue becomes the domain of discursive

spontaneity, authenticity, and purity, in other instances it nurtures manipulative play and

pervasive spread of oppressive ideology. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, for instance,

showcases discussions at lunch during which the workers re-circulate the oppressive notion of

"common sense" and reiterate political falsehoods that they glean uncritically from newspapers.

On the other hand, Tressell seems to seek out seeds of emancipation in the very same everyday

conversations of half-literate workers. In his novel, the foul-play that Mugsborough City Council

members devise during their meeting represents face-to-face discussion as a context where

conspiracy can thrive. In *TRTP*, one also finds face-to-face dialogues wrought with barriers and

gaps in understanding, such as many of Owen's encounters with the workers who are not

sympathetic with his socialist views. However, many other novels feature face-to-face discussion as a medium conducive to emancipation as, for example, the moment of an idyllic understanding between Charles Egremont and Gerard in Disraeli's *Sybil.* The novels in question recognize face-to-face everyday discussion as a means to political emancipation, although they are wary of idealizing it blindly and sense that it can also harbor anti-democratic tendencies towards the other party. Arguably, the novels of discussion are aware of the complexity of the everyday, and their concerns echo more recent understandings of the everyday as simultaneously a space of repression and evasion (Lefebvre)[2] and of potential emancipation through communicative practice (Habermas).[3]

Novels of discussion display a wide range of attitudes to the progressive discursive practices they represent: offering us ready-to-use ideal models, aestheticizing discussions and linking the harmony of their form to the validity of their content, relegating discussions to the chaotic and vulgar realm of ambition and self-interest, and finally, sidestepping the notion of an ideal altogether and proposing an on-going and evolving practice instead. Harriet Martineau proposes to her readers to practice "plain speaking" as an ideal to implement in daily practice. For Walter Besant, politics and aesthetics go hand in hand when his characters talk "prettily" about the cultural and economic issues in the East End. For Benjamin Disraeli, too, the aesthetics of discussion blend seamlessly with the politics as the mysterious and beautiful image of medieval England, and Sybil as its embodiment, becomes an organizing center for political discussions among strangers. George Gissing's *Demos*, on the other hand, dismisses the entire

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[2] See Lefebvre, Henri. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. Trans. Sacha Rabinovitch. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971.
[3] See Habermas, Jürgen. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Intro Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990.

discussion forum in the public sphere under the premise that pure political ideals necessarily become corrupted and fractured in the practical realm. Robert Tressell, in turn, offers a self-reflexive on-going practice of "argyfying about politics" in lieu of a lofty ideal. This variety of attitudes towards political discussion illustrates the high degree of Victorians' interest in their discursive models/practices and in cultivating ways of thinking about them.

In my examination of the cultures of discussion, I focus on the genre of the novel for several reasons. Above all, the novel was one of the predominant genres in the Victorian literary landscape. As such, novelistic representations of and attitudes toward political discussion carried significant weight in the public sphere. Since the novels I examine largely belong to popular fiction, they provide good evidence as to what ideas resonated with the Victorian common reader. Secondly, novels present an intriguing case in regard to cultures of discussion because of their narrative intent, despite the often overriding opinion of the author, to embrace the polyphony of viewpoints in society. But even those novels that can be characterized as one-sided and propagandist seem to put an honest effort into representing as fully as possible the opinions of the "other" side. Novels thrive on dialogic openness. Periodicals, on the other hand, oftentimes picked sides in the fractured social and political sphere to embrace the party spirit rather than attempt to represent societal heterogeneity. Thirdly, novels think about discussion differently from other genres as they depict its spontaneous nature that cannot be reduced to a formula or procedure. The paradoxical tension between a celebration of spontaneity and the predetermination that comes with the scripting of discussion in the novel indicates how the novelistic representational ambitions pushed against the limitations of the genre. Also, it is my view that through this paradox the novels grappled with an uneasy dilemma between spontaneity

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(liberating, yet conducive to anarchy) and regimented procedures (universally applicable, yet depersonalizing and restraining).

Novels offer a more multifaceted view on political discussion than yet another genre besides periodicals: debating societies whose discursive practices are documented in their proceedings and theorized in their manuals. My survey of nineteenth-century debating societies' materials at the British Library led me to conclude that novels of discussion and debating societies' gravitated towards divergent rhetorical philosophies. If the novels relished in the richness of nuances, spontaneity, and complexity of discussion and defied formal protocols, debating societies' manuals and proceedings aimed to regulate and format discussions to make them manageable and comprehensible in the larger bureaucratic political machine. In fact, many debating societies used parliamentary procedure for their template.[4] In this spirit, debating societies would impose limits on their membership,[5] censorship of "unparliamentary language,"[6]

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[4] As stated in one manual's preface, "There was a twofold object before the minds of the authors in preparing this little volume. They desired to collate into a more accessible form the principal facts and features of existing parliamentary procedures, and at the same time to present their work in such style as would make it of assistance not only to Members, or those aspiring to be Members, of Parliament, but to the very large section of the community interested in debating societies, at whose meetings there is always a disposition to adhere more or less to parliamentary practice. The training of young men for public life, which is a direct object of many of these institutions, would be more complete if strict adherence to the model could be generally encouraged" (7). See Freeman, Wm. Marshall and J. Carson Abbott. The A. B. C. of Parliamentary Procedure. A Handbook for Use in Public Debate. London: Butterworth and Co., 1906.
Parliamentary procedure thoroughly informed views on discussion as evident, for example, in a short-lived periodical in the 1850's titled The British Controversialist, and Self-Educator: Established for the Impartial and Deliberate Discussion of Important Questions in Religion, Philosophy, History, Politics, Social Economy, Etc., and as a Magazine of Self-culture. It published "affirmative" and "negative" articles relating to issues of the day.
[5] See, for example, rules on page 3 in Tyneside Parliamentary Debating Society, Newcastle-on-Tyne. List of Members. Constitution and Rules. Session 1891-92. Tyne Printing Works Co., Newcastle-on-Tyne.

restrictions on the range of topics,[7] and time limitations,[8] in an effort to mold discussion into a

parliament-like formula. Like no other genre, novels showcase the richness and spontaneity of

everyday discussion, but also bring to light the complexities and contradictions of the proposed

ideals and uncover the inevitable flaws and dangers of these models, however appealing.

My chapters are organized chronologically and examine Harriet Martineau's tales on

political economy (1827-1833), Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (1845),

Charles Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* (1870) and Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions*

*of Men* (1882), George Gissing's *Demos* (1886), and Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered*

*Philanthropists* (1916). The first chapter traces the evolution of Martineau's vision of political

discussion from one-sided didactic dialogues in "The Rioters" and "The Turn-Out" to a more

equal and de-centered discussion in "A Manchester Strike." Her work demonstrates a tension

between middle-class pastorship of the lower classes and a more democratic model. I argue that

her commitment to the principles of political economy and her ideal of "plain speaking" are

interdependent. The tales propagate discussion because it can keep the workers away from

strikes by substituting words for violence. But no less importantly, Martineau wants to show that

rational discussion will inevitably prove the principles of political economy to be true. Although

the tales always insure that *laissez faire* arguments come out as truths in the end, Martineau does

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[6] See, for example, a list of "unparliamentary" terms in Gray, Geo G. Hand-book of Procedure of the House of Commons. With Suggestions and Precedents for the Use of Parliamentary Debating Societies. London: Horace Cox, 1896.

[7] See listings of topics, for example, in Our Magazine. Subjects for Thought and Discussion in Social and Political Clubs, Co-operative Reading Rooms, Class Rooms, Discussion Meetings, Lecture Halls, Mutual Improvement and Debating Societies, Polytechnic Institutes, &c. London: Cooperative Printing Society, No. 1 January 1891. See also Gibson, Laurence M. Handbook for the Literary and Debating Societies. London, 1898.

[8] See, for example, in Rules of the Union Debating Society. Printed by Abdool Hukeem at Muzhurool-Ajauyeb Press, Calcutta, 1871.

want to test the validity of these ideas against other viewpoints in discussion scenes. Thus the tales are anchored in two "economies": political economy that guides the relationship between men and capital and the "economy" of "plain speaking" that organizes the public sphere.

My second chapter examines Benjamin Disraeli's techniques of consensus-building in *Sybil*. I argue that Disraeli creates an elusive pastoral image of pre-Reformation England which lacks diachronic depth but precisely because of it generates consensus among the aristocracy and the People in the present. A shared image of pastoral England creates a common ground among conversing strangers in *Sybil*. Through such a vision of discussion Disraeli exposes the limitations and points to the alternatives of the rationalistic culture of competing arguments. Disraeli suggests that it is precisely the condition of strangehood that allows for freedom in discussion and an abstraction from social attributes of class. While face-to-face conversation is crucial in *Sybil*, it does not aim to overcome strangehood but rather preserve it as a condition for productive discussion.

In my next chapter, I focus on how Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* and Charles Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* imagine political discussion through the liberal fantasy of perspective-taking. The two novels are quite optimistic about the principle of putting oneself in another's place as a means to resolve social conflicts. These under-read novels raise questions of transparency and ultimate exchangeability of perspectives in the public sphere. Preoccupation with perspective-taking in these novels reveals Victorians' concerns with objectivity as well as social equality/hierarchy. In Besant's novel it is the upper-class protagonists that have the privilege to assume the perspectives of a cabinet-maker and a dress-maker in the East End and hence lay claims to a more many-sided or objective vision of the social problem. While *Put Yourself in His Place* suggests that perspective-taking is possible and

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can be universal, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* treats the other party's perspective as never

fully accessible and exchangeable. As such, Besant's novel moves away from the optimistic

Victorian fantasy of transparent perspectives and articulates an alternative vision of the other as

not fully accessible—a vision that actually opens new possibilities for inclusiveness and

tolerance in our own modern condition.

Early-Victorian optimism about discussion gives way to late-Victorian anxiety about mob

threat and the impossibility of a pure and simple (unmediated) face-to-face political discussion

that would uphold democracy and ensure consensus. The fourth chapter discusses George

Gissing's *Demos, A Story of English Socialism* as a novel representative of this change. In the

novel, the socialisms of working-class Richard Mutimer, the gentlemanly Westlake, the radical

Roodhouse, and "demos" itself expose the myth of a unified people's movement. Gissing

juxtaposes the aesthetic sensibility of the aristocrat Hubert Eldon to the whirlpool of practical

politics, the embodiment of the battle of life. Instead of "plain speaking," the novel is fraught

with political fragmentation, antagonism, and newspaper wars. In *Demos*, society no longer

figures as a potentially inclusive democratic forum, but as a potpourri of discordant claims and

interests. Gissing's novel registers a disillusionment in the ideals of political discussion from the

1830's and 1840's fiction.

My final chapter examines an Edwardian novel by Robert Tressell that depicts the lives

of construction workers in Mugsborough (based on Hastings, Sussex). *The Ragged Trousered*

*Philanthropists, Being the Story of Twelve Months in Hell, Told by One of the Damned, and*

*Written down by Robert Tressell* abounds in scenes of "argyfying about politics" during the

workers' lunch breaks. Although this novel features a socialist Owen who promotes his ideas

among the workers, a unanimous consensus is always deferred. Tressell represents discussion as

a spontaneous and heterogeneous forum where positive progress comes from the fact that consensus is never fully reached. Unlike Gissing who is disillusioned with fragmentation of ideas, Tressell acknowledges heterogeneity as something that propels discussion forward. I suggest that this novel transforms the Victorian notion of agreement as a static end result (serving more aesthetic rather than pragmatic purposes) into a more politically viable notion of agreement as an evolving work-in-progress.

My project articulates a direct (if complicated) relationship between the democratic ideal of face-to-face political discussion, novels' advantages and inadequacies in representing the latter, and the evolving Victorian imaginings of the public sphere. Political discussion figures differently across the novels that I gather under the heading "novels of discussion": in some of them, the art of discussion is a rather prominent theme while in others it fares more as a background to unravel social problems of the day and as a means to solve them. However, what unites all of these works is their commitment to reshape social, economic, and political world through discussion. The novels challenged, revised, and modified the ideals of liberal discussion in the public sphere as well as envisioned forgotten but no less intriguing alternatives. Focusing on a few moments in the history of the novels of discussion, I conclude that over the course of the nineteenth century the questions of what claims can be made in the public sphere and who can make them were accompanied by another equally important question: what should discussion in the public sphere look like? Fiction articulated competing models of political discussion as it responded to the evolving politico-economic contexts over the course of the Victorian era. The novels created descriptive and prescriptive blueprints of political discussion in ways more complicated and insightful than what contemporary and current theory has offered. Once we recognize our own contemporary concerns behind discussion scenes in Victorian

novels, our theorizing of the democratic public sphere could move onwards with the same

passion that Victorians fostered.

CHAPTER 1

ON "PLAIN SPEAKING" IN HARRIET MARTINEAU'S *ILLUSTRATIONS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*

In her essay "On the Duty of Studying Political Economy," first published in the *Monthly Repository* in 1832, Harriet Martineau announced that a universal knowledge of science is a matter of democratic progress:

> It is evident that they [people] cannot even be sure of choosing their
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> representatives better till they are clear as to what is requisite in their member,
>
> and can judge whether he possesses the requisites. The people, then, must become
>
> practically acquainted with the principles of political economy, before they can
>
> expect their interests properly taken care of by the government. (275)

Convinced about the urgent need of a comprehensible manual of political economy for all classes, Martineau published her *Illustrations of Political Economy* in 1832-1834. Although she never laid claim to originality (since she considered herself only a popularizer of such political thinkers as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, and James Mill), Martineau's writing was innovative both in respect to content and form. The series of tales transformed the high theory of political economy into relatable scenes from daily life that were supplemented with a summary of principles in the conclusion of each tale. This enlivening approach of illustrating abstract principles with fictional stories would, Martineau believed, make her message accessible for many, especially the working classes. Intertwining fiction and non-fiction, Martineau crafted her project so that "Political Economy could be understood *by all*" ("Preface" xvi)—a message

that was intended within and beyond national bounds. The publication of the series indeed met with large numbers of readers, and the financial and literary success of *Illustrations* made Martineau a well-off, independent woman writer. There is, however, a tension at the heart of her works: meant to popularize the science of political economy among a mass audience, Martineau's tales revolve around face-to-face discussion. Her works pit the ideal of unmediated political discussion against the mediated fictional representation of her tales.

Martineau illustrates principles of political economy by featuring characters engaged in everyday face-to-face dialogues. These scenes are part and parcel of Martineau's pioneering attempt to create a *narrative*, not a treatise, about political economy. Couching theoretical principles in lively scenes of everyday life was an enterprise whose advantages Martineau attempted to capitalize on and whose "traps" she meant to avoid. She claims in the "Preface" that she considers narrative to be the best form in which to teach political economy and insists on the difference between her use of narrative and the "use of narrative as a trap to catch idle readers" employed in "works that pretend to be stories, and turn out to be catechisms of some kind of knowledge which we had much rather become acquainted with in its undisguised form" ("Preface" xiii). In other words, her story-telling is somehow essential, not peripheral, in explicating the moral science of men and wealth. Although she confesses that her writing process would begin with "making the Summary of Principles" (*Autobiography* I, 194) and only then move to scenes, conversations, and characters, the fictional elements in her tales seem to "absorb" theory and facts rather than the other way around. It is the making of a fictional tale on the third day of her composition that she calls the "severest" toil when she would write down "not only the action of the personages and the features of the scene, but all the political economy which it was their business to convey, whether by exemplification or conversation,—so as to

absorb all the materials provided" (*Autobiography* I, 195). Writing the "descriptions," the "narrative," and "the argumentative or expository conversations" (*Autobiography* I, 195) was for her equally enjoyable and important for putting the tales together. To have characters arguing about, explaining, or reasoning out together a principle of political economy added some kind of social value to the principle itself in comparison to an authoritative statement in the "Summary." In fact, Martineau was a strong believer in argumentation, and her *Illustrations* provide plenty of proof for this. Her narrative captures precisely this *process* of dialogic argumentation rather than simply offering the readers ready-made principles. It is the narrative form, too, that forestalls destructive, riotous action: the conversations conducted in the tales keep the working-class characters out of trouble and facilitate their progress from the discursive economy of talking together to the political economy of working together. Then, for Martineau, political discussions (and narrative in general) are not only means to *illustrate* some theoretical principles, but they are a *precondition* of a properly functioning political economy in the first place.

Contemporary with the 1832 Reform Act, Martineau's *Illustrations* reflect her support of reform and her optimism about coming together and reasoning on political and economic issues. There is another tension, however, that organizes her work: on the one hand, an egalitarian aspiration for an inter-subjective dialogue based on the force of reason, and on the other, a patronizing stance of didactic moralizing. Martineau's *Illustrations* and other industrial stories maneuver between these two gestures. And she seems to package two in one quite seamlessly. Her work is representative of the overall sentiments experienced by the post-Reform Bill society: a patronizing gesture toward the poor along with a more egalitarian attitude. I will reconsider Martineau's didactic moralizing in her role of "governess to the nation," in Shelagh Hunter's words, and attempt to show how her commitment to a democratic communicative ethic does not

entirely fold into the authoritative, monologic structures of moralizing. I will show, however, that while Martineau's works are committed to the ideal of a pluralistic culture of discussion, the pedagogic purposes of her stories truncate this ideal by conferring the privilege of the "better" argument[9] only upon the narrator.

Martineau's moralizing message to the lower classes exemplifies a central feature of nineteenth-century techniques of political power, which Lauren Goodlad in her account of Victorian liberalism describes as pastorship. Borrowing from and simultaneously revising this Foucauldian term given the specificity of the English context, Goodlad characterizes pastorship as a "hallowed but contradictory concept of the social bond" (25). Namely, pastorship takes the form of a "reciprocal relation between morally equal actors"—a moral equality that both transcended and solidified economic inequality (Goodlad 25). But for Martineau, pastorship takes a different form. Her discussion scenes do not consolidate economic inequality under the pacifying guise of moral equality. In her dialogues, moral equality is not something assumed from the start, but rather something acquired in the process of reasoning together. As far as economic inequality, Martineau believed in the identity of interests between workers and employers and thus sidestepped the question of economic (in)equality altogether in her optimistic vision of a society where universal happiness was guaranteed by the laws of political economy.

The method and style of the *Illustrations* spawned a wide range of contemporary responses. As the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* remarked, "[f]ew writers have been rewarded with more praise and profit, few loaded with more censure and calumny" (41. 162 137). Reviewers were eager to comment on the awkward meshing of fiction and non-fiction, realistic portrayal and theory, instruction and imagination, unnatural dialogues and flat

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[9] See Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991. 54.

characters. Periodicals expressed reservations as to her intention to popularize theory through fictions: "although in her descriptions she may be allowed to 'exhaust worlds', she must not 'imagine new'" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 343). The *Dublin University Magazine* debunked her popularizing method: "notwithstanding her success, we remain fully persuaded that political economy is not a science capable of being taught by tales. [. . .] political economy is not distinguished from every other science by a capability of being illustrated by fictitious narratives" (558). In the same vein, another reviewer explained that Martineau's tales fall short of their educational purpose due to the limitations of the genre:

> They have been read as amusing tales, constructed with ingenuity and feeling; but, as illustrations of political economy, their only end has been to give to those who look no farther  the information contained in the lucid summaries at the close of the volumes; while those who really desire to obtain an adequate insight into this yet infant subject are but the more imperatively convinced that such knowledge is only to be gained by serious and sedulous reading of the best authors. (*New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 41.162 148)

The *Monthly Magazine, or, British Register* was also skeptical about Martineau's innovation and addressed it from the perspective of her audience: "It may be all very well [. . .] to insinuate principles of political economy into a tale which shall have popular requisites to recommend it; by these means [. . .] the philosophical authoress may contrive (not to kill, we trust, but) to bring down "two birds with one stone [sic]; and, while she secures the political economist, to bag at the same time the novel-reading spinster; but the effect of her labours is another question" (470). In the age of specialized literary production as well as specialized audiences, Martineau was a muddling transgressor of genres and naively optimistic in her desire to address "*all*."

The press stoked criticism about her blend of fiction and theoretical doctrines. The argument went that Martineau's fiction could only cloud the "lucid" principles of political economy, while understanding of political economy was believed to be gained through intellectual exertion over tracts, not tales. Yet, Martineau was convinced that her work could not have taken any other form.  When she reflected on her own writing, she admitted that form is organically linked to the "thought."  She explains this connection in a "Preface" to her collection of miscellanies by saying that each piece "presents the thought with which my mind was engrossed at the time; and, in each case, the thought fashioned for itself the form in which it should appear" (*Miscellanies* iii). Then, her "thought" also determines the form of *Illustrations*, where both the fictional story and the "lucid" summary of principles are essential to the form. Furthermore, Martineau held against any recommendations to modify the form of *Illustrations* very adamantly. She writes that her publisher Charles Fox once met with James Mill "who had assured him that my method of exemplification,—(the grand principle of the whole scheme) could not possibly succeed; and Mr. Fox now required of me to change my plan entirely, and issue my Political Economy in a didactic form! Of course, I refused" (*Autobiography* I 169). If the form of *Illustrations* is something other than "a didactic form" advised by Mill, it suggests that the tales perform if not a function completely different from didactic instruction, then not entirely contained by the term. Deborah Logan defines Martineau's *Illustrations* as "didactic fiction designed both to entertain and instruct" ("Introduction," *Illustrations* 26). If so, Martineau envisions the process of instruction through some alternative to a "didactic form," and her insistence on a combination of fiction and non-fiction seems to open for her this possibility. Fictional conversations are the sites of exchange of ideas and arguments. Once the characters master the dynamics of a *discursive* exchange (by learning to listen to the other's opinions,

articulate their own, and find common ground), they would more readily understand their roles, this time, in the *economic* exchange of labor and goods.

Reviews perceived Martineau's popularizing project as a work in which the fictional elements were largely compromised by theoretical-scientific overload, but this same "flaw" enhanced the expediency of Martineau's moralizing strategy which shaped her narrative and her relationship with the readers. She was often condemned as an author of downright bad fiction. The *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* criticized Martineau's failure to create realistic characters noting that "the peculiar nature of the subjects chosen by the [. . .] author has contributed greatly to contract the sphere of her inquiry into the diversities of mankind: for the most part her characters are divided into two great *genera*—the one character is prudent, honest, and enlightened—the other is reckless, embruted, and criminal" (148). The review continues with a sharp criticism of what Martineau calls her "argumentative or expository conversations":

> her dialogue offends verisimilitude—she writes more simply when she narrates, than when she causes her labourers and her fishermen to speak in their own persons. It is easy to see her benevolent and wise purpose in making the poor themselves speculate on truths, rather than be lectured by others into instruction. [. . .] All this is very sensible; but to fiction in its most sensible shape we must still apply the rules of fiction; and we cannot help feeling that however oracular the doctrine, the footman is not the fitting Pythius to promulgate it. (149)

While the *New Monthly Magazine* recognized Martineau's emphasis on dialogic deliberation as a means to discover the truths of political economy, the *Literary Examiner* saw the tales as a monologic discourse of prepackaged truths: "We wish every workman in the Island had this tract in his hand, for its clear and agreeable lessons would soon be fixed in his head" (164). Similarly,

the *Metropolitan Magazine* saw her work as a drill of "all the morals those tales have essayed to inculcate" (106). The *Literary Gazette* used the same diction praising "the simple yet great truths" Martineau's tales "inculcate" (473).

At the same time, Martineau's commitment to an equal deliberation could not neatly fit into the overall moralizing frame. Shelagh Hunter offers a more nuanced understanding of Martineau's moralism than the notion voiced by many reviewers of mere "inculcation" or "fixing" of ideas in the heads of the readers. "Martineau's conception of a 'Moralist'," Hunter writes, "was of a writer who could enlist the reader in the process of his own educated change" (56). Martineau wants to initiate an independent agency of her readers, even if inspired by her moralizing prescriptions. Taking off from Hunter's observation, I will show that throughout her tales Martineau's complex position as an author implies simultaneously reciprocal, dialogic, and equal terms with her readers and an elevated platform of a moralist.

Rather than imposing abstract principles with condescension, Martineau oftentimes assumed a more equal footing with her audience. It was a must for Martineau to know the workers' lives from the inside, yet she was never quite confident in her knowledge. The working masses were the part of her audience that she was most concerned with.[10] The multitude was her addressee and at the same time the source of factual information for her tales. In a 1832 letter to William Tait (the editor of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* that gave Martineau's work favorable reviews), Martineau referred to herself as "the annalist of the Poor" (Sanders 38). For instance, Martineau wrote "A Manchester Strike" with the help of the "bundle of documents" received from the Manchester operatives who "were eager to interest me in their controversies about

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[10] Ian Haywood in his book *The Revolution in Popular Literature* remarks that the cost of Martineau's *Illustrations* accounted for a "predominantly middle-class readership" (125). At the same time, I want to emphasize that looking for effective ways to address a working class audience constituted for Martineau a most urgent matter.

Machinery and Wages" (*Autobiography* I 215). She was happy to find rapport with the

Manchester operatives, especially when they regarded the tale to have been written by one who

had "'spent all her life in a cotton-mill'" (216): "I considered it a compliment, when I found I

was supposed to have been relating my own experience" (*Autobiography* I 217). However, later

in life, she is more anxious about the relationship with her audience. In 1849, she writes in a

letter about the urge "to use the power attributed to me of enlightening the restless and

malcontent among the people" (Sanders 116). Yet, she admits to her own helplessness a couple

lines below: "But I don't in the least know how to reach these people" (Sanders 116). This

timidity and respect for the little-known social other adds some nuances to Martineau's

moralizing. Instead of condescending with her enlightened authority to the masses, she modifies

this route. For her depicting characters who converse on an equal footing with one another

becomes as important as the authoritative ethos of "lucid" summaries at the end of the tales. In

her tales, the principles of political economy are not imposed from the start, but arrived at in the

process of a mutual deliberation and *only then* instituted as guiding rules. Martineau's approach

is a turning point in conceptualizing the public sphere insofar as it points to a more democratized

and multi-vocal culture of discussion.

Martineau's tales occupy an ambivalent position in relation to the masculine realm of

political economy and the didactic monologic methods of conveying it to the public. Embracing

the dominant masculine stance, Martineau simultaneously introduces elements that unsettle these

norms. Critics have defined Martineau's tales as didactic literature. Elaine Freedgood calls

Martineau's tales "an impossible and inefficacious generic hybrid: realist myth" (36).  Referring

to *Illustrations* "didactic novellas"(383), Eleanor Courtemanche notes a contradiction between

their function as "illustrations" (in which stories of human experience illustrate "an abstract

law") and their claims to realism (in which "abstract law" is "inadequate" to account for "lived experience") (384). However, Martineau's didacticism does not belittle her subversive and democratic sensibilities. For instance, Caroline Roberts finds the strengths of Martineau's tales in that they subvert the obscure "dominant discourse" "of upper-class men" (15) by employing "feminine" writing techniques such as narrative (15-16). Roberts' comment about Martineau's use of narrative instead of abstract argument is important because it opens up a new mode of participating in the public sphere. Martineau is progressive not only in her own choice to *narrate* tales, but also in her choice to have her characters *narrate* their lived experiences to others who may occupy different social positions. She hints that story-telling is no only as valuable in the public sphere as argument is, but that narrating one's lived experiences from different social positions can move public discussion forward in ways that the long-privileged mode of argument cannot.

A reconsideration of the prevalence of "argument" in the public arena and recognition of other modes of political expression, like narrative, is a project that, Iris Marion Young claims, will make the public sphere more democratic and inclusive. Young's theoretical work on democracy exposes the structures of domination and exclusion behind such central concepts for discussion in the public sphere as "argument" and "common good"—the very concepts that resonate with Victorian rhetorical ideals of John Stuart Mill, Walter Bagehot, and in many ways Martineau herself. Young suggests that discussion about the "common good" often conceals a privileged social group that marginalizes others.  Appeals to "common good" imply that participants should share the same uniform premises—a condition that is hard to ensure in a multicultural society with social differences. Like "common good," "argument," too, carries exclusionary connotations in the public sphere. Alternative modes of political claim-making,

e.g., street protests, emotionally charged speeches, or testimonial narratives, do not get

recognized because they fall outside of the normative rational dispassionate argument. Relying

only on "argument" produces a problematic model where competing arguments on behalf of self-

interested groups do not create and value a bigger picture of society that we all share, after all.

Young refuses to see democratic discussion as either centered on the "common good" that is

blind to social difference or comprised of "arguments" on behalf of private interests that are

blind to a society shared with others. Young proposes an "alternative to either private interest

competition or difference-bracketing public discussion of the common good. This third way

consists in a process of public discussion and decision-making which includes and affirms the

particular social group positions relevant to issues. It does so in order to draw on the situated

knowledge of the people located in different group positions as resources for enlarging the

understanding of everyone and moving them beyond their own parochial interests" (109). With

Young's redefinition of the public sphere comes a new need to reconsider the accepted modes of

political expression.

Young notes that in order to gain a comprehensive point of view on an issue, participants

may have to start out from not having many views or experiences in common, yet willing to

orient toward common ground. And here, it is not arguments, but sharing each other's narratives

that builds the foundation for future dialogue. As Young explains, "narrative" serves an integral

part in a democratic process: "narratives can supply steps in arguments, but they can also serve

to explain meanings and experiences when groups do not share premises sufficiently to proceed

with an argument" (7). She challenges the exclusive status of argument in discussion and writes:

"sometimes forms of communication other than argument can speak across our differences to

promote understanding" (72). In light of Young's theory, Martineau's use of narrative serves not

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only the purpose of illustrating, but also imagining a more versatile public sphere that includes a variety of modes of argumentation and promotes understanding through narrative. Martineau intuits this political potential of narrative mode in the public sphere as we encounter in her tales not only theoretical argument, but also characters who narrate their lives. Face-to-face discussion scenes seem to be conducive to a wider range of discursive modes than the disembodied reason of theoretical tracts.

Martineau's interest in political economy begins with two industrial tales that precede the *Illustrations* by a few years.[11] "The Rioters; or, A Tale of Bad Times" and "The Turn-out; or, Patience the Best Policy" were written in the late 1820's, while the *Illustrations* came out in installments during 1832 and1833. As if to imply that her writerly instincts were always in tune with society's emergent needs, Martineau makes a point that this interest came to her before she even found a term for it: "I had not the remotest idea that I was meditating writing on Political Economy, the very name of which was either unknown to me, or conveyed no meaning" (*Autobiography* I 135). Reading the *Globe* newspaper, as she wrote in her autobiography, would get her interested in the "subject of Machine-breaking" (I 135). The dire conditions of cotton weavers, croppers, and framework-knitters fomented the rebellious sentiments in the industrial districts of England (Thompson 521-522). The first half of the nineteenth century is punctuated with social upheavals from Luddism (1811-1817) and the Peterloo massacre of 1819 to the unrest around 1830-1832 and the Chartist movement (1836-1848). E. P. Thompson describes this period as the time of unyielding political activity of the working classes (even though a quarter-century span of the Combination Laws forced most of this activity underground): "From 1817 until Chartist times, the central working-class tradition was that which exploited every means of

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[11] Ian Haywood aptly calls the two tales "rehearsals" for a tale "A Manchester Strike" from Martineau's *Illustrations*.

agitation and protest short of active insurrectionary preparation" (670). The aggravating social

polarization resulted in a chain of working-class protests. Martineau's discursive solution to this

problem is already articulated in her first industrial tale "The Rioters." If only the principles of

political economy could be delivered to the working classes in an accessible manner and

eventually become understood by all, the vicissitudes of economics would be tolerated better by

all classes.

Critics have noted that while in "The Rioters" the dialogic interactions between

characters seem poorly integrated and heavily lopsided as to which party has more sense and

thus the didactic force in the dialogue, the later tale features what Linda Peterson calls "a more

equal" dialogue.[12] "The Turn-out" focuses "on disputation not action" (Haywood 125). Even

though both tales are saturated with the moralizing tone of the narrator, the subtle evolution of

Martineau's dialogue is important. Martineau's gradual evolution of representation of political

discussion from asymmetrical moralistic lecturing to a more reciprocal rational dialogue traces

her evolving views on a larger debate in the public sphere.

I will examine "The Rioters," "The Turn-out," and "A Manchester Strike" from

*Illustrations*—a tale dealing with similar aspects of political economy—in order to trace

Martineau's evolving vision of communicative process. "The Rioters" is a first-person narration

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[12] Peterson characterizes Martineau's major technique in "The Rioters" as "a didactic dialogue"
(424). In "The Turn-out," as Peterson explains, the dialogue is "more equal" (428) "between Mr.
Wallace, a mill-owner, and Henry Gilbert, a spokesman for the workers" (428). This "more
equal" dynamic of conversation lies in the fact that "though Mr. Wallace's reasoning wins out, it
is only after Henry Gilbert fully expresses his frustration and grief" (428). Claudia Oražem's
reading of the two tales outlines the same trajectory. In "The Rioters," the dialogues between
Brett, one of the working class, changes his opinions on the riot under the relentless, didactic
explanations of the middle-class narrator. "Brett," Oražem writes, "is clearly driven by emotions
and his arguments are determined by the extreme poverty" (79), while the narrator "reasons
strictly logically" (79). In "The Turn-out," according to Oražem, the conversations are "much
better integrated into the narrative" (84), but the development of the dialogue is predetermined as
"the narrator consistently sides with the manufacturer's position" (85).

where the narrator is a middle-class Londoner who comes for a "commercial business" (17) visit to Manchester and unexpectedly finds the town caught up in social unrest and loom-breaking. Meanwhile, the narrator meets an impoverished local Mary Brett with a child in her hands and compassionately arranges a night's lodging for her at her neighbor's. Before long, the narrator witnesses a riotous mob and their scuffle with soldiers. The narrator engages in discussions with Mary Brett and her husband regarding machinery, employment, the cost of rioting, and the necessity of individuals to obey the laws in return for government's protection. Convinced by the narrator's arguments, Brett is no longer tempted by "bad people" "to riot" (100). By the same token, the narrator himself undergoes a change as a result of these discussions: "I had learned how to be thankful for daily bread" (24). He places an order for stockings with Mary Brett, which gives her means for sustenance, while his little daughter Mary makes her "sacrifice" by directing her potential birthday-party expenses to provide "potatoes, soup, and bread" (97-98) for seven poor families. Brett's sons—John and George—are taken to jail and put to trial for violence during the riot. Both of them luckily happen to escape punishment by death and, to the narrator's and Brett's joy, deeply repent their unlawful acts. The narrator closes the story with a moralizing message against "unlawful violence" (122) that corrupts the "minds" (122) of the community and impedes everybody's wellbeing. The narrator remains hopeful that a better understanding of economic questions by the working poor would help soothe the riotous spirit and sway the people from the influence of the "mischievous leaders of the mob" (121).

What is striking about this tale is just how unbalanced all the dialogues are. The narrator's opinions on the authority of law and the self-destructive nature of rioting do not even get a fair polemical battle with some alternative points of view from the workers. Instead, the narrator continuously dispels the ignorance and fallible logic (if any) when he leads long

discussions with the Bretts. Brett is a working-class character with whom the narrator converses the most and whom he most surely and irrevocably persuades into non-violence. Even Brett's sons' future is uncertain as they need to stay immune from the bad influence of other criminals while in prison. The sons were not as lucky as the father to be exposed to timely discussions with the narrator that would have opened their eyes to the futility of violence. After the narrator's compelling exposition against machinery-breaking, Mrs. Brett regrets the belated arrival of this instruction: "I wish my boys had heard all this before they got into such mischief" (42). The Bretts are little more than passive receptacles of the narrator's arguments, and their discussions are far from a reciprocal exchange of ideas. Brett's infrequent counter-arguments are easily relegated to the status of ignorance, misinformation, or a claim that fails a test by logic.

Enjoying his moral and intellectual supremacy, the narrator treats these conversations as a meticulous work of persuasion on his part. Even though he is often overcome by strong emotions and compassion, his main agency lies not in looking for solutions through sympathy, but rather through argumentation, explanation, and correction of misinformed opinions. Sympathy only prepares the ground for the narrator's communicative agency. The story is, indeed, punctuated with moments of elevated feeling. When the narrator sees Mary Brett's face "pinched by cold and misery"(7), he "could not help stopping to speak to her" (7). The sight of Mary Brett's dwelling and her own "destitute state" (10), the narrator confesses, "deeply moved my compassion" (10). When he sees Brett's sons get into a scuffle with a soldier, he is once again overtaken by feeling: "I really could not help wishing they might [escape from the soldier], so strong was the compassion excited by their famished and miserable appearance. I felt for the moment that their poverty almost excused their violence" (16). This "almost" is a remaining slim barrier that separates the narrator's perspective from that of the violent workers. Martineau's

intent, however, is not to break down this barrier. While compassion for the workers' destitution is crucial for her, *nothing* can be an excuse for violence. Rather than letting sympathy loose in justifying violence, the tale intends to channel sympathies and reasoning into cultivating non-violent workers. Later, the narrator is at times overwhelmed with sympathy, but it never goes as far as to justify violence. After the two youths are arrested, we get another indication of an emotional outburst: "I could bear no more" (16). In the end, when the narrator and Brett come to visit Brett's two sons in prison, the narrator reaches another emotional peak: "I drew back instantly, but not till the agony of their farewell had struck on my very heart" (121). The narrator does not so much propagate an image of himself as the eighteenth-century man of feeling, but rather as the nineteenth-century sympathetic, yet pragmatic and articulate social reformer.

His agency in the dialogues is not that of overpowering dominance, but rather a sophisticated tactic of timely and firm interventions into the other's thinking, which gives an effect of less direct persuasion, yet insures complete control of discussion. When it comes to discussion, the narrator avoids the formula "the more the better" as he realizes that argument and persuasion should be applied in different contexts with discretion and tact. His careful assessment of the situation is indeed impressive. He seems to know exactly the right time to moralize (or rationalize) and when to put it off; he manages to prevail in every discussion in the story and what seems to have begun as a dialogue soon assumes the format of a lecture with insignificant intermissions; he never loses hold of actively managing his conversations by projecting the outcomes of his speeches and making notes of the individual transformations he observes. These tactics begin from the very scene where the narrator meets Mary Brett and helps the distressed woman find food and comfort for the night at her neighbor's. He knows that his words would not find resonance with a mind overtaken by emotions:

I thought it useless to argue with, and cruel to reprove, one suffering so bitterly

from want; and I therefore let her words pass without observation for the present;

determining, however, to reason with her, and to correct her erroneous notions of

the cruelty of the masters in employing machinery, at a more favorable time,

when the exasperation of mind which her destitute condition excited, should have

subsided. (11)

The narrator conflates here two modes of reasoning: reasoning *with* Mary Brett and *corrective*

reasoning over Mary Brett's erroneous notions. Ironically, the narrator as much as Mary Brett

has preconceived notions about political economy that he brings into discussion. However, his

initial knowledge of the "correct" notions counts as the power of reasoning in the tale's

framework. Had there been a narrator less confident in his own rightness and more willing to

bring the workers' argument to the necessary level of articulateness, the dynamics of the

conversation would have been quite different.

As a stranger in Manchester, the narrator speaks very little in the beginning (mostly

asking questions to get more information about the people and the situation). Mary Brett goes

into quite detailed descriptions of herself, her home, and her family, and the narrator merely

interposes a question or two. But when the narrator gets an opportunity to express his opinions to

Brett, and when it comes down to explanations of political economy, the roles are reversed.

During these conversations (formally, dialogues, but for the most part, monologues), the narrator

prevails, and the characters respond or object only occasionally. The beginning of the narrator's

conversation with Brett is rather forced, not mutually desired. The narrator promises to bring

Brett food, saying "and then I dare say you will hear what I think about rioting" (20). That same

evening, the narrator diligently stops by again and notices that after dinner "the immediate fear

of starvation was removed" (26). The narrator snatches the opportunity: "I thought this would be a favorable time for some conversation on the subject of rioting" (26). Indeed, reasoning with a well-fed Brett seems like an opportune moment for the narrator. Because Brett's immediate needs are met, there seems to emerge a sense of equality. Now the narrator and Brett can converse as peers and be detached from such factors as the physical pain of hunger.

This moment of initial equality does not flourish into a democratic deliberation but still demonstrates Martineau's drawing on the hierarchical moralizing modes of discussion. First, from a purely quantitative perspective, Brett does not get to utter as many words as the narrator does, which already formally creates an asymmetrical exchange. Second, the narrator takes the lead in the conversation to a point where he begins to fashion Brett's potential responses *for* him:

> "Very well: we will suppose all the machinery abolished [. . .] so you are quite contented, and think all the mischief is over [. . .]. After a while, however, your employer's agents write him word that he is undersold in the markets [. . .]. You say you won't work for lower prices [. . .]. But if all [manufacturers] are undersold, who undersells them? Why, the foreign manufacturers. 'The foreign manufacturers!' you exclaim; 'why, we used to manufacture better than they'. Ay, they *used* to do so; but now they have made great improvements in their machinery [. . .]. 'O, if that be all,' you say, 'their prosperity won't last long: they will overstock the markets [. . .]. At length, however, you have the satisfaction of hearing that trade is very bad abroad; and you say, 'I knew 'twould be so; I said they would overstock the market." [. . .] you hope your turn is coming at last. But no: [. . .] your trade is gone for ever." (38)

This leads to Brett's ultimate surrender to the narrator's impeccable argument for machinery: "you seem to understand this matter better than I do" (39). Brett is put in a passive position to be "struck" (34) by or to acknowledge the superiority of the narrator's reasoning. Even though the narrator has taken care to clear the discussion from such physiological factors as Brett's hunger, their exchange is clearly hierarchical. On the one hand, the narrator seems to appeal to Brett under a certain liberal premise that every opinion deserves to be heard; but on the other hand, the situation seems to be a case of gaining one's compliance after one is put in "tolerable comfort" (26) and provided with the immediate basic needs (i.e., tonight's dinner). The outcome is a dogmatic imposition of a certain viewpoint espoused by Martineau.[13] Her moralizing tale cannot enact a scenario where there could be disagreements about political economy itself (such as if two political economists, e.g., M'Culloch and Smith, were to argue about the validity of distinction between productive and unproductive labor). Martineau fashions her often heavy-handed dogmatism as a mutual understanding around the irrefutable laws of political economy—a kind of good-natured consensus, just like the laws of political economy that harmonize the economic world. It seems that behind the moralizing Martineau, there is also the democratic Martineau who wants her argument to win fairly in an equal dialogue.

The narrative showcases the effectiveness of face-to-face dialogues over futile attempts to reason with a potentially violent crowd. The narrator refrains from interacting with a crowd only to witness another man play out this scenario. When faced with "a dark mass" of rioters (45), he keeps his distance and only observes Mr. Melville's (the magistrate's) address to the mob that dramatically spirals out of control. The magistrate is the narrator's less successful foil

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[13] Claudia Oražem gives a detailed account about Martineau's specific economic position and her adherence to Adam Smith's tenets (e.g., on the distinction between productive and unproductive labor), despite J. R. M'Culloch's objections (113-115). At the same time, Martineau is a complete supporter of David Ricardo's theory of rent (108).

when it comes to a dialogue with the poor. His "loud and clear" (51) voice seems to capture the attention of the rioters as he tries to offer them his arguments, similar to the narrator's efforts with Brett. However, the magistrate's message to them about "how earnestly your masters wish to relieve your wants" (51) gets antagonistic cries in response until the situation reaches a climax: "But he might as well have spoken to the raging sea; not a syllable could be heard, and brickbats flew in all directions" (52). As reasoning with a violent mob is shown to be a failed enterprise, the story seems to consistently turn its focus onto scenes of face-to-face dialogues—the ones between the narrator and the Bretts. These discussions go longer and get farther because they manage to channel mass violence into individual agency. Unlike the magistrate's conversation with the hungry and infuriated mob, the narrator's conversations with the Bretts take place outside of social factors (e.g., Brett's anger is taken care of when he converses with the narrator and his dwelling is in much better shape than in the past). But it does not mean that the narrator and the Bretts converse with one another in a completely abstract sphere of political-economic theory. All of them still embody a strong sense of class, vocation, family role etc., and not to a degree that forecloses a dialogue, but to a degree that poses surmountable challenges in their debates. Their discussions move freely between the everyday experience of the Bretts' life and the abstract principles of political economy. The discursive practice Martineau showcases through these discussion scenes links effectively the abstract rules and the lived experience of the characters.

Against the magistrate's failures, the narrator's instruction of the Bretts displays an effective rhetorical model. The narrator dominates the dynamics of the dialogue and carefully monitors his persuasive agency. He initiates discussions, sets out goals for them, expresses his intentions, and remarks on the effects on others from his conversations. What he ultimately

pursues seems to be an enlarged understanding among the working-people about the effects of their ignorant actions: "I perceived how much ignorance and error prevailed among the poor, and into what fatal violence they had been led for want of understanding what injury they were doing to their masters and themselves by their frantic proceedings" (26). In other words, the narrator ingratiates himself into someone who can fix just that—the want of understanding. The narrator readily sums up what exactly Brett, and his sort, should understand: "But I think, now, he has heard enough to convince him, at any rate, that such affairs as these [rioting] should not be decided on in a hurry; and that it is not so certain as some people think, that machinery could do nothing but harm. Haven't you Brett?" (42). We never learn Brett's answer, but we know that the silence in the text is fraught with optimism. At the same time, Brett does not have an analogous "summary" of what he wants the narrator to take away from the discussion. This further aggravates the asymmetry.

