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# The Cultural Crime of Femininity: Advocating for Viable and Successful Womanhood in Charles Dickens and George Eliot

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The Cultural Crime of Femininity: Advocating for Viable and Successful Womanhood in  
Charles Dickens and George Eliot

The Cultural Crime of Femininity: Advocating for Viable and Successful Womanhood in  
Charles Dickens and George Eliot

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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## **Abstract**

Mid-century Victorian England creates an environment for women in which they are expected to adhere strictly to a socially inculcated view of gender and prescribed behaviors. Difficulty arises, however, because women who follow these cultural expectations ultimately fail as they are not given the appropriate skills to function as wives or mothers. On the other hand, women who choose to disregard these social norms for gender are crushed by a cultural policing force that includes both women and men. Thus, prior to legal and educational reforms that allow for women to progress beyond these restrictive gender norms, they are unable to exist as viable, independent women. Through their fictional representations of women, Charles Dickens and George Eliot reveal the impossible system in which women find themselves, and, in so doing, advocate a cultural reformation that would allow these women not only to survive, but also thrive in the rapidly changing nineteenth century.

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## Introduction

Nineteenth-century England is a demonstration of a culture heavily reliant upon custom and accepted modes of behavior that society carefully codified and enforced in an attempt to create social order. Yet, the methods by which these modes of behavior were selected are not the most socially beneficial as John Stuart Mill ultimately argues in his *The Subjection of Women*. In fact, women are kept “as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised” (Mill 173). Social and cultural criticism need not be the only avenues that identify and critique these unrealistic expectations for women and their potentially disastrous consequences. Novels of the nineteenth century provide an outlet for this type of criticism as well.

With the prevalence of the novel as a form of literature, choosing particular authors for this study at first may seem an overwhelming task. The aim of this work is to choose icons of British literature who certainly had the attention of the reading public and to choose one of each sex in order to clearly represent the concerns of both men and women in nineteenth-century England. The final criterion established is that of a demonstrable attempt to engage with issues of social concern, particularly gender and the role of women in English society. From a careful consideration of these criteria, Charles Dickens and George Eliot emerge as logical choices.

Before considering the arguments made in each of these author’s fictional works, it is necessary to establish their desire to engage with gender and the social problems that are a part of social struggle women faced. The social problems Dickens wishes to help come from his own experiences as a child, living with the poor financial decisions of his parents and an unforgiving social system that forced them to live in a debtor’s prison while Dickens himself was sent out as a child to work in a blacking factory rather than continue his education. With the understanding

that his situation was not unique and that women too faced the same forced lack of education and opportunity that his own family's indebtedness forced upon him, Dickens used his work as a writer to reach individuals on a level where they might be inclined to create the change that all members of society desperately needed. Fred Kaplan writes of Dickens's conception of his renowned journal *Household Words* in *Dickens: A Biography*: "The new journal was advertised as 'Designed for the Entertainment and Instruction of all classes of readers, and to help in the discussion of the most important social questions of the time'" (265). With its first issue appearing in 1850 and containing the first three installments of *Lizzie Leigh*, a novel by female novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, Dickens certainly appears interested in not only social debate but also instruction – which makes his inclusion of a female writer alongside his own work all the more telling.

Yet, a willingness to publish female authors does not a proto-feminist make. In addition to his establishment of *Household Words* in 1850, Dickens was working prodigiously with Angela Burdett Coutts on a social project designed to rehabilitate prostitutes through a process of shelter and future emigration. The project was known as Urania Cottage, and Dickens was not simply a silent partner or benefactor. As Kaplan writes, Dickens "devoted a staggering number of hours to supervising Urania Cottage, to establishing rules and enforcing them, to working out overall policy, to arranging for safe passage abroad, and to finding promising candidates" (260). In fact, Dickens wrote to Coutts in February of 1850 that in his writing of *David Copperfield* with its representations of Little Em'ly and Martha Endell and their work as prostitutes, he was attempting "to turn the public's 'thoughts a little that way' in the hope of eliciting support for his efforts" (260). As a writer of Urania Cottage's publications, Dickens wrote the letter that was to be circulated to women who were candidates, simply titled "An Appeal to Fallen Women." The



empathy drawn from his own past is evident in his words: “[D]o not think that I write to you as if I felt myself very much above you . . . I mean nothing but kindness to you, and I write as if you were my sister” (*Letters* 187). This combination of literary and social goals dovetail nicely in his hope for *Household Words* to serve as a forum for discussion of social issues as well as the instruction of all classes of readers.

George Eliot’s experiences with social concerns involving women lie on an even more personal level. The adoption of the pseudonym George Eliot is a formal move to mask the feminine identity that Marian Evans had not been able to claim in her literary work prior to novels, which included having published through John Chapman’s publishing house a thoroughly well-received English translation of David Frederick Strauss’ *The Life of Jesus* anonymously. Her connection with John Chapman extended over the years to serving as silent co-editor of *The Westminster Review*. As biographer George Haight writes, “She was quite willing to let Chapman pose as chief editor while she did the real work without public acknowledgement” (91). Many critics argue that this move may have been tied to her romantic attachment to Chapman that formed the early part of their relationship, yet her fears of publishing her novels under her own name reveal a different concern altogether. Having chosen the name from rather mundane circumstances – her common-law husband’s Christian name being George and Eliot being “a good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word” (qtd in Haight 220) – her fear of being exposed as the author behind the pseudonym demonstrates her concern with the perception of aberrant femininity in nineteenth-century England. Eliot had turned to a new publisher, John Blackwood, to publish her first novels, and as the precariousness of the pseudonym became apparent, she wrote to him of her concern for her second work *Adam Bede* to reach the press quickly: “I am very nervous about the preservation of the incognito . . . This

makes me anxious that the publication of ‘Adam’ should not be delayed longer than is necessary after the Christmas Holidays, for I wish the book to be judged quite apart from its authorship” (qtd in Haight 267).

Aberrant femininity is an accurate term to describe George Eliot. Her husband, whose name she adopted as her pseudonym and whose last name she adopted upon their common-law marriage, was not to be her legal husband. George Henry Lewes was already married and could not be divorced from his wife Agnes on the grounds of her infidelity because he had knowingly agreed to give his legal name to children that were in fact the product of Agnes’ relationship with Thornton Leigh Hunt, Lewes’ friend and collaborator. Undaunted by the irregularity of the circumstances, G. H. Lewes and Marian Evans commenced their married relationship with a trip to Germany in 1854. Word soon reached the pair of the rumors that were circulating in England, and Marian wrote to John Chapman:

You ask me to tell you what reply you shall give to inquiries. I have nothing to deny or conceal. I have done nothing with which any person has a right to interfere. . . .But I do not wish to take the ground of ignoring what is unconventional in my position. I have counted the cost of the step I have taken and am prepared to bear, without irritation or bitterness, renunciation by all of my friends. (qtd in Haight 162)

A letter to her close friend Cara Bray, reveals the isolating cost of aberrant femininity, even in the intellectual circles of nineteenth-century London: “Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do *not* act as I have done – they obtain what they desire and are still invited to dinner” (qtd in Haight 169).

While still being invited to dinner may not have been a concern for a philanthropist and author like Charles Dickens, his concerns and George Eliot’s expose a society in which women were ostensibly worshipped, in ideals such as the Angel in the House, but were in actuality

oppressed. Mid-century Victorian England creates an environment for women in which they are expected to adhere strictly to a socially inculcated view of gender and prescribed behaviors. Difficulty arises, however, because women who follow these cultural expectations ultimately fail as they are not given the appropriate skills to function as wives or mothers. On the other hand, women who choose to disregard these social norms for gender are crushed by a cultural policing force that includes both women and men. Thus, prior to legal and educational reforms that allow for women to progress beyond these restrictive gender norms, they are unable to exist as viable, independent women. Through their representations of women, Dickens and Eliot reveal the impossible system in which women find themselves, and, in so doing, advocate a cultural reformation that would allow these women not only to survive, but also thrive in the rapidly changing nineteenth century.

In the first chapter, “Dickens, Eliot, and Cultural Context,” the focus of the argument is to demonstrate the multifaceted belief system in which Victorian authors found themselves writing and situates Charles Dickens and George Eliot within that culture on various issues from the role of the artist in Victorian culture to their respective stances on the woman question. An apt description of Eliot and Dickens would be unlikely compatriots in the work of proto-feminism. Yet, the idea of feminism at all in the Victorian period calls for at least a brief examination of women and their place in society. While this overview may seem a bit overdone, after all there are many texts that focus on this very subject, a focus on nineteenth-century social philosophy and other non-fiction texts reveals far more about the day-to-day beliefs of average Victorian men and women than historical texts may.

This section begins by providing cultural context through Victorian authors themselves, particularly in relation to women and women’s rights. The first contemporary author who will

be analyzed is John Ruskin and his work *Sesame and Lilies*. It is Ruskin's work that introduces the idea of an ideal woman, almost beyond the reach of mortal concerns, who necessarily serves a subordinate but important role in the Victorian household. It is his view that women are necessarily subordinate that stands in contrast to the work of the next author studied, John Stuart Mill.

Mill's work, particularly in *The Subjection of Women*, will be examined to reveal another view of Victorian women, one that argues that the behaviors that Ruskin sees as natural are actually the product of a carefully planned social construction that privileges men in order to secure the power of their own masculinity. By revealing the nature of women to have been stunted as well by a lack of education, Mill's work will serve as an introduction to an argument about the education of women that will shape the argument regarding feminine development in chapter three. Yet, it is the extension of this view combined with the law that favors Ruskin's view that creates the powerful practical argument for women's rights that exists in the work of Caroline Norton.

Norton's *English Laws for English Women* elucidates the need for an updated view of women based upon a case study of her own brutal marriage to George Norton. This text is utilized in this section to demonstrate the legal struggle a woman would face if it became necessary to extricate herself from a marriage in which she is abused or otherwise treated cruelly and the legal precedent that allows such treatment of women to continue with repercussion for the men involved. The legal definition of women as nonexistent once inside the marriage relationship will factor heavily into the cultural concept of the wife as examined specifically in chapter three as well as the legal ramifications of childbearing and motherhood as examined in chapter two.

With the cultural context established, the chapter will then focus on the role of the artist within this culture, using Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" as a defining text for what that role should be. As Arnold sees the role of the artist to be one that comments upon the social climate and brings contemporary issues before the reading public, the chapter will examine how Dickens and Eliot answer that challenge. While each takes a different approach, with Eliot favoring a more removed style of authorship as compared to Dickens's vociferous public persona, both attempt to enact social change through their novels.

The final section of this chapter establishes Eliot's and Dickens's respective positions on the woman question. Using their journalistic works as well as their personal letters, this section will demonstrate that each author actively intends to better the social situation for women. In fact, rather than be content with small measures, both authors argue for a new system under which women will gain the right to pursue a life that can lead to successful and viable womanhood.

The second chapter, "The Fallen Woman," grounds the forgoing discussion in an analysis of one work from each author – Dickens's *Bleak House* and Eliot's *Adam Bede*. This chapter begins the examination of successful and viable womanhood through an analysis of the fallen woman with the ultimate goal of realizing that these women hold the key to understanding what changes are necessary to make womanhood a successful venture. Following a brief introduction of nineteenth-century views of sexuality and sexual transgression, the chapter turns to establishing a theoretical basis for examining feminine sexuality using the work of Michel Foucault, Jeremy Bentham, and the idea of the Panopticon.

Foucault's theories of punishment as presented in *Discipline and Punish*, form the backbone of the analysis, yet it is incomplete without a comprehensive understanding of

Bentham's literal Panopticon, a prison. After a brief, yet vital, examination of Bentham's prison, the chapter turns to connecting both Foucault and Bentham in the concept of patriarchal panopticism, a term first introduced by David Buchbinder. Through the extension of the term, the stage is now set to analyze the novels at hand, beginning with Dickens's *Bleak House*.

Focusing specifically on Lady Dedlock, this section examines her progression to fallen woman status. First, Lady Dedlock commits a sexual transgression, although the circumstances surrounding the transgression call into question the exact use of the term. Next, Lady Dedlock's exploitation at the hands of her husband's lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, will reveal the ways in which nineteenth-century society creates a form of Bentham's Panopticon and practices patriarchal panopticism to punish feminine sexuality. Finally, in Lady Dedlock's ultimate exoneration for murder and Sir Leicester's forgiveness of and devotion to his wife, this section concludes that Dickens provides his readers with an appropriate way to understand the plight of fallen women – one that stands outside of punishment and social rejection.

Rather than continue to focus on upper-class society and the realm of high-society gossip, the section of chapter two devoted to Eliot's *Adam Bede* turns its attention to the role of patriarchal panopticism in the domestic space. This section opens with an analysis of the patriarchal structure of Eliot's pastoral town of Hayslope and introduces the character of study, Hetty Sorrel, who often finds her actions the subject of the panoptic gaze from both male and female family members alike. This section differs somewhat from the Dickens analysis, however, as Eliot's novel allows readers to see patriarchal panopticism as it affects both men and women who fall outside of its standards for approval. As such, the unsanctioned relationship between Hetty, the niece of a tenant farmer, and Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to that estate, will be analyzed to show the differing patriarchal expectations inherent in gender and class as well as

the ways in which both are punished for their sexual transgression. Unsurprisingly, the patriarchal panopticon proves to be far more brutal in its treatment of Hetty than it does of Arthur.

Rather than serving as the hero, which one usually expects from a titular character, Adam Bede begins the novel by serving as the force of patriarchal punishment, which this section will argue may be found in his ending the relationship between Hetty and Arthur, placing Hetty in a position of having no option but to marry Adam, and ultimately functioning as no more than a spectator to Hetty's trial for infanticide. It is the conflict that Hetty feels in being unable to turn to anyone, including her family or her fiancé, when she realizes that she is pregnant with Arthur's child that forms the crux of this section's argument. It is due to the machinations of the patriarchal panopticon that Hetty becomes a fallen woman, yet it is through the transformation of Adam from punisher to forgiver that Eliot demonstrates the appropriate removal of societal punishment and rejection. Much like Sir Leicester's forgiveness of his wife serves as the catalyst for change in Dickens's *Bleak House*, it is the transformation of those around the fallen women that offers the hope that can come from the tragedy of their lives.

Chapter Three, "The Victorian Wife," discusses a far more commonplace scenario for Victorian women. By far the most common role for women in the nineteenth century, the Victorian wife found herself constrained by the patriarchal panopticon in ways that closely mirrored those of their fallen compatriots. This chapter will begin by first examining women's education, the location in which the ideals of womanhood and wifedom are first introduced. Following this discussion, a close examination of the domestic ideal will be conducted in order to provide a complete view of the expectation of the patriarchal panopticon for Victorian wives. With these delineations made, the chapter will finally focus on Eliot's *Middlemarch* and

Dickens's *David Copperfield* with the intention of proving that each novel's structure of contrasting marriages is intended to demonstrate the necessity of educating women and establishing egalitarian principles in marriage for the creation of viable and successful womanhood.

In examining feminine education, this section will utilize the work of the Schools Commission of 1864 to demonstrate the disparity between girls' education and boys' education in nineteenth-century England. The intention of this discussion is to show how women were educated to be subordinates in the marriage relationship, rather than intellectual partners. Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England* will complete this study of education by demonstrating that texts written for women and by women regarding their place in the home encourage the subordination of women and exhorts them to refrain from desiring any other order in the home. The connection of patriarchal panopticism to education is also made through Ellis, as her work not only encourages women to meet patriarchal expectations, but also threatens them with potential consequences for failing to do so, imputing fallen status to a "failed" wife, even without sexual transgression.

Resulting from this study of education is a brief investigation of the ways these attitudes translated into domestic ideology. This section will establish what comprises the ideal wife and mother, according the patriarchal panopticon's expectations of both roles. As this is the ultimate guidepost by which women are measured, understanding the characteristics of the "correct" wife is key to analyzing the arguments made by Eliot and Dickens in their novels. By examining texts such as Mrs. Beeton's *The Book of Household Management* and Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House*, the view of woman as subordinate and self-abnegating will become apparent. The chapter will then use these ideals as a framework for determining behaviors that would be



acceptable to the patriarchal panopticon and those that would not in the novels themselves.

Eliot's *Middlemarch* is the first text that will be examined, chosen for its interesting juxtaposition of marriages that reveal both struggling against patriarchal panopticism and complete submission to it. As the character around which most of the novel revolves, Dorothea Brooke is a logical choice for beginning to study women in the novel. When Dorothea experiences two diametrically opposed marriages in the novel, she further becomes a strong subject for study for the idea of women in Victorian marriage.

This section will analyze the resulting quality of life for Dorothea following each of her marriages, each of which she enters with different expectations. In her first marriage, Dorothea seeks a combination of conventional and unconventional in her relationship with Edward Casaubon, which brings disastrous results. This section will begin by outlining Dorothea's desire to marry the much older academic as a way of helping with his work and gaining education for herself. As the analysis will go on to reveal, these goals are not acceptable within the patriarchal panopticon and are punished by a codicil in Casaubon's will that reduces Dorothea's agency going forward, limiting her choice of marriage in the future and implying a possible sexual transgression on Dorothea's part, although the jealousy lies only in Casaubon's mind. Recognizing the power of the patriarchal panopticon, Dorothea is faced with the choice that forms the crux of this chapter's argument – to submit to patriarchal authority and the enforced childhood it entails or to move outside of that and form an adult identity. Dorothea chooses the latter, and although her marriage ultimately exiles her from Middlemarch, she remains happy in her decision. Her marriage stands as one of the few equal and viable relationships in the text.

To reinforce this view, the chapter then studies Eliot's Rosamond Vincy. As a product of

a standard nineteenth-century English education for women, Rosamond devotes herself to becoming the Victorian ideal. However, as the analysis will show, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Victorian ideal is not adaptable to a lived experience. When her husband's needs fall outside of the approved behaviors for women within the patriarchal panopticon, i.e. she must work with him as a partner in financial matters, she is not educated in such a way to assist him. Thus, the ideal marriage becomes a monstrous one in which the wife fails to provide the support her husband needs yet is supported in her behavior by the desires of the panopticon, which is certainly not the end that the patriarchal system intends.

With these examples of marriage firmly in mind, the chapter will next turn its attention to Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This novel also uses the structure of contrasting marriages, but takes the idea one step beyond that by first showing how marriage ideals are passed from one generation to the next. The analysis first focuses its attention on David's mother, Clara, demonstrating her eventual relinquishing of an independent identity to David's tyrannical stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, who stands as a figure of patriarchal punishment within the panopticon. This relationship stands in contrast to the idealized first marriage of Clara to David's father, a man who seemed to be attempting to educate Clara to be his equal.

In his first marriage, the next focus of the chapter, David attempts to recreate his father's efforts in his own marriage to Dora Spenlow. However, through a series of failures that underscore Dora's feminine education, David realizes that Dora is actually unwilling to learn the skills that could make her David's equal. Choosing instead to be a "child-wife," a concept the chapter treats more thoroughly, Dora becomes the same burden to her husband that Rosamond Vincy was to hers. Again, successful and viable relationships are thwarted by the expectations of the patriarchal panopticon that demands the complete subordination of women. David is

released from this marriage through the death of his “child-wife” during childbirth, a narrative similarity to Eliot’s handling of Dorothea’s first marriage and a reminder that Dora could never fulfill the potential of full womanhood by becoming a mother and thereby no longer a child herself.

Rather than shy away from a debated topic, the final section of this chapter will examine the final marriage of David to Agnes Wickfield and the surrounding idea of Agnes as an “Angel in the House” figure. While the marriage is a positive example of a marriage of equals, Dickens’s truncation of details about the marriage in the text as well as the angelic rhetoric surrounding the relationship creates some difficulty in making the argument that Agnes is an example of a woman who disregards the Victorian ideal. However, this section will extricate Agnes herself from the rhetoric that David brings to the description of the relationship. Agnes will be shown to be competent in managing an independent life, managing a small school and her own household. Further, Agnes enters into a marriage of equals with David, supporting him and working with him in a way that the child-wife Dora could not. Dickens’s Agnes and Eliot’s Dorothea are not revolutionaries, yet in leading through the example of their own lives, they demonstrate a very radical conclusion – relationships based on equality between the sexes are the only path to successful and viable womanhood, even if womanhood includes wifedom.

In the conclusion, all of these arguments will be drawn together in order to relate them to larger concerns regarding feminism. Noting all of these instances of the systematic repression of women, both the non-fictional occurrences and the fictional representations of them that would bring them to the attention of the large reading public that Charles Dickens and George Eliot commanded, a logical question would be why do these women not create their own system and rebel as a group against those who oppress them? First, one should consider that women were

essentially legal slaves in the eyes of British law, with their identity being completely subsumed under her husband's. Referring to dehumanization and the utter subjectivity of one class of people to another in order that one may profit by the other's subjection situates the role of women on par with another social movement of the nineteenth-century – Marxism. The overall effect of this legal subordination combined with exploitation and alienation is that women are ultimately prevented from forming a class consciousness – a realization of similar feeling and the organized desire to fight against the established social order. Without the ability to adequately interact with each other, which is compounded by fears of the cultural panopticon that includes other women, the situation of women as a whole is unlikely to progress. It is through the efforts of authors that commanded the social stage that both men and women were encouraged to form an understanding of the role of women beyond their own personal experience. Through the combined efforts of great men and women, Britain began to move toward a more cultured man and a more liberated woman capable of engaging in a society where power negotiations would not be legal matters, but rather matters for equal partners working together for the progress of British society.

## Chapter One: Dickens, Eliot, and Cultural Context

### Introduction

To begin a discussion of such a large topic as cultural reactions to femininity, one must first provide some context within which the argument may then take place. This will be accomplished by first giving historical background of nineteenth-century England, addressing the views of Victorian reformers regarding what is commonly referred to as the Woman Question, including the work of John Ruskin, John Stuart Mill, and Caroline Norton. Into this cultural context enter the Victorian novelists who form the basis of this study – Charles Dickens and George Eliot. By carefully situating the authors within this cultural context, one may draw conclusions about their connection to not only the literary life of Victorian England, but also the political and social climate of the time. The goal of relating these authors' particular concerns with the lived experience of Victorian women is that the argument may then turn in forthcoming chapters to the effect that these views have on their narrative creations as well.

### Ruskin and Mill: The Woman Question

The Victorian period in England was an age of rapid social change – from the place of men and women in society to the development of new economic markets to the scientific developments that would fuel the progress that characterizes the spirit of the age. As Walter Houghton notes of John Stuart Mill in his *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, Mill “found transition to be the leading characteristic of the time” (1). Mill himself in “The Spirit of the Age,” an article published in *The Examiner* in 1831, wrote that “mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones” (par. 8). In fact, “the prominent trait just indicated in the character of the present age, was obvious a few years ago only to the more

discerning: at present it forces itself upon the most inobservant” (par. 9). One of the most obvious areas in which change was taking place was the interaction between men and women, particularly with regard to the expected behavior within and leading up to the marriage relationship. While the highly conservative view of women’s role still prevailed in many homes, an environment in which the woman was not educated and treated as little more than a household servant to her husband, there was an intellectual movement to revise these views. John Ruskin’s series of lectures, collected in the volume titled *Sesame and Lilies*, espouses a view of women that begins to move away from the view of woman as servant, yet it does not argue for the liberation of women entirely. Mill, however, goes further in *The Subjection of Women*, arguing for the liberation of women from what he characterizes as household bondage.

As Mill’s essay in *The Examiner* indicates, the atmosphere of social change in the nineteenth century is not easily marked by a series of orderly revisions of thought. Yet, there is a discernible move toward viewing marriage as a type of partnership where two individuals take on responsibility to create a well-ordered balance between the domestic sphere and the world outside of it. Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* attempts to articulate a view that begins to give women more importance in the household; he characterizes the old doctrinal view as one that perpetuates the “idea that woman is only the shadow and attendant image of her lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience, and supported altogether in her weakness by the pre-eminence of his fortitude” (71). He illustrates his adaptation of women’s new role in declaring, “This, I say, is the most foolish of all errors respecting her who was made to be the helpmeet of man. As if he could be helped effectively by a shadow, or worthily by a slave” (72). Thus, the old doctrines are dismissed, and Ruskin embarks on his mission in the lecture titled “Of Queen’s Gardens” to enlighten men as to the better role of women that would allow for better and more

useful interaction between the sexes, focusing, of course, on the ways in which women will make the domestic sphere more worthy of the British man of the new culture.

Ruskin begins addressing the marriage relationship as one “quite vital to all social happiness” (72). Yet, despite the modern scholar’s hope that this holds great promise for the liberation of women, he goes on to note that men “cannot consider how education can fit them [women] for any widely extending duty, until we are agreed on what is their true constant duty. And there never was a time when wilder words were spoken, or more vain imagination permitted, respecting this question” (72-3). The use of “wilder words” and “vain imagination” all point to the more conservative nature of Ruskin’s proposed reforms. Further undergirding his point, he notes that in the current age “[w]e hear of the ‘mission’ and of the ‘rights’ of Woman, as if these could ever be separate from the mission and rights of Man” (73). It is not surprising then to read Ruskin’s warning that comparing men and women is “foolish,” telling his listeners that an attempt to speak of them in terms of superiority of one over the other is pointless, “as if they could be compared in similar things” (84-5). Essentially, men and woman are not similar in any way, thus a consideration for the education of women and the redefining of the role of wife should not raise her to the level of man, as it would not be useful to the marriage of the two.

So, what then, is a woman’s role in marriage for Ruskin? He addresses this question in reassuring his audience that women will still be compatible “with a true wifely subjection” (84). Women are to serve “a guiding, not a determining function” for their husbands. This new wife will be “incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise not for self-development, but for self-renunciation . . . not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side” (87). In short, a woman’s power in marriage is still a function of serving her husband but now to the effect that he has a helpmeet that raises the home from a scene of

domination and forcible subservience to a sphere of order and reason wherein a woman reigns to provide for the comfort of her husband and to serve him as he reaches for higher pursuits than those of simple masculine assertion. Ruskin concludes:

[T]he woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is praise; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. (86)

Woman, then, is removed from the world of concrete pursuits, metaphorically referred to by battle. She is to order and arrange the home given to her by men, and she is to use her emotional ability to judge and make recommendations. Above all, she offers praise, specifically to the men who compete in this battle that provides the space in which she resides free from “all danger and temptation” (86). While women are more than servants providing thoughtless obedience, their function is still dependent upon men who must treat their roles with more seriousness, but never more than a man's role. Thus, a woman's role is to guide, but not lead, to be wise, but only for the benefit of her husband, and to be strong only in so far as it is fitting for a woman to be so. Perhaps, it is not so unusual that there are many confused embodiments of the Victorian ideals found in nineteenth-century fiction.

In *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin asks an ironical question; would Shakespeare and Dante and their counterparts create fictional women that were not actually to be desired in real life? As he writes, “Are Shakespeare and Aeschylus, Dante and Homer, merely dressing dolls for us; or, worse than dolls, unnatural visions, the realization of which, were it possible would bring anarchy into all households and ruin into all affections?” (36). Of course, the answer for Ruskin is no, but through the modern scholar's eyes, Ruskin has creatively imagined what his own view of women actually attempts to do – create unnatural visions and women who function in society



more as dolls to be dressed than individuals from whom to expect support and productivity.

John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth-century British philosopher and contemporary of Eliot and Dickens, addresses the idea of women as simply the embodiment of male visions in his work, *The Subjection of Women*. Rather than support Ruskin's claims, Mill describes in his work the ways in which the nineteenth century unyieldingly creates an atmosphere in which women cannot form a coherent identity capable of functioning in society if the only ideals for character formation are those created by men intent on preserving their own social dominance.

Mill was a philosopher who progressively became more radical as he moved away from the work of mentor Jeremy Bentham and his father, James Mill. His *The Subjection of Women* illustrates his position as a proponent for women's rights and liberation from what he saw as the "only actual bondage known to our law," slavery having been outlawed in the British Empire (118). Yet, as Mill writes, "There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every household" (118). The creation of woman as unequal to men is an emotional matter, not a factual one. Mill argues, "For if it were accepted as a result of argument, the refutation of the argument might shake the solidity of the conviction, but when it rests solely on feeling, the worse it fares in argumentative contest" (119). Even among potential progressives, such as Ruskin, there are various envisionings of female liberation. Ruskin, ultimately, is unable to overcome the paradigm of masculine dominance of the feminine, even though he feels it should be moderated to suit a higher cultural purpose than many brutal marriages seemed to exemplify. Mill points to this type of attitude as the example of simply relying on custom and present conduct of women to show the natural ordering of the sexes. He contends, however, that women cannot be judged upon this standard:

Women have always hitherto been kept, as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly

distorted and disguised; and no one can safely pronounce that if women's nature was left to choose its direction as freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it . . . there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves. (173)

Without interference by men anxious to preserve their own sense of dominance in a changing world, women would become much like men in their character and capacity, and thus, not inferior at all.

This argument brings into play two large elements of Mill's logical underpinning. First, men find themselves attempting to solidify their role of dominance in the home in response to feelings of inferiority outside the home, particularly as British men in a shaky age for the British Empire abroad. A traditional way that men asserted masculine authority was through colonization: "Conquering races hold it to be Nature's own dictate that the conquered should obey the conqueror, or as they euphoniously paraphrase it, that the feebler and more unwarlike races should submit to the braver and manlier" (40). The year 1857 brought what was quickly termed the Indian Uprising, and the British role as unquestionably the stronger race was indeed brought into question. These feelings of insecurity abroad translate into feelings of undermined masculinity at home. Further, one may benefit from recalling the way in which Ruskin describes women's nature as "not for battle" and that she "enters into no contest" (*Sesame* 86). Literally then, the common view of women is unwarlike, and when connected to the idea of imperialism, women are metaphorically set up as necessary to be conquered to ensure masculine, and more fully, British, dominance.

The second element of logical underpinning that carries Mill's argument is the warning of what will become of British society if women's subjection to men continues. First, Mill warns that an allowed dominance will encourage the more base nature of otherwise good men, who

because “in every other quarter their aggressions meet with resistance, indulge the utmost habitual excesses of bodily violence towards the unhappy wife, who alone, at least of grown persons, can neither repeal nor escape from their brutality . . . on the notion that the law has delivered her to them as their thing” (53). In accordance with that, Mill then asks his reader to consider the role that these mistreated women are then supposed to play in the development of men. As he writes, “The influence of mothers on the early character of their sons, and the desire of young men to recommend themselves to young women, have all in recorded times been important agencies in the formation of character, and have determined some of the chief steps in the progress of civilization” (161). In essence, Mill returns the argument back to the value of women as individuals to men. If allowed to freely develop, women have the potential, Mill argues, to better fulfill the expectations of even the most conservative Victorian. As a fully developed individual, one who is educated and allowed to live for her own advancement as well as those around her, rather than a dominated, unequal, and potentially abused adjunct to men, women are better able to work together with men to establish the harmony and dominance of the British Empire both in the domestic sphere and abroad.

Secondary criticism justifies this interpretation of contemporary texts of the Victorian period. Mary Poovey states succinctly that her argument in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* is “that both men and women were subject at midcentury to the constraints imposed by the binary organization of difference and the foregrounding of sexual nature” (22). Through a careful analysis of medical, legal, and literary artifacts, Poovey pursues the role of ideology in the formation of gender expectations. The legal subjection of women to men further underscores Mill's point of domesticity as an artificial construct. Poovey writes that in 1857 legislator Alexander Beresford-Hope expressed a

characteristic of women finding any lasting legal equality, stating, “What seems to have been at stake for Beresford-Hope and others was the vision of English domesticity that by midcentury had come to be equated with the very identity of an Englishman” (73). Thus, women must be kept in subjection to men through the ideals of domesticity, which entailed a lack of educational opportunity and any form of independence, so that men would be allowed to meet their own gender expectations and fulfill the role of proper Englishmen.

