

**Debating Difference in an Age of Reform:
Liberal Praxis and Representation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain**

by

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Abstract

“Debating Difference in an Age of Reform: Liberal Praxis and Representation in mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain” explores the function of difference and the nature of equality in the Victorian period. Focusing on the 1850s and 1860s, the dissertation offers a distinctive account of liberal thought, organizing, and aesthetics at a key moment of historical transformation in British society. It identifies how the expansion of the citizenry and the public sphere of readers revealed the fact of difference and why difference challenged democratic ideals of equality. The central question is this: how did liberal thinkers, organizers, and writers navigate the contradiction between equality’s unrealized promise and the actually-existing hierarchy of differences in which they lived?

Scholarship on Victorian liberalism often prioritizes liberal over liberal action. This dissertation seeks to redress the imbalance by focusing on the strategies and forms of representation that evolved in order to accommodate new sets of people as political actors. The first chapter sets the parameters of liberal thought by presenting an analysis of the way J. S. Mill’s conception of difference informed his political practice. I argue that in his political speeches, “The Negro Question” (1850), *On Liberty* (1859), and *The Subjection of Women* (1869) Mill’s empirical uncertainty about the cause of difference – whether it was natural or socially constructed – underpins the liberal equality that he worked to bring about throughout his political career. The second chapter turns to an account of the way that difference structured the organizing work of the feminist collective known as the Langham Place group. My analysis of

the group's letters and articles from their mouthpiece, the *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864), shows how the group represented an attempt to expand the democratic public sphere through the production of difference as the basis for forging collective bonds. The third chapter considers the strategies of representation in three novels of reform – George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, *The Radical* (1866), Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), and Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1869). The novels thematize ideas about difference, commonness, and publicity in an age of reform. I argue that the representation of liberal equality they formalized left a legacy that was in many ways more enduring than the liberal action I discuss in Chapters One and Two.

The aim of my dissertation is to offer a comprehensive picture of the political claims it was possible to make in response to difference as the basis for and challenge to the liberal public sphere in the mid-nineteenth century. Each chapter provides detailed analysis of the ways in which liberals came to terms with an expanded sense of plurality as the political condition of life, and how they worked to represent and live with the fundamental condition of difference structuring life in common. Ultimately, I argue that the novel offered a unique solution to the problem of how to live with difference because, in formalizing a structure that demands the reader encounter the text as a mass subject, it relied on disidentification and detachment as much as sympathetic identification. By revealing the common project underlying diverse forms of liberal action and representation – political campaigns, activist organizing, and literary works – I therefore show how publics, as politically effective social spaces, engaged in definitional struggles over ways of organizing, representing, and imagining a form of citizenship in its expanded sense.

Introduction

The Meaning of Difference in Nineteenth-Century Liberal Thought

In the preface to *Equals* (2002), the psychologist Adam Phillips wrote, “That people are not identical, but that it is possible for them to be equal in certain ways, is one of our modern political hopes.”¹ Phillips emphasizes the aspirational nature of political equality: we must hope for the coexistence of equality and difference, rather than comfortably take it for granted. In so doing, he points not only to the work required to sustain a basic premise of democracy, but also to one of democracy’s constitutive paradoxes. Difference (of thought, opinion, and position) is a necessary condition of democracy, signaling the dissensus that is the engine of the democratic process, and without which we approach the homogeneity of totalitarianism. Yet differences (of class, status, gender, or ability) are also democracy’s stumbling block, for what Phillips terms the “reflex” to inscribe hierarchy onto difference is conceptually at odds with a form of political life based on the absence of any superior individual or group. Difference, when it cannot be seen without also seeing hierarchy, therefore challenges the form of political association necessary in democratic life, which assumes that the increasing numbers of people granted the rights of the citizen can choose their own government based on an unshakeable, inherent equality and an equivalence with respect to political power.

¹ Adam Phillips. *Equals*. New York: Basic Books, 2002, p. xiii. Subsequent page references in text.

The questions to which the fact of difference gives rise are enduring ones. As Phillips asks, “what kind of equality is viable in the light of difference?” (27). We might also ask, less optimistically, whether in the light of difference equality is at all possible? And, further, if equality endures as a political hope though not a political fact, how might we negotiate the contradiction of equality’s unrealized promise and, too, the actually-existing hierarchy of differences in which we live? Alexis de Tocqueville saw this kind of dynamic at play in the democratic social relations of America, in which, he observed, “public opinion” can bring people “to a common level” to create “a sort of imaginary equality in spite of the actual inequality of their social condition.”² But of what does imaginary equality consist? Can a form of equality that is only theoretical or imaginary change actually existing social relations, as Tocqueville maintained it could change the relations between master and slave by altering their forms of thoughts? These are the questions I take up in this dissertation, which explores the function of difference and the nature of equality in liberal thought, organizing, and aesthetics in the Victorian period, focusing specifically on the decade before the Second Reform Act of 1867. This was a period of economic expansion, when, as Eric Hobsbawm notes in his account of the period 1848 to 1875, economic prosperity coincided with political activity.³ In Victorian Britain, prosperity was built on economic liberalism and free trade. Britain’s imperial power enabled its people to encounter the difference of non-European nations, if only through Britain’s ability to purchase food and materials cheaply to bolster its economy. Of course, as Lauren Goodlad observes, “rubbing against the agreeable idea of British commerce as the engine of world peace and prosperity was the far less desirable awareness of a ‘free trade’ reliant on the continuous

² Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (1835-1840). Translated by Gerald E. Bevan. London: Penguin, 2003, p. 668.