Martineau celebrates the pragmatism of the narrator by showing the amount of practical planning and effort that goes into seemingly spontaneous day to day conversations. We come across a passage in which the narrator analyzes his own progress and holds himself accountable for the Bretts' transformation:

> Here I left him [Brett]. I hoped that what I had been saying would produce some good effect, though I had not entered upon the most important considerations which I could have urged. I determined that I would not lose sight of this family till I had quite cured them of all inclination towards their own destruction. I had cleared the way by showing that nothing was to be gained in the way of trade by present violences; and I meant to point out, at a future time, the crime, and its dreadful and deserved consequences. (44)

From the particular case of the Bretts to the large numbers of the working poor, the narrator believes that it is through discussion and better economic literacy that society can regain its lost wellbeing. The narrator reflects: "This social order will, I trust, be restored: and the first step towards its restoration must be to convince the people that they are working their lasting ruin by their present violence" (57). The work of "convincing" reveals Martineau's tension between didacticism and an equal dialogue. While there is a hierarchy between the one who convinces and the one who is being convinced, the success itself largely depends upon getting feedback from the interlocutor. "The shout of destruction or despair" (57) should be replaced by "convincing" dialogues modeled by the narrator. Martineau almost tries too hard to ensure that the narrator's opinion comes on top of anything that Brett has to say. Just as she creates a predictable universe ruled by the laws of political economy, so does she create predictable dialogues that give her a sense of comfort. The consensus that ensues gives further comfort that a reasonable argument can find its way into the minds of everybody.

The narrator's work of "convincing" entails not only the abilities to argue, but also to listen. We see in him an attentive listener as he overhears a conversation between Hannah Brett's grandfather and a woman: "It was my object just now to learn as much of the situation and prospects of the poor as possible, and I determined to lose no opportunity of conversing with them that came in my way" (70). Instead of moralizing, the narrator learns some useful information, namely that the two youths he had seen taken to prison from the riot were the young Bretts. Through the story, he maneuvers between two modes: the one of an instructive interlocutor, and the other of a quiet observer. This dual agency represents Martineau's own aspirations: on the one hand, to collect facts about the life of the "workies," and on the other, to conduct an instructive dialogue with them. A few pages later, we see the narrator silently

stepping to the background again—this time to be a tactful teacher. After his speech on the advantages of laws and the obligations of citizens to submit to them, the narrator falls into silence only to better observe how his message sinks into Brett's mind: "Mr. Brett pondered upon what I had said. I left him to his own thoughts for a few moments, and then continued" (94). This moment is Brett's rebirth into a liberal individual. Brett's transformation is complete when the narrator hears from Mary that her husband no longer joins the rioters. The narrator tells Mary that he has conscientiously made every effort to talk Brett out of violence: "I did all I could to prevent it" (100). The narrator suppresses Brett's inclinations for riot by means of the illuminating power of face-to-face reasoning. At this interpersonal level, Martineau begins to see larger social and economic solutions.

But if for her an interpersonal culture of political discussion is the key to transforming society as a whole, her choice to convey this message through an impersonal medium of a mass-printed tale remains puzzling. Arguably, Martineau (while still believing in the power of face-to-face encounters) already looks nostalgically at this ideal and complies with the communicative technologies of the emergent mass society. This nostalgic look backwards to the face-to-face ideal of democracy, yet an acceptance of a medium that is opposite of this ideal creates a kind of uneven development within literary production. Her tale, promoting a face-to-face political discussion, may well have served as the latter's main impediment. The increasingly individualized and private practice of reading fiction in the nineteenth century would isolate workers from one another as well as workers from the middle classes. Then, the effect of Martineau's tales would be not only channeling the workers' violent action into a discursive action, but ultimately foreclosing on the possibility of any collective action.

However, as Haywood shows with the example of the Chartists' *Northern Star*, the high costs of the publication actually fostered "collective reading habits" (143) since individual purchases were outside the realm of a worker's possibilities well into the 1840's. Besides, Martineau's political economy tales had much better chances of making their way to the shelves of Mechanics' Institutes' libraries than less useful fiction.[14] Reading at the libraries also suggests that the workers' encounters with her tales had a more collective character than private reading later in the century. This leads one to conclude that the medium of a printed tale neither entirely inhibited the face-to-face political discussion among the actual workers, nor effectively promoted it. Along with other authors I discuss in subsequent chapters, Martineau found herself caught between nostalgia for idyllic democratic ideals and the advent of new mediated networks of communication. Hence, her solution sounds somewhat paradoxical: the promotion of unmediated discussion through the printed medium of works of fiction.

Already in "The Rioters" we can see a tension that runs through Martineau's later works. In the tale, monologic moralizing jars against a more equal, dialogic method of discussion. The narrator's moralizing tone finds its justification in that he should impart knowledge upon the ignorant. Martineau's dialogues are propelled forward by the knowledge of one of the parties over the other. However, besides the knowledge/ignorance axis,[15] Martineau introduces in her

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[14] See Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (197).

[15] Greg Myers in his article "Science for Women and Children: The Dialogue of Popular Science in Nineteenth Century" describes a tradition of didactic literature for children written by popularizers of scientific knowledge. This body of literature includes works by Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Marcet, Richard and Maria Edgeworth, and John Ruskin among others. While scientific knowledge had to be transformed and perhaps simplified in order to educate females and children, Martineau's popularizing project also shares a lot of textual techniques with this tradition, in my opinion, insofar as she searched for ways to deliver the knowledge of political economy to the working classes (similarly excluded from scientific knowledge as

tale something else: the culture of argumentation. The narrator does not simply know more than

Brett does, but can make a stronger case for his ideas. Their conversations turn into mutual

efforts to trace one another's arguments and agree on whatever argument stands the test of

reason. The tongue-tied Brett finds out that the narrator's arguments fare better than his own.

Martineau wants to stage an exchange of opinions that would result in a mutual agreement

around the better argument. Yet, the artificiality of Martineau's dialogues lies in the fact that the

narrator's arguments are always in a position too secure and unchallenged by anything that Brett

is ever capable of articulating. Martineau's culture of argumentation is significantly

compromised when we can predict the "better" argument from the start. Outside of the laws of

political economy, the characters in her tales have no chances of constructing a successful

argument. While Martineau's aspirations for a better argument reflect her progressive

sentiments, the fact that the best argument always aligns with her agenda short-circuits the very

process of democratic argumentation that the story endeavors to illustrate. She seems to be

invested both in the stability and predictability of the "best" argument as well as in a free and

equal discussion—two opposing elements that are hard to conjoin.

The tension between Martineau's desire to instill her (i.e. correct) ideas in the minds of

others and her commitment to fair argumentation translates into her representations of face-to-

face encounters. For her, interpersonal conversations (and not, e.g., addresses to the mob) are the

locus where mutual understanding is sure to come about. Martineau fashions consensus as a

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women and children). Myers discusses two forms of dialogues—didactic and Platonic. The first
"dialectical, exploratory" model (as in Robert Boyle's *The Sceptical Chymist* (1661)) represents
"opposing views on a scientific or philosophical issue" (174), while the second didactic model
represents "ignorance and knowledge: the learner who knows nothing, and the teacher who
knows everything" (174). In my opinion, although "The Rioters" is for the most part a series of
didactic dialogues, she is already bringing in some changes into this model with her incipient
desire to contrast opposing viewpoints to reveal the best argument in the course of a discussion.

mutual agreement, not imposed from above but arrived at through explanation and understanding. The face-to-face encounters between the narrator and the Bretts seem to be successful instances of how a reasonable thought engenders consensus among all. The Bretts even wish they would have heard it sooner. But the text seems to work against itself because in spite of the fact that Martineau intuits political potential in face-to-face dialogues, they are surprisingly devoid of interpersonal dynamics and read more like a disembodied, faceless voice of political economy interrupted by minor utterances from the Bretts'. It was clearly a challenge for Martineau to integrate her theoretical dogmas into the face-to-face everyday conversations. For her, the understanding of political economy begins at the interpersonal level, when the narrator can directly address Brett, and not in the abstract discourse of theory. We are left imagining what kind of face-to-face encounter Martineau means to represent through her dialogues since to some degree it was beyond the capabilities of the genre to represent.

All in all, a gesture toward democratic argumentation that we may recognize in the story is humbled by the asymmetry and predetermination in the dialogues. The discussion scenes are not testing grounds for Martineau's ideas, but rather safe havens for them. Having said this, I think there is a danger of oversimplification in seeing Martineau's communicative ethics only as a quasi-dialogical didacticism. We can see this, if we further trace Martineau's ideas on the practices of political discussion in "The Turn-Out" (1829), "A Manchester Strike," but no less importantly in "Essays on the Art of Thinking" (1829).

"The Turn-out; or, Patience the Best Policy" develops a more complex network of negotiations and arguments than "The Rioters," and if it was not for lack of the "Summary of Principles" at the end, the tale would easily pass for one of Martineau's later tales of political economy. Preoccupied with the question of wages, the tale depicts a Yorkshire town where slack

trade has caused a decline in the spinners' wages and hence their discontent. The brothers Henry and James Gilbert find themselves on opposing sides of the turn-out issue. Henry becomes the leader of the turn-out and firmly believes in the rightness of the action, whereas James wants to make up his judgment only after carefully listening to the arguments from his brother Henry and his employer Mr. Wallace (since "there is a great deal to be said on both sides" (105)). A desire for "fair discussion" (78) and "fair argument" (98) seems to be shared by everyone in the story, and the need to determine the right course of action for the operatives becomes ever more pressing when the turn-out funds dwindle away as fast as the winter approaches. During the decisive meeting at the Mill-Field, Henry's exciting slogan to "BE FIRM" (120) is superseded by Wallace's explanation of the economic causes and effects in the spinning trade and the force of his argument for returning to work. James drives the moral of the tale home by summing it up: "any thing is better than a TURN-OUT" (128).

This time, Martineau does not simply put the truths of political economy into the master's mouth, letting the workers absorb them like a sponge. Rather, the workers (Henry, James, and the "plain" man (77) who opposes Henry's speeches, among others) are more actively engaged in discussing the matters. Martineau makes the operatives more articulate compared to the Bretts in "The Rioters" and in doing so attempts to set the stage for the very fair argumentation that she espouses. Besides, if in "The Rioters" the crux of the narrative is the dialogue between the narrator and the Bretts, in "The Turn-out" political discussion is more decentralized and multifaceted in a sense that we see a whole range of arguments being pitted against each other by characters of varying convictions and those who still have to make up their own judgment. For example, on his fund-raising travel to Leicester, Henry Gilbert tries the force of his arguments

against his accidental carriage companion,[16] a hosier from Derby, and later witnesses the state of

depravity of his unemployed cousin George. But at home, too, Henry faces opposition from "a

plain man, who could only state plain facts in the plainest way" (120) and whose counter-

arguments always curtail the effect of Henry's exciting speeches. When his opinions are

challenged, Henry reverts back to his position and holds on to it even at the expense of a fair

discussion: "like most other people, he suffered his judgment to be biased by his interests, and

not only recurred to his old opinions, but half determined that he would avoid argument in future,

for fear he should again be troubled with doubts" (98). While Henry is adamant in his opinions,

James Gilbert weighs out the arguments on both sides, listening to his brother's appeals for

workers' rights and also heeding to Mr. Wallace's explanations of wages, trade, and supply of

labor. Thus, the story portrays a whole network of inter-related as well as parallel political

discussions that seek out the best argument between the "two sides."  When the characters in the

tale get together to reason with each other face-to-face, Martineau drives the story to a happy

ending where any difference of opinion is resolved by "fair argument."

      While in "The Rioters" the didactic dialogue revolves primarily around the

knowledge/ignorance axis, and the conversations in "The Turn-out" tone down the heavy-handed

didacticism, in the *Illustrations* Martineau reflects further on her ideal of a fair dialogue. In "A

Manchester Strike," unlike in "The Rioters," the lines between knowledge and ignorance no

longer neatly follow the class lines. If in "The Rioters," the middle-class narrator represents

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[16] Given Martineau's interest equally in the content of her fictional conversations and their
setting, the scene of Henry's encountering a stranger in a carriage is quite peculiar.
Transportation becomes not only a space of closer mixing between classes or a space of a
temporary suspension of one's class position, but also a space where a sense of a nation
(consisting of strangers who are now becoming increasingly connected) comes to the fore. The
dynamics of a conversation between strangers seem to be appealing to Martineau as she portrays
Henry and the Derby hosier engaged in a mutually stimulating dialogue.

knowledge and the working-class Bretts represent ignorance, in this other tale about Manchester the middle-class Wentworth and the working-class Allen are the ones who talk sense as opposed to the rest whose politics are self-destructive and illiterate from the perspective of political economy. While didacticism still supports the overall framework of the tale, Martineau seems to be much more interested in the process of negotiation rather than indoctrination. In this regard, her shift from a first-person narration in "The Rioters" to a third-person narration in "The Turn-out" and "A Manchester Strike" is symptomatic of her desire to take a detached stance on opposing views without privileging one middle-class perspective over others as it happens in "The Rioters."

In the various discussion scenes of "A Manchester Strike," Martineau wants to imagine possibilities either for consensus or polemics that would separate reasonable points from nonsense. But the expected consensus between Wentworth and Allen does not usher in a new happy world. The narrative dramatizes a sharp contrast between its "sanguine" tone, Martineau's optimistic belief in the harmonizing forces of political economy, on one hand, and the grim reality of Allen's social condition, on the other (Gallagher 61). While a big part of her optimism comes from her conviction that the economic interests of masters and men are identical, another part of this optimism has to do with her conviction that an honest reciprocal dialogue can turn things around. A kind of "plain speaking" (189), as Allen once puts it, becomes for Martineau an important element that is an important supplement to her political-economic principles. While we already see glimpses of "plain speaking" demonstrated by a "plain" man in "The Rioters," it becomes more prominent in "A Manchester Strike." The ideal of "plain speaking" emerges in "A Manchester Strike" as something that is not wholly reduced to the economic principles, yet something that is a means to implementing her politico-economic world. Although her

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"Summary of Principles Illustrated in This Volume" does not touch upon "plain speaking," I suggest that in the tale itself Martineau becomes an advocate of a practice of "plain speaking" that could take place between such worthy agents as Allen and Wentworth—but which ironically forecloses on this ideal in the end.

Tension floats in the Manchester air when the Trade Union's members decide to produce a petition to the masters for a public meeting in order to demand equalization of wages. A popularity-hungry Union leader Clack is the mastermind of the preparations for the strike. The Spread-Eagle, a local pub, becomes a place of debates and a headquarters from which Clack wants to coordinate the actions of the Union members. If for Clack a strike is a matter of revenge against the masters, Allen looks at it as a necessary evil "in defence of the rights of the working-man" (145). The deputies from the Union (Clack, Taylor, and Gibson) decide to collect employers' signatures on their petition but have little luck collecting them, except for Mr. Wentworth's. In addition to his signature, however, Wentworth gives the deputies an expository talk about the interdependence of wages and the supply of labor. Allen is elected by the operatives to become the Chair of their Committee thanks to his abilities to "express himself with moderation in speech, and with ease on paper" (165). The negotiations between the masters and the operatives, however, result in "no progress made" (170). Meanwhile, Allen's daughter Martha, sick from cotton dust at the factory, witnesses the beginning of a strike. While Allen solicits support of the strike from outside regions, he also becomes frustrated with the "ill-natured tittle-tattle" (181) that the Committee breeds as well as Clack's jealousy of his position. There follows another failure to achieve a compromise, when Allen's "tete-a-tete" conversation with the cowardly Mr. Rowe falls through.

The tale proceeds to feature Mr. Wentworth's speeches to the workers on the detriment of

a strike, on the preventive check to make the economic crises less damaging to their families, and

on the connection between the supply of labor and the rate of wages. Like Allen, Wentworth

enjoys respect from the workers. Meanwhile, Allen's family's destitution forces Allen to sell

Martha's bird Billy. The turn-out runs out of funding, and a decision is reached: the masters will

pay the medium wages, while the workers promise "their peaceable adherence to the Union"

(112). But Allen is a "marked man in Manchester" (211) now with no chance of obtaining work.

Wentworth explains to Allen that he cannot offer him employment because he is not employing

as many people as he used to. Allen—"the leader of an unsuccessful strike" (215)—ends up

working as a street-sweeper. Martineau concludes with a compelling question that further

underlines the discrepancy between the tale's grim content and her optimistic tone:[17] "When will

masters and men work cheerfully together for their common good, respect instead of proscribing

each other, and be equally proud to have such men as Wentworth and William Allen of their

fellowship?" (215). Thus Wentworth and Allen—who would be ideal candidates to model a

dialogue of reconciliation between the employers and the operatives—can hardly celebrate the

laws of political economy together.

The scenes of political discussion in *A Manchester Strike* (whether it is Clack instigating

the Union members for a strike, Allen pressing against Mr. Rowe's cowardliness, or Mr.

Wentworth explaining the intricacies of the free market to the Union delegates) represent a

synthesis of abstract laws and an embodied face-to-face encounter. On the one hand, Martineau's

characters represent generic types—such as a self-interested employer (Rowe), an employer with

a sound knowledge of political economy (Wentworth), an operative who defends the workers'

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[17] See Catherine Gallagher *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (51-61).

rights, but also understands the mechanisms of the market (Allen), or a populist instigator (Clack). No wonder her characters seemed "flat" to a lot of her contemporary reviewers. But in Martineau's *Illustrations* the inner psychological depths do not matter when characters are little more than effects of the workings of abstract laws. In a note to *A Manchester Strike*, she writes: "The author hopes that as she has no acquaintance with any one firm, master, or workman in Manchester, she will be spared the imputation of personality. Her personages are all abstractions" (139). Martineau defines her characters as "abstractions" perhaps to better employ them in demonstrating abstract laws. Her disclaimer in part excuses her fiction from the aspiration of realism for character development and in part elevates the characters' discussions to a sphere of abstract principles. But while her characters are disembodied generalities, the tale puts a peculiar emphasis on the embodied intimacy of a face-to-face dialogue.

Indeed, the abstract laws of political economy rely on the level of everyday face-to-face dialogue. It is Allen's "moderation in speech" and "ease on paper" (165) and Wentworth's "argumentative manner of speaking" (199)—practical skills of everyday practice rather than abstract laws—that earn them public (and Martineau's) respect. Martineau arranges a "tete-a-tete" meeting between Allen and Mr. Rowe to give them a chance, although slim, of mutual understanding. For Martineau, the dynamics of face-to-face political discussions in the everyday context seem to be a necessary medium where her abstract laws are articulated, circulated, explained, and understood. For Martineau as a popularizer of economic theory, everyday discussion becomes extremely important because understanding (the light-bulb moment) happens only through everyday speech. In and of itself, everyday speech does not guarantee understanding and consensus. In fact, all the characters in the tale have access to everyday speech (except for Elliott who chooses to withdraw from communication with the Union

deputies), but only Wentworth and Allen can come really close to initiating these moments of understanding with others. Their communicative abilities are closely related to the integrity of their character. And yet, none of the tale's conversations are transformative, and in the end the Manchester world is as socially polarized and economically hostile as ever. Against this grim backdrop, Martineau still does not give up hope capturing the possibilities of the everyday political discussion through her narrative. Martineau thus intuits the same link between narrative and the everyday as the one theorized by Michel de Certeau who writes, " 'stories' provide the decorative container of a *narrativity* for everyday practices" ( *The Practice of Everyday Life* 70).

William Allen's arguments are those of moderation and common interests. Throughout discussions with the operatives and the mill-owners, he seems to share the perspective of both the workers who want to defend their living conditions and the mill-owners who have to take the necessary measures triggered by the laws of the market. In Allen's words, "both parties are so necessary to each other" (145)—a belief that Martineau held fast to. His statements produce an instant harmonization and elicit unanimous agreement. For example, at the Spread-Eagle pub, Allen responds to Clack's spiteful speeches with an argument that while any strike is an evil, it is reasonable to defend workers' rights, not take revenge. This logic instantly unites the people around as "[s]o many agreed in this opinion" (145). Allen seems to be able to articulate those ideas that people are already in tune with, even though they have not managed to articulate them first. In other words, Allen speaks their minds. The "debaters" (147), as Martineau calls them, automatically lean towards Allen's reasoning, when given a choice between Allen's moderation and Clack's retaliatory discourse.

Clack is a different kind of popular leader. Whatever Clack undertakes in his campaign against the masters seems caricatured and ranges from a lack of thorough reasoning to selfish

hubris and thirst for popularity. Martineau paints a humorous image of Clack's presiding in the Union Committee at the Spread-Eagle pub and feeling "big with importance" (149): "Having a very high opinion of his own powers of persuasion, and being confident of his knowledge of law, he wanted to be everywhere at once, and to guide all the movements of the people he employed" (149). In spite of Clack's important post in the Union, his antagonistic attitudes and war-instigating moves are restrained by a few with more sound opinions. For Clack, an obvious way out of the crisis is a war against the masters, rather than tedious negotiations between masters and operatives: "he would have proclaimed war against the masters at once, and the turn-out would have begun on the Monday morning: but there were a few soberer folks than himself engaged in the consultation [. . .]" (152). When three Union deputies, including self-appointed Clack, appeal to Mr. Rowe to sign their petition for a public meeting, Clack's confrontational tone is counterbalanced by Gibson's peaceful propositions:

> "[. . .] there is more than one kind of peace. The masters have called it peace when they had all their own way, and their men were cowed by the law and dared not openly resist. The men call it peace when the two parties have confidence in each other, and make a cordial agreement, and keep to it. This is what we want at the present time."
> So said Gibson, whose turn it was to be spokesman; but Clack could not help putting in his word.
> "And if either party refuses peace, you know, sir, the next thing is war."
> "O, no war!" said Mr. Rowe. "A cordial agreement, as you say, is the right thing. (154)

Here the workers are interested not so much in political economy, but in an ethical notion of "peace." By "peace" Gibson seems to imply not so much a kind of economic equilibrium, but an ethical stance of mutual recognition. In this dialogue, Martineau contrasts the logic of "war" to that of "a cordial agreement" to show just how volatile could be the tip of the scale without commitment to a fair argument.

But while the dialogue can turn just as easily into antagonistic polemics as into a mutual agreement, even a bigger problem arises when the very possibility for negotiation is stymied. The three Union deputies fail to get signatures for a public meeting, except for Mr. Wentworth's. This blank and soiled petition (contemptuously thrown by Mr. Elliott into the mud) speaks louder than words about the obstructed dialogue between the masters and the workers. As Gibson believes, "the soiled paper would tell part of their story better than they could tell it themselves" (156). The blankness of the sheet epitomizes not only economic, but most obviously communicative crisis between the two classes. The lonely signature by Wentworth shows up on paper as an outcome of a respectful discussion between him and the deputies. Wentworth's welcome of the deputies is different from that given by Rowe, Mortimer, and Elliott in significant ways. Rowe is set on his "escape" (154) hoping that he can avoid being noticed by the deputies; Mortimer shows clear signs of inhospitality judging by "[h]ow coolly he looked over the letter he took from his clerk" (155); and Elliott's interaction with them is similarly scarce of face-to-face dialogue as he first "glanced his eye over it [the petition] as well as the restlessness of his horse would permit" (156) and then "pranced down the street without bestowing another look or word upon them" (156). Wentworth's reception, in turn, suggests hospitality and consideration: "He looked steadily at them from under his shaggy eyebrows while they explained their business, and then took the petition to look over" (157). This moment

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of face-to-face encounter ensures an amicable, collaborative tone for the discussion between Wentworth and the three deputies.

Martineau assembles Wentworth's communicative qualities in such a way as to emphasize what it really takes to have a productive discussion. She contrasts what can be called his speech defect to his lucid arguments so as to show that well-articulated ideas do not necessarily have to be coated in well-articulated sounds. Moreover, the one who is willing to listen will somehow understand Wentworth. Wentworth is described as

> not much given to talk, and when he did speak, causing some surprise and weariness to strangers by the drawling twang of his speech. Those who knew him well, however, had rather hear his voice than any music; [. . .]. There was, to be sure, no need for so many words from him as from other people, for he practiced a great variety of inarticulate sounds, the meaning of which was well understood by those accustomed to converse with him, and deserved all the purposes of a reply. (157)

Wentworth has the ability to be understood and to speak sense even in spite of his speech that may seem at first as "murmurings and cluttering" (157). The mechanics of language cannot be in the way of Wentworth's ability of plain speaking. The ideal of plain speaking begins to surface in the tale as a kind of medium that always leads to mutual understanding, resolution, and agreement. By raising a question as to what counts as a comprehensible argument, Martineau suggests that even Wentworth's inarticulate sounds should have a place in the public sphere. Martineau's meticulous attention to Wentworth's voice seems to turn him into a voice *only*, thus taking away an aspect of his face-to-face interaction with his interlocutors. Wentworth's lecture on political economy to the three deputies heightens this duality: on the one hand, we know that

this is a face-to-face encounter, but on the other, Wentworth's voice becomes a pure logical argument, a voice only, rather than an embodied person. This paradox seems to lie at the core of how Martineau's fiction blends abstract theory and everyday lived experience.

Arguably, for Wentworth, what matters besides the principles of political economy is the economy of face-to-face recognition. Part of the crisis, according to Wentworth,   lies in that the masters and the men "have not learned to look steadily in honest faces" (164). Wentworth does not take up Clack's methodology of revenge and "war." Instead, Wentworth's politics of considering "the interests of all" (164) align more readily with Allen's convictions about the two classes being "necessary" (145) for one another. Wentworth's "argumentative manner of speaking" is represented in the tale as perhaps the most promising political tactic. During a public meeting with the men, Wentworth's mode of reasoning quickly gains respect. The workers value Wentworth's fresh views more than their own working-class leadership:

> Some of them had become a little tired of the weekly meetings at which their
> orators had said the same things over and over again, and were pleased to be
> reasoned with by one whom they esteemed, and to obtain, by these means, a
> better insight into their affairs than was given them by leaders who were all of one
> party. (199)

Martineau entertains here a possibility for an inclusive democratic discussion. She places value on the expediency of one's argument regardless of one's social attributes. What she is after is a standard of impartial argumentation that lies beyond party spirit. This universal standard of "plain speaking" seems to ruffle the social hierarchy because it can be obtained by anyone from the working-class Allen to the middle-class Wentworth.

Both Wentworth and Allen perform the role of "peacemakers" (174) coming from the two opposing sides. The similarities in their reasoning imply Martineau's conviction that from any social position one can agree with a reasonable argument. But antagonism prevails between the classes, and with "no chance of coming to any agreement" (174), the Manchester strike commences. It soon becomes apparent for Allen (as the leader of the strike) that the strike in and of itself breeds sentiments that perpetuate conflict rather than search for a reconciliation. The epicenter of such ill talk is the Union Committee itself: "He knew enough of such Committees to believe that ill-natured tittle-tattle was particularly apt to find its way into them, and that quarrels between masters and men were often kept up by these means long after they would naturally have died out" (181). He feels indignant about the narrow-mindedness of the party spirit that reigns among the workers:

> [. . .] it vexed him to the heart to hear evil motives assigned for every proposition which did not please the people. He often said to himself that it must be a very different thing to sit in a committee of gentlemen where opinions are treated as opinions, (*i.e.*, as having no moral qualities, and to be accepted or rejected according to their expediency,) and in a committee of persons who expose their deficiencies of education by calling all unkind or foolish who differ from themselves" (181).

Martineau creates an idealized picture of a gentlemen's circle where ideas are purified from their social context and treated in a disinterested and unbiased manner by the measure of "expediency." The workers' "gossip," "misrepresentations and scornful sayings" (181) about the masters undermine the standard of plain speaking that Allen adheres to and a steady look in the face that Wentworth believes in. Through Allen's indignation, Martineau seems to express her

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own feelings about the factors that are incompatible with plain speaking. Interestingly, for her, it is such rigid social markers as "gentlemen" and "education" that can assure this allegedly universal model of discussion. The problem here is that "gentlemen" like Mr. Rowe fall short of this ideal, whereas the working-class character Allen can fully comprehend and acknowledge the "committee of gentlemen" as an ideal.

In fact, the contrast between Allen and Rowe appears stark in the chapter "A Teté-a-Teté." Allen puts forth his way of plain speaking against Rowe's equivocations:

> "Just tell me plainly," said Allen, "since you seem to like plain speaking: will you yourself make a concession about raising the wages to a middle point, if we yield some of our demands of equal importance?"
>
> "Why, you see," replied Rowe, edging his chair closer, and filling Allen's glass,
>
> "I don't want to come forward the first in this kind of thing." (189)

The promising title of the chapter turns out to be a complete frustration of Martineau's hopes for face-to-face open dialogue because Allen and Rowe do not share the same commitment to plain speaking. In the tale, the dividing line between those like Allen who insist on openness and those like Rowe who are embroiled in self-interested artifice or those like Clack who see war as the only expedient seems to be just as crucial as the economic line dividing Manchester into masters and men.

One of Allen's strongest appeals for an open dialogue takes place during his address to the Union upon his recent election to lead the strike. His integrity manifests itself in that "His address was in natural accordance with the feelings which had just passed through his mind" (165). While Allen speaks openly and wins agreement from the workers, what is interesting about his address is that he offers two alternatives as to how political communication may

unfold. For him, a "battle" and an agreement between masters and men are the two options

between which he feels incompetent to make a choice. Allen speaks as follows:

> There may be some method yet unknown by which the interests of all may be
> reconciled; if so, by union we must discover it. But if, indeed, interests must
> continue to be opposed, if bread must be fought for, and the discord of men must
> for ever be contrasted with the harmony of nature, let the battle be as fair as
> circumstances will allow. (168)

Allen, who can speak in such a way that most of the listeners would agree with his reasoning and

who acts as a peacemaker by uniting everybody's interests, seems to be surprisingly vague about

achieving a harmonious agreement between men. Perhaps his indecisiveness as to which path to

take leads him to his pitiable state in the end. He fails due to his lack of persistence in

discovering this "method yet unknown."

The end of the story depicts a drab reality of Allen's street-sweeping job and leaves some

wish that "masters and men work cheerfully together for their common good" (215). This wish,

however, is precisely what Martineau fails to *illustrate* through her narrative. Strikingly

unsatisfactory and hopeless is the last conversation between Allen and Wentworth. Although

Allen understands that Wentworth cannot give him a job, there is something amiss about this

agreement and harmony. The world of Manchester seems to be as polarized as before, and the

unrelenting laws of political economy make the moments of "plain speaking" bitter-sweet. In

spite of such a grim conclusion in "A Manchester Strike," Martineau keeps coming back to

"plain speaking" in other tales. For example, a thematically similar tale "The Loom and the

Lugger" (which addresses the problems of contraband French silk and free trade among

countries) features a more optimistic scene of "plain speaking" in the conclusion. Mr. Culver, a

local silk manufacturer, and M. Gaubion, a French silk-manufacturer who settles in England, arrive at an amicable agreement that the laws of free trade and fair competition are beneficial to all sides. Importantly, this is not a melodramatic scene of sympathetic feeling or a tearful embrace between the two. What is at work here is rather a kind of impetus towards a democratic process of argumentation that results in a mutual consensus. "Plain speaking" remains the source of Martineau's optimism. Audaciously skipping the gap between the problematic reality and the laws of political economy, Martineau's text suggests a sure hope that mutual happiness in a free trade world would be possible in the future if only people availed themselves of the power of "plain speaking." If so, it would be more accurate to say that Martineau popularizes the economy of "plain speaking" that should come *before* and lay ground for political economy. If the latter could be summed up in tracts and pamphlets, it is the former that insists more urgently on the form of a narrative.

Martineau's nonfiction essays add more nuances to the culture of argumentation that she fleshes out in her fiction. She sets a high standard for discussion when she writes, "we should argue accurately or not at all" (*Miscellanies* 64). While Martineau is a believer in arguing "accurately," she is conscious of the difficulties that language as a medium of communication entails. At one point, for instance, she notes:

> Language is far from being a perfect mode of communication. We have more ideas than words, and the same word, therefore, must often express more ideas than one; and a proposition which may be perfectly true when the word bears one sense, may be false if the meaning be changed. Artful reasoners take advantage of this imperfection of language to mislead the unwary; and careless reasoners are themselves led astray by it. (*Miscellanies* 84)

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Language is a double-edged sword that can either open up an avenue for understanding or become an instrument of manipulation. She keeps coaching us in plain speaking: "If conducting an argument in conversation, it is absolutely necessary to ascertain that both disputants understand the meaning of the terms employed by each. It is irritating and humbling to the mind to ascertain, on arriving at some false conclusion, that the truth has been missed through the imperfection of the instrument [language] employed to obtain it; but few misfortunes are more common, as the experience of every young logician can attest" (109). Without artifice and with due awareness of the nature of the medium, Martineau's speakers strive to become "reasoners" empowered by "plain speaking." It is the personal integrity of characters like William Allen, Mr. Wentworth, or M. Gaubion and Mr. Culver that ensures that language be employed for mutual understanding, and hence common good. As Dallas Liddle convincingly shows, Martineau's beliefs about writing evolved over time as she was exploring different writing genres.[18] If so, her *Miscellanies* seem to recap well her beliefs about discussion, which she adhered to in the previous decade while composing her first tales on political economy and *Illustrations*.

Just as the laws of political economy constitute, for Martineau, a harmonious universe, so do the laws of "Conversation" create their own economy. Her tales integrate the two economies together and create a matrix where the economy of "the production and distribution of the necessaries and comforts of life" ("Preface") is invigorated by the economy of production and distribution of conversations among men. The similarities between Martineau's thinking about

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[18] Liddle's analysis of Martineau's *Autobiography* (1855) demonstrates that it should be read not as her best attempt at documenting the facts of her life, but as an attempt to fashion herself and her ideals about writing that she shared at the time of its composition. Liddle shows that by implying her "intellectual liberty and public obedience, her innocence of all premeditation, manipulativeness, and careerism," Martineau in fact adhered to the ideals of mid-Victorian journalism (*The Dynamics of Genre* 56).

the circulation of material goods (political economy) and the circulation of "intellectual wealth" are striking:

> Some of the best advantages of this and of all the other methods of improvement which we have suggested may be secured by Conversation, if well conducted. Not only may truth be gradually drawn out by argument, and substantiated by a laborious application of facts, but by means of the intellectual excitements and moral influences which are brought into play by conversation, the circulation of intellectual wealth is indefinitely accelerated, the reasoning power receives a new impulse, the suggestions of the imagination become more lively, and its illustrations more appropriate. (111)

It is important that in this universe of "intellectual wealth" every individual is a creative and critical participant. Martineau does not commend passive recipients of knowledge, and in doing so puts in question the authoritarian mode of didacticism. She writes, "If we passively adopt the opinions we meet in books, or remember the facts they relate without any endeavor to reflect upon them, or to judge of their relation to other facts, we might almost as well not read at all. We may gain knowledge, such as it is; but, at the same time, that knowledge will impede instead of strengthening the operations of our intellects, and the load of facts will lie like a heavy weight, under which the motions of the reasoning power will become more and more feeble, till at length they stop [. . .]" (98). She must have envisioned that her own works, like the *Illustrations*, ought to be received in this way. Rather than spoon-feeding political economy-"lite" to passive consumers of reading matter, Martineau extrapolates a practice of critical dialogue from her tales to her larger readership, perhaps opening up the very principles of political economy for discussion. Therefore, one should be careful in qualifying her fiction as didactic. It seems that

her goal was not so much to impose her own opinion on her audience but rather to resonate as an "impulse" for "the reasoning power" that would effect social change in the British society.

Did Martineau herself achieve the ideals which she so passionately adhered to in her writing? A proponent of arguing "accurately or not at all," Martineau paradoxically crafted her philosophy on contradictory tenets, such as her Utilitarian belief in the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers, on one hand, and laissez faire individualism, on the other. She perhaps failed to subject some of her own opinions to the full extent of a rigorous argument. Her biographer Valerie Kossew Pichanick characterizes the inconsistencies in Martineau's philosophy as follows: "If she had ever permitted herself to carry all her arguments to their inevitable conclusions then she would have been forced to admit the contradictions in her philosophy, but Martineau did not permit her conflicting opinions to disturb each other; and her contradictions and discrepancies notwithstanding, there was, paradoxically enough, a basic consistency in her philosophy" (198). Martineau revised her ideas during her lifetime[19] and gravitated towards the ideas that she could find more reasonable ground for, as was the case with her evolution from Unitarianism to positivism. But paradoxically, she could be quite stubborn in believing in something that defied rational evidence, such as was her belief in healing by mesmerism even after her abdominal tumor came back. No argument could have a forced power over her if it went against her convictions. It is a fact, after all, that this strong-headed woman would "sometimes put down her ear trumpet when the discussion began to move in an unwelcome direction" (Greg cited in Pichanick 241). But this does not make Martineau less of a spokeswoman for "plain speaking." Rather, the opposite. It is because Martineau put forth the ideal that she herself would

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[19] Valerie Pichanick describes the evolution of Martineau's views: "Her early fundamentalism gave way to necessarianism, her Unitarianism surrendered to positivism, and even her laissez fairism was eventually subject to substantial qualification" (241).

oftentimes discard or fall short of that makes her own argument for "plain speaking," if not always logical, compelling.

As a popularizer of political economy, Martineau synthesized her ideas into something distinct from the original theory. The preoccupation with human behavior and self-interested action, which prevails in the work of Adam Smith, evolves into the preoccupation with discussion as an alternative to violent action in Martineau's tales. Unlike Smith who builds his theory of self-interest as a given of human behavior, she employs the powers of conversation to transform individuals' behavior and to foreground her economic principles on the discursive practice. It is the *narrative* form specifically that allows her to illustrate the everyday practice of face-to-face political discussion and show the connection between the economy of words and political economy. Shifting from first to third person narration, from moralizing lectures to more equal dialogues, and from a central conversation that runs throughout the story to a network of discussions, Martineau elaborates on a culture of political discussion guided by fair argument and plain speaking. Her intentions to imagine an equal and fair dialogue, however, in some ways work against the hierarchical moralizing frame of all her tales and her project to popularize a set of unquestionable principles. She carefully calibrates the space for discussion and disagreement in her tales only to contrive a magical point at which discussion stops and neatly flows into a summary of principles (predetermined by Martineau from the start). What seems to emerge as a result is an awkward blueprint for a public sphere predicated upon deliberation geared towards consensus. With the summary of principles always already awaiting in the end, her tales are unable to represent either an ongoing or freely evolving discussion. Martineau seems somewhat anxious about *too much* discussion which may destabilize her political-economic system. However instrumental the conversations are for building consensus around the principles of

political economy, Martineau also comes close to realizing how subversive unregulated discussion could be for her principles. That she is an advocate of laissez-faire does not prevent Martineau from creating a planned economy of arguments. In contradiction to her attempts to create a free and fair competition of arguments, she narrates a static universe ruled by unquestionable laws and immune from the vicissitudes of discussion.

CHAPTER 2

A "DUTY TO ENTER ALL SOCIETIES": DISCUSSION AMONG STRANGERS IN

BENJAMIN DISRAELI'S *SYBIL*


If Harriet Martineau utilizes her tales to popularize the principles of political economy,

Benjamin Disraeli upholds his novel *Sybil* as a kind of manifesto of the Young England program.

But if Martineau's principles can be clearly summarized, Disraeli chooses a different approach to

convey his politics, one that does not rely on precise formulations. Instead, the Young England

program is communicated to his readers through a series of images that give expression to his

ideal of a pre-Reformation England, yet resist mechanical definitions. This chapter examines

how Disraeli mobilizes the communicative potential of images and symbols in *Sybil* and

elaborates a culture of political discussion centered on the kinds of understanding that can be

derived from metaphorical, not rationalistic procedural thinking. To this end, Disraeli activates

certain qualities that he recognizes about fiction prose to create a distinct kind of political novel.

I begin with arguing that Disraeli turns to the genre of the novel because he sees its traits, such as

imaginativeness, metaphoricity, and vagueness, to be optimal vehicles for his own political

thinking. I proceed to examine how he employs the image in fiction. Specifically, I discuss his

notion of history in *Sybil* and show that it operates as a compact image that becomes a part of his

political vision. Similarly, the space of the Marney Abbey metaphorically stands for Disraeli's

idealized England, and the absence of Charles Egremont's speech in the House, essentially the

Young England manifesto, operates as an empty, yet ever appealing symbol for Disraeli's

movement. I also suggest that Disraeli's culture of discussion centers not merely on a string of

images, but on discussion among strangers that these images create a shared space for. In my attempt to recover Disraeli from a stigma of a crafty manipulator and a mastermind of false consciousness, I suggest that his views on political discussion expose the pitfalls of excessive rationalism, like that of political economists, and point to new ways of understanding and the possibilities of arriving at consensus that are perhaps unachievable through the means of rational-critical debate.

Just as Harriet Martineau's economy of "plain speaking" in her tales comes in full view when considered alongside her political economy, so does Benjamin Disraeli's vision of a public sphere in his novels find itself in a complex relationship with his politics outside of fiction. I call this relationship complex because reviewers and scholars have passed judgment on Disraeli-the-novelist and Disraeli-the-politician in quite divergent ways. Some contend that fiction was an organic stepping stone for developing his political ideas. Michael Flavin, for example, argues: "Disraeli's novels are the site on which he produced and developed the ideas which informed his political creed" (1). Similarly, others call Disraeli's Young England trilogy "a testing ground for his political and moral philosophy" (Schwarz "Disraeli's Romanticism" 64). Thom Braun, however, views this relationship between Disraeli's fiction and politics as more problematic. Although Disraeli's "artistic integrity often had a healthy independence of his political views," Braun notes that "it is also true that much of his writing was political, in that it was so often unashamedly manipulative in the way it interpreted life" (*Disraeli the Novelist* 146). An acclaimed originator of the genre of a "political novel," Disraeli at the same time would not be immune to criticism that "[t]he two elements, the novelistic and the political, never fuse" (Escott *Fraser's Magazine* 9.52 1874, 525). Considering the relationship between Disraeli's fiction and political philosophy either as a straightforward connection or a troubling combination seems to

be a simplified approach. Rather, I suggest that, for Disraeli, there is something endemic to

fiction that resonates directly with the innermost mechanisms of his political thinking. To

examine Disraeli's novel writing with this premise will not tell us, of course, what is so distinct

about the genre of the novel per se, but it would be extremely suggestive if we want to know

what Disraeli himself wanted to see in this genre. Thus, Disraeli takes recourse to writing novels

not only to reach a wide audience, but also because he recruits the genre of fiction to serve as a

vital medium for the enactment of his political vision.

Disraeli's contemporary reviewers and current critics have pointed to the vagueness of

his political vision and hence the impotence of his novels in relation to the realm of practical

politics. To be sure, Disraeli earned this reputation not unjustly. His aphoristic political

statements impressed in the public mind vivid images of the nation, history, and religion, rather

than constructed long chains of logical causalities. Leslie Stephen commented on Disraeli's

creed that "[t]o grasp its precise meaning, or to determine the precise amount of earnestness with

which it is set forth, is of course hopeless. Its essence is to be mysterious, and half the preacher's

delight is in tantalizing his disciples" (*Fortnightly* 432), adding that "Disraeli had something to

say, and [. . .] unluckily that something was a mere nothing" (440). Another critic observed that

in *Coningsby*, for example, the path of regeneration of England "is not quite cleared up"

(*Examiner* 307). Scholars have carried this trend on. Daniel Schwarz underscores the vague,

impractical endings of the Young England novels where it is not clear just "how such necessary

political changes as the revival of a strong monarchy and of an independent responsible

aristocracy will take place" (*Disraeli's Fiction* 102). Others similarly pointed to his novels'

"fervour, enthusiasm, faith, impracticability and, above all, vagueness" (Braun *Disraeli the

Novelist* 92), his lack of "inclination, and perhaps capacity, for the elaboration of systematic

argument"[20] (Richmond and Smith "Introduction" 14), and his novels being "incoherent about

the work to be done" (Colón 50).

What has been considered as a flaw of his novels or lack of "capacity" to argue clearly is,

in fact, an integral principle of Disraeli's political design and consensus-building. Rather than

founding his vision of a public sphere on dry rationalism and "systematic argument," Disraeli

communicates his ideas in images thus suggesting a public sphere where the common

denominator is not the best argument, but a shared image created through words. This is why the

genre of the novel is uniquely accommodating of his politics. In opposition to the commonplace

perception of Disraeli's fiction, I develop an alternative interpretation, which is not just more

sympathetic or flattering, but is more insightful about what Disraeli actually brings into the

contested arena of Victorian cultures of political discussion. The novels do not cloud his political

ideas, but instead mobilize the agency of a unifying image. Articulating his political vision

through images, Disraeli capitalizes on their constructive vagueness. His images bring about

cohesion and expose the limits of excessive polemical rationalism, which falls short of

expanding and sustaining consensus over differences of opinion.

The fact that the Young England manifesto appeared in the form of fiction stems from

implicit connections between Disraeli's political philosophy, the genre, and the kind of

circulation and consumption this genre entailed. The author's choice was a deliberate one: "It

was not originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to

scatter his suggestions, but, after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which, in

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[20] Smith maintains his argument in his book on Disraeli's life, commenting that the
proclamations of future change in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* were "more uncertain than they sounded"
(66) whereas *Tancred* offers even a more emblematic example of vagueness by dwindling into
"lack of conclusion" (89). See Smith, Paul. *Disraeli: A Brief Life*. New York: Cambridge
University Press, 1996.

the temper of the times, offered the best chance of influencing opinion" ("Preface to the Fifth

Edition" vii-viii). Although coming from a perspective different from Disraeli's, even his

harshest critics agreed on the fact that the novel was his only option as far as his attempt to

revamp flagging Toryism: "Toryism, as Mr. Disraeli conceives it, is not an historical, or a

scientific, but an historic-romantic policy. [. . .] It has no principles, no laws, no rules, no

organization. How then is it to be recommended except in the non-scientific form of the novel? It

is a mere question of sentiment, of loyalty, of fanaticism. [. . .] Views vast and perplexed,

indefinable to one's-self, inexplicable to others, find themselves on all sides imprisoned by any

fixed order" ("The Repentance" *North British Review* 489). As much as the reviewer

disparagingly discards Disraeli's politics alongside its "non-scientific" form of expression, so

does he point to what fiction becomes under Disraeli's pen. The novel for Disraeli is not an

encyclopedia of empirical knowledge or an exercise in inductive reasoning, but instead a mode

for an altogether different kind of insight. Ironically, the novel here is construed as a medium

that conveys the "indefinable," the "inexplicable," the incommunicable. Because the review

locates Disraeli's politics outside of the public sphere predicated on rational-critical debate, his

claims are labeled essentially incommunicable and incomprehensible. If only "historical" or

"scientific" politics fall within the limits of what is communicable, Disraeli's vision falls short of

this standard. Disraeli, though, seems to have a different standard in mind when representing in

his novels something that could not be expressed in terms of rational-critical debate. Besides

highlighting the perceived flaws of Disraeli's politics, this critique, conversely, conveys the

problems Disraeli had with rationalism.