James Eli Adams’ *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* examines the role of unstable masculinity and, by extension, its relationship with prescriptive definitions of femininity. In order for a man to determine his masculine identity, it was important to find a fundamental separation between gender roles, but the difficulty soon arose that these boundaries were more fluid than one might first imagine in a time of binary gender constructs. Self-discipline is just one characteristic that Adams addresses in elaborating upon the difficulty faced by men: “Self-discipline is the distinguishing feature of professional men . . . Because self-discipline perplexes the binaries of active and passive, of self-assertion and self-denial, tributes to it frequently confound traditional assignments of gender” (7). In the male attempt to secure a stable masculine identity, women are then kept in a child-like state, lacking proper education and cultural opportunity to pursue the life of an independent adult that serves as partner rather than servant.

Marriage is the closest social bond allowed between men and women, and it is in this relationship that one may fully understand the social ramifications of woman as child and domestic servant. Judith Flanders’ *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life* expresses the importance of marriage, particularly to the social development of women: “It was entirely accepted by the vast majority of the population that the central event in any woman’s life

was marriage” (214). An unmarried woman, at least traditionally, would not find herself in the position of setting up a household for a husband or being the mother of children. As these were key aspects of the usefulness of women, it is logical to infer that society would not consider these women as meeting the ideals of womanhood. To form an identity that matched what a woman should be, a young woman would strive to be married and embark on meeting her next set of expectations – setting up a home and producing children.

It is important to keep in mind not only what women expected in marriage, but also what men thought they would be experiencing in marriage. Understanding the expectations that men brought into marriage requires a bit of work in outlining the nature of masculine and feminine roles in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Victorian society itself carefully grouped actions and behaviors into the categories of male and female, creating a repressive system in which there could be little flexibility. In her *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong writes of the “classic double bind” of the binary model of gender, which “confines us to alternatives that are not really alternatives at all. . . . Any political position founded primarily on sexual identity ultimately confirms the limited choices preferred by such a dyadic model” (24). Thus, the alternative that at the end of the century will come to be known as the “New Woman” is only achieved in the midst of great struggle.

Proper femininity, and the type of marriage that men expected, reinforced a comfortable and traditional view of masculinity. Yet, ideals are rarely compatible with real-world application. Judith Flanders relates the way in which Victorians attempted to mitigate social upheaval: “As the Industrial Revolution appeared to have taken over every aspect of working life, so the family, and by extension the house, expanded in tandem to act as an emotional counterweight. The Victorians found it useful to separate their world into a public sphere, of

work and trade, and a private sphere, of home life and domesticity” (4-5). These separate spheres are then coded according to gender. The masculine gender takes the world of work and trade; the realm of home life and domesticity is coded as feminine.

Marriage, then, revolves around the concept of creating a home – a practical entity that requires the acquisition and proper disbursement of money as well as an emotionally stable environment. Ideally, Victorians saw the husband as providing the former and the wife providing the later. Joseph Ambrose Banks and Olive Banks discuss the ideal home created by a woman in *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*: it should be “such a home that would provide an environment of emotional stability for her husband and children” (58). While the prescriptive roles for women are very clear, there is less conformity when it comes to what a man must be in order to fulfill his obligations to wife and family.

As Mill has suggested, Victorian society did not seem to take into account all of the possible outcomes for creating this ideal. Men were sometimes surprised at the complete ignorance of their wives in regard to the realities of worldly life. Flanders offers an explanation for this ignorance: “Girls who did not need to go out to work had no break to mark their passing from childhood to adolescence: they were often children until they married” (89). The realities of life within the marriage relationship also surprised many young women. The expected role of feminine subservience was not always so confining when the woman was not a wife. Once a woman entered into marriage, she was expected to live for her husband and any children she may have; her opinions on any matter, including that of the home for which she was considered responsible, was secondary to that of her husband. As Flanders writes, “The assumption was that the house was to be run around the needs of the man...her desire was not expected to take precedence over his convenience” (247). Yet, it is not simply social custom that works to the

benefit of men and their convenience.

### **Caroline Norton: The Law and Victorian Women**

The foregoing study of women through the lenses of social criticism and historians has shown that the role of women in the nineteenth century underwent many visions and revisions. These also include heated legal debates that eventually result in more rights being granted to women in the marriage relationship. This more liberated woman found expression at the *fin-de-siècle* as what came to be known as the New Woman. Yet, it was only through the very difficult fight for women's rights that this woman came to exist at all. The passage of two legal acts in the mid-century created the path by which further liberations would be granted later. These acts were the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1870. The relatively short amount of time between the two elides the painful struggle that women faced in the interim.

The legal struggle that women faced in retaining an identity, and any rights to her property and even her children, can best be understood through a case study. By looking carefully at a first-person account of a Victorian marriage, one may find the common views of marriage and its incumbent dangers for women. For this study, one may turn to Caroline Norton's 1854 text, *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* in which she argues for protection for women under British law from their husbands. The text outlines Norton's marriage to her husband, George Norton, and the contentious legal struggle she faced when the marriage rapidly became primarily characterized by abuse, financial disputes, and accusations of adultery.

Caroline Norton states the purpose of her work in its opening lines: "I desire to prove, not

my suffering or his injustice, but that the present law of England cannot prevent any such suffering, or control any such injustice. I write in the hope that the law may be amended” (13). She begins by outlining many instances of physical abuse in their relationship. Shortly after their honeymoon, George attacked Caroline following their first argument, where he “flung the ink-stand, and most of the law-books, which might have served a better purpose, at the head of his bride” (32). Further, after having been married only two months, Caroline is again attacked, this time even more violently, after having spoken unkindly to her husband: “This remark was punished by a sudden and violent kick; the blow reached my side; it caused great pain for many days, and being afraid to remain with him, I sat up the whole night in another apartment” (33). Yet, under the law, Caroline had no recourse for physical abuse in her marriage. Her husband is allowed to treat her as he pleases because of the way the law functions at this time: “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage” (Blackstone 445). Thus, a woman is not protected under the law as she and her husband are legally one person. Despite knowing the rather unlikely nature of a divorce, Caroline went to an attorney, asking if there were any way to dissolve the marriage. The response illustrates the laws regarding women as they stood before 1857: “I was then told that no divorce *I* could obtain would break my marriage; that I could not plead cruelty *which I had forgiven*” (49, emphasis Norton's). In remaining with George in the family home, an action for which there is no reasonable alternative in many cases, Caroline was assumed by the law to have condoned his actions toward her.

George Norton abused his wife more than simply physically, however. Somewhat unusually, George was not the sole wage-earner in the household. Caroline used her family connections to get him a position as magistrate, and she also worked as an author, providing for



her family's needs and George's amusements:

[I] worked again to help him and forward the interests of my children. I have sat up all night,—even at times when I have had a young infant to nurse,—to finish tasks for some publisher. I made in one year a sum of 1,400 l. pound by my pen; and I have a letter from Mr. Norton's own brother, proving that even when we were on terms of estrangement, I still provided, without grudging, money that was to be spent on his pleasures. (26-7)

However, this was not enough to financially satisfy her husband, and he began to press her to raise money against her trust – an act that would require her consent and the consent of her trustees. The reply of the trustee to Caroline's statement of the family's financial condition reveals the financially ruinous situation that resulted in their final separation: "Norton applied to me for my consent to raise a portion of the trust fund and to place the principal at his disposal. I told him I could do nothing of this kind without legal advice. . . . Your statement of the present circumstances of the case, proves the precaution to have been necessary" (28-9). When his ability to use Caroline's familial and financial connections to obtain more money reaches an end, he abandons her. As Caroline relates, "He notified to me that my family might support me, or that I might write for my bread; and that my children were by law at his sole disposal" (29). Again, with no recourse under the law, Caroline is left with nothing. Almost penniless through George's spending habits and with no claim to his financial support as he has taken the children, she is left to make her own way.

Even finding that her children have been given "into the hands of a mistress," does not change the situation with potential custody rights (49). The fact that George may now be charged with adultery as well as cruelty also changes nothing in the eyes of the law. Lord Harrington, a magistrate in one of the trials that took place in open court between husband and wife, can do nothing more than warn George of his public estimation: "They say you kept a mistress. . . . That you have often used personal violence to your wife. Unless you can disprove

these accusations, you are lost in the estimation of the world” (43). Note that he is simply lost in the estimation of the world — the law has no reach in these matters, even in their combination.

The case of Caroline Norton is presented by herself to advocate for legal change, a change that will protect women from the possibility of an abusive husband who could physically harm them, spend all of their money, and even remove them from the position of motherhood — the role that Victorian society deemed to be their most important. As Norton writes, “Is there any reason why . . . women alone, of the more helpless classes,— the classes set apart as not having free control of their own destinies,—should be denied the protection which in other cases supplies and balances such absence of free control?” (15). The legislation for which she was arguing in this 1854 pamphlet was what would become known as the Matrimonial Causes Act, finally passed in 1857 after almost three years of debate in Parliament. While not fully emancipating women, there were particular areas of legal redress now made available to women that would become the foundation upon which the liberation of women could begin to emerge. Poovey briefly outlines the legal ramifications of the Matrimonial Causes Act: “A man could sue [for divorce] for simple adultery, but the woman was allowed to petition for divorce only on the grounds of ‘aggravated’ adultery — a transgression that combined adultery with incest, bigamy, desertion, or cruelty” (84). Further, “By allowing [women] to obtain legal protection against the husbands from whom they were separated, the divorce law undoubtedly benefited thousands of working-class women who otherwise would not have been able to protect their earnings” (85). Thus, the woman-as-partner of Mill’s *Subjection of Women* is at least closer to becoming a reality, rather than merely a speculative, optimistic theory.

As a way of understanding just how this legislation would change the everyday lives of Victorian women, one may examine how Caroline Norton’s case would have been different if

these laws were in place prior to her marriage. During their separation, in which George chose not to file for divorce while Caroline had no option to do so, Caroline would have been able to protect her wages from writing from George's acquisitive measures. As she had no legal existence outside of marriage, Caroline's money could simply be taken to pay George's debts. Most importantly, however, Caroline herself would have been able to file for divorce. The cruelty of physical abuse, which was documented by many witnesses, combined with the adultery that was acknowledged even by a legal magistrate would be suitable grounds for divorce under the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. As such, Caroline Norton would have been able to free herself from her devastating marriage and live independently, using her work in writing to provide for herself as a wage-earner.

What the dissatisfied tone of Poovey's work intimates in discussing the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 is that all legal abuses of women were not eradicated by this legislation. It is important to note that "absolute divorce was still prohibitively expensive" and that "men and women still received different treatments under the law" (85). To add even more concern, there are the issues of inherited property and money brought into a marriage by the wife that are not addressed in legislating the behavior of men and women in regard to divorce. In the cases where a divorce is not possible or desirable, men still have the power to abuse a woman financially, just as one can note in George Norton's attempt to force Caroline to raise money for him against her inherited trust. In fact, so common is this type of action that it serves as the plot device of many sensation novels of the nineteenth century.

The fictional situation of exploited women who are tricked into marriage reflects a very real anxiety felt by women in Victorian society. Where later generations of women would find themselves free from these fears within marriage by the ending decades of the century, the

women of mid-century Victorian England advocated for social change to protect themselves. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870, along with its Amendment Act of 1874, put in place the final piece of legislation that would allow women as legal and social individuals to come into a full existence. The legislation itself is very complex; in fact, it is so complex that perhaps one of the best sources for information about it is an 1875 law manual intended for lawyers in applying the laws to their clients. J.R. Griffith, author of the law text, sums up the Married Women's Property Act:

They [women] are now enabled to acquire, during the coverture, certain classes of property to their separate use, in respect of which they have an independent personal status in courts of Law; and are capable of taking such proceedings, in courts of both Law and Equity, as may be necessary for the protection and security of such property, freed from the disabilities which have hitherto attached to coverture. (2)

The primary benefit of this legislation, especially insofar as creating a somewhat independent woman that could be socially viable, was granting women the right to their earnings as designated for separate use. As the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 states: "The wages and earnings of any married woman acquired or gained by her after the passing of this Act in any employment, occupation, or trade . . . shall be deemed and taken to be property held and settled to her separate use, independent of any husband to whom she may be married" (Griffith 44). The situation of Caroline Norton could have been entirely prevented if her marriage had taken place after the passage of this act, which is largely why she was instrumental in arguing for legislation such as this. In her case, her money would never have been used injudiciously. With the full benefit of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 and subsequent Amendment Act of 1874, women are able to exist in a socially validated way independent of a husband, even in marriage, which is the ultimate partnership ideal that Mill gestures toward in the most progressive chapters of *The Subjection of Women*.

### **Eliot and Dickens: The Role of the Artist in Social Reform**

The literature of the nineteenth-century cannot help but reflect these changing doctrines, as its authors are a product of the same shifting society. In fact, according to contemporary literary critics, truly great and powerful literature must arise from an attempt to engage with the social and intellectual concerns of the time. Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," published in 1864, demonstrates that "literature itself [functions] as a 'criticism of life'" (Richter 412). In fact, Arnold's argument lies in the recognition that authors and the literature they create must come from the current environment of intellectual and spiritual ideas. As he writes, "[T]he elements with which the creative power works are ideas; the best ideas, on every matter which literature touches, current at the time. At any rate we may lay it down as certain that in modern literature no manifestation of the creative power nor working with these can be very important or fruitful" (416).

More than an argument for a particular type of subject matter, Arnold's work also advocates for a particular need for the artist to understand the world in which he or she is working as a means of interpreting it for their readers. Using the idea of the poet, which is also applicable to writers of novels as well, Arnold argues for the background of the writer:

[E]veryone can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry; and life and the world being, in modern times, very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it; else it must be a comparatively poor, barren, and short-lived affair. (416-7)

Thus, the writer must not only be a creative master, but also a careful critic of the world with all of its complexities as well as a critic of literature and its production. In an age of best-selling novelists, Eliot's notable years of work in criticism and translation before turning to her own production of fiction and Charles Dickens's career of social causes leading to forays into politics

combined with his prolific writing in almost all areas of Victorian culture make them both fruitful examples of Arnold's ideal creative writer.

George Eliot is a particularly interesting example of the critic and artist as she embodies both roles fully in different stages of her career. In 1846, Eliot published her first major work, a translation of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*. After the extraordinarily positive critical reception of the work, Eliot became the silent co-editor of the *Westminster Review*, working alongside John Chapman – the public face of the magazine – for two years. During her tenure, she selected works for publication ranging from social criticism to literary reviews. She authored her own reviews that were published in the magazine as well, including “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” which criticized what she saw as the trivial writing found in these novels. It is her concern for realism and the need to create fiction based on her literary critical principles that drew Eliot to assume her pseudonym and begin her career as a novelist herself.

Eliot's view of the role of the artist in his or her own works sets her apart from other writers and lends an intriguing interpretation to Arnold's view of the artist. Eliot removes herself from the printed world as the author, hoping for her works to speak for themselves. As she writes, “I have a conviction founded on dispassionate judgment, that any influence I may have as an author would be injured by the presentation of myself in print through any other medium than that of my books” (*Letters*, VI, 289). Further, Eliot feels she is within her proper role as artist to avoid presenting her ideas in any other context than that of her novels: “It is my function as an artist to act (if possible) for good on the emotions and conceptions of my fellow-men” (*Letters*, VI, 289). In short, it is through her works themselves, the examples set by her characters and the tragedies seen to unfold in her novels, that others should find Eliot's critique of the world, which both she and Arnold feel is an important goal of literature. For Eliot, the creation of novels is to

embrace realism and to use these fictional situations to reflect the lives of actual people, all of which inherently draws on the world of intellectual and social ideas of the current time.

While Eliot's view of the artist is certainly logical and in line with Arnold's views, it is not the only interpretation of how one can become a successful artist and social critic. Charles Dickens began his writing career in journalism, joining the staff of the *Mirror of Parliament* in 1831. Fred Kaplan describes the world of journalism that Dickens joined as "teem[ing] with talented reporters and editors attracted to the glamour of opinion-making, the hope of political and literary influence, the attraction of making a living by becoming an articulate part of London and national life" (50). This desire to be an articulate part of life as well as the hope of political and literary influence is what Dickens takes into his career as a creative writer, combining his fiction with his social work and refusing to be known simply by his novels.

Upon returning from a trip to America, Dickens reflected that the radically different governmental structure still offered "no easy solutions to long-standing social problems" (Kaplan 142). The social problems Dickens wishes to ameliorate come from his own experiences as a child, living with the poor financial decisions of his parents and an unforgiving social system that forced them to live in a debtor's prison while Dickens himself was sent out as a child to work in a blacking factory rather than continue his education. With the perception now gained that revolutionary changes in governmental structure still brought no progress, he turned to his work as a writer to reach individuals on a level where they might be inclined to create the change that Dickens felt society needs. As Kaplan writes, "Justice and charity in the public world could only come from such virtues in the private individual...As a novelist, [Dickens] could move other hearts toward higher levels of compassion and idealism and 'strike a blow' against identifiable evils" (142). However, Dickens did not intend to sway his readers toward his views only by

appealing to their emotions. He saw his efforts in novel writing as part of the larger work of the artist and author in culture.

Arnold has already been shown to place the author in the position of social commentator and an important part of the way in which the ideals of the age are shaped and communicated to the reading public. As Dickens begins to develop as an artist, he assumes his own command of this artistic charge. Kaplan vividly captures this shift in artistic purpose following the publication of *David Copperfield*: Dickens's "sense of himself as a professional author also expanded into bolder, more energetic efforts to define writers as socially valuable and communally cohesive professionals caring about one another and about their position in the culture" (221). Where Eliot took this charge to be a call for her to remove herself from the public sphere with the exception of her novels, Dickens takes it another direction by stepping even more forcefully in the public sphere. He begins to present himself on the stage, performing as an actor and acting as a reader of his own works, which allowed him not only to control the authorial experience of the text but to also form the reading experience as well. These efforts prove to be socially valuable in that Dickens is able to make sure that the aim of raising awareness and instilling a desire for justice and compassion is satisfied not only in his writing but also in his readings where audiences could see and hear the struggle of the poor and outcast dramatized through Dickens's powerful dramatic style.

The final component to Dickens's argument for the value of literature to the social reform of England is to address the supposed superiority of reason and logic in creating reform. In his 1853 essay, "Fraud on the Fairies," Dickens critiques the goals of the utilitarian philosophers in attempting to rationalize fairy tales in order to use them as a form of propaganda (Kaplan 305). In particular, Dickens takes issue with the idea that it is somehow necessary to remove the



imaginative element of fairy tales in order to make literature more useful to the reading public. In making imagination “a poor second cousin of reason, logic, and science,” he argues that literature and life itself loses its path toward genuine human feeling and happiness and rather finds itself in a realm of “unfeeling and abstract rationality” (305). It is from this critique that his novel *Hard Times* is produced, again bringing together the concepts of social argument with the need for the public to see it represented in literature.

What is important to note in analyzing the ways in which Eliot and Dickens answer what is called for in Matthew Arnold’s view of the artist as a cultural commentator is that the two authors approach the same goal in very different ways – methods that are in some ways diametrically opposed and yet equally beneficial and powerful. These methods primarily differ in the way in which each author chooses to engage his or her audience. As the previous sections have begun to demonstrate, Dickens is very direct in the way he approaches his readers. He invites his readers to interact with him in a myriad of ways, making himself known as an author of fiction, an actor and performer, and a journalist, often serving in all of these roles simultaneously. Readers then are invited to not only see Dickens as a novelist, but also as a journalist and to take the views he expresses in his journalistic work back with them into his novels as they read them. Thus, it is necessary to view Dickens’s work in his journals as an extension of his literary vision and to analyze them for the message of compassion and justice that he espouses to be the aim of his literature.

As the editor of the *Daily News*, Dickens found himself in a position of authority from which he could express his own political and social opinions. He shortly took advantage of this opportunity to “express strong opinions on a number of social issues, particularly on the relationship between criminality and lack of education” (Kaplan 198). The relationship must be

understood in the correct order, as Dickens is striving to make clear that it is not the nature of individuals to be criminals that prevents them from desiring an education but rather that “societies with high levels of poverty and ignorance created the conditions that encouraged high levels of crime and alcoholism” (198). Not content with simply arguing from abstracted logic, the same method for which he criticized Bentham and Mill, Dickens conducts his own fact-finding missions to provide his readers with concrete evidence of the human experience of these conditions and its impact on those individuals’ lives. To that end, Dickens embarked on a close study of prisons, surveying both the conditions of imprisonment and the prisoners themselves. As Kaplan notes of Dickens’ mission, “He combined a personal interest in the lives and personalities of social and physical deviants with reformer’s enthusiasm for analyzing and improving social institutions” (143). Through these encounters, Dickens gathers firsthand experience of what it means to be the social outcast. This is just one of the factors that comes into play with his concern for the poor and for the social position of women. For him, “[t]he poor, the imprisoned, the physically and emotionally deprived, were the familiar other, what he had the potential to be but had not become” (142). It is this personal recognition of what could easily have been his own life that Dickens attempts to bring to his readers – this fate might have been possible for them as well if they had been born into similar circumstances.

While his association with the *Daily News* proves to be brief, Dickens’s dedication to using journalism as another method for interaction with his reading public remains strong. In 1850, he once again finds himself at the helm of a journal, this time one of his own creation named *Household Words*. The mission of his journal was stated with its first issue and clearly demonstrates Dickens attempt to move an audience toward reform; it reads, “Designed for the Entertainment and Instruction of all classes of readers, and to help in the discussion of the most

important social questions of the time” (Kaplan 265). The subject matter of the journal would live up to its rather lofty mission statement, publishing the work of Elizabeth Gaskell, Dickens’s own *A Child’s History of England*, and an article drawn from his own social work, “A Home for Homeless Women,” among many other pieces that included hiring Richard Henry Horne to serve as the journal’s leading investigative reporter for two years. In considering Dickens as a careful observer and participant in the culture about which he created fiction, one might be hard-pressed to find a more literal interpretation of the goal for the artist.

By contrast, Eliot could be seen as almost fading into the background of the world of political opinions. Yet, the most important aspect of the artist that Eliot seeks to embody is that of the careful observer of the culture and to express those views through literature. It would be wrong-headed to assume that because Eliot did not enter into the written debate surrounding social problems, she had no views on the matters that she observed. In her work as editor of the *Westminster Review*, she uses her authority to decide what moves forward to publication as a sort of political voice in its own right, as her letters to Chapman demonstrate:

Martineau writes much that we can agree with and admire. Newman ditto, J. S. Mill still more, Froude a little less and so on. These men can write more openly in the Westminster than anywhere else. They are amongst the world’s vanguard, though not all in the foremost line; it is good for the world, therefore, that they should have every facility for speaking out. Ergo, since each can’t have a periodical to himself, it is good that there should be one which is common to them – id est, the Westminster. (*Letters*, II, 47-50)

Envisioning the *Westminster Review* in this fashion, Eliot creates a journal that expresses her own political views, which are shared by Chapman, even when not publishing her own written thoughts on all of the social issues that the above listed authors would address. In this type of editorship, one finds great similarity to Dickens’s leadership of the *Daily News* and *Household Words*. Both authors are keenly aware of the impact they wish for their journals to have with the

reading public and shrewdly calculate which authors will help them achieve this purpose, even if they do not always take up the pen themselves.

As a novelist, Eliot continues to avoid direct contact with her reading public, going so far as to avoid reading any reviews of her own work. This type of personality made it very difficult for even her publisher to communicate with her at the outset of her career. Turning to John Blackwood as a publisher, Eliot communicates with him through George Henry Lewes, the man she considered her husband. Lewes first works to preserve Eliot's anonymity and then to convince Blackwood of the type of author with whom he is working, referring to Eliot as "unusually sensitive" and one who is "afraid of failure though not afraid of obscurity" (*Letters*, II, 276-7). Lewes furthered his warning when Blackwood was critical of one of the installments of Eliot's first novel, *Scenes of a Clerical Life*: "Entre nous let me hint that unless you have any *serious* objection to make to Eliot's stories, *don't* make any. He is so easily discouraged, so diffident of himself, that not being prompted by necessity to write, he will close the series in the belief that his writing is not relished" (*Letters*, II, 363-4). While this type of censorship did maintain Eliot's confidence in writing, it deprived her of the opportunity for potentially valuable feedback about her writing. At times, her works did not create the same feelings in her readers that she felt in writing the work, but her refusal to read negative criticism does not allow her to rectify these issues until she relents later in her career.

With the protracted serial publication of *Middlemarch* from 1871 – 1872, Eliot begins to read the reviews and the subsequent letters sent to her about her work. The feedback proves useful on a number of levels. Where there are errors in the text, Eliot is able to correct them: "A barrister in the Temple wrote anonymously to Eliot to say that by destroying his second will, as he tried to do in Chapter 33, Featherstone could not have revived the earlier one. In the next

book (Chapter 52), Eliot let Mr. Farebrother explain that fact to Mary Garth” (Haight 446).

Further, in reading the critiques of her work that readers have to offer, Eliot is better able to gauge how well her work is influencing the reading public, which she has already described as her goal.

What the comments from *Middlemarch*'s readers reveal shows Eliot's success. Not only is it a commercial success, but the book also garners her the recognition that an author hoping to influence public feeling and thought needs in order to be a valuable social critic. Henry James wrote of the work, “George Eliot seems to us among English romancers to stand alone. Fielding approaches her, but to our mind she surpasses Fielding. Fielding was didactic – the author of *Middlemarch* is really philosophic” (qtd. in Haight 444). The distinction here regarding didactic and philosophic is very important as it speaks to the ability of the author to reach his or her audience. The didactic writer often finds it difficult to win the favor of an audience with its moralizing tone whereas the philosophic writer can more easily connect with readers by giving characters a world within which to operate that is based on this philosophic outlook and then following these very human characters through their lives. In fact, Eliot becomes a touchstone for others to understand the human condition, which is exemplified by a West End clergyman using Eliot's text as an example in his sermon: “Many of you have no doubt read the work which that great teacher George Eliot is now publishing and have shuddered as I shuddered at the awful dissection of a guilty conscience. Well, *that* is what I mean by the prophetic spirit” (qtd. in Haight 445). Even Emily Dickinson expressed her views of the novel, reading it from her home in America, “What do I think of *Middlemarch*? What do I think of glory? ... The mysteries of human nature surpass the mysteries of redemption” (qtd. in Haight 445). Eliot's voice as that of purely the artist through her work is still powerful, as she becomes a philosopher, a teacher, and

ultimately a guide down the path of human redemption. Through her characters, Eliot reaches the goal of social commentator by showing her readers what the human experience really looks like through her use of realism and by also showing them how to benevolently care for those individuals in need.

Where Eliot uses her novels to influence people to do the work of social reform, Dickens actively pursues the work of social reform in the journalistic and political arenas as well in his novels. As his work in his journals suggests, Dickens wants to be an active reformer, and he undertakes a trip to America in 1842, in part to attempt to validate his own views of social reform. Kaplan explains Dickens's interests in taking the journey and his subsequent disappointment:

His American aspirations, though, were far from only commercial. From *Sketches* on, he had increasingly turned his literary eye toward social conditions. What he would see in America would qualify his belief that much of European misery had its roots in social, political, and economic exploitation embedded in the class structure and reflected in the attitudes of a corrupt ruling hierarchy that had not incorporated basic Christian principles into economics and government. (125)

Dickens embarked on this journey in the hopes of discovering an answer to England's problems in the form of a new governmental structure, but what he found were only different forms of the same problems. What particularly disturbed Dickens about his time in America was the acceptability of slavery. In recording his views, he wrote that slavery was both self-serving and self-destructive, seemingly like "cruelty, and the abuse of irresponsible power ... were one of the greatest blessings of mankind" (Kaplan 136). While slavery as such does not exist at this time in Britain, Dickens is able to see the connection of this type of slavery to the abuse of power by the ruling hierarchy that could use the class structure to exploit the poor and even women to achieve its own ends – an argument that Mill later adapts, explaining that the condition of women in

England is that of a slave, which is self-destructive for the character of men as well.

What the trip to America did accomplish for Dickens is sharpened focus for what he feels is necessary to help the lower classes. Rather than “live in a society in which purported classlessness was a disguise for a class system based on wealth,” Dickens finds that he would rather offer tangible assistance to the lower classes (Kaplan 141). For Dickens, the purported system of classlessness actually creates an atmosphere where the “tyranny of the majority made daily life ugly and suppressed free speech” (141). Using his position in the upper middle class, Dickens launches several campaigns to directly influence the lives of the poor.

In 1846, Dickens put his name behind a movement to support the ragged schools, which were designed to provide education to even the poorest children. Among other acts of attempting unsuccessfully to gain governmental support, Dickens writes “a strong letter to the *Daily News*” which “advocated support for the ragged schools” (Kaplan 148). His argument rests in the belief that “educated children were likely to become socially productive citizens” (149) – an argument which he would come to employ later in his discussions of women as well. Despite a lack of success, Dickens does not cease his efforts in the political arena to find support for the poor and exploited. Yet, Dickens is a careful negotiator, always seeking compromise rather than revolution. This trait earns him the criticism of Thomas Carlyle who casts Dickens’s attempts at governmental reform as “well intentioned but superficial” (309). Dickens reveals his well-intentioned zeal in his work with Austen Henry Layard and the Administrative Reform Association that sought to rouse the people to see the oppressiveness of the government, particularly where class differences are concerned. He passionately responded to a friend’s cautions against impetuosity, “For this reason solely, I am a Reformer heart and soul. I have nothing to gain – everything to lose (for public quiet is my bread) – but I am in desperate earnest,

because I know it is a desperate case” (Kaplan 331). However, as Kaplan notes, “[f]or all that, though, he was a cautious national reformer, eager to persuade rather than coerce” (331). Thus, while Dickens’s political efforts may have been short-lived and unsuccessful at times, they exemplify the same strategy that makes the use of the novel for social reform a good choice, a method of offering persuasion through the use of a compelling story of true-to-life characters.

Eliot, from her own views of the role of the artist as well as the societal constraints placed on her gender, is more silent in the area of direct social reform. That is not to say, however, that Eliot never ventures into the realm of politics in her own way. In fact, when she does make a political statement at the request of her publisher, she asks for moderation in much the same way as Dickens seeks political compromise. After the publication of *Felix Holt: The Radical*, Eliot becomes a sort of touchstone for the ideas of voting reform. When the Second Reform Bill is passed in 1867, Blackwood turns to Eliot for a way of addressing the potential political unrest caused by the extension of the right to vote. In response, Eliot writes an “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,” which Haight describes as using the voice of her fictional hero to create “an eloquent appeal to ‘us artisans, and factory hands, and miners, and labourers of all sorts’ to use their new power of the ballot with restraint, so that the ‘common estate of society ... that treasure of knowledge, science, poetry, refinement of thought, feeling, and manners’ shall not be lost, as it was in the French and Spanish revolutions” (395). Eliot proves to have a rather similar political agenda to that of Dickens, to promote freedom and these types of ideas, but to stop short of revolution. As her caution here shows, she supports the extension of the vote yet does not want that to then become a complete overturning of the established governmental system. Further, while Eliot rarely speaks directly on politics, one should not assume that she did not follow carefully the political developments in England. The day after she sent off the manuscript



of “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt” Eliot was to be found sitting for “eight hours in the gallery of the House of Commons, listening to the debate on Abyssinia, where Napier had been sent to take control, one of the first steps towards British imperialism in Africa” (396). Albeit through quiet and roundabout measures, Eliot still makes sure she is well-informed of the cultural and political climate of England, which serves as points for her characters to take up in debate in the pages of her novels.

### **Dickens and Eliot: The Woman Question**

Social reform in nineteenth-century England is not limited to the extension of the vote or legislation to provide more assistance for the poor. The cause of women’s rights, as has been noted previously, becomes a topic for legislating bodies as well as in the everyday lives of British men and women. In this realm of social reform, one finds the unlikely voice of Charles Dickens taking up the cause of the rights of women, or at the very least, society’s responsibility to women. For a man who is rumored to have once declared that he could not understand why his wife kept having children, this is not an area in which one would expect him to be supportive. Eliot seems a far more likely choice for the beginnings of what would become feminism. She is, after all, a woman forced to hide her identity behind a male pseudonym who is also pushed in her moral bounds to enter into an unconventional marriage with George Henry Lewes because of England’s restrictive laws regarding divorce. Yet, the direct voice of social reform comes not from her but from Dickens.