Because, for Disraeli, novels offer an optimal medium of communicating something that

is incomprehensible within "scientific" forms, he concentrates on their imaginative qualities. The

political novel as a form provided for him a stronghold against rampant rationalism. As Disraeli famously remarks, "Imagination governs Mankind" ("The Mutilated Diary" 447). His politics, too, were governed by imagination. Disraeli's flight of fancy and the analytical spirit of the age lay on the opposite ends of the scales. Yet, in defining Disraeli's power of imagination in opposition to rationalism, some critics believed in cooperation between the two modes of thought:

> Mr. Disraeli is not a man of argument, but of wit; his fancy is more powerful than his reason; he is only half a philosopher, having the imagination that is an element of that character, but wanting the corrective presence of *causality* [. . .] that is essential to its perfection. Hence it is that he seldom reaches more than half a truth. His imagination suggests new and large views of things, but he is unable to track them backward, and define their limits and their sources; or onward, and pursue them to their consequences. He must be content to leave his duty to others having less of the creative faculty he enjoys, and more of the reasoning faculty he wants; and content he ought to be even to point the way to an end which all must anxiously desire, although to others must be committed of practically conducting society to the goal he has indicated. ("Sybil, or the Two Nations" *The Critic* 56)

While in the popular view Disraeli comes across as a man of one quality (imagination) and therefore only "half" the truth, his stance already goes a long way in short-circuiting rationalism's complacency that continues to be on the rise throughout the century. The reviewer's effort to tell Disraeli his place ("content he ought to be") among his more analytical contemporaries is one such manifestation of rationalism's preeminence. His propensity for vagueness is recalibrated here into a question of scale and perspective: he commands "large

views of things," from where the minutiae are indistinguishable. It is not surprising, then, that a man of fancy rather than of reason would express his political vision through fiction. If analytic reasoning and "*causality*" is to be sacrificed for the sake of a new insight, this is precisely what Disraeli capitalized on in the trilogy. To be sure, *Sybil* is far from being an irrational collage of images; it has a plot-driven form, a sense of progression and unfolding and nicely fits into the common critical notion of the novel genre. However, I maintain that Disraeli mobilizes some qualities of the medium he is working with and downshifts others, including the novel's preoccupation with causal or empirical thinking. The reviewer notes that his imaginativeness precludes him to think "backward" and "onward," that is diachronically. This is important because in *Sybil* the narrator posits himself as a historian of sorts relating to us two centuries obfuscated by the Whig mystifications. As I will show, his sense of historical unfolding indeed wants a diachronical dimension. As a result, Disraeli's sense of history becomes flattened-out, all present at the same time, and so more akin to an image. If so, Disraeli's gesture of "point[ing] the way to an end" paradoxically lacks any depth and trajectory, but becomes a gesture towards a flat image.

In Disraeli's fiction, a systematic argument yields to, or rather takes the shape of, an image. Where the sequence of events seems out of joint, the display of images unfolds brilliantly. I understand Disraeli's images quite broadly and admit to their heterogeneity, but what interests me here is that, despite their differences, they all share Disraeli's non-rationalist way of expressing and communicating his political ideas. Whether it is the mysterious and captivating appearance of the "new" "better mind of England" (*Coningsby* xxix), a nebulous image of the two "nations" of the rich and the poor followed by the heavenly "female form" of Sybil in "the vacant and star-lit arch" (*Sybil* 97), or Egremont's speech in the House that remains ever a

mysterious absence in the text, images carry more weight for Disraeli than meticulous chains of arguments and counter-arguments or even cut-and-dry inventories of facts would. Although he did glean facts from Blue Books and commissioners' reports for *Sybil*, the novel itself is a complicated blend of his imaginative crafting of political reality and conducting of empirical observation. As William Monypenny and George Buckle write, "Disraeli had the speculative, *a priori* mind which finds pleasure in the exercise of fitting facts to theories; but in the region of politics and history this type of mind, as long as it is active, flexible, and receptive, is, if not more likely to arrive at truth, more likely to be illuminating than the other laborious type, often overpraised, which clings timidly to detail, and shrinks from independent and imaginative flight" (vol. I 694). Disraeli's "imaginative flight" and use of image in lieu of argument is not so much a manipulative tactic of a politician, but rather an alternative way of understanding and crafting the sphere of political discussion. Although Disraeli had an idiosyncratic style in discussion, he was an avid advocate of discussion as such. In his speeches he refers to "the spirit of discussion" as "the principle upon which our society at present depends" (*Selected Speeches*, v. 2, 13). I want to recover the culture of discussion in Disraeli's fiction, specifically *Sybil*, which has been dismissed with suspicion or read *only* as manipulative. To see in Disraeli not a manipulator, but an advocate of an alternative culture of discussion that offered a viable critique to the dominant rationalist strain leads to a significant reconsideration of the Victorian public sphere. Besides reproducing the commonplace accounts of it as a contested ground among various identity groups, such as workers, women, and other "outsiders," I hope to bring to light the contested history of the models organizing the public sphere as such. While some models gained preeminence and others vanished or survived in part or with modifications, novels of discussion, of which *Sybil* is a prominent example, give us glimpses into this turbulent history.

In addition to using images to foreground or operate within political discussion, the novel is invested in imagining a specific kind of participant in these discussions. A most intriguing feature in Disraeli's trilogy, most vividly *Sybil*, is that he stages most crucial and revelatory discussions among *strangers*. The dynamics of such encounters oftentimes carry a trail of mystery and romantic fantasy. But what may at first seem fantasy-like in such scenes does not diminish the extent to which they explore the practical implication of strangehood on the national and cosmopolitan arenas. Despite his own anti-cosmopolitan political agenda and veneration of race, Disraeli seems to foreground the advantages of the condition of strangehood among participants in a dialogue. A face-to-face discursive community of strangers, alluded to in these two novels, allows Disraeli to negotiate between the embodiedness, intimacy, proximity of a stranger and the stranger's ability to bracket social and political attributes and aspire for the universal truth that would be shared by all in England and beyond. In such scenes, for instance, an aristocrat acknowledges the views and opinions of one of the People. Their face-to-face conversation suggests the ethical importance of an interpersonal recognition between human beings. They remain strangers and know little of one another. Even the clothes they are wearing are so indeterminate that it suspends their class position. This kind of abstraction from social and cultural identifiers allows for a certain freedom of exchange as they aspire for the truth about England's history and its present condition.

*Sybil* reflects on the political possibilities of a discursive community of strangers, in which discussion is predicated on the shared condition of strangehood that neither folds into a totalizing community of neighbors, nor fractures because of estrangement and incomprehensibility. In many ways anticipating modern developments of the public sphere, *Sybil* aspires to an ideal relationship among strangers where differences of opinion are submerged, yet

not necessarily eliminated, by the shared image of England *à la* Tory Democracy. Disraeli's

*Sybil* inquires into a new possibility for agency found between a suffocating consensus, on one

hand, and radical estrangement that forecloses a dialogue, on the other. *Sybil's* preoccupation

with strangehood also offers a commentary on the novel as a printed medium that implies an

audience where "strangehood is the necessary medium of commonality" (Warner *Publics and*

*Counterpublics* 75). While Warner describes strangehood as a necessary condition of modernity,

in Disraeli strangehood comes across as a desirable condition that brings the advantages that

cannot be achieved otherwise.  Finally, Disraeli himself enacts the role of a stranger on two

levels: by fashioning his own elusive image to his novels' readers and by coping with the stigma

of a stranger throughout his entire political career. All in all, I argue that *Sybil* imagines a model

of discussion in the public sphere that is predicated on consensus-building among strangers by

means of a shared image; this notion provides a critique of the prevalent rationalistic model by

introducing the image as a key agent in consensus-building. At the same time, the novel explores

the condition of strangehood on multiple levels and by doing so gives us insights into

understanding modern condition as such.

To begin my analysis of how *Sybil* imagines a discussion among strangers and how

images facilitate a fantasy of consensus, it is important to mention Coleridge's influence on

Disraeli. Critics have linked Disraeli's politics to Coleridgean symbol. Mary Poovey

characterizes Disraeli's politics as "noncontestatory, disinterested, and capable of subsuming

opposing positions" (515) and calls them "another version of what Coleridge called the symbol"

("Disraeli" 515). However, for other critics, it is not a symbol, but an image that seems to be

crucial for understanding Disraeli's thought. For instance, Paul Smith comments that in his

aspiration to influence people's "imaginations in a manner that called for the artistic

orchestration of images rather than the logical exposition of arguments," Disraeli pursued "a politics of public relations" of sorts (*Disraeli* 75). Thus, while exhibiting a pronounced connection to the Romantic worldview, Disraeli also anticipates in many ways the future developments of mass democracy and populism. However, the critics' evocation of both "symbol" and "image" in describing Disraeli's work requires further investigation because a symbol and an image entail different kinds of agency in the context of a public sphere.

While symbol implies a way of understanding that cannot be achieved, for instance, through reasoning, an image evokes oftentimes manipulation of our feelings, thoughts, and desires.[21] Then, the question becomes whether Disraeli's work can be best characterized in terms of symbols (which intimate a way of understanding) or in terms of images (which at times short-circuit reflection and draw us closer to mass politics). I argue that in *Sybil* Disraeli straddles the line between the two. While promising an organic community based on the sharing of a symbol

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[21] Coleridge valorizes symbol as a way of understanding: "[. . .] our being is nobler than its senses, and the man of genius devotes himself to produce by all other means, whether a statesman, a poet, a painter, a statuary, or a man of science, this same sort of a something which the mind can know but which it cannot understand, of which understanding can be no more than the symbol and is only excellent as being the symbol" (*Works* 8, I, 197). In his famous passage on the glorification of a symbol over an allegory in *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge writes that a symbol "is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (30). A symbol "partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative" (30). A symbol has a much more meaningful representative function, for Coleridge, than an image that is but an abstraction from a concrete object which is perceived through senses[21]. Unlike an image, a symbol mediates between specificity and universality, temporality and a-temporality. Moreover, Coleridge suggests that an image may short-circuit the powers of the human mind and activate animalistic behavior:
"But a moment's steady self-reflection will shew us, that in the simple determination that 'Black is not White' –or, 'that two straight lines cannot include a space'—all the powers are implied, that distinguish Man from Animals—first, the power of *reflection*—2d. of *comparison*—3d. and therefore of  *suspension* of the mind—4th. Therefore of a controlling will, and the power of acting from *notions*, instead of mere images exciting appetites; from *motives*, and not from mere dark *instincts*" (*Works* 4, I, 160). "Mere images" arouse our "appetites" and in doing so render such faculties as "*reflection*" unnecessary.

as the truth (e.g., the idyllic England), Disraeli's images also foreshadow the populist

mechanisms of consensus. Images in the novel, then, interestingly operate both on the level of

pointing to some kind of transcendental truth and serving quite down-to-earth pragmatic goals of

furthering the Young England program. I suggest that this hybrid quality of Disraeli's images

positions him neither as a mere manipulator of images, nor as a disinterested voice of truth. What

Disraeli shows us through his use of images is that they are always already implicated in some

practical agenda, but their power can be viewed as something other than merely manufacturing

false consciousness. Rather, his use of images in discussion scenes offers perhaps the only

feasible way to establish consensus among different social interests. Thus, I use the term "image"

in order to highlight its pragmatism (hence the difference from the Coleridgean symbol), but  at

the same time to recover a constructive (not necessarily manipulative) agency of "image" (an

agency quite different from just "exciting appetites," as it is in Coleridge) in Disraeli's fiction.

As a second part of the Young England trilogy, *Sybil* intends to portray "the condition of

the people of this country" and provide "some picture of the moral and physical condition of that

people" ("General Preface" viii-ix). The people, for Disraeli, are a foundation for the

development of what he calls "the new and [. . .] better mind of England" ("To Henry Hope."

"Preface to the Fifth Edition" vi). The novel portrays its protagonist Charles Egremont whose

"emancipated intellect and expanding intelligence" (60) allow him to become a mouthpiece of

reform. In a passionate address to Sybil, Egremont delivers essentially an abridged version of the

Young England program:

> The mind of England is the mind ever of the rising race. Trust me it is with the
>
> People. And not the less so, because this feeling is one of which even in a great
>
> degree it is unconscious. [. . .] you will witness a development of the new mind of

England, which will make up by its rapid progress for its retarded action. [. . .] I

know, however hindered by circumstance for the moment, those principles must

bear their fruit. It will be a produce hostile to the oligarchical system. The future

principle of English politics will not be a leveling principle; not a principle

adverse to privileges, but favourable to their extension. It will seek to ensure

equality, not by leveling the Few but by elevating the Many. (354)

The "mind of England" in this passage reveals its political purchase because it figures here as an

appealing, yet vaguely outlined image. It is quite beside Egremont's point to expound to Sybil

what the "mind of England" means exactly or whom it includes. More, an inquiry into a clear-cut

definition of the "mind of England" would rather diminish than enhance Egremont's teleological

worldview. It is precisely in this romanticized form, painted by broad strokes, that the "mind of

England" can muster differentiated viewpoints under its umbrella. The image of the "mind of

England" is not an empty signifier, however, but a notion around which Disraeli is able to gather

different characters of different persuasions that are all somehow genuinely invested in it. It

means *something* to Egremont as well as it does to Sybil or Gerard. But this image does not stand

alone. Its linkage to another image, the "People" creates a kind of weaving of ideas as images,

which differentiates Disraeli's political discourse from Martineau's rational principles. The term

"People" here calibrates its meaning as an image between a connotation of inclusiveness and yet

a more restrictive sense it acquires in Disraeli's vision. Elsewhere, Disraeli lambastes a term "the

people" as "sheer nonsense" ("The Spirit of Whiggism" 23). Unlike a "nation," "the people" for

him is not "a political term," but one of "natural history" (23). However, Egremont elevates "the

People" (hence the capitalization) precisely to the level of the political. His address to Sybil

bristles with multivalent images that form intriguing linkages among themselves and draw their vitality from their somewhat loose meanings.

In order to reach for the future so vividly imagined by Egremont, a transition from people's unconscious feelings to a conscious realization and deliberate action is needed. The new mind of England can become conscious of itself and of England's new future only when it becomes conscious of the country's "true" history. The moment of coming to consciousness is also expressed as the moment of waking up of the true Tory spirit that for now, according to Disraeli, "sleepeth" (330). It is suggested, too, that "an age of inquiry and agitated spirit like the present" (64) will catalyze this impulse. In order to imagine a future, *Sybil* is preoccupied with uncovering the real (or rather constructing an) image of the past.[22] The narrative persistently oscillates between two tasks: pointing to the future revival and crafting an image of the true history in lieu of "a complete mystification" (40). This true past, the novel suggests, lies just beneath a veneer of falsehood that started from the period of reformation. But even with this sense of layering of history, it does not work in the text as a complex unfolding. The true history remains a depthless image at a distance that merely has to be uncovered.

Despite centuries-long mystification, this history is demystified in one chapter. His project to cover a span of English history from the early sixteenth century to the early Victorian era seems rather compact for its ambition. In part, what makes such brevity possible is Disraeli's specific vision of history as a succession of singular individuals. Bolingbroke, Lord Shelburne, Pitt the Younger, and the reclaimed Major Wildman lend themselves as milestones of Disraeli's history. The nation, "the English people" (46), or "the multitude" (45) similarly take the shape of

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[22] Peter Jupp argues that a construction of England's past was an essential part of how Disraeli saw his political intervention: "One of the principal ways in which Disraeli fashioned an identity and a role for himself in public life was by constructing a particular interpretation of the past and giving it repeated publicity through a stead stream of writings" (131).

one individual-like historical agent when, for instance, the narrator announces that "Whiggism was putrescent in the nostrils of the nation" (38). Since the "People" become a conscious agent in his account and not passive masses kept in check by ideology, this suggests that Disraeli configures his politics, including his use of the image of the "People," on emancipatory terms. Just like the "People," the notion of history itself takes on qualities of an image. What seems to be a recovery of true history from the history written in the spirit of "Whiggism" is problematic in Disraeli's delivery. The chapter in question by no means intends to supplant this true history. At best, Disraeli points to this alternative history in hypothetical terms: "If the history of England be ever written by one who has the knowledge and the courage, and both qualities are equally requisite for the undertaking, the world would be more astonished than when reading the Roman annals by Niebuhr" (39-40). But if Disraeli by no means pretends to attempt this "undertaking" in one chapter of the novel, he also seems to suggest that true history itself would always remain in the hypothetical realm. Such a seemingly self-defeating gesture in his text actually prepares us to embrace the idea that history, if at all, can only come into political presence in the form of an image. Disraeli is not so much after accomplishing this "astonishing" narrative of bare history as he is after preserving the affect of this notion. It is a desire for something that matters more than the actual possibility of recovering it. If so, an image of true history accommodates both this desire for truth and gives some concreteness to the history that is impossible to write.

Although Disraeli cherishes this possibility of writing the true history, he admits that an entirely clear, comprehensive, and demystified history is always beyond reach. There is a curious moment in Chapter 3 (Book I), where he suggests that history will perhaps never be free from a trail of mystery, nor will it ever be given sufficient discursive space. His account of Lord Shelburne who was Prime Minister during the reign of George the Third foregrounds the two

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points: "Why Lord Shelburne on that occasion was set aside, will perhaps always remain a mysterious passage of our political history, nor have we space on the present occasion to attempt to penetrate its motives" (43). As opposed to his intolerance for mystification, Disraeli is somewhat fascinated with the idea that some historical reasons and motives will remain a *mystery*. Just as mysterious as Shelburne's discharge is the England that existed before the two-century Whig regime. Moreover, Disraeli's awareness of insufficient textual "space" suggests that he crafts the present historical excursus into a shape predetermined by this limitation. As a result, he performs a kind of flattening out of history into a veneer of mystification while featuring the idyllic image of pre-Reformation England as a charmingly mysterious, if flat, image—an image whose mysterious halo itself comes dangerously close to mystification. A flat, surface-thin image becomes a conveniently portable device for Disraeli's politics.

As much as Disraeli's version of history aims to subvert historical mystification, it remains dependent upon it. This mystified and distorted history is the only given, and thus even Disraeli's recovery of history inevitably has to take its origin from this mystification. When Disraeli describes this mystified version of history, he seems much more *interested* in mystification as such than in elaborating what lies under its veneer: "Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear, and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented, that the result is a complete mystification" (40). Thus, all Disraeli has to work with is mystification. The image of England that comes *before* this point in history remains surprisingly underdeveloped and unattended. This is as if to imply that, for him, history *begins* at the very moment it gets distorted. Disraeli's main battle is to expose the distortions of what came after this idyllic moment of England's past. For his project, the image of England removed by a few centuries

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does not need to be finessed with microscopic details. Its very efficacy lies in its vagueness and its distance. In other words, his image of England is to be perceived only at a certain scale. It is as if to say that a view from a distance is what gives a sense of reality to this image. While, on the one hand, his historical excursus gestures towards some static image of the past (seemingly on solid historical footing), on the other, it entertains quite a different view on history. In *Sybil* history becomes a process of "perpetual displacement" (207), as Catherine Gallagher suggests, "a realm without origins or stable values" (207). While Disraeli's aim in this novel is "more carefully to distinguish between facts and phrases, realities and phantoms" ("General Preface" vi), his idyllic England is a distant point on the historical horizon where historical reality and myth converge.

The image of Disraeli's England glimmers not only through his compact historical narrative, but also through the crucial architectural and pastoral site in the novel. Abbey Marney, with its materiality of stone and landscape, complements the immaterial, imaginative aspect of the idyllic past. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests, the Abbey conveys "the mythic, ahistorical quality in Disraeli's vision of an ideal society" (174). The image of medieval England acquires more relief as the Abbey's spatial and temporal (or rather, atemporal because it is above historical unfolding) dimensions combine. The ancient monastery dramatizes the contrast between the past as a "mythical" age of communal wellbeing and hospitality, on the one hand, and the devastating effects of modern history, on the other. An aristocratic protagonist, Charles Egremont, ruminating on his walk about the hard times for the poor, is deeply touched by "the grateful vision of some monastic remains" (86). These "moss-grown and mouldering memorials" (86) lend themselves as a stage for political discussion when Egremont encounters two strangers

(Gerard and Morley) under the shade of an old yew—a silent thread between past, present, and future.

Thus the Abbey being a suggestive setting for a conversation between Egremont, Gerard, and Morley, raises the novel's central historical and political questions. The conversation seems to flourish not despite but precisely because Egremont and the two men remain strangers to one another. They converse face-to-face and "in a tone of respect" (94) about the history of the abbey and the role the monastics played as the original land-owners. The text gives us a detailed description of the faces and demeanor of the strangers, but suspends their class position:

> The first was of lofty stature, and though dressed with simplicity, had nothing
> sordid in his appearance. His garments gave no clue of his position in life [. . .]. [.
> . .] he showed a frank and manly countenance. His complexion might in youth
> have been ruddy, but time and time's attendants, thought and passion, had paled it
> [. . .]." (89)

Gerard's presence in the conversation is furnished neither with the knowledge of his name nor his social status, but simply through his "frank and manly countenance." This way of being intimately present to the other, yet enjoying the freedom of abstraction from one's class and personal identity, carries an emancipating agency throughout *Sybil*. In other words, the novel treats the condition of being a stranger not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a means to overcome obstacles, which all amount to the central problem of the novel—the estrangement between the rich and the poor.

If Gerard subverts the hierarchical discursive conventions by bracketing his class status, Morley employs yet another kind of liberating tactic—by suspending his physical presence in discussion, he enters into it through a more abstract, disembodied medium—his voice. Morley

joins in "unobserved" (94) as "a voice which proceeded neither from Egremont nor the stranger" (94). A face-to-face encounter is juxtaposed here with a more indirect one, a voice that (although still has concrete personal characteristics) articulates abstract ideas rather than embodied and class-determined experiences. Through a description of his voice, we learn about Morley's prominent, but perhaps too abstract and therefore unfeeling ethos: "It was a still voice that uttered these words, yet one of a peculiar character; one of those voices that instantly arrest attention: gentle, and yet solemn, earnest yet unimpassioned" (94). His excessive intellectualism is further evident in his face, which is "slightly marked with the small pox" and is "redeemed from absolute ugliness by a highly-intellectual brow, and large dark eyes that indicated deep sensibility and great quickness of apprehension" (95). Morley's revelatory diagnosis of England about the existence of "THE RICH AND THE POOR" as two estranged nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers of different zones, or inhabitants of different planets" (96) seems to result from a kind of synergy produced, ironically, by this discussion among *strangers*. Against the idyllic landscape and symbolic significance of Abbey Marney, Disraeli configures a practice of discussion among strangers where the suspension of certain social identifiers and names opens up new possibilities.

The outcome gained in this process is not so much a uniformity of opinion, but rather a sense of deeper understanding of the condition of England. The visual, and hence semantic emphasis on "the rich and the poor" transforms it into an insight that everybody embraces. This insight does not seem to operate as consensus derived from a reasoning procedure or, in other words, the prevalence of the best argument over others. Instead, the insight about the "rich and the poor" is shared by all and so forms a non-restrictive alliance among the strangers, but still

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allows for room to accommodate the differences of perspective on this point. It seems that the mechanism at work in this scene can be further elucidated by Niklas Luhmann's account of modernity and its practices. Luhmann defines the "politics of understanding" as superseding those of "authority" and as a process that operates beyond the traditional notion of consensus:

> Something seems to have taken the place of authority that could be termed the politics of understanding. Understandings are negotiated provisos that can be relied upon for a given time. They do not imply consensus, nor do they represent reasonable or even correct solutions to problems. They fix the reference points that are removed from the argument for further controversies, in which coalitions and oppositions can form anew. (69)

"The rich and the poor" statement exemplifies said "politics of understanding" because it serves as a kind of "reference point" around which some coalition can be formed, but it does not imply a monolithic consensus, nor offers solutions. While it provides some closure to the discussion, it simultaneously opens new avenues for negotiation. What this scene is alluding to is an effort to capitalize on unifying and agonistic dynamics of discussion at the same time. This mechanism of discussion is propelled forward neither by an agonistic clash of arguments, nor a conformity imposed by consensus. Disraeli preserves a subdued but tangible tension between the different opinions around some shared, if temporary, insight into a problem. He deploys his notion of images shared by conversing strangers to flesh out this model of a public sphere.

Despite the fact that the novel is preoccupied with the rebirth of a strong sense of one nation and that Disraeli despised cosmopolitan sympathies,[23] this scene of productive

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[23] In his Crystal Palace speech, Disraeli condemns Liberal cosmopolitanism while defining the Tory party exclusively through the national sentiment: "Gentlemen, the Tory party, unless it is a national party, is nothing" (524). He continues: "Influenced in a great degree by the philosophy

strangehood evokes strong cosmopolitan sensibilities. Being a stranger in this scene, with the

ability to negotiate between the abstract and the embodied, the universal and the particular, opens

up new opportunities in discussion. Abbey Marney is first of all a place open to strangers.[24] It is

a place where a wandering stranger who is welcomed here forms affinities to the local, to the

concrete place and face-to-face act of hospitality, while still exercising his detachment from any

specific place in the service of belonging to the global community. The Abbey's hospital, besides

being the most conspicuous structure to an observer, is closely interwoven with the spirit of

hospitality that strangers would receive, irregardless of who they are:

> [. . .] there, still more distinctly, because built on a greater scale and of materials
>
> still more intended for perpetuity, the capacious hospital, a name that did not then
>
> denote the dwelling of disease, but a place where all the rights of hospitality were
>
> practiced; where the traveler from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim asked the
>
> shelter and the succour that never were denied, and at whose gate, called the
>
> Portal of the Poor, the peasants on the Abbey lands, if in want, might appeal each
>
> morn and night for raiment and for food. (87)

The recent history of the Abbey, however, puts an end to this ethics of hospitality to strangers,

and Disraeli laments that "the gate of the poor was to be closed for ever; and the wanderer was

no more to find a home" (87). Being a supporter of parish relief and a critic of the New Poor

and the politics of the Continent, they ["a body of public men"] endeavoured to substitute
cosmopolitan for national principles; and they baptized the new scheme of politics with the
plausible name of 'Liberalism'" (524). Disraeli expresses his conviction that the majority of the
working class "repudiate cosmopolitan principles" and "adhere to national principles" (528).

[24] Kristina Deffenbacher traces the connection between architecture and consciousness in *Sybil*
and argues that the novel operates from awareness that architecture determines consciousness.
Marney Abbey, then, becomes an embodiment of "the medieval social system" (3) and so
promotes the formation of a certain kind of "social character" (4). Building off Deffenbacher's
argument, I want to uncover what kind of stranger-oriented consciousness Marney Abbey
embodies.

law,[25] Disraeli sees face-to-face recognition between strangers as a basis of community and public sphere. Built to last, the Abbey's hospital becomes an embodiment of this ethic that is preserved through centuries of spiritual decline and sustains a possibility of revival.

In the discussion between Egremont, Gerard, and Morley, there emerges the very ethic of recognition, respect, and hospitality that the ancient Abbey embodies. The image of England's past, so vividly evoked by the Abbey's structures, rather than imposing a totalizing consensus, in fact serves as a common ground, while allowing for diverse opinions. Egremont is aware of the purchase this background consensus yields: "'Well, whatever difference of opinion may exist on these points [whether the monastics were "easy landlords" (91)],' [. . .], 'there is one on which there can be no controversy: the monks were great architects'" (93). Just like this shared appreciation of the ruins, the strangers share an idyllic, albeit flat image of the monastic England.

While from this scene and from Disraeli's historical excursus one may tease out some outlines of this idyllic England, this image never acquires precise definition. Of course, part of it could be historical distance, but there is another important dynamic that better explains the vagueness of the image that lies at the heart of Disraeli's novel. The England we are led to long for without quite knowing what it looks like is nothing other than a result of populist techniques. As Ernesto Laclau notes, an imprecise definition or an empty signifier is a technique of populism (105) which allows for "the construction of a global identity out of the equivalence of a plurality of social demands" (83). In Disraeli's novel, this technique serves to not only construct such unity, but also present it as if it were coming from a relative homogeneity of social demands. The global identity under construction here is a symbiotic identity of the People and the aristocracy, whose interests and social demands are indeed reconciled by Disraeli's low-resolution image of

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[25] Paul Smith notes that Disraeli "continually lambasted the new poor law" (*Disraeli: A Brief Life* 77).

England. Yet, this is not to say that the novel's sole purpose is to trick. Quite the opposite: this image provides the common ground while acknowledging difference. Where possibilities for Habermasian consensus through procedural argumentation exhaust themselves under the weight of irreducible perspectives, *Sybil's* fantasy of consensus through a shared image becomes a viable alternative to socially polarized society. In Disraeli's vision, the People and the aristocracy now get united by realizing that England is their *mutual* interest. The circulation of this image among the three strangers brings into the same conversation Egremont's expanding mind (which eventually professes an organic relationship between the aristocracy and the people), Gerard's Chartist mentality (i.e., mass physical action), and Morley's dream-like abstractions about a community of purpose.

But what does it take to be a stranger? For Disraeli, a stranger means something more than someone who is a newcomer and whose name is unknown. It is a matter of natural gifts, experience, and cultivation. Egremont has a predisposition for this role due to the gifts of "pensive" countenance, "tenderness" in his brow, "sympathy" and "sweetness of his voice in speaking" (58). Next, his experiences abroad expand his mind. Losing Lady Arabella to his established elder brother, Egremont flees England to open himself up to travel and as a corollary to partake of cosmopolitan worldview. A year and a half of travel marks a profound change in Egremont: [. . .] he was not in an inapt humour to observe, to enquire, and to reflect. The new objects that surrounded him excited his intelligence; he met, which indeed is the principal advantage of travel, remarkable men, whose conversation opened his mind [. . .] (60). While his conversations with "remarkable" strangers are mentioned in passing, from the preceding *Coningsby,* which features discussions between its eponymous hero and a most remarkable Sidonia, one may infer the stimulating nature of such conversations.  On his return in 1837,

Egremont is a different kind of an aristocrat who breaks away from his old "life of saloons" (61): "Egremont re-entered the world [. . .]. But there was this difference in his existence, before and since his travels: he was now conscious he wanted an object; and was ever musing over action, though as yet ignorant how to act" (60-61). The novel suggests that although Egremont acquires the kind of agency as a stranger *abroad*, the same cosmopolitan attitudes are applicable and actually desirable *at home*, especially in a time when the country is not one nation, but two. Hence, still professing local, national affinities, Egremont mobilizes a cosmopolitan frame for discussion among strangers.

Besides Egremont, Aubrey St. Lys is another character who aspires to mediate between estranged "nations." It is St. Lys's "duty to enter all societies," which necessitates his travel "to Mowbray Castle, as well as to the squalid courts and cellars of the town" (189). If St. Lys employs his calling as a pastor, Egremont gains access to the people by means of an assumed occupation of a "reporter" (173) and a fictitious name of Mr. Franklin—both attributes sustaining him as a stranger. As the two of them visit a destitute dwelling of Philip Warner, a handloom weaver, they run into Sybil who similarly enters various "societies" and expresses her sympathy with the people, i.e. the Warners, through face-to-face charity. But if Sybil's agency is conveyed through feminized sympathy in the domestic sphere, Egremont's sympathetic feeling is combined with a desire for public, political action: "his sympathies had become more lively and more extended; [. . .] a masculine impulse had been given to his mind; [. . .] he was inclined to view public questions in a tone very different to that in which he had surveyed them a few weeks back, when on the hustings of his borough" (170). When on the hustings, Egremont successfully snatches a seat in Parliament even though "the condition of the people was a subject of which he knew nothing" (74). He is transformed from an alienated, complacent stranger to a sympathetic

stranger driven by a desire to know the people, which transcends inter-subjective barriers. This powerful effect produced by a sympathetic stranger even causes the indignant and jealous Morley to regret a spontaneous act of opening oneself up to the other: " 'We have all of us opened ourselves too unreservedly before this aristocrat' " (303).

The novel brings Egremont's agency into contrast with Morley's interventionist and ultimately unsuccessful model of strangehood. Gerard impugns Stephen Morley for a lack of knowledge of the people that was once characteristic of Egremont: " 'Stephen is prejudiced,' [. . .] 'He is a visionary, indulging in impossible dreams, and if possible, little desirable. He knows nothing of the feeling of the country or the character of his countrymen. [. . .]" (358). Morley's "high-flying philosophy" (173), in Gerard's words, about what people are and what they need accounts for his estrangement from them and a consequent stalemate in discussion at the Rising Sun. When a group of miners gather at the pub after a working-day, their leader Master Nixon begins a discussion of the injustice of the tommy system and the oppression from Diggs, a tommy-shop manager. In contrast to the Abbey, the pub, due to its class specificity and us/them mentality, precludes possibilities for productive discussion. In addition, an editor of the *Mowbray Phalanx*, Morley proves incapable of a face-to-face argument, without the medium of his newspaper. On overhearing the conversation, Morley intervenes only to be brushed off as a "stranger":

> 'But why do not you state your grievances to the landlords and lessees,' said the stranger.
>
> 'I take it you be a stranger in these parts, sir,' said Master Nixon, following up this remark by a most enormous puff. [. . .]

'I take it you be a stranger in these parts, sir, or else you would know that it's as

easy for a miner to speak to a main-master, as it is for me to pick coal with this

here clay [clay pipe]. Sir, there's a gulf atween 'em. (182)

When Morley proceeds to argue his "high-flying" "principle of association" (183) by suggesting

for fifty families "to live under one roof" (183), Master Nixon undercuts Morley's pitch: " 'you

speak like a book'" (183). The persuasive power of Morley's bookish abstractions crumbles

under his estrangement from the particulars of the miners' lived experiences. Ironically, while

oblivious of the "gulf" between the miners and the masters, Morley overlooks yet another gulf—

between the people and himself. His agency is just the reverse of Egremont's endeavor to wed

the image of Tory England to the everyday lives of the people.

On a bigger scale than Morley's failure at the Rising Sun, the novel intimates that the

Chartist crisis and the violent action that ensues are also symptomatic of mishandled discussion.

Despite the fact that "all that the people desired was a respectful discussion of their claims"

(275), they meet with a refusal of this right by the House of Commons. The resulting Chartist

disturbances suggest that the source of violent action is rooted in a broken code of a fair

discussion: "The House after a debate which was not deemed by the people commensurate with

the importance of the occasion, decided on rejecting the prayer of the Petition, and from that

moment the part of the Convention who advocated a recourse to physical force in order to obtain

their purpose, was in the ascendant" (342). Gary Handwerk highlights a tension between the

novel's advocacy of "discussion as a political mechanism" (328-329) and the novel's "message

of expediency" (341), manifested in the application of force.  Since the consequences of the riot

bring the novel to a happy end, Handwerk suggests that the novel "couples a rhetorical

renunciation of force with a narrative justification of its consequences" (336). While I agree with

Handwerk that Disraeli places a particular importance on discussion, and that the agency of discussion is undercut by a more expedient physical force, I am more skeptical about Handwerk's claim that what Disraeli supports is *persuasion*. Handwerk himself admits that the role of persuasion in the novel is undercut by its not infrequent association with "manipulation" (332) and the only persuasion success story is that of Egremont in relation to Sybil. Since, for Disraeli, a public sphere based on persuasion would only be too methodical and rationalistic, he is searching for alternative modes of communication. If *persuasion* never really carries much weight in the novel, what kind of discussion does?

Disraeli is invested in imagining a public sphere predicated not so much on persuasion, but rather on discussion among strangers that "opens up," perhaps even "too unreservedly" (303), yet entails respect and recognition of the other, even if that other upholds different views. While an emblematic example of this takes place among Egremont, Gerard, and Morley at the ruins of Marney Abbey, another instance of such productive strangehood transpires in London as the Chartist delegates Gerard and Morley converse with Lord Valentine. Their encounter generates respect and recognition of the other *without* necessarily upholding persuasion as a *raison d'etre* of discussion. Again, we are in the midst of a discussion scene which thrives on the dynamics between strangers and in which Gerard and Morley become simply "one of the delegates" or "the other delegate" (276), to a point where the identity of a stranger becomes indistinguishable. After the delegates express their Chartist claims to Lord Valentine and hear his aristocratic convictions in return, Gerard advocates a respectful recognition of differences: "'Well, well; he has his opinions and we have ours. But he is a man; with clear, straightforward ideas, a frank, noble, presence; and as good-looking a fellow as I ever set eyes on. [. . .]'" (279). Arguably, these words amount to more than class-conscious etiquette. Just as he does in earlier

descriptions of Morley's and Gerard's, Disraeli continues to draw connections between physiognomy and the course of discussion. Valentine's face-to-face interaction with the delegates, unlike the majority of their door-to-door round of the political elite, suggests that we may pick up on clues from one's "frank, noble, presence." This embodied presence is key to an ethic of recognition, albeit recognition of difference. Moments like this when characters entertain diverse opinions in the spirit of mutual recognition insinuate that even though *Sybil* imagines a consensus around an image of Tory England, this consensus is far from totalizing and is capable of accommodating intellectual diversity. Although the image of England can be viewed as nationalistic and exclusive, I want to recognize in it a potentiality for inclusiveness that comes to the fore as Disraeli infuses it with reciprocal relations among strangers.

Alongside this trajectory of a discussion among strangers where a shared image of England serves as common ground, there continue to crop up other moments of discussion where the intersubjective synergy never happens. Lady Marney's attempts to initiate her son Egremont into the art of political plotting and gossip result in his consent to run for Parliament, yet never resonate with his larger view on politics. The secrets such as "the king is dying" (51), which she is privy to and which lend her an advantage in her political games never become valuable commodities for Egremont. With a hope that "confidence [. . .] will always subsist between us" (52), Lady Marney creates a coalition with her son only to highlight the difference between her pragmatic calculation of what steps need to be taken to get a seat in Parliament with a spontaneous mutuality and respectful exchange of ideas about the country among Egremont and the strangers at the Abbey ruins. Lady Marney's management of her son's political career in the name of the Tories "to have our own again" (52) prompts Egremont not to submit to it, but to search for an alternative model of a politician. Besides Lady Marney, Sir Robert Peel (or "a

gentleman in Downing Street" (411)) employs a manipulative discursive practice. Peel's ideal of coming across as "'frank and explicit'" (414) to the deputations of manufacturers, farmers, and others seeking his help is but a performance of sincerity, which he considers to be "the right line to take when you wish to conceal your own mind and to confuse the minds of others" (414). The shutting down of discussion in such way contrasts starkly to the opening up of the strangers' minds at the Abbey ruins.

Lord Marney's destructive argumentativeness and inflexibility delineates another bankrupt avenue of discussion. In Lord Marney, Disraeli critiques an excessively proceduralist and agonistic approach to argumentation that inhibits, rather than enhances, Lord Marney's understanding of the condition of the people. With a "dogmatical or argumentative" (72) manner of speaking, Lord Marney engages in discussions not for a better understanding of some subject in question, but for the sake of his own "passion for controversy" (72). In spite of the mediating efforts of their mother, Lord Marney and Egremont cannot find common ground. The novel traces a gradual "expansion" of Egremont's mind, both his intellect and his sensibility, over against Lord Marney's maxim "[e]verything in this world is calculation" (98), which boils down to the calculation of the interest of the "landed proprietary" (73) and his own self-interest. When Egremont finds out that his elder brother would not help him pay for the expenses Egremont incurred during the elections, Lord Marney, the man of "argument," falls into the mold of a selfish villain, not an exemplar of reason:

> 'Well, George, [. . .] you are really the greatest humbug that ever existed.'
> 'Abuse is not argument, Mr. Egremont.'
> 'You are beneath abuse, as you are beneath every sentiment but one, which I most entirely feel,' and Egremont rose from the table. (193)

Marney's position founded on a fusion of self-interest and a "passion for controversy" as an end in itself serves further to set off an alternative model of political discussion the novel pursues in exploring the encounters among strangers.

While we recognize Disraeli's philosophy refracted through Gerard's, Egremont's, St. Lys's, or Lord Valentine's statements, it may seem ironic that Disraeli misses out on a major opportunity to express his views fully through Egremont's speech in the House. The absence of Egremont's speech hits on something important, given that Peel's manipulative responses to various deputations are full present in the text. Such narrative absence is contrasted with the resonance his speech produces in political circles. The high society makes futile attempts to make sense of Egremont's speech. Mr. Egerton insists that "the whole speech was against radicalism" (340), but adds that "no one knew exactly what he was after" (341). Another infers that it "was the most really democratic speech that I ever heard" (341) and even ventures the meaning of the speech to be "that if you wished for a time to retain your political power, you could only effect your purpose by securing for the people greater social felicity" (341). Lord Loraine is no better off puzzling over Egremont's meaning behind "obtaining the results of the charter without the interventions of its machinery" (341). Insofar as the meaning of Egremont's speech resists transparency, so does Egremont himself elude a definition in the MPs' political lexicon. A "radical" (340), a "whig" (340), "[n]ot a conservative certainly" (340), and "crotchety" (340) are the labels applied to Egremont. This moment may well reflect Disraeli's own piqued ego from critical responses like this: "Mr. Disraeli looks but at the surface of things. Originally a Radical, then a Whig, by and by a Conservative, and now we really cannot tell what, he has no well-grounded principle to fall back upon" (*Fraser's Magazine* 30.175 83). Perhaps to justify himself, too, Disraeli represents the labels attached to Egremont as mindless talk.

Egremont and his speech remain obscure to imply that the emergent ideas of the "new mind" of England have not still found their full expression in discourse. The absence of Egremont's speech from the text dramatizes this deferral of precise language and stable meanings. This textual hole is in itself a vague image of the Young England program that organizes the novel, yet resists precise definitions or expressions.

However, the rationalistic criteria of clarity, comprehensibility, and systematic argument are not necessarily Disraeli's central maxims of political discussion. If so, the trail of mysteriousness and vagueness that envelops Egremont's speech once again indicates some populist tendencies about his speech and the novel. I view his speech as populist in a sense that its vagueness turns it into an "umbrella" discourse to encompass varying social interests under its banner. The speech functions not so much as an *expression* of the new mind of England, but rather a kind of emptied-out emblem of the new mind of England. Without much of specific content (it is presented to us only through second-hand reports), the speech acquires almost unlimited capacity to embrace society beyond factions and classes. Combined with this mobilization of populist techniques is also the elevation of Egremont to the level of abstraction. He is distilled to an ethereal state of a "voice" only:

> Yes! there was one voice that had sounded in that proud Parliament, that free
> from the slang of faction, had dared to express immortal truths: the voice of a
> noble, who without being a demagogue, had upheld a popular cause; had
> pronounced his conviction that the rights of labour were as sacred as those of
> property; [. . .] who had declared that the social happiness of the millions should
> be the first object of a statesman [. . .] (350)

In order to get to the universal truth, Egremont sheds all sorts of particularities, from political affiliation to his white, male, aristocratic body. But Egremont's abstraction of universal address fares better than Morley's abstraction from the people because Egremont commands the entire spectrum of communication: from speaking face-to-face to addressing an infinite public. For a moment, Disraeli lets Egremont run away with this Habermasian abstraction only to present him in full particularity (as much as fiction can allow) in front of Sybil who is reading his printed speech. In other words, Egremont continuously calibrates his discourse between abstraction and embodiment. Hence, the novel's interest in effective political discussion maneuvers between two levels: the abstractions that help transcend class, gender, partisan and other particularities for the sake of common dialogue and the embodied context of face-to-face encounters that makes the "immortal truths" come alive.

The conversations between Egremont and Sybil unfold throughout the novel against the backdrop of romance. The holding hands, Sybil's "streaming eyes" (336), and Egremont's "throbbing heart" (400) blend with arguments about the gulf between the rich and the poor. But it is not exclusively sexual desire or sympathy on Sybil's part that leads to her accepting of Egremont's Tory Democracy. To be sure, Sybil is perhaps an epitome of sympathetic agency in the novel, but when it comes to something like a debate, she holds her ground and does not let sympathy sway her. Thus, despite Egremont's "effort to induce Sybil to consider his suit" (337), and despite the emotional charge of the scene with his tears dripping on her hand, Sybil puts a check on this overflow of feeling by affirming her opinion: "the gulf is impassable" (337). This moment juxtaposes Sybil's feeling to her reasoning only to show how they can harmonize later on. Sybil reads Egremont's speech "[w]ith a heart not without emotion; with a kindling cheek and eyes suffused with tears" (350-351). But her transformation is due not only to this

sentimental effect. She radically transforms her reasoning, as she refers to herself: "I who have been wrong in all my judgments" (353). The harmonization of Egremont's and Sybil's thinking and feeling indicates that for Disraeli reason is not a check on sympathetic feeling, nor is sympathy more insightful than reason, but rather that the agency of reason and feeling are oriented towards the same ideals. This is why Egremont wants not only to "remove" the dream-like "convictions of [Sybil's] mind" (333), but also to "find [. . .] an echo in [Sybil's] breast" (352).

Speaking "immortal truths" without being "very sure of his audience" (341), Egremont engages with the challenges and shares the anxieties of a novelist. David Randall's historical account of the public sphere suggests that due to the proliferation of print culture beginning from the Renaissance, readership "expanded toward unknowability at the very moment of printing" (231). But in this scene, both Egremont's oral discourse and its printed version confront the anonymity and potential limitlessness of their audience/readership. Egremont is not "very sure of his audience" (341) not only because he realizes that the scale of his reach goes far beyond the intimate listener in a face-to-face discussion, but also because the public he evokes into being (the "new mind" of England) does not yet exist. The emergent "new mind" of England, as any other public constituted through printed discourse, "exist[s] by virtue of [its] address" (Warner *Publics and Counterpublics* 73). In the novel Egremont mobilizes the embodied and the universal planes of strangehood: a stranger who converses face-to-face and a stranger who addresses an open-ended public of strangers in the virtual space of readership. Rather than dismissing face-to-face oral discussion in favor of the modern public produced by the printed word, *Sybil* treats the two as complementary to each other. Disraeli himself expands this stance by embracing the print medium of the novel and still affirming the agency of inter-personal

discussion. While the advantages of the unprecedented scale and unity of time of a public held

together by print are crucial, they cannot provide an analogue for the embodied proximity of the

other in face-to-face discussion. Disraeli's attempt to point to the intrinsic values of both

suggests his complicated answer to the question of what kind of intersubjective relationship

constitutes a democratic community. Ironically, the fact that he tries to preserve the weight of

both models as he uses *the print medium of the novel* points not to a smooth suture of the two

but rather a modern ascendancy of print over unmediated discussion (a kind of uneven

development) that is impossible to rebalance.

Having discussed in this chapter the ways in which strangehood figures to mobilize new

modes of political discussion, I turn to my last point to suggest that Disraeli himself was

fascinated with the idea of being a stranger. He arguably relished the fact that his authorial

persona in his fiction could create often confusing perceptions of him as a kind of perpetual

stranger to his own readers. He performs himself as a stranger by self-fashioning through various

characters and with varying degrees of verisimilitude. Puzzled by this carnivalesque effect, we

are left wondering: To what extent and from what angle does Disraeli present himself and his

ideas through Egremont, Lord Valentine, St. Lys, Morley, or Sidonia? And are the characters in

Disraeli's novels, after all, but kaleidoscopic images of himself? The *North British Review* takes

just this perspective claiming that in Disraeli's novels "there is no character but himself, divided

into many masks, exhibiting his full face in his principal personages, and his profile and quarter

face in collateral characters of the story" ("The Repentance of the Tory Party" 497). The

*Fraser's Magazine* makes even a more mocking criticism: "Egremont, we rather fancy, is meant

to be a sort of copy from the author. Mr. Disraeli delights in bringing himself into all the

tableaux which he forms, and is so blinded by the self-conceit which constitutes the prominent

feature in his character, that he takes no pains whatever to conceal this" (31:186 1845 June, 736).

However, a quarter century later, such mockery subsides into a question: "Even [. . .] if it could

be proved that Mr. Disraeli in former days at any time, in any of his works, had written any part

of them with a sidelong look at himself in the glass, what then?" and entertains a "philosophic

interest" in Disraeli's fictional self-portraits (Cracroft 159). Rosemarie Bodenheimer similarly

admits that some characters in Disraeli's Sybil are "self-reflexive" and suggests that Morley is an

"image of Disraeli as a politician," while Baptist Hatton reflects "Disraeli the novelist" (185).

Regardless of the tone of the reviewers, Victorians as well as critics today have found Disraeli's

model of authorship quite unique. Neither an anonymous author, nor an intimate friend, Disraeli

is an ever elusive, yet intimate stranger who thrives on remaining such. Disraeli's preoccupation

with strangehood in relation to authorship and readership reflects the modern developments print

culture effected in the public sphere and the constitution of public itself.[26]

Sidonia, who is mentioned in *Sybil* only in passing, but carries a major role in *Coningsby*,

is perhaps the most memorable of Disraeli's "masks" as he embodies everything heroic and

almost superhuman.  Again, Disraeli playfully handles his authorial persona as a stranger and

never allows us to equate him with Sidonia entirely. Contemporary reviews are sure testimonials

of just how masterfully Disraeli could evade complete identification with any of his characters

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[26] In his account of the evolution of author (or *auctoritas*) and his *ethos* in the literary public
sphere from antiquity to the eighteenth century, David Randall suggests that print culture
transformed the relationship between author and his audience (previously visible and reachable
with a spoken word) into a relationship among strangers (linked through the medium of print):
"print culture attacked the underpinnings of *ethos*: as the socially disembedding transformations
of print and commerce disrupted the link between author and audience, made it a relationship of
mutually unknowns , *ethos* lost its persuasive power" (231). However, Randall suggests,
Montaigne's skepticism about *ethos* does not destroy *ethos*, but becomes a new kind of *ethos*.
Similarly, I think, Disraeli's experiments with presenting himself as a stranger do not undercut
his *ethos*, but produce a new *ethos*.

and still be represented though them. Some recognized in Sidonia "Mr. Disraeli himself" (*Fraser's* 30.175 1844, 74). Some divided Disraeli equal parts between Sidonia and Coningsby:

> If it be sound, *Sidonia*, not Coningsby, is the *true* portraiture of Disraeli. The one is the author as he is, the other as he seems; the one embodies what he feels, the other what he assumes. And, in truth, there are many involuntary indications of this: Sidonia influences Coningsby, who represents that new generation of English youth whom Disraeli seeks to influence. (*Rambler* 1 May 1854, 445)

Still others read Sidonia as "a sublimation, one-half Mr. Disraeli himself, and the other half Rotschild" (Escott *Macmillans* 32.187 May 1875, 6). In any event, Sidonia's cosmopolitan outlook, his "penetrative intellect" (Stephen 439), and his charisma of a mysterious stranger are a few things that reveal Disraeli's own ideals. While on the one hand Sidonia's resemblance to Disraeli imparts him with a strong sense of individuality, at the same time, Sidonia strangely resembles a bundle of abstract, impersonal principles rather than a human-like literary character intriguing with his particularity.

Egremont as a character raises the same question of particularity and individuality, on the one hand, and abstraction and typicality, on the other. Disraeli at times seems to make Egremont a mouthpiece of his opinions, a literary device or mechanism of conveying his political views, and at other times, Egremont seems to possess precisely the particularity and individuality which make face-to-face discussion scenes meaningful at the interpersonal level. The novel unfolds so that the Egremont who transforms into a voice to speak the "immortal truths" at the House has to negotiate continuously with the Egremont whose intimate embodied presence stimulates a frank discussion among the strangers at the Abbey ruins and makes Sybil accept his views. This ability to mobilize both levels is what gives Egremont advantage over Morley's abstractions that

operate on large scales, treat of lifeless concepts, and are entirely divorced from the individual lived experience. Morley, "the votary of Moral Power and the Apostle of Community" (490), cannot find a place for himself in the conclusion of the novel. Seen in this light, Egremont's and Morley's rivalry for Sybil, the daughter of the people, and a subsequent union of Egremont and Sybil suggest that the conclusion of the novel affirms a politics that bridges the gap between the particular and the universal—a gap no less central in this novel than the gulf between the rich and the poor. Linking the particular and the universal is, of course, not only a question of politics, but of the genre of the novel itself. Disraeli's choice to write a *political novel* becomes an effective move to cross-examine questions of literary form and those of political theory.

References to the Chartist disturbances and the final scenes of Hell Cats' invasion of the Mowbray Castle may lead one to conclude that Disraeli abandons his faith in discussion and admits to the necessity of force to rectify historical injustices. However, the plot takes recourse to force only when discussion is foreclosed, whether it is through the dominance of the Whig discourse of history or the refusal of the House to give the Chartist plea due deliberation. So, instead of figuring as a means more advantageous than discussion, violent force operates rather as an inevitable corollary of interrupted discussion. The happy union of Sybil and Egremont that seems to be a result of the riot and seems to justify the application of force is counter-balanced by the fact that the casualties in this riot are the very individuals who put primary importance on physical action rather than discussion: Morley, Gerard, and Bishop Hatton. When Disraeli ends with a "prayer" that "a free Monarchy and a privileged and prosperous People" "can only be brought about by the energy and devotion of our Youth" (497), his admiration for the energies of the youth align with Egremont's commitment to discussion, and not the violent energies of a riot. Those who are more willing to forfeit their commitments to discussion for a short-term expedient

of force fall out of the narrative scope by the end of *Sybil*. Whereas Handwerk argues that Disraeli "mixes" his commitment to discussion with justification of force ("a Machiavellian justification of whatever works" (341)), I think that it would be a stretch to say that force actually "works" in *Sybil*. Rather than being a sure means to an end, force is represented as fraught with vicissitudes. What is therefore unpredictable and uncontrollable seems hardly to "work" in a practical sense, as Handwerk implies it. What the novel is certain about, though, is that force destroys its own proponents. In *Sybil*, force becomes not something that "works" where discussion fails, but something that follows when discussion is not given a chance to succeed.

Preoccupied with the condition of England as a country of two "nations," *Sybil* foregrounds a culture of discussion that promises a remedy for social polarization. Disraeli invests the figure of a stranger with a communicative advantage and empowers his protagonist on his journey into the "nation" of the poor. Egremont's encounters with the People open up minds and hearts, and the novel suggests the desirability to maintain the status of a stranger (even if it means to go under another's name). While predicated on respect, sympathy, and mutual understanding, a conversation among strangers in *Sybil* does not produce a totalizing consensus. At the ruins of Marney Abbey, Egremont, Gerard, and Morley gain insights into each other's thoughts, but still maintain plenty of room for the differences of opinions. When the Chartist delegates Gerard and Morley converse on the subject of the Charter with Lord Valentine, the exchange of opinions does not lead to unanimity, but surprisingly generates respect for another's views and a tolerant interest in those views. The novel represents these moments of "productive" strangehood alongside dead-end avenues of discussion exemplified through Morley, "a gentleman in Downing Street" (411), Lady Marney, Lord Marney, and other members of high society. The novel ultimately rewards commitment to discussion, while those

who at some point were tempted by the expediency of physical force fall victim to the very force they intended to marshal.

To be sure, in Disraeli's vision of Tory Democracy it is an aristocrat who has the privilege of being a stranger. No lower-class character gains the kind of mobility and agency that Egremont does. But even if the agency of strangehood in this novel implies a hierarchal structure, one cannot ignore the democratizing pull it generates as well. When Egremont converses with Gerard and Morley and chooses to remain a stranger to them, they, too, are equally strangers to him. By bracketing social differences, the novel imagines a discussion among strangers as a potentially unlimited forum based on equality of participants. At the same time, a common ground among participants is created not only by bracketing the differences, but also by foregrounding an equal parts mysterious and historical image of England. Hailing from the past, this image produces a common ground for discussion in the present, and suggests a blueprint for Tory Democracy in the future. Scenes of discussion that invoke this image mobilize both argumentation and sympathetic attachments among strangers, where a significant result becomes the expansion of one's mind. Exposing the limitations of the rationalistic model of discussion offered by Utilitarians and political economists, Disraeli reveals to us that consensus is not altogether a result of rational deliberation. An image veiled in mystery is an equally indispensable foundation of consensus and perhaps by far more feasible than a reason-based one. Yet, along with the opportunities of this public sphere that converges on a mysterious image of England, *Sybil* raises questions of its legitimacy. Does the novel come down to Disraeli simply letting us peek into his workshop of creating false consciousness through images? To be sure, although *Sybil* mobilizes the democratic potential of such public sphere, the dangers of slipping into totalizing control and manipulation through images, nevertheless, remain all too real. *Sybil*

imagines an ideal of discussion, but is also aware of its vulnerability. But Disraeli's model of

political discussion does not collapse into the notion of false consciousness for several reasons.

First, his vision points to the limitations and vulnerability of rationalism and, therefore, questions

its ultimate supremacy. Second, Disraeli's thinking about the "People" as a hero-like actor of

history rather than an indistinguishable multitude makes the idea of false consciousness hardly

applicable. Disraeli endows the "People" with the power to recover the "true" history and to

transform the public sphere on terms of reciprocity among strangers. And finally, I hope I have

shown that the images that organize discussions are quite porous, allowing for diversity of

opinions, and so always disruptive of the totality that false consciousness needs. While one might

argue that Disraeli's images and discursive techniques ultimately work to preserve the traditional

hierarchies and command ideological control, I have unpacked their significant emancipatory

implications, which makes Disraeli's fiction that much more complex and intriguing. Disraeli's

novelistic explorations of a culture of discussion make me join Leslie Stephen's heartfelt remark:

"May not one lament the degradation of a promising novelist into a prime minister?" ("Mr.

Disraeli's Novels" 450).

CHAPTER 3

THE LIMITS OF SYMPATHETIC KNOWLEDGE IN CHARLES READE'S *PUT YOURSELF*

*IN HIS PLACE* AND WALTER BESANT'S *ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN*

In his famous essay "On Liberty" (1859), John Stuart Mill underscores the importance of

heeding the opposing argument as a crucial element of a discursive quest for truth:

> He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of [arriving at the
>
> truth]. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them.
>
> But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does
>
> not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either
>
> opinion. (42)

Mill goes on to lament that a great majority of "educated men" fall short of his ideal of

discussion because "they have never thrown themselves into the mental position of those who

think differently from them, and considered what such persons may have to say" (42-43). In a

similar vein, an advocate of rational discussion George Jacob Holyoake contends: "when men

think on true principles they become adherents—but only those adherents are worth having who

have thought on *both* sides, and discussion alone makes them do that well" ("Rudiments of

Public Speaking and Debate" 68). Mill and Holyoake express a popular Victorian sensibility,

which proposes that a successful resolution of a social issue and pursuit of social justice demand

that participants in discussion suspend their own views and get to know an opposing perspective.

In other words, putting oneself in another's shoes emerges as a model for coping with otherwise

irreconcilable opinions. The Victorian enterprise of putting oneself in another's shoes

foregrounds the link between an abstract mental exercise and the physical, bodily experience. As Mill's and Holyoake's statements show, the method of assuming the other's perspective had already occupied a place among Victorian cultures of discussion at a time when Charles Reade's novel *Put Yourself in His Place* was serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine* (1869-1870) and when a little over a decade later Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* came in print in 1882.

I will argue in this chapter that while both Reade's and Besant's novels attempt to envision a public sphere grounded in embracing the other's perspective, they in fact provide opposing critiques of this model. A philanthropist Dr. Amboyne in Reade's novel propagates his principle "Put yourself in his place—put yourself in her place—in their place" (78), thereby anticipating a fantasy of unlimited and egalitarian exchangeability of positions and viewpoints among individuals. The novel features its protagonist Henry Little, a wood-carver and inventor of tools, standing up against the savagery of the unions, and Reade asks his readers to put ourselves in his place, as the title suggests. As the readers find themselves "Amboynable" (151) by trying to see the unions from the perspective of Little, Reade's novel stokes unrestrained optimism in this tactic. *Put Yourself in His Place* imagines an inclusive forum in which any position is transparent and readable by anyone who wishes to engage with it in pursuit of consensus. The same idea of assuming the other's perspective underpins Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, in which a brewery heiress Angela Messenger puts herself in the place of a dressmaker in the East End and a well-bred Harry Goslett, a sergeant's son adopted by Lord Jocelyn Le Breton, ventures to the East End to live a life of a cabinet-maker and reconnect with his people. However, when Angela and Harry incognito discuss future reforms for the workers, it is precisely the fact that they do not (and cannot) fully know each other's perspectives that makes the discussion that much more constructive. Their incognito status puts a check on unbounded

exchangeability of perspectives and calls for acknowledging otherness as something irreducible

to exchange. In other words, the novel recognizes alterity as a fundamental condition of

discussion. If Dr. Amboyne's principle lays the ground for a homogeneous public sphere where

each perspective is commensurable with another and so moves toward a common agreement,

Besant's novel insists on reckoning with another's perspective as otherness anchored in

heterogeneity. Reading the two novels as distinct commentaries on a prevalent Victorian tenet of

sympathetic tending to the other's perspective, I argue that novelistic fiction was a dynamic

medium in which various models of discussion were tested out. As the two novels engage with

the spatial metaphor "put yourself in his place," we see Victorians' nuanced negotiations

between the abstracted mental capacity to imagine the other's perspective and an embodied

physical movement into the other's social location and understanding the other's environs, from

experiencing the other's home to literally putting oneself into the other's shoes and clothes.

While Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* offers this tenet as a universal and limitless principle,

Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* experiments with its limits and suggests an alternative,

i.e. more modern and complex, understanding of agency and identity in the public sphere.  As a

result, Reade and Besant produce two partly overlapping and partly differing discussion models.

Written in the tradition of sensation novel and melodrama, *Put Yourself in His Place*

dramatizes a tension between the "dirty oligarchy" of the Hillsborough union (Burns 272), as

Reade referred to it, and Henry Little, one of Reade's "Resourceful Heroes."[27]  Reade attempted

to approach the issue of the tyranny of capital vs. the tyranny of labor "with a mind impartial and

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[27] Critics and biographers, such as Wayne Burns and Elton E. Smith, have referred to a
"Resourceful Hero" as a pattern recurrent in Reade's fiction. For example, Burns sums up that
Reade "viewed life" "as a melodramatic stage on which he could play the Resourceful Hero"
(*Charles Reade* 269).

open to conviction" (*A Memoir* 342)[28] and employed his method of collecting newspaper

clippings and writing observations in his notebooks in hopes that "either side would recognize

the judicial attitude of a writer who had as little liking for the brutality of plutocracy as for the

brutality of rattening" (*A Memoir* 342). But in contrast to Reade's claim for an elevated position

of an impartial writer, the novel itself advocates a more involved process of putting oneself in

another's place. Before we see this principle at work, we witness the union's violence in full

when it almost costs Little his life to ignore their anonymous threats. After a premeditated bomb

explosion at the factory, Little is forced to quit his job with Mr. Cheatham and accepts Dr.

Amboyne's gracious invitation to work for him by observing the workers' life. Little persuades

Mr. Cheatham to grant him employment forging blades, if secretly, thanks to using Mr.

Amboyne's powerful principle "Put yourself in his place" (78). Eventually, Henry goes to the

United States to sell his patents while leaving behind his beloved Grace Carden. Enduring a

whole chain of vicissitudes, including Henry's miraculous rescue of Grace in the flood, the

lovers are happily reunited. The readers follow the vicissitudes of the love plot and, in addition,

are provided with a direct manual for socio-economic improvement, exemplified in Little's

report to the Philanthropic Society on the condition of the file-cutters with suggestions as to what

should be done by masters and workers.

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[28] Reviewers, too, recognized Reade's attempt at impartiality. Thus, in its critique of Reade's play based on the novel, *Athenaeum* claimed that he possesses "armed neutrality" and "enters as a peace-maker into the fray, knocking down each of the combatants and repeating with the utmost impartiality the process so soon as either of them attempts to get on his legs" (2223, June 4, 1870, 749). Another review stated that the story is "written in no spirit of prejudice for or against either labor or capital, and while it has not as yet given any solution of the problem how to adjust the interests of these two elements of industry, it has shown in vivid colors many of the shortcomings of each" (*Scientific American* 21:19, 6 Nov. 1869, 291). However, as Wayne Burns argues, Reade was prone to "myopically Baconian observations" (274) when he studied violent activities of the unions.

The reviewers of *Put Yourself in His Place* taunted Reade for the improbabilities of the

twists and turns of the plot[29] and its formulaic nature, which, nevertheless, did not diminish the

huge success of the novel. Breathtaking improbabilities are strangely intertwined with the facts

that Reade gleaned from blue books and newspapers. As a result, reviewers' considerations of

the novel as "blue-book light literature" with "glaring improbabilities" were well warranted[30]

(*Arthur's* 43:2, Feb. 1875, 91). Reade's signature blending of factual truth and pragmatism, on

the one hand, and "improbabilities" and idealizations, on the other, informs his vision of one's

mobility among social perspectives. As one reviewer feared, the appeal of Reade's ideal

principle could be tarnished by the improbability of its logistics: "What a good thing would it be

if those who approach the matter in dispute from two different sides could put themselves—what

a good thing would it be if they even made some decided attempt to put themselves—in one

another's place! When work is short, and times are hard, how difficult it is to do this!" (Morris

550). Associating Reade's principle with "understanding and sympathy," the reviewer

concluded: "We must try to put ourselves in one another's place" (Morris 551). While, on the

one hand, indeed, the challenges for Reade's principle seemed to be the scarcity of economic

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[29] *The Examiner and London Review*, for instance, commented: "But Mr. Reade's chief fault is an effort at realism, which takes no count of absurdity. He is apparently so much in earnest with his story that he forgets the reader may not be so much impressed, and may be inclined to laugh at extravagances" (3254, 11 June, 1870, 373).

[30] Similarly, another review commented on Reade's blend of facts and sensational improbabilities thus: "Mr. Reade is an inventor: society and the world do nothing for him except to supply him with a number of facts, which he carefully disarranges, and a code of probabilities, which he scrupulously violates" (Lippincott's Magazine of Literature, Science and Education 6, Sept. 1870, 338). Furthermore, Reade's knack for sensational plots is distinct from sensationalism in newspapers. Although there are direct connections between sensational accounts in the newspapers and sensational plots in the novels, Dallas Liddle shows that they co-existed as competing genres, with different agendas. See more on this in Liddle, Dallas. *The Dynamics of Genre: Journalism and the Practice of Literature in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009. 122-140.

resources, another review found major challenges in one's inability to abstract oneself from one's embodied characteristics: "The difficulty is that not all persons have the imaginative strength of Dr. Amboyne or his creator; for example, when a fat middle-aged doctor sees a young lady smile or frown, he may find it rather difficult to interpret her meaning by temporarily changing his sex, age, position, and circumstances" (*Saturday Review* 29:763, 11 June, 1870, 777). While the reviews of *Put Yourself in His Place* raise concerns about the practical possibility of inhabiting the other's perspective, they uphold Dr. Amboyne's principle as an ideal.

Perhaps the reason for the latter is that Reade paints a few appealing discussion scenes resolving in mutual understanding. One such discussion takes place between Henry Little and his employer Cheetham. Reade imagines a moment of face-to-face (or "man to man") discussion, in which a practice of abstraction from one's own "sex, age, position, and circumstances" and putting oneself in another's place is rewarded with a newfound understanding:

"Well?" said Mr. Cheetham, rather surlily.

"I am come to ask for my month, sir."

"So I guessed. Do you really mean to exact that?"

"Why not, sir?"

'Haven't you heard how they [the unions] ground me down?"

"Yes, sir. But why did you give in? I was true to you, but you failed me. I'd have shut up the works for three months, rather than be made a slave of and go from my word."

"Ay, ay: that's bachelor's talk. I've got a wife and children; and they make a man a mouse."

"Well, sir, I forgive you; but as to my month's wages—now all I say is—PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!"

"Well?"

"You are me. You are brought from London, under an agreement, a month's notice on either side. You work, and give satisfaction. You are threatened, but you don't run from our employer. You are blown up, and nearly killed. You lose a fortnight, but you don't charge for it; 'twasn't your employer's fault. You come back to him, and face the music again. You work with the sword hanging over you. But your employer gives in, and sacks you in a minute. Oughtn't you to have your month? Come now, man to man, oughtn't you?"

"I ought, and that's the truth. I didn't look at it that way. I saw my own side. There—no more about it—I'll draw the check—with a good heart." (151)

After Little finds Cheatham "Amboynable" (151), they both work out a plan to secure employment for Henry as a blade-forger in a deserted church. Reade capitalizes every letter in Henry's appeal to Cheatham to put himself in Henry's place in order to put visual and semantic emphasis on it. This moment embodies the novel's fantasy that perspective-sharing can be a universal panacea for injustices and misunderstandings of all kinds. It only takes a moment's good will to enter into another's situation or viewpoint, and some kind of newly acquired clarity of understanding will lead to an optimal perspective that everyone would agree with. Reade does not psychologize the moment when a character steps into the novelistic space of another, but treats stepping into another's shoes as a simple formula where success is guaranteed with a sincere invocation, "PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!"

"Amboynability" here gestures back to the eighteenth-century accounts of sympathy by David Hume and Adam Smith. Smith sees sympathetic attachments as a "feasible basis of society" (Ablow 3). Dr. Amboyne's principle, though, cannot be reduced to Smith's sympathy defined as "our fellow *feeling* with the sufferings [. . .] of others [my emphasis]" (Smith 43). Rachel Ablow redefines sympathy more broadly as "the experience of entering imaginatively into another's *thoughts or feelings* [my emphasis]" (8). Indeed, the dialogue above indicates not just a transference of Little's suffering into Cheatham's affective sympathetic response (which may have well happened without a dialogue), but Cheatham's new awareness of a multiplicity of perspectives besides his own (with a self-reproach, "I saw my own side"). If Smith's sympathy is a natural faculty that operates as a fellow-feeling, or feeling in common, Reade envisions recognition of the other through difference, not commonality. Cheatham pays Harry the wages because he realizes that Harry's side is different from rather than similar to his own. Cheatham discovers not so much feeling compassion with a fellow human being, as recognizing the other through his difference in the name of justice.

This scene showcases the richness of the resources of everyday language. In Little's casual, even clichéd, yet pivotal phrase, "PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!" there is an element of invitation and acceptance that differ from the account of sympathy as an involuntary transfusion of passions (Smith 11). Reade and Smith also differ on a more practical point. For Smith, there can never be a complete identity between the spectator and the sufferer because the "imaginary change of situation" is "but momentary" (21). For Reade, on the other hand, a plea "You are me" is far less problematized and rather taken as a recipe for everyday action. The everyday in the novel is a space of novelty and spontaneity. It is everyday interactions, the novel suggests, that have the power to enrich our social perspective and become more aware of others'.

Reade sees everyday encounters as a transformative spontaneous practice, not a monotonous routine. A Victorian cartoon nicely illustrates his flight from the drab notion of the everyday. Titled "Something like a novelist," the cartoon portrays Reade's flying on a gigantic quill over a dark and indistinguishable mass of "Every-day Life" far below and holding a banner with "Imagination" written on it. With the help of imagination, Reade brings to life, at least in fiction, the everyday as an arena for inter-subjective recognition that lays the foundation for inclusivity, justice, and respect for difference in society at large. That said, part of him, of course, is driven by the desire to sensationalize the everyday so that his novel would reap the commercial success and top the popularity ratings. Indeed, Reade's concern that a meticulous rehearsal of "barren portions of time" (*Cloister and the Hearth*) can bore the readers leads him to omit the monotony and infuse the novel's construction of the everyday with endless vicissitudes. Overall, while Cheatham's riveting change in his perspective (one such vicissitude) adds to the novel's sensationalist flavor, it nevertheless carries serious political implications.

The phrase "PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!" begs for analysis with the help of what Garrett Stewart calls narratography. In his claim to reveal the structuring of the plot from the very material level of fiction prose, where it unfolds "syllable by syllable" (1), "word for word" (6), "line to line" (13), Stewart grants the principal significance to the medium, the prose itself, in his inquiry into the narrative of Victorian novels. Not only does Little's phrase hail us back to the title of the novel, but in this scene it is crucial in moving the plot forward. Through its capitalization of every letter, the phrase enacts a kind of "strategic deviance" (19), or violence, in Stewart's terms, and breaks through the normalized conventions of text both visually and semantically. The refreshing violence of "PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!" puts a check on the animalistic violence of the unions in the larger framework of the novel. This utterance is

Little's last, perhaps desperate, argument, and this is also a turning point in the dialogue. From a timid solicitor, Little turns into a proactive agent. While Cheatham's first "Well?" is spoken "surlily" and so tries to block the discussion, the second "Well?" is infused with curiosity and anticipation. Reade capitalizes his "pet doctrine" ("PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE!") "syllable by syllable," so to speak, to place it both *within* the everyday discussion scene he is portraying, but also to place it *above* the everyday. For him, it operates as a universal doctrine above all. It transcends the reader's immediate environment by the fireplace and goes beyond the realm of fiction. Only then can Dr. Amboyne's principle aspire for universality.

However central the principle of exchanging perspectives is in the novel, its applications seem to be selective. The Unions' mob mentality, anonymous threats to Henry ("the incongruous mixture of a sanguinary menace with bad spelling" (39)), and antagonistic communications suggest an alternative that refuses to listen to the other. Exchange of perspectives does not prove up to the task when the parties are not equally invested in its success. Even Jobson, the Secretary of the Edge-Tool Forgers' Union, proves unable to mediate between Henry's petition to join the Union and anonymous violence against him. At times Henry himself forestalls tending to the other's worldview. Thus, his observation of the work conditions among dry-grinders, saw-grinders, and file-cutters arouses in him mixed emotions of "hate, contempt, and pity" (138). On the other hand, he can get "a glimpse into the mind of Amboyne" (138) to agree with his theory of Life, Labor, and Capital as a direction for reform. On his factory tour, Henry investigates the dangers of workers' labor with the concern of someone who can truly put himself in their place. His "Report" shows a mind capable of looking at the issue from various perspectives as Henry considers a plan of action for multiple parties: "masters," "workmen," and "Legislature" (527-531). Inside fiction, this "Report" acquires the power beyond the "dry bones" of blue-books (v.2

161) while the "foul play" of the unions is denounced for their violence and their misspelled "phonetic" letters (159). Contrary to its democratic intentions, a practice of embracing the other's perspective often does not include the working class. The novel suggests that the sharing of perspectives is rooted in an individual interaction and since the unionized working masses cannot be individualized, their perspective remains a cipher in the public sphere.

After the romance plot meanders through rivalry, Henry's alleged death, flood, and rescue, the novel presents the readers with symbolic resolutions in a series of marriages. After Henry acquires capital as an inventor on his trip to the United States and gets reinstated as a nephew of Squire Raby, he finally marries Grace Carden. The upper class remains thoroughly detached from the workmen. As someone of noble birth, Henry shows that his workman status has never fully determined his life. His withdrawal from the investigation of the unions' violence and handing it over into the hands of the journalist Holdfast turns Henry into a comfortably settled aristocrat rather than an activist for the common worker. Edith Little's reuniting with her old love Dr. Amboyne is a union of gentility and an improvement from her youthful elopement with a "bricklayer" (13). Jael Dence's common-peasant-folk background is glossed over and her loyal service is rewarded by her marriage to Squire Raby thus promising a hopeful future for the land interest. The ending stabilizes the social hierarchies and stakes out an upper-class world of comfort that cannot be disturbed even by the continuing "foul play" of the unions. While Dr. Amboyne's principle will prevail in the next generation of Littles and Rabies who will learn "the art of putting themselves into his place, her place, their place" (158), it remains a big question whether "their" place could ever denote the union members or file-cutters like Silly Billy's father who died in a grindstone machine accident.

Investigating the issue of union violence, Reade attempts to imagine a world that hinges on the exchangeability of perspectives. Glimpses at a public sphere where conflicts of interest and the struggle for subsistence are negotiated by putting oneself in another's place resurface in the text frequently indeed, although with varying degrees of success. While the novel's commitments to exchanging perspectives are explicitly articulated, what remains a question is just how far this model ought to extend across the social fabric. Besant goes to lengths to represent the unions' violence only to reveal his own reluctance to understand their perspective. Besant's agenda to write a novel against union violence imposes limitations upon the novel's vision and undermines the potentially inclusive and democratic principle the novel itself advocates. After all, if Dr. Amboyne's principle itself reverberates as a clear and simple slogan through the novel, what remains at the margins are the most intriguing questions of who has the agency of exchanging perspectives and on just what social scope it can operate. Reade shares Jürgen Habermas's views in contemplating a public sphere organized by mutual understanding and with language being a transparent medium that is free from ambiguity or instability of meanings. Every perspective then can be accessed and understood.

By putting value on face-to-face discussions, Reade's novel imparts the appeal of what Raymond Williams calls "the knowable community" (*The English Novel* 16). Reade's mid-Victorian novel wants to revamp "the knowable community" within and beyond his novel in response to the increasing complexity of modern collectivities. Reade's commitment to transparent and direct discussion also manifested itself in his opinions on contemporary criticism. As Mary Poovey observes, Reade resented bitterly "the ability of literary reviewers to publish their judgments anonymously" ("Forgotten Writers" 436). Reade would label these types as "Criticaster and the True Anonymuncule" ("Forgotten Writers" Poovey 436). For him, for a

dialogue to be meaningful, whether in novels or periodicals, it had to comply with the tenets of a "knowable" public sphere. In some way, too, Reade wanted to enact an exchange of perspectives of sorts by insisting that Robert Barnes, the illustrator for this novel, would see the design for illustrations through Reade's eyes and denied him the freedom to "re-visualize" the authorial design (Cooke 323).

But to return to the novel, Reade's view of exchanging of perspectives as a solution to conflicts of interests and his knack for sensation, to some degree, worked against each other. His fiction often prioritizes "satisfying the contemporary craving for 'sensation'" at the expense of "soberly exploring a social problem" (Smith, Sheila 145). For instance, Henry keeps readers on edge with the twists of his narrow escapes from the union violence as well as with his heroic rescue of Grace during the flood, which arguably overshadows the controversial questions of the unionized workforce and inter-class marriage. While Reade may be accused of favoring sensationalism over serious study of social problems, Besant arguably offers a more complex engagement with the concept of exchangeability of social positions and political perspectives in the public sphere. Besant's novel subscribes to the principle that structurally underlies, according to Carolyn Betensky, many social problem novels, and professes the "exchangeability of positions and of the knowingness and feeling that allow one to occupy them" (12). Besant's novel engages in intriguing ways with the principle of exchangeability and contributes to the Victorian fantasy of social inclusion that Pam Morris terms "imagining inclusive society" (7). Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* revises its own investment in the sympathetic knowledge of the other by suggesting that perhaps recognizing the other's perspective as never fully exchangeable or translatable can forge a more inclusive and pluralistic public sphere.

The notion of putting oneself in the place of the other is the operative mechanism of

sympathy. However, the sympathizer's assumption that the other's perspective is transparent and

accessible seems to be of a piece with the mechanisms of social domination. As scholars have

shown, Victorian sympathy is implicated in the hierarchical relations of power between the

dominant and the dominated classes. In her work *Feeling for the Poor*, Carolyn Betensky claims

that the act of reading by the middle classes about their own sympathetic feelings was a kind of

social action, an end in itself, and an attempt to re-validate the class hierarchies, i. e., the

dominant position of the *feeling* bourgeois. Victorian sympathy operates with a conservative

social agenda because the middle classes redeem themselves by sympathizing with the poor

whereas the *status quo* remains unchallenged.  As sympathy becomes complicit with the power

relations of domination, it increasingly loses its potential to be a catalyst of democratic change.

Victorian sympathy is inextricable from the class structure in which it operates and which

it reproduces. Sympathetic relations are hierarchical and include a sympathetic middle-class

observer and a lower-class object of sympathy. This relationship is not entirely fixed, which

produces the middle-class anxieties that some day the object of sympathy may get into position

of power. Audrey Jaffe points out that sympathy in society is inextricable from anxieties about

power relations and states that scenes of sympathy perform "the construction of subjectivity in a

hierarchal but increasingly mobile society in which the middle-class self exists in a perpetually

vexed relationship with the figures of social difference that surround it" (11). Both Angela and

Harry set out to seek sympathetic knowledge about the East End poor, but their paternalistic

sympathy and desire to assume the working-class perspective further consolidate the class

hierarchy. The novel illuminates the subject-centered rather than inter-subjective mechanisms of

sympathy and suggests that, ironically, the work of sympathy in Victorian social problem novels

is a response to injustice insofar as it is also a means by which social inequality seeks to naturalize itself.

Besides eliciting sympathetic curiosity about the poor, Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* reveals its paternalistic undertones through its civilizing project. As one of his "studies of the East End and of the people" (*Autobiography* 209),[31] the novel is motivated by his mission to civilize the working-classes of the East End by introducing them to culture and leisure. Besant was one of a few Victorians to walk the streets of the East End and to study the lives of its slum dwellers. A variety of publications about the poor, such as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-1862), Charles B. P. Bosanquet's *Handy-Book for Visitors of the Poor in London* (1874), John Thompson's *Street Life in London* (1877-1878), and Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in Lond*on (1891-18903) testify to an increasing interest in the East End residents for social reformers, investigative journalists, charitable ladies, as well as general public. In fact, as Seth Koven shows, by the 1880's and 1890's East End contained quite a few institutions that were "the epicenters of fashionable slumming" (7) that exerted a continuous draw of the middle-class slum tourists. Koven cogently illustrates how Victorians' charitable intentions were complicated by "voyeuristic curiosity" (9) and the tantalizing pleasure of class, gender, and sexual transgression. That said, while the novel's commitment to social reform can be put in a productive tension with the voyeuristic pleasures that perhaps drove Besant down the East End streets, I think that the reformist notion of reaching out to the poor itself is no less problematic.

The novel unfolds simultaneously the reformist and emancipatory agenda to recognize the social other as an equal, on the one hand, and thoroughly paternalistic attitudes to better the

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[31] Besides this fictional novel, Besant also published essays in the spirit of journalistic investigation, e.g., a series titled *East London*.

lives of the poor through middle-class culture, on the other. Critics have interpreted this two-pronged gesture as the ultimate failure of the novel and critiqued its project of "colonizing the poor into middle-class values" (De Vine 24) or showed how the novel's implicit reinforcement of "social stratification" "invalidates the narrative's manifest democratic program" (Neetens 143). Indeed, social hierarchies are evidenced in the unequal mobility between class positions: only the middle-class Angela Messenger and Harry Gosslett have the privilege to place themselves in the shoes of the working class. As the two protagonists venture out into the East End as a kind of participant-observer, the agency they exert towards the working classes is not a hospitable acceptance of the other, but the engrafting of one's culture onto the other. That said, I bring a more nuanced understanding of the novel's fashioning of its "democratic program," or more specifically, democratic discussion. Moving away from the "colonizing" impulse of assuming the perspective of the others, the narrative revises this model to intimate the idea that perhaps a view of the other as somewhat unknowable, not fully accessible, and not quite definable, is more liberating and thus better constitutes a democratic project. As such, while the novel on many levels is committed to taking the other's perspective on terms of certainty and clarity, discussions between disguised Harry and Angela oddly work against this commitment, and the novel's fascination with the unknowable other produces a countervailing stance. The novel's preoccupation with questions of access to the other's perspective and with cultivating sympathetic knowledge about the other allow us to see the text's hidden anxieties about its own propagation of bringing Culture to the masses. The fear that the other's perspective may never be fully accessible to understanding puts an ultimate check on the middle-class desire to infuse the lower classes with the "proper" culture and so make the lower classes similar to themselves.

The opening of the novel speaks to Besant's faith in the possibility and desirability for his upper middle-class protagonists to truly understand the people of the East End by placing themselves in the East End's ways of living. Independently of one another, Angela and Harry acquire this mobility to exchange their perspective by merely assuming working-class professions and quitting their West End residences. While Harry desires to "prove the brotherhood of humanity" (23) by "going back to my own people" (22), Angela becomes "one of the people" (14) with a similar idea to "feel myself a part of this striving, eager, anxious humanity, on whose labours I live in comfort" (14). Almost too easily combining in these words the democratic gesture of common humanity with an awareness of social stratification, Angela becomes a key agent of change in the East End. Her introduction of culture and entertainment into the lives of her seamstresses and Harry's conception of the Palace of Delight represent Besant's own views on ameliorating the East End. *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* was a product of "a great deal of time walking about the mean monotony of the East End of London" (*Autobiography* 243) in an effort to uncover "the romance that lies beneath its monotony" (*Autobiography* 243). Just like Angela, who, discontent with the abstract theories of political economy, wants to know the people of the East End, Besant foregrounds the need to know the human side of the East End rather than consider it statistically, politically, or economically. Writing his essays, he wants to produce "a document altogether human" ("One of Two Millions" 225).[32] While himself only a wandering observer of the East End, Besant chooses for protagonists to see "the romance" of Stepney Green not via a detached perspective of a *flâneur*, but via an immediate and embodied perspective of living in the skin of the East End artisans.

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[32] In these East London sketches, Besant depicts the lives of characters based on real people, but generic in nature. Thus, his essay follows the life of a girl Liz whose conditions and challenges are typical of many others in the East End.

The question of how seriously Besant considered an imperative to embrace the other's

perspective as a way of community-building leads to the question of genre overall. Equal parts

reality and fantasy, the novel fashions itself as a manual for social improvement and a fairytale.

Straddling the line between a tale of "romance," a social problem novel, and something like

"Utopian extravaganza" (Melville 304), Besant's novel has a complicated relationship with

realism. From his walks in the East End, Besant realized that "one of the things very much

wanted in this great place was a centre of organized recreation, orderly amusement, and

intellectual and artistic culture" (*Autobiography* 243). But when this vision of reform was

couched in the form of the novel, it seemed to have lost its realist claim. Under the influence of

"certain friendly advisers," Besant writes in the "Preface," he adds a subtitle "An Impossible

Story." Yet, he admits that he has "never been able to understand why it is impossible" (4).

Contemporary reviews similarly characterized Besant's work as "[i]mpossibility tempered by the

ordinary": "the closer Mr. Besant approaches 'actuality', the nearer he comes to the smoky and

squalid life of the East End, the more he introduces an effective kind of prosaic fantasy. [. . .] As

the local environment [. . .] is invariably described with much minuteness; as the description is

firmly touched, and gives, as a rule, a sense of reality, the impossibilities of the plot and action

become the more odd and fascinating" (*Saturday Review* 59:1534, 385). Besant was criticized

for his "quality that stamps everything he touches with unreality," including his "schemes of

improvement" (*The Critic* 268, 1889, 76). The reviews recognized the fracture between reality

and imagination that organized the novel, but the question was whether this weakened the

novel's purchase or enhanced its potential for social change. Besant's fantastic realism is a

counterpart of sorts to Reade's sensationalism. They both view social problems through a prism

of exciting fantasy. Yet, Besant employs the fantastic in a slightly different way. Unlike Reade,

he is less after sensational and sales-oriented twists of the plot, than after blending the dire social reality with the fantasy of a better one to come. Besant's novel catalyzes social change in yet another way: as a medium intended for *leisurely* consumption, his novel cannot make a better argument for the culture of recreation in the East End but merely promote its own consumption.

However fantastic or utopian it may have been labeled, the novel brought about real change. A fictional utopia turned reality when Besant's idea of the Palace of Delight inspired a real People's Palace in East End which opened on the Mile End Road in 1887. The *Literary World*, for instance, considered the real and the unreal in Besant's work not at odds with one another, but as linked into a relationship of a real problem and a solution that has to be imagined before it becomes a reality: "Besant has done more than point out a disease; he has suggested a remedy. His dream of The Palace of Delight—pronounced by many to be impossible—has been realized [. . .]" (2 Mar. 1889, 20.5; 75-76). Unfortunately for Besant, the People's Palace failed to become a full-fledged embodiment of the Palace of Delight because "the original idea of a palace of recreation was mixed up with a place of education" (*Autobiography* 244). His novel gave expression to something urgent, new, and yet unknown, which made it simultaneously a "text-book" (244) for the future and cast it perpetually in a utopian light. As a model of discursive agency at the heart of this novel, embracing the other's perspective, too, acquires both pragmatic and idealistic connotations. His model of discussion aspires for some empirical realism, but at the same time is thoroughly brimming with his optimistic, utopian desire to gather "all sorts and conditions of men" under the common denominator of humanity.

The notion of a public sphere that derives from "the brotherhood of humanity" (23) and that construes everyone's perspective to be visible and understandable by anyone else serves as a kind of conceptual tool for Besant to begin to approach the unknown East End. He takes recourse

to the two-nations trope of the 1840's to represent the cultural, economic, and geographical gulf between the middle-class public and the "hive of working bees" ("One of Two Millions" 225), as he called East London. "Nobody goes east [. . .]; no one is curious about the way of life in the east" (29), the narrator laments as we first peek into Mrs. Bormalack's boarding-house and encounter its tenants. Angela's and Harry's crusades suggest that it is imperative for the middle-class public to get to know "the east." Of course, besides humanitarian impulses, the novel adds into the mix the middle-class anxieties about the uneducated, disenfranchised, and potentially violent workers. Therefore, to know them and their "way of life" by stepping into their shoes is a means to dispel these anxieties. One can recognize here not only middle-class aspirations for safety, but also Besant's democratic intentions for the inhabitants of the East End. His advocacy for a genuine curiosity about them seems to shape a democratic attitude of acceptance.

However, this impulse of acceptance fades away when the novel departs from the original curiosity to know the "way of life in the east" and begins to mobilize the tactics of introducing specifically middle-class ways of life, leisure, and culture in the East End. On meeting his kinsfolk in the East End, Harry's curiosity is superseded by a feeling of being "bored and disgusted" (43) with his cousins who seem to him "a pair of sulky, ill-bred young men" (43). In his initial attempts, Harry cannot understand his cousins, let alone acknowledge their ways of life: "Conversation was difficult between two rather jealous workmen and a brother artisan who greatly resembled the typical Swell" (43). Harry's fluctuation from "curiosity" to "disgust" is symptomatic of the challenge to accept the other's ways of life. Harry employs his ability to assume another's perspective with the intent not to recognize another's culture and way of life, but to disseminate his notion of Culture to those who do not possess it yet. His zeal to engraft his ideas of culture and leisure upon the East End inhabitants living "monotonous lives" in

"monotonous houses" (44) reveals far more colonizing implications than his original curiosity about the East End "romance" might suggest. As the plot unfolds, Harry's agency can be described not so much in terms of reciprocal curiosity and recognition as in terms of infusing the Culture and the Leisure into those who possess neither one.

Such tactics of cultural dissemination in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* display familiar undertones of Matthew Arnold's influential thinking. Arnold's notion of culture as "pursuit of perfection" (81) and his ambition to diffuse "sweetness and light" (79) to the "raw and unkindled masses of humanity" (79) echo in Harry Goslett's language: "every man's mind is worth cultivating as soon as you find out the things best fitted to grow in it" (43). Along with the egalitarian idea of bringing culture to the masses, however, the narrator hurries to qualify the previous statement by adding through the indirect discourse : "But some minds will only grow turnips, while others produce the finest strawberries" (43). By doing so, he conveniently posits himself as a friend of the East End multitude and a proponent of middle-class cultural authority. For sure, the ideas about social improvements in the East End, as it turns out, flourish in the most cultivated mind—Harry's. Yet, there is also a glimmer of hope for some like "rough and uncultivated" (255) Dick Coppin who can one day become a working-class representative in the House if he continues to "go on reading; go on speaking; go on debating" (315) and "learn all that there is to learn" (315) to become "a practical man with knowledge" (315). Besant projects his ideas of culture onto a linear scale from "turnips" at the bottom to "strawberries" at the top. Culture, then, operates through the language of presence, absence, and augmentation and becomes homogeneous and monolithic. This notion of culture inflects the novel's interest in the other's perspective accordingly: a promise of mutual cultural exchange is debunked by a strategic delivery of culture to the "unkindled masses."