Dickens enters the discussion of women’s rights and society’s responsibility to women in a rather characteristic manner, through a project for reform. Dickens’s conviction that best “line of protection against the criminality of adults was the education of children of both sexes”

(Kaplan 146) is shown through his support of the ragged schools, and it is through this belief that Dickens becomes connected with Angela Burdett Coutts, the daughter of the radical political leader of the 1820s Francis Burdett. Kaplan describes Miss Coutts as “combin[ing] evangelical ardor for strict Church of England sectarian good works with shyness, insecurity, loneliness, immense fear of being exploited, and a coolness of temperament that kept her always on the distant side of warmth” (147). Her fears likely being grounded in her reputation as being the richest woman in England, Dickens approached her carefully. However, what is important to note is the way in which Dickens chooses to work with Miss Coutts, an unmarried woman who is attempting to use her fortune to do good works rather than secure a husband. Dickens describes his relationship with her as being characterized by “a most perfect affection and respect for her,” even saying years into their work that he felt for her “as always the love of a brother” (147). It could be argued that Dickens perhaps simply knew how to work with Coutts in such a way as to have access to her resources, but his views of other women do not support this claim. He describes meeting “the illustrious” George Sand, noting particularly that there was “nothing of the bluestocking about her,” even though she was well known for being assertive and self-confident in her views (Kaplan 341). Further, when presented with gossip about “the notorious Mrs. Caroline Norton, the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s beautiful granddaughter, having further damaged her reputation by assisting a young friend to elope,” Dickens responds not by condemning her, which is the implied response in sharing gossip in such a way, but rather he takes her part in the idea, saying, “I’m sure I should be very happy to help anybody run away” (132). When taken together, Dickens appears to be far more ready to see women as intellectually capable of being independent individuals and even agrees that women are equal to men in many of the same fields in which he participates – social reform, authorship, and even marital

unhappiness.

Dickens's attitude toward women is important, but what may be the most overwhelming evidence of Dickens's interest in the causes of women is his participation in Angela Coutts's Urania Cottage project. Rather than serve as a silent partner as many philanthropic men were likely to do where women's causes were concerned, Dickens actively works on behalf of this plan to help redeem former prostitutes. In its conception, the home would provide a shelter for women so that they could leave the profession of prostitution; once there, they would be provided with training that would allow them to work and break the cycle of poverty and resist the lure of desperately needed money that prostitution had to offer. In November of 1847, Urania Cottage opened. As Kaplan notes, Dickens spends the next ten years working on behalf of Urania Cottage, "as if the redemption of a small number of fallen women symbolized the potential for wider salvation" (228). For Dickens, the results shown in his work there reaffirmed his view that prostitution and other social ills are the result of an oppressive cultural system that did not allow for redemption or compassion. In fact, Dickens connects the causes for the creation of a group of fallen women as very similar to those upon which he elaborated in the *Daily News* as responsible for other types of crime:

Since society offered few economic opportunities for women outside the home, those who had been deprived, by accident, by drunkenness, by poverty, by seduction, by crime, by the immoral elements within patriarchy, of an appropriate domestic environment inevitably turned to prostitution once their alternatives had been exhausted. (Kaplan 261)

Yet, one should not assume that Dickens intends to completely revolutionize gender relations; he still seeks compromise as he has done in other areas of reform. As such, one goal of the Urania Cottage project is to remove the women to a new location where they might start over free from prejudice regarding their past lives: "Only the prospect of marriage in a context free of past

associations could be sufficient incentive for former prostitutes to give up their long-earned and endured vices” (229).

Projects to reform fallen women were not uncommon in the Victorian era, yet Urania Cottage stands apart, particularly in the way in which Dickens and Coutts approach the women they want to help. Dickens writes to Coutts in the planning stages of their work:

The design is simply, as you and I agreed, to appeal to them by means of affectionate kindness and trustfulness, – but firmly too. To improve them by education and example – establish habits of the most rigid order, punctuality, and neatness – but to make as great variety in their daily lives as their daily lives will admit of – and to render them an innocently cheerful Family while they live together there. On the cheerfulness and kindness all our hopes rest. (*Dickens Letters*, 186)

Their joint involvement in the project saw Dickens doing more than handling business matters.

Kaplan writes that Dickens “was familiar with the histories and personalities of every one of them [the former prostitutes taken into the cottage]” (228). From his experiences of revulsion in seeing wretched prison management as well as the institution of slavery, Dickens strives to create a different environment for these women, even if they have transgressed both moral and legal boundaries. His letter written to persuade women to enter Urania Cottage exemplifies this attitude.

Known as “An Appeal to Fallen Women,” Dickens’s letter first establishes the tone with which he wishes to work with these women. He writes, “And do not think that I write to you as if I felt myself very much above you, or wished to hurt your feelings by reminding you of the situation in which you are placed. God forbid! I mean nothing but kindness to you, and I write as if you were my sister” (*Dickens Letters*, 187). Deconstructing this letter is necessary, as it serves as a good conduit through which to see Dickens’s view of women who find themselves in situations that would lead them to be social outcasts. First, Dickens assures the woman reading

the letter that he does not consider himself above her, hinting perhaps at his early life that found him visiting his own father in a debtor's prison. Further, Dickens's letter does not patronize the woman who reads it, asking instead for her own active role in reformation because she is capable of making such decisions for herself:

But, consider well before you accept it... You must resolve to set a watch upon yourself, and to be firm in your control over yourself, and to restrain yourself; to be patient, gentle, persevering, and good-tempered. Above all things, to be truthful in every word you speak. Do this, and the rest is easy. But you must solemnly remember that if you enter this Home without such constant resolutions, you will occupy, unworthily and uselessly, the place of some other unhappy girl, now wandering and lost; and that her ruin, no less than your own, will be upon your head. (*Dickens Letters*, 188)

The admonishments here are not to submit to external rule but rather to work to change themselves in an environment where help will be made available to do so. Failure is entirely possible, in Dickens's view, if the woman enters the Home with no desire to work on her own behalf. More so than just her own failure, Dickens warns that the woman who does not work on her own behalf holds the responsibility of possibly having turned away some other woman who would have made good use of the opportunity. While the reasoning is certainly designed to persuade, it does approach women with the assumption that reason and logic are not skills of which they are incapable, and that they do not, in virtue of being women, simply need a strong figure to force them to a better course of action. That Dickens himself makes this assumption says much for his views of women, even if they should be in a fallen state when Victorian mores condoned the view that they could be considered so degraded as to cease to be the concern of any upstanding member of society.

As an established author, Dickens is often approached to give his support to projects of social reform and other political matters. The same is true for Eliot, perhaps even more so given that she occupies a rather unconventional position in society. As Haight notes, "Misled by

Eliot's open defiance of the marriage convention, reformers of all kinds tried to enlist her help" (396). Yet, rather than choosing a similar path to Dickens, Eliot acts in keeping with her former views of the role of the author and attempts to stay out of the realm of direct social reform.

When Mill introduced his amendment to extend voting rights to women, Eliot seemed to many to be a natural advocate for the cause. However, Eliot declines, writing to John Morley, "If I were called on to act in the matter, I would certainly not oppose any plan which held out any reasonable promise of tending to establish as far as possible an equivalence of advantages for the two sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development" (Haight 396). This reply certainly seems to imply that Eliot might help the cause had she not added that the condition of women should produce the result in society of "a sublimer resignation in woman and a more regenerating tenderness in men," noting that these were likely derived from "the peculiarities of my own lot" that gave her "idiosyncrasies rather than an average judgment" (Haight 396). While this view first seems odd from a woman who so dared to defy convention on many levels, it can be seen as an extension of the political compromise Eliot always strives for in her views of society. Rather than a revolution of equality, Eliot would prefer lend her voice to a society of more egalitarian principles in which men would recognize their legal power and use it judiciously and women could in turn express their own abilities in the safety of a less oppressive society.

Despite refusing to become involved in Mill's political reform movement for women's right to vote, Eliot has supported him in the past during tenure as co-editor of *The Westminster Review*. The two find their common ground in the realm of education. Mill is an advocate of allowing women to be educated in the same way as men as has been demonstrated in his *The Subjection of Women*. For her part, Eliot is in agreement with Mill, although she is cautious to

maintain her distance in the public eye of such a view, choosing always her vision of the role of the author in social reformation. She writes to Barbara Bodichon about Emily Davies' work to establish a women's college, expressing a desire to promote women's education outside of her own authorial voice: "There are many points of this kind that want being urged, but they do not come well from me, and I never like to be quoted in any way on this subject. But I will...ask you to prevail on Miss Davies to write a little book which is much wanted" (*Letters*, IV, 425). To Miss Davies herself, Eliot writes a letter expressing her views of women's education which align closely with those that Mill proposes in his own work:

The answer to those alarms of men about education is, to admit fully that the mutual delight of the sexes in each other must enter into the perfection of life, but to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgment may be as far as possible the same. (*Letters*, IV, 468)

Thus, Eliot's view of compromise in the political arena does not extend to total submission of women to the authority of men who must be trusted to be compassionate. Rather, women should be given the same tools as men that are acquired through education so that they may be effective partners in the relationship between men and women, whether that be familial bonds, marriage, or even friendship.

It is through her own intellectually equal friendships that Eliot chooses to pursue supporting women's causes, and in many ways, one may see Eliot's views reflected in the company she keeps. While Eliot often does not put herself before the public eye, she maintains strong connections with other intellectuals who did, furthering their own views with her private support. She and Lewes were cordial with Anthony Trollope, himself not unfamiliar with writing social critiques, as well as Robert Browning and even Wilkie Collins, Dickens' protégé and close friend (Haight 371). Collins' work in the sensation genre often highlighted the

vulnerable role of women in marriage and under the law, which parallels many of Eliot's own concerns shown through her works.

In addition to literary figures, Eliot maintained relationships with many people associated with social causes. Among the most constant visitors are Rosalind Howard and her Trinity College-educated husband, George Howard. Rosalind was "an ardent champion of feminist causes all of her days," and her husband's Trinity College connections only furthered Eliot's own friendships with other Trinity Fellows (Haight 392). Gradually, Eliot's home, known as the Priory, began to be a hub of intellectual life. Haight explains that even her irregular marriage was overlooked – "it was not forgotten but it was regarded as an exception" – in favor of the "attraction of her name and personality" which made "the Priory the centre of the most interesting society in London" (406). The conversations of Eliot's society, both her own and those whom she gathered around her, created an atmosphere that she attempts to capture in a poem named "A College Breakfast-Party." This poem derives its subject matter from "her impressions of her talks with the young Trinity men during her first visit to Cambridge" (507). While not a publication that earned much recognition or money, Eliot publishes the work as a way of participating in the intellectual conversation that she only publically partakes in through her works.

Her connection to the Trinity men would bring her further into contact with methods of supporting her cause of women's education. Henry Sidgwick was one of these Trinity men, and he quickly became a trusted friend of the Leweses, with the couple staying with the Sidgwicks for five days while their new home in Witley was being made ready for the arrival. What makes Sidgwick stand apart from many of the other Trinity connections is his devotion to women's education. In 1871, Sidgwick established Newnham College, the second university to accept



women after Girton College. During her visit to the Sidgwick's home in 1877, Eliot visited both Newnham and Girton, even visiting with students at Girton (Haight 504). Through her connections and support of other pioneering intellectuals, Eliot maintained her own support for the furthering of women's causes.

As may be noticed, most of Eliot's close connections are men. For a woman concerned with feminine causes, this strikes one as odd. Further compounding this confusion is Eliot's own seeming diffidence where female equality is concerned, which has been shown in her refusal to support women's suffrage. This dichotomy has sometimes led to Eliot not being considered a strong voice for women's causes. In fact, in her review of *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, Carol A. Martin references this scholarly debate as "the vexed question of George Eliot and feminism" (201). This confusion of where to place her in the realm of the woman question is a trait she shares with Dickens. Where Dickens's actions may speak louder than his words, Eliot's words show us far more insight than perhaps her actions do.

As those who surrounded Eliot were quick to notice, women were often drawn to the author. Haight writes of "Eliot's extraordinary attraction for women" and that it was seen "throughout her life" (493). Social class also did not seem to be a barrier, despite her own dubious social standing. Eliot even attracted the attention of Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne, who was genuinely interested in higher education for women. Lewes narrated the meeting of Eliot and the Princess in his journal, referring to Eliot by his nickname for her that also reflects her attractiveness to everyone – Madonna: "[The Princess] showed her pleasure in a very unusual way, for instead of Madonna being presented to her she asked, immediately on arriving, to be presented to Madonna" (Haight 501). It is telling that a woman with an established interest in feminine education would seek out the company of Eliot, even more

intriguing that her work and personality are so powerful that her otherwise unlikely social advancement is successful.

Later in Eliot's life, she attracted the ardent devotion of a woman who was revolutionary in her own right, Edith Simcox. Haight's description of Simcox captures the variety of her interests and passions, almost all of which were centered in women's causes. She wrote articles on women's education, women's suffrage, and the employment of women. More than just writing on the topics, she also was a businesswoman, undertaking an enterprise with Mary Hamilton to "conduct a successful shirt-making company in SoHo to employ women under decent working conditions" (494). Simcox's attentions to Eliot were extreme in their love and devotion, writing at one point about Eliot, "Day by day let me begin and end by looking to Her for guidance and rebuke, ... make a dread rule to myself out of the vow that every night what has been done ill or left undone shall be confessed on my knees to my Darling and my God" (Haight 495). While flattered by the attention and very much friendly toward Simcox, Eliot finds herself in the awkward position of being unable to return that kind of affection even though some of earliest friendships with men were marked by the same passionate devotion. As has been noted previously, Eliot feels her unique circumstances give her a particular view of life and that it is one that leaves her finding little in common with other women. It is in this explanation that Eliot must make to Simcox that one is able to fully understand Eliot's complicated relationship with other women.

The conversation between Eliot and Simcox marks what may be one of Eliot's few direct statements about herself and her relationship with other women. Simcox powerfully relates this conversation in her autobiography:

Then she said – perhaps it would shock me – she had never all her life cared very much for women – it must seem monstrous to me. I said I had always known it.

She went on to say, what I also knew, that she cared for the womanly ideal, sympathised with women and liked for them to come to her in their troubles, but while feeling near to them in one way, she felt far off in another; the friendship and intimacy of men was more to her. Then, she tried to add what I had already imagined in explanation, that when she was young, girls and women seemed to look on her as somehow ‘uncanny’ while men were always kind. (qtd. in Haight 535)

While this knowledge is difficult for Simcox to accept given her level of devotion to Eliot, it does provide some explanation for Eliot’s ambivalent relationship to feminism in her own life. Further, Eliot’s experiences as a child can be connected to how many of Eliot’s female characters find no sympathy or help from other women who are so devoted to social custom that they overlook or even condemn a woman in need. In her own life, Eliot always wishes to help women in need, even if she is concerned that they may somehow not understand her choices in life.

Eliot’s life exhibits one difficulty that Dickens did not face – the possibility of remarriage, or in Eliot’s unique case, her first legal marriage. After Lewes’ death in 1878, Eliot found herself very much alone as her family had long since withdrawn support of her lifestyle. As a man in nineteenth-century society, when Dickens separated from his wife, he was certainly free to maintain his own independent life. While Eliot had lived independently for a short time in her youth, it was not viable for a woman in the nineteenth century to maintain an independent, working life. It is important to understand the way in which Eliot handles this difficult aspect of feminine life as it directly reflects the pressures of society on women that both authors will take up as a source for their fictional representations of women. For Eliot, it seems that societal pressure may have prevailed at the end of her life. Rather than continue to struggle against expectation, Eliot married a friend of the family for many years, John Cross. Eliot’s friends had become accustomed to her defiance of the marriage convention and “were more shocked by her

lapse into convention” than by her “quarter-century of marriage outside the law” (Haight 543). Yet, others saw a different side to her decision. Annie Thackeray Ritchie writes of Eliot’s remarriage, “She is an honest woman, and goes in with all her might for what she is about” (qtd. in Haight 542). Where some saw Eliot as finally giving in to convention and others believed that she felt actions should be pursued to their fullest extent and marriage with Lewes was impossible, it may be a combination of the two that is closest to the actual circumstances. Just before her marriage Eliot visited Mrs. Burne-Jones, an old friend, and the change in Eliot was remarkable to her: “She looked so unfit to do battle with daily life, that in spite of all her power, a protective feeling rose in my heart” (qtd. in Haight 537). Eliot herself notes a change in her outlook on life, telling Burne-Jones, “I am so tired of being set on a pedestal and expected to vent wisdom” (qtd. in Haight 537). Eliot, much like many of her most beleaguered female heroines, finds that fighting social convention comes only from much effort, and effort becomes very hard to give after the support system she had built up in her partnership with Lewes was removed by his death.

Both Eliot and Dickens take up the idea of the potential for women’s societal rejection and the need for a support system for these women in their works, which is what drew Dickens to Eliot as a potential contributor. In carefully studying the lives of authors, it can be forgotten that the London literary world is rather small, with most authors having read the work of their contemporaries. However, Dickens and Eliot have a more complex relationship than simply reading each other’s works. Dickens used his role as publisher to approach the up-and-coming author known as George Eliot in the hopes of publishing her next work.

While working as editor of *All the Year Round*, Dickens searched for authors to fill his pages, but his fastidious nature would not allow him to simply accept any work. As such, he

devoted a great amount of time to attempting to secure the authors he thought best upheld his vision for the publication. In 1859, Dickens found he was in need of a new work for serial installments to follow the conclusion of the publication of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. His thoughts turned to Eliot, whom he knew through his acquaintance with George Henry Lewes. It is of particular interest that in the midst of publishing Collins' novel that is highly critical of the legal system that traps women in brutal marriages and makes them simply a means of having property and wealth, Dickens would think of Eliot who was also an acquaintance of Collins. Her characters and plot concerns match more than just Dickens's themes in his journal, they match his philanthropic interests as well. In fact, Dickens is drawn to Eliot's *Adam Bede* where he found the story of Hetty Sorrel's tragic life an "extraordinarily subtle and true" depiction of [her] character" (Kaplan 430). Dickens even personally visited Eliot to court her for his work, dining with the Leweses at Holly Lodge; he wrote only four days later asking for a novel from the author and assuring her (through Lewes) that "an immense new public would probably be opened to her, and I am quite sure that our association would be full of interest and pleasure to me" (*Letters*, III, 203). Though Eliot ultimately declined, the relationship between the two remained friendly and occasionally offered opportunities for the two to socialize together. The fact that the two authors maintained a similar circle of friends further allows one to see how their lives and works are more closely intertwined than first glance might imagine them to be.

While religious beliefs are not always a strong motif in either author's works, it is interesting to note that where there were religious affiliations, both Dickens and Eliot aligned themselves with the Unitarian Church. Dickens actually becomes a member of the church, citing his reasons as common sense and a devotion to social causes. At the end of 1842, Dickens wrote

of his decision, “Disgusted with our Established Church, and its Puseyisms, and daily outrages on common sense and humanity, I have carried into effect an old idea of mine, and joined the Unitarians, who *would* do something for human improvement, if they could; and who practice Charity and Toleration” (Kaplan 175). Dickens’s philanthropic concerns combined with the common themes of his work are in keeping with this type of religious concern; he would rather a religion focused on good works than doctrine.

Yet, Dickens was not an overly religious man in his own right, which allowed him to feel little discomfort in the fact that his acquaintances the Leweses were not really churchgoers at all. In fact, they were atheists. As Haight observes, “Their friends were amused that two such staunch unbelievers should live in a house called the Priory” (453). These amused friends included Dickens, who wrote jokingly to Lewes, “On Sunday, I hope to attend service at the Priory” (Haight 454). While Eliot and Lewes were not formally members of any church, it became necessary with the death Lewes to find some manner in which to conduct his funeral service. Dr. Thomas Sadler, a Unitarian minister, was chosen to conduct the service, which he did “using most of the order of the Prayer Book with discreet Unitarian omissions” (550). Fittingly, when the need for some form of religious order arose, Eliot turned to a religion of good works and charity. For Eliot’s death in 1880, the same order of service would be used.

However this decision might have secretly vindicated Dickens’s choice of religious institutions, he was no longer living to express his satisfaction. Charles Dickens died in 1870, only three months after visiting the Priory. Eliot was not oblivious to the growing illness of their friend, noting that despite his telling a story quite well, he looked “dreadfully shattered” physically (Haight 423). In much the same way Dickens was once willing to open up a new audience for the emerging talent of Eliot, Eliot assisted Lewes in holding up Dickens’s memory

for the admiration of the reading public. She worked with Lewes, reading Dickens's *David Copperfield* to him as he prepared an article of commemoration for the *Fortnightly*. It is a fitting tribute indeed that the characters of Dickens's famous fallen women Little Em'ly and Martha would be the subject of their final tribute to him just as Eliot's famous fallen woman Hetty Sorrel was what drew the great author to recognize her work those many years ago.

## Chapter Two: The Fallen Woman

### Introduction

As the lives of both Charles Dickens and George Eliot indicate a concern for the lives of nineteenth-century women, so, too, does their work as authors in creating characters that exemplify their ideals and attempting to teach the reading public. The binary structure of patriarchy in Victorian England produces a binary structure among women as well. There are essentially two types of women – those who are approved and thus respectable and those who fall into disapprobation and are thus considered fallen women. The second term, *fallen women*, implies the nature of its binary counterpart, an ideal held to lofty standards. In this study, we will consider the implications for successful and viable womanhood, with the important recognition that it is the fallen woman that often became a source of fascination in the nineteenth century.

In *Woman and the Demon*, Nina Auerbach dramatically describes the figure of the fallen woman as “heartbreaking and glamorous” whose “stance as galvanic outcast, her piquant blend of innocence and experience, came to embody everything in womanhood that was dangerously, tragically, and triumphantly beyond social boundaries” (150). Further, she notes particularly that in the novels of both Dickens and Eliot “the equivocal figure of the fallen woman is a recurrent, troubling presence, while in [the authors’] lives, she grows into a symbol of wished-for, almost magical transformations” (179). Where Auerbach is arguing for a revision of the myth of the fallen woman as a literary figure, this study chooses to look at the second aspect of her statement, the fallen woman as a potential for wished-for transformations. By examining the fallen women of Dickens’s *Bleak House* and Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, one will find that these women who seem to have the least to offer may actually hold the key to understanding what is needed



for womanhood to become a successful venture. Through studying ideas of social and moral punishment in response to their perceived transgressions, and in witnessing the tragedy of these lives that Dickens and Eliot dramatize for their readers, one may see what society must transform into to help women find a viable existence.

### **Social Transgressions: The Creation of the Fallen Woman**

The transgressive action of fallen women is typically that of sexual immorality. J. A. and Olive Banks briefly summarize the attitude of Victorians toward sex, particularly the double standard of morality:

In its most obvious form it involved, as is well known, the imposition of a far stricter sexual morality upon middle-class women than upon the men of the same class. Chastity, both before and after marriage, was regarded as desirable for a man, but it was a necessity for any woman who wished to retain even the semblance of respectability. (107)

In fact, the culture of forbidding women from sexual agency took action to keep women as ignorant of sexual knowledge as possible. Medical education of women's reproductive systems was even regarded as a topic not suitable for women themselves. In the formal political sphere, legislators were shocked at the petition drive led by Josephine Butler to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act. The Contagious Diseases Act allowed policemen to detain women suspected of prostitution and force them to undergo compulsory medical examinations for venereal disease. The fear of women's supposed corruption gave rise to the alarm that greeted the petition's receipt. Sir Henry James' aversion to women speaking on such matters is shown in his tone when he states, "We learn from their Petitions and their statements that they 'thoroughly understand the subject' and know the effect it has alike on the physical and moral health of the community" (*Hansard* 452). He then proceeds to draw a moral conclusion about these women

based on nothing more than their ability to understand the social and medical effects of such practices: “That is one of the effects of the entrance of women in political life. The question is, whether you would wish to see it extended, and, if so, to what extent, for to what it might lead us no one can tell” (452).

However, restricting practical knowledge of sex is not the only concern of nineteenth-century society. In practice, the moral double standard “covered a much wider field than the single insistence on female chastity” (Banks 108). Because they believed “the very knowledge of sexual immorality was harmful to their womenfolk...the Victorians banished sexual topics from their drawing-rooms and exerted a stern censorship on those publications which were for mixed reading” (108). One example of texts intended for mixed reading is the novel, which makes the separate decisions of Dickens and Eliot to include the fallen woman in their work a somewhat avant-garde choice that also forces them, as authors, to tread carefully throughout the narrative in order to maintain acceptance by the mainstream reading public. One could not use the novel form as a social tool if one finds him or herself rejected immediately by being too overt with his or her themes.

The fallen woman, at times, seems to be such a staple of Victorian ideology that her actual criminal state is easily forgotten or ignored. The popular figure of the fallen woman is the prostitute, and while prostitution may have been a somewhat condoned practice at the time, it was not legal. While prostitution was often the end of the journey for fallen women, the beginning could very well have been a loving relationship outside the confines of marriage. Such a relationship would still make the act criminal, at least for the women involved. A brief re-examination of English law will better explain the situation in which a woman could find herself. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 granted the right of divorce to both men and

women, but the conditions under which the petition could be brought were different between the sexes, again demonstrating the sexual double standard that underlies feminine existence. A man would be allowed to file for divorce based on the infidelity of his wife alone; no other extenuating circumstances would be needed for him to begin legal proceedings. A woman, however, would not only have to prove adultery but also an extenuating circumstance such as desertion, rape, cruelty, incest, sodomy, or bestiality (Banks 107). The obvious double standard under the law was impossible even for the male-dominated legislature to ignore, and thus it was discussed in the debates leading to the passage of the Act. As Mary Poovey writes, “The debate in the Commons, in other words, did not address the issue of the sexual double standard so much as it invoked it,” using the common argument that “only a woman’s infidelity could produce ‘spurious offspring’ and so jeopardize the legitimate transmission of a man’s property” (61-2). The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 does more than simply provide a guideline for divorce proceedings. By creating the Act in such a way as to make adultery legal for men, it decriminalizes the act of sexual immorality on a larger scale. If sexual immorality is not illegal for men, the fact that a woman could be sued for divorce because of it makes her act of sexual immorality illegal for some other cause than just the adulterous act in and of itself. In this case, adultery is illegal because she could produce a child from an unapproved union that would create difficulties with inheritance and finance. Hence, the crime is not sexual immorality but the agency of the sexual act being taken away from the husband and assumed by the woman. By being her own agent, the woman’s choice of sexual partner could negatively influence the power of her husband to effectively utilize the material benefits of masculinity. To extend this idea, even sexual relationships that women entered into before marriage could be considered illegal as well as immoral because the assumption of sexual agency is simply not allowed for women. In

this circumstance, the power over a woman's sexual agency resided in her father who would ultimately make the decision regarding her marriage. The father then transfers the power of sexual agency to the woman's husband as her marriage then places her under the law outlined above that grants only the man the expectation of fidelity in marriage. In the broadest application, women's free sexual expression is criminalized as it takes power away from the patriarchal structure and hinders its ability to exercise full control of its masculine power, an aspect of which is the repression of female sexuality for its own masculine ends.

### **Foucault and Bentham: Punishment, Panopticon, and Panopticism**

With feminine sexuality then criminalized on a number of levels, ranging from adultery and premarital sexual behavior to even more nebulous acts of expressions of sexual agency, the concept of punishment for societal disapprobation must be explored. In addition to a rigidly structured patriarchal system, the nineteenth century also entails a shift in the concepts of punishment and rehabilitation – one that reflects the Victorian discomfort with a focus on the physical body. The landmark study of this penal reform and the society the prison begins to reflect is Michel Foucault's 1975 text, *Discipline and Punish*.

Foucault points to the reform acts passed in 1832 that introduce attenuating circumstances to the implementation of criminal sentencing as one mark of a shift in the handling of criminal cases. Criminal punishment in the eighteenth century was characterized by an astonishing number of offenses being punished by process of public hanging. The reform acts in the nineteenth century significantly reduced the number of offenses punishable by hanging. Yet, it is the spectacle of public hanging, and by extension, any form of public punishment, in the eighteenth century that is important to understanding the shift away from public punishment

in the nineteenth century. Public punishment is more appropriately referred to as penal torture, which Foucault explains is “a differentiated production of pain, an organized ritual for the marking of its victims and the expression of the power that punishes” (34). The liturgy of punishment is calculated; first, it “must mark the victim” by the process of pain being inflicted that correlates to “the quality, intensity, duration of the pain, with the gravity of the crime, the person of the criminal, the rank of his victims”(34). Then the public torture and execution “must be spectacular, it must be seen by all” (34). Thus, the concern is not for the criminal *per se* as much as it is for marking the criminal as a societal outcast – the Other – and then expressing the power of the penal structure to regulate the deviance of an individual. The focus lies in the body of the criminal and extorting pain and inflicting death upon that body for a crime rather than focusing on the criminal as an individual or the product of circumstances.

In noting that these changes allowed for a lessening on the hold over the physical body of the prisoner, Foucault's work also demonstrates a shift in the justice system which reflects the Victorian concerns of the body as an object. Foucault describes these new concerns in punishment: “In the old system, the body of the condemned man became the king's property, on which the sovereign left his mark and brought down the effects of his power. Now, he will be rather the property of society, the object of a collective and useful appropriation” (109). However, lest one should interpret this movement as a weakening of the system of punishment, it should be noted that in taking this action, society actually strengthens its hold on criminals and non-criminals alike. It is a process through which one may “shift the object and change the scale. Define new tactics in order to reach a target that is now more subtle but also more widely spread in the social body” (89). Society is now a part of administering the punishment of the criminal rather than the outside force of the sovereign or his designees. What comes with this

charge is a social responsibility to report wrongdoing and to fear being cast out of society even further should one commit a crime as it is a dual rejection of respectability – one has deserted his responsibility and has opened themselves up to becoming the Other.

When combined with Victorian fears of the body, as exemplified earlier in the concerns surrounding the dissemination of information regarding women's bodies, the shift from punishing the body to reforming the criminal begins to make ideological sense as well. First, society takes a more active role in the punishment of individuals, which serves the purpose of creating a more vigilant and self-policing society. Further, when seen in the same context with the prevalent evangelical Christian concerns with public morality and modesty that preached deprivation of bodily desires as a path for eliminating sin, removing the spectacle of torture, a base public gratification, and turning to the idea of reclamation works well with a religious ideology intended to gain repentance and then upright living. Accordingly, the desire to reform criminals and to understand their motivations – rather than simply punish – fits nicely into the social landscape of the nineteenth century.

Importantly, Foucault's text does not simplify the process to argue that culture affects all aspects of social development. Rather, it allows one to see that it is not the culture that forms the prison and the focus of punishment; rather, the roles are reversed. The changing landscape of the power of the sovereign being wielded through a show of force also allows for a change in the way discipline and punishment are implemented in a society. Perhaps then the focus on the prison in Victorian culture is not so macabre as it first appears. The desire to punish drives and motivations rather than simple acts and the desire to rehabilitate rather than extract some basic form of recompense are both reflected in the way society begins to police itself, which leads to Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's Panopticon in the broader idea of panopticism.

In order to contextualize the concept of panopticism, one needs a solid foundation in the project for the perfect prison created by philosopher Jeremy Bentham. To begin his work, titled simply *Panopticon*, Bentham first defines the purpose of the perfect type of confinement. Interestingly, he feels that any situation that could require confinement – hospitals, asylums, work houses, even schools – could benefit from his method. Ultimately, what he wishes to prove is that in all situations, what is required above all other circumstances is surveillance, and the Panopticon as a physical structure can accomplish this with a very economically sensible approach toward staffing and construction. What is important to our study is the concept of surveillance and the ways in which it can be extended to society as a whole.