However, middle-class complacency about their ability to access and to know the perspective of common folk is destabilized through discussion scenes between Angela and Harry in their working-class disguises. While Angela thinks that she has a definite knowledge of the identity and class status of the cabinet-maker conversing with her, she oftentimes finds herself uncertain of who Harry truly is and what he truly thinks. Similarly, Harry is intrigued by Angela's ambiguous persona as a dressmaker as she frequently shifts her discussions from lamenting the monotony of a dressmaker's existence to figuring out the grand scale reform in the East End that only Miss Messenger's inheritance money can sponsor. This uncertainty creates a communicative situation where participants exchange ideas not because they can fully access and comprehend the other's perspective, but precisely because this perspective is mutable and deferred. This sense of uncertainty is mutual: "Angela, with her own guilty secret, was suspicious that perhaps this young man [Harry] might also have his" (69). Importantly, the uncertainty about one another's perspective is productive as it serves to empower Angela and Harry to express ideas that they would not otherwise. This performative situation throws a different light on Victorian imaginings of discussion in the public sphere: it questions the commonplace notions of stable identities, publics, and viewpoints and features a discussion forum where identities and perspectives are more complex, multifaceted, and never fully knowable. As a result, the novel is organized around two fantasies of discussion that ultimately work against each other. Angela's and Harry's immersion into working-class roles illustrates the fantasy of one's perspective as something entirely accessible and stable, while their incognito discussions  debunk this fantasy and conceive of perspectives in the public sphere as always multivalent and not entirely intelligible.

Discussions between Angela and Harry suggest that cultivated minds develop a natural attraction despite their working-class appearances. Such stratification, i.e. distinguishing Angela and Harry from the rest in the East End, reinforces the cultural authority of the middle classes. At the same time, however, the slippages that permeate all of their discussions allow Besant to experiment with this cultural hierarchy. In fact, he interestingly reconciles the endorsement of cultural authority with his faith in "common humanity." Angela's first meeting with Harry showcases her as someone akin to a cultural snob:

> What could there be, she asked, in common between herself and this workman? Then she wondered, remembering that so far she had found nothing in her own that was not also in his. Could it be that two years of Newnham had elevated her mentally no higher than the level of a cabinet-maker? (65)

The fact that Angela intuits "Culture" in Harry and is drawn to him and not many others in the East End subverts her original intention to integrate among the people. Angela's impulse toward Harry despite his appearance presents it as natural that upper classes mix with their educated peers. What on the outside looks like discussions between a dressmaker and a cabinet-maker, then, reinforces the exclusivity of the middle-class. Angela's and Harry's discussions *about* the working classes are curiously exclusive of the working classes themselves. And yet, Angela's cultural complacency is mitigated by a more democratic gesture to find something "in common" with this, or any other workman, for that matter. The notion of "common humanity" becomes here complicit with the middle class desire to impart middle-class ideas of culture unto the working class by recognizing something "in common" with them.

Angela's and Harry's agency among the working people strongly invites reading these scenes in the vein of the middle-class' ambivalent project of maintaining middle-class authority,

on the one hand, and identifying commonality between classes, on the other. The working classes share common humanity with the upper classes, but the only thing the former lack is culture. In order to impart culture upon the social other, the middle-classes have to assume the other's perspective is knowable, stable, and transparent. However, I argue that Angela's and Harry's discussions do not affirm, but subvert this assumption. Instead of being able to read the other, to locate the other's perspective, and to treat the other's identity as a fixed thing, Angela and Harry succeed in their discussions precisely because this ability is foreclosed upon. Angela and Harry have to communicate with the other who is never clearly defined and to refashion their own identities and arguments so as to remain undiscovered by their interlocutor.

We have seen how a model of perspective-sharing where positions are viewed as comparable and accessible by others lends itself to the middle-classes' colonizing superiority and cultural homogeneity. If so, I am interested in examining what kind of cultural and political alternative emerges from the model of embracing the other's perspective based on the potential inscrutability and non-fixedness of the other. I will tease out the democratic tendencies of such an alternative. The very notion of obscurity generates the notion of the other in ways radically different from the other in a public sphere based on transparency and unbound exchangeability. The middle-class project of cultivating the masses cannot recognize anything but its own notion of culture and creates a monologic public sphere. Conversely, the other that is not transparent and never fully known disrupts this homogeneity creating a diversified and decentered public sphere. Emmanuel Levinas posits our "Desire for Others" (30) as an alternative to Ego-centric philosophy: "The visitation [of the Other] is the upset of the very egoism of the Ego that upholds that conversion. The face disorients the intentionality that sights it" (33). Arguably, the disorientation that Levinas refers to is akin to the disorientation when Angela is confronted by

someone who does not neatly fall into her system of cultural hierarchy. Because she can classify him as neither upper nor lower class, she is left with the only option to respond to Harry in an ever changing communicative situation and thus come to terms with the elusive and inscrutable nature of the Other.

Angela's and Harry's maneuverings in discussion caused by shifts in perspective generate a mind-opening experience for both parties. Discussion creates a desire for inter-subjective rather than egocentric encounter. Although Levinas is not so much concerned with discussion, he views a desire for the Other as destabilizing of the Ego: "In Desire the Ego goes out to Others in a way that compromises the sovereign identification of the Ego with oneself" (29). Angela's and Harry's awareness of the Other's presence and interest in what the other party has to say destabilizes the "Ego." The awareness of the Other further informs the situation as they deal with otherness not only in their interlocutor, but also more privately, in their own identity. Angela has to embrace being a dressmaker as her own identity. Harry, too, has to filter what experiences and opinions he communicates to Angela to embrace the otherness of a cabinet-maker within himself. What I call here "otherness" can be viewed as tricks and lies and so interpreted as a taboo in Victorian morality, but, ironically, this "otherness" has an effect *conducive* to political discussion. The workings of otherness in the novel open up new views on the social problems.

As disguise introduces layers of otherness into the dialogue, it makes Angela's and Harry's discussions more multi-faceted and more oriented to the other's difference and the other's experience. These dynamics play out from one of the first moments of their acquaintance. As the dress-maker and the cabinet-maker walk the streets of Stepney Green, their dialogue dramatizes the challenges and rewards of reaching to relate to the other's experience:

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'Do you know the West End?' Angela asked her companion when they were gazing together upon an unlovely avenue of small houses which formed a street. She was thinking how monotonous must be the daily life in these dreary streets.

'Yes, I know the West End. What is it you regret in your comparison?'

Angela hesitated.

'There are no carriages here,' said the workman; 'no footmen in powder or coachmen in wigs; there are no ladies on horseback, no great squares with big houses, no clubs, no opera-house, no picture-galleries. All the rest of life is here.'

'But these things make life,' said the heiress. 'Without society and art, what is life?'

'Perhaps these people find other pleasures; perhaps the monotony gets relieved by hope, and anxiety, and love, and death, and such things.' The young man forgot how the weight of this monotony had fallen upon his own brain: he remembered, now, that his companion would probably have to face this dreariness all her life, and he tried in a kindly spirit to divert her mind from the thought of it. 'You forget that each life is individual, and has its own separate interests; and these are apart from the conditions which surround it. [. . .]' (66)

Recurring shifts between "Angela" and an "heiress" and a "workman" and a "young man" suggest just how each utterance is determined by speakers whose identities fluctuate in the course of the conversation. Harry's "I know the West End" is in line with his upper class status, yet it has an entirely different resonance with Angela who perceives him as a "workman." Promptly, however, Harry gives a description of the West End only as an outsider, as a "workman" would know it. The list of objects and people creates a picture that any outside

observer would see. Then, Harry-aristocrat, again, contemplates how a worker would "perhaps" survive the East End monotony as he brackets his own first-hand experience of everyday drudgery.  Similarly, when Angela claims that "society and art" make life, she imparts this from an upper class perspective, but at the same time she does not fail to act as if Harry were addressing a poor dressmaker.

Highlighting the incongruities between an utterance and one's perception and interpretation of it, the scene reveals that language is far from a transparent and linear medium of communication. Additionally, language is presented here as an embedded indicator of class when Angela interrogates Harry: " 'Men of your class [. . .] do not as a rule talk like you' " (69). Besides their mutual desire to understand the other's class, they also perceive an individual as an individual and not simply as a building block of class-consciousness. Harry sees life as "individual" filled with "its own separate interests." This view suggests that in order to understand the other class, one has to step into the shoes of another individual of that class rather than make assumptions about class as a whole. Inter-subjective exchange wields more political effect than contemplating abstractions of "class." Their dialogue replaces a rigid category of "class" with a more general notion of otherness in the public sphere. Angela's and Harry's experimentation with multiple meanings of otherness and their attachments to more than one identity outline our own (post)modern sense of the flexible, ambivalent, and multi-faceted nature of a discussion forum in the public sphere. The novel attempts to reflect on the inconsistencies of identities and rhetorical positions that lie at the heart of the public sphere evolving under the forces of modernity and its increasingly complex discursive forums. This conception of the public sphere precludes a simplistic model of exchanging perspectives and urges us to reconsider

our relationship with the other on new terms that account for complexity and ambiguity of participants in political discussion.

A sense of multifaceted identity imparts new freedoms in discourse and an ability to conceptualize change: Angela's and Harry's discussions generate a shared vision of reform. Awkward moments of juggling between viewpoints such as when "Angela hesitated" (66), when "She remembered that she was a dressmaker" (67), or guarded "her own guilty secret" (69) become the fractures in discussion that open new possibilities for self-fashioning. As this allows one to hear the opinions that one would not hear otherwise, Angela is willing to take recourse to such an extreme mode of self-fashioning as an estrangement from herself. Only when she refers to Miss Messenger (herself) in third person can she elicit Harry's thoughts on how her money could be put to use:

> 'Suppose, for instance, this young lady, this Miss Messenger, who owns all this property, were to use it for the benefit of the people, how would she begin, do you suppose?'
>
> 'Most likely [. . .] she would give away quantities of blankets, bread and beef in the winter, which would pauperize the people. [. . .] What you could do, by yourself, if you pleased, among the working girls of the place, would be, I suppose, worth ten times what she could do with all her giving. [. . .]'
>
> 'Her money! Yes, I see. Yet she herself—' She paused.  (69)

Harry explains his plans for reform in the East End by directing his speech to the "absent" Miss Messenger: "Now, if this young heiress wanted to do any good, she would build a Palace of Pleasure here" (70). While there is something genuine and sincere about the fact that Angela and Harry discuss social problems face-to-face, the genuine articulation of ideas also comes from an

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indirect address to someone who is not a part of the discussion. The face, then, denotes simultaneously an immediate openness and an element of elusive masking and impenetrability. This creates a notion of the other as open to communication, yet always preserving something about one's identity and viewpoint that is incommunicable to the other.

While it is hard for Angela and Harry to gauge one another's class status, their gender is clear and infuses their "long" (75) discussions with romance. By the same token, gender determines the differences in their agency. Angela as a woman is allowed to be progressive enough to want social change, but not to a point of militant feminism. As she thinks to herself, " 'We women are weak creatures,' [. . .] 'We long to be up and doing, but we cannot carve out our work for ourselves. A man must be with us to suggest or direct it. [. . .]' " (71). She comes across as a receptacle of Harry's ideas that he "put in her head" (71) as well as a source of capital to implement them. But however strong a point Besant wants to make of the fact that "these ideas were certainly his, not hers" (75), their discussions are more than just Harry's instructions to Angela. In fact, Angela's role is more than a listening ear. It is her manipulation with the different aspects of herself and the switching between herself and her alter ego and finally speaking of herself in third person that provoke Harry to respond and articulate his thoughts on the Palace of Delight. After all, Angela's role is far more proactive than Besant's traditional assumptions of femininity[33] and her remarks about herself as a passive female interlocutor might suggest.

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[33] My reference of Besant's traditional mindset on the women's question needs more explanation. Besant's opinions on women are an odd mix of traditionalism and progressive thinking as, for instance, in his 1894 interview where he states: "I am against woman's suffrage. That, however, is an opinion which may be modified by the changes which what I might call their emancipation will effect" (Parker 5). Besant's representation of Angela as a receptacle of Harry's ideas is reechoed in this interview when he claims: "Women are not creative; they do not bring ideas into the world. [. . .] They take ideas from men and develop them, and in the end they

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As I have showed, Angela's and Harry's discussions open up what seems like an unrestricted exchange of opinions because of the ways they mobilize their disguise. However, disguise lends itself not only to facilitate, but also hamper discussion. At times, it is only when the disguise of the other and one's own is "forgotten" that an open face-to-face discussion takes place. As Angela and Harry talk about the monotony of existence of the multitude, we see that talking "freely" becomes possible through not engaging but rather overcoming disguise:

> 'We cannot help ourselves.' This time it was the Cabinet-maker who spoke to the
> Dressmaker. [Previously the narrator refers to them as "Angela" and "Harry"].
> We belong to the crowd, and we must live with the crowd. You can't make much
> glory out of a mercenary lathe, nor out of a dressmaker's shop, can you, Miss
> Kennedy?'
> It was by such reminders, one to the other, that conversations of the most
> delightful kind, full of speculations and comparisons were generally brought up
> short. When Angela remembered that she was talking to an artisan, she froze.
> When Harry reflected that it was a dressmaker to whom he was communicating
> bits of his inner soul, he checked himself. When, which happened every day, they
> forgot their disguises for a while, they talked quite freely, and very prettily
> communicated all sorts of thoughts, fancies, and opinions to each other; [. . .].
> (86)

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are finer than what the men conceived. But they invent nothing" (Parker 5). Earl A. Knies sums up Besant's relation to feminism as a tension: "Besant clearly would have preferred that women remain at home, but no one argued more strongly for fairness  when they could not or would not stay there" (229). Viewed in this context, Angela's agency in discussions with Harry exemplifies the tension between a patriarchal perspective on women and a feminist one that runs deep in Besant's novels, essays, and interviews.

Awareness of disguise here grinds the discussion to a halt. They can talk "freely" as long as they forget about each other's disguise. In various scenes then, disguise functions alternately as a catalyst and an impediment. At times the characters embrace their disguised identities, and at times they try to bracket them in an attempt to reach out to the other. But in both scenarios the other remains somewhat unknown, obfuscated, and mutable. This further suggests that the figuration of the other in the novel inquires just to what extent and to what end one can understand the other and place him/herself in another's place. We see the novel's attempt at a new conception of identity and discourse in the public sphere, which entails a revision of attitudes and tactics in discussion.

An introduction of an ambivalent and unreadable Other in discussions inflects Harry's and Angela's role as participants-observers among the East End poor. The notion of a participant-observer collapses in this case because its function as an "insider-outsider" is no longer sustained by a clear distinction between the middle-class subject and the lower-class object of observation. In fact, these two participants-observers do not observe their intended objects but rather observe one another in a self-reflexive way. While Angela's and Harry's discussions seem to suggest that their "knowledge" about the perspective of the poor is but a middle-class fantasy, this curious positioning of participants-observers face-to-face also shows how the novel interrogates the sociological practice of the participant-observer. This moment of self-reflexivity (when a participant-observer observes his/her counterpart and is unable to "read" the latter) infuses this practice with a new self-awareness and revises its assumptions about the participant-observer's relationship with the Other. To put it differently, a failure of a participant-observer to read the Other is presented not as a failure at all, but as a call for self-reflexivity and for perceiving the Other on new terms. Although this new kind of relating to the Other takes

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place only in discussions between Angela and Harry, it has a potential to transgress the class boundaries because the nature of class itself is unsettled in these discussions.

Besides acting as participants-observers, Harry and Angela also represent a variation of sorts on Disraeli's figure of a stranger. The fact that they are strangers to one another, like in Disraeli's novel, enables the participants in discussion not only to abstract themselves from certain social and cultural markers, but also to stand in their truth and speak their minds unimpeded by conventions that would dominate in other contexts. The estrangement from one's social class entails a productive distancing from the social problem of ameliorating the East End that they discuss. Additionally, the fact that Harry and Angela do not simply abstract themselves from their class, but speak in disguise as another class signifies their attempt to view the people as not only an *object* of discussion, but a possible *speaking subject*. Embodying such a lower-class speaking subject, Harry speaks his ideas freely to Angela because she chooses to distance herself from the capital and power she possesses. Despite the similarities, Besant revises the notion of a stranger in some ways that makes it different from Disraeli's. If in *Sybil*, strangers discuss the condition of England and move towards a consensus to restore a union of the classes, i.e., the aristocracy and the People, Besant's strangers seem to unsettle the notion of class itself and replace the notion of consensus with a more tentative and contingent moment that only points towards consensus because the other's perspective is always mutable and never fully accessible.

While the scenes of Angela's and Harry's discussions about social change are aestheticized and represented as "pretty," those discussion modes that are ethically questionable or unsuccessful fall short of Besant's aesthetic approval. For instance, vulture-like Mr. Bunker offers Angela his assistance with setting up her business by appreciating his "talk" time with

others as a commodity: " 'I charge', he said, 'as arranged for beforehand. Time for talking, arranging, and house-hunting, half-a-crown an hour. That won't break you. And you won't talk too much, knowing you have to pay for it. [. . .]' " (54). His commercialized mentality treats the time spent on "talking" as an expense to be reimbursed and a nuisance to be restricted to a minimum. This communicative efficiency that Bunker prides himself on to Angela creates a jarring contrast if compared to Angela's and Harry's "long" talks (75), where time spent in discussion is anything but a commodity. Furthermore, because Angela and Harry get carried away by imagination in their discussions, time ceases to be measurable or quantifiable and thus further resists Bunker-like, ugly commodification. Angela withdraws from talking to Bunker. While her disguise adds more insights into her conversations with Harry, in talking business with Bunker she is "afraid" of exposure because "her own ignorance [and thus her true identity] would be exposed if she talked" (54). Bunker's "reporting progress" (72) on his search to find Angela a place to set up her workshop adds up to the bill for his services and inevitably frames discussion as a business transaction. Along with his dishonest ways of appropriating Harry's property, as the novel reveals to us later, Bunker lacks integrity in discussion, too. Not only does he follow the sole criterion of economic profit of one at the expense of the others, but he also does not engage in entertaining anyone else's viewpoint but his.

Another instance when discursive reciprocity is forestalled is a moment when Harry raises a question of religion with, ironically, a real dressmaker Rebekah Hermitage. As Harry delivers his vision of a Palace of Delight and makes a case for "the necessity of pleasure, the desirableness of pleasure, the beauty of pleasure" (109), Rebekah does not respond to his enthusiasm. For her, the Palace of Delight stands but a faint chance of improving the conditions of the people in the face of a larger problem which she sees in that "half the people never go to

church" (109). Harry remarks to the stubbornly religious dressmaker that the Palace will give a start to all improvement, including religious spirit, because "religion is a plant that flourishes best where life is happiest" (109). To continue with his logic, Harry wants to explain to her the link between the happy (and wealthy) people and their religious feelings. But what follows takes a disastrous route of misunderstanding, so different from what we see in his discussions with Angela:

> '[. . .] Who are the most religious people in the world, Miss Hermitage?'
>
> 'They are the worshippers in Red Man's Lane, and they are called the Seventh-
>
> Day Independents.' (109)

After this unexpectedly "wrong" answer, the discussion stops. The narrator accentuates Rebekah's ignorance and poverty as reasons for her failure to articulate the answer expected from her by Harry: "The worst of the Socratic method of argument is that, when the wrong answer is given, the whole thing comes to grief. Now, Harry wanted her to say that the people who go most to church are the wealthy classes. Rebekah did not say so, because she knew nothing of the wealthy classes; and in her own circle of sectarian enthusiasts nobody had any money at all" (109). Where Angela's playful otherness prompted Harry to articulate his ideas in a more insightful way, Rebekah mobilizes a different aspect of the other. Rebekah's otherness does not come from her complex identity: she is a real, not a disguised dressmaker. Her otherness is not a catalyst for discussion, but a roadblock in Harry's logic. This impenetrable other disrupts the discussion completely. In Harry's encounter with this working-class girl, the differences in thinking and experience are too large to promote understanding. The scene falls into a patronizing model as an expedient to traverse this difference. Besant's ideas of common humanity break down in the face of such drastic differences: his vision of putting oneself in

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another's shoes requires some pre-existing basis for commonality, which is tragically absent in this scene. As outsiders like the religiously fanatical and working-class Rebekah disrupt the delicate imaginary of the inclusion of the other, it further casts this model as a specifically middle-class fantasy of inclusion. The working girls like Rebekah have a chance of inclusion, but only through Angela's middle-class pastorship as "Those who conversed with her became infected with her culture" (163).

The political rhetoric at the Advanced Club serves as another problematic strain of discussion. While Dick Coppin, or Dick the Radical, can arouse his working-class audience at the Club, the Club is a sham place of discussion, where the predictability of speakers and listeners and lack of genuine thought replicates the monotony of the East End. Dick's process of preparing and delivering his political speeches is described in the novel through the imagery of factory labor, which ironically serves not to validate, but to mock his discourse. Harry tells Angela that "Dick is forging his speech for tonight" (151). The monotony of his speeches is intimated by the fact that Dick exerts himself in front of an audience "almost every Sunday evening" (151) while the speeches themselves seem more like mechanical ramblings "on the House of Lords, or the Church, or the Country Bumpkin's Suffrage, or the Cape question, or Protection, or the Nihilists, or Ireland, or America, or something" (151). In order for his speech to be "red-hot" (151), we are told that Dick "spends the afternoon sticking it into the furnace, so to speak" (151). And just as the manufacturing process evoked here roughens one up, so do Dick's "red-hot, scorching" speeches produce a similar effect on the audience who "have had so many sham grievances told in red-hot words that they have become callous, and don't know of any real ones" (151). The club thus proves unfit for the emergence of the culture of discussion in stark contrast to the coffee-houses in Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere.

Instead, it is shown as a "sham" place where "eloquence" serves but to rouse sham enthusiasm. The humdrum circular argumentation in the Club exemplifies the kind of discussion that fails to conceptualize social change. As Harry explains to Angela: "the British workman has got a vague idea that things go better for him under the Liberals. When the Liberals come in, [. . .], and when, like their predecessors, they have made the usual mess, confidence is shaken. Then he allows the Conservatives [. . .] back again [. . .]. As if it matters which side is in to the British workman!" (151). Thus, described through the imagery of manufacturing production, Dick Coppin's discursive production ironically discredits his working-class voice and presents the club as a place of sham performance and rhetoric trapped in a false dichotomy of party politics.

Dick Coppin, however, is a working-class character with enough "common sense" (184) to undergo a personal transformation with the help of Angela's pro-culture and pro-leisure instruction. As a part of this conversion, Dick has to realize that he is in the wrong. Since the novel conflates the middle-class project of cultivation and the "vague denunciations and cheap rhetoric" (185) of the working class, Dick has to abandon his old ways. Dick's ability for what is called "common sense" makes his conversion possible at all. With "common sense" exclusively on the side of the middle-classes, the discussion between Dick and Angela does not even imply a need for thinking on both sides. In its place, an uncompromising clash of opinions seeks to weed out the "wrong" side. Although Angela creates her enigmatic persona by stepping into the shoes of an ordinary dressmaker, she does not in the least entertain a way to see politics from Dick's perspective or to take an insider's look at the "cheap rhetoric of his class" (185). By the same token, Angela's enigma ("Who was this dressmaker who spoke about directing him?" (186)) becomes a vehicle for her uncompromising persuasion.

Dick's overtly political jargon and fixation on institutions gives way under Angela's deliberately not so much "political," but "practical" (185) approach and a personal concern for the people. Upon arrival with Harry to the Dressmakers' Association, Dick introduces himself as a "Republican" (185) and announces that he is "for root-and-branch Reform" (185) only to suggest the superficial nature of such political language that would perhaps find acclamation at the Advanced Club, but not with Angela. In fact, his way of talking politics is further debunked as the dialogue promptly turns into Angela's "queen-like" expostulations (185) on the improvement of the people punctuated by Dick's telling silences. Such moments ("He made no reply"; "He stared again"; "He was silent [. . .]"; "He was too much astonished at the whole conversation to make any coherent reply" (185-187)) indicate Dick's "cold doubt about himself" (186). If Dick's silences are carefully put into words by the narrator, Angela's talking is partly absent from the text. Her explanation of the Dressmakers' Association is edited out of the scene and replaced with a one-line blank. Dick's silences that are present and Angela's talking that is absent make an interesting choice to portray a dialogue of persuasion. The effect of this editing is that we see Dick's doubtful silence more prominently than Angela's arguments and explanations. It matters more to us that he has nothing to respond with rather than what exactly Angela has to say to him. These moments of silence on Dick's part portray him "humbled but pensive" (189), and even if still perhaps set in his ways, already aware of being in the "wrong" and ever more receptive to Angela's experiment in the girls' improvement.

Besides fading in light of Angela's practicality, Dick's "forging" of his "red-hot" speeches for the excitable audience fades in comparison with Harry's liberal self-restraint and the ability to cultivate ideas in his own mind before offering them to others. Harry's reflective

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process presents him as an exemplar of Victorian self-discipline and reserve that in the end produces the "finest strawberries":

> The great secret about waiting is that while a man waits he thinks, and if he thinks in solitude and thinks long enough, letting words lie in his brain and listening to ideas which come upon him, sometimes singly and slowly, sometimes in crowds like the fancies of a wakeful night, there presents itself an idea at last which seizes upon him and holds him captive, and works itself out in his brain while he mechanically goes on with the work, the rest, the toil, and the pleasure of his daily life. (253)

Importantly, the everyday serves as background for cultivating some of the finest ideas. Refraining from the excess of excitement that reigns at the Advanced Club, Harry's practice as described above implies that sometimes political discussion can be premature. It is only a self-disciplined subject that can intuit the moment when his ideas are ripe for the public. And yet, with all the obvious glorification of self-controlling agency in the passage above, Harry's being "captive" of his idea seems a bit subversive of liberal individuality. In fact, Dick's "forging" seems to imply more agency than Harry's "captive" state of mind. In an attempt to define a model discursive practice, Besant's novel oscillates between exposing the excess in Dick's "forging" of his "red-hot" speeches and Harry's restraint that dangerously borders on the captivity of the mind that perhaps in a more subtle way threatens his liberal agency. However, Harry eventually speaks at the Club and thus reclaims the latter.

Harry's speech to the people at the Advanced Club serves to demonstrate that a well-thought-through argument weighs more than Dick's moving, yet misguided speech. Harry blames the people's "cursed ignorance" (260) that does not let them realize that "Yours—

yours—yours is the Power" (263). In response to the customary rhetoric of the Club, he calls for a new language of political discussion: "Leave the humbug of Radicalism and Liberalism and Toryism" (263). Dick Coppin's subsequent transformation from an eloquent orator at the Club to a leader of the people and their future representative in the House of Commons embodies the empowerment of the people that Harry articulates. As the ex-Chartist advises Dick to "go on reading; go on speaking; go on debating" (315), he is confident that Dick will one day become a "working man's candidate; one of ourselves" (315). Only after exchanging his former "red-hot" eloquence for a new life of self-cultivation can Dick Coppin enter into the public sphere favored by the novel. With his biting critique of Dick's radicalism as a false cure of people's "cursed ignorance," Harry lays ground for Dick's transformation not by means of seeing through Dick's eyes, but by means of eradicating the mistaken notions in Dick's "red-hot" rhetoric. The Club eventually becomes a competitive arena where a "collision of adverse opinions" (59), to borrow John Stuart Mill's words, unfolds in an effort to produce the "clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error" (21).

Besides its investment in a reciprocal relationship with the other, the novel is no less preoccupied with eliminating the "wrong" opinions which ought to remain outside of the discussion forum altogether, i.e. outside of the scope where embracing the other's perspective would be desirable. This intolerance for a "wrong" opinion and the urgency to eliminate it (even if it happens to be one's own opinion) informs the entire conversation between Dick and Angela at the Association dance and music night. The success of Dick's conversion is due to Angela's persuasion as well as his own realization that he is in the wrong. The same logic of eliminating wrong opinions is at work when Harry points to the fallacies he hears at the Advanced Club. As Dick puts it, Harry "gets up after the speech, and says so and so is wrong. Yet they like him—

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because he isn't afraid to say what he thinks" (187). Harry, unlike Dick Coppin, does not play on the workers' excitability and emotionality and does not aspire to "move" them (253). Instead, Harry prefers to "set a man right as to facts" (253) and meditate on his ideas before he feels it time to articulate them in public. A need for shedding wrong opinions resurfaces in other instances, too. Rebekah's erroneous beliefs account for narrow-mindedness and preclude exchanges of perspectives between her and Harry; her perspective is outside the scope where common ground is achievable. That certain voices are not even suitable to be heard raises a question of the extent to which this model is oriented toward inclusiveness. It would be fair to state that the discussion forum in Besant's novel is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. While it generates commonality and understanding by extending between divergent points of view, at the same time it needs some preexisting common ground in order to take place. The tension that runs through the novel can be formulated as follows: while the text aspires for acceptance of the other, it nevertheless takes comfort in tending a common ground formed by middle-class ideas of culture and reform. It is not until Dick learns to pronounce the "House" instead of the " 'Ouse" (318) that he can speak on behalf of the people.

With the newly opened Palace of Delight crowning the end of the novel and with the "new refinement" (361) observed among Angela's protégées, the narrative sets in motion the grand-scale reform largely on middle-class terms. The discovery of uncle Bunker's embezzlement fraud makes Harry a "rich man with houses and money in the funds" (386) and hence an appropriate match for Angela Messenger. Since Harry does not know that Angela the dressmaker and the heiress Miss Messenger are the same person until the last minute at the altar, he passes the test of "sweet and disinterested love" (416). It is his readiness for "[a] life of work—with Angela" (413), "only a dressmaker" (412), that makes Harry worthy of this

marriage. Through Angela's and Harry's marriage, Besant affirms the middle-class cultural authority and the project of social improvement through the union of ideas (Harry) and capital (Angela). Reflecting Besant's confusingly progressive and traditional views on feminism, Angela gladly resigns public agency and passes it to Harry. Her speech that announces the Palace of Delight to be the "property of the people" (432) is her only public address because, as Besant explains with nostalgia, she "belongs to that rapidly diminishing body of women who prefer to let the men do all the public speaking" (431). Reaffirming the public sphere on class and gender boundaries, the novel seems to contradict its egalitarian message that "all sorts and conditions of men are pretty much alike" (179). Ironically, the appeal for a common humanity serves as a device not to foreground equality, but to reinforce cultural, economic, and gender hierarchies.

To read *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* as a text thoroughly infused with the middle-class complacent and patronizing gesture means that the novel falls short of a more democratic ideal that it elaborates in a variety of scenes. While my examination of the workings of sympathetic knowledge in this novel corroborates this strain of Besant's criticism, I have aimed to show that the novel simultaneously affirms the culturally colonizing project of the middle classes and pointing to its limitations suggests an alternative to it. From the first pages of the novel, when Harry and Angela assume working-class roles, exchange of perspectives is based on the idea that it is possible to step into the working-class shoes because any perspective is accessible, comprehensible, transparent, and interchangeable with any other. In other words, all sorts and conditions of men are alike; it is only that some have education and leisure and others do not. This kind of thinking makes all perspectives and social positions potentially interchangeable since one can bracket such characteristics as, for instance, "culture" to access a worldview of someone without "culture." This unifying view of a discussion forum follows

Besant's belief in common humanity, but seems to be suspiciously incapable of diversity and recognition of otherness. This kind of perspective-sharing converts all otherness into sameness and eliminates difference. Instead of its democratic potential, perspective-sharing could be considered as nothing else but the middle-class desire to convert the lower classes into middle-class trusted attendants. That the socially privileged Harry and Angela can step into the place of the working classes of the East End and spread the middle-class idea of Culture suggests that the fantasy of the exchange of perspectives may very well conceal the conservative tyranny of this enterprise.

But Harry and Angela's discussions in disguise foster a different attitude toward the other and challenge the notion that the other's position is always transparent and ought to be assimilated. Their political discussions thrive on the recognition of difference and seeing the other as a multi-faceted, mutable, unfixed, and partly unknown participant. Moments when Harry and Angela find themselves uncertain about the identity and class of their interlocutor are the liberating moments that put a check on the middle-class complacency. Indeed, how can the middle classes impose their authority if "masquerading" creates a non-transparent other? A project of cultural authority would have to assume that the middle classes "know" what the lower classes think, feel, need, and want. The novel in part debunks the project of middle classes "knowing" the working classes because the Harry and Angela never truly reach out to the "real" working classes. As these scenes suggest, the middle classes should negotiate with the working classes not through their similarity, but through embracing their otherness. The novel gestures toward new mechanisms of relating to the other in the public sphere. Harry and Angela imagine social change and achieve mutual understanding never fully knowing, yet embracing, responding to, and opening up to the other's perspective. Besant's novel, then, intriguingly remains

committed to the middle-class cultural authority, yet works against itself by sketching out a subversive discussion model.

A practice of exchanging perspectives persists among Victorian cultures of discussion in an effort to stitch together a society ridden by cultural, social, and economic divides. For some, like Charles Reade, stepping into the other's place allows for a different look at things and so naturally resolves conflicts of interests or opinions. Dr. Amboyne's maxim in Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* serves as a universal mantra that can apply to and resolve any conflict of opinions. But in the work of Walter Besant the benevolent maxim of Dr. Amboyne loses an optimistic flair and instead betrays more pragmatic goals of the middle-class project. Besant's novel seems intriguing in its insights into understanding the other on more complex terms and capitalizing on rather than glossing over difference and ambiguity about the other. This emergent alternative vision of the public sphere seems to be no less important than the cultural import of the Palace of Delight in understanding Besant's vision of social change.

CHAPTER 4

GEORGE GISSING'S *DEMOS*: PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND THE "MANY-HEADED

MONSTER" OF SOCIALISM

When in 1888 Edith Sichel wrote an article in *Murray's Magazine* about George

Gissing's pessimistic outlook on the working classes, she stated that Gissing was one of the

writers whose attention was now turned to "that many-headed monster Demos" (506). Although

nowhere does Gissing's novel *Demos* contain such a colorful metaphor to describe the masses of

New Wanley, Sichel's phrase is clearly suggested by the tone of the novel. The article in

*Murray's* puts Gissing's social "pessimism" side by side with Walter Besant's philanthropic

"optimism." Indeed, the kind of view of the lower classes suggested by the phrase would be at

odds with Besant's rosy vision of social solutions. As a truly late-Victorian novelist, Gissing

casts doubt on mid-Victorian eagerness to point to social evils and offer ready solutions.

Representing a "new style of realism" (DeVine 41), Gissing's *Demos* does not share Besant's

optimism and hence is not the mainstream Victorian novel embedded in a specifically middle-

class vision of social reform. In *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, East-Enders merge into one

homogeneous entity that craves middle-class Culture and aspires for the values of liberal

discussion. *Demos*, on the other hand, dismisses such social homogeneity as a comforting

fantasy. Gissing's case study of socialism(s) suggests that a social landscape is best represented

as a fragmented sphere of political causes, methodologies, and publics. In doing so, *Demos*

marks a shift in Victorian conceptions of the public sphere and reformulates the means and the

ends of political discussion therein. Sichel's image of "that many-headed monster of Demos"

serves well to capture the way in which the novel straddles the line between, on the one hand, representing the working classes somewhat as a kind of totality and, on the other hand, providing insight into its fragmented nature.

I will focus on the novel's preoccupation with the question of agency in the public sphere as it imagines two main alternatives: large-scale political movement vs. individual pursuit of art. Gissing is in the end skeptical about both. Any idea, however benevolent, would gain resonance in the public sphere only to dissolve under the centrifugal forces of selfish ambitions, plural interpretations, or even mutations into its very opposite (as is the case with Richard Mutimer's "Democratic Capitalism" (416)). The kinds of socialisms that we see in *Demos*—from Westlake's intellectualism and Mutimer's moderate agitation to Daniel Dabbs' zeal for "stamping and shouting"(35), Roodhouse's violent revolutionism and even a Russian variety with a "nihilistic" flair—point to the limits of a unified social action or an impossibility to articulate a political argument by large multitudes. Such diversity and incommensurability of political ideas and movements makes a shared discussion forum unfeasible. The illusory voice of the people inevitably splinters into many styles and agendas. As such, the practical aspect of participating in the public sphere entails a loss of pristine political notions, an impossibility of a shared dialogue, and an inability to exert a concerted collective action. As if by a law of entropy, collective action loses its momentum before it even begins.

Another alternative is embodied in the aristocrat Hubert Eldon's individualistic pursuit of art, which includes preserving Wanley in its pre-industrial, pastoral condition. While the desire for the pastoral beauty in Wanley invokes pastoralism in Disraeli's *Sybil*, it is different from Disraeli's politically charged image of England. In *Demos*, pastoralism signifies a withdrawal from politics. That socio-political and the aesthetic planes do not intersect in the novel is evident

from Eldon's rhetorical question, "What has a hungry Demos to do with the beautiful?" (77). While individual pursuit of art dangerously withdraws Hubert from social concerns in the public sphere, Mutimer's political agitation for a mass movement is compromised even more. Although Gissing wrote *Demos* "from a very Conservative point of view" (*Letters* vol. 2, 363) and Eldon's eco-preservation and taste for the beautiful are presented favorably, Gissing does not imply that Eldon's aesthetic Conservatism is a solution to late-Victorian social anxieties. *Demos* does not seek a solution or prescribe a mode of agency in the public sphere, but rather posits the two alternatives as a dilemma. However, pushing to the limits the travesty of political discussion, on the one hand, and the ultimate withdrawal from the world of politics, on the other, the novel implies new hopes of the possibilities of discussion in the public sphere that lie outside these futile alternatives.

In *Demos* Gissing illuminates the structures of social movements and the nature of the public claims that they make. With the English Socialism as a case study, the novel seems to be preoccupied with a question of homo- and heterogeneity within a social movement in the public sphere. What may at first seem as an insignificant slippage between the singular form of the English Socialism in the title has the plural form of "many kinds o' Socialism," or Socialisms, in the actual narrative, shows that for Gissing this question is central. The cliques and the offshoots within the socialist movement in the novel become more visible when the socialist ideas, as Gissing tells us, hit the ground of practical politics and when the narrative perspective zooms in on individual leaders and their divergent "styles" of socialism. What is interesting is that the question that *Demos* poses about the dynamics within the Socialist movement also carries broader insights into the proliferating movements and reform campaigns that were distinctive of the Victorian period. Scholars like Amanda Claybaugh, for instance, describe the social

movements of this period as simultaneously heterogeneous and homogeneous because behind the overwhelming multiplicity of campaigns they trace a common liberal project of reform. Claybaugh describes the diverse political landscape mentioning "a number of reform movements, including temperance and the abolition of slavery, the campaigns for women's and working-class suffrage, and also efforts to equalize marriage laws, to restructure poorhouses, and to establish utopian communities and schools" (*The Novel of Purpose* 21). She insists, however, along with Victorian reformers themselves, on an underlying unity of purpose that allows her to group these seemingly disparate social movements together:

> This list is long and heterogeneous, to be sure, but it does not begin to exhaust the array of nineteenth-century reforms, which also included Magdalene houses and fallen women and settlement houses for immigrants and the poor, the campaign against naval flogging, the campaign for animal welfare, reform of asylums and prisons, sanitation reform, rational dress reform, vegetarianism, mesmerism, phrenology, and water cures. Surprisingly, this heterogeneous array was seen by contemporary reformers as coherent. There were some conflicts among these reforms, as well as within them, but for the most part they were understood to be part of a single project. (*The Novel of Purpose* 21)

While Claybaugh registers homogeneity of purpose behind the heterogeneous movements, I think that Gissing wants to show that homogeneity and heterogeneity are all continuously present in social movements at whatever scale they are examined. If for Claybaugh it is important to claim the overall unity of the project to which all of the reform campaigns belong after all, Gissing is more skeptical that this all-encompassing unity of purpose exists in practical politics.

For him, it is more productive to think of Socialism(s) as an always present potentiality for consolidation, on the one hand, and fragmentation, on the other.

Besides Gissing's interest in the dynamics of the public sphere movements, *Demos* betrays Gissing's ambivalent view on the working classes entering the late-Victorian public sphere. Scholars have commented on his mixed attitudes of sympathy with the suffering poor and disdain for their violence and vulgarity evident in his social problem novels (Lelchuk 358; Grylls xi; Selig 34; Delany 379; Maltz 56). The irony of his position as a half-starved intellectual is that while his diet of "tinned beef [. . .] & potatoes" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 358) may have induced him to feel with the poor, he stayed detached from the tumultuous crowd during Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square Riots. At the Socialist meeting at Kelmscott House in 1885, Gissing was rather amused by the sound of an unrefined speech by a socialist candidate for Hampstead: "I heard him ranting in the street on Sunday morning; —the  roughest type of working man, &—ye Gods!—breathing maledictions! He described the H. of Commons as a 'decrippled institootion!'" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 371). With the characteristic mix of sympathy and repulsion Gissing features the protagonist in *Demos* Richard Mutimer.

*Demos* puzzled contemporary reviewers in that it did not subscribe to any popular philanthropic projects of social reformers. In contrast to them, Gissing, while inevitably drawn to the fate of the poor, provides no solution to improve their condition and goes as far as to suggest that the lower classes, except for some worthy few, are ultimately a savage assembly incapable of raising above their condition either culturally or economically. Almost in one voice, reviewers called the novel "pessimistic" (Sichel 507; "Mr. George Gissing" 489; Dolman 258; qtd. in Wells 192). While in *Demos* he never prescribes a solution, he makes a point that Socialism is clearly not a solution. As Sichel remarked on *Demos*: "It is written to prove the errors of

Socialism and the impracticability of equality" (511). Indeed, the novel implies that fast and ready solutions may in the end be more detrimental than lack of immediate action. What seems like the novel's "pessimism" is in fact a cautious attitude towards reform which stems from a paralyzing awareness that it is impossible to come up with an optimal solution. In this, Gissing responds critically to promising, yet problematic "solutions" such as Besant's hand-on reformist approach epitomized in the Palace of Delight or Reade's easy fix of putting oneself in another's place.

The novel *Demos* traces Richard Mutimer's life from the time when he unexpectedly inherits the estate of Wanley and his socialist plan to turn "New" Wanley into mines and iron-works to secure comfortable conditions for the workers and to direct profits for further socialist propaganda. Scenes of socialist meetings, however, demystify the allegedly unified movement. We see a satire on political discussion in caricatures like Daniel Dabbs ("the proletarian pure and simple" (34)), a Conservative workman (a "self-contradiction" in terms (61)), Mr. Cullen with his self-destructive rhetoric at "a point of fury" (62), Mr. Cowes in the glory of his grammatical incompetence, or an anonymous arraigner of the People who collapses in the excitement of his speech and is carried off to a coffee-shop nearby. Several cliques of partisans are formed and before long Socialism in New Wanley is a maelstrom of competing leaders and ideas. To substantiate his newly elevated status, Richard rejects his working-class lover Emma Vine and marries Adela who is a "lady." In the meantime, a miraculous find of the old Mutimer's lost will which bequeaths the property to the aristocrat Hubert Eldon precipitates a makeover of New Wanley back to its pre-industrial condition. Richard's failed investment scheme with the unionists' money enrages the mob and accounts for his violent death. Demos shows its true face of violence and unreason, but at the same time does a sort of cruel justice to Richard who lost

sight of his socialist ideals and embraced career self-interest and the money-making spirit of capitalism. In the meantime, Hubert's aristocratic mindset and his love of art and nature are fully rewarded not only with the possession of Wanley which belonged to Mutimer, but a marriage to the true love of his life Adela.

Although characters in *Demos* represent different social classes, the plot is not preoccupied with establishing a dialogue between them as would be commonplace in earlier Victorian novels such as *Hard Times*, *Shirley*, *Mary Barton*, *Sybil*, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* and others. From the words of Daniel Dabbs, we learn that the conflict between Richard and his employers is merely "a case of incompatible temperaments" (34). Negotiations between Richard and his employers that may have taken place are outside the novel's investments. Interactions between Richard and Hubert concern the logistics of the Eldons' moving out of the estate. The novel in fact lacks any politically significant confrontations between Richard and his aristocratic counterpart. A similar theme of incompatibility is reinforced when Hubert states: "[I]t is impossible for me to pretend sympathy with Mr. Mutimer's views" (337-338). The novel represents the employers, the aristocracy, and the workers as disjointed worlds that interact with one another only tangentially. A sense of social fragmentation that is conveyed here parts ways with earlier aspirations of a realist novel to encompass a social totality, as Georg Lukács understands it. The novel's zeroing in on the working class, rather than imagining social classes as participants in the shared public sphere, is a consequence of this fragmentation that becomes increasingly felt late in the century. Fredric Jameson suggests that Gissing's naturalist narratives no longer represent, as in Dickens, a social totality, but showcase "a new classification of narrative material according to specialization, or the division of labor" (190). The "crisis of social totality" that Gissing's novels grapple with is the result of "reification" and "social

fragmentation." Against the backdrop of the lost social totality, what *Demos* can accomplish is to represent the world of the workers as a kind of totality in itself. According to Fredric Jameson, "Gissing's conception of a novel about 'the people' is a form of high naturalist specialization that seeks to pass itself off as a map of social totality" (190). In *Demos*, political discussion is predicated on a class-based community and, rather than traversing class divides, it reaffirms them. But the phenomenon of fragmentation about which Gissing's narrative raises questions, I argue, goes beyond Jameson's class-based view of social fragmentation. I suggest that Gissing hardly conceives of the working classes as a "totality" but instead foregrounds the fragmentation within the working-class public sphere that unfolds through the break-up of socialism into numerous offshoots. What becomes of primary interest for Gissing here is the kind of fragmentation that affects any political idea once it enters the realm of praxis.