To begin, we must first examine the way Bentham understands the concept of surveillance and applies it to his Panopticon. He begins his work by describing the ideal circumstances for surveillance in the structure:

It is obvious that, in all these instances, the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose X of the establishment have been attained. Ideal perfection, if that were the object, would require that each person should actually be in that predicament, during every instant of time. This being impossible, the next thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should *conceive* himself to be so. (4)

The fact that the prisoner will always feel as if he is under surveillance, even if at that particular moment he may not be, then creates a system of self-policing, which Foucault notes in his work is one benefit of a penal system less focused on inscribing punishment on the body. Bentham's method is psychological, and it is most fully achieved by use of clever construction in building the Panopticon as a physical structure.

The overall schematic of the building is crucial to the implementation of surveillance that feels constant. Bentham details the structure carefully:

The building itself is circular. The apartments of the prisoners occupy the circumference. You may call them, if you please, the *cells*. These *cells* are divided from one another, and the prisoners by that means secluded from all communication with each other... The apartment of the inspector occupies the centre. (5)

As one may see, the prisoner is always visible to an inspector who resides in the center of the Panopticon, and the round shape prevents corners or other spaces where cells and their inhabitants could be less visible. Yet, there are far more precautions than simply shape to allow for the most effective surveillance. The cells all have a large window at the back, secured of course, but which forces the prisoner to be consistently back-lit, eliminating the possibility of darkness within which the prisoner could hide. They are lit at night by artificial lighting mounted on the inspector's lodge in the center of the circular structure. The goal all of these precautions including a thinner grating for the cell doors is "not to screen any part of the cell from the inspector's view" (5). As a final isolating technique from the prisoner's physical perspective, partitions are used that extend into the passageway to prevent inauspicious communication between cells and the further benefit of being able "to cut off from each prisoner the view of every other" (5). Thus, the prisoner is unable to form any connection with other prisoners; in fact, his only experience of the prison itself would be his own isolation.

The final component of the Panopticon that completes the psychological effect of constant surveillance is the construction of the inspector's apartment in the center. Bentham devises an innovative technique whereby the inspector is able to assume an ever-present visage despite never having to physically see him:

To the windows of the lodge there are *blinds*, as high up as the eyes of the prisoners in their cells can, by any means they can employ, be made to reach. To prevent *thorough light*, whereby, notwithstanding the blinds, the prisoners would see from the cells whether or no any person was in the lodge, that apartment is divided into quarters, by *partitions* formed by two diameters to the circle, crossing each other at right angles. (5)



The physical space occupied by the inspector is constructed to be impenetrable by the eyes of the prisoner and also serves to reinforce psychologically the prisoner's vulnerability by visibility with the inspector's security. To further disorient the prisoner and to keep the actual physical location of the inspector unknown at all times, Bentham suggests using a small tin tube to communicate with prisoners by means of acoustics from the lodge itself. Therefore, the inspector could be in the lodge, always watching, or he could just as easily be on the floor of the prison itself; the prisoner will never be able to know and will thus behave as if he is always under surveillance. Rather than fully rely on the feeling of surveillance, however, Bentham instructs that the inspector should make his presence known from time to time by correction and instruction in activity. He underscores the importance of this action by relating, "the greater chance there is, of a given person's being at a given time actually under inspection, the more strong will be the persuasion - the more *intense*, if I may say so, the *feeling*, he has of his being so" (11). Thus, the prisoner is always aware of the potential for surveillance and will learn to restrain his actions and eventually will be trained to follow the rules if for no other reason than for fear of being seen not following the rules and punished. The goals of punishment that Foucault outlines as "penal torture" are achieved without the physicality that was associated with them previously.

Even Foucault's idea of a society more involved in the policing structure can be found in Bentham's prison. Given the nature of the work, and despite the psychological feeling created in the prisoners, the inspector cannot always watch each of the prisoners. However, one of the benefits of the physical structure of the Panopticon is that the main vantage point for watching the prisoners is the lodge in the center, and the inspector himself is not always needed for the surveillance:

A very material point is, that room be allotted to the lodge, sufficient to adapt it to the purpose of a complete and constant habitation for the principal inspector or head-keeper, and his family. The more numerous also the family, the better; since, by this means, there will in fact be as many inspectors, as the family consists of persons, though only one be paid for it. Neither the orders of the inspector himself, nor any interest which they may feel, or not feel, in the regular performance of his duty, would be requisite to find them motives adequate to the purpose. Secluded oftentimes, by their situation, from every other object, they will naturally, and in a manner unavoidably, give their eyes a direction conformable to that purpose, in every momentary interval of their ordinary occupations. It will supply in their instance the place of that great and constant fund of entertainment to the sedentary and vacant in towns - the looking out of the window. (11)

With the arrangement of a fully functioning household inside the Panopticon, the other members of the household become, at the very least, passive observers of the prisoners. In this manner, the surveillance of the prisoner would be far greater than in the prison systems that were currently in use in England at the time. Further, society at large has a place in viewing the Panopticon as Bentham proclaims that the best way to prevent any corruption of a public institution is by public access: “[T]he doors of all public establishments ought to be, thrown wide open to the body of the curious at large - the great *open committee* of the tribunal of the world” (13). With the prisoner on display to not only the inspector and his family but also the public, he is effectively marked as Other, which fulfills the second half of what Foucault identifies as socially necessary for the punishment of the criminal.

The fact that Bentham’s prison was never actually constructed does not diminish its place in the landscape of transgressions and punishment of the nineteenth century. In fact, it was not for ideological but rather political reasons that Bentham’s project did not reach fruition. The Panopticon itself is an idea that captures in great detail the process by which policing becomes a social action as well. Foucault suggests that in understanding the mechanisms of punishment, in this case Bentham’s prison which answers for the nineteenth-century desire to reform without

punishing the physical body, we are discussing bodies “conceived not as a property, but as a strategy” and that its “effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’ but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings that one should decipher as a network of relations constantly in tension, in activity” (26). The Panopticon is a series of complex tactics that open a field for understanding not only a prison but a system of punishment whose functionings and manoeuvres were extended into the social fabric of Victorian England as society at large became the Inspector in the panopticon of the world around them.

A part of the social fabric of Victorian England is the novel, and the novel itself can function as way of observing the panopticon as it is constructed through cultural means. Where D.A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* argues for a view of the novel as complicit in monopolizing the power of social institutions whose authority could come into question, I argue that Dickens and Eliot are attempting to subvert the power of the panopticon in order to call those social institutions into question. Dickens’s *Bleak House*, which will be our first novel of study, is constructed as a mystery. The solving of the mystery inherently entails surveillance, and on that note, the readers of the novel who are also trying to solve the mystery, are invited to feel themselves in the role of the Inspector in the Panopticon, using the power of the panoptic gaze to attempt to judge the characters in the novel. By the same token, Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, our second novel of study, utilizes a narrative focus to capture the idea of the panopticon, giving us a view into every aspect of the character’s lives, yet also forcing us to serve as a passive observer and potential judge within the cultural panopticon, much like the Inspector’s family in Bentham’s model. In fact, Bentham did not limit his construction of the Panopticon to the idea of a prison nor to an application solely for men. While he mentions the usefulness of such a model for other institutions requiring isolation, such as hospitals, it is his application of the

model to boarding schools that is most relevant to this discussion. After weighing the benefits of keeping schoolboys from mischief against the detriments of a potential lack of socialization, Bentham turns to the idea of a boarding school for girls founded on this method. Tellingly, there are no detriments he sees in this application. In fact, Bentham states, “[w]hat advantage might be made by setting up a boarding-school for young ladies upon this plan, and with what eagerness gentlemen who are curious in such matters would crowd to such a school to choose themselves wives, is too obvious to insist on” (40). In this last formulation, Bentham brings the discussion around to the most perfect application of all, the isolation of women and the ability of men to freely use the panoptic gaze for the sole purpose of choosing a wife. Female autonomy, and even female camaraderie, have no place in the Panopticon as a school, just as female autonomy and to a certain extent female camaraderie, in the form of solidarity, have no place in the cultural panopticon of nineteenth-century society. The structure of the physical Panopticon can be seen in the way the patriarchal structure focuses on the isolation of women, the use of the panoptic gaze on feminine bodies, and the surveillance and ultimate punishment of dissenters used to preserve the power of the patriarchal system.

The focus of social policing in this context is that of women, the ways in which members of the patriarchy police women’s bodies and behaviors. To elaborate upon this concept, I will extend the use of David Buchbinder’s term, *patriarchal panopticism*. In his *Studying Men and Masculinities*, Buchbinder discusses the way in which a patriarchal panopticon exists, creating a system in which men’s behavior is codified, evaluated, and perhaps punished in the effort to preserve the power that resides in the patriarchal structure. As he writes, “[B]ecause the patriarchal order makes power and status available to those males who conform to its requirements and prohibitions, it is in men’s vested interests to preserve that order” (81). This

argument may be extended to women as well, whose submission to masculine authority was considered necessary to maintaining the power and status available to conforming men. As such, both conforming men and women would serve as the Inspector in the panopticon system, evaluating and reporting behavior that does not conform with the ultimate goal of preserving patriarchy.

In very important detail, Buchbinder describes the process of patriarchal panopticism where men are concerned:

Because *both* the inmates of the cells *and* the concealed observer consist of the collectivity of men, the panoptic effect of the patriarchal order is carried out on individual men by all other men. In other words, each man must perform his masculinity to the satisfaction of other men, and in turn must function with other men, as the observer and judge of the gender performance of other males. This means that there must necessarily exist a distance between one male and others ... It is useful, therefore, to think of the patriarchal order as a kind of panopticon, keeping all males under observation in order to control their behavior to ensure that the criteria of masculinity are observed and maintained. (81)

In concluding this discussion, Buchbinder notes that there is a complementary system in place for women that seek to reproduce the criteria of femininity. Yet, a complementary system is not quite accurate. As noted briefly above, the patriarchy that polices a woman is made up of not just men but also members of her own gender – this feature is not reproduced in the patriarchal panopticism of men as women are not accepted critics of masculine gender performance in the nineteenth century. As Buchbinder’s argument concludes, the continued potential for being observed and potentially even violently censured ensures that “even in private, men tend to behave according to the norms of masculinity as if they were under actual and continuous observation” (81), which further establishes the connection to Bentham’s Panopticon and its ability to create the psychological effect of continuous observation even when none may actually exist.

The psychological effects of a perceived continuous observation are heightened in women as the potential for actual observation is increased by social contact not only with men but other women as well. With the rise in the employment of domestic servants, even middle-class women rapidly became ladies of leisure, attending to “her morning calls, her tea and whist parties, [and] her balls and receptions” that all brought her into the company of other women as part of her social obligations (Banks 67). Thus, women are, in effect, rarely given a release from the actuality of observation by the very nature of her proper performance of the gender expectation, and proper gender performance becomes the only approved occupation for women as there is no realm of work deemed appropriate for middle and upper class women that could take her out of the home or away from the carefully observing eyes of the multitudinous Inspectors of the patriarchal panopticon.

The silent suffering and cultural tragedy of women punished in the patriarchal panopticon of the nineteenth century is brought to the attention of the reading public by two of its most loved authors – Dickens and Eliot. In *Bleak House*, Dickens offers readers an exploration of the fallen woman with quite a distance to fall; Lady Dedlock is the height of fashionable society until her past becomes a subject for recrimination and places her under the power of the physical embodiment of patriarchal panopticism, Josiah Tulkinghorn. Eliot brings another perspective of the same plight, the lower-class woman in the pastoral countryside who finds herself vulnerable to the patriarchal panopticon after her brief affair with a wealthy landowner. *Adam Bede* follows the path of this young girl who learns that navigating the world of patriarchal panopticism does not just mean protecting oneself from men but women as well.

### ***Bleak House: Lady Dedlock and Patriarchal Panopticism***

Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* presents itself as the story of Esther Summerson, yet the corresponding life of Lady Dedlock at times overshadows Esther's narration of the events that surround her own life. To understand the dominating figure of Lady Dedlock, one must first examine her place in the novel as a character. In a fashion that is characteristic of nineteenth-century novels, and particularly Dickens' novels, the total scope of the novel unfolds through the stories of a large number of individuals from the heights of society to the poor crossing-sweeps of London. Perhaps Lady Dedlock's story captures readers just as much as Esther's because she is revealed to have connections to every level of society in a way that relates to the cultural touchstone of the lady of good breeding who finds herself cast out due to indiscretion, the fallen woman.

Dickens' novel is structured as a mystery, and to find one place in the novel that coherently relates the entirety of Lady Dedlock's history is not an easy task. However, aside from the necessity of delaying revelations for dramatic effect, this structure also serves to underscore the concept of the panopticon, where every person is watchful of the other and always obtaining information and capitalizing on it to consolidate power. Thus, we have Lady Dedlock's secret past related to us by a variety of sources. We learn from extorters that there was a "Captain Hawdon, and his ever affectionate Honoria, and their child" (462). Interestingly, Dickens chooses to name his fallen woman Honoria, with the intrinsic implications of honor as a virtue that the name implies. As Honoria Barbary was Lady Dedlock's name before her first and only marriage, this means any child produced in this relationship is illegitimate. Yet, Lady Dedlock is revealed not to have tried to hide the child because she was given the false information that the baby had died at birth. Another of the extorters relates, "I helped to bring

up Miss Hawdon, her ladyship's daughter. I was in the service of her ladyship's sister, who was very sensitive to the disgrace her ladyship brought upon her, and gave out, even to her ladyship, that the child was dead" (464). Inspector Bucket attempts to tactfully relate the information to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock's husband, of her "lover before you courted her and who ought to have been her husband," emphasizing again that this lover ought to have been her husband to imply the immoral sexual nature of the relationship (460). Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester's lawyer, relays the final pieces of the puzzle as to why Captain Hawdon could never have been Lady Dedlock's husband; she was from a good family and he was "a young rake" who was a "captain in the army, nothing connected with whom came to any good" (363). Finally, Lady Dedlock was told that Captain Hawdon died in the course of his service, which turns out to be another falsehood. All of these individuals use this information to attempt to snare Lady Dedlock in a trap that will gain them some power for reporting the offense against gender norms to the punishing forces of the patriarchal panopticon. Even the name she comes to take as her own is symbolic of the situation in which she finds herself, there is no action she can take to change the course of her own life – she is in a state of deadlock with familial and societal forces. Believing she is a fallen woman with no hope to salvage a relationship that she desperately wanted to succeed because of the disapproval of her family and then her lover's supposed death, Honoria Barbary agrees to marry Sir Leicester Dedlock as her family arranges. Lady Dedlock is not fallen due to wanton behavior; rather she is forced into the position of a fallen woman by the machinations of her family who refuse to allow her a marriage for love rather than social advantage, which would allow them more power in the patriarchal structure that utilizes marriageable women as a tool for gaining political influence and financial security.

The plot devices that bring all of these secrets to the forefront of the novel are ones that



nineteenth-century readers would expect, marriages and questions of inheritance, but they are all set against the backdrop of larger questions of English legal apparatus, particularly Chancery. While there have been some critiques of the coherence of Dickens' novel that argue that Lady Dedlock's narrative has only a tangential connection to the overall theme of Chancery, it is my argument that the unraveling of the mystery of Lady Dedlock's life fits quite well within the questions that Chancery is attempting to answer. In the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce that dominates the novel, the question is essentially that of inheritance: what makes someone a legal heir, and who has the most right to the money in question? In focusing on the legality of inheritance, two concepts are immediately made clear – heirs are established by a patriarchal system that declares male family members to be preferable to female ones and sexuality must be regulated by marriage to produce legitimate children. These concepts and questions all directly relate to the experiences of Lady Dedlock, whose child is revealed to be Esther Summerson, in that she has a child who could be a threat to Sir Leicester's estate, which is Tulkinghorn's concern, and the fact that she did not regulate her sexuality to marriage, producing illegitimate offspring that serves as a threat to the patriarchal structure. It is this perceived threat to the patriarchal structure that drives Lady Dedlock's sister to first attempt to break off her disadvantageous relationship and then to conceal the child that could threaten the marriage the family does manage to contract for Lady Dedlock. Thus, Lady Dedlock's first introduction into the punishing forces of patriarchal panopticism comes not at the hands of men, but at the hands of her own sister, leaving Lady Dedlock to lament upon realizing the betrayal: "O my child, my child! Not dead in the hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!" (261-2). Because of Lady Dedlock's refusal to acknowledge the rules of the patriarchy that demand legitimate heirs, she is

forced to give up what would have been considered her most natural role in Victorian womanhood, being a mother, and is then cast out of her own family after being married to Sir Leicester.

The question of Lady Dedlock's agency is rather difficult, but it is necessary to consider as it directly relates to how she moves forward in her life after her marriage. Rather than shrink from her position as a fashionable lady, she attempts to be the wife that she believes Sir Leicester deserves. He married somewhat below his station in choosing her for his wife, and Lady Dedlock never wishes to cause him embarrassment or shame. In fact, as she tells Esther, "I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!" (323). Part of her responsibility to society as Sir Leicester's wife is to engage with others and be charming, yet she warns Esther never to believe that this is how she truly views herself:

If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered, think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her if you can, and cry to heaven to forgive her, which it never can!" (325)

Lady Dedlock's view of herself demonstrates her submission to the patriarchal panopticon that has already demonstrated its power to her in shaping her life in exactly the opposite way than she wished to live it. By being forced into a fallen state, Lady Dedlock acknowledges that she now has very little hope of redemption or forgiveness: "I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it" (323). Tellingly, Lady Dedlock no longer seems to recognize that much of the secret she is forced to keep has been artificially placed upon her by the manipulation of her sister and

others. She assumes full responsibility and guilt due to the fact that the patriarchal panopticon ceased to regard her as innocent from the moment she had a child outside of wedlock.

Lady Dedlock's isolation can best be understood through a connection to Bentham's Panopticon in that the prisoners are all cut off from one another through a series of physical boundaries. While Lady Dedlock is not physically isolated, although one could argue that her two homes in which she feels bored to death serve as their own type of prison, she does know quite keenly that she is unable to form any meaningful connection with another person based solely on truth because it would lead to her rejection from society and the meager amount of companionship she currently has. Thus, isolation serves the same purpose in society as it does in Bentham's prison. In the prison, the goal is to prevent the prisoners from being able to collaborate and possibly rebel against the Inspector. For Lady Dedlock, she is prevented from discussing her situation with anyone who might be able to show her that she has been forced into her situation by supporters of the patriarchal panopticon in the guise of her own family.

Lady Dedlock's fears of the specter of patriarchal panopticism are rendered even more palpable when one considers the character of Josiah Tulkington, Sir Leicester's lawyer. In fact, Tulkington can almost be seen as a physical embodiment of the ideas of patriarchal panopticism from his role in the household as a representative of the law to his role in Lady Dedlock's life as the holder of her secret. In response to Esther's asking if she the person she dreads is an enemy, Lady Dedlock gives a description of Tulkington:

Not a friend. One who is too passionless to be either. He is Sir Leicester's lawyer, mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses. . . . He is always vigilant, and always near me. I may keep him at a standstill, but I can never shake him off. (324)

Further, Tulkington is characterized as having no sense of compassion. Esther offers that

Tulkinghorn might have pity or compunction that would grant Lady Dedlock some sympathy, but Lady Dedlock refutes this supposition: “He has none, and no anger. He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it” (324). Comparing Tulkinghorn to the apparatus of patriarchal panopticism is fruitful. Where the system features ever watchful members of society acquiring information with an intent to preserve the power structure in place and increase one’s own standing within it, Tulkinghorn’s relationship to the Dedlock household is the same by Lady Dedlock’s descriptions. It is not a personal motive that drives him but a mechanical one – the machine-like workings of patriarchal panopticism that punish without regard to circumstance with the singular aim of maintaining its own power. Tulkinghorn as an individual seeks to be an impeccable member of this system and increase his own status by punishing those who could be a threat to it.

Through a series of suspenseful chapters, Dickens guides his readers through the ways in which patriarchal panopticism punishes those who have transgressed its rules through the particular example of Lady Dedlock and her battle with Tulkinghorn. After carefully compiling the story of Lady Dedlock’s past, Tulkinghorn reveals his knowledge to her in front of her husband, although through the use of a fictitious story to avoid exciting Sir Leicester’s suspicions. His descriptions of the great lady in the story not only work to let Lady Dedlock know that he has discovered her secret but also to reify her own feelings of guilt and to imply that she should feel even more. He imputes intent and implies that she does not deserve her position: “[T]his lady preserved a secret under all of her greatness, which she had preserved for many years” (363). He further accuses her of calculating her own marriage to Sir Leicester, saying that with “[t]he captain in the army being dead, she believed herself safe” (364). In

adopting these tactics, Tulkinghorn reveals that the first method of punishment is psychological, choosing to torture the “criminal” rather than simply turning her over for punishment, which in many ways is reminiscent of the psychological effects of Bentham’s Panopticon on the prisoners held within it. Those prisoners were intended to fear surveillance as well as the punishment for wrongdoing that could be observed while under surveillance. Tulkinghorn is attempting to use this moment as a turning point to make Lady Dedlock aware of his surveillance of her and to leverage his power as the Inspector of the patriarchal panopticon.

Lady Dedlock, for her part, shows that she is not willing to outwardly submit to Tulkinghorn’s authority, and she attempts to deal with the situation as an equal businessperson to Tulkinghorn. Rather than beg for mercy, she calmly attempts to ask the lawyer what would be necessary to obtain her husband’s release from their marriage and if there is anything she can do to help him: “You have prepared me for my exposure, and I thank you for that too. Is there anything you require of me? Is there any claim I can release or charge or trouble that I can spare my husband in obtaining HIS release by certifying to the exactness of your discovery?” (366). However, Tulkinghorn is not pleased to find his victory so easily admitted; he does not wish Lady Dedlock to assume such power over her own discovery as it is his power to hold over her. It is not a satisfactory result to simply punish Lady Dedlock in absentia but also to rehabilitate her in such a way that she does not try to assume agency against the wishes of the patriarchal system, which corresponds to the shift in the punishment of prisoners in the nineteenth century that seeks not to physically punish but to rehabilitate morally. Tulkinghorn’s physical responses demonstrate his concern, “contract[ing] his eyebrows” and shaking his head when she declares she will leave the house and her position instantly (365-6). Lady Dedlock even acknowledges that she understands what he wants to hear – “Of repentance or remorse or any feeling of mine,

... I say not a word. If I were not dumb, you would be deaf. Let that go by. It is not for your ears” (366) – but she refuses to give him this as it would mean giving up the last bit of agency she feels remains.

Lady Dedlock’s battle to retain at least part of her own agency is not a battle she is capable of winning, however. Tulkinghorn recognizes that the one point Lady Dedlock is trying to avoid is exposure of her secret to her husband in her presence. Thus, he seizes control through her last fear: “Lady Dedlock, have the goodness to stop and hear me, or before you reach the staircase I shall ring the alarm-bell and rouse the house. And then I must speak out before every guest and servant, every man and woman, in it” (367). With that, as the narrator notes, “he has conquered her” because when he has seen “indecision for a moment in such a subject, he thoroughly knows its value” (367). The balance of power shifts back to the status quo in this instant, and Tulkinghorn returns to his position as punisher in the patriarchal panopticon having quelled Lady Dedlock’s small rebellion. As Dickens’ work asks us to see, even a rebellious attitude toward ultimately granted submission cannot be tolerated under this system, effectively refuting any claims that women are allowed a modicum of independence as long as general submission is given. Tulkinghorn pushes this point even further when in telling Lady Dedlock exactly what she will now do, he asks, “Pardon me, Lady Dedlock. This is an important subject. You are honouring me with your attention?” Despite knowing that he now holds all of the power, Tulkinghorn must extract verbal confirmation of the last aspect of submission before feeling satisfied of his position.

The arrangement that Tulkinghorn first determines for Lady Dedlock is to simply remain exactly as she is. While one might be tempted to read this as a sympathetic gesture, it is actuality because he must decide how next to proceed and needs time to find the most advantageous plan.

In this purgatorial state, Lady Dedlock lives in the presence of Tulkinghorn. The narrator describes this experience of Lady Dedlock living in the presence of her tormentor in terms that echo those of the inescapability of the patriarchal panopticon. Despite the secret being known between them, the narrator acknowledges “[t]heir need for watching one another should be over now, but they do it all this time” (366). The act of watching continues, even if it is likely that it is no longer necessary, just as it is the Panopticon of Bentham’s imagining. In Bentham’s prison, the Inspector is always watching, even though the prisoner is effectively subdued in the confines of the structure. This serves as a form of disorientation in the prison, creating the image that the Inspector is ever present and could notice any action, whether or not he is actually watching at the time. In knowing that Tulkinghorn could reveal her at any moment, Lady Dedlock experiences a similar form of disorientation, regarding surveillance as constant and the possibility of punishment as imminent. Furthering the psychological aspect of Tulkinghorn’s punishment, Lady Dedlock is even unable to speak with her husband without Tulkinghorn being present: “Always at hand. Haunting every place. No relief or security from him for a moment” (413). Much like a prisoner who has been found guilty will be remanded to custody and reminded of his guilt, Lady Dedlock is not allowed to feel as if she is innocent from the moment of her discovery forward. Her punishment under the patriarchal system has already begun with one member of the panopticon’s overt surveillance of her every action. In fact, Tulkinghorn seems to be very aware of both his and her place in the patriarchal panopticon:

“The power of this woman is astonishing. She has been acting a part the whole time.” But he can act a part too. His is one unchanging character and as he holds the door open for this woman, fifty pairs of eyes, each fifty times sharper than Sir Leicester’s pair, should find no flaw in him. (417)

Where he marvels at Lady Dedlock’s ability to act as if she is in control when she is not, he recognizes that he is in control and that he acts from a position of approbation. No one can find

a flaw in him, which makes him a worthy judge of Lady Dedlock in his own estimation and that of others who wish to be conforming members of the panopticon.

In the final resolution of Dickens' study of punishment, Tulkinghorn decides Lady Dedlock has acted outside their arrangement and determines to reveal her to her husband. Again, he seems to interpret her action as an affront to his authority and dismantles the agency he fears she has tried to reassume. When she refers to the past as her secret, Tulkinghorn stops her: "It is no longer your secret. Excuse me. That is just the mistake. It is my secret, in trust for Sir Leicester and the family. If it were your secret, Lady Dedlock, we should not be here holding this conversation" (418). In essence, Tulkinghorn finally severs Lady Dedlock even from the actions she took in her past: her loving a man outside of her class, her sexual acts, and even the birth of her child. Her agency is firmly removed, and these actions are reduced to the symbolic power that they give Tulkinghorn. In turn, Tulkinghorn relates this power to upholding the reputation of the patriarchy, meaning himself, Sir Leicester, and what he refers to as the family, which is comprised of the legitimate claimants to the name Dedlock as determined by a patriarchal inheritance. Even when Lady Dedlock asks for him to spare an innocent young woman whom she was sponsoring, Tulkinghorn refuses: "As to sparing the girl, of what importance or value is she?" (418). Further, Tulkinghorn reveals that he sees even this act as a show of agency, remarking to himself, "SHE cannot be spared. Why should she spare others?" (418). Interestingly, Dickens seems to use Tulkinghorn's own marvellings to make sure that readers are understanding the importance of this interview. Tulkinghorn looks wonderingly at Lady Dedlock: "'This woman . . . is a study.' He studies her at his leisure, not speaking for a time" (419). Much like the prisoners in Bentham's Panopticon, she is to be under surveillance but not for the purposes of interaction or understanding, only to see the curiosity of transgression



and the transgressors. He leaves, promising to reveal her soon, but declining to say exactly when – a final act of power calculated to show Lady Dedlock her utter dependence upon him now. Cultural crimes are translated to literal crimes, however, as Tulkinghorn is found the next morning, “lying facedownward on the floor, shot through the heart” (421).

Tulkinghorn’s death works on one level as a fantastic plot twist, moving the action from one discovered secret to another that is yet to be unraveled. However, to further the study of patriarchal panopticism, Tulkinghorn’s death functions in two ways. The first is to point out what Dickens may actually feel about the manipulations of Tulkinghorn and the many representatives of the panopticon who behave in a similar fashion. There is very little remorse at his death shown by anyone who really knew him, and the reader is not encouraged to feel sympathy for Tulkinghorn. The second is to draw a new contrast for readers to understand about Lady Dedlock and her past. What Tulkinghorn was treating as a crime and punishing by the same penal methods is not a matter for the police; Tulkinghorn’s murder, however, is a matter for the police. With the necessity of the police, Dickens brings the character of Inspector Bucket to the fore.

Introduced in previous sections, Bucket’s importance to the furtherance of the plot is now clear, and Dickens uses this character to full effect in solving the remaining mysteries of the novel. Yet, it is his interaction with Sir Leicester, particularly in his role as mediator with the potential extorters, that demonstrates to the reader the differing ideas of criminality that we have seen introduced in the text. Bucket’s circumspect description of Lady Dedlock’s past, “a certain person . . . who ought to have been her husband,” shows his deference, but does not explain it outright. On the surface, Bucket could simply be recognizing the vast class difference between them and be acting in accordance with them in order to avoid offense. However, there is no way

that the errand that brings him to Sir Leicester's house is likely to avoid offense. Given this circumstance, why does he not then simply say what he knows? Another interpretation is that Bucket does not see the social codes as anything more than that. He sees criminals every day, and Lady Dedlock has simply committed a social transgression, not a crime. Rather than judge her and condemn her to her husband, he gives her the respectability that he seems to think she still deserves, especially in the presence of her husband.

With Lady Dedlock suspected of the murder, the reader is invited to jump to the conclusion that many of the others in the novel make – if Lady Dedlock could be an immoral person at one point in her life then she might well be capable of taking an illegal action to secure her safety. The extortioners that visit Sir Leicester accuse Bucket of not doing his job when he does not seem to suspect Lady Dedlock, saying, “We want more painstaking and search-making into this murder. We know where the interest and the motive was, and you have not done enough” (462). The interest and motive is Lady Dedlock's status as a fallen woman. Bucket, however, responds decisively:

YOU want more painstaking and search-making! YOU do? Do you see this hand, and do you think that I don't know the right time to stretch it out and put it on the arm that fired that shot? . . . . The advice I give you is, don't trouble your head about the murder. That's my affair. . . . I know my business, and that's all I've got to say to you on that subject. Now about those letters. (463)

On the surface, it seems that Bucket is simply offended at being accused of not doing his job well or perhaps of even colluding with Sir Leicester to protect Lady Dedlock. A careful analysis of this scene reveals some keys to seeing Dickens' intended contrast. The extortioners are there to trade on their knowledge of letters that incriminate Lady Dedlock for her past relationship and child, and Bucket continually brings them back to that task rather than acting as if it is at all connected to the crime he is investigating. He tells them not to worry about the murder as that is

his affair, and then turns to the subject of the letters, which he consciously separates as another subject by signaling the shift in using the transition word “now” in speaking to them. To Bucket, the murder is an actual crime; what the extorters have come to trade upon is nothing but gossip.

This interpretation of Bucket’s speech receives further confirmation when it is revealed that Lady Dedlock did not commit the murder. Dickens created a character that seemed to have motivation and, to the judgmental eyes of the patriarchal panopticon, the personality to commit the crime, yet he does not make her guilty. In a decision that completes the contrast of Lady Dedlock’s past actions with those of an actual crime, Bucket is asked to find Lady Dedlock, not to punish her, but to save her. The actuality of crime is not synonymous with what Lady Dedlock has done, and Bucket shows this in attempting to reassure Sir Leicester: “And I wish you better, and these family affairs smoothed over as, Lord, many other family affairs equally has been, and equally will be, to the end of time” (483). He does not use the language of crime, but of forgiveness – the smoothing over of family affairs that will bring Lady Dedlock home safely to her ill husband.

The potential extorters view Lady Dedlock’s flight from her home as evidence of her guilt, but Dickens casts this act as an act of desperation due the disparity of power that Lady Dedlock experiences even with her tormentor physically removed from the drama. As the narrator notes before Lady Dedlock leaves, “Her enemy he was, and she has often, often, often, wished him dead. Her enemy he is, even in his grave” (479). Even in his death, Tulkinghorn has more power than Lady Dedlock to control the punishing forces of patriarchal panopticism. Where he has attempted to destroy her life based on his own moral judgments, Tulkinghorn is regarded by many as their friend, but Lady Dedlock is immediately cast out at the revelation of her past relationship, a far less harmful act than Tulkinghorn’s. In fact, Lady Dedlock is still

missing when the forces of patriarchal panopticism begin to level judgments in the form of rumors and gossip. The narrator describes the scene as Sir Leicester lies ill in his home, pining for the return of his wife:

It is given out that my Lady has gone down into Lincolnshire, but is expected to return presently. Rumor, busy overmuch, however will not go down into Lincolnshire. It persists in flitting and chattering about town. It knows that that poor unfortunate man, Sir Leicester, has been sadly used. It hears, my dear child, all sorts of shocking things. It makes the world of five miles round quite merry. (497)

The patriarchal panopticon forces Lady Dedlock into the position of Other and closes ranks to protect Sir Leicester, a male who deserves appropriate treatment. Further, the function of gossip in this section is twofold. First, it reinforces the cultural views of correct and incorrect behavior, reminding all who hear the news of the scandal of taking such action and serving as a type of implied warning to other women. However, it also amuses those who are safely sheltered in the approving eyes of the patriarchal panopticon. In both providing warning to those who might be willing to consider such an act as acceptable and giving a sense of amusement and also relief to those who are not in danger, the story of Lady Dedlock serves the function as a cautionary tale in the social setting.

Even Lady Dedlock's death is not enough to assuage the desire to punish, symbolized particularly in the gossiping old women of London. In notes left behind, Lady Dedlock describes what will become her suicide: "Cold, wet, and fatigue are sufficient causes for my being found dead, but I shall die of others, though I suffer from these" (511). While the literal references that she makes in other sections name her broken heart and guilt, she also notes terror as one of the causes. This terror has come in one main form – Tulkinghorn as the physical embodiment of the forces of patriarchal panopticism. In short, the forces of patriarchal panopticism can force even death upon those who step outside its bounds. At the grave of

Captain Hawdon, Esther finds her “mother, cold and dead” (513). Thus, Esther again stands orphaned despite having just found her parents, the victim of a social structure that would determine the lives of individuals based on a set of standards that do not account for individual expression of personalities.

However tempting it may be for the reader to simply accept Lady Dedlock’s death and move on in the narrative, there is one very important detail of Esther’s finding her mother that should be examined. When Esther first sees her mother’s body, she does not recognize her as such; she thinks the corpse belongs to another woman who Esther describes as a “distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature” (512). In misrecognizing her own mother, even for a moment out of grief, Esther reduces Lady Dedlock to what would be the culmination of being made into the Other. Further, the body before Esther serves as the culmination of the Foucauldian idea of punishing the criminal’s body. Lady Dedlock is transformed for a moment into nothing more than a punished and tortured body, removed from her own identity. Yet, it is through Esther’s love and the men’s decision to let Esther approach the body first because her hands “have a higher right than ours” (513) that Lady Dedlock is restored to her position as an individual. She is no longer a senseless creature but something far more powerful in Victorian ideology – mother.

The narrative of Lady Dedlock’s sad life does not end there, and it is in examining how others react to her life that we find further proof of Dickens intent to expose the destructive force of what has been termed here patriarchal panopticism. Sir Leicester, long the representative of a society that one expects to uphold all social values to the most exact degree, buries his wife “in the mausoleum in the park,” the place of his ancestors (551). The old women, “peachy-cheeked charmers with the skeleton throats,” are the only ones to continue to gossip, wondering that “the

ashes of the Dedlocks, entombed in the mausoleum, never rose against the profanation of her company” (551). Tellingly, however, the narrator is the one with the final word here: “But the dead-and-gone Dedlocks take it very calmly and have never been known to object” (551). In choosing such marginalized figures of patriarchal support as elderly women lacking family responsibilities, it can be inferred that Sir Leicester’s example can silence the stronger forces of the patriarchal system that wish to pass judgment where they should not.

John Jarndyce serves as another representative of the patriarchal structure. The novel invests him with this responsibility in a number of ways, not the least of which is in making him guardian of Esther, Richard, and Ada. As he is supposed to direct their lives toward acceptable means, Jarndyce is expected to represent the appropriate behaviors of society. His reaction to learning of Lady Dedlock’s situation, and the fact that she is actually Esther’s mother, demonstrates yet another moment where men can circumvent the system that makes women virtual prisoners to social judgment. In understanding Esther’s parentage, Jarndyce realizes that his dear friend, Boythorn, had been prevented in marrying Miss Barbary because she was Lady Dedlock’s sister who was raising Esther in seclusion. Rather than blame Lady Dedlock for his friend’s disappointment and furthering the punishment of the patriarchal system, Jarndyce turns to comfort Esther: “He spoke so tenderly and wisely to me, and he put so plainly before me all I had myself imperfectly thought and hoped in my better state of mind” that Esther is touched and blesses him many times. If one is able to move beyond these arcane systems, as both Sir Leicester and Jarndyce seem to characterize them, then one may find the true goodness of the human existence.

### ***Adam Bede: Hetty Sorrel and Patriarchal Panopticism***

Where Dickens' novel gives us a view of patriarchal panopticism that involves acid-tongued upper-class gossipers and dangerous lawyers concerned with financial gain, this is not the only place where one can find the destructive nature of panopticism at work. George Eliot's *Adam Bede* demonstrates a perhaps even more insidious view of patriarchal panopticism that lives within one's own family and hides behind the guise of love while set in the pastoral countryside of England, evoking all the Romantic ideals of simple and honest country living.

Set in 1799 in the small community of Hayslope, *Adam Bede* consists of multiple plots that interlock to provide one view of the society as the narrative moves through the lives of each of the characters. In the opening scenes, Adam and his brother Seth are working with a labourer named Ben who is teasing the brothers for their differing views on religion. Adam represents a far more traditional path, speaking of his pastor Mr. Irwine, "Mester Irwine's got more sense nor to meddle wi' people's doing as they like in religion. That's between themselves and God, as he's said to me many a time" (48). What is of particular importance here is the disagreement that he and Seth have in religion – a divide over women serving as preachers in the Methodist church. Ben reveals Adam's view: "I thought ye war dead again th' women preachin'" (48). In agreeing with the fact that he is against such a profession for women, and in demonstrating his support for Mr. Irwine, Adam allows the reader to see just how a preacher's view can shape a community, particularly one that is already experiencing some upheaval in shifting views of women in religious traditions.

In her characterization of Mr. Irwine, Eliot brings together the connection of religion and custom in a traditional social system that relies on a patriarchal structure to maintain authority:

[Mr. Irwine] would perhaps have said that the only healthy form religion could take in such minds [those of labourers] was that of certain dim but strong

emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties. He thought the custom of baptism more important than its doctrine, and that the religious benefits that the peasant drew from the church where his fathers worshipped and the sacred piece of turf where they lay buried were but slightly dependent on a clear understanding of the Liturgy or the sermon. (946)

As this description outlines, Mr. Irwine's views align an obedience to the patriarchal structure of society with a type of religious experience that is just as meaningful as a strong understanding of doctrines, if not more so. The important aspects of upright living detailed here are family affections, neighbourly duties, and a devotion to the church where a man's father worshipped and the land that symbolizes the family name. In fact, women are not mentioned in this section at all. The peasant is male and the family is completely represented in masculine terms of patrilineage. Further, Eliot connects his views to those of the community even writing that whatever we as readers may feel about Mr. Irwine's lack of strict religious doctrine, "you must have felt that, however ill he harmonized with sound theories of the clerical office, he somehow harmonized extremely well with that peaceful landscape" (966).

However peaceful the landscape of rustic, patriarchal peasants may seem in these idealized portraits, one should keep in mind that women must exist in this atmosphere as well. In Mr. and Mrs. Poyser's household, we are given a view into the domestic world that women occupy in Hayslope. Mrs. Poyser's first description in the novel allows the reader to see aspects of patriarchal panopticism in the domestic sphere: "Nothing could be plainer or more noticeable than her cap and gown, for there was no weakness of which she was less tolerant than feminine vanity, and the preference of ornament to utility" (1017). This preference of ornament to utility that Mrs. Poyser finds difficult to tolerate is often tested by her niece Hetty Sorrel. As Eliot writes of Hetty's cleaning tasks, "Hetty Sorrel often took the opportunity, when her aunt's back was turned, of looking at the pleasing reflection of herself in those polished surfaces" (1003).



Mrs. Poyser's dislike goes beyond sharp looks, however, as it is also written that "her tongue was not less keen than her eye, and whenever a damsel came within earshot, seemed to take up an unfinished lecture" (1017). It is important to note that Mrs. Poyser's concerns are not with the men in her home but rather the other women. Her keen tongue and eyes are reserved for inappropriate female behavior, and she stands ready to give the needed lecture that she believes will place the girl back on the correct path. As such, Mrs. Poyser functions as a female supporter of the patriarchal panopticon, providing the near constant surveillance of the Inspector in the physical Panopticon. Through her aunt's surveillance, Hetty is often punished, which leads to the moments of small rebellion that Hetty takes when she feels she may not be under the panoptic gaze. Further, as Hetty learns which behaviors to display and which to hide, she begins the process of self-policing that is the ultimate goal of panoptic surveillance.

In the Poyser household, Hetty finds herself quite out of line with her aunt's way of thinking. When given attention by Captain Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to the estate on which the Poyser family are tenants, Hetty "dropped the prettiest curtsy, and stole a half-shy, half-coquettish glance at him" (1190). Arthur represents the upper class, with Eliot often referring to him as "the young squire" and pointing out his "high-born humor" (1190). The social positioning of the two characters is a necessary component to understand the relationship that will develop. Hetty is unable to do more than recognize the power he has over her and try to win his affection by being as attractive as possible. Arthur's power lies in his rank, but this scene also demonstrates his power within the patriarchy. It is this tension between desire and responsibility on Arthur's part to behave as befits his station and his place within the patriarchal panopticon that characterizes their relationship.

In their first time to meet alone in the Chase, Arthur is made to feel his power in their

relationship. He unintentionally makes Hetty cry, and in his desire to make her happy, holds her arm – an act she meets with “a sweet, timid, beseeching look” (1890). After being transfixed for a moment, Arthur recognizes that Hetty’s beseeching look gives him the authority in the situation, and it is a realization that makes him uncomfortable. He sends her away and contemplates what he must do:

He was getting in love with Hetty – that was quite plain. He was ready to pitch everything else – no matter where – for the sake of surrendering himself to this delicious feeling which had just disclosed itself. It was no use blinking the fact now – they would get too fond of each other, if he went on taking notice of her – and what would come of it? (1892).

Arthur’s concerns in this passage reveal much about the patriarchal panopticon. He does love Hetty, yet he recognizes his love can come to nothing. The desire for social conformity demanded by the patriarchal panopticon will not allow for their marriage, and that is the only viable path for a relationship. Also, Arthur’s contemplations ask the audience to consider who holds the power; Arthur believes he does, simply by virtue of being a man, but also because of his higher social class. Thus, he assumes a responsibility for the direction of the relationship that is completely outside the realm of considering Hetty’s own desires or seeing her as anything but a pretty representation of a social position. In seeing Hetty in this fashion, even the seemingly kind Arthur is reducing her to little more than a female body upon which to exercise the power that is vested in him by the patriarchal panopticon. It is his action that will determine their relationship and ultimately Hetty’s life.

Where Arthur’s reaction to their flirtation is to think of patriarchal forces that could prevent a relationship and resolve to take action, Hetty’s own reaction could not be more different. She has no education or social training that prepares her for how to interpret Arthur’s attentions. She views herself as the passive recipient of a great gift, which is the proper response

to masculine attention according to the patriarchal panopticon that governs the customs surrounding marriage: “It was as if she had been wooed by a river-god, who might any time take her to wondrous halls below a watery heaven” (1928). It should be noted that in this description that Arthur is portrayed in the role of a god; Hetty is the mere mortal that is granted favor by the powerful being. Further, Hetty’s vanity is encouraged, which may also be an expected effect of an education focused on appearance and marriage. Eliot attempts to describe Hetty’s experience: “If a chest full of lace and satin and jewels had been sent her from some unknown source, how could she but have thought that her whole lot was going to change . . . Hetty had never read a novel; if she had ever seen one, I think the words would have been too hard for her; how then could she find a shape for her expectations?” (1928). Hetty’s experience of Arthur’s growing love is that he will do what she has been told men who loved her would do – he would marry her and she would share in his social world. As Eliot has pointed out, she does not even have the education of novels to tell her that the patriarchal system will not allow for such outcomes, so she dreams of and attempts to secure a life that is not viable.

Arthur’s resolution to end their relationship falls apart when he is next with Hetty in the woods. Rather than hold faithful to what he recognizes as his role in the patriarchal panopticon, he takes their relationship further: “This is not what he meant to say. His arm is stealing around her waist again; it is tightening its clasp; he is bending his face nearer and nearer to the round cheek; his lips are meeting those pouting child-lips, and for a long moment time has vanished” (1952). Yet the feeling of happiness does not last long; Eliot narrates, “But already something bitter had begun to mingle itself with the fountain of sweets: already Arthur was uncomfortable” (1952). It is in Arthur’s self-recriminations following their kiss that we see his direct fear of the patriarchal panopticon. Rather than a concern for behaving well to satisfy his own image of

himself, we now see Arthur struggle with what could be his own punishment for violating the rules of the patriarchal panopticon:

But this little thing would be spoken ill of directly, if she happened to be seen walking with him; and then those excellent people, the Poysers, to whom a good name was as precious as if they had the best blood in the land in their veins – he should hate himself if he made a scandal of that sort, on the estate that was to be his own some day, and among tenants whom he liked, above all, to be respected. (1964)

The fears that Arthur expresses are not that he is deceiving Hetty about his love for her; rather, his fears lie in others' interpretation of those feelings. He worries about scandal, the necessary product of punishment in the patriarchal panopticon which demands its punishments be public, and the family names he might destroy. In the cultural system that prizes patrilineage, Arthur wants respect for his own family name and to avoid causing any disrespect to the Poysers whom he does not identify here as friends or individuals but a representative of their family name. All of these signs set the stage for the ultimate conflict that is to come in the novel with the discovery of his part in Hetty's actions.

Bringing together the larger representatives of the patriarchy and those who may be struggling with it, Arthur decides to turn to Mr. Irwine to help him deal with his temptation to subvert the panopticon. In a further connection to patriarchy, Mr. Irwine has served as a father-figure to Arthur, thus his decision to turn to him also reflects the respect and obedience due to a father that the patriarchy attempts to uphold. As Arthur reasons, "There was but one resource. He would go and tell Irwine – tell him everything. The mere act of telling it would make it seem trivial; the temptation would vanish, as the charm of fond words vanishes when one repeats them to the indifferent. In every way it would help him to tell Irwine" (1978). In turning himself over to Irwine, Arthur is able to gratify several needs – it will prevent him from taking further freedoms with Hetty because he will recognize his visibility to the Inspector of the panopticon,

much like the prisoners in Bentham's Panopticon must recognize that they can never hide from the Inspector in the prison, and he also hopes he will find reassurance that he has not taken any actions that are too deplorable.

Eliot is not content, however, to show us only the male struggle to reconcile oneself to the desires of the panopticon. By showing both Arthur's struggle and Hetty's in paralleling passages, Eliot asks her readers to compare the stakes, noting what Arthur stands to lose versus what Hetty's punishment may be. Where Arthur may lose name and reputation, Hetty may well lose her claim to a respectable life if the patriarchal panopticon disapproves. However, where Arthur is aware of the presence of the Inspector in the panopticon, Hetty is blissfully unaware of even the existence of a panopticon, and that panoptic gaze is beginning to undertake a far more careful surveillance of her. When she returns late after meeting Arthur, she excuses herself by referring to the clocks at the Chase being behind their own. Mrs. Poyser draws a connection that makes it all the more poignant when we know where Hetty has been: "What! You'd be wanting the clock set by gentlefolks's time, would you? An' sit up burnin' a candle, an' lie a-bed wi' the sun a-bakin' you like a cowcumber i' the frame?" (2063). Mrs. Poyser is discouraging Hetty's pretensions toward an upper-class lifestyle, attempting to set the girl on the path of a viable future, in her opinion. In this small way, Mrs. Poyser continues to serve as a representative of the patriarchal panopticon; she sees Hetty's potential for inappropriate behavior and tries to correct it with a mild form of punishment in the shape of her lecture. Even Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher and Hetty's cousin, tries to push Hetty toward an approved life in the panopticon. When she is encouraged to help with one of the children, Dinah hesitates, "not liking to thrust herself between Hetty and what was considered Hetty's proper work" (2099). Where the child refuses to go to Hetty, she immediately goes to Dinah, which signals a subtle

recognition of the change in Hetty after her kiss with Arthur. It is particularly important that Hetty is rejected in a maternal role here. The female body holds its place of authority in the panopticon in one area only – motherhood. The fact that Hetty’s actions now result in a subtle push away from motherhood indicates the ways in which the patriarchal structure will begin to separate her from a useful identity at all under its structure. Further, in a number of ways, the family is already slowly rejecting Hetty, an isolation that will only grow stronger as she pursues the culturally inappropriate relationship further.

Rather than notice any of these subtle punishments or hints toward her correct behavior, Hetty dreams of her life with Arthur: “Captain Donnithorne couldn’t like her to go on doing work: he would like to see her in nice clothes, and thin shoes, and white stockings, perhaps with silk clocks to them; for he must love her very much . . . He would want to marry her and make a lady of her” (2149). Hetty does recognize her aunt’s disapproval, but seems to think that is a personal dislike rather than endemic of an entire panopticon’s opinion. In envisioning her new life as a lady she tells herself, “Everyone would perhaps see her going out in her carriage – or rather, they would HEAR of it: it was possible to imagine these things happening at Hayslope in sight of her aunt” (2162). What she does not recognize is that her aunt’s disapproval is very mild compared to what could be the case for her should she be exposed to the full punishing power of the panopticon. These things are not just impossible because of her aunt in Hayslope; they are not possible anywhere because it disrupts the system of patriarchal panopticism as a whole. In fact, Hetty is so insensible to the respect that the patriarchal panopticon demands, that she is willing to cast off family entirely: “Does any sweet or sad memory mingle with this dream of the future – any loving thought of her second parents – of the children she had helped tend – of any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood? Not one . . . Hetty could

have cast all her past life behind her and never cared to be reminded of it again” (2198). As readers, we have a sense of Hetty’s danger, and we grow more anxious for the young heroine who has no idea how powerful the panopticon that surrounds her actually is.

Mrs. Poyser is not the only one that recognizes the precariousness of Hetty’s situation. Dinah Morris senses that Hetty may be more in need of assistance than Mrs. Poyser, and more importantly, she wishes to offer help rather than punishment. Dinah is drawn to Hetty the evening after her kiss with Arthur, and contemplates her cousin’s lack of understanding:

[H]er thoughts became concentrated on Hetty – that sweet young thing, with life and all its trials before her – the solemn daily duties of the wife and mother – and her mind so unprepared for them all, bent merely on little foolish, selfish pleasures, like a child hugging its toys in the beginning of a long toilsome journey in which it will have to bear hunger and cold and unsheltered darkness. (2249)

It is important that the image of Hetty here is that of a child as it underscores the power dynamic that is in place within the panopticon where women are concerned, child to parent. Dinah represents Hetty in the light of a small child who does not realize the ultimate unimportance of toys in the larger scheme of a life that could easily bring pain. Dinah does not recognize the extent of the trouble in which Hetty has been placed, but she attempts to let Hetty know that she is not alone in the world: “It has been borne in upon my mind to-night that you may some day be in trouble . . . I want to tell you that if ever you are in trouble, and need a friend that will always feel for you and love you, you have got that friend in Dinah Morris” (2289). Dinah’s offer stands in stark contrast to the other women in Hetty’s life that offer only criticisms of her and punishments should she behave improperly. It seems in the panopticon, there is one person who will at least offer a respite from judgment and punishment. While Arthur is searching for this very respite and help in Mr. Irwine, Hetty has it offered to her and does not know to take it.

Where Hetty has an opportunity to easily accept help, Arthur finds himself in the difficult

position of asking for help when he is unsure of the outcome. As Eliot writes of his hesitation, “How could he make Irwine understand his position unless he told him those little scenes in the wood; and how could he tell them without looking like a fool? . . . Irwine would think him a shilly-shally fellow ever after” (2423). Buchbinder describes this process of one that prevents a man from exposing weakness in the face of patriarchal panopticism for fear of punishment. Arthur realizes that “he was conscious of increased disinclination to tell his story about Hetty. He was of an irrepressible nature, and lived a great deal in other people’s opinions and feelings concerning himself” (2448). Arthur’s behavior in this scene demonstrates Buchbinder’s concept almost perfectly, and it is the turning point for the text as it makes the decision to hide from the panopticon and attempt to subvert it. These decisions bring punishment. In conversation with Irwine, Arthur turns to a discussion of punishment for sins and tries to get Irwine to agree with him that circumstances should have an effect on punishment. Irwine’s answer determines Arthur’s final decision: “Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before – consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. And it is best to fix our minds on that certainty, instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us” (2485). Irwine shows his inability to remove himself from judging others; in fact, he goes further to note that consequences are rarely limited to the guilty party. Most importantly, he normalizes this process. Rather than offer comfort, he reminds Arthur that no pity should be expected. In the face of an overwhelming fear of punishment for the actions he has taken even so far, Arthur is unable to turn to Irwine for help as he shows himself to be a representative of the patriarchal panopticon Arthur knows to fear. Even in his own family, Arthur knows that patriarchy does not often breed love. His grandfather does not seem to care for Arthur, and even Mr. Irwine admits in that context, “There’s plenty of



‘unloving love’ in the world of a masculine kind” (3720). With nowhere to turn, Arthur proceeds in his love for Hetty, which is simply a transgression because of her class.

While Arthur’s decision would seem a potentially brave move to pursue love at all costs, the actuality of the situation is less romantic. Arthur fears the punishment of the panopticon, and in turning to Irwine, he shows himself to be even incapable of admitting the transgression he has committed to this point. Arthur is not worried about Hetty in this scene at all; he never considers what could be the damage to her reputation for even kissing a man she should not. In planning to expose himself to the authoritative Mr. Irwine to cleanse himself of his wayward desire to subvert the panopticon, he does not seem to realize that he would be sacrificing Hetty in order to regain the panopticon’s approval. Thus, in Arthur’s deciding to attempt to subvert the power of the panopticon, with all the crushing possible punishments for failure, he makes the same decision for Hetty. Again, Hetty is reduced to a female body to be acted upon rather than join with in a concentrated effort. Unfortunately, the consequences for a female attempt to subvert the power of the panopticon are far greater than what Arthur would experience.

Rather than ending the relationship, Arthur encourages it, even buying Hetty expensive jewelry that cannot be seen by her family. Hetty’s feminine training, shaped by the forces of patriarchal panopticism, has instructed her to never have pretensions beyond her station in life. Demonstrating the behavior of self-policing that Bentham feels the prisoner in the Panopticon will eventually develop, Hetty tries on these gifts only in private. In one scene, she admires her new earrings, taking a moment to put them on, but “only for a moment, to see how pretty they look, as she peeps at them in the glass against the wall” (3620). Further, she chooses to wear a locket that Arthur has given her, noting that she “must keep it under her clothes, and no one would see it” (3632). All of these secretive actions hint toward the power from which Hetty is

attempting to hide. Eliot's commentary as the narrator watching Hetty try on her jewelry foreshadows the punishment she will face as a dissenting woman:

It is too painful to think that she is a woman, with a woman's destiny before her – a woman spinning in young ignorance in a light web of folly and vain hopes which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish. (3620)

Eliot makes clear that her destiny is that of all women, where young ignorance and folly can turn to an insidious form of punishment that suddenly takes the familiar garment of life and strangles the unsuspecting victim in it. Hetty's vain hopes will be the source of her punishment by the patriarchal panopticon, and she is still unaware of what lies before her. Tragically, these vain hopes also serve to isolate Hetty, effectively making her transition into a prisoner within the panopticon even clearer.

Despite the secretive progress of Hetty and Arthur's relationship, one may not hide from the Inspector in the panopticon for long. The panopticon has thus far been shown to include Mr. Irwine and Mrs. Poyser, but the strongest example of the panopticon in Arthur and Hetty's relationship becomes the novel's title character, Adam Bede. In a speech at his birthday, Arthur introduces Adam in such a way that we may read him as an exemplar of the patriarchy and the panopticon: "I think there can be no man here who has not a respect, and some of you, I am sure, have a very high regard, for my friend Adam Bede" (3853). Adam is acquainted with everyone, and his character is held up as a paradigm of sorts in the community. Even Adam himself seems to think he is a good judge for others' behavior. As he tells Arthur of his refusal to fight any more, given his superior strength, he makes on caveat for himself, only if the man "behaves like a scoundrel" because "if you get hold of a chap that's got no shame nor conscience to stop him, you must try what you can do by bugging his eyes up" (2386). A self-appointed judge and

punisher of the patriarchal panopticon, Adam's interest in Hetty as a wife for himself creates a dangerous situation for both Arthur and Hetty as attracting the attention of the Inspector of the panopticon often leads only to punishment.

Unbeknownst to Arthur, Adam has been holding out hopes of making Hetty his wife. Hetty has been aware of Adam's attentions, but as she is not seriously interested in him, she ascribes little seriousness to his feelings. It is Adam's realization of Hetty's affections for his friend that brings the first crushing blow of panopticism and its punishment. Adam, as a representative of the panopticon, does not want to be taken by surprise by information, particularly regarding a woman he feels he has been observing carefully. It is the nature of the panopticon to know all through careful surveillance like that which Adam feels he has conducted, so when he realizes that he might not know everything about Hetty, he becomes alarmed and angry. As Eliot writes, "A puzzled alarm had taken possession of him. Had Hetty a lover he didn't know of? . . . [N]one of her admirers, with whom he was acquainted, was in the position of an accepted lover" (4159). The language chosen to describe his view is important; an accepted lover implies that Hetty has made an agreement with her family to allow the man to court her, but the term also carries with it the idea of an acceptable lover. Adam, in thinking of all those admirers with whom he is acquainted and categorizing them, is aligning himself with being a judge of Hetty's choice as well. In linking her lover to her family and to himself, Adam is removing Hetty completely from the decision that most affects her – what man should be her husband. To Adam as well, Hetty is a female body upon which authority is exercised and nothing more substantial in terms of personal humanity.

Once Adam realizes that Hetty's lover is Arthur, a man not accepted by her family or acceptable by the patriarchal standard, Adam takes recourse in his position of punisher. First,

Adam seems to be offended at his own lack of knowledge, which is revealed to him when he catches Arthur kissing Hetty: “He understood it all now . . . a terrible scorching light showed him the hidden letters that changed the meaning of the past” (4297). With the realization that the panopticon has been subverted and that one of those parties participating in the subterfuge is Arthur, Adam takes more power over his friend than his station would otherwise allow. After all, Adam is laborer, and Arthur is the landowner. Arthur is the one with actual power in the situation, yet Adam feels justified as a representative of the panopticon to begin to inflict punishment. Rather than chasing after Arthur, “Adam had not moved, but stood with his back to him, as if summoning him to return” (4297). Even though Arthur recognizes his own power, he submits to Adam’s authoritative stance because the power of the patriarchal panopticon vanquishes him. As Eliot writes, “And yet he was dominated, as one who feels himself in the wrong always is, by the man whose good opinion he cares for” (4309). Adam begins his punishment of Arthur with a lecture intended to show him that he has imperiled Hetty’s reputation. However, the narrator’s description of Adam’s thoughts reveals a different anger altogether: “Adam at this moment could only feel that he had been robbed of Hetty – robbed treacherously by the man in whom he had trusted” (4333). While Adam is using the language of the protecting panopticon that seeks to punish Arthur for endangering a helpless woman, the truth is far more sinister. Adam insists that Hetty “might ha’ loved me,” even though he has no evidence that this is the case. Hetty’s reputation is not Adam’s concern; what he is concerned with is that he feels he has lost a potential piece of property – a wife. Hetty is simply a pawn in this argument to settle masculine dominance and to punish those who attempt to subvert the patriarchal panopticon. As a result of Arthur’s not behaving in the way the panopticon expected him to do, Adam attempts to fight him physically, an action he previously said he reserved for

scoundrels. It is not until after Adam takes out his rage and nearly kills Arthur with a particularly brutal blow to the head that he finds himself calm enough to consider the future and force the end of Hetty and Arthur's relationship.

Adam's punishment of Arthur begins with an immediate physical struggle that ultimately shows Arthur Adam's physical superiority to him and encourages Adam's feelings of masculine dominance that are due to the punishing Inspector in the Panopticon of Bentham's conception. However, the punishment cannot end there as it does not restore order to the system that Arthur and Hetty's relationship has disrupted. Adam proposes his plan to restore balance, a plan that allows him the possibility to marry Hetty himself:

I ask you to write a letter – you may trust to my seeing as she gets it. Tell her the truth, and take blame to yourself for behaving as you'd no right to do to a young woman as isn't your equal. . . . I must be safe as you've put an end to what ought never to ha' been begun. I don't forget what's owing to you as a gentleman, but in this thing we're man and man, and I can't give up. (4463).

With no other choice offered to him by the panopticon, Arthur acquiesces to Adam's demands. His vain hope is that Hetty may be spared the same punishment Adam is inflicting upon him. As Arthur recognizes, "[I]t was the only way of satisfying Adam, who must be satisfied, for more reasons than one. If only he could have seen her again! But that was impossible; there was such a thorny hedge of hindrances between them, and an imprudence would be fatal" (4548). Just as Dickens shows in Lady Dedlock's relationship with Captain Hawdon in *Bleak House*, there is no love lacking in this relationship only a series of panoptic forces that conspire to make the relationship impossible.

Adam and Arthur's conflict is vitally important to understanding Hetty's position within the panopticon. First, Hetty is regarded as an object to be possessed rather than as a person. Adam insists Hetty might have loved him despite her obvious indifference to him, and Arthur

ultimately chooses to give Hetty to Adam all without her desires being considered even once.

By portraying Hetty as a pawn in this fight for masculine dominance, Eliot is demonstrating that Hetty had no chance of being treated fairly from the very outset when even Arthur, who genuinely seems to have loved her, will sacrifice her to save his own reputation and regain the approval of the patriarchal panopticon.

With Arthur subdued and effectively punished, Adam turns his attention to Hetty. He is less brutal to Hetty because he cherishes the images he has conjured up for himself about Hetty's innate womanhood. Eliot writes that men look on Hetty's beauty and think of "how she will dote on her children!" (2175). As Hetty's actions show in taking care of Totty, she does not like children. Further the men create an image of the home where "the husband will look on, smiling benignly, able whenever he chooses, to withdraw into the sanctuary of his wisdom, towards which his sweet wife will look reverently, and never lift the curtain" (2175). These descriptions are transferred to Adam as Eliot writes that this "was very much the way that our friend Adam Bede thought about Hetty" (2175). All of these descriptions about Hetty's character are drawn from a physical surveillance of her body, placing her in a position of being on display and again objectified. Men are granted the power to create an entire identity for a woman simply through the act of looking, using the panoptic gaze as a way to create suitable wives out of whichever female body the man chooses. As Hetty is presented as such a child-like figure, Adam decides to be straightforward with her and simply deny her the option of Arthur through the letter he has demanded Arthur produce. Hetty finally seems to recognize the power of the panopticon when Adam makes his role as its representative clear. As such, she attempts to manipulate the system in order to still manage to have Arthur: "As long as Adam thought there was any hope of her having him, he would do just as she liked, she knew. Besides, she MUST go on seeming to

encourage Adam, lest her uncle and aunt should be angry and suspect her of having some secret lover” (4596). Hetty underestimates the strength of the patriarchal panopticon, however, as Adam proves when he gives her the letter that he knows will contain a rejection by Arthur as well as a justification for himself to her: “It’s right for me to do what I can to save you from getting into trouble for want o’ your knowing where you’re being led to” (4634). In presenting her with this information, Adam utilizes the panoptic gaze to force Hetty to accept the end of her relationship with Arthur. In speaking to her, he is constantly watching her and underscoring that she is under a surveillance directly synonymous with that of Bentham’s Inspector in the Panopticon. Hetty becomes his prisoner as she struggles to avoid him knowing the full truth of her relationship with Arthur and to avoid punishment:

‘You’ve no right to say as I love him,’ she said, faintly, but impetuously, plucking another rough leaf and tearing it up. She was very beautiful in her paleness and agitation, with her dark childish eyes dilated and her breath shorter than usual. Adam’s heart yearned over her as he looked at her. (4645)

Hetty’s nervousness when confronted with Adam’s power demonstrates her fear, and uncomfortably for the reader, Adam seems to be attracted even to that fear of his power. With all of the patriarchal panopticon’s machinations successfully managed, Hetty is left no other choice than to marry Adam, restoring order to the patriarchal system and rewarding its most vigilant members with the desired outcome.