Gissing heeds precisely to this practical realm of politics to tease out the elements of affect, disorder, fragmentation, and spatial dynamics that fall outside of the abstract ideal of a rational debate. Discussion scenes among the workers bristle with excessive temperaments and meaningless circulation of buzzwords like "exploitation" and "capitalist" (62-63). As a spatial center of discussion, an agitation platform ironically demonstrates anything but coherence of ideas as the speakers replace one another falling victims to their own political "enthusiasm." The presence of a Chairman and a semblance of an agenda evoke a parallel between this scene and the ways discussion was practiced in the wide-spread debating societies. At first glance, in portraying these non-sequitur speeches, chaotic proceedings, and emotional excess, Gissing seems to condemn the workers' way to talk politics and to gesture favorably to the liberal culture of discussion. Victorian mutual improvement and debating societies were the foremost organizations whose goal was to spread the practice of liberal discussion. Their agendas fit

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neatly into the grand scheme of gradual social improvement and promotion of self-enlightenment by means of "the full development of the moral and intellectual faculties of mankind," which also entails the "improvement of the working classes" (*Report of the Proceedings* 1843 9).  In this sense, the Union meeting at Commonwealth Hall is an antithesis of what one would expect at a debating society's meeting: a standardized list of questions for discussion,[34] regulation of length and order of speeches,[35] and follow-up voting.[36]

While it is true that the novel works to show the contrast between the workers' meetings and, by implication, a more refined model of political discussion, it would be inaccurate to conclude that through scenes like the Union meeting at Commonwealth Hall Gissing tries to reaffirm the values of liberal discussion. Gissing is disillusioned with Positivism and a positivist idea of gradual social improvement by the time he writes *Demos*. If so, then the scene in question rather casts skepticism on the ideals of liberal discussion. The implication of this scene is that the theory of clear argumentation, ordered speeches, and selfless "intellectual gladiatorship" (*The Debater's Handbook* iii) is removed from the real workings of the public sphere and as such is inadequate in understanding it. Moreover, the question that arises from this scene is whether a highly regimented, standardized, and "temperament"-free discussion with result-oriented

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[34] *Our Magazine* and *The British Controversialist, and Self-Educator* supplied such lists of questions for discussion in every issue. The questions were broken up into sections such as Social economy, Political Science, History, and General Literature. Similar lists appeared in Laurence Gibson's *Handbook for the Literary and Debating Societies*, Samuel Neil's *The Young Debater,* Frederic Rowton's *The Debater* and others.

[35] "[N]o Member shall be allowed to speak more than twice on any subject and only for a period not exceeding 20 minutes on the first occasion and 10 minutes on the second" (3). From *Rules of the Union Debating Society*. Printed by Abdool Hukeem at Muzhurool-Ajauyeb Press, Calcutta, 1871.

[36] See, for instance the rules in *Tyneside Parliamentary Debating Society, Newcastle-on-Tyne*. List of Members. Constituion and Rules. Session 1891-92. Tyne Printing Works Co., Newcastle-on-Tyne. 1892.

attitudes (like consensus or voting on an issue) ought to be an ideal for discursive exchanges in the first place. The Socialist Leaguers debunk this ideal by reveling in "uproar" (59), not heeding to "punctuality" (60), walking out on the assembly, giving vent to anger and mockery, and zigzagging from the original subject of Land to harangues about exploitation and capitalists, from the arraignment of the people to the reasons for drinking among the workers. Rather than yearning for some ideal speech situation, Gissing investigates the dynamics of mass politics when Mutimer with a "vigour of popular oratory" (61) in front of a crowd "began to believe what he was saying" (61) or when Mr. Cullen "makes a point and pauses to observe the effect upon his hearers" (63). Gissing presents disorder, disjointedness, and spontaneity as phenomena endemic to mass politics rather than hindrances to get rid of in aspiring for a higher ideal. For him, there *is* no ideal. He calls for coming to terms with the whirlpool of political discussion as it is. Gissing enacts a proto-sociological experiment through his fiction to show not a reformer's, but a detached observer's view on the tumultuous and heterogeneous arena of mass politics.

Richard Mutimer plays a central role in many scenes of political discussion and agitation. Critics such as Adrian Poole, Christine DeVine, Diana Maltz, and Raimund Schäffner have discussed connections between Richard's lack of creative imagination, Gissing's view of the people, and his veneration of art. Richard's deficiency manifests itself through his utilitarian library and his scorn of children's fairy-tales. Through Richard's representative character, Gissing hints at the deficiency in imagination among the working classes that short-circuits their political agency. The narrator tells us: "The fatal defect in working people is absence of imagination" (136). As their representative, Richard fully embodies this deficiency. That "you could not imagine [his eyes] softening to . . . thoughtful dreaming" (33) suggests that Richard falls short of being a political romantic. Richard's library, including volumes of Malthus and

Owens, is wanting in other aspects: "English literature was to him a sealed volume" (42). What has been overlooked is that Richard is in fact a dreamer of a kind: "he believed himself about to become a popular hero; already in imagination he stood on platforms before vast assemblies, and heard his own voice denouncing capitalism with force which nothing could resist" (36). It is not so much lack of imagination that Gissing denounces in Mutimer, as the dangerous powers of imagination that feeds on all-consuming political ambition. So different from the political imagination of Mrs. Westlake whose "eyes 'dreamed against a distant goal'" (57), Richard's fantasy dictates a more pragmatic goal—"a party of his own" (415). Richard becomes an unconscious agent of what Gissing terms "the tests of schism" (225) which probes the vitality of any idea that traverses from the speculative realm into the practical realm of the public sphere.

Gissing draws a sharp divide between the ideal and the social realm, in which schism looms large: "Movements which appeal to the reason and virtue of humanity, and are consequently doomed to remain long in the speculative stage, prove their vitality by enduring the tests of schism" (225). Does Gissing really mean that there are "poor" political ideas that fail the "test of schism" and "good" ones that do not? Is this test really an indicator of the "vitality" of an idea (225)? *Demos* problematizes the notion of uniformity of any political movement by focusing on the heterogeneity of elements that compose it from its very inception. Even before the "test of schism" looms heavily over the Union, even when Socialism seems still to be in a "speculative stage" (225) before taking action, the scene of a socialist meeting at Commonwealth Hall conveys a sense of variety among styles, priorities, and understandings of Socialism. Between Richard's bookcase with "extreme" (42) and outdated works, the Unionists' physical and emotional energy at Commonwealth Hall, and the spirit of cultural privilege in Mr. Westlake's study, it is hard indeed to suppose that there is a point of perfect uniformity in the

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origin of Socialism, or any other idea for that matter. It is not a "test," but rather a "condition" of schism that seems to characterize for Gissing any political idea that enters the public sphere. It is this paralyzing awareness of what happens with ideas for the good of humanity when they enter the world of human error and political turmoil that feeds into Gissing's overall disbelief in and negation of social reform. Ironically, it is the human factor itself that hinders the betterment of mankind. *Demos* suggests that the public sphere does not fit a tidy positivist blueprint of the application of reason to social affairs. Rather, the public sphere ought to be conceptualized as a mass forum, with all the complexities of individual and mass psychology and behavior patterns. And we need to come to terms with it.

In *Demos*, potential for fragmentation permeates the movement from a microscopic level. It begins with such at first glance personal, but in fact socially determined, markers as one's voice and tone. Another meeting at Commonwealth Hall witnesses Westlake's opening speech followed by Mutimer's. The differences in speech delivery between Mutimer and Westlake quickly acquire political connotations: "his [Mutimer's] hard voice contrasted painfully with the other's cultured tones" (236). The harshness of Mutimer's voice does not only mark him as one of the working classes, but also becomes a signifier for a specific strain of Socialists, who would follow him as their leader. On the other hand, Westlake's "cultured tones" give an expression to Socialism of a different kind, with overtones of Matthew Arnold's Culture and William Morris' integration of art into life. Socialism comes across as an amalgamation of different strains and leaders. Westlake, Mutimer, Roodhouse, and Dabbs are all *types* of a certain kind of a sympathizer with socialist ideas. Westlake represents "the cultured and leading elements" (226) of the movement; Daniel Dabbs is "the proletarian pure and simple" (34); Richard possesses "the best qualities his class can show" (33); and Roodhouse moves toward his Socialism with "Blood

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and iron!" (226). The strains of Socialism and their vivid representatives have never been homogeneous in the first place, but their subdued differences come to the fore when, indeed, as Gissing notes, Socialism graduates from its "speculative stage" to the level of practical action.

The plurality of the offshoots of socialism demonstrates not only the de-centering effects of practical participation in the public sphere, but also the new and more complex structure of political dialogue. Describing the dynamics of modern politics, Nancy Fraser states: "Current conflicts exceed its template of a simple dualism of commensurable alternatives, as present-day claims for justice routinely run up against counterclaims whose underlying ontological assumptions they do not share" (3).The novel seems to dramatize a similar departure from traditional discursive templates. *Demos* departs from viewing conflicts in a two-sided frame, which was prevalent among the social problem novels of the 1840's. These earlier novels tend to lay out any social tension in such a way as to present it in the form of two sides or two possible alternatives. Such a line of thinking demands either picking the right side or reconciling the two sides. For instance, in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, this logic is at work when Stephen Blackpool explains to Bounderby his understanding of the conflict between masters and men: "Agreeing fur to mak one side unnat'rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat'rally awlus and for ever wrong , will never, never do 't" (181). Although Dickens was "a major point of reference" for Gissing, Gissing's work is by no means a part of Dickens' novelistic worldview (Goode 15). The way of describing social problems in terms of two sides that works for *Hard Times* fails to represent social problems in *Demos*. Elizabeth Gaskell treats the tension between masters and men in *North and South* in a similar "either or" manner: are the interests of masters and men identical or not? Are masters and men dependent upon or opposed to each other? Are the poor worthy or unworthy of sympathy and help? For her, like for Dickens, solutions come

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under the banner of humanizing the world of economic relations. This can be achieved by "enabl[ing] both master and man to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy" (420). Disraeli seeks reconciliation between the People and the Aristocracy in the idyllic image of pre-Reformation England. Unlike its thematic predecessors, *Demos*, firstly, abandons the framework of prescribing solutions and, secondly, suggests that the old ways of thinking about political discussion are inadequate to describe the modern processes in the public sphere.

Political discussion that was represented as a streamlined opposition of opinions, demands, or alternatives in early-Victorian novels would be too reductionist in regards to the social landscape that *Demos* seeks to describe. To be sure, Demos is an anti-socialist and a pro-status-quo novel. However, it does not simply ask a question about whether socialism is good or bad. The question that the novel seems to be more preoccupied with is just how to describe a public sphere where claims can no longer be neatly placed on two opposite scales because they are made from entirely different platforms and sets of ideas. Roodhouse makes claims for violence because for him "the principles of assassination" are "the sole working principles" (226). Mutimer's claim for socialism is anchored in appropriating the capitalist mechanisms of exploitation and using them in the interests of the workers. He would use the capitalist wage-system to make profit and spend it on socialist propaganda. He would also be eager to capitalize on an investment venture to benefit from such a great capitalist "discovery" as compound interest.  In other words, socialists should do "as the capitalists do" (413). As such, Mutimer's claims for socialism are supported on a strong capitalist footing. Westlake's cultured socialism comes surprisingly close to Hubert Eldon's aristocratic conservatism and love of art. As a result, these claims for socialism do not constitute a coherent platform but operate independently and even in competition with each other as *incommensurate* claims. Furthermore, the very opposition

between socialism and capitalism becomes problematic. The early-Victorian fantasy of a uniform political dialogue across social layers transforms into a late-Victorian realization of the public sphere as a plurality of competing publics and incommensurate claims.

The splintering of socialism unfolds against the backdrop of a geographic diversity of public spaces, where leaders deliver speeches on their socialist sentiments. The variety of venues and the styles of discourse they shape reinforces the notion of a natural heterogeneity within the movement. Richard is well aware that the significance of space may contribute or take away from his public success as he "experienced some vexation that his lecture was not to be at Commonwealth Hall, where the gathering would doubtless have been much larger" (59). The spaces for political discussion mentioned in *Demos* range a gamut between the prime location at Commonwealth Hall to more peripheral "regular places of assembly" and the space in the street for "open-air lecturing." The members of the Socialist League in Islington, where Richard gives his lecture meet in "a room behind a coffee-shop, ordinarily for festive purposes." The lecture-room itself is marked as a working-class venue: "The atmosphere was tobaccoey , and the coffee-shop itself, through which the visitors had to make their way, suggested to the nostrils that bloaters are the working-man's chosen delicacy at Sunday tea." The lecture-room and the adjacent coffee-shop become legitimate spaces for a socialist discussion as they exude the smell of class. A late-Victorian coffee-shop in *Demos* creates a contrast to what more than a century earlier used to be an arena of enlightened political discussion. As one observer commented in 1863, "With the opening of the eighteenth century the coffee-houses . . . ceased by degrees to be the arena of political discussion, and became merely centers of re-union, devoted to refreshment, recreations, and conversation" ("London Coffee-Houses" 186). However, a coffee-shop as a space of sobriety and circulation of the press fares far better than a pub. The article goes on to

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say, "There is all the difference in the world between going into a public-house to booze, smoke, quarrel, and waste one's substance, and entering a coffee-house to keep sober and gather information from the teachings of the press" (188). The space of the lecture-room staves off the destructive crowd power of demos, but it also shows just how far are the dynamics of a political movement from a rational debate at a coffee-house that suggests a normative ideal for Habermas.

As the schism within the movement unfolds, the spatial geography of public meetings demonstrates the struggle of different leaders for their "sovereignty" (226) on the platform. Roodhouse begins to recruit his followers by calling for violence "in fiery eloquence of open-air meetings." The open space of Roodhouse's addresses seems to be conducive to shaping an ignitable revolutionary mob in accordance with his design. Clerkenwell Green, among other places, becomes a territory of Roodhouse's socialist agitation. The differences between ideas on socialism curiously take on a spatial dimension as they become territorial wars. For Roodhouse, Mutimer, and Westlake, where to speak matters as much as what to say. In *Demos*, leaders and their publics get involved, along with the politics of schism, in the politics of space:

> At the original head-quarters of the Union addresses were promised from two leading men, Comrades Westlake and Mutimer. Comrade Roodhouse would in the morning address an assembly on Clerkenwell Green; in the evening his voice would summon adherents to the meeting place at Hoxton which had been the scene of our friend Richard's earliest triumphs. With few exceptions the Socialists of that region had gone over to the new man [Roodhouse] and the new paper [*Tocsin*]. (227)

Each representing a certain strain of Socialism, Roodhouse, Mutimer, and Westlake compete for public spaces and for the audience. Roodhouse stretches the limits of his bodily presence,

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striving for *omni*presence of his political persona by speaking at a few places in a day. On the other hand, Westlake and Mutimer compete even more with one another as the public space is limited and shared between the two of them. Unlike the dynamics of the public sphere of print where the audiences are potentially unlimited and the virtual "space" of the forum is potentially expandable, the competition for the face-to-face audience and for limited physical spaces (platforms, halls, streets, etc.) turns into a politics of displacing and ousting of the other. As a result of these campaigns, socialism that could be relatively unified in its "speculative stage" fails to withstand the realities of political egos, feuds for public spaces, and the vagaries of migrating publics.

Print and face-to-face modes of discussion become as crucial in structuring the dynamics within a public space as material elements such as the platform, rows of benches, an adjacent coffee-shop, or even the smell of "bloaters." Newspapers and flyers circulated by the competing socialist factions introduce the dynamics different from the Unionists' practice of face-to-face meetings. In *Demos*, face-to-face meetings and printed propaganda are shown in close proximity to one another. They share the same physical space: "A table just within the door of the lecture-room exposed for sale some sundry Socialist publications, the latest issue of the 'Fiery Cross' in particular" (59). The scale of Mutimer's ambition makes him seek alternatives to   an intimate one-on-one dialogue where truth emerges from the collision of opinions. To be sure, it flatters him to be doused in "thunderous cheering" (60) and stamping on the boards with "Hear, hear!" (65) at the union meetings, but his innermost dreams hail the age of mass politics: "No longer would his voice be lost in petty lecture-halls, answered only by the applause of a handful of mechanics. Ere many months had passed, crowds should throng to hear him; his gospel would be trumpeted over the land" (49). Thinking in terms of addressing the masses Mutimer pushes the

possibilities of unmediated communication to the limit because the anonymity of the crowd breaks down the fragile intimacy of a face-to-face dialogue. Mutimer turns naturally to the press as an alternative. The press becomes Mutimer's new platform, from which he addresses a virtually limitless and anonymous audience in a homogeneous timeframe constituted by the print discourse. His pamphlet "My Work at New Wanley," albeit a failed venture, shows that Mutimer is very much in tune with the changing notions of what counts as public presence in the local as well as national politics.

The circulating print culture represented in *Demos* through multiplying newspapers registers the internal dynamics of the movement where the spirit of competition and fragmentation prevails. As Roodhouse implies, there has to be a "new paper" for "the new man." The *Fiery Cross*, where Westlake and Mutimer voice their opinions, and the *Tocsin*, Roodhouse's paper, oppose one another more than critique capitalism per se. Their competing claims for the right kind of socialism do not in the end have an emancipatory effect. Here John Stuart Mill's notion of a clash of opinions that would separate truth from heresy does not apply. For Gissing, the factional media war in the socialist press in *Demos* by no means leads to social improvement, but if anything, steers the political discussion astray. The novel suggests that selfish desires to have a party and a newspaper of one's own are so essential to the practical world of politics and yet so tightly interwoven with more idealistic dreams of social justice that to think of a public sphere without one or the other would be a conceptual failure.

Competition and egotism in the political sphere become a vivid demonstration of what Gissing denounces in more general terms as "the battle of life" (94). Roodhouse and Mutimer (ironically, both "Comrades") fully embrace these forces, which, for Gissing, are intrinsically evil. Captive of his own political egotism, Roodhouse capitalizes on the first opportunity to

satirize Mutimer's New Wanley project with an article in the *Tocsin* titled "The Bursting of a

Soap Bubble." As Roodhouse launches a print attack on Mutimer, Socialism as an idea is muted

by the pervasive struggle for political survival of the fittest which does not discard name-calling.

"The brute who gets the uttermost farthing out of the toil of his wage-slaves is more a friend to

us and our cause," writes Roodhouse, "than any namby-pamby Socialist [Mutimer], such as the

late Dukeling of New Wanley. Socialist indeed! But enough. We have probably heard the last of

this *parvenu* and his loudly trumpeted schemes. No true friend of the Revolution can be grieved"

(353). The linking of Mutimer's opinions to the sound of a "trumpet" implies an impressive

scope of his political broadcast, but ultimately undercuts his opinions as vulgar meaningless

noise that for all their power lack thoughtfulness.  A saturation of the public sphere with

"trumpeted" opinions like Mutimer's indicates one of the aspects of Gissing's critique. After

Roodhouse's attack, the agonistic spirit bolsters Mutimer's ambitions for a comeback, even if

ever more disastrous. The kind of public discourse that emerges on the pages of *Tocsin* is far

from the emancipatory spirit of democracy predicated on "depersonalization" (Warner *Letters of

the Republic* 43). In his pursuit of power, Roodhouse employs not self-negation, but self-

affirmation. For him, it is the dog-eat-dog principle that underpins the political, and his *Tocsin*

becomes a key vehicle for bringing this principle home.

The selfishness and antagonism that play out in the political "battle of life" in *Demos*

point to Gissing's profound preoccupation with the forces of egotism that organize not only

political life, but life as such. In "The Hope of Pessimism," an essay that precedes *Demos* by

only a few years, Gissing follows in Schopenhauer's footsteps to denounce "Agnostic

Optimism" (Gissing's term for Positivism (*Letters* vol. 2  223)) as a philosophy which stems

directly from egotism. In Gissing's words, the essay was "nothing more nor less than an attack

on Positivism" (*Letters* vol. 2  103). Gissing's critique of egotism in "The Hope of Pessimism"

illuminates his revulsion from the ways in which egotism comes to the fore in scenes of political

discussion in *Demos*, both face-to-face and mediated through print. Explicating Schopenhauer,

Gissing equates life-affirming optimism with egotism: "optimism directly encourages the

affirmation of the will to live, consequently cannot but encourage egotism" (Coustillas 91).

Optimism is in essence "the instinct by virtue of which every living thing clings to life with the

utmost energy of its nature, and finds the goal of being in the propagation of its kind."  To

destroy this ingrained egotistic optimism, one must be guided by "self-forgetfulness," "severest

asceticism," and compassion with others. In other words, to destroy an optimist in oneself, one

must become a pessimist. Hence, the hope of pessimism for Gissing. Only "the optimism of the

artist" (Coustillas 95) remains untainted with egotism since "[i]n the mood of artistic

contemplation the will is destroyed" and "self is eliminated."

Mutimer lives out the battle of life philosophy in the political, economic, and personal

sense and stands for a paragon of egotism in the novel. A *Quarterly Review* article called him

"an ambitious egotist" ("Art. I" 405). In the political world, he is blinded by delusions of

grandeur and does not conceive of socialism as anything other than a party of his own. His sense

of superiority over the rest of the Comrades is aggravated by his seeming success at the platform:

"His head was thrown a little back; he viewed the benches from beneath his eyelids. True, the

pose maintained itself but for a moment. I mention it because it was something new in Richard"

(60). His leadership at times gravitates towards what seems to be not posturing, but sincerity. At

one point "he began to believe what he was saying, and to say it with the right vigour of popular

oratory" (61). In his directness of address, Mutimer represents what Pam Morris calls "the code

of sincerity" as a new phenomenon in popular leadership that emerges in the 1860's (9-10).

Leadership through sincerity does not counteract, but rather lends itself to Mutimer's egotism and becomes a technique to promote the cult of "King Mutimer" (404). Economically, Mutimer embraces capitalist individualism, self-interest, and money-making spirit. The unexpected finding of the will that bequeaths old Mutimer's wealth to Hubert makes Richard forget honor in a desperate attempt to prevent a reversal of his fortune. He couches his greed in the arguments for common good such as, "It isn't for myself, it's for the cause, for the good of my fellowmen" and "The end is too important" (318). His readiness to be a hypocrite with himself further divulges his "manipulative sincerity" (21), to use Morris's phrase, as a leader of the people. Finally, Mutimer's betrayal of his fiancée Emma Vine and his marriage to Adela, a "lady" and so a better match for his new status, proves self-interest to be a prevailing guide for his personal life. Not being "capable of love in the highest sense" (134) and lacking compassion for those he tramples on his way, Mutimer succeeds in the battle of life only to pay a deadly price for his fleeting success.

The double knot of personal agendas and incommensurable claims about socialist reform work havoc among those who in one way or another call themselves socialists. However, this sums up only one aspect of why the novel's preoccupation with the workings of political discussion in the public sphere results in Gissing's deep skepticism about its possibilities. Another aspect that seems to contribute to Gissing's disillusioned view of the public sphere is the inevitable slippage between the term socialism and the phenomena around it. The term socialism proves to be rather malleable, and so the very process of labeling one's position, deciding one's identification, and maintaining affiliations in the public sphere becomes problematic. In the novel, two sets of problems layer upon one another: on the one hand, the socialists break up their idea into many socialisms, and on the other hand, those who would not normally be called

socialists partake in socialist ideas and so expand and destabilize the notion of socialism. Interestingly, Gissing's subtitle "A Story of English Socialism" does not reflect these nuances and even seems to treat of socialism as one concrete thing where the name correlates with the substance. Notwithstanding, the plot divulges the complexity of meanings when one notes Mutimer's and Roodhouse's varieties of socialism on the platform or when one observes just how aggressively socialism lends its name to other phenomena and stretches beyond itself in hopes to claim the whole social arena.

As Mutimer's wife, Adela undergoes a radical change and acquires a worldview that hinges entirely on her husband's creed. In a conversation with Letty, Adela's brother's bride, Adela exposes a very fine line between, on the one hand, endowing socialism with a universal human desire for common good and, on the other hand, entrapping herself in the narrow-mindedness and conceptual violence of socialism's claim for universality. Rather than recognizing the good there is in Socialism, Adela recognizes Socialism in everything that is good. If the approach has a potential to enrich discussion in the public sphere, the second line of thinking is a recipe for ideological tyranny in the public sphere. Following this logic, Angela insists on Socialism as the only valid voice that can be heard in the public sphere:

> 'Yes, I am a Socialist,' said Adela firmly. 'I am sure anyone will be who thinks about it, and really understands the need for Socialism. Does the word still sound a little dreadful to you? I remember so well when it did to me. It was only because I knew nothing about it.'
>
> 'I don't think I have that excuse,' said the other. 'Alfred is constantly explaining. But, Adela—'[. . .] 'I was going to say—I'm sure you won't be offended. But you still go to church?'

'Oh yes, I go to church. You mustn't think that everything Alfred insists upon belongs to Socialism. I believe that all Christians ought to be Socialists; I think it is part of our religion, if only we carry it out faithfully.'

'But does Mr. Wyvern think so?'

'Yes, he does; he does indeed. I talk with Mr. Wyvern frequently, and I never knew, before he showed me, how necessary it is for a Christian to be a Socialist.'

'You surprise me, Adela. Yet he doesn't confess himself a Socialist.'

'Indeed, he does. When did you hear Mr. Wyvern preach a sermon without insisting on justice and unselfishness and love for our neighbor? If we try to be just and unselfish, and to love our neighbor as ourself, we help the cause of Socialism. Mr. Wyvern doesn't deal with politics—it is not necessary he should. That is for men like my husband, who give their lives to the practical work. [. . .]

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The anxiety about the name of socialism ("Does the word still sound a little dreadful to you?") and about Wyvern calling or not calling himself a "Socialist" in addition to a consistent effort to grasp the meaning behind the name (e.g., Adela's reference to her past ignorance of the meaning of socialism when she "knew nothing about it" or Letty's mention that Alfred keeps "explaining" the meaning of socialism) is symptomatic of the slippage that haunts Socialism in the practical public sphere. Taking advantage of this unsettling looseness between name and meaning, Angela gains more conceptual territory for Socialism. Socialism, in Adela's presentation, views all other ideas as derivative from itself and does not recognize anything as a viable alternative to it.

Angela's newly acquired activism and intransigence about her socialist beliefs expose her as someone who shuts down a face-to-face political discussion without giving it a chance to

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become an intersubjective exchange of opinions. Angela's involvement with the "practical work" for the cause is interestingly linked to her more aggressive style of argumentation:

> Letty was awed by the exceeding change which showed itself not only in Adela's ways of thought, but in her very voice and manner of speaking. The tone was so authoritative, so free from the diffidence which had formerly kept Adela from asserting strongly even her cherished faiths. She felt, too, that with the maiden hesitancy something else had gone, at all events in a great degree; something that it troubled her to miss; namely, that winning persuasiveness which had been one of the characteristics that made Adela so entirely lovable. At present Mrs. Mutimer scarcely sought to persuade; she uttered her beliefs as indubitable. A competent observer might now and then have surmised that she felt it needful to remind herself of the creed she had accepted. (252-253)

Adela's change from the "maiden hesitancy" to the masculine assertiveness is troublesome for while giving Angela an impulse to act for the cause, it deprives her of being sensitive of others. The increased vehemence of her convictions eats away the integrity of her character.

For Gissing, there is something amiss, therefore, in the idea of practical political action. He always seems to be skeptical about the practical world of politics which loses the appeal of the ideas in a "speculative stage." Paradoxically, too, political action seems to be at odds with sincerity. Although Angela grounds her political determination in her "indubitable" views, she ironically has "to remind herself of the creed she had accepted." If political activism, as the novel here demonstrates, has to be complacent about its own certainty and if authoritative rhetoric comes at a cost of sincerity, the choice between plunging into the political tumult and withdrawing from it into speculative inaction is never an easy one in Gissing. This dilemma

reflects Gissing's complicated view of the working classes: he wrote literature that is filled with concern for their condition and yet remained intolerant to any attempts at activism on their part. His personal choice was to channel his social rage into artistic withdrawal: "I can get savage over social iniquities, but even then my rage at once takes the direction of planning revenge in artistic work" (*Letters* v.2, 223-224). This is why Angela's temporary political zeal is represented as a self-assured delusion. Wyvern exposes the zealous proletarian Socialists for their lack of sincerity and concludes that they "do not believe what they say, and therefore they are so violent in saying it" (386). There is something equally unsettling for Gissing in respect to these political zealots' assertiveness and Adela's authoritative tone. *Demos* imagines political agency as something that can be gained only through the loss of sincerity and intolerance for others' claims for truth. For Gissing, the very nature of the public sphere praxis in an increasingly mass society can bring about nothing but a tumultuous mass of "trumpeted" opinions. He refuses to believe that a cultivation of human powers of abstraction can wed successfully the vortex of practical politics and the theoretical purity of ideas.

While Gissing views political movements as inherently composed of incompatible elements and always on a trajectory of further fragmentation, what is also concerning to him about the public sphere is that alliances that form at times can be more threatening and perplexing than factions. Above all, *Demos* sends a warning message about the most unpredictable, volatile, yet powerful and all-consuming political alliance: the unity of a crowd. The variety of socialisms articulated in discussion come to nothing in the face of an enraged "many-headed monster Demos," to borrow Edith Sichel's expression. The conclusion of the novel focuses on portraying the violence of the mob. Headed by Redgrave, a riot attacks New Wanley manor causing destruction and claiming Mrs. Eldon's life. Gissing contrasts the enraged

multitude starkly against liberal conceptions of Reason and the Individual. The voice of Reason is alien to the multitude as they announce their presence at the Manor with "a terrific yell, a savage cry of many voices" (378). Later, Demos unleashes its violence just when it becomes clear that Demos cannot participate in rational discussion: "Demos was roused, was tired of listening to mere articulate speech; it was time for a good wild-beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed. Scarcely a face in all the mob but distorted itself to express as much savagery as can be got out of the human countenance" (453). Demos is a monstrous amalgam, "a tempest of savage faces" (452), "faces of rude intelligence, faces of fathomless stupidity, faces degraded into something less than human" (445). As their leader, Mutimer sees in front of him a collective with changing moods and passions that cannot be parsed out into rational individuals. The many-headed monster does not have a face to speak to: "One moment their eyes would be fixed upon him, filmy, unintelligent, then they would look at one another with a leer of cunning, or at best a doubtful grin" (416). Capable of exploding into violence at any moment, this savage unity of people in a given time and place showcases a unity that is strangely anchored in no specific political ideas. In the public sphere where political ideas entail fragmentation of movements and where people get united into a violent mob around no specific ideas at all, what is left is Gissing's longing for the "speculative stage" of ideas.

In this irredeemable, for Gissing, public sphere, Demos figures as a monstrous quasi-character of sorts. A "tempest of savage faces" (452) gives this collective character of Demos a "face" that no one, not even Mutimer, being one of them, is able to address. The multitude of subhuman faces takes the shape of one massive moving body: "The great crowd swayed this way and that" (452). The misrule that sets in when the unleashed Demos rises in anger against Mutimer gives expression to the battle of life in its crudest form (the selfish force that Gissing

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denounced): "Demos was having his way; civilization was blotted out, and club law proclaimed" (454). Mutimer realizes just how uncompromising the battle of life is when he finds he has fallen out of favor with the crowd and is about to fall into their midst: "If he fell into the hands of the mob he was done for; Mutimer knew that, and was ready to fight for his life" (454). Demos is a *quasi*-character not only because the sprawling multitude is represented here as one monstrous organism, but also because this organism, unlike a typical novel character, is deprived of consciousness. "They did not know what they were doing" (379), murmurs Mrs. Eldon as she is dying from the hands of the raving Demos. Demos cannot be conscious of what it does because, for Gissing, taking action and being conscious of one's action in the political realm are mutually exclusive. With more consciousness comes, paradoxically, a withdrawal from action. And conversely, agency is gained through a suspension of consciousness and self-reflection. The novel represents Demos as the epitome of pure action and by doing so gives insights into the rising mass politics that reshapes the playing field in the public sphere. The tragic relationship between Mutimer and Demos foregrounds the vicious cycle of mass politics: Mutimer's ability to produce an enlightened body of followers is just as impractical as the crowd's ability to select an enlightened leader.

The destructive agency of Demos becomes more accentuated as the novel takes on a rather selective approach representing it. The focus is placed on the effects of the action whereas the actors themselves remain almost invisible in the background. The Demos in the novel is never quite fully present in a sense that we do not so much see the description of the masses or their perspective on events as register their presence through savage yells or the effects of their actions. The narrator assumes a detached stance in narrating to us the story of the roused Demos. The agents of the raid on the New Wanley manor remain in the dark, literally and figuratively,

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while Hubert is exposed to the actions of this semi-invisible Demos: "The windows behind his back were broken and a couple of heavy missiles thundered near him upon the floor—stones they proved to be" (378). As a quasi-character, Demos never really comes in full presence to the reader, but his presence is sketched out through a series of effects such as the "yell and the shower of stones" (378) followed again by the "furious voices and the stone-volley" (378). This focus on the crowd's noise and destruction without a detailed depiction of the agents themselves parallels the way in which late-Victorian society experienced anxiety about the masses. The novel intimates that the threat emanating from the angry Demos is overwhelmingly felt through some obvious signs, but Demos itself remains treacherously invisible and unknown. Demos, with violence as its only readily available mode of action, channels this violence both at whom it perceives to be its class enemies and at its own leaders, like Mutimer, and so it finds itself at an impasse.

The novel does not propose a philanthropic scheme of improvement, but instead poses cautiously as an alternative Hubert Eldon's aesthetic retreat from political agitation and violence. Mutimer's scheme to transform Wanley into "an industrial settlement" (56) to provide good-paying jobs for the workers is challenged by Eldon's claim "I prefer nature" (71). Associated with the forces of progress and unbridled industrialization, socialism impinges on the beautiful and puts at risk the ecological wellbeing of the land. Eldon finds in Mutimer an antagonist professing a creed utterly irreconcilable with his own: "no movement can be tolerated which begins with devastating the earth's surface" (339). For him, the notion of class always entails ecological and aesthetic implications. In a conversation with his mother, he portrays the working class as complicit in the evils brought about by industrialization, indifferent to the beautiful, and headed on the course of ecological devastation:

'[. . .] Shall I tell you how I felt talking with him [Mutimer]? I seemed to be

holding a dialogue with the twentieth century [. . .].' 'The man was openly

exultant; he stood for Demos grasping the scepter. I am glad, mother, that you

leave Wanley before the air is poisoned.'

'Mr. Mutimer does not see that side of the question?'

'Not he! Do you imagine the twentieth century will leave one green spot on the

earth's surface?'

'My dear, it will always be necessary to grow grass and corn.'

'By no means; depend upon it. Such things will be cultivated by chemical

processes. There will not be one inch left to nature; the very oceans will somehow

be tamed, the snow-mountains will be leveled. And with nature will perish art.

What has a hungry Demos to do with the beautiful?' (77)

Eldon puts the blame on Demos for the trampling advance of progress and the apocalyptic

picture of the devastated planet. In his view, Demos is not a mass of people enfeebled by poverty

and working conditions, and so philanthropy is not seen as a solution. Demos comes across as a

dangerous multitude hungry for political power and a presence in the public sphere as much as

for their daily bread. In response to this dangerous political newcomer in the public sphere,

Eldon sees a solution not in a reactionary political agency, but in a quiet aesthetic and

speculative retreat into his own corner of the world, Wanley, which conveniently is restored to

him after Mutimer's short-run industrial reform.

This is not to say, however, that the novel entirely renounces political agency. Vicar

Wyvern anticipates a future change in society, but in ways other than the Socialist activists do.

Wyvern is committed to change, and although he does not know exactly how to bring it about, he

makes no mistake about the erroneous schemes of change: "Changes will come about, but not of these men's making or devising" (386). In response to Mutimer's fervent reformism, he proposes not political indifference, but rather caution against ill-thought-through reform: "To see is a much easier thing than to originate a sound scheme. I am far from prepared with any plan of social reconstruction" (142). Like Gissing himself, Wyvern hardly believes in "solutions," the more so in such easy ones as Mutimer's. In the society torn by class and political antagonisms, Wyvern above all advocates for tolerance: "My old zeal lingers in the form of tolerance. I can enter into the mind of a furious proletarian as easily as into the feeling which [Eldon] represent[s]" (382). His toleration to perspectives so opposed as Mutimer's and Eldon's suggests a way to reforming society on the principles of "sympathy and humanity" (385). Wyvern is Dr. Amboyne's fellow spirit, but Reade's enthusiasm about the universal principle of putting oneself in the other's place is seriously diminished in Gissing. While Gissing's novel gestures favorably towards it, the vicar comes across not as much as a reformer of political turmoil, but someone who withdraws from it.

Wyvern's voice is ultimately that of dreamy and conservative nostalgia. The vicar anticipates a future change to rectify present social injustices by longing for the irretrievable "good old order" (385) of the past. His desire for change is outweighed by his status-quo political sympathies. Wyvern's philosophy of happiness does not recognize the class system as the source of human suffering. Indeed, there is no need to change the class system because, as Wyvern thinks, "happiness is very evenly distributed among all classes and conditions" (383). This idea of equal distribution of happiness is echoed in Adela's words when she responds to Mutimer's proletarian politics with: "I certainly think you value too little the means of happiness that we all have within our reach, rich and poor alike" (99). All in all, Wyvern expresses

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Gissing's mix of conservative sensibilities, intolerance to violence, and a paradoxical concern for and denunciation of Demos.

Wyvern's principle of putting oneself in the other's place yields to a more prevalent message in the novel of staying in one's own place and minding one's own class. For Gissing, class is one of the factors that wreak havoc in the public sphere, but an elimination of classes is an even more grotesque alternative. His characters are preoccupied with positioning themselves in relation to class as they range from Mutimer who sees in his marriage to Adela a union of classes to Eldon who maintains his aristocratic distance from the people. The novel's prevalent perception of class difference as something that is "a chapter of social history" (202) goes to show that, as DeVine argues, "Gissing sees the class system as man-made" (22). Being someone painfully situated between a lower class income and an educated background, Gissing was acutely aware of his outsider position in relation to the class system. A class-differentiated society inflicted suffering on some, but at the same time produced the cultural refinement that he valued. Suspicious of philanthropic reforms that sought to bring education to the masses, Gissing was apprehensive of this way of intervening into class structures. Wyvern expresses Gissing's anti-progressive sentiment about the possibilities of universal education in reorganizing a class-based society by stating that the results of universal education

> '[. . .] affect all classes, and all for the worse. I said that I used to have a very
> bleeding of the heart for the half-clothed and quarter-fed hangers-on to
> civilization; I think far less of them now than of another class in appearance much
> better off. It is a class created by the mania of education, and it consists of those
> unhappy men and women whom unspeakable cruelty endows with intellectual
> needs whilst refusing them the sustenance they are taught to crave. Another

generation, and this class will be terribly extended, its existence blighting the

whole social state. Every one of these poor creatures has a right to curse the work

of those who clamour progress, and pose as benefactors of their race.' (384-385)

Rather than a mechanism of social mobility, education for Gissing seems to be a disastrous

intervention among classes. He sends a warning of sorts that the implications of universal

education for the public sphere are dangerously miscalculated by philanthropists. Being ill-

accommodated within the class society, Gissing provides a valuable critique of the society he

represents. He dramatizes Mutimer's ambivalent attitude to class that lies in his desire to climb

up the class ladder, on the one hand, and his naïve socialist thinking to unite all classes, on the

other. *Demos* engages with the problematics of class not by looking for solution in emancipating

certain classes or uniting them all into one, but by delving into the question about a balance

between economic and cultural needs. Whatever reforms or movements pose the question of

class in other terms, they are omitting, as a result, this crucial aspect in which class can be

understood and which Gissing had to live out personally.

Gissing was always self-conscious about the disparity between his cultural level and his

income. This translated into the ways he thought of himself as an author writing about the

working classes. While his background made him an outsider and provided him with a distance

from the working classes, his perspective undermined the middle-class ideology embraced by

many social problem novels that turned workers into objects of reform. When Edith Sichel stated

that Gissing "writes from a back-ally reeking with putrid vapours" (515) in comparison to Besant

who writes from a cozy study, his response evinces just how anxiously Gissing reflects on his

class position:

I have been led to wonder, in an amused way, whether at that time you really did

suspect that I might be a denizen of the slums?—Why, so I have been; I have

lived in extraordinary places, & gone through dire straits. But the German's[37]

suggestion is, of course, that I was probably taken for a self-educated artisan.

Pooh! I am half ashamed of writing about this at all; & should be wholly so if you

imagined that I write in a spirit of pique. It is nothing but a point of speculative

interest. If you said, "Well, yes; I rather thought of you as washing your grimy

hands & sitting down savagely to pen descriptions of the things about you";—be

sure that I should have no feeling but pleasure in your frankness.

Let me see; no one of my books was actually written in a slum; [. . .] (*Letters*, vol.

4, 126)

In this passage, Gissing is at pains trying to make sense of himself, albeit under the cover of

"speculative interest." One can see a great deal of uneasiness about his class position as these

lines are filled with compulsion to differentiate himself, not without irony, from the class he

depicts. His insistence that he is *not* a "self-educated artisan," *not* a "denizen of the slums," that

his hands are *not* grimy, and that his novels were *not* "written in a slum" suggests that he was

prone to think of his class identity through the negative definitions of what he was *not*. Lack of

definitive status provided Gissing with unique insights into class, but the anxiety that came along

with this unclassed "freedom" caused Gissing to obsess over and hold on to the very class

structure that made him an outsider.

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[37] Gissing refers to his friend Eduard Bertz. After reading Sichel's review of Gissing, Bertz
expressed that Sichel "evidently think[s] of the author [Gissing] as belonging to the social class
he depicts" (*Letters*, vol.4, 126).

*Demos* is obsessed with class. Affiliation with a class or aspiration to join a higher class determines the existence of many characters. Class is so ingrained in Mutimer, Adela, Eldon, Westlake, Daniel Dabbs, and the narrator that a negation of class differences seems, at best, a naïve idea and, at the worst, disastrous premise. Mutimer's symbolic marriage to Adela as "the union of classes—of the wage-earning with the *bourgeois*" (137) ends in a tragic breakdown of Mutimer's misconceptions about class. This plot development reaffirms that class distinctions stem from irreducible differences determined from the moment of birth: "He was not of her class, not of her world; only by violent wrenching of the laws of nature had they come together. She had spent years in trying to convince herself that there were no such distinctions, that only an unworthy prejudice parted class from class. One moment of true insight was worth more than all her theorising on abstract principles. To be her equal this man must be born again, of other parents, in other conditions of life" (350). Skeptical about the early Victorian desire to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, the novel shows that the inequity of material "conditions of life" determines access to the cultural world and in the end accounts for "natural" and indeed irreversible distinctions between classes. If many Victorian novels provided a critique of social polarization through the variations of a theme of marriage between the rich and the poor, Gissing exposes the naivety of this literary device and so makes his critique of the class system even more incisive. He shows how the gulf between classes is unbridgeable due to "natural" class-based differences of character, but at the same times critiques these "natural" differences to show that they result from the imposed inequality of material "conditions of life." Gissing's worldview exhibits an ambivalent relationship between his condemnation of material injustices and his elitist conviction about "natural" class differences.

To the extent that Mutimer's ideal of "the union of classes" results in his own failed

marriage, so does his ironic obsession with jumping on the other side of the class divide expose a

contradiction with this ideal. Mutimer's awkward and futile attempts at acquiring the class

markers of a *bourgeois* serve to emphasize the insurmountable distinctions in birth and

upbringing. Like Gissing, Mutimer is very conscious about his class and takes care to

demonstrate his distinction from the workers as the narrator notes that Mutimer's "hand which

rested on the table was no longer that of a daily-grimed mechanic" (68). The narrator mocks

Mutimer's relentless aspiration to pass for a *bourgeois*, and the more Mutimer tries to show that

culture and manners are easily acquired attributes of class, the more he fails in his attempts,

which only reaffirms the innateness of class differences. At dinner with the Walthams, Mutimer

cultural deficiency comes to the fore as he tries to master the good manners he observes at table

even though "there were numerous minor points of convention on which he was not so clear"

(89). Scenes of his courtship of Adela as well as his political public speaking reinforce cultural

boundaries between classes. With plans "to have a 'lady' for his wife" (138), Mutimer is hard-

pressed to master the polite discourse: "Not only did he aim at polite modes of speech altogether

foreign to his lips, but his own voice sounded strange to him in its forced suppression" (99). In

the political arena, Mutimer's "hard voice" loses its political purchase compared to Westlake's

"cultured tones" (236). Mutimer makes sure to maintain prestige in Adela's eyes and so berates

his sister Alice for her poor spelling because "Won't do, you know, to make mistakes if you

write to Adela" (201). Adela, in turn, while being a "lady" to the Mutimers, struggles with

writing to Eldon and interpreting the cultured language of his verses: "Hubert's verses she found

difficult to understand; their spirit, the very vocabulary, was strange to her. Only on a second

reading did she attain a glimmering of their significance" (181). Adela, however, unlike

Mutimer, seems to overcome the cultural and class differences more "naturally." Featuring

Adela's failed marriage to Mutimer and her subsequent marriage to Eldon, the novel is

intriguingly ambivalent as to whether class differences are essential or superficial.

The novel traces class differences back to the influence of the environment and the role

of heredity, in a strikingly Darwinian fashion. Adela's refined nature seems to be the result of the

social forces at work and the pinnacle of human evolution. Conversely, Alice represents crude

evolutionary material. Registering the workings of social evolution on both girls, Mutimer notes

the biological aspects of class distinctions and so raises a question of where a man-made social

hierarchy and human nature intersect:

> Adela and Alice sat over against each other; their contrasted appearances were a
>
> chapter of social history. Mark the difference between Adela's gently closed lips,
>
> every muscle under control; and Alice's, which could never quite close without
>
> forming a saucy pout or a self-conscious primness. Contrast the foreheads; on the
>
> one hand that tenderly shadowed curve of brow, on the other the surface which
>
> always seemed to catch too much of the light, which moved irregularly with the
>
> arches above the eyes. The grave modesty of one face, the now petulant, now
>
> abashed, now vacant expression of the other. (202)

A shift from a third-person narration to an imperative mood in the beginning of the passage

draws the readers in to compare the two female faces that Mutimer is studying. The narrator

invites the readers to see behind Adela's and Alice's personal features something larger than

individual uniqueness: the forces of social history that are reflected in the faces of many girls like

Adela or girls like Alice. In Mutimer's observation, one's class and one's nature are tightly

linked to the point that it becomes impossible to disentangle natural dispositions and social

inequity in the construction of class. Alice's "natural" crudeness and Adela's "natural"

refinement seem to be to an equal extent the *consequences* as well as the *reasons* of social and

cultural polarization. Gissing finds himself simultaneously critiquing class society and being

invested in its distinctions. This mix of sentiments softens his critique, on the one hand, yet on

the other, complicates what may be called merely his "very Conservative point of view" on the

working classes in *Demos* (*Letters* vol. 2, 363).