In the midst of planning her wedding to Adam, Hetty becomes aware of a problem that will change the course of the rest of her life – she is pregnant with Arthur’s child. Although the child was created from love and with no ill-intent, it will be Hetty’s shame and the first outward sign of her punishment for subverting the patriarchal panopticon. Hetty may again be linked to Dickens’s Lady Dedlock who finds herself pregnant with a child that should have been a happy occasion if not for society’s interference. Eliot describes Hetty wandering in the fields,

frightened of her future, “not knowing where to turn for refuge from swift-advancing shame” (5247). Having been shown the dangerousness of being exposed by the panopticon, and realizing that her future husband is a strong representative of it, Hetty tries to choose a path that will hide herself. She considers suicide first, but rejects it: “No, she has not courage to jump into that cold watery bed, and if she had, they might find her – they might find out why she had drowned herself. There is but one thing left to her: she must go away, go where they can’t find her” (5273). Where Hetty was figuratively isolated by her secret relationship with Arthur, she must now seek literal isolation to avoid the panoptic gaze. The question for Hetty becomes where can she run that she can escape the punishing power of the panopticon. As she soon realizes, however, there is nowhere she can go that affords such a refuge.

Arthur had encouraged Hetty to write to him, and she had thus far not done so because “he could do nothing for her that would shelter her from discovery and scorn among the relatives and neighbors who once more made all her world” (5273). Hetty is recognizing now all of the elements of the panopticon that imprisoned Arthur in his search for help – the family names that could be destroyed, the loss of public reputation, and ultimately the punishment for disrupting the order of the patriarchal system. Having already experienced some of this in being left with no other option than marrying Adam, an option she has tried earnestly to make the best of, Hetty recognizes her only hope lies in removing herself from the trappings of patrilineage, meaning she must give up her family and her safety in order to attempt to hide among strangers. The prospect of running to Arthur, the man who would at least share in her shame to some degree, holds “a relief in it which was stronger than her pride” (5285), and Hetty formulates her plan to run to him.

It is important to note how Hetty’s view of life has changed with her experience of



patriarchal panopticism. What started as a fairy tale has become nightmarish: “For Hetty could conceive no other existence for herself in the future than a hidden one, and a hidden life, even with love, would have had no delights for her; still less a life mingled with shame” (5345). In her journey toward Arthur, Hetty’s feelings of being in the panopticon are not lessened by being in the company of strangers. As Eliot writes, “[T]he men stared at her as she went along the street, and for the first time in her life Hetty wished no one would look at her” (5383). Hetty also learns to dislike public houses, despite their necessity, because “there were always men lounging there, who stared at her and joked her rudely” (5396). Significantly, Hetty’s experiences with men primarily reveal their use of the panoptic gaze to abuse a young woman alone and their unflinching tendency to serve as members of the patriarchal panopticon, making her forever feel watched and judged, just as Bentham’s prisoners would forever feel under surveillance in the circular structure of the Panopticon.

While the men in Hetty’s journey are almost always portrayed in this way, the women are a different circumstance. Accustomed to the observing power of women and the likelihood of punishment from her life with Mrs. Poyser, Hetty is skeptical of any assistance being offered from that quarter as well. However, the first overt reference to Hetty’s pregnancy comes from a woman, the innkeeper’s wife, who points out to her husband, “Ah, it’s plain enough what sort of business it is . . . She’s not a common flaunting dratchell, I can see that. She looks a respectable country girl” (5433). It is important to note here that from an authorial standpoint, Hetty’s story from this point forward is increasingly told from the perspective of others, with the innkeeper’s wife revealing the turning point of Hetty’s life. What this type of narration does is force readers to see Hetty as the panopticon sees her, giving us less room for sympathy than we might have otherwise had if the story were related from Hetty’s perspective. However, Eliot is not

discouraging sympathy, but rather, she is encouraging us to recognize the potential difficulty others might have in finding sympathy for Hetty and asking us to overcome it as those in the text should do. Acting according to sympathy can be difficult in the context of the panopticon, but Eliot has worked to create Hetty as a full person rather than a stock character so that we may fully understand the tragedy that is the life of the fallen woman.

Having come in search of Arthur, Hetty is devastated to find that he is no longer in England, having been sent to Ireland with the military. With no familiar face to aid her, Hetty gives birth to the child in the inn. Despite the inkeepers' kindness in not turning her over to any authorities or asking many questions, Hetty is unable to turn to them for help, fearing punishment and wishing to further avoid the panoptic gaze. Leaving their establishment, Hetty resolves to commit suicide, determining that no one "should ever know her misery and humiliation" (5519). Most important to Hetty is to die anonymously: "no one should know what had become of her" (5519). Even with a child, Hetty still wishes to hide from the panopticon, and the only way she can see to accomplish this goal is to remove herself from the panopticon entirely, eradicating her own identity.

In her time of trouble, foreshadowed so long ago by Dinah's words, Hetty remembers her cousin. Hetty has been unable to commit suicide, despite her resolve, as she is not really suicidal. She does not want death, only escape from the panopticon. Rationality begins to fail Hetty as she searches for an escape that is not attainable. Yet even knowing Dinah would comfort her, Hetty realizes that she cannot even see assured love as a way of hiding from the panopticon:

If it had been only going to Dinah – if nobody besides Dinah would ever know – Hetty could have made up her mind to go to her. The soft voice, the pitying eyes, would have drawn her. But afterwards the other people must know, and she could no more rush on that shame than she could rush on death. (5607)

Hetty's isolation is now complete; she fears the panoptic forces so much that she will turn from the help Dinah would assuredly give in order to avoid being seen as a dissenter to the panopticon. Further, the self-policing function is now so well developed that Hetty's refusal to seek help allows for the patriarchal panopticon to punish her more easily as she has already begun the punishment process. Driven to the point of desperation, Hetty leaves her child under a bush where it dies of exposure. Hetty is captured because she cannot ultimately turn her back on the child; she returns to see if a farmer she heard nearby has taken the child and is driven by a spectral crying of her child that is no longer living. Essentially, Hetty turns herself in to the authorities, further stand-ins for patriarchal panopticism, for the crime by not running and by returning to the scene of the crime. Where Dickens's Inspector Bucket is able to draw the distinction that Lady Dedlock is not an actual criminal; the panopticon has driven Hetty to become a criminal subject to not only moral punishment but also legal punishment.

Tragedy does not lessen the effect of patriarchal panopticism in the community. Further connecting Lady Dedlock to Hetty, Hetty's story is related by gossip through the entirety of Hayslope. Eliot notes that neighbors "told Hetty Sorrel's story by their firesides in their old age" (6205). The Poyzers, Hetty's own family, turn away from their relative: "The sense of family dishonour was too keen even in the kind-hearted Martin Poyser the younger to leave room for any compassion for Hetty" (5965). Hetty's familial rejection has been set in motion from the moment of her first kiss with Arthur and was only furthered upon her running away from Hayslope. Upon finding out that Hetty had abandoned Adam, Mr. Poyser tells Adam, "Shake hands wi' me, lad: I wish I could make thee amends" (5811). With the news of Hetty's arrest, the family struggles to salvage its position in the patriarchal panopticon, as Mr. Poyser's conversation with Irwine, another iteration of the Inspector in the panopticon, demonstrates: "I'm

willing to pay money towards trying to bring her off, ... but I'll not go nigh her, nor ever see her again, by my own will" (5963). Mr. Poyser is willing to sacrifice Hetty to save his position, just as Arthur was willing to sacrifice her to save his. Even Adam struggles to overcome his perception of himself as a wronged lover, who has lost not only the image he created of his fiancée but also his vision of his power in the panopticon. Yet, the telling part of this portion of Hetty's story is that she has no part in telling it. In fact, the only way that Hetty is recognized in the courtroom is as a female body on display, awaiting the authority of the panopticon to be exercised upon her as the rest of her tragic past has taught her will be the case. The physical description of Hetty in the courtroom encapsulates the idea of the prisoner in Bentham's

Panopticon:

[Hetty looked] frightened, very frightened when they first brought her in; it was the first sight of the crowd and the judge, poor creatur. And there's a lot o' foolish women in fine clothes...they put up their glasses and whispered. But after that she stood like a white image, staring down at her hands and seeming to hear nor see anything. (6167)

Refusing to speak to anyone after her arrest, Hetty finds that she has no voice in the courtroom as her attorney is not allowed to make a plea for mercy, "a favor not granted to criminals in those stern times" (6281). The system that strove to repress Hetty in action and thought now suppresses her ability to speak so that even her decision not to speak is not her own decision but one of the court, much like the prisoner's one-way form of communication with the Inspector in Bentham's Panopticon. Hetty is sentenced to death without ever speaking one word.

Even with Adam's silent support, Hetty does not speak until Dinah comes to her. With no way of escaping punishment now, Hetty seeks what little comfort she can, and it is through Dinah's work with Hetty and later Adam that we see the rechanneling of the destructive power of the patriarchal panopticon to a better purpose. Dinah refuses to acknowledge the power of

panopticism by confronting it straightforwardly with a stronger power of patriarchal authority – God. In this mission, Dinah pledges to Hetty, “I’m come to be with you, Hetty – not to leave you – to stay with you – to be your sister to the last” (6450). Where Hetty’s family has turned from her, Dinah accepts Hetty, claiming an even closer connection than before, that of sister rather than cousin or friend. With this acceptance, Hetty comes to speak and eventually repent of her actions. Dinah makes sure that Hetty understands that this form of repentance is not that of punishment like the patriarchal system that has placed her in this position but one of love:

If God our father was your friend, and was willing to save you from sin and suffering, so as you should neither know wicked feelings nor pain again? If you could believe he loved you and would help you, as you believe I love you and will help you, it wouldn’t be so hard to die on Monday, would it? (6479).

While Dinah knows she cannot save Hetty from earthly punishment, she wants to show her that not all patriarchal figures are determined to punish with un pitying consequences regardless of circumstances, as Mr. Irwine described earthly judgment to Arthur. Dinah even prays with Hetty through the crowd that has gathered as a ghastly witness to their own power in the panopticon. However, her execution is stopped at the last moment by Arthur Donnithorne, “carrying in his hand a hard-won release from death” (6654). Arthur, too, is seeking redemption for his actions by doing all that is possible with his power to spare her from death, but he is only successful in commuting her sentence to transportation rather than death. In witnessing this moment of punishment moving from a physical exertion of torture upon the body of the prisoner to a moral rehabilitation found in transportation, we see a literal interpretation of Foucault’s idea of how the nature of punishment changes for criminals in the nineteenth century. Hetty is again sent away from all who knew her, demonstrating that, while there may be some pity to be found in the patriarchal system, the panopticon can still banish her from their sight. Hetty finally finds a way to hide, but it is not at all what she hoped it could be.

In a story that seems at every turn to reify the power of the panopticon, one may wonder how Eliot can be using this woman's life to create a claim for a viable existence for women under these circumstances. After all, Hetty is punished repeatedly and even Arthur is forced into an exile of sorts so that Adam and the Poysers can still live on his land without shame. However, Adam does not end the novel as the staunch representative of the patriarchal panopticon that he was at the outset. Even early in the novel, Adam recognizes that his un pitying nature can cause grief to himself and others: "It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my ear gets shut up against 'em, so as I can't bring myself to forgive 'em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul" (2897). With the humbling experience of realizing that he gave Hetty no way to turn to him for help, Adam slowly becomes a new man. In visiting Hetty on her way to the gallows, she recognizes the difference in him: "When the sad eyes met – when Hetty and Adam looked at each other – she felt the change in him, too . . . it was the first time she had seen any being whose face seemed to reflect the change in herself" (6619). In a moment that marks the change in Adam's thinking forever, Hetty asks for forgiveness. Adam is forced to choose to cling to his old beliefs which would mean that he would refuse to forgive her or to choose to seek a new path for himself: "Adam answered with a half-sob, 'Yes, I forgive thee Hetty. I forgave thee long ago.'" (6631).

As an author, Eliot addresses the way in which she wishes readers to use her text when she makes an aside in the middle of the text to address claims of realism and answer the question of why she should tell a story that so many readers would find uncomfortable when she had the power to create it as she liked. As she writes of her artistic choice to not create a happy story, "Certainly I could, if I held it the highest vocation of a novelist to represent things as they never

have been and never shall be” (2510). In establishing realism, Eliot is drawing the connections of Hayslope society to the British society she sees surrounding men and women in their every day lives. She notes that rather than offer support for individuals in difficult circumstances of their own making, “You would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye . . . on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice” (2535). *Justice* is a very important term here as it implies that the action of reaching out to those who may be harmed by others’ rejection of them is the correct path to take. It does justice to individuals to treat them as such and not simply cast them aside if there is a mistake made. Further, Eliot makes sure that her readers note that she is not simply referring to characters in her book. She refers to those she speaks of as real breathing men and women, in short, the people her readers see in their lives every day. There are many Hetty Sorrels and Arthur Donnithornes who need the help of those like Dinah Morris rather than the punishment of the Poysers and the panopticon at large. Further, there are many Adam Bedes who could be converted by reading a tragedy rather than creating one by their own stubborn nature. As Eliot concludes, “It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes” (2560). The patriarchal panopticon is a world of extremes, particularly once one finds him or herself outside of the realm of approbation. If there is no mercy or ability to move beyond such an extreme system, Eliot argues that we have nothing to look forward to than broken men, and particularly women, who take unreasonable action to try to save themselves from an ultimately unreasonable fate.

### **Conclusion: Conventional Endings and Advocating for Change**

In both Dickens's and Eliot's texts, the endings are remarkably conventional, which is unexpected given the critique of patriarchal panopticism found in the experiences of Lady Dedlock and Hetty Sorrel. A common trope of fallen women in Victorian literature is for the woman to eventually die, which satisfies the push for conventionality in the publishing market of the nineteenth century. Lady Dedlock and Hetty Sorrel are not exceptions; Hetty dies upon journeying to return home following her sentence of transportation. Rather than additional punishment, however, these fates can be interpreted to demonstrate the inhospitable society that would not allow such a woman to exist in their midst. In essence, these women die not because of their crimes but rather because of an unfit society that would not know how to incorporate them into an unforgiving patriarchal system. Yet, both of these novels close with images of happy marriages – relationships made viable by the lives of the suffering women who came before them. In *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock's daughter Esther is married to Allan Woodcourt, the man she loves, because Jaryndyce, already shown to eschew the patriarchal system, recognizes what she truly desires and releases her from her promise to him. Her life is one of industry and is never characterized by the boredom that exemplifies most of Lady Dedlock's life in the text. Eliot's *Adam Bede* closes with the married life of Adam and Dinah. Adam has to be transformed by his experience with Hetty and to see his own part in it before Dinah will even take notice of him. Further, Adam learns through Dinah what to recognize as the true patriarchal authority – a loving and forgiving God. Only in being able to relinquish the authority as Inspector and punisher is Adam able to move forward with his life in a positive way. Thus, the experience of a more egalitarian life for men and women is made possible through



witnessing the tragic lives of friends and parents. As both Dickens and Eliot established in their goals as authors, novels should be able to serve the purpose of social reform. Rather than waiting for a tragic experience to befall each member of the general population in order to bring them around to change, *Bleak House* and *Adam Bede* serve the purpose of providing a venue to watch the lives of friends and parents destroyed by the system of patriarchal panopticism in order to ask each reader to consider his or her own life and make changes before it could be too late for those real, breathing men and women of Eliot's authorial aside.

## Chapter Three: The Victorian Wife

### Introduction

Even for all of its fascination with the fallen woman, Victorian culture was far more likely to encounter women who would seem to have no difficulty meeting the expectations of the patriarchal panopticon that is conducting its surveillance and making judgments regarding all female bodies. Thus, it is equally important to devote time to a study of the seemingly approved woman, the Victorian wife. The patriarchal panopticon that creates the system by which fallen women are punished likewise creates a system of education and a codified system of expected marital behavior that should, in theory, produce women who are successful in their roles as wives and mothers. Yet, if one recalls the image of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon wherein women could be educated while men look on eager to choose wives from the selection of students before them, the process of education for women becomes a more questionable concept than otherwise conceived.

In this section, we will first examine the process of women's education in nineteenth century Britain in order to understand the preparation women are given to become the ideal that is often espoused in Victorian literature, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Women of England* and Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House*. Following the study of education, we must turn our attention to marriage as an institution, examining the ways in which men and women approached the role of wife that was viewed most natural for women of the period. In order to be successful, a woman must be able to meet the expectations of her husband in his role of Inspector in the patriarchal panopticon and the expectations of society who deputizes Inspectors of all genders, each of whom are eager to find approval by offering up their own observations of

those who deviate from approved behavior to the punishing forces of patriarchal panopticism. Yet, all of these ideas must be fully explored in order to demonstrate that Dickens and Eliot are using their novels to argue for the viability of fulfilling and successful womanhood in Victorian England. In both Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the authors give us two views of marriage – the unsuccessful marriage in which both wife and husband are unhappy and the successful marriage in which both wife and husband are happy and at least somewhat successful in fulfilling their dreams of personhood. Ultimately, it will be shown that both authors use these contrasting views of marriage to underscore the necessity of educating women as equal to men as well as demanding a recognition of women as adults rather than children for the creation of a successful and viable female existence in nineteenth-century England.

### **Student to Wife: Female Education in Victorian England**

In 1864, the British government undertook a study of secondary education in response to growing concern about regulating the material that was taught in schools in order to determine if any improvements should be made, as well as the amount of funding schools should receive. The Schools Inquiry Commission of 1864, often referred to as the Taunton Commission, completed its study in 1868 and issued its report the same year, titled simply *Report of Schools Inquiry Commission*. This commission's report was one of the first official documents to bring to light the disparity between girls' education and boys' education in nineteenth-century England. As such, this report is a very useful contemporary document to aid us in determining the state of girls' education, an education that was supposed to enable these girls to become successful women in society. Chapter VI of the report is devoted entirely to girls' schools and

begins with a statement intended to demonstrate the importance of educating women, quoting a Mr. Lingen, likely Secretary of the Department of Education:

If one looks to the enormous number of unmarried women in the middle class who have to earn their own bread, at the great drain of the male population of this country for the army, for India, and for the colonies . . . it seems to me that the instruction of the girls of a middle-class family for any one who thinks much of it, is important to the very last degree. (546)

However, the report also brings into focus the debate surrounding girls' education that forms the crux of patriarchal influence over the lives of women, noting that this view is "recent and still growing" in 1868 and "still greatly needs to be inculcated on and accepted by parents of that class" (546). In fact, the report laments the power of the patriarchal system – although it never recognizes it as such – to restrict what seems to be in the best interest of many women. The authors recognize that society considers appropriate education for women to consist of "what is showy and superficially attractive . . . in particular, that as regards their relations to the other sex and the probabilities of marriage" (546-7). Further, this system of belief regards "more solid attainments" as "actually disadvantageous rather than the reverse" (547). Interestingly, the report simultaneously recognizes reform that would be most advantageous for women and the power of the patriarchal structure, represented by parents and the telling descriptor, mankind.

The report notes that the views of women in regard to marriage as sole aim

will not affect the character of the recommendations we shall offer . . . But it must be fully admitted that such ideas as we have referred to have a very strong root in human nature, and that with respect to the average, nay to the great majority of mankind, it would be idle to suppose that they would ever cease to have a powerful operation. (547)

In prefacing their report on girls' schools this way, the commission captures well the struggle anyone wishing to provide a more equal, or at the very least sustainable, existence for women faces in contradicting the patriarchal panopticon's authority.

The findings of the commission are even more disappointing than the ominous opening leads the reader to expect. The authors provide a list of all of the endowed secondary schools for girls' in England; there were only fourteen schools – a number small enough to garner concern by even casual observers of the system (565). The data sections of the report open with the conclusion that “[i]t cannot be denied that the picture brought before us of the state of Middle-Class Female Education is, on the whole, unfavourable” (548). The leading factor in the selection of schools for most middle-class families is that “instrumental music is to be the leading subject of instruction,” and the report further notes that “[n]eedlework, also, is reported to occupy too much time . . . and the kind of it which most prevails is said to be too much of an ornamental character” (552). As these subjects of instruction indicate, girls' schools attempt to appease the middle-class desire for ornamental women, educated to please a husband more than cultivate an intelligence and skill that might allow women to function on their own within or outside of marriage. The report summarizes its findings regarding curriculum in the words of Mr. Norris, a member of the commission:

We find, as a rule, a very small amount of professional skill, an inferior set of school-books, a vast deal of dry uninteresting task work, rules put into memory with no explanation of their principles . . . a very false estimate of the relative value of the several kinds of acquirement, a reference to effect rather than solid worth, a tendency to fill or adorn rather than to strengthen the mind. (552)

Given these findings, the goal of the patriarchy that creates and encourages this system of girls' education becomes clearer. Women who are taught simply to adorn and to work toward effect cannot be successful outside of marriage, which solidifies the power of men both in the economic sphere and the domestic sphere. Women are rendered dependent from the outset by an education that makes their only viable vocation marriage.

However, it should not be supposed from the recommendations of the commission that all women were advocating for better education for themselves. In fact, as previous sections of this study have shown, many women proved to be anxious to uphold the power of the patriarchal panopticon in order to solidify their own position of approval. Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England* intends to be a guide to the proper behavior of English women in order to restore the country's fairer sex to its once held superiority. The wife of Rev. William Ellis and a member of the London Missionary Society, Ellis' works argue for the importance of women in the domestic sphere, serving as a moral influence in the home and thereby raising the moral quality of both men and women in England. The patriarchal system of religion has been gestured toward in my previous discussion of Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and Ellis serves in a more conservative capacity than Dinah in Eliot's novel. The argument in Ellis' *The Women of England* helps to elucidate the inculcation women received in all areas of their lives.

Ellis opens her text with a direct statement about the necessary education of women, particularly the movement toward more formal education like that recommended by the Taunton Commission, citing it as the cause of the decline of English women:

When the cultivation of the mental faculties had so far advanced as to take precedence of the moral, by leaving no time for domestic usefulness, and the practice of personal exertion in the way of promoting, general happiness, the character of the women of England assumed a different aspect, which is now beginning to tell upon society in the sickly sensibilities, the feeble frames, and the useless habits of the rising generation. (116)

In examining this opening, one may see the process of establishing the authority of the patriarchal panopticon. First, Ellis creates a false dichotomy in arguing that furthering a woman's mental faculties will necessarily lead to a lessening of moral faculties simply by virtue of having less time in the home. With maintaining morality already established as the path to avoid becoming a fallen woman who would be punished by the patriarchal panopticon, Ellis'

argument carries an implied threat of punishment. Further, Ellis uses the underlying concerns of marriageability to attempt to dissuade women from pursuing education; husbands do not want a wife of sickly sensibilities, feeble frame, or useless habits. In fact, Ellis gestures strongly toward the panopticon as is often the case through terms like customs and social expectation in her admonishments of what duties women must perform and the consequences attached to not conforming to the rules put in place by the panopticon:

In short, the customs of English society have so constituted women the guardians of the comfort of their homes, that, like the Vestals of old, they cannot allow the lamp they cherish to be extinguished, or fail for want of oil, without an equal share of degradation attaching to their names. (269)

The use of the image of Vestals serves the overt purpose of relating women to Vestal Virgins, who were entrusted with maintaining the sacred fires of the goddess Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. However, the implication of virginity is also carried in the image, as Vestals took a vow of chastity. Thus, if women fail to maintain the fires of the home through their duty being satisfactorily performed, they would be equated with a failed Vestal Virgin, making the link to a fallen woman that much more overt. Even more intentionally, Ellis then connects this failure to a degradation of name and reputation with all the implied punishments of the panopticon that come along with that status. While Ellis presents herself in a motherly fashion, advising women to live up a grander nature that she argues their older relatives maintained, she is consistently using the threat of punishment under the patriarchal panopticon as a motivating factor for young women who might aspire to a different life. Much like the middle-class parents the Taunton Commission refers to as disregarding education in favor of accomplishments designed to make a marriage match, Ellis warns of a character that will be undesirable, disappointing all levels of the panopticon as represented by parents and potential husbands.

If women must not be formally educated but rather trained in some way to be good wives and mothers, as the popular ideology surrounding nineteenth-century female education suggested, what then must the role of education be? Ellis lauds the women of past generations who possessed “a strength and dignity of character, a power of usefulness, and a capability of doing good, which the higher theories of modern education fail to impart” (202). Thus, education is ruled out almost completely, which perhaps accounts for the situation that the *Report of Schools Inquiry Commission* relates wherein women are educated unevenly and with a focus toward skills such as needlework that could be used domestically in creating ornaments for the home and contributing to the overall atmosphere of domesticity that Ellis holds up as supreme. In fact, Ellis seemingly only allows women to exist within their own home: “[T]he women of whom I am speaking seldom went abroad. Their sphere of action was at their own firesides, and the world in which they moved was one where pleasure of the highest, purest order, naturally and necessarily arises out of acts of duty faithfully performed” (202). In confirming isolation within the home as an ideal status, Ellis demonstrates her conformity with the views of patriarchal panopticism.

It is important to understand Ellis’ role as Inspector in the panopticon because she is a woman who extols to other women the ways in which they should behave. She serves as an authority on the subject for many parents seeking to educate their daughters about appropriate behavior and the path to becoming a good wife and mother, and it is in this last capacity that Ellis’ work proves to be strangely lacking. While she repeatedly discusses the role of performing one’s duties cheerfully, even warning women that “when the performance of any kindly office has to be asked for . . . it loses more than half its charm,” she does not give a clear description of what it is exactly that women should be doing in the home to perform kindly offices or manage



the household (22). The text promises a discussion of household management when Ellis declares that “[i]n England, there is a kind of science of good household management . . . [and] there is a philosophy in this science, by which all of [women’s] highest and best feelings are called into exercise” (25-26). However, the discussion that follows is vague at best, with a focus on morality rather than practical education: “Not only must a constant system of activity be established, but peace must be preserved, or happiness will be destroyed. Not only must elegance be called in, to adorn and beautify the whole, but strict integrity must be maintained” (25). Even when the idea of education in this field is directly addressed, the result is not such as to produce women who would be able to complete the task from Ellis’ work alone:

Good household management, conducted on this plan, is indeed a science well worthy of attention. It comprises so much, as to invest it with an air of difficulty on the first view; but no woman can reasonably complain of incapability, because nature has endowed the sex with perceptions so lively and acute, that where benevolence is the impulse, and principle the foundation upon which they act, experience will soon teach them by what means they may best accomplish the end they have in view. (26)

Given this description, one may see the complex system by which women are presented with many expectations but no clear path of education to prepare them to meet those expectations. Ellis’ argument is that women are naturally capable of good household management as long as they are moral women. In fact, women only require lively and acute perceptions to determine what must be done to achieve the well-ordered household that the patriarchal panopticon expects its wives to create. The illogical aspects of this argument cannot be ignored. With no formal training in basic household tasks or skills such as mathematics, women are not likely to be able to budget for a home or to even manage hired help if they are financially fortunate enough to have the assistance. Yet the consequences for failure are made ever present, even in Ellis’ “mothering” approach; women who fail to maintain appropriate homes as wives will be degraded

and face the same punishments as the fallen women – a crushing exposure to the regulatory power of patriarchal panopticism. Even more ominously, there are many women just like Ellis who are willing to serve as Inspectors in addition to husbands and fathers who traditionally serve as such.

As a final warning to uphold the structure of the patriarchal panopticon, Ellis offers advice to any men who may think that women trained in this fashion may not be suitable as wives. Her advice is to consider their roles as protector of women and their responsibility to act appropriately toward the opposite sex:

But let every man who disputes the right foundation of this system of conduct, imagine in the place of the woman whose retiring shyness provokes his contempt, his sister or friend; and while he substitutes another being, similarly constituted, for himself, he will immediately perceive that the boundary-line of safety, beyond which no true friend of woman ever tempted her to pass, is drawn many degrees within that which he had marked out for his own intercourse with the female sex.  
(34)

As the previous chapter demonstrates, David Buchbinder argues that men are held responsible in the patriarchal panopticon for fulfilling their own responsibilities, and failure to do so can result in their punishment. What Ellis' admonition to men serves to do is warn them of the potential for punishment as well. First, she reminds the men of their responsibility to sisters, and by implication, their obligation to the panopticon to function as Inspectors over the behavior of those sisters. Further, she then reminds him of his own power, and sexual dominance, over women in creating a being "similarly constituted" to himself. In short, she warns that men know of their own sexual desires and the potential for leading women astray due to their power to do so, and tells men that any movement to free women from a restrictive state of behavior would only lead those women down the path of becoming fallen women. Fallen women are not the desired object of the panopticon, so if a man were to be responsible for such an action, he too

would be subject to punishment. Therefore, men as well as women should strive for the patriarchal panopticon's standards in order to avoid punishment and find the approval that supposedly leads to a successful life.

### **Husbands and Wives: Marriage in Victorian England**

In examining the multitudinous volumes of domestic handbooks, it can seem that there was an easily definable idea of exactly what the roles of wives and husbands were in Victorian households. While it is the case that many of the definitions of roles overlap, creating a sense of nearly monolithic ideas of identity, the actual process by which these roles would produce the household ideal was less obvious. Much like girls' education was advocated to create good wives without a clear curriculum, the idea of exactly how a relationship should function to realize the Victorian ideology of the sanctuary of home went mostly implied, with many expressing that happiness would follow naturally from performing one's duties and that a relationship between husband and wife would be harmonious as long as the particulars of domestic charms were attended to by the wife. As Chapter One illuminates many of the patriarchal expectations of marriage as well as the legal standing of women, what is warranted here is an understanding of how women, as well as men, went into marriage uneducated about how to make the ideology of a happy home an actuality.

The middle-class education outlined in the previous section plays a role in creating young wives, but this education fails them greatly when helping them to establish a home for the first time. As Ellen Jordan notes, "The schools were expected to produce a girl who bore the marks of her middle-class status in her manners and deportment, who fulfilled the ideal of femininity defined by the domestic ideology, and who would thus enhance her family's status while she

lived at home, and eventually attract a husband of the same social rank as the family” (449). With the focus on finding a husband and refining manners and deportment in order to solidify rank, it is understandable that marriage becomes the only goal that women can envision for themselves. As was noted in Chapter One, “It was entirely accepted by the vast majority of the population that the central event in any woman’s life was marriage” (Flanders 214). Further, the atmosphere of many girls’ schools, particularly boarding schools, instills early the fear of the patriarchal panopticon and any behavior, even just among her female schoolmates, that might be viewed as deviant: “Most schools seem to have interpreted [a demand for protecting a girl’s reputation] as meaning that the pupils must not be allowed to think about men or sex. The constant supervision in these schools, sometimes criticized as a form of spying, grew out of a fear that the girls might corrupt one another’s minds” (Jordan 450). With a curriculum that inculcates fear of punishment for thinking of men as well as a desire to be pleasing and to maintain all outward signs of rank, it is little wonder that women would be unprepared for marriage. Even in texts such as Mrs. Beeton’s *The Book of Household Management*, which is supposed to be a comprehensive text aiding women in their role as wives, there is no discussion of how to perform household tasks oneself. Instead the assumption is that one will have a domestic servant who will take care of many of the day-to-day tasks, and a good housekeeper will prevent a wife from even arranging the work of multiple servants: “[I]n those establishments where there is a housekeeper, it will not be necessary for the mistress, personally, to perform the above-named duties” (Beeton Sec. 23). However, without knowing how to perform the household management on one’s own, how is the mistress to know if the housekeeper is performing her duties correctly? It is just this type of dependence that strips away the ability of Victorian women to develop autonomy. In not understanding an adult relationship outside of a

very vague abstract principle of wife and not being given any tangible training in domestic science, such as the mathematical skills necessary to create a budget and the ability to plan a menu, women are set up to fail as the homemakers they are intended to be in the panopticon's ideology for them. With failure comes punishment, and it is in punishment that the patriarchal panopticon reifies its authority over women.