The novel essentializes class distinctions also by presenting Mutimer as someone with

"the best qualities his class can show" (33). Mutimer's qualities that come across here as class-

bound not only give shape to the category of class in the present, but also provide a historical

perspective as we learn how Radical and Conservative traits struggle for prevalence through

generations in Mutimer's genealogy. Mutimer's interest in socialist propaganda, on the one hand,

and his ingrained capitalistic grip, on the other, seem to be determined not only by the forces of

"social history," but also by his contrasted inheritance. His grandfather Henry and great uncle

Richard are both recognizable in their offspring. Henry, "by nature a political enthusiast" and an

"uncompromising Radical of formidable powers" (27), pursues his "career of popular agitation"

(27) in the Chartist movement only to meet a pathetic end by leading one of the 1840's riots. In

contrast, due to his "native conservatism" (27), Richard accumulated wealth and held in high

esteem such class markers as "birth, hereditary station, recognized gentility" (28). Richard's

convictions lead him to see a harmony between one's natural attributes and one's class. Social

mobility, then, is not a matter of reordering social structures, but an exercise of character-

building and letting one's nature find one a place on a social ladder. In this vein, he contemplates

his brother's working-class family and in making his will is guided by conservative ideas of

class: "if such [the working class] were to rise at all, it must be by their own efforts and in

consequence of their native merits" (29). Therefore, his great nephew's sudden inheritance of

Wanley and his less than noble desire to hold on to it even after old Mutimer's lost will is

recovered ensues in a reaffirmation of class boundaries. The generations of the Mutimers in

different ways drive home the same idea: class is predetermined both by nature and environment.

With "the best qualities his class can show" (33), Mutimer becomes not a self-made man

climbing the social ladder like his great uncle, but someone whose nature does not let him rise

above the Demos.

As much as the novel intends to keep the Demos in its place, it nevertheless does not

leave the class system unquestioned. Mrs. Eldon's question to her son betrays an anxiety about

the emptying out of class distinctions:

> [. . .] 'what is this class distinction upon which we pride ourselves? What does it
>
> mean, if not that our opportunities lead us to see truths to which the eyes of the
>
> poor and ignorant are blind? Is there nothing in it, after all—in our pride of birth
>
> and station? That is what people are saying nowadays: you yourself have jested to
>
> me about our privileges. [. . .] I know no longer what to believe. Oh, Hubert!' (21)

The advent of the new age casts aside the distinctions and privileges of the old one. Mrs. Eldon's

disillusionment leads her neither to stick blindly to nor to disavow the right to privilege. Rather,

the right to distinction seems to validate itself only if it is questioned by its owner over and over.

The novel duly rewards Hubert Eldon who while affirming his aristocratic privilege, puts it up

for critique by "jesting" about it. Similar to how philanthropists approached the question of

poverty by dividing the poor into those worthy and unworthy of sympathy and assistance,

Gissing's novel poses a question of the worthy and unworthy rich. To dramatize the disconnect

between having privilege and being worthy of it, the novel represents Mutimer as "more a

gentleman than a great many whose right to the name was never contested" (141). Thus, the novel insists on class distinctions by representing the Demos as a blind violent force that is incapable of being led by its own leaders, yet it never ceases to question the artificiality of the class system. Delving into the complexity of the notion of class and its role in the public sphere, Gissing's novel thinks about class as something that is artificially imposed to the extent, however, that it becomes natural.

Gissing's ambivalence about class can be traced further through a comparison between Richard Mutimer and Jim Mutimer, the main character of a short story that Gissing devised in the summer of 1884, the same time as when he was thinking about *Demos* (Coustillas 241). Despite the similarities of the name, Richard Mutimer and Jim Mutimer evoke quite contrary perspectives on the working classes. In "Mutimer's Choice," Jim is a noble and incredibly strong-willed working-class character who is the victim of a work accident: he is injured by a block that gives way due to a broken chain. In the meantime, the work-injury drama is unfolding against a personal drama. His wife, who had chosen to marry Jim over Bill Snowdon, seems to have second thoughts about her decision. After the work accident, Jim faces a choice between having his legs amputated or dying. In his decision about life or death, Jim's noble heart intuits a way to resolve this love triangle. In a "strangely resolute" (Coustillas 253) manner Jim refuses to have his legs amputated and on his deathbed makes Bill promise that he would take care of his wife when Jim dies.  In "Mutimer's Choice," Gissing turns our attention to an individual worker's suffering and the unjust system of exploitation that puts profits over one's safety or even life. In *Demos*, by contrast, Gissing presents us with what happens when workers begin to think of themselves as a class and form the blind and raging "many-headed" monster of Demos.

As foils to one another, the two namesakes put in full relief Gissing's ambivalent view of the working classes.

Class mentality permeates Gissing's novel so that the idea of creating a common discussion forum by bracketing class differences is no longer feasible. Lack of politically meaningful discussion between Hubert Eldon and Richard Mutimer or between Richard and his employers suggests that in fact the public sphere does not exist as a unified world of discursive exchange, but rather consists of loosely related worlds circumscribed by economic function. Class becomes not something to be abstracted from in discussion, but the sole premise of organizing discussion. Hubert expresses his revulsion at the emergent public sphere and longs for a face-to-face interaction as an alternative to class: "To the individual poor man or woman I would give my last penny. It is when they rise against me as a class that I become pitiless" (382). In a face-to-face discussion, Hubert is willing to embrace perhaps some class-determined character traits and opinions or "natural" dispositions of the other, but he insists on bracketing the more externalized and collective notion of the working-class multitude. His diction of "rising against [. . .] as a class" presupposes an opposition of classes, and hence an antagonistic public sphere. As such, in *Demos*, a public sphere predicated on class operates as a fragmented arena filled with opposing interests that cannot be drawn together into a common forum for negotiating a consensus. While Hubert gestures to a face-to-face interaction which induces sympathy and a sentiment of common humanity rather than class, his ideal can no longer stand strong in the late-Victorian context and appears in Hubert's reflection only in hypothetical and idyllic terms. Hubert's longing for a sociality based on face-to-face encounter is of a piece with Wyvern's nostalgia for the "good old order" (385): both are skeptical of the changes brought about by

modernity, such as the waning of the local rural community, the rise of the urban anonymous masses, and the spread of print culture.

Having undergone an awakening of sorts, Adela seems to be the character that sees most clearly an avenue for agency that does not fall into nostalgic reminiscence or aspire for power over the masses from a popular platform. Her female agency lies not in winning political battles or propagating reform, but rather in staying truthful to a strikingly local and allegedly apolitical ideal of community-building:

> [. . .] there is a work in the cause of humanity other than that which goes on so clamorously in lecture-halls and at street corners, other than that which is silently performed by faithful hearts and hands in dens of misery and amid the horrors of the lazar-house; the work of those whose soul is taken captive of loveliness, who pursue the spiritual ideal apart from the world's tumult, and, ever ready to minister in gentle offices, know that they serve best when nearest home. (470)

Adela helps Emma Vine by providing her with employment in the East End and by doing so shows just what the men's world of political "tumult" where leaders like Mutimer and Roodhouse compete for crowd popularity is incapable of. In Adela's personalized agency, Gissing represents the hope of reform, but not in a philanthropic sense of the word. She remains untainted by "the world's tumult," yet her ideals do not remain in the "speculative stage" (225), but go far in the everyday world.

*Demos* is a novel that in many ways exposes the naivety of optimistic imaginings of a liberal public sphere that hinges on a rational, detached individual capable of generating independent opinions and exchanging them with others in a common discussion forum. Gissing is not interested in presenting how such participatory agency and discursive practices can be

cultivated in Demos, nor does he believe that this framework can be neatly superimposed on the actual dynamics within the public sphere. The "story of English Socialism" is ultimately a story about any idea that enters the tumultuous world of politics: its unity and cohesion are but ephemeral and it moves from detached speculation into the realm of action only to disintegrate into disparate interests. For Gissing, the public sphere bears no resemblance to a common discussion forum where social differences are bracketed in the name of disinterestedness and objectivity. In fact, the novel expresses profound skepticism about such an ideal put into practice by showing just how much universal claims for the cause of humanity and common good are embedded in the very economic and cultural factors that need to be bracketed in order to make claims of this kind. The "cause of humanity" can only retain its universality and purity in the "speculative stage" and not amidst factional antagonisms of practical politics. However, if *Demos* dispels the fantasy of a unified idea in the realm of practical politics, it also reflects on the dangers of the unified mob that ironically is anchored in no ideas, but shared rage. Gissing refuses to represent demos as a mass that can be cultivated into rational individuals. Although sincerely concerned with alleviating the fate of the working classes, Gissing writes a novel that finds a problem precisely in class politics.

Where does *Demos* leave us if the public sphere is a space of fragmentation, disillusionment, and corruption? Gissing does not propose a recipe against social evils like philanthropists do. And unlike them, he does not welcome the forces of progress with hope and optimism. He defines our modern condition in terms of learning to accept the inevitability of progress and to see in it as much a cure from social evils as their source. To rein in the forces of progress and the rise of mass politics in the public sphere, the novel offers an individual eco-aesthetic withdrawal as an alternative. In alignment with this stance, *Demos* casts a nostalgic

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look back at a local face-to-face community where an individual encounter goes further than a political argument directed at a crowd of strangers. But Gissing does not flesh out what this kind of sociality would look like and how it would withstand the pressures of modernity in the long run. As a result, Adela remains for us a semi-idealized heroine who gains a true vision of acting in the cause of humanity. Perhaps this alternative agency remains only a speculative blueprint because Gissing is well aware that once it enters into the tumultuous world of political action, it is bound to be corrupted with power structures and downgrade from a pure ideal into a political scheme.

CHAPTER 5

"ARGYFYING ABOUT POLITICS": SOCIALISM AT LUNCH IN ROBERT TRESSELL'S

*THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS*

This study in some ways comes full circle beginning with Harriet Martineau's tales of

political economy and concluding with Robert Tressell's socialist working-class novel. In both

instances the authors undertake a project to popularize theoretical principles and bring them

closer to everyday understanding by employing the power of parables, metaphors, and examples.

Both Martineau and Tressell hinge their projects on face-to-face political discussions that in the

long run would transform local communities and rebuild the world from the ground up. But here

similarities stop. While for Martineau rational dialogue inevitably culminates in the approbation

of a laissez-faire worldview, for Tressell it is the Socialists that come out winners out of any

open debate due to the "accuracy of their reasonings and the correctness of their conclusions"

(496). Claiming open and fair discussion to be on their side, Martineau validates laissez-faire

capitalism whereas Tressell uses discussion among workers as a weapon to demolish the tyranny

of the capitalist "System" altogether. Martineau's utopia turns into a dystopian nightmare in

Tressell. I am using these two authors as the beginning and ending coordinates for my study not

to cast discussion as an easily malleable mechanism in the hands of authors pursuing their

political agendas and seeking to validate their views by putting them through the test of

discussion scenes. The question that motivates this study is not so much *what* views become

validated through discussion but rather *how* various authors imagined the discursive process of

fair validation and *how* this vision of discussion evolved. What I have been examining is the

evolution of views on how this dialogue should unfold. And in this regard, the differences between Tressell's and Martineau's work present an intriguing shift.

Despite the similarities between Tressell's and Martineau's "popularization" projects, Tressell suggests that political discussion is always an *un*finished process and reflects on the dialogic nature of discussion beyond the possibilities generated in Martineau's tales. If Martineau writes tales that converge on her laissez-faire tenets and seem to usher in a static universe of economic harmony, Tressell (despite writing a work of socialist propaganda) curiously refuses such a definitive and fixed closure in his public sphere. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (*TRTP*) is very aware of the transformative potentialities of political discussions; however, the novel does not culminate in Owen's definitive conversion of the house-painters into socialists. Many have readily overlooked Tressell's valuation of discussion and have criticized his discussion scenes for bogging down the progression of the novel, considering them superfluous to the novel's intent. The *Daily Sketch* deemed the novel "[f]ormless and without a connected story" and concluded that it "can hardly be called a novel" (qtd. in Harker 80). Jessie Pope, *TRTP*'s first and merciless editor who pared off two-thirds of the original manuscript, thought she was making the novel fit for the market place as she decided to "cut out most of the *political* discussions" and to "retain much of the matter referring to Socialism" (qtd. in Harker 88). I suggest that political discussions that occur at the lunch hour among the house-painters employed to renovate the buildings for Rushton & Co. are important to our understanding of Tressell's vision of the public sphere. They are key to understanding the ways in which Tressell critiques the self-reproducing capitalist spirit of Mugsborough and anticipates the advent of socialism. It is unwarranted to view the discussion scenes as fillers that bog down the plot, although, admittedly, they are quite lengthy. I argue that through unfolding the workers'

discussions, Tressell demonstrates his commitment to the practice of an ongoing, open-ended, and truly dialogic practice. He creates a novel so fraught with discussion scenes that it struggles to come to an end or, in other words, to become a completed novel. Ultimately, this narrative tension revises the novel form itself.

In this chapter, I engage with Pierre Bourdieu's work on discourse to illuminate how the discussion scenes in *TRTP* simultaneously reinforce tacit conformity with existing norms and provide opportunities for breaking them. My analysis is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the universe of discourse and of the "undiscussed" as well as his account of the possibilities for the expansion of the field of debate that creates potential for critique. I also use Bourdieu's ideas to examine the novel's careful discrimination between real and superficial heterogeneity of ideas. *TRTP* exposes the construction of a sanctioned field of diverse opinions and develops a critique from the outside of this contained oppressive "diversity." Tressell works through the notion of critique in terms of, above all, negotiating distance: can the workers themselves begin to question what is "undiscussed," or is it only through the agency of outsiders like Owen, Barrington, or Tressell himself that words can be found and arguments expressed to challenge the self-evidence of the "undiscussed." Tressell's vision of critique becomes more nuanced once we further unpack Owen's significance in the novel: as a socialist and an outsider, Owen has the critical insight into the pervasive domination of capitalism over the workers' lives that they are unable to recognize; and even so, Tressell shows that Owen's *monologic* lecturing *fails* to deliver and disseminate his critical insights.  In *TRTP*, critique is something that requires a stance of an outsider, but, interestingly, critique can only gain momentum if it is cultivated through *dialogue* between "outsiders" and ignorant "insiders."

I will explore what I think Tressell sees as two dead-end extremes of political discussion: on the one hand, monologic critique that alienates itself from its addressees, and on the other hand, a potentially democratic arena that risks losing its critical possibilities by shrinking into an enclave of sanctioned opinions and so getting incorporated into the "System." This issue informs the novel's self-reflexive gesture. On the level of its own structure, the novel aspires to avoid the pitfalls of Owen's monologues, to embrace democratic inclusiveness and heterogeneity, yet retain its critical distancing from unquestioned and "undiscussed" reality. In representing discussion that is always unfinished, the novel provides a guarantee against systemic tyranny. But following this logic, the novel comes in direct conflict with its status as propaganda that ought to drive its message home. Because *TRTP* has been understood primarily in terms of socialist propaganda, I think that the novel's investments in a democratic political discussion have remained under-examined. In many ways, *TRTP*'s vision of the public sphere speaks to our own moment that is informed by challenges of inclusion, diversity, universal norms, and democratic justice. By imagining political discursive practice as *un*finished, evolving, and self-reflexive, *TRTP* conceptualizes an ongoing inclusive forum with a broadening horizon of discussed issues and an ability to revise collectively the norms that organize discussion itself.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu theorizes how the subjective dispositions of social agents and the objective structures of the social world interact, constitute, and reinforce one another. He also shows that sets of objective theoretical models that describe the world do not fully account for various practices of social agents, and as such, practices are not neat reflections of the objective models. Because the objectivist approach to the social world is limiting, Bourdieu seeks to find middle ground between objectivism and subjectivism and articulates a need for a theory of practice that is at the core of his project of reflexive sociology.

His inquiry pursues the question of how social agents acquire and act on certain dispositions towards the world, adhere to certain ways of living in it, and understand the social relations within it. In his treatment of the public sphere, Bourdieu fleshes out a discursive system that comprises two fields: the universe of discourse and the universe of the undiscussed. The first field is a space of competing discourses where orthodox opinions tend to affirm the existing social power relations and where heterodox opinions express the alternatives. The "universe of discourse" is circumscribed by the "universe of the undiscussed." The latter field comprises beliefs and dispositions about society and its workings that are taken for granted, without discussion, as self-evident. The "undiscussed," or doxa, Bourdieu, explains, can only be defined negatively, i.e. as something that lies outside of the field of debated opinions. Although the world appears to us self-evident when our doxa is aligned with the social structures, at certain moments this collusive harmony may be disrupted. Crises strip the veil of naturalness from the social structure and at such moments the "undiscussed" can fall into the field of active discussion, thus expanding the area of the universe of discourse and compromising the field of doxa. As Bourdieu writes, a crisis may, but not necessarily does, present an opportunity for change: "Crisis is a necessary condition of a questioning of doxa but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse" (169). Tressell's novel unravels the question of how, if at all possible, human beings, whose perceptions of "normal" class relations smoothly fold into the outside objective class structures, can produce critical discourse of their own condition, can turn their apathy into incisive questions, and put the "undiscussed" itself in the spotlight of discussion.

The workers' discussions reveal their impoverished lives punctuated with persistent economic crises. But a crisis creates conditions for change. According to Bourdieu, a crisis

causes a misalignment between one's subjective dispositions and the objective social structures

and so may generate a possibility for critique. The economic troubles alone, however, are shown

to trigger critical thinking only among very few, while to intensify the blind selfish battle for

survival among the majority. The vagaries of the employment market in the building industry of

Mugsborough place the characters in a position where they barely make their ends meet: paying

off their debts when employed and making new debts when out of employment. Against the

backdrop of the chronic economic crisis, we find out that the workers are very much involved in

what one of them, Jack Linden, calls "argyfying about politics" (19). However, the discussion

among these "Liberal" or "Tory" sympathizers reveals that these political labels constitute rather

superficial distinctions and that the passions these debates arouse fall short of emancipatory

politics or social critique. For Tressell, the political life the characters imagine themselves to be a

part of is just that—an illusion: "Some of them were under the delusion that they were

Conservatives: similarly, others imagined themselves to be Liberals. As a matter of fact, most of

them were nothing" (20). This remark corroborates what can be called Tressell's elitist belief

that the workers cannot emancipate themselves, without outside help and guidance. The more

they imagine themselves to be a part of the established political world, the more it becomes

apparent that in actuality they belong to the apolitical underworld.

The opening scene with the workers' political discussion at lunch hour in the "Cave"—a

building they are renovating for Mr. Sweater—hints at the reasons why their discussion cannot

be emancipatory. As the *Nation*'s review observed: "The novel is notable, indeed, for its

exposure of the working-man's thick-headedness, foggy-mindedness, and servility" (146). Their

"coarse language and unbalanced discussions" (*Spectator* June 6, 1914; 962) represent a

circumscribed and preformatted field of opinions where exchanges are unlikely to initiate a

change because the dialogues focus on weak alternatives and superficial choices that, ironically, trigger vehement altercations. Linden expresses his pessimistic and apathetic attitude to discussion: "argyfying about politics generally ends up with a bloody row an' does no good to nobody" (19). To avoid the escalation of violence, the workers settle for an apathetic denial of discussion: "Most of them were averse from arguing or disputing about politics" (19). Tressell portrays the workers at a dead-end because of, on the one hand, their unconscious rehearsal of superficial party-colored arguments formulated and imposed on them through the press, and on the other hand, the strength of their convictions that is conversely proportionate to the validity of their claims. There is no room left for John Stuart Mill's collision of adverse opinions in an environment where the notion of discussion is emptied out: "If two or three men of similar opinions happened to be together they might discuss such things in a friendly and superficial way, but in a mixed company it was better left alone" (19). The workers get trapped in a vicious cycle of political illiteracy and apathy that become the reason for their failure to emancipate themselves.

From the outset, the novel invites us to examine the workers' discussion about the causes of poverty as already limited in scope and devoid of rationality and hence transformative potential. Their blind reliance on the press instead of a self-motivated study of issues adds up to what Marian Walls calls their "unquestioning belief in accepted norms, of inevitability, of things that 'just are'" (168). This apathy par excellence shuts down alternative discourses. Easton's question about the "fissical policy" and free trade sparks a discussion of the causes of poverty among the workmen. This talk, however, carries but little weight since "none of them really understood the subject: not one of them had ever devoted fifteen consecutive minutes to the earnest investigation of it" (21). Crass who blames "the bloody foreigner" for the poverty at

home gets into an argument with Harlow who is of a Liberal persuasion and seems sympathetic with free trade. Meanwhile, Slyme chimes in to claim that the real causes of poverty are drinking and early marriages, Harlow blames women in the workforce, and Crass adds the problem of machinery as an explanation of poverty. The socialist Owen intervenes in this medley of opinions to explain how the condition of poverty is an intrinsic element of capitalism. However, his socialist views and explanations of the real causes of poverty are taken as insanity, something that goes against "common sense." Owen never finishes his explanation, gets interrupted frequently, and does not seem at times very willing to make his point across to the body of derisive and strong-headed workers. As an outsider, Owen is able to gain insight into their condition, but with that he runs up again a communicative barrier to deliver his points to the callous-minded audience.

Owen gestures toward a new culturally important position that strives for a critical insight from within. Despite the fact that he is one of the workers, he simultaneously views their condition from the outside: "*They were the enemy*. Those who not only quietly submitted like so many cattle to the existing state of things, but defended it, and opposed and ridiculed any suggestion to alter it" (46). Owen's attitude to his fellow-mates is a mixed package of condescension, sarcasm, and at the same time an understanding of the conditions that made the workers apathetic and even averse to alternative ways of perceiving the world around them. Owen's mixed attitude toward the workers is echoed in the narrator's oscillation between criticism and understanding of them. At times, the narrator scolds the apathetic workers because "not one of them had ever troubled to enquire whether it would not be possible to order things differently" (218), but at other moments we detect the narrator reaching out to the workers to understand how their mindsets were shaped by the system: "In their infancy they had been taught

to distrust their own intelligence and to leave 'thinking' to their 'pastors' and masters and to their 'betters' generally" (299). As Raymond Williams describes it, their consciousness "is resistant to sustained serious talk" ("Memorial Lecture" 78). The narrator and Owen continuously negotiate their insider/outsider position to capitalize on its advantages of relating to the others and providing a critical insight. Such maneuvering seems to promise possibilities for social change. Owen's is a new kind of vantage point that was not conceptualized so prominently before *TRTP* and other working-class socialist novels. The figure of Owen who belongs to the environment and yet never loses hold of a critical distancing from it has come to replace the traditional literary figures of a middle-class consciousness. Blending outsider and insider positions, Owen is distinct from a sympathetic observer, e.g., Margaret Hale in *North and South*, or from somewhat awkwardly sculpted hybrid characters who are an embodiment of bourgeois consciousness in a working-class disguise, e.g. Angela and Harry in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, or from a seemingly class-less sympathetic stranger like Charles Egremont in *Sybil*. Owen, as an insider/outsider, offers a new position of resistance that similar socialist-minded characters in *TRTP* cannot offer. Unlike the undercover middle-class Barrington, Owen is more smoothly integrated into the working life, and his agency to change it comes more organically from his everyday labor in the "Cave."

But Owen's position, however advantageous in concept, at times suffers from limitations and challenges in practice. His presence in the novel amounts to that of a somewhat arrogant lecturer who faces confrontation and aggression from the audience and whose alienation escalates the more he falls back on his habitual monologic didacticism. Owen's political and intellectual distance from the workers is accentuated by the linguistic difference. His lectures stand out from the surrounding "rough and ready dialogues" (*The Academy* May 23, 1914; 656)

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not only by means of his socialist convictions but by means of his superior command of English. In "The Oblong" chapter, Owen's lecture on the true causes of poverty reveals the tension between his critical insights that have the potential to empower the workers yet at the same time alienate him from them. Owen's explanation that people should be able to secure for themselves the "benefits of civilization" (28) that they produced elicits respect as much as aggravates misunderstanding: "Some of them began to wonder whether Owen was not sane after all. He certainly must be a clever sort of chap to be able to talk like this. It sounded almost like something out of a book, and most of them could not understand one half of it" (29). What gives Owen the advantage of a critical distance is also what obfuscates his message as he is "unable to penetrate the language of the workers" (Walls 156). Admittedly, Owen has to take recourse to his monologic rhetoric and a kind of rhetorical *violence* to make the workers hear his message as he wonders: "How was he to put it to them so that they would *have* to understand it whether they wished it or not" (287). On the other hand, the workers fail to understand Owen's language. For instance, when Owen sees the cause of poverty in that the wages are not equivalent to the work that the workers perform, he is ridiculed as a speaker ignorant of his audience: "Wotcher mean, quiverlent?" cried Crass. "Why the 'ell don't yer talk plain English with out draggin' in a lot of long words wot nobody can't understand?" (297). Tressell's ironic treatment of this communicative barrier illuminates that "normal" language and "normal" state of affairs are constructed and not at all politically innocent categories.

Barrington is an outsider of a different kind though he and Owen share a lot in common in terms of their ability to explain to the workers the working of the "System" and what socialism is. Little is known about Barrington except for vague rumors: "Some said that he was a toff in disguise; others that he had rich relations who were ashamed of him because he was a

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Socialist, and who allowed him so much a week  so long as he kept away from them and did not use his real name" (568). Like Owen, Barrington, too, delivers speeches and faces mockery, apathy, and aggression on the part of his audience. Barrington's "great oration" is interrupted many times despite Philpot's efforts as chairperson to keep "horder." His socio-economic distance from the workers is represented through linguistic difference that elicits workers' comments like "'I believe you must 'ave swollered a bloody dictionary'" (508). But at other times, Barrington slips from the role of a socialist agitator into the role of an unobtrusive undercover observer who may or may not derive some voyeuristic pleasures from breaking out of his middle-class shell and slumming in the lowest social strata of Mugsborough. For him, most of the workers' discussions become a spectacle and an object of observation, not an arena to participate in: Barrington looks at them from afar, with his "manner of reserve, seldom speaking unless addressed" (461). Barrington corroborates the novel's idea that socialism is a middle-class invention that the social betters want to bring down to the poor because "socialism [. . .] does not arise organically from within the working class" (57), as Swingewood puts it. But in addition, Barrington's figure also reveals just how complicated is the line between his socialist agitation and a more ethically questionable late-Victorian trend of "fashionable slumming" (Koven 7). His otherness and distancing from the living conditions and ways of thinking of the workers is a part of Tressell's navigating the question of whether social change comes from the outside, from within, or yet a third, more flexible and multi-valent position.

Owen's and Barrington's dilemma in regards to their outsider position in many ways evokes Tressell's own negotiations of his position in relation to the English working-class. As an Irish-born illegitimate son of the Anglo-Irish Protestant middle-class father employed as an inspector for the Royal Irish Constabulary and an Irish Catholic mother, as someone who

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emigrated from Ireland to South Africa and experienced the far reaches of the British Empire, who chose to live the life of a single parent caring for his daughter, and finally, a socialist by conviction, Tressell is an outsider on multiple levels. Raymond Williams commented on Tressell's ambivalent insider/outsider position by pointing to the fact that Tressell worked on the novel at the same time as he was also "a worker fully engaged in his own work" ("Memorial Lecture" 76)), but that he stood out from the rest by being "a very literate man" "capable of sustained reading" (78). Tressell's position within and outside the laboring class is complex since he was a self-made working man and consistently chose to remain so. After the financial support for his family changed due to his father's death, Tressell's opportunity to enter a professional world slipped away: "He was now a working-man without having been nurtured as one" (Ball 6). But Tressell was by no means an aspirant for the middle-class prestige, and according to Fred Ball's biographical account of Tressell, "He himself said that he turned down offers of foremanship because [. . .] he didn't want to become deeply involved in 'business' nor to have to act as spy upon the men" (117). By blending his critical insights as an outsider and the immediacy of living in "hell" as one of "them," Tressell mobilizes the advantages of both perspectives and shapes them into a comprehensive insight for change. His outsider status helps Tressell conceive of a new critical position that so far has been attempted but not attained in fiction. With his character Owen, Tressell achieves something that Besant, wrapped in his middle-class cocoon worldview, fails to imagine through his undercover middle-class characters who fashionably indulge in slumming.

Tressell's ambivalent insider/outsider position has elicited a variety of responses among critics, with some celebrating the long-awaited working-class novel written by one of the workers and others incriminating Tressell with a patronizing, condescending, if sympathetic,

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attitude towards the workers. Tressell seems to be simultaneously with the workers and looking at them from a distance. This negotiation of distance says a lot about Tressell's preoccupation with the question of whether or not the working classes can effect socialist change through their own awareness and self-directed agency. Tressell is a controversial case as he seems to believe in the working-class agency from within, yet infuses his faith in the workers with elitist overtones.

Some have argued that "*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is the first English novel to depict the lives of the poor in a manner that is, not merely sympathetic, but empathetic" (Mayne 75). Others, conversely, have questioned Tressell's empathy with the working classes and, highlighting his frustration with the apathetic masses, have argued that his political stance can best be termed "elitist socialism" (Young 286). James D. Young, therefore, in his reading of the novel, juxtaposes Tressell's politics against Marxist notions of the working class: "Robert Tressell's explicit rejection of the classical Marxist argument that the emancipation of the working class could only be accomplished by the working class themselves permeates his socialist concepts and colors his portrayal of the English working class" (292). Alan Swingewood goes a step further by suggesting that, for Tressell, the workers can become agents of social change only if socialist ideas are injected into them from the outside:

> [. . .] if *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is to be defined as a proletarian
> novel, it is obviously not of its depiction of a socialist or even potentially socialist
> working class but rather by virtue of its implication that a socialist consciousness
> has to be brought to the proletariat from outside by radical middle-class
> intellectuals (that is, the figure of Barrington). For Tressell, socialism in either its
> intellectual or its organizational expression does not arise organically from within
> the working class. (56-57)

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For Tressell, the real obstacle to socialism is not so much the dominant position of employers within the system but what seems like an intrinsically apathetic essence of the working class who are unable to rise to critique their oppressors and their own compliance with their oppressors.

Tressell frequently peppers his language with ironic undertones as he launches his criticism of the capitalist system in ironic and paradoxical phrases such as, for instance, Owen's statement "Money *is* the principal cause of poverty" (166). Still, the major irony concerns the workers. The ironic motif that runs through the novel is that socialist ideas and ideas of political emancipation have to be delivered to the workers by their social betters. But only focusing on this irony, however prevalent in the novel, would simplify Tressell's complex coming to terms with the working class. I would argue that there is always Tressell-the-insider who is preoccupied with long discussions in *TRTP* not merely to show that the workers must be instructed in socialist ideas, but also because he intuits that ideas can come organically from these long discussions, albeit not instantly and not without a hearty swearing. After all, the hopeful future seems to depend just as much on the middle-class Barrington, who may or may not return, as it does on the workers engaged in "argyfying about politics" among themselves. Therefore, to characterize Tressell as either an "empathetic" insider or an "elitist" outsider does not present the whole picture of how Tressell views social change and its agents.

But, for Tressell, the question of social change does not boil down only to a balancing act between insider's and outsider's insights. His novel seems to suggest that social change is maintained through an ongoing discussion. Tressell's commitment to this kind of democratic discursive practice comes in contradiction with the novel's genre. Indeed, despite its status as socialist propaganda, the novel is very preoccupied with the workers' discussions (where socialist ideas do not necessarily triumph) to a point that it is unable to arrive at a closure, and

even the closure remains open-ended as if to suggest that more "argyfying about politics" is going to take place. In other words, besides putting a value on socialism, *TRTP* implies that discussion has value in and of itself and perhaps the most valued one is an open-ended discussion. It is, indeed, rather curious that in the course of this chronicle of the workers' life and their political discussions, Owen does not convert any of them, not a single one, into socialism entirely. As Jack Mitchell writes, Tressell "does not allow himself the luxury of 'converting' someone in the book," although, he adds, "in the clinical conditions of Owen's lecture a certain amount of progress is made with the more class-conscious workers such as Philpot, Harlow, and Easton" (119). Although Owen's lectures may not persuade and convert directly, they surely galvanize the discussions. If Owen comes short of being a socialist leader who commands the minds of his newly minted followers, he is most valuable as a character because his lectures catalyze ongoing discussion.

With antagonism, competition, and lack of openness, the novel's discussion scenes illustrate what Habermas would define as distorted communicative practice. Ironically, however, these very features make the workers' political discussions ongoing, and in this regard they hold out hope for a potential emergence of a democratic public sphere:

> 'You're always sayin' that everything's all wrong," complained Harlow, "but why the 'ell don't you tell us 'ow they're goin' to be put right?"
>
> "It doesn't seem to me as if any of you really wish to know. I believe that even if it were proved that it could be done, most of you would be sorry and would do all you could to prevent it."

"'E don't know 'isself," sneered Crass. "Accordin' to 'im, Tariff Reform ain't no bloody good—Free Trade ain't no bloody good, and everybody else is wrong! But when you arst 'im what ought to be done—'e's flummoxed."

Crass did not feel very satisfied with the result if this machinery argument, but he consoled himself with the reflection that he would be able to flatten out his opponent [Owen] on another subject. (108)

The arena of "argyfying about politics" in this scene exposes several drawbacks both on Owen's side and on the side of the other workers. Owen receives fair criticism for not having an open and truly inclusive discussion of his ideas. On the other hand, Crass suffers a fiasco in this discussion due to his militaristic approach to "flatten out his opponent." But Harlow's role in this scene is no less significant: Harlow reproaches Owen for shunning a reasonable discussion with the workers, thus forcing Owen to abandon his arrogance. Owen's elitist intellectualism is pitted against a more collectivist (and thus perhaps truly socialist) pattern of discussion.

Like Owen, then, Crass is just as instrumental in maintaining discussions day in and day out. Crass employs his pugnacious spirit to its fullest: "Crass himself had no liking for such discussions, but he was so confident of being able to 'flatten out' Owen with the cutting from the *Obscurer* that he had several times tried to lead the conversation into the desired channel, but so far without success" (148). As Crass contemplates retaliation, he perceives their discussions as ongoing, as always ready to continue "next time": "'I've got a pill ready for 'im, though, next time 'e starts yappin' "(103). When the cutting is finally read aloud and Crass anticipates his triumphant blow on socialism, Owen "flattens out" Crass by interpreting the article as, in fact, an argument not against socialism, but against Christian hypocrisy. However pugilistic his intentions are, Crass ironically presents more occasions for Owen to elaborate this socialist ideas.

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Crass also becomes Owen's associate in a sense that their debates disrupt the stifling apathy of the majority. Owen and Crass along with others engage themselves in a discursive process by which ideas are examined dialogically. Marion Walls suggests that these discussions resemble a debating game or a kind of Socratic dialogue where "one person defended a thesis against another who tried to get him to agree to statements that contradicted the thesis" (166). Walls suggests that for Tressell this process of "rational argument culminating in coherent knowledge" leads to a triumph of socialist ideas (166). However, the novel leaves more room for discussion outside the text and ends with an anticipation of this triumph, but not with the triumph itself. Tressell's choice to leave his narrative conceptually unfinished goes to the heart of realism, defined by Tony Davies as "not really a literary form or genre or movement or tradition at all but a contested space, the scene of an unfinished argument" (135 qtd. in Fox 64). The "argument" in *TRTP* remains unfinished because the novel thinks differently about the situations that arouse arguments in the first place. As Wim Neetens notes, the novel's innovation is in that it represents "places where economic interest, political power and personal accident intersect to produce conflicts that cannot be resolved within the existing parameters" (86). Taking Neetens' point further, I suggest that Tressell's novel does not only rethink the representation of conflicts, but implies something important about the novel of discussion as a genre. Specifically, while novels "discuss" various conflicts and imagine discursive solutions, more often than not novels point to a temporal slippage between the plane of political conflicts and the plane of discursive parameters. Thus, some deep-seated conflicts can be ameliorated by the new language of resolution while some established discursive frameworks may gloss over some emerging conflicts. For instance, Martineau believes in "plain speaking" as a new language that can mediate existing tensions, while Disraeli exposes the "false" and outdated rhetoric of the Whigs

that covers up the real political sympathies of the People. *TRTP*, too, shows how the philanthropic discourse of helping the poor is ineffectual and also conducive to silencing the workers' claims for justice. *TRTP* is aware of the uneven workings of the language that either anticipates or lags behind the changing social tensions that it tries to negotiate. Tressell's realism dictates that discussion about social conflicts must abandon the framework of fixed resolutions and reinvent itself as an ongoing process with ever-evolving "arguments" and parameters of discussion.

Besides this new conceptual framework in *TRTP*, the novel is invested in self-reflexivity. The novel is highly aware of its explicit political agenda and of its own status as propaganda. Peter Miles writes: "What distinguishes *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* from other novels of socialist propaganda is the extent to which it recognizes its own status as propaganda and offers itself for *use* as much as contemplation" (6). I agree with Miles that the novel clearly reflects on its own status as a novel of social realism, and in more ways than one. Besides reflecting on its practical use, which Miles mentions, the novel also reflects on its distinctly novelistic capabilities to be a device for propaganda. The novel constantly interrogates its own status as a tool of persuasion by incorporating a whole range of competing media, such as newspaper clippings, Owen's charcoal drawings, flyers, posters, workers' songs, and even Rushton & Co.'s time-sheet. Self-reflexivity makes *TRTP* "good" propaganda (i.e., mobilizing its strengths more critically) as well as "bad" propaganda (i.e., unable to confine open-ended discussion in order to affirm its message). To be sure, *TRTP* did its work as popular propaganda, and its parts such as the "Money Trick" were often staged as mini-plays. The novel has made a

direct political impact and accounted for the 1945 election victory of the British Labor Party.[38]

At the same time, its self-reflexivity diffuses its propaganda impulse and channels the novel to put more value on an ongoing discussion rather than blunt persuasion.

The novel's valuation of the workers' discussions, regardless of the outcomes, suggests that what is at stake for Tressell in them is uncovering the democratic potential of this practice. Tressell's focus on the workers talking about politics among themselves marked a shift in the development of social problem novels. As Jack Mitchell sums up this change: "They are now in dialogue with themselves only" (Mitchell in Klaus 69). The roughness and unconventionality of the workers' speech seems to be a potential source of emancipation: "Tressell's workers' talk [. . .] is a speech which is unruly aggressive and discontented. It is a speech which despises rather than is unaware of the rules and regulations about language set up by the powers that be, a speech that moves according to its own laws and cuts itself out its own path. Its distinctive rhythm is an aggressive discontented one. In this the swear-words play an important part" (Mitchell 185). The unruliness of their speech, on the one hand, creates a need for someone like Owen or Barrington whose literate and self-controlled discourse can guide them, but on the other hand, represents a will that can be the only effective way of resistance and self-emancipation. Their resistance to conventions goes beyond linguistic difference. The format of the lunch-hour discussions defies the principles of efficiency (or "scamping"), pervasive control, and monotonous regularity—the features that are intrinsic to capitalist production process and on which Rushton & Co. depend for staying in business. The workers' spontaneous everyday

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[38] In his introduction to a later edition of *TRTP*, Alan Sillitoe recollects: "I read an abridged edition of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* when I was nineteen and with the Air Force in Malaya. It was given to me by a wireless operator from Glasgow, who said: 'You ought to read this. Among other things it is the book that won the '45 election for Labour'" (qtd in F. C. Ball *One of the Damned* 186).

discussions that flare up as suddenly as they die out and that seem to masterfully evade Hunter's all-seeing spying eye are already, if only formally, pre-political signs of resistance.

The lunch-hour is a temporal pocket outside the "System," yet is incorporated into it. After Crass's "[p]rolonged blast upon a whistle" (14) the space of the kitchen in the "Cave" turns into an assembly of the workers and for a moment becomes a space of discussion and a space outside of capitalist production. Tressell plays with this idea and even allows himself to treat it with irony. When Owen is about to explain to the workers how the money trick works through robbing the workers of the products of their labor in return for unjust compensation, he jokingly assures that their leisurely discussion about the money trick will not be interrupted by Hunter because it entirely follows the logic of capitalism:

> "Now this is the way the trick works—"
>
> "Before you goes on with it," interrupted Philpot, apprehensively, "don't you think we'd better 'ave someone to keep watch at the gate in case a Slop comes along? We don't want to get runned in, you know."
>
> "I don't think there's any need for that," replied Owen, "there's only one slop who'd interfere with us for playing this game, and that's Police Constable Socialism." (227)

Of course, Owen's intentions are not to reproduce the money trick but to raise the workers' awareness of the foul play. By setting up a discussion about the money trick at the symbolic heart of capitalist exploitation, i.e. the "Cave," Owen implies that capitalism can be blind to potentially subversive activities. The "System," then, however pervasive it is and however masterfully it incorporates potential resistance, is never fully invincible to being deconstructed from within.

"Argyfying about politics" is a subversive and spontaneous element within capitalism that originates in everyday activities. Each discussion seems to start out casually and as if out of nowhere: "At first there was no attempt at conversation and nothing was heard but the sounds of eating and drinking" (14). Thematically, political conversations that ensue are unruly and rough like the speech of the workers. In one scene, for instance, engrossed in discussing the causes of poverty, they wander from "fissical policy" and drinking to the evils brought about by machinery and women in the workforce. There is no format or prerequisite to be a part of this discussion—Sawkins has just been awakened by the "shouting" (21), a "murmur of approval" (19) counts as participation, Easton brings in evidence from the newspaper, even though "reading was hard work for him" (23), and Barrington "who took no part in the conversation, still sat silently smoking" (25). The scenes of discussion are opposed to the scenes of silent work as is evident in Rushton's instruction to Crass: "Any man who is slow or lazy, or any man that you notice talking more than is necessary during working hours, you must report him to Mr. Hunter" (427). The act of speaking then constructs itself as an act of resistance to work and carves out a discursive space outside of capitalist exploitation.

A sense of freedom comes from the spontaneity of discussions, the workers' defiance of regimented rules, and an apparent absence of a definite purpose of such dialogues. The objective at lunch-hour is not achieving a consensus, nor is it perpetual fighting about politics. If anything, the goal is to fill up with one's dinner and tea from a condensed milk tin can. But intermingled with routine snacking are dynamic discussion scenes that evoke the readers' interest due to their richness and Bakhtinian polyphony. While lunch breaks are strictly regulated by the capitalist system, they nonetheless present possibilities of subverting this order. Tressell does not hold out a communicative ideal (either of rational-critical debate or of agonistic public sphere). Rather, he

wants us to witness an everyday practice that he believes in the end is the only mechanism to change the world the painters live in. To be sure, Tressell as an author *constructs* his representation of the everyday spontaneity he wants to celebrate, which raises a question of whether or not analogous political discussions would take place outside the novel, in a "real-life" environment. Brian Mayne comments on the constructedness of the spontaneous everyday context in the novel: "There is nothing mean or petty or incidental in the novel and the writer is careful to make the scenes in which that extended discussions and 'lectures' on socialism and capitalism occur appear to be credible and even inevitable" (82). However constructed the notion of spontaneity may appear in the novel, its representation conveys a certain meaning. Tressell celebrates a spontaneous environment that nurtures emancipatory discussion and suggests that spontaneity and emancipation are woven into the very fabric of everyday conversation.

The novel does not seek an ideal for which "argyfying about politics" should aspire, but instead is preoccupied with finding radical possibilities in the practice of everyday exchanges among the workers. There is something about the everydayness as a context for these discussions that suggests the vibrancy of this practice that goes beyond prescription, categorization, or formalization. The workers' arguments flare up and die out taking unpredictable turns and shifting to new topics; some anxiously read excerpts from newspapers to support their claims, others doze quietly off still with a chance to wake up from someone's loud statement; some are decent readers, while others take pains to read out loud a newspaper passage; some are quite articulate, while others prefer to communicate with a murmur of approval or disproval; some claim to have political identities, like a Liberal or a Tory; while others, like Owen, resent how arbitrarily these labels are appropriated. Everyday discussions constitute for Tressell hidden resources of political awakening. Tressell has aimed "to write a readable story full of human

interest and based on the happenings of everyday life"(12) and in doing so perhaps to explore how the resources of everyday exchanges among fellow-workers can bring about a more democratic public sphere than the one constituted only by lectures of a socialist agitator.

His socialist sympathies aside, Tressell assigns democratic value to heterogeneity of ideas. Owen's lectures do not transform the group of workers into a homogeneous group of socialists, but his speeches do facilitate an ongoing debate. The everyday discussions do not produce winners or losers in the "Cave." These conversations simply are not oriented toward a closure as there is always something left unresolved and unfinished, which in itself aligns with a democratic process. In the "Cave" Owen will always be only one of *many* voices, one of many contenders for "truth." The novel seems to favor this polyphonic public sphere more than to privilege exclusively Owen's ideas over others'. Tressell conceives of the truth as a horizon that cannot be captured from a single perspective, even Owen's. That said, Owen's socialist voice gradually enters the public sphere in *TRTP* and earns its central place through competition amidst a heterogeneous public.

Rather than seeing discussion that moves toward a magic point of resolution or, in other words, the triumph of the best argument, Tressell focuses on such elements of discussion as spontaneity, unpredictability, and the ongoing pursuit of an always moving horizon of discussion. He seems to be more interested in the frustrations of the participants as the eternal engine of discussion rather than idealizing a consensus that would put all tensions as ease. If in Martineau, liberal discussion is arranged in a neat and aesthetically pleasing form that coincides with the narrative form itself (i.e., the dialogues end in consensus between parties, and the winning opinion is summarized again in the appendix to the story), in Tressell one detects an impulse to emphasize the non-ideal and messy dynamics of discussion that the narrative is often

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inadequate to represent. Discussion about socialism does not end with the end of *TRTP*, but rather frees itself of the narrative limitations of time and space and bursts into the world outside. As Ian Birchall states, the resolution of *TRTP* can take place only outside the novel (55 qtd. in Harker 256).