Where the focus on the domestic sphere of marriage is given as a woman's responsibility, men are not completely absolved from a responsibility to the household. A husband was "exhorted, for example, to pass over his wife's errors with indulgence, attributing 'her follies to her weakness, her imprudence to her inadvertency'" (Banks 60). The choice of adjectives continues to establish the husband as an Inspector in the patriarchal panopticon, indulging his wife rather than harshly reprimanding her as long as her actions are inadvertent. The implication here is that if the actions are not inadvertent, then her punishment would be well deserved and the husband should be the first to administer that punishment. As such, women are still seen as children, just as they were at school. They are constantly under the surveillance of a husband, and each domestic act must meet the standard for appropriate behavior just as each act at school must maintain the deportment of their class and emphasize their marriageability.

Beyond serving as an Inspector, husbands are given additional duties under the patriarchal panopticon. A husband should focus all of his care and industry to support his wife, as it was "his duty to provide a comfortable maintenance for her while he lived and to take steps to ensure that she was safeguarded after his death in case he should die first" (60). This division of responsibility is characteristic of the Doctrine of Separate Spheres, and on the surface, this type of statement appears no more than a reiteration of the analogy that these two halves come together to make a cohesive whole. However, as Dickens and Eliot will demonstrate in their

novels, providing a comfortable maintenance for a wife who mismanages it because of a lack of education proves difficult to the success of the marriage. Also, as Eliot's *Middlemarch* will show, the expectation to provide for a wife even after death can lead to abuse as much as it can lead to an opportunity to protect women from harm.

Despite the underlying negativity that these duties of the panopticon will inevitably bring, popular ideology in the nineteenth century attempts to create a very different image for the married relationship. Rather than an Inspector conducting surveillance and inflicting punishment on his female prisoner, the husband is cast as the protector and benefactor of the fragile, yet morally superior, angel that is his wife. While Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* certainly captures this idea, it is the poetry of Coventry Patmore in his *The Angel in the House* that espouses the view most plainly. In the section entitled "The Wife's Tragedy," he attempts to show how a married woman might experience love in her marriage. He writes, "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself" (1 – 4). Patmore's description is intended to show the angelic qualities of the wife, yet it does more to demonstrate the sacrifice of a female body to masculine dominance that is presumed to be natural in the patriarchal panopticon. It is important to note that the woman is depicted as first casting her best, seemingly her best and most pleasing behaviors, and then herself in its entirety. As such she disappears into the marriage altogether, merging the ideological with the legal as women were for quite some time not separate legal persons from their husbands after marriage.

Even more striking are the views of power that Patmore's poem shows the careful reader. He pities the wife who "yokes / Her heart to an icicle or whim," although the whim seems to be her own in selecting the man for marriage, which only further entails fault on the part of the

woman. Even when her husband is unkind, Patmore envisions a wife who silently “Waits by, expecting his remorse” (11), and when the remorse is shown in the most meager fashion, “She leans and weeps against his breast, / And seems to think the sin was hers” (15 – 16). Thus, the ideal wife will assume all responsibility for unhappiness in marriage. If the man proves to be unsuitable for her, he is presented as her whim. If the man is unkind, when he finally offers an apology, the wife will apologize to him instead, assuming the guilt of an offense she did not commit. In understanding the power that the panoptic structure grants men over women, this view is not as far-fetched as one might think. With the husband serving as Inspector, it only makes sense that the wife will not question his authority and will do everything possible to render herself pleasing, all the while hoping to avoid punishment under the panoptic structure.

The husband’s death is not even the culmination of the wife’s responsibility to him in Patmore’s idealized marriage:

At any time, she’s still his wife,  
Dearly devoted to his arms;  
She loves with a love that cannot tire;  
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,  
Through passionate duty loves springs higher,  
As grass grows taller round a stone. (20 – 24)

Given this description of marriage in one short section of Patmore’s poem, it becomes clear how the ideology of the Angel in the House masks a world of power structures that understanding the patriarchal panopticon exposes. What is cast as angelic self-abnegation is really something much more like a surrendering of self under the threat of punishment by Inspectors in the patriarchal panopticon. It is a system where both men and other women will seek out those who deviate and render them up for punishment in order to secure their own approval and aggrandize their own status. Further, it is a dangerous world in which a false move can thrust one suddenly out of a happy marriage and pleasing society into the world of the fallen woman. For men who marry

women who strive solely for patriarchal approval, the marriage may ultimately prove unsatisfying as these women are not equipped to be the moral compass and helpmeet that Victorian ideology has taught them to expect. Marriage then proves to be yet another relationship that is stilted and distorted through the power structure of the patriarchal panopticon, and it is only in attempting to move in some way beyond this structure that a more viable path for women and even men can be achieved. However, moving beyond a system like the patriarchal panopticon is not easy, nor could it even be fully achieved without dismantling the entire social structure. Thus, as our novels will show, while there is another path to take, it does not come without a price. It is in the work of George Eliot that we may first attempt to dissect the difficulties caused in marriage by the patriarchal panopticon and the ultimate inability of women to be successful unless this system is revised.

### ***Middlemarch*: Marriage for Love or Wealth?**

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot offers an interesting juxtaposition of struggling against the patriarchal panopticon and complete submission to it by creating two very different leading female characters – Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy. Both women come from prominent families with strong business ties, which immediately situates them in the middle class and squarely under the authority of the patriarchal panopticon. Rather than follow one character, *Middlemarch* attempts to capture the experience of an entire town, examining the complex social relationships and interwoven narratives that make up life in a provincial town, which is what the subtitle of the novel – a study of provincial life – is gesturing toward. While the novel contains many characters, for the purpose of studying marriage, we will first examine Dorothea's experiences through her choice of her first husband and her unorthodox choice of a second



husband. Dorothea is very capable, surviving one disastrous marriage that ended with her husband's death and a socially nightmarish codicil to his will with grace and strength of character to forge her own path, albeit one that still includes devoting herself to her chosen husband and living a form of self-exile as a mother and wife away from her family home. In Dorothea's providing council to Tertius Lydgate, Rosamond's husband, Eliot places these two female characters side-by-side for the audience to inspect and note the differences. Following Eliot's lead, we will then study Rosamond, a woman determined to render herself pleasing to the panoptic structure in every way she has been instructed. When the needs of her husband fall outside of the approved panoptic desires, Rosamond is unable to assist him, and this forms the crux of the argument against the cultural inculcation of the patriarchal panopticon. Much like Dickens' David and Dora in *David Copperfield*, whose relationship will be examined later, Rosamond and Lydgate face financial hardship in their marriage, particularly in trying to live up to an ideal of housekeeping that they could not maintain. Unable to find a partner in his own concerns, Lydgate finds himself struggling to support every aspect of a failing marriage. Through this contrast of Dorothea and Rosamond, Eliot exposes the deficiencies of the patriarchal system that exiles a woman who has the strength of mind not to be a burden to her husband and educates another to her disadvantage and even her husband's ruin.

Dorothea is the first character Eliot introduces to the reader, and the chronicles of Dorothea's two diametrically opposed marriages provide the reader with a dramatic representation in which to see the ways in which Eliot critiques the motives and methods of the patriarchal panopticon: "The leading story of the novel is that of Dorothea Brooke and her two marriages, both equally distressing to most of her society, but not to her" (Hornback 124). Dorothea is revealed to be unconventional from the start, working on architectural plans to

improve her uncle's homes for his workers and seeking a relationship only when she feels she may improve herself as well as her husband. Not surprisingly, her introduction into the world of marriage relationships and the power of the patriarchal panopticon proves to be a shock to her visions of feminine independence combined with a form of subservience.

Dorothea's first marriage is to Rev. Edward Casaubon, and the reaction of those around her to the announcement of their engagement, reveals the panopticon's certainty that it should be the determining factor in the decisions of women. Shortly after the final decision regarding their marriage is made, Dorothea realizes that "all the world round Tipton would be out of sympathy with this marriage" (50). In this recognition, Eliot demonstrates that even someone as unconventional as Dorothea, whose views of herself have not been questioned by her uncle, has been educated to understand that the panopticon will have its own expectations for women. Her suspicion is swiftly upheld by Mrs. Cadwallader's reaction. Cadwallader is characterized as a gossip, but her function as a female supporter of the patriarchal panopticon is as sure as the gossips who strove to undermine Lady Dedlock's reputation in *Bleak House*. Cadwallader's reaction to the news is less than encouraging, particularly because she has been attempting to arrange Dorothea's marriage to another man. Shocked and appalled, she states unequivocally, "This is frightful" (56). In Cadwallader's attempted matchmaking and her swift rejection of Dorothea's choice for an engagement, Eliot illustrates the ways in which the patriarchal panopticon is involved in the lives of women. Cadwallader not only serves as a passive observer and commenter, but she takes her role even further, attempting to determine Dorothea's life for her in choosing her husband, the one momentous decision of many Victorian women's lives. Cadwallader first conducts surveillance of Dorothea, which is shown in the fact that the news of Dorothea's engagement is not brought to her by Dorothea herself. Following the surveillance,

Cadwallader tries to remove Dorothea's agency in another way, denying her the approval of the patriarchal panopticon and essentially warning her of the punishment that could follow.

The enforcement of the views of the patriarchal panopticon is not limited to thwarted matchmakers, however. Eliot also uses Dorothea's engagement to demonstrate the characteristic of male dominance inherent in the structure of the patriarchal panopticon, and the demand that other men must uphold the structure to ensure order and correct behavior by women. Sir James Chettam is the man that Cadwallader intended Dorothea to marry, and the fact that Sir James had begun the courting process with Dorothea, despite her rejection of his advances, does not make the news of her engagement to another man a source of happiness for him. However, his reaction to the news of Dorothea's engagement is to question her uncle's judgment, not hers. Sir James argues, "She is too young to know what she likes. Her guardian ought to interfere. He ought not to allow the thing to be done in this headlong manner" (68). The fact that Sir James questions the wisdom of the guardian's decision and disregards Dorothea's feelings on the matter demonstrates the outcome of the education of patriarchal panopticon that focuses on creating women who function as children more than adults capable of making decisions for themselves. In this case, the patriarchal panopticon does not even allow Dorothea to claim ownership for her own potentially negative decisions. Mr. Brooke is responsible for Dorothea in the same manner as he has been as her surrogate father, raising her from her childhood to her apparent new phase as an adult child in Sir James' eyes.

Even among those who support Dorothea's decision, the dominance of the patriarchal panopticon is heartily endorsed. Mr. Brooke displays his support in a visit to Casaubon's home prior to the marriage. He tells his future son-in-law, "Casaubon, she will be in your hands now; you must teach my niece to take things more quietly" (66). The implications of this speech are

enormous. The responsibility for Dorothea's life is passing from Mr. Brooke to Casaubon, and Casaubon, as Dorothea's husband, will now be responsible for showing her the proper ways to think and act – Casaubon will now have her in his own version of Bentham's Panopticon, and he must now serve as the Inspector. It is important to notice, too, that Dorothea's status never changes; she is a child in her relationship with her uncle, and she continues as a child even after marriage. In marriage, she is to continue to be reared in the panopticon's rules, and Dorothea is in her husband's hands now, which Mr. Brooke implies will mark the need for her to recognize her submission more fully in her new relationship. In an authorial decision that underscores the importance of the point, Eliot herself interjects as narrator to comment on Dorothea's situation in this male dominated society: "The betrothed bride must see her future home and dictate any changes that she would like to have made there. A woman dictates before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards" (73). By constructing the reactions to Dorothea's engagement in this manner, Eliot subtly reveals the movements of a panopticon dependent upon surveillance and multiple Inspectors to reinforce the panopticon's authority, an authority that Dorothea will soon be unable to avoid.

Eliot's critique of the panoptic structure becomes evident in the fact that, despite the panopticon's disapproval, the marriage does indeed take place. Dorothea's shows her determination in conversation with her uncle, telling him unequivocally, "I know of nothing to make me vacillate. If I changed my mind, it must be because of something important and entirely new to me" (46). As the male dominated panoptic structure of Middlemarch, upheld even by most women, has already shown her that it does not wish her to make adult decisions that conflict with its ideals of womanhood and the careful construction of a seeming adult-child,

Dorothea's point is rather clear. These issues are not her concern; she will act in accordance to her own will and her own ability to determine right and wrong from the perspective of an adult.

It is important to note, however, that supporting the right for women to make decisions where their future is most concerned does not mean that Eliot believes that happiness will necessarily follow. Following the same line of argument that J. S. Mill creates in *The Subjection of Women*, the focus is on the freedom to make choices does not guarantee that these choices will lead to one outcome or another. Creating a sham choice in which the outcomes are predetermined is what one would do with a child in order to placate a semi-formed desire for independence while balancing it with the realization that the child cannot be trusted to make decisions that will be beneficial to her. Dorothea does not wish for this type of placation; she recognizes the distinction and chooses a fully formed desire for independence in decision-making. However, women then must take responsibility for the outcome of their decisions as Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon demonstrates. Despite the relationship's beginnings, Dorothea soon learns that her husband is as conventional as the rest of society; he is the Inspector that Dorothea thought she had defied in choosing him for marriage. Rather than an educated man that desires an equal partner, Casaubon's reaction to her accepting his marriage proposal is to feel "that heaven had vouchsafed him a blessing in every way suited to his peculiar wants" (51). Thus, even before marriage, he sees Dorothea as being divinely created for his needs; he never questions himself regarding whether or not he meets her needs, fulfilling the ideal that Flanders details in her work and Patmore idealizes in his own. As Flanders writes, "[feminine] desire was not expected to take precedence over his [masculine] convenience" (247).

Despite her best hopes, Dorothea finds no escape in marriage to an educated man. In attempting to live vicariously through Casaubon's work, Dorothea hopes to find education for herself, perhaps even more than the suggested feminine education of Ruskin:

All such knowledge should be given her as may enable her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men: and yet it should be given, not as knowledge, – not as it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge.  
(42)

As Ruskin's description aptly notes, knowledge is an inappropriate feminine goal and Dorothea has been seeking knowledge, perhaps even more than she has been seeking a husband. However, even if she could be satisfied with only serving as a helpmeet, Casaubon rejects her desire to help him in his work, apparently believing she is not suited for it. Eliot illustrates this lack of compatibility in belief: “[H]ad not Dorothea's enthusiasm especially dwelt on the prospect of relieving the weight and perhaps the sadness with which great tasks lie on him who has to achieve them? And that such weight pressed on Mr. Casaubon was only plainer than before” (192). Unable to be of assistance to her husband and fulfill even that adult responsibility of marriage, Dorothea attempts to be useful in the surrounding community, yet she does not find this to be fulfilling in any lasting way as her attempts are relegated to small tasks deemed appropriate for women by the patriarchal panopticon. Expecting to be treated by others as a capable member of society, Dorothea is dismayed to realize that marriage has no more made her an adult in society's eyes than it has in her husband's eyes. Bert Hornback describes her frustration: “Dorothea has difficulty being useful in everyday life because she does not belong to the society in which she should be living” (131). Ultimately, Dorothea's stymied existence as a woman-child is ended by her husband's sudden illness and his subsequent death.

While it may seem counterintuitive to the cause of promoting women's freedom to make decisions for themselves independent of the desires of the panopticon, Eliot's depiction of

Dorothea's failing first marriage can be read as noting a potential objection by the patriarchy and still demonstrating that this freedom is necessary. While Dorothea may not have made the best choice, it is the freedom to make that choice and the acceptance of its consequences that raises women above childlike status. As Mill notes, the happiness that is gained does not necessarily come with the choice one makes but in "the unspeakable gain in private happiness to the liberated half of the species, the difference to them between a life of subjection to the will of others, and a life of rational freedom" (212). Dorothea failed to recognize the power of the patriarchal panopticon in her marriage to Casaubon, and Eliot, as narrator, implies Dorothea's regret: "did she herself find it out to be a mistake, and taste the salt bitterness of her tears in the merciful silence of the night?" (269).

Strikingly, Casaubon's enforced childhood of Dorothea does not end with his death. Much like the power that Dickens's Tulkinghorn retains in his death, Casaubon's status as a man in the panopticon allows him to maintain a hold over his wife, even from the grave, which Patmore idealizes as a desirable outcome in his poem. Casaubon's will serves as tool for him to control Dorothea's actions and decide what is best for her as she seemingly cannot do so herself. Celia, Dorothea's sister, tells her the news: "he has made a codicil to his will to say the property was all to go away from you if you married...Mr. Ladislaw, not anybody else" (475). In life, Casaubon reveals himself to be jealous of Ladislaw, not because of Dorothea's actions but because of his perception that Ladislaw would have been a more appropriate husband for his wife. By creating a codicil to his will, Casaubon attempts to use his power in the panopticon one last time to establish a barrier to Ladislaw and Dorothea forming a relationship, which serves the dual purpose of making it socially unacceptable for Ladislaw to pursue Dorothea and maintain his own patriarchal status, as well as making it financially disadvantageous for Dorothea to

consider any offer Ladislav might make. Yet, Casaubon's jealous action does not achieve its intended effect. As has been shown throughout their marriage, Casaubon underestimates his wife, and his jealousy actually pushes Dorothea to consider Ladislav in a way that she never would have before that moment. As Dorothea reflects, "[I]t had never before entered her mind that he [Will Ladislav] could, under any circumstances, be her lover" (476). Casaubon had no evidence of Dorothea's supposed feelings for Ladislav, but his superior position as a man in the patriarchal panopticon allows him to create legislation to justify his own insecurity and further inculcate the view of Dorothea as a child who must be protected from her own misguided attempts at being an adult. Further, in using the legal aspect of a will, Eliot gestures toward other types of misguided legislation on a national level that also underestimate women and seek to prevent them from becoming their own legal persons who should be able to function outside of the constraint of a patriarchal panopticon.

While Dorothea had never considered Ladislav as a husband before, Casaubon's codicil forces her to consider why he might have seen Ladislav as a threat. After much reflection, Dorothea realizes that Casaubon was right; Ladislav would be a very appropriate husband for her, and she decides to marry him. However, the Dorothea that chooses her second husband is very different from the young girl who chose her first husband with a great measure of idealism. Recognizing now the power of the panopticon, she approaches this new marriage very cautiously, beginning with her financial situation since she will lose the estate of her deceased husband. In calculating and planning for her future, Dorothea assumes adult responsibility for her life and disregards the child-like decisions that were allowed to her before her previous marriage. Rather than focus on ordering a home and the frivolities of décor, Dorothea focuses on financial security and crafting a marriage that functions as a partnership. As she reasons with



Ladislaw, “We could live quite well on my own fortune – it is too much – seven hundred a year – I want so little – no new clothes – and I will learn what everything costs” (787). Instead of simply turning over her own money to her husband, Dorothea offers to work with him, learning what everything costs and taking responsibility for being financially solvent. In this way, Dorothea has determined to lead a life centered on her own concepts of what is best for her and within her own means, thus placing her desires and confidence in her belief in herself as a productive member of society and partner to her husband before the behavioral constraints of the patriarchal panopticon.

Dorothea’s second marriage elaborates on Eliot’s social commentary. Jeannie Thomas writes of “George Eliot’s continuing effort to deflate ideal aspirations and ground her character and reader alike firmly in the real world” (25). Dorothea’s decision to marry Will is based on a realistic expectation of what life will be like; this is why her second marriage is a success, whereas her first was not. Further, this marriage calls into question not only the panopticon’s control of women, but also its control of other men. Ladislaw as well must defy its authority in choosing to marry Dorothea despite Casaubon’s codicil. His decision, and lack of hesitation in making it, demonstrates the thoroughness of Eliot’s critique. Rather than a man like Arthur Donnithorne who bows to patriarchal pressure and sacrifices Hetty Sorrel, Ladislaw finds strength in his future wife’s conviction and follows through with their marriage – a marriage based both on love and equality. In Eliot’s view, the patriarchal panopticon must be dismantled in favor of a system in which men and women should both be allowed to determine their own destiny and are equally responsible for the consequences of their actions.

One must be careful, however, to avoid drawing sweeping conclusions from one example. Perhaps Dorothea is simply an exception to an otherwise good rule; she could be a

way of finding a careful niche for women who can fit in with a few exceptions, preserving the patriarchal system overall. After all, Dorothea does become a successful wife and mother, although her new home life with Ladislaw is not fully presented in the text. Further, Eliot's own reluctance to definitively enter the political sphere of women's rights makes some question her devotion to the idea in her novels. In order to understand if Eliot is calling for a complete reevaluation of the patriarchal panopticon or something more along the lines of a more lenience for those who cannot meet the ideal but may want to do so, one should examine another woman in the text, Rosamond Vincy. Both Dorothea and Rosamond are depicted in their youth and their married lives, and their very different experiences serve to make them foils for each other in the text.

As a product of her upbringing under the patriarchal panopticon, Rosamond devotes her life to society and observing all of the correct conventions. Eliot, through the eyes of Rosamond's future husband Lydgate, describes these aspects of her character. Lydgate ruminates positively on his meeting "Miss Vincy, who had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman – polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for further evidence" (162). Rosamond's way of cultivating all of the approved of characteristics certainly upholds the standard for women that the panopticon perpetuates, a standard that has severe consequences because "where a woman fitted into the rules and obligations of society marked her whole life" (Flanders 251). As such, Rosamond fills her life by "being from morning till night her own standard of a perfect lady, having always an audience in her own consciousness" (Eliot 165). It is important to examine the implications of the adjectives surrounding Rosamond's behavior and physical presence. "Docile" implies delicacy

and, troublingly, a domesticated animal, and her body is one that only expresses her docility and delicacy, not womanly qualities. Rosamond is an adult described in the terms of child, always living for the audience of her consciousness, an internalized form of the Inspector in the panopticon, as a child behaves well to please his or her parents and other authority figures. Fulfilling the role the patriarchal panopticon deemed best for her is Rosamond's goal in young womanhood, and it is a womanhood that does not distinguish itself from her childhood in any marked ways.

To further emphasize Rosamond's acceptability to the panopticon, her life does not include productive labor. Eliot presents Rosamond's view of industry: "now more than ever she was active in sketching her landscapes and market-carts and portraits of friends, in practicing her music . . . she found time also to read the best novels, and even the second best, and she knew much poetry by heart" (165). Mrs. Plymdale, however, sounds a note of dissent in her view of Rosamond's upbringing, contemplating that Rosamond had been "educated to a ridiculous pitch, for what was the use of accomplishments which would be all laid aside as soon as she was married?" (165). In this rather brief exchange, we revisit the prejudices regarding women's education that the Taunton Commission faced in conducting its study. Rosamond's education is a smattering of subjects designed to make her attractive, but they do not serve a practical purpose once the goal of marriage is achieved. Whereas Dorothea sought out some helpful and practical work even though her financial situation does not require it of her, Rosamond actively cultivates the accomplishments of a panopticon-approved womanly education. In introducing Mrs. Plymdale's criticisms, Eliot draws her readers to consider the next concern in the lives of Rosamond and Lydgate; what happens when the Victorian man finds that the woman who meets

every mark socially determined for her is not in actuality prepared for any sort of adult relationship?

The ability Rosamond has for sustaining an adult relationship such as marriage is questionable from the beginning. She pleads with her father in a childlike manner to gain his approval of her marriage. She threatens, "I cannot give up my only prospect of happiness, Papa... You would not like me to go into a consumption, as Arabella Hawley did. And you know that I never change my mind" (344). Rosamond's child-like behavior is shown to produce childish behavior as well – contrasting with Dorothea's well-reasoned arguments for her right to marry and, especially in the case of her second marriage, for a recognition of what that relationship will entail socially and practically. Rosamond's tactic for convincing the male figure in her life is to wheedle as she always has, continuing to demonstrate the child that she still is. She threatens to become ill, much like a child threatens to run away from home and deprive the parent of his or her most valuable presence. She concludes her argument with the assertion that she will never change her mind; in short, she must have what she wants or she will be displeased and disagreeable for the foreseeable future. Tellingly, this style of argument works. Mr. Vincy, as a representative of the patriarchal panopticon, seems to appreciate an argument that casts his daughter in a very submissive role to him and, by implication, her future husband. As such, Mr. Vincy acquiesces to Rosamond's demand in the same way he has given in to her childish whims in the past, subtly acknowledging her perpetual childhood and granting her request, "Well, well, child, he must write to me before I can answer him" (344). With her parents' permission secured, as well as the approval of the patriarchal panopticon, Rosamond marries Lydgate.

Once married, Rosamond and Lydgate experience financial hardship caused by overspending in their attempt to establish a socially respectable household, using the Vincys as a model. Hornback describes Rosamond's expectations for her married life: "Having grown up a Vincy, Rosamond looks to material things as the source of her pleasure" (134). However, Rosamond has no concept of the price of the material things that will bring her pleasure. As their domestic situation becomes clearer, Lydgate attempts to stay Rosamond's spending hand to little effect except exasperation: "He still felt it necessary to refer to an economical change in their way of living as a matter of course, trying to reconcile her to it gradually and repressing his anger when she answered by wishing that he would go to live in London" (730). In wishing he would go live in London, Rosamond consistently reveals her inability to behave in any other way than that of a child. When the material wealth quickly runs out, the depth of Rosamond's feelings toward her husband are revealed: "The poor thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate was part of that world" (628). Disappointing her husband, Rosamond cannot take control of their affairs and play the active role in salvaging their finances that he needed from her. In fact, her reaction to plans to eradicate their debt is "a moment of more intense bitterness than she had ever felt before" (631). Ultimately, Rosamond undermines many of her husband's plans out of a desire to keep up appearances and to retain the material possessions that bring her happiness as nothing else can. Rosamond's education, as predicted by the Taunton Commission's report and its conclusions, fails her when she must function as an adult.

Eliot's use of juxtaposition with Rosamond and Dorothea enduring financial hardship in their chosen relationships is carefully constructed to demonstrate the different approaches that the two women take to solving an all too common problem for nineteenth-century marriages.

Whereas Dorothea determines to understand the world in terms of finance and create a home from what she has, Rosamond responds in the same manner as a petulant child. The ideal of perpetual childhood is forced upon Dorothea but fully embraced, although unconsciously, by Rosamond. The adult-child Rosamond is not capable of handling situations in the harsh realities of the world nor does she feel responsible for the consequences of her actions. This attitude stands in stark contrast to Dorothea who recognizes her mistakes in marriage to Casaubon and seeks to rectify them in carefully preparing for her second marriage. As Eliot writes of Rosamond's view of her marriage, "there was but one person in Rosamond's world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and that was the graceful creature with blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, who had never expressed herself unbecomingly and had always acted for the best – the best naturally being what she best liked" (645). Sadly, Rosamond's attitude leads to Lydgate's final acceptance about the state of their relationship: "He had chosen this fragile creature and had taken the burden of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying that burden pitifully" (775). Ultimately, Dorothea's rejection of the patriarchal panopticon's ideal of women remaining a type of child even into adulthood leads to her happiness. In being able to function in the world as an adult and taking responsibility for her choices, she finds fulfillment. Rosamond's careful adherence to the views inculcated in her by the panopticon leads only to disappointment and a breakdown of the marriage relationship, which is detrimental to both male and female alike. Mill outlines a positive marriage relationship, one that stands in contrast to Rosamond and Lydgate and supports the foundation upon which Dorothea builds her marriage with Ladislaw: "The real mitigating causes [in a marriage] are, the personal affection, which is a growth over time . . . their common interests as regards the children, and their general community of interest as concerns third persons . . . the

real importance of a wife to his daily comforts and enjoyments, and the value he consequently attaches to her on his personal account” (69). Dorothea and Ladislaw actively attempt to find common ground and respect each other for their respective contributions as their frank conversation regarding income prior to marriage demonstrates; Lydgate and Rosamond can find no level of common feeling and come to regard each other with exasperation and finally pity on Lydgate’s part. A happy marriage, and a viable female existence, can only be found on terms of equal participation in adult responsibilities – a goal that the panopticon attempts to thwart at every turn.

***David Copperfield: Clara, Dora, and Agnes***

A common objection in even reserved feminist readings of Eliot is that one may expect to find this sort of criticism in her work. She is a woman in nineteenth-century England, repressed by the same system Dorothea finds herself trapped by and encouraged by the patriarchal panopticon to be a woman in the mold of Rosamond. However, Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* reaches many of the same conclusions that Eliot’s work does. As Alison Booth compares the two authors, “Like Dickens, Eliot seems to have been searching for fresh ways to account for the traditional division between the public world of men and the private world of women without endorsing the injustice and misconstruction that plagued a society so divided” (135). However, with texts that produce strong depictions of women such as Dorothea and Rosamond in Eliot and Clara, Dora, and Agnes in *David Copperfield*, something more than a new way to account for custom without endorsing it may be present. This distinction is important because if it may be shown that Dickens’ work – the work of a successful male author with certain gender biases of his own as has been shown – also corroborates the fears expressed by

contemporaries such as Mill in his social philosophy and Eliot in her fiction, then it certainly implies that there is an undercurrent to Victorian thought that already questions the prevailing views of feminine subjection to male superiority and the creation of child-like ideal women who ultimately flounder in real-world settings. *David Copperfield* works to demonstrate differing paths for feminine existence, and perhaps only one viable avenue for it, through the use of three main female characters all connected to the titular narrator. Copperfield's mother, Clara, lays the foundation for his experience of womanhood, one that is formed by a tyrannical representative of the patriarchal panopticon. His first marriage to Dora Spenlow echoes that of Dorothea, a child-like fantasy that meets with difficult circumstances when placed in a real-world context. Finally, Copperfield's second marriage to Agnes Wickfield is Dickens's attempt to create a viable existence for women and a viable marriage for his beleaguered narrator. Yet, as this examination will show, it is not without difficulty that this imperfect representation is achieved.

*David Copperfield* begins by introducing its reader to the narrator, David, and his recounting of his birth and his parents' circumstances. Noting his father's death before David was born, his mother Clara's youth and innocence is immediately brought to the fore. David recounts that his father "was double my mother's age when he married" and later notes that she was "not yet twenty" (2). Interestingly, in the same section, Dickens introduces the idea that David's great-aunt Betsey Trotwood refuses to meet Clara because Clara was "a wax doll" (2). Immediately after introducing the audience to Clara, Dickens invites the reader to see many of the same stereotypically feminine characteristics noted, albeit somewhat ironically in Ruskin's line of questioning regarding feminine development; Clara is a doll who not only is young in



social development but also in age. This youth makes her highly influenced by power, and the patriarchal panopticon carries with it most, if not all, of the power in the social structure.

Clara's first interaction with Betsey illustrates her child-like development as well. In being scrutinized by the strongly independent Betsey, Clara is nervous and afraid. Upon seeing Clara without her cap, Betsey exclaims, "You are a very Baby!", referring to Clara's age. Yet, Clara sees something in that statement that will only be proven more true as Dickens unfolds the text's plot, sobbing that "she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she lived" (5). Rather than attempt to rise above her current situation and find a measure of independence like that of Betsey, Clara throws herself upon the strength that Betsey represents, mirroring the relationship that Clara seems to have with every authority figure in her life. Clara's husband Mr. Copperfield recognized her childlike state and sought to help her gain a useful education that would make her his partner, not simply his servant as she was in another household prior to their marriage. Clara relates his teaching her about housekeeping: "And I hope I should have improved, being very anxious to learn, and he very patient to teach me," concluding that she "kept [her] housekeeping-book regularly, and balanced it with Mr. Copperfield every night" without "a word of difference respecting it" (8). While he could have encouraged her dependency upon him, Mr. Copperfield recognized that Clara needed education beyond that of the panopticon-approved feminine education system to advance toward self-sufficiency and partnership in marriage, and he endeavored to give her those tools. Yet, before he can be successful in educating his wife, Mr. Copperfield dies. With Clara prevented from fulfilling her potential in their marriage, she turns to the only path that she has been educated for in order to survive, another marriage. Her subsequent marriage to Mr. Murdstone results in even

these rudimentary attempts at rejecting the patriarchal panopticon's complete authority being stripped away from her.

Taking Clara as the young widow that wants education, Mr. Murdstone strives to reverse any responsibility she may want to take and keep her from having the opportunity to develop into anything more than a child thereby reinforcing the authority of the patriarchal panopticon.

Bringing in his sister to take charge of the house, Miss Murdstone encapsulates Mr. Murdstone's plan in one succinct conversation:

‘Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless' – my mother blushed but laughed, and seemed not to dislike this character – ‘to have any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be so good as to give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of thing in future.’ (59).

The dynamics of the multiple characterizations are important here. Miss Murdstone sees Clara as “pretty” focusing on her physical beauty and “thoughtless,” a way of undermining any education or willingness to learn that could be held over from her previous marriage to the late Mr.

Copperfield. Clara's education from the panopticon has taught her to recognize these characterizations as compliments and accepts this view of herself readily, desiring above all to be pleasing and avoid any punishment that could come from dissenting. What is interesting is that Dickens shows this conversation through the eyes of David, her son. David is a young boy not yet fully indoctrinated into patriarchal panopticism due to his father's refusal to fully participate and being raised by his mother only to this point. He does not see his mother as thoughtless and is surprised to see her easily accept that about herself. Closing the scene is Clara giving up her symbolic adulthood, the keys that allow her to be in charge of the home, to her sister-in-law, accepting the role of a child to be protected from even her own judgment. In this moment, Clara

submits to the desires of the panopticon, but what she does not realize yet is how all encompassing the panopticon wants that submission to be.

Despite her submission to the Murdstones, Clara Copperfield is not simply able to forget that she was once viewed as more capable. Clara and Murdstone's early relationship is characterized by a series of struggles regarding her power, however minor it may be, in the household. As David relates with a touch of pride, "My mother did not suffer her authority to pass from her without a shadow of protest" (60). The image her resistance as a "shadow of protest" functions on a number of levels. Any attempt she makes is vanquished as assuredly as turning on a light in a semi-dark room, and the patriarchal panopticon is able to quell such rebellion with the same ease of turning on a light. In protesting that she should be consulted about her household arrangements, Clara reverts to her formerly capable identity: "'It's very hard . . . that in my own house –' 'My own house?' repeated Mr. Murdstone. 'Clara!'" (60). Clara evidently still retains some of her adult capabilities, despite Murdstone's attempt to erase those tendencies from his wife's character. This aspect of Clara's character illustrates an important point of Mill's. In *The Subjection of Women*, he makes a commentary regarding what is natural for women. Using the common nineteenth-century argument that women are naturally created to defer to men in all areas, Mill argues that if this is so, why then must there be legislation about what women can and cannot do? As he writes, "One thing we may be certain of – that what is contrary to women's nature to do, they will never be made to do by simply giving their nature free play. The anxiety of mankind to interfere in behalf of nature, for fear lest nature should not succeed in effecting its purpose, is an altogether unnecessary solicitude" (143). Using this as a lens to view Dickens's work through then, one may find an intriguing corollary. Assuming as Murdstone seems to do that woman's natural tendency is for submission, it is a telling critique on

Dickens' part that Murdstone finds it necessary to reinforce this trait in Clara as it certainly does not seem to come naturally.

It would be a modern reader's inclination to think that Clara would rightly refuse to follow Murdstone's edicts, but Clara's education as an adult is not fully formed. She does not have the confidence to assert herself and stand by her decision to do so. Further, Clara fears punishment for even inadvertently questioning the power of the panopticon, as Murdstone's reaction proves is warranted. As an Inspector of the panopticon, Murdstone uses his position to control Clara's behavior and to punish her verbally, and perhaps physically, as her fear seems to imply, for any transgression against patriarchal authority. When she is sharply reprimanded for daring to think that she has a claim to the home she acquired through marriage, she returns to the child-like desire to please: "'OUR own house, I mean,' faltered my mother, evidently frightened – 'I hope you must know what I mean, Edward – it's very hard that in YOUR own house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters'" (60). Clara moves from claiming at least partial ownership, "OUR own house," to submitting everything to her husband, "YOUR own house," is a matter of moments. She laments, "I thought you were pleased, once, with my being a little inexperienced and girlish, Edward . . . but you seem to hate me for it now" (61). Much like Lydgate who finds that girlish really comes to mean childish, Clara recognizes that the formation of her character back into that of a child does not create a happy marriage; however, Murdstone is firmly in control of who he wants her to be and Clara must struggle to meet his demands of "firmness and decision" (62). David details the way in which his mother finally meets these contradictory demands: "I never knew my mother afterwards to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss Murdstone" (62). Clara's old strength of character is now

directed, as Jane W. Stedman notes of Dickens' child-wife characters, "toward loving their unworthy men" (114).

Not all men approach marriage with a view of male superiority of women, however. Where Murdstone successfully manages to crush any potential for adulthood in Clara, David attempts to cultivate adult independence and partnership in his child-like first wife, Dora Spenlow. With Murdstone's brutal example of patriarchal panopticism before his eyes, David tries to gently educate his wife in the way that his father educated his mother in the short time they were together. Yet, Dora is not eager to learn, unlike Clara; she much prefers to embrace the patriarchal panopticon's ideals of child-like adulthood and in this way resembles Rosamond in Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

Dora's life with her father effectively spans what might be called her chronological childhood. Her courtship with David marks the end of the childhood and culminates in a failed attempt by David to ask Mr. Spenlow for Dora's hand in marriage. Mr. Spenlow dies shortly after this event, and Dora's supposed adulthood really begins in the negotiations of David with her aunts to continue his courtship with the eventuality of marriage if all proves agreeable. Thus, it is in this place of Dora and David's relationship that one may begin to see more of Dickens's criticism of what Dora will later asked to be called, a child-wife.

In what serves as foreshadowing, the aunts open their discussion with David by referring to his relationship with Dora as "the light . . . inclinations of young people . . . owing to the difficulty of knowing whether they are likely to endure or have any real foundation" (744). Hastily assuring the aunts that his intentions will not change, David makes all the promises necessary to continue his engagement. The introduction of Dora into the domestic scene reveals how much Dora is being encouraged to reason well and become a responsible adult: Miss

Lavinia “treated Dora just as if she had been a toy” (744-5). Further, Dora’s educational accomplishments do not aid her journey into adulthood any more than Rosamond’s do in *Middlemarch*. In comparing Dora to Traddles' fiancé Sophy, David, in his youth, feels he has gotten the better choice; Dora beautifully plays the piano, sings to the guitar, and paints. Yet, one should note the careful use of Sophy’s talents: she “knows enough of the piano to teach it to her little sisters,” and “she sings ballads, sometimes, to freshen up the others a little when they are out of spirits” (750). Dora may have a feminine education superior to that of Sophy, but it is Sophy who makes these talents useful and even somewhat practical. As David recalls, “I compared her in my mind with Dora, with considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly admitted to myself that she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too” (745). What is interesting to focus on here is that Dora is a good match to David at this point; both are young and inexperienced, and neither seems to worry too much for providing for the future. Yet, to secure Dora’s hand in marriage, David must move beyond youth and inexperience. In doing so, he becomes a man like Traddles, working to provide for a future domestic situation. In being more like Traddles, the type of woman that would be a good match suddenly becomes someone more like Sophy than Dora, which points out the complexity of Dickens’ multi-plot storytelling. Where Traddles and Sophy will ultimately succeed, David and Dora will ultimately fail because feminine education is not at all useful when pursued only to create refinement and render oneself attractive to a potential husband. Again, one finds the dichotomy noted in the comparison between Mill and Ruskin; a woman must do exactly what seems forbidden to her, in this case pursue a meaningful education, in order to be what a man in this society actually wants and needs her to be.

David and Dora find points of contention in their respective viewpoints about feminine ideals and practical applications even before they are married. As another moment of foreshadowing, which Dickens manages quite well throughout the novel, David's aunt Betsey, a thoroughly sensible if gruff woman, is determined by Dora's aunts to be "an eccentric and somewhat masculine lady with a strong understanding" (750). In this sentiment, the masculine trait is having a strong understanding, which seems to imply that Betsey's sensibility and determination to act according to her opinions regardless of those of the patriarchal panopticon makes her more masculine than feminine. The view of Dora's aunts carries over to their treatment of Dora herself, and this behavior disturbs David in a way that marks Dickens' concern as well. Rather than being fully pleased with Dora's subservience, David grows concerned that he will need Dora to be a partner in the household, not an adoring praise-giver:

One thing troubled me much, after we had fallen into this quiet train. It was, that Dora seemed by one consent to be regarded like a pretty toy or plaything. My aunt, with whom she became gradually familiar, always called her Little Blossom; and the pleasure of Miss Lavinia's life was to wait upon her, curl her hair, make ornaments for her, and treat her like a pet child. (752)

Dickens utilizes two types of imagery to compare women in their state of dependence: animal imagery and the imagery of childhood. Both are dependent upon the strength of others to the point that their very lives are held in another's hands. Here, the imagery is combined, making Dora a "pet child" (752). Yet, David is an unusual example of a man who should serve as an Inspector in the panopticon not worrying about his wife meeting the typical expectations of child-like womanhood, likely because his examples of womanhood include Betsey and a strong female friend named Agnes Wickfield. David, however, offers Dora the freedom to create her own identity without the strictures of Mill's aptly described "artificial bent" in feminine nature. He encourages her that she "might be very happy, and yet be treated rationally" (753). Dora's

reaction is less than encouraging to David, however, lamenting, “if I [David] didn’t like her, why had I ever wanted so much to be engaged to her? And why didn’t I go away, now, if I couldn’t bear her?” (753). Dora’s response recalls that of Eliot’s Rosamond Vincy who in reply to her husband’s gentle remonstrations that their lifestyle must be adjusted wishes that he would go live in London. Neither woman can understand why it is important to be treated as rational independent individuals because they have allowed themselves to be fully formed in the mold of child-wives by the patriarchal panopticon. In fact, they expect men to make all of the decisions and to do all of it with an eye toward their wife’s happiness, so it confounds them when they are asked to participate in the process of determining their own happiness.

Dora at least recognizes that she should perhaps attempt to be what David needs from her in marriage. As she bargains with David, “Then don’t find fault with me . . . and I’ll be good” (753). Yet, Dora cannot apply herself to her work of becoming an adult wife: “[T]he cookery-book made Dora’s head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn’t add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets” (754). Once married, the domestic situation does not improve, and compared with Traddles’ home life with Sophy, one is led to see the many deficiencies that could be corrected if Dora would, or perhaps could, assume the role of something more than a child playing at marriage. Finally, in her own unhappiness regarding their failing domestic situation and the strife it causes between them, Dora proposes a solution: “Will you call me a name I want you to call me? . . . Child-wife” (803). Not understanding fully, David asks for more explanation, and the proposed solution becomes clearer; Dora wishes to be absolved of her faults because she truly feels she is a child, incapable of the adult behaviors David has been expecting of her:

I only mean that you should think of me that way. When you are going to be angry with me, say to yourself, ‘it’s only my child-wife!’ When I am very



disappointing, say, 'I knew a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!' When you miss what I should like to be, and I think I can never be, say, 'still my foolish child-wife loves me!' For indeed I do. (804)

Taking this plea to heart, David resigns himself to sacrificing his own fulfillment in marriage to making Dora happy and assuming responsibility for all things, including the household he had hoped to give to his wife as an exercise in her own adult capacities. In essence, David is forced to be the Inspector in the panopticon because his own wife expects him to do so, which reinforces the power of the panopticon regardless of whether it is David who forces correct behavior on Dora or vice versa.

Dickens devotes a considerable portion of his text to the disconsolate feelings that David has regarding this failed attempt at a more equal, balanced marriage, which lends more weight to the argument that Dickens is attempting to highlight a very real problem in the patriarchal panopticism of Victorian society. As Mill warns is the case in his philosophy, Dickens shows to be the case in his fiction: women who are given inadequate educations and encouraged to be perpetual children will not serve as good partners in a marriage relationship, causing discord in what Victorians would have seen as one of the most sacred relationships allowed to man. Well intentioned, David begins this new phase of his marriage: "Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them" (806). However, David does realize that the marriage quickly becomes something other than what he had hoped; in fulfilling Dora's dream of a child-wife relationship, David finds his own adult qualities out of place and unsupported: "I was happy, but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting" (869). Moreover, David acknowledges that marriage would be more beneficial in a way that he knows is possible: "But

that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew” (869).

Sadly, the ideal when presented in the actual does not produce a happy and fulfilling marriage. In sacrifice of people’s happiness, the patriarchal panopticon reinforces its own power; and those people may be men or women. One partner or the other may be happy or both may be unhappy, but it is impossible to create a balanced and beneficial marriage under this model of patriarchal panopticism as Dickens’s fictional representation of David and Dora illustrates. This theme recalls that of Eliot in Lydgate’s final succumbing to Rosamond’s inability to support and help him in the marriage. In fact, the two texts describe the situation in remarkably similar images. Lydgate realizes, “He had chosen this fragile creature and had taken the burden of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying that burden pitifully” (Eliot 775). This may be compared to David’s realization in *David Copperfield*:

‘There can be no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and purpose.’ Those words I remembered, too. I had endeavored to adapt Dora to myself, and found it impractical. It remained for me to adapt myself to Dora, to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must and still be happy. (870)

Completing the comparison between Rosamond and Dora, one finds that both husbands are described in images of physically carrying the burden of a child-wife that will impair their own ability to function in the adult world of responsibilities and the Victorian drive for productivity and action.

Unlike Rosamond who beleaguers Lydgate until his early death upon which she remarries a rich, and to her thinking, better, husband, Dora herself dies. Symbolically, this reiterates Dickens’ point that child-wives cannot function in actuality; Dora is unable to successfully become a mother – although one should be careful to note that Dickens’ does not seem to place

blame here, – and she is equally unable to function as a wife and helpmeet to her husband. Yet, Dora dies with some measure of self-awareness, which is more than Rosamond ever considers, although that is likely because Eliot utilizes a strong narrator in her text that allows for commentary not expressed by the characters' themselves. Dora frankly tells David, "I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything . . . I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife" (958). Dora goes on to envision their future should she live, "[M]y dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. . . .He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is" (958). With these profound words hardly expected from his child-wife, David is ushered from the room and Dora dies shortly after making Agnes, her model that she felt she could never live up to, promise to take care of David and implicitly to become his second wife. Much like Dorothea is released from an unhappy marriage by death in order to find a more suitable marriage, so too is David suddenly released from his. What sets this event apart from authorial contrivance is Dora's deathbed realization of her inability to attain a viable feminine existence. Where the death of Casaubon is a moment of relief for readers in *Middlemarch*, Dora's death in *David Copperfield* serves as a point of sadness for the child-like woman who was never going to be able to survive in the realm of real-life hardships.

Returning to Agnes from a trip abroad to deal with his grief over the loss of his wife, David's descriptions of Agnes' effect upon him foreshadows their happy marriage to come as it nearly mirrors the description of a healthy marriage as outlined by Mill: "I owed her so much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance for what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell her (as I had done in letters) what an influence she had upon me" (1049). This moment of gratitude, characteristic of David's relationship with Agnes, fictively

illustrates Mill's ideas of personal affection that is a growth over time and the value that a man attaches to a wife, or in this case, potential wife, for her contribution to his comfort. Further, Agnes elucidates Mill's view of women as influential in the formation of character both of young men who desire to please young women and later as a mother.

Much like the narrative choice made by Eliot to truncate the concluding details of Dorothea and Ladislaw's positive marriage, Dickens does not give his reader's many scenes of the domestic life of David and Agnes. It is this truncation of details that seems to reveal the imperfect nature of Dickens's portrayal of Agnes, however. As Peter Gay writes, "Almost from the time that Charles Dickens invented Agnes Wickfield for *David Copperfield*, she has had a bad press. In his lifetime, critics accused him of failing to endow her with individuality. She seemed a cipher, a puppet, a typical Dickens virgin, little else" (1). In order to be viable, Agnes must exist as more than an Angel in the House, yet David's descriptions of his second wife seem to echo all of those sentiments in a way that does not seem revolutionary at all. Yet, we must consider Agnes not simply as David sees her. Gay encapsulates this view best, if a bit colloquially:

To David, Agnes (whom he has known since his childhood) is an icon, a superhuman superego forever enjoining him to eschew the base and embrace the noble. He certainly calls her an angel often enough, a sister-angel who serves him as confessor and guardian. But that, after all, is his problem, not hers. From all we are allowed to know about her, she has shown herself competent in her domestic and her professional roles, busy and efficient as she keeps house for her lonely father and, later, as she runs a small school. (1)

David's rhetoric surrounding his feelings for his wife may seem to make her an Angel in the House figure, but it is Agnes's own work that defines her. Considering her only through her descriptions from male characters is to see her through the lens of the patriarchal panopticon, and much like Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Agnes redefines the ideals of the patriarchal panopticon in such

a way that it almost does not realize that it has been subverted. Perhaps the best moment to gauge the relationship between Agnes and David is very similar to that of Dorothea and Ladislaw – when the two are discussing marriage as adults.

In both novels, there is a scene of honest conversation between the lovers discussing their engagement. *David Copperfield* presents this moment as an appeal between equals, just as *Middlemarch* does. As David tells Agnes he loves her, his commendations of her echo those of Ruskin: “Ever my guide, and best support!” (1078). However, David’s love for Agnes is not truly that of the Angel in the House ideal, either, for he approaches her as an equal, quite willing to give what he hopes to receive in return: “[I]f you are unhappy, let me share your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to give it to you” (1076). Rather than Ruskin’s ideal woman functioning as a guide and praise-giver, Agnes functions as one from whom David learns how to be a man. Note the second appellation; David does not embrace masculine superiority to female reason, which is what the panopticon expects of them both. Rather, he asks to “to try to give” counsel to Agnes, fully accepting without qualm that he may not have the answers or that hers may be better. What he asks for her is similar to what Dorothea performs in calculating her financial situation and offering a frank assessment to Ladislaw – both want a marriage of adult partners, not one of child-wives and perpetual childhood. Fittingly, and likely deliberately, the only guests at David and Agnes’ wedding are the principle characters that demonstrate adult concepts of womanhood and marriage – Traddles and Sophy and Doctor and Mrs. Strong. Even as Dickens through his narrator David closes the text, Agnes claims the supportive and formative role in David’s life, and he finds his realization of a marriage that involves happiness for himself and his spouse: “O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I . . . still find thee near me, pointing upward!” (1095).

**Conclusion: Subversion of the Panopticon**

The patriarchal panopticon of nineteenth-century England worked to create a system by which women were educated to be subservient to men, surveilled even into marriage to examine their behavior, and punished if their behavior deviated from the desire of the patriarchal panopticon that seeks to always reinforce its own power. Fallen women are more obvious targets for patriarchal punishment, but as Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Dickens's *David Copperfield* demonstrate, married women are just as likely to be surveilled and punished as their "fallen" counterparts. Examining married women offers another aspect to understanding the double bind of femininity that the patriarchal panopticon creates, however. Even in being a model example of the patriarchal panopticon's ideal of womanhood that is inculcated from their very earliest education, women can still fail to be successful. In fact, women who successfully mold themselves into the child until marriage ideal, and potentially even further, can destroy what is perhaps the ultimate Victorian ideal of all – the socially ordered and happy marriage. Further, men are just as likely to be forced into the position of Inspector in this panopticon that they do not wish to assume. Both Lydgate and David are rational men; neither strikes the reader as wishing to be revolutionary, only to have wives who can work with them as adults to achieve mutual success in the world. Rather than radical proto-feminists, both Eliot's and Dickens's men are simply seeking the ideal of marriage and success that has been presented to them as a result of following the prescribed social rules. Even Eliot's Dorothea and Dickens's Agnes are not revolutionary women; neither are presented as the type of woman that would foment rebellion. Yet all of these normal lives prove a very extraordinary conclusion for the patriarchal panopticon; success is only viable outside of its structure. As both Eliot and Dickens strive to

demonstrate, the patriarchal panopticon must be dismantled for women to attain a viable existence that includes the recognition of women's adulthood and the ability to claim responsibility for one's own life. Only when this system is subverted can the ideals of the nineteenth-century – happy marriages and successful, productive citizens – be truly achieved.

## Conclusion

In this critical examination of these novels, the systematic repression of women is revealed to be an inescapable hallmark of Victorian society. When faced with the historical accounts of the legal repression of women as well as compelling arguments regarding women's social situation in the works of well-respected authors such as George Eliot and Charles Dickens, one begins to ask him or herself how such a system could not utterly collapse upon itself. In short, why do these women not create their own system and rebel as a group against those who oppress them?

Questioning the development of a group identity in the context of a division of roles invites the use of a Marxist framework for evaluation. However, as Lise Vogel notes, looking to Marxist socialism for a direct framework for the liberation of women is a difficult, if impossible, endeavor: "Marxist tradition provides only limited theoretical guidance on the twin problems of women's oppression and women's liberation" (133). Yet, this does not mean that Marxism cannot meaningfully inform the nineteenth-century oppression of women. Vogel writes of capitalist societies such as nineteenth-century England, "class-struggle over the conditions of production represents the central dynamic of social development in societies characterized by exploitation" (135). Further, "surplus-labor is appropriated by the dominant class," wherein women's role is linked to the "generational replacement [that] provides most of the new workers needed to replenish this class" (135). Thus, women's importance to society is based specifically in her biological capability to bear children; socially, this means women must either choose or be compelled to marry and have children. This situation is reproduced in the microcosm of the household wherein, as Marx and Engels note, "[the husband] is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat" (qtd. in Vogel 136).



Yet, even the creation of a social structure that rendered women nearly incapable of choosing not to participate in their role of producing new workers, there was soon identified another issue that further situated women as a class unto themselves. Victorian theorist W. R. Greg writes in his “Why Are Women Redundant?” that the population of marriageable women in England greatly outnumbered that of marriageable men and argues that these superfluous women, those who would not be married, should emigrate to Australia where the British Empire needed more women in order to produce more workers in this settlement. The commodification of women demonstrated so plainly in this social plan to reallocate resources completes the creation of the female identity as Other to any masculine identity. Just as the bourgeoisie do not recognize the proletariat as people like themselves, men do not recognize women as a social group deserving the same rights to liberty and freedom of choice as they do. Consequently, the social tensions between men and women mirror those of the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

Marx takes up the social development of class-consciousness in the preface to *A Contribution to Political Economy*. As he writes, “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (4). On the surface, women’s social existence in Victorian England seems to offer them some productive outlets for labor outside of producing children for the workforce. In fact, George Eliot and Charles Dickens point to some of these female activities when carefully representing the philanthropic acts of Dorothea Brooke and Esther Summerson, respectively. Yet, as Lucy Delap notes, none of these activities led to any organization of women as a class group:

Instead, the early nineteenth-century evangelical revival had encouraged women in Britain and America to take on philanthropic work, in prisons, schools, temperance and abolition. Abolitionist women drew up petitions, raised funds and lectured in public – and this work has long been seen as setting in motion the conditions that led to an organised ‘women’s movement’ later in the century, though recent scholarship has emphasised the lack of any predetermined transition from philanthropy, to abolition, to ‘feminism.’ (19)

As it is just this type of political activism that leads male social groups to develop a class-consciousness, it presents a conundrum to be examined that women do not follow the same lead.

Again, returning to Marx may provide an answer to why these efforts were carefully monitored by the patriarchal system so that they would not develop into anything larger. First, it is important to recognize the potential for revolution inherent in the development of a class-consciousness. The process starts in understanding that “conflict exist[s] between the social forces of production and the relations of production” (4). Referencing Marx’s previous assertion that social existence determines class-consciousness, Engels bluntly reviews Marx’s work, “This proposition is so simple that it should be self-evident to anyone not bogged down in idealist humbug. But it leads to highly revolutionary consequences not only in the theoretical sphere but also in the practical sphere” (131). It is precisely this potential for revolution that the patriarchal panopticon of the nineteenth century wishes to avoid making possible for women. In much the same way that the bourgeoisie fears the potential for uprising from the larger population of their proletariat subjects, the patriarchal structure fears a potential uprising and subsequent loss of power from the larger population comprised on female subjects. Thus, the ultimate design of the patriarchal panopticon allows for the prevention of the development of a class-consciousness.

In the works of Eliot and Dickens, we have seen the effects of the patriarchal panopticon’s desire to prevent the development of a class-consciousness. In *Adam Bede*, Hetty feels that she is unable to seek the help of Dinah, despite Dinah’s explicit offer to aid Hetty

should she ever find herself in trouble. Further, in Dickens's *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock tearfully tells her daughter Esther that it would be impossible to save Lady Dedlock from punishment, even with Jarndyce's assistance. It is crucial to recognize that even a willingness to save Lady Dedlock is rejected because she cannot see her situation as endemic of a larger system of oppression. As an isolated individual, she feels her social crimes are solely her fault and desires her own punishment to assuage her guilt. This isolation of women creates a system in which each woman sees rebelling against the patriarchal panopticon as a personal fault. Since the patriarchal panopticon rewards women for reporting potential subversion of the panopticon to the authority figures, women are far less likely to turn to each other for assistance, which assumes that the socially constructed guilt they feel does not consume them first. An individual cannot fight the power structure alone with any measure of success, as Marx demonstrates throughout the body of his work. Therefore, isolation through the panoptic gaze serves the dual purpose of reinforcing patriarchal power and preventing female revolution.

To place this struggle within historical context, the overpowering force used to control women in England can be seen as an extension of the fears of imperialist Britain, which sees its own power fading with instances such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Using women's symbolic connection to the principles of emotion, John Stuart Mill connects the concern for dominance at home and abroad. A traditional way in which men asserted masculine authority was through colonization: "Conquering races hold it to be Nature's own dictate that the conquered should obey the conqueror, or, as they euphoniously paraphrase it, that the feebler and more unwarlike races should submit to the braver and manlier" (*Subjection* 40). In Victorian England, the unconquered races surrounding them, the French and Italians, are considerably more emotional by English standards. The history of competition between the English and the

French and Italians is well documented and may be referenced here in order to provide a basis for the creation of emotion as Other to masculine identity. As Mill writes, “The French, and Italians, are undoubtedly by nature more nervously excitable than the Teutonic races, and, compared at least with the English, they have a much greater habitual and daily emotional life: but have they been less great in science, in public business, in legal and judicial eminence, or in war?” (90). By associating emotion with the races that have succeeded in spite of British contempt and competition, the imperialist spirit of the Empire becomes attached to the masculine rejection of emotion. In this way, women, who are associated with emotion, become a surrogate for these opposing races. Thus, anxiety regarding British dominance in the world, making them the “braver and manlier” (40), is reflected in the microcosm of the household and domestic relations. Women become a symbol for emotion, which connects them with the anxiety British men feel toward their place in world politics as well as within their own society. In order to quell this anxiety, women are placed under the rule of men, affirming the traditional masculine gender norm both at home and abroad.

For Mill, it required a serious encounter with overwhelming emotion, a nervous breakdown, to fully understand the need to break down the social and legal carriers between masculinity and femininity. Just as *Adam Bede*'s Arthur Donnithorne found himself trapped in the patriarchal panopticon, so too does Mill. Mill's *Autobiography* provides the reader with an interesting study in the traditional views of masculinity, which he experienced in his youth, and his later development toward the ideals of gender equality as he reached maturity. He describes his early life goals in the vein of traditional masculinity in his *Autobiography*: “I was accustomed to felicitate myself on the certainty of a happy life which I enjoyed, though placing my happiness in something durable and distant, in which some progress might be always making, while it

could never be exhausted by complete attainment” (99). The focus here is not an emotion, happiness, but the ability to progress successfully. Yet, this complete focus on progress and work leaves Mill suffering a nervous breakdown by his early twenties. Attempting to create a masculinity that spurns emotion in order to reject femininity is unnatural; no human being can avoid emotion nor should he as Mill argues effectively from experience in *Autobiography*.

When faced with a natural occurrence of emotional crisis, Mill relates that he was unable to talk with anyone who might be able to help him because of what we understand as the expectations of the patriarchal panopticon:

I sought no comfort by speaking to others of what I felt. If I had loved anyone sufficiently to make confiding my griefs a necessity, I should not have been in the condition I was. I felt, too, that mine was not an interesting, or in any way respectable, distress. There was nothing in it to attract sympathy. Advice, if I had known where to seek it, would have been most precious. (100)

The mid-century Victorian male, as Mill then was, is unable to cope with great emotion as his development has been stunted in an attempt to conform to the desires of the panopticon. As Mill’s experiences demonstrate, a healthy emotional range would have prevented his devolving into despair. Furthering his despair is the realization that masculine gender norms render his condition lacking in respectability, and he is unable to find respite. Perhaps this realization is what allows Mill to argue for the equality of women and point out the illogical aspects of masculine arguments for the rejection of women’s rights, as he does in *The Subjection of Women*. Only in developing a respect for what would be termed feminine is Mill able to recover. He notes that masculinity and femininity do not have to function as opposite poles in character development: “I had now learnt by experience that the passive susceptibilities needed to be cultivated as well as the active capacities, and required to be nourished and enriched as well as guided” (104).

Mill, like Dickens and Eliot, begins to use his social standing to bring more equality to the relationship between men and women. His work in Parliament attempts to remove the legal barriers to women's ability to see themselves as a united class group. Willing to lead by example, upon his 1851 marriage to Harriet Taylor, who had herself been separated from her husband before his death, Mill signed "a legal instrument renouncing the powers that marriage conferred on him as husband" (Tosh 17). Rather than passively accepting the rule that the law would give him over his wife and vowing to use his power kindly, Mill took legal action to remove the power from his hands, in essence allowing his wife to function in many ways as a precursor to the free and equal woman he was working with her to make legally possible. In many ways, Mill stands in the last part of the nineteenth century as an embodiment of Eliot and Dickens's calls for social reform, taking up the challenges their works clearly presented in the realm of public opinion as well as the halls of legal power. Crucially, Mills does not seek to use power as benevolent protector but to simply grant power to women for their own free development.

Eulogies of both Eliot and Dickens demonstrate their lasting effect on British society.

One of Eliot's obituaries reflects her goals as an artist – to be known simply by her works: The life of George Eliot is, as we have said, little more than the history of her literary activity. A mere catalogue of her writings will stir many memories, and far better than a critical estimate of their value will remind her innumerable readers of the keen and innocent pleasure she has afforded them, of the stirring and elevated thoughts she has lavished on their entertainment. Those who only knew her books will deplore an irreparable loss to English letters, while those who also knew the writer will feel that a great and noble spirit, supreme in intellect as in culture, as tender as it was strong, has passed away from the world. ("George Eliot" 3)

Further, one of Dickens's obituaries connects him in a similar method of authorship, however with a more personal connection indicative of his broad appeals in the name of social causes:

[In his works,] he evinced a sympathy for the poor, the suffering, and the

oppressed which took all hearts by storm. This power of sympathy it was, no doubt, which has made his name a household word in English homes. How many a phase of cruelty and wrong his pen exposed, and how often he stirred others to try at least to lessen the amount of evil and of suffering which must be ever abroad in the world, will never be fully known. There was always a lesson beneath his mirth. (“Charles Dickens” 3)

As products of an era so well known for anxiety and a rapid changing of worldviews, Charles Dickens and George Eliot, a rather unlikely duo of reformers, captured the public imagination with timeless stories of oppression and loss only to persuade the public to find a way for redemption. As their obituaries and the works of reformers such as Mill suggest, their pleas did not pass unnoticed. Where Dickens may have seemed to fail as a legal reformer and Eliot seemed to decline to participate, both hold a stronger place in the progression of women’s causes than a historical accounting can ever intimate.

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