All in all, the novel showcases those features of discursive practice that previous rhetorical aesthetics, such as Martineau's, meant to suppress. For instance, the workers' discussion of the effects of machinery on employment is representative of a discursive process that unfolds in a new conceptual framework. That discussion always sparks spontaneously, and is perceived as such, becomes clear from Harlow's remark to Crass and Owen as the two diverge on the subject of old Jack Linden's sacking: " 'Oh, for Gord's sake don't start no more arguments [. . .]. We 'ad enough of that last week. [. . .]'" (105). At a later time, when Crass is eager to "flatten out" Owen, a period of quiet precludes him from doing just that and ignites his willingness for an open debate ever more: "Crass had been waiting for a suitable opportunity to produce the newspaper cutting which it will be remembers he showed to Easton on Monday morning, but he had waited in vain, for there had been scarcely any 'political' talk at meal-times all the week, and it was now Thursday" (148). "Argyfying about politics" seems to be sporadic in its occurrences, however, with a guarantee that it will go on. In this case, like in many others, an everyday occurrence, i.e., the sacking of Jack Linden, serves as a tipping point of sorts that, once reached, unleashes the discussion about political questions on a much larger scale: machinery and unemployment in general. It is perhaps not despite but rather because of the spontaneity that these discussions link up so easily the particular to the general, an unfortunate incident to a vicious law of capitalism. The unexpected new ways of thinking come out of these

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connections when the mates' animosity and derision are replaced, if temporarily, with a silent moment of understanding Owen's argument.

"Political" talk becomes an organic part of the workers' existence and is mixed in with rather trivial topics, like fleas. The flea talks, like "argyfying about politics," start out with a trigger: "Harlow mentioned that he had found traces of bugs in one of the bedrooms upstairs and this called forth a number of anecdotes of those vermin and of houses infested by them" (148). This discussion scene about flea infestation of houses may perhaps evoke for someone like Owen capitalism's pervasive infestation of human minds. The scene below bristles with the spontaneous energy of discussion and gives insight into Tressell's observations of the public sphere:

> There were several other of these narratives, four or five men talking at the top of
> their voices at the same time, each one telling a different story. At first each story-
> teller addressed himself to the company generally, but after a while, finding it
> impossible to make himself heard, he would select some particular individual who
> seemed disposed to listen and tell him the story. It sometimes happened that in the
> middle of the tale the man to whom it was being told would remember a
> somewhat similar adventure of his own, which he would immediately proceed to
> relate without waiting for the other to finish, and each of them was generally so
> interested in the gruesome details of his own story that he was unconscious of the
> fact that the other was telling one at all. In a contest of this kind the victory
> usually went to the man with the loudest voice, but sometimes a man who had a
> weak voice, scored by repeating the same tale several times until someone heard
> it. (149)

Here Tressell is interested in mastering the power of persuasion, finding an ear that is "disposed to listen," and getting through to someone who is wrapped up in one's own story and so is oblivious of the other's speech. While Tressell admits that the public sphere works by the rules of the "Battle of Life," he reserves the final victory not for Hunters, but for Owens. To be sure, Hunter can usurp power as the "man with the loudest voice" and yell at old Jack Linden for slow work: "Hunter shouted so loud that his voice filled all the house" (41). However, while Hunter's voice can reach the ears of the workers in the "Cave," it is Owen's steady voice that can transform their minds "by repeating the same tale several times." As Owen puts it to Crass, "I have no doubt I have to say it  about five hundred times more before you understand what it means" (285).

Owen's persistence in rehearsing his argument does not achieve an ultimate conversion of his workmates, but what it does is disrupts their usual mindset. Tressell captures the minute changes in the ways the workers think and participate in dialogues with Owen. To that end, the novel represents not only how their derisive or aggressive remarks about Owen shift occasionally to an open dialogue, but also how the silences speak volumes of their changing mindset. The work of silence and its changing meanings are prominent during Owen's lecture "The Oblong." Silence conveys its shifting connotations even before the lecture as we witness a silent scene of the philanthropists laboring in the "Cave." Silence sets in because of their fear of surveillance: "The hands worked in silence, for they were in no mood for talking, and not only that, but they were afraid that Hunter or Rushton or Crass might be watching them from behind some bush or tree, or through some of the windows" (276). Silence turns the workers into productive automatons that do not waste time on idle talk. It also serves as self-defense in a place where a careless word can cost employment. As the workers' suspicion of being watched turns into a

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permanent paranoia, they undertake the most resistant way left to avoid surveillance: to withdraw from discussion altogether until the lunch hour when surveillance seems to loosen its grip.

During the lecture, silences become important factors that shape discussion and mark its turning points. For instance, Owen gets accused of being silent and not explaining his argument in full. As Crass remarks: "'E knows all about wot's the cause of poverty, but 'e won't tell nobody. 'E's been goin' to tell us wot it is for a long time past, but it don't seem to come orf" (279). Owen's communication with his mates always seems to defer some final point, or clarification, and because of this it functions as a kind of performative silence that promises the answers but never reveals them fully. Barrington is also someone whose image is associated with silence as he attends Owen's lecture "as usual, silently smoking, apparently oblivious of his surroundings" (281). His silence is that of an under-cover observer and denotes his distancing from the workers. But the workers' experience of silences is a much more dynamic and evolving process through which Tressell marks tipping points in discussion that can initiate understanding and dialogic interaction.

Silences that punctuate Owen's lecture mark the moments when the logic of the workers' objections breaks down or when they themselves realize the falseness of their counter-arguments. Owen manipulates their silences to make them self-aware of their shortcomings:

> "I never said anything about 'sharing out all the money' [. . .]. Can any of you tell
> me the name of someone who proposes to do so?"
>
> No one answered [. . .]. (281)

A similar lack of response follows after another of Owen's direct questions: "[. . .] you believe in Christianity: why don't you do the things that he said?" (283). But when he sketches out a rectangle to begin to explain to them the relationship between the "Loafer class" (295) and the

workers, Owen encounters perhaps a most disheartening silence among his audience: "An absolute, disconcerting silence reigned. His embarrassment and nervousness increased. He knew that they were unwilling to hear or talk or think about such subjects as the cause of poverty at all" (287). But in the course of the lecture, the meaning of silences changes from shutting off Owen's arguments to engaging with him in polemics: "For a few moments silence prevailed, each man's mind being busy trying to think of some objection to the lecturer's arguments" (294). Owen encounters yet another silence after explaining the role of money in robbing "the workers of the greater part of the fruits of their toil" (297). Although there is no evidence of their cooperative engagement in discussion, the workers no longer try to derive or attack Owen: "Owen ceased speaking and silence once more ensued. No one gave any sign of understanding, or of agreeing or of disagreeing with what he had said. Their attitude was strictly neutral" (297). And finally, an "oppressive silence" (299) sets in to mark a small minority's effort, however feeble and fleeting, to engage with Owen's ideas: "Several men had risen from their seats and were attentively studying the diagrams Owen had drawn on the wall; and nearly all the others were making the same mental effort—they were trying to think of something to say in defense of those who robbed them of the fruits of their soil" (300). If Owen cannot break through the oppressors' discourse that the workers learn and acknowledge as common sense, it is in the silences where he locates potential for change. The silences carve out room for alternatives to the oppressors' monologic "common sense" and Owen's own didactic monologues.

As a part of discovering the potentialities of dialogic discourse, the novel is invested in a face-to-face practice of "argyfying about politics" as opposed to the mediated discussion on the pages of the Mugsborough press. Face-to-face discussion comes off as more authentic and capable of resisting corruption and hidden agendas of the local media tycoons. The public sphere

of print where the oppressors' opinions monopolize public debate becomes an analogue to the Battle of Life waged on the socio-economic plane. Sweater and Grinder have an iron grip on the media in Mugsborough: "The editors were a sort of marionettes who danced as Sweater and Grinder pulled the strings" (333). Three press organs shape the local public opinion and offer themselves as the only authoritative channels of information. Ironically, they also become a measuring stick for an "enlightened" reading public. Crass claims to be a part of the informed citizenry when he says: "I reads the *Ananias* every week, and I generally takes the *Daily Chloroform*, or the *Hobscurer*, so I ought to know summat about it" (23). The irony of Crass's insight into political matters is, of course, conveyed through his language that reveals otherwise. As Raymond Williams points out, Tressell uses the literate and the illiterate registers of speech as "a kind of counterpoint between people who have got some sense and people who haven't" ("Memorial Lecture" 81). With such telling titles for the newspapers, Tressell suggests that political discussion mediated through the double bind of press and capital obfuscates the distinctions between sense and sham, poisons the readers' critical abilities to think, and deals in lies.

The anonymous public sphere of the printed word is, for Tressell, not a guarantor of disinteredness, objectivity, or freedom, but the heart of corruption. When the Town Council realizes that the Electric Light Works cannot compete with the Gasworks and that they cannot usurp the Gasworks' profits, it concocts a scheme that the Town should purchase the almost-bankrupt Electric Light Works to minimize the damage to the monopolists. The bandits rely on the anonymity in the press to execute the scheme and back up their foul play with public opinion. In the hands of Didlum, anonymity in the press becomes not a prerequisite of transparency and democratic discussion, but a veneer for a phantom public that does not exist:

"[. . .] We could arrange to 'ave a lot of letters sent 'To the Editor of the

*Obscurer*' and 'To the Editor of the *Ananias*' and 'To the Editor of the *Weekly*

*Chloroform*' in favour of the scheme."

"Yes, that's a very good idear," said Grinder. "For that matter that editors could

write them to themselves and sign them 'Progress', 'Ratepayer', 'Advance

Mugsborough', and sich-like." (333)

The novel mistrusts the printed world of the media as it flourishes without a real connection with

its readership and manufactures publics according to the designs and needs of the media tycoons

at a given moment.

The media become a self-referential and self-contained system that, instead of

transmitting the public voices, becomes alienated from them. As the editors' self-addressed

letters symbolize, the Mugsborough newspapers close in on themselves in an anti-democratic

cycle.  The press holds up a skewed mirror to the public and sells the image of a fabricated

citizenry to reproduce a world where representations and perceptions are divorced from their

referents, yet are the ones that matter. An engineered image of the public is not merely a

removed abstraction or a simplified emblem of the public, but a falsification by the powers that

be. For that matter, it lacks the authenticity of a face-to-face dialogue among the workers where

the public emerges through a shared discussion of diverse opinions. So different from the

republic of letters described by Michael Warner in his account of the eighteenth-century

American public sphere, the Mugsborough press is an early twentieth-century caricature of the

print world where capitalism and the printed word converge into a monopoly. The collusion

between the printed word and capital, the alliance between the machinery of perception and the

system of economic production becomes, for Tressell, even more oppressive than a strictly economic Battle of Life.

In other words, *TRTP* dramatizes the turn-of-the-century crisis of community and seeks to tease out potential for reinvention. Jeremy Hawthorn interprets the novel as a progressive rethinking of what local community means and how it operates: "in the face of the Leavisite demand that a novel should reject technologic-Benthamism and the mechanical principle in favour of the organic community and life, here was a novel that suggested that the local communities of England were full of corruption and suffering and were in dire need *not* of a return to the unequal communities of the past but of a movement forward to a reorganized community or commonwealth of the future that would establish a real fellowship for the very first time" (*Revisiting*, "Preface" xiv). Tressell and Owen begin this reorganization from starting a lending library in the local community. Similar to how Tressell "started a penny-a-week lending library for his workmates, using his own books" (Mitchell *Robert Tressell* 11), Owen uses his start-up library to rebuild a community, albeit with modest success:

> Owen [. . .] spent a lot on what he called 'The Cause'. Every week he bought some penny or twopenny pamphlets or some leaflets about Socialism, which he lent or gave to his mates; and in this way and by means of much talk he succeeded in converting a few to his party. Philpot, Harlow and a few others used to listen with interest, and some of them even paid for the pamphlets they obtained from Owen, and after reading them themselves, passed them on to others, and also occasionally 'got up' arguments on their own accounts. Others were simply indifferent [. . .]. But the majority were bitterly hostile; not to Owen, but to Socialism. (460-461)

Fraught with challenges, Owen's book-lending practice creates a shared network of people who are connected to one another face-to-face as well as through the medium of pamphlets. Regardless of their varying responses, be it indifference, disagreement, or acceptance, they all become a community united through this book-lending process. To be sure, Owen, like Grinder or Sweater, has his agenda disseminating Socialist literature. But the monopolists' press and Owen's lending-library construct two differing types of communities. In the former case, the reading public can at best be united by a falsified image of themselves concocted on the pages of the *Obscurer* or the *Weekly Chloroform* where public opinion imposes itself on the readers. In the latter case, communal networks arise from a tangible reading public that constitutes itself through differing responses to the texts they share and so produces a more dynamic public opinion. Tressell does not imply that the press can only be a corrupt mechanism of community-building, nor that face-to-face exchanges are always authentic. However, the novel insists that face-to-face discussions can be a starting point for reinventing a new community of active citizens against the more systematic and embedded manipulation in the press.

The novel's preoccupation with the questions of community affects its formal organization. The reader's attention is distributed among many characters and does not focus on one hero whose innermost thoughts and feelings the reader would be let in on. As such, it is a discursive community that becomes Tressell's main focus of attention and mechanism for effecting social change. Perhaps, for this same reason, Owen's teachings are shown as ultimately not very effective. It takes a community, not an individual, to make a change. According to Mitchell, "Tressell replaced the old plot-in-length with a new-type plot-in-breadth" ("Early Harvest" 71). As he explains, offering a panoramic view of the working classes works better to "indicate the universal and systematic nature of capitalist exploitation" (71). I would add that

another reason for Tressell's "plot-in-breadth" is his attempt to show that only through rebuilding small and large scale communities is it possible to subvert the individualistic Battle of Life. Literary form then amplifies his politics.

The discussion scenes at the "Cave" represent the dynamics at two levels: a local community and the nation. The image of the "Cave" is "so rich in concentrated typicality" that it always symbolizes something bigger than itself, that is, " 'state of the nation' as a whole" (Mitchell "Early Harvest" 74). The "Cave" becomes a multi-level symbol that suggests that the state of the local matters accounts for the state of the nation as a whole. As such, the novel anticipates that changes throughout local communities will entail a national change. At the same time, it does not mean that Tressell somehow implies that face-to-face discussion can work at a national level. To be sure, the scenes of face-to-face discussions at a local level may in fact represent more mediated and indirect models of a national public sphere. What works within a local community may not work for the nation, but the workings within a local community definitely affect the nation. For Tressell, face-to-face discussion structures *local* communities, but in the end underpins the workings of a *national* forum. Face-to-face discussion becomes a source of micro-change in local communities that would eventually affect the whole. *TRTP* envisions a national Socialist movement beginning with local victories, such as a conversion of Harlow and Philpot and a new kind of reading public galvanized by the face-to-face practice of Owen's lending library.

So, if Tressell refuses to idealize any specific model of discussion, we can glean some features of the kind of communicative process he wants to cultivate. I have so far emphasized the spontaneity of everyday discussion and freedom from formal restrictions and exclusions that create certain discursive possibilities in the "Cave." But there is not a single recipe like

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Martineau's "plain speaking" that is idealized in *TRTP*. In contrast to Martineau's tales, *TRTP* is self-aware of the problems associated with putting forth an ideal of discussion. For instance, the novel attributes all the strengths of perfect reasoning to the socialists, but on the other hand, the novel is also concerned with their unnecessarily excessive zeal to assert the ideal. The passage below raises concerns about an aggressive promulgation of an ideal as it remarks on the socialists' "insanity." On the surface, the Socialists are "insane" for overestimating the rational capacities of the workers, but if viewed from a different angle, the socialists are dangerously "insane" due to being wrapped up in their ideal of reasoning and perceiving it as universal:

> Those who were opposed to them always failed to refute their arguments, and feared, and nearly always refused, to meet them in fair fight—in open debate—preferring to use the cowardly and despicable weapons of slander and misrepresentation. The fact that these Socialists never encountered their opponents except to defeat them, was a powerful testimony to the accuracy of their reasonings and the correctness of their conclusions—and yet they were undoubtedly mad. One might converse with them for an indefinite time on the three divisions of their subject without eliciting any proofs of insanity, but directly one enquired what means they proposed to employ in order to bring about the adoption of their plan, t hey replied *that they hoped to do so by reasoning with the others*! (496)

The socialists' mode of discussion, in fact, is so effective that it undermines itself by foreclosing on a continuous discussion with others. Once all their opponents are smitten by their reasoning, the socialists are left alone on the discussion field.

The socialists repeat Owen's mistake in that they create a monologic model of a public sphere. Their claim for truth comes across as monopolistic as Sweater's and Grinder's grip on the press. But perhaps even more troubling is the socialists' conviction that *their notion* of discussion is applicable to anybody and warrants to be a universal standard. In discussion, they aim to eliminate their opponents and affirm the supremacy of their claims. As such, the socialists understand an "open debate" as a means to squelch, not cultivate, a relationship with the opponent. Tressell's excessively vehement approbation of their methods suggests that he treats them with slight irony and critiques the limitation of their rhetorical strategy. This limitation lies in their inability to see that perhaps an opponent's position is not something that one always wants to defeat, but to maintain, encourage, and make some effort to hear. For Tressell, the socialists' impeccable reasoning does not outweigh his respect for diversity of opinions and modes of argumentation. Tressell does want to paint them a little "mad" for their smug belief in the supremacy of *their reasoning* and *their opinions*.

The socialist reasoning thus finds itself in an impasse. The socialists' confidence in the power of their argument leaves them suspiciously isolated from any alternative voices to a point where they cannot even demonstrate their own voice in an open debate but find themselves thinking about their own ideas to themselves and conceptualizing the public as "us" v. "them." In contrast, the workers' amateur, inarticulate ramblings about politics seem to provide just what the socialists' overbearing logic wants, namely an inexhaustible source of alternatives, spontaneity, and a sense of togetherness even across ideological differences. Tressell's sympathies seem to lie, paradoxically, not exclusively with the socialists' arguments that force everyone else into silence, but also with the more vibrant and unpredictable workers in "The Cave." Tressell is curiously attached to this space of spontaneous discussion and in a way wants

to protect it from the homogenizing influence of socialist propaganda. The workers'

conversations create this democratic potential by balancing between two extremes—the violence

of totalizing consensus and the incommensurability of antagonistic viewpoints—either one of

which would put an end to an ongoing "argyfying."

A vivid scene where the workers create a proto-democratic inclusive forum by sharing

their differences in opinion unfolds during Barrington's "Great Oration" towards the end of the

novel. It is a hopeful moment that brings the differences together rather than foists the "correct"

definition of Socialism, which Tressell as an author had plenty of opportunity to do. This scene

becomes a source of optimism because it defers the "authoritative" definition of Socialism,

which could be uttered by Owen or Barrington, and instead showcases an attempt at a self-

enlightening public, not top-down indoctrination. And although we do not yet see a democratic

process of reconciling these various opinions, just bringing them together and thus putting them

in perspective with other opinions anticipates an emergence of a new kind of public discussion in

the "Cave":

> "I've 'eard a 'ell of a lot about this 'ere Socialism," remarked the man behind the
>
> moat, "but up to now I've never met nobody wot could tell you plainly exactly
>
> wot it is."
>
> "Yes; that's what I should like to know too," said Easton.
>
> "Socialism means, 'What's yours is mine, and what's mine's me own,'" observed
>
> Bundy, and during the laughter that greeted this definition Slyme was heard to say
>
> that Socialism meant Materialism, Atheism and Free Love, and if it were ever to
>
> come about it would degrade men and women to the level of brute beasts. Harlow
>
> said Socialism was a beautiful ideal, which he for one would be very glad to see

realized, but he was afraid it was altogether too good to be practical, because

human nature is too mean and selfish. Sawkins said that Socialism was a lot of

bloody rot, and Crass expressed the opinion—which he had culled from the

delectable columns of the *Obscurer*—that it meant robbing the industrious for the

benefit of the idle and thriftless." (505)

In their attempt to define socialism, they become united not only among themselves, but also

with Barrington at the pulpit. It is important, too, that no concise definition of Socialism is

worked out in the end. To be sure, Barrington touches on aspects of a socialist society, such as

making the workers the rightful owners of the things they produce, an establishment of "State

factories" and "labour saving machinery" (517) to make work pleasant and minimal, an opening

of a "pleasure house" (519)—a echo of Walter Besant's People's Palace, and the triumph of "the

COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH of the future" (522). But even *he* does not provide a

concise definition of Socialism and defaults to negative definitions: "It is not a wild dream of

Superhuman Unselfishness" (512). Socialism operates as an *anticipated* concept that is universal

and shared as long as it engages everybody in defining it.

This new sense of a debating community in Tressell seems to be strikingly contemporary

as it reechoes Judith Butler's reflections on universality. Tressell is working through the same

questions of the public sphere as Butler is. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler revises the notion of

consent to suggest a more dynamic and ongoing process in the public sphere:

The ideal of consent, however, makes sense only to the degree that the terms in

question submit to a consensually established meaning. [. . .] But are we, whoever

"we" are, the kind of community in which such meanings could be established

once and for all? Is there not a permanent diversity within the semantic field that

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constitutes an irreversible situation for political theorizing? Who stands above the interpretive fray in a position to "assign" the same utterances the same meanings? And why is it that the threat posed by such an authority is deemed less serious than the one posed by equivocal interpretation left unconstrained? (87)

Butler advocates a "continuing revision and elaboration of historical standards of universality proper to the future movement of democracy itself" (90) and redefines the universal as "a postulated and open-ended ideal" (90). She suggests a new way to think about the universal: "The anticipated universality, for which we have no ready concept, is one whose articulations will only follow, if they do, from a contestation of universality at its already imagined borders" (91). Tressell anticipates Butler's ideas as he conceives of the discussion about Socialism as an ongoing process and locates the definition of Socialism at an always *anticipated* point in the future. The above scene in *TRTP* brings together contesting definitions to circumscribe the notion of Socialism, but never to fix its meaning permanently. This scene further confirms how Tressell's thinking about Socialism shapes a public sphere similar to the one that Butler captures through her terms of the "anticipated universality" and an "open-ended ideal."

In this new model of a public sphere, open-endedness and fluidity galvanize the discussion. It is not only the ideal that remains open-ended, but individuals' worldviews are also subject to change. It is significant that shortly after the moment of the emergence of something like an inclusive democratic forum, we also witness Harlow's acceptance of socialist ideas as a testament to his changing worldview:

"I may say that when I came to this firm I was a Liberal, but through listenin' to several lectures by Professor Owen and attendin' the meetings on the hill at Windley and reading the books and pamphlets I bought there and from Owen, I

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came to the conclusion some time ago that it's a mug's game for us to vote for

capitalists whether they calls theirselves Liberals or Tories. [. . .]" (541)

Harlow's conversion into Socialism (this is as close as he gets to being a socialist in the novel) is

not a finalized product, but a work, or rather thought, in progress. Harlow is not going to be a

copy of Owen's or Barrington's views, but he is working out his own worldview in which

Socialism has a place. As much as his conversion into Socialism is dynamic and open-ended, so

is his own definition of what Socialism is. For him, as to a large extent for Barrington and Owen,

Socialism articulates itself through negative definitions: it is not the Liberal-Tory political game

and it is better than the capitalist reality of the Battle of Life. All in all, then, Tressell hinges his

model of a new public sphere on an open-ended ideal and extends this open-endedness to the

thought-processes of the discussants. This open-ended model allows him not to fetishize one

final concept of political discussion but to focus instead on the ongoing and evolving practice of

discussion that always moves to a deferred ideal.

What Tressell suggests by refusing any definitions of an ideal discussion is that he

recognized the inadequacy of any ideal and instead moves towards a cultivation of practices. A

prominent instance of the novel's rejection of fetishizing any discussion model is a scene with

the planning of the Beano. According to Jack Mitchell, this discussion scene "is obviously a

mockery of the workers' pedantic interest in the formal trappings of democratic procedure  in

contrast to their ignorance and complete lack of interest in its real content," but it is also "an

indirect satire on the interminable and petty wrangling of the House of Commons itself" (*Robert*

*Tressell* 94). I would add to these observations that Tressell does not only critique the

Parliamentary procedure as such, but cautions against a blind investment in any ideal procedure

for its own sake that by definition cannot ever truly guarantee meaningful democratic practice.

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Through this scene, Tressell evokes sentiments similar to Carlyle's famous metaphor for Parliament as a "National Palaver" (220), but in addition reflects more broadly on the dilemma of communicative ideals and practices. If ideals and norms are subject to corruption and tend to degrade to "palaver" in practice, Tressell opts for a non-ideal ongoing and self-revising communicative process as an alternative.

One recognizes the premises of the Parliamentary procedure played out in a working-class setting only to realize how the workers' obsession with this ideal impoverishes their actual discussion practices. From the beginning, the image of the chairman opening the meeting embodies the "National Palaver" as chairman Payne "in a lengthy speech, explained the object of the meeting" and "took the trouble to explain several times, going over the same ground and repeating the same words over and over again, whilst the audience waited in a deathlike and miserable silence for him to leave off" (407). The more the discussants labor through such a trivial topic as to whether to hold the Beano and which bars to include on the itinerary, the more they obsess over the rules and procedures of a public meeting. The formulaic process is punctuated with putting forth and seconding the motions, endorsing the remarks, abiding by the "decision of the majority" (408) as well as occasional minor outbursts of arguments and the pounding of the chairman's mallet. Tressell's satire reaches its pinnacle when a man with a "harsh, metallic voice" (411) gives a "long rambling lecture about the rules of order and the conduct of public meetings" (411) to a rowdy body of men already absurdly obsessed with playing Parliament. In contrast to such trivial discussion aggravated by excessive proceduralism, Tressell envisions an alternative: a meaningful, spontaneous, democratic discussion that is unburdened from bureaucratic mechanisms, fetishized ideals, and heavy-handed monologs.

Tressell's interest in exploring the alternatives to monologic thinking ties in with his

overall style of socialism. As I mentioned before, his socialism has been characterized as "elitist"

and his often condescending attitude towards the workers and frustrations with them suggest that

Tressell's preferred way of communication would be a didactic monologue that would instill

socialist ideas in their heads. However, as scenes discussed above show, Tressell is interested in

focusing more on incipient dialogic interactions than on engineering political conversion into

socialism by the power of monologic propaganda. His socialism, therefore, too, reveals a tension

between the monologic discourses of the oppressive "common sense" or of propaganda and the

democratic, polyphonic, dialogic sphere of the workers' political discussion. I argue that *TRTP*

ultimately rejects the logic of propaganda to favor a more democratic model of a public sphere.

The novel places this model of dialogic discussion as the ultimate value, even if it delays the

advent of socialism or even puts socialism itself into question. To examine socialism itself

dialogically, Tressell goes as far as to contemplate disillusionment in socialism as much as

commitment to it. To counterpoise its favor of socialism, the novel also makes room for a voice

of disillusionment from a renegade: "When I devoted my life [. . .] to the service of my fellow

workmen; when I sought to teach them how to break their chains; [. . .] I did not want them to

give me money. I did it for love. And they paid me with hatred and injury. But since I have been

helping their masters to rob them, they have treated me with respect" (585). Overall, the novel

remains hopeful about the workers and socialism, but it also remains committed to dialogic

discussion to a point that it finds itself polemicizing with its own overall political message.

Tressell implies that only the novel that has incorporated voices of disillusionment has a right to

promote socialism.

While Tressell sees socialism as an end, for him no means other than a democratic political discussion would justify this end. The narrative promotes dialogic interactions at the level of characters as well as the level of the text and its readership. Dave Harker characterizes *TRTP* as intrinsically dialogical:

> [. . .] the narrative voice leaves open whether we should identify with the vacillations of Owen's 'inner speech', his reported utterance and Mugsborough workers' differing reactions, or with his activity. It also mimicks the hopes, thoughts, anxieties, frustrations and, yes, fantasies, like the exploding Rev. Belcher, which pass through socialist activists' heads, especially during a hard argument, and above all during political downturns. What could be more *realistic* than that? So *RTP* is a dialogue with us, its readers, about faith in the working class as an agency of socialist transformation and, therefore, about the possibility of hope. (252)

In this statement, Harker connects the dialogic nature of the novel to two things: realism and hope. Indeed, an ongoing dialogue seems to perform a function analogous to that of enduring hope and optimism. Embracing the pluralistic dialogic world, the novel ultimately creates a larger dialogue: between the representation of a given reality and a hopeful anticipation of a new reality to come. For Tressell, this dialogue will always remain open.

Tressell models dialogic discussion by performing it at the level of the authorial voice that is in direct dialogue with the reader. Stepping aside from the midst of the novel's events and characters, the narrator trains the reader to read *TRTP* not by consuming the story passively and indulgently, but by having a dialogue with each character in the story, the author, the system, and with oneself:

If you, had been one of the hands, would you have slogged? Or would you have

preferred to starve and see your family starve? If you had been in Crass's place,

would you have resigned rather than do such dirty work? If you had had Hunter's

berth, would you have given it up and voluntarily reduced yourself to the level of

the hands? If you had been Rushton, would you rather have become bankrupt than

treat your 'hands' and your customers in the same way as your competitors

treated theirs?  It may be that, so placed, you—being the noble-minded paragon

that you are—would behave unselfishly. But no one has any right to expect you to

sacrifice yourself for the benefit of other people, who would only call you a fool

for your pains.

[. . .] The more aggressive, cunning, unfeeling and selfish you are the better it will

be for you. As long as this "Battle of Life" System endures, we have no right to

blame other people for doing the same things that we are ourselves compelled to

do. Blame the system. (217-218)

The reader is constantly ousted from his/her possibly passive readerly seclusion and provoked

into a perpetual questioning and polemics. This moment interestingly makes the reader an object

of the author's persuasion, but no less so a subject capable of disagreeing and engaging in

polemics. Tressell expects more of the reader and challenges him into active reading, which

further illustrates the overall open-endedness and dialogic nature of *TRTP*.

However open-ended is Tressell's conclusion about socialism, the novel prepares the

ground for a slow change. The dynamics within the workers' group do change and some of its

members seem to make informed choices about their political sympathies. Thus, after a lecture

on capitalists given by Barrington at one of the lunch breaks and titled "The Great Secret, or

How to Live Without Work" does result in one converter—Harlow: "I came to the conclusion some time ago that it's a mug's game for us to vote for capitalists whether they call theirselves Liberals or Tories" (541). The Liberals and the Tories are shown throughout the novel as false alternatives, and their bickering at the election campaigns just meaningless noise of status quo politics. Harlow is not the only character whose views are affected. Tressell makes it a point that if the socialists are not yet capable of converting the masses, they can spark up a discussion among the few. For example, after a van with socialists and their propaganda literature left, "for a long time after the meeting was over little groups remained on the field excitedly discussing the speeches or the leaflets" (467). Tressell seems to end on a modestly optimistic note by believing that change does come from the masses, even if painfully slow. Presented with a scene of Mugsborough squalor and ruins under the capitalist system, we get a vague sense that "from these ruins was surely growing the glorious fabric of the Co-operative Commonwealth" (630). It seems that everyday "argyfying about politics" among Owenses, Harlows, Crasses, and Eastons leaves Tressell hopeful of the imminent joy that mankind is "awaking from the long night of bondage and mourning and arising from the dust wherein they had lain prone so long" (630).

CONCLUSION

I have examined a strain of novels that demonstrate a significant preoccupation in the Victorian era with the form(s) of political discussion in the public sphere. All the pursuits of Victorian liberalism such as individual freedom from authoritative power and custom, self-development, and social reform are predicated on "free and equal discussion," to use John Stuart Mill's phrase (15). Despite his belief in discussion, Mill refrains from giving a definitive set of principles that ought to guide it. In his rather general formulation of discussion, individuals ought to seek out the truth from the "collision of adverse opinions" (59). My project has traced persistent attempts by Victorian novels to further define the principles and form of political discussion. This preoccupation suggests that an ongoing revision of the discussion forum with a special attention to its *formal* aspects lies at the very heart of liberalism's project. In this regard, Elaine Hadley's observation about mid-Victorian liberalism is applicable to the nature of liberalism in general in that it "outlines *how* one ought to think but not precisely *what* to think" (10).

While Hadley's attention to the form of Victorian thinking is crucial to my project, I have attempted to complement and revise her interpretation of liberal agency as confined to privatized reflection—a scholarly framework that prevails in Victorian studies. Hadley claims that, "[i]n mid-Victorian liberalism, the domain of political thought was by necessity a private, individuated one" (47). In contrast to her account of the liberalization of individuality, I have argued for a way to view Victorian liberalism other than as an ideology of private, individuated reflection. To this

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end, I have examined a never fading preoccupation among what I call "novels of discussion" with the political valence of face-to-face discussion.

My interest in the dynamics of face-to-face discussion as a context where abstract ideas intertwine with embodied sentiments and experiences intersects with Hadley's interests in liberalism's calibration between abstraction and embodiment. Examining the Victorian imaginings of liberal individuality, Hadley has shown that the project of living liberalism is fraught with tensions as she examined "the more nuanced relations between a liberal subject's body and mind, the subject's universalist yearnings and individualist tendencies, and the subject's interests and disinterests" (13). Hadley uses the term "abstract embodiment" to describe how these binary categories combined in various instantiations of liberal individuality. Her insight into the challenge of living liberalism through the balancing of abstraction and embodiment has informed my work. The novelistic scenes of face-to-face discussion that are at the center of my project are playing with layers of abstract ideas and embodied experiences, and so provide an instance of "abstract embodiment," to use Hadley's term.

In my chapters I have focused on teasing out the articulations of various discussion models that suggest a curious tension: while liberal dispositions for discussion were shared by all of them, there was not such a ready consensus about what exactly discussion should look like and what ideal it should measure up to. This diversity of opinions about discussion implies liberalism's continuous self-reflexive gesture. As a gradualist program of social reform and as a recipe for the pursuit of perfection and liberty, the liberalism of such figures as J. S. Mill and Matthew Arnold acknowledges its own ideals as unrealizable and even dangerous if suddenly realized in a society that is not "prepared" for them. Rather, liberalism is more invested in the continuous pursuit of its ideals and the promotion of "progress towards perfection" (Arnold 174);

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always getting there, but never being there. With this disposition for an ongoing progress towards an ideal, the novels represented discursive practices that were continuously striving for an ideal model, yet along with that, they brought to the surface their internal contradictions.

Scholars of Victorian liberalism have foregrounded both its political potentialities and internal tensions and contradictions. Lauren Goodlad has shown liberalism's negotiations between liberty and government, and Elaine Hadley has revealed liberalism's problematic linking of abstraction and embodiment. Pam Morris has traced yet another contradiction within liberalism (i.e. its inclusive and exclusive tendencies) as the mid-Victorian project of "imagining inclusive society" evolves into late-Victorian fractured sphere of the "popular realm" and the "realm of distinction" (28). Their frameworks have been valuable for my own inquiry in examining the tensions and ambivalences within discussion models. I have suggested that the competition of various models produced the kind of liberating tendency that was on liberalism's agenda. At the same time, however, every one of these models demonstrated its own monopolistic ambitions to arrange the entire public sphere according to itself and so to foreclose on the pluralistic vision of its arrangements. Furthermore, by engaging in the process of discussion about discussion, Victorian novels teetered on the brink of withdrawing from the actual realm of political action where social change was to be made. Consequently, instead of liberating momentum, this process could be viewed as a self-righteous and self-content gesture on behalf of the middle classes who were concerned with real change through discussion, but who also desired to hold on to the hierarchy of power. Does the variety of discussion models in the Victorian imagination suggest that novels were the sites for articulating emancipatory horizons or, conversely, that the novels exerted disciplinary control by attempting to prescribe modes of discussion? Rather than accusing the novels of their complicity with the power

structures or celebrating their emancipatory agency, I have aimed to describe how Victorians

themselves, through trial and error, searched for the ideal of "free and equal discussion" by

balancing the problematics of power and freedom, abstraction and embodiment, inclusion and

exclusion.

Through my close-readings, I have traced the ongoing pursuit of perfection in the realm

of political discussion. These models aimed to prove their validity and their revisionary take on

their predecessors by negotiating and fine-tuning the fundamental elements that shape the

political forum and determine its discursive dynamics. For instance, certain modes of face-to-

face reasoning (be they political economy or Tory Democracy) drew lines to distinguish

themselves from demagoguery at the electoral platform or the political gossip and intrigues of

high society. Certain modes of discussion among strangers affirmed themselves as efficacious

alternatives to the tyranny of the unionized mass of strangers and their anonymous public threats.

Tactics of live discussion claimed to produce a more lucid understanding of various social

perspectives than reaching out to the social other through the lens of statistical knowledge. And

yet other modes of abstraction from the lived experiences (in search of the "new mind" of

England in Disraeli) or abstraction from exploitation (in Tressell) produced progressive social

critiques in contract to "negative" forms of abstraction from the lives of the People that gave rise

to disastrous political leaders such as Stephen Morley.

While each of the works I analyze articulates a distinct vision of political discussion,

these novels also incorporate and revise some recurring themes and discursive mechanisms. For

instance, the treatment of a "stranger" or a participant-observer becomes one of the novelistic

motifs as Harriet Martineau sends her middle-class outsider to investigate the happenings of a

Manchester strike, as Benjamin Disraeli makes Charles Egremont a mysterious stranger to

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connect with the People, as Walter Besant unravels a civilizing mission of the East End by middle-class inquisitive strangers, as George Gissing condemns demos as a dangerous and unenlightened stranger, and finally as Robert Tressell endows the socialist Owen with the insights of an outsider and experiences of an insider. The theme of a stranger that is so prevalent in the novels of discussion tapped, for Victorians, into a larger question of cultural, social, economic, and racial inclusion. However, at stake was not merely the scope of the public sphere and the degree of its inclusiveness, but also the means and media by which political discussion in the public sphere would unfold and the kinds of discursive norms and practices that would hail a more democratic society. The discussion models competed with one another and so not one of them could assume an unquestioned status of common sense or exercise the tyranny of its procedures since it would be continuously revised by alternatives. Therefore, I locate the liberating potential not in any given model, but in the very fact of their variety and competition. The self-reflexivity of the culture of discussion that I want to highlight here always dictated the need to revise the realizations and definitions of its main concepts.

Attempts to envision such models of democratic discussion through fiction generated a democratic forum where these models competed for preeminence. Many models are in tune with popular Victorian sensibilities of clear reasoning, mutual understanding, and fair discussion, and yet they differ in structuring discursive spaces and defining the public sphere participants. To be sure, many of the models articulated on the pages of the novels may be suspicious from the perspective of ideological control. Martineau's "plain speaking," Disraeli's "New England" or Reade's principle "put yourself in his place" might be rather ambivalent notions promising, on the one hand, a more fair society, but on the other hand, working as devices of totalitarian control. What I am interested in here is not this ambivalence. Rather, I am interested in

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foregrounding a claim that the vibrant competition among these models (and not one specific model by itself) ensured an emancipatory effect and a critical perspective. All of these models ultimately constituted a democratic forum, both debating political issues of the time and redefining the framework of discussion norms per se.

Models of discussion responded, challenged, and built on one another, and by doing so they realized Victorian desire for a many-sided and evolving view of discussion. Martineau places her notion of political discussion in a framework of a rational dialogue and gives her vision an international flair as she believes in the harmonizing power of free-trade as a kind of economic enlightenment worldwide. Disraeli reacts to this rationalistic approach and exposes the limits of rationalistic thinking by illustrating that political sympathies are best mobilized through the mystical power of a unifying image of England. What is not yet prominent in Martineau as much as in Disraeli is a new way of understanding the modern public sphere as a world of strangers bound to cultivate relationships with one another and share at least the space of discussion. Reade, in turn, offers an alternative to Disraeli's world of strangers; his world is an inclusive society predicated on unlimited exchangeability of perspectives that can potentially eliminate the very condition of being a stranger. Although Besant builds on Reade's principles of the exchange of perspectives, he views strangehood as ultimately productive, not inhibitive for understanding and sympathy in the public sphere. Gissing abandons the terms of sympathy and understanding to underscore the chaotic, violent, and fragmented nature of the public sphere and of the social movements driven by the ideas distorted in the practical world of politics. Tressell revisits and revises the notion of a stranger as a pivotal agent for critique of the existing conditions under capitalism and reshapes discussion into an ongoing evolving and self-guiding process. My intent has been to capture the changing views on political discussion and to show

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that Victorians' most important contribution was not any single discussion model, but a drive for an ongoing and pluralistic dialogue about the norms of discussion. We should recognize Victorians' attempts at ensuring that no particular model becomes ingrained as common sense and lends itself as a device of unquestioned exercise of power and exclusion.

I have also shown that these novels reaffirm the political potential of face-to-face discussion as a kind of reaction against the increasingly mediated and alienating environments of the nineteenth-century public sphere. This characteristically modern problem is especially evident in the instance of the novels that, despite their own print materiality and mediation between faceless and anonymous readership, affirm the ideal of the face-to-face discussion as a context of understanding, sincerity, sympathy, and democratic justice. I have tried to show that rather than being nostalgic, this gesture is affirmative and its power derives from the very fact that discussion scenes contrast against the medium through which they are articulated and promoted. Victorian novels have shown us that in the modern world the appeal of face-to-face political discussion does not diminish, but intensifies with the increasing spread of highly mediated environments and that, ironically, in-person discussion continues to gain cultural capital as the seat of humanity, morality, transparency, and integrity in the modern political public sphere. The continuous introduction of new communication modes and environments inevitably seems to imply that something very integral to discussion is taken away. Novels wanted to reaffirm this elusive, yet pivotal purchase of face-to-face encounters against the encroachments of new mediated environments, including novels themselves.

The novels that I focus on are perhaps not the most familiar and well-read texts among Victorianists and literary scholars. But since all of these texts were widely read in the Victorian period, I think that the trends they evince shaped Victorian sensibilities in a significant way, and

if preoccupation with discussion is evident even in these "minor" novels, I hope to show to what extent the problematics of discussion were omnipresent. From outlining the models of discussion in these under-read texts, I am certain that connections to more commonly examined novels can be drawn. For instance, in Dickens' *Hard Times* Stephen Blackpool urges for a new revised discussion model as he calls the distorted discussion between the rich and the poor a "muddle" and rallies Mill's idea that every opinion has some portion of truth by saying: "Agreeing fur to mak one side unnat'rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat'rally awlus and for ever wrong, will never, never do 't" (181). Elizabeth Gaskell, in *North and South*, has her protagonist, the industrialist Mr. Thornton hint at a new possibility in discussion: "My only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere "cash nexus" (431). Across major and minor Victorian novels, the notion of political and socio-economic progress was tied with the project of reconfiguring political discussion on new terms and in a new form.

My project has traced the history of discussion models and argued the importance of these models to our understanding of Victorian liberalism. Liberalism, then, does not merely concern itself with the form of discussion (how to discuss), because it never thinks about this form as static in the first place. Because cultivating a self-developing individual is at the center of its philosophy, liberalism itself engages mechanisms of ongoing self-revision. Liberalism always has high stakes in discussion, yet not in any single way of *how* to discuss. By arguing this, I do not want to empty out the notion of liberalism and suggest that its premises are essentially indefinable because they are always in flux. What my study suggests, however, is that in its pursuit of progress, the critical revision of the status quo, and the promotion of social reform, the principles of Victorian liberalism of *how* to carry out discussion are always open to

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redefinition. And the possibility of one model being challenged by another is what allows for a progressive evolution and a pluralistic culture to emerge in the public sphere. In fact, the novels were so preoccupied with the form(s) in their *pursuit* of "free and equal discussion" that this preoccupation tested the discursive limits of their own genre.

This project is by no means exhaustive in thinking about the implications of the ongoing competition and interdependence of discussion models for Victorian liberalism. What remain intriguing are the ambivalences about Victorians' notions of political discussion that seem at times progressive and open-ended and at times suspiciously prescriptive, closed-in, and exclusive along the class lines. Such an intense, yet ambivalent preoccupation with the forms of discussion invites us to think more about the paradoxes of freedom as conceived by liberalism. Where are the lines between the form that structures a democratic society, non-essential formalities of discussion, concealed control through discussion, and finally the fetish-like formalization of discussion? On the one hand, the built-in changeability of these models prevents excessive rigidity of procedures and ushers in a free exchange of opinions, yet on the other hand, the desire to formalize discussion dangerously prescribes not only the general form of discussion, but what counts as an opinion or a participant therein.

My inquiry has been motivated by the question of where liberalism allocates its priorities, whether it is in cooperative deliberation or individual reflection. Interestingly, Victorian liberalism simultaneously produced a version of individuality wrapped in the privacy of self-reflection as well as a version of an agent eager to exchange opinions in a public forum. It seems that these opposing versions of a liberal subject and ultimately of the public sphere dramatize yet another contradiction at the heart of liberalism: its awkward Janus-faced attempt to locate the

"truth" simultaneously in the poised realm of self-reflection and in the tumultuous realm of the public forum.

Where does this inquiry into the vibrant and multi-vocal Victorian discussion about discussion leave us? I have teased out what I see as inherently democratic traits of Victorian notions of discursive norms and practices and suggested that this robust competition has demonstrated, first of all, how porous, malleable and open-ended models of discussion were. After all, Victorians did not so much seek after some pinnacle of perfection among discussion models, but promulgated a continuous revision of the notions of inclusion, consensus, argumentation, justice, universality, common good, and others. In that sense, too, what "face-to-face" means in a discussion forum and what moral and democratic values it imparts on discussion can be open to reconceptualization. While each individual discussion model may fall short of an ideal of democracy, these novels created collectively a truly democratic forum for a discussion of not only social issues but also discursive norms per se. In other words, the way Victorians went about figuring out more egalitarian models of discussion already in itself created what they were looking for. That said, I by no means diminish the value of these models themselves for the theory and practice of a democratic society because they in many ways still shape our own political moment.

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