³ Eric Hobsbawm. *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*. 1975. London: Vintage, 1996, p. 32.

exercise of military power.”⁴ At home, the emergence of liberalism as a philosophy and political practice was coterminous with a period of reform, and saw the passage of the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884. The First Reform Act redistributed the franchise by eliminating so-called “rotten” boroughs with disproportionately small electorates and extended the vote to men who met the property qualification. It was the Second Reform Act, the 1867 Representation of the People Act, which extended the franchise to men of legal age who were householders or lodgers in the boroughs and lowered the property threshold in the counties; it effectively doubled the franchise and fundamentally reshaped the definition of citizenship in Britain.⁵

Rising literacy rates, technological improvements in printing, and the railway, which created a market for cheap entertainment and enabled a better distribution network, changed the shape of the reading public in Victorian Britain. The expansion of the reading public, as much as the expansion of the citizenry, changed the composition of the public sphere and the kinds of political bids that it was possible to make. For Jürgen Habermas, the nineteenth century saw the rise of mass print culture and the consequent loss of the rational debate that had been possible in the eighteenth-century gentlemanly world of letters. Published in German in 1962, and translated into English rather later in 1989, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* made the case that the “continual expansion” of the public sphere to “include more and more participants,” though necessary for the “requirements of democracy,” brought about the “degeneration” in the quality of public discourse.⁶ Critics have noted the exclusions of the public sphere, specifically in relation to class and gender. This work was initiated by scholars, including Seyla Benhabib,

⁴ Lauren M. E. Goodlad. *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 7. Subsequent page references in text.

⁵ UK Parliament. *An Act further to amend the Laws relating to the Representation of the People in England and Wales (“The Second Reform Act, 1867”)*. 15 August 1867.

⁶ Craig Calhoun. “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere.” *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992: 1-48, p. 3.

Nancy Fraser, Geoff Eley, and Mary P. Ryan, who contributed to Craig Calhoun's edited collection published after the September 1989 conference marking the English translation of Habermas' text.⁷ My dissertation is clearly indebted to such work, as well as the work of queer theorists such as Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, who took up and extended Fraser's concept of subaltern counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses."⁸ In particular, the second chapter of this dissertation, which focuses on the group of feminist organizers who became known as the Langham Place Group, builds on and contributes to the nuanced version of the public sphere that these scholars shaped.

The rationale

Following those who have challenged Habermas' claim that the public sphere lost its political function in the nineteenth century, this dissertation explores the political claims it was possible to make in response to difference as the basis for and challenge to the liberal public sphere in the mid-nineteenth century. In his famous lecture on the two concepts of liberty, Isaiah Berlin defined politics as the struggle to define the ends of common life. How we achieve what is determined as the good is a mechanical question, not a political one: "Where ends are agreed, the only questions left are those of means, and these are not political, but technical, that is to say, capable of being settled by experts or machines like arguments between engineers or doctors."⁹

⁷ Craig Calhoun, editor. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

⁸ Nancy Fraser. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80, p. 67.

⁹ Isaiah Berlin. *Two Concepts of Liberty. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958, p. 3. Subsequent page references in text.

If politics is the working out of ends, recognition and not liberty becomes the crucial good.¹⁰

Thus, for Berlin, John Stuart Mill's notion of the limits of liberty in the dangers of doing harm does not "allow for the variety of human wishes" (47). Positive freedom in Berlin's analysis is a form of liberty in which I am free to be who I am, and just as crucially to be seen as I am: I am a member of a group in which the other members "understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody in the world" (42). This recognition is not exactly freedom, but it is equality or the basis for it: "it is more closely related to solidarity, fraternity, mutual understanding, need for association on equal terms" (43).

If we abandon the idea that there is what Berlin evocatively calls a "final solution" (52), we must accept the commonplace that "neither political equality nor efficient organization is compatible with more than a modicum of individual liberty, and certainly not with unrestricted laissez-faire; that justice and generosity, public and private loyalties, the demands of genius and the claims of society can conflict violently with each other" (53). We must also accept that "not all good things are compatible" (53), even if it means that we feel the "universe is not a cosmos, not a harmony" and that "conflicts of values may be an intrinsic, irremovable element in human life" (53). Doing so challenges our ability to see wholeness in the idea of human collectivity, forcing a recognition of difference as a fundamental condition of not merely assembly but in some sense what it means to be human: "To admit that the fulfillment of some of our ideals may in principle make the fulfillment of others impossible is to say that the notion of total human fulfillment is a formal contradiction, a metaphysical chimera" (53). We must, in the end, choose

¹⁰ See also Charles Taylor: "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being." "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Edited by Amy Gutman. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994: 25-73, p. 25.

“between ultimate values”: people “choose as they do, because their life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are as much a part of their being and conscious thought and sense of their own identity, as their basic physical structure” (57). If politics is the working out of ends, and if we take up our position in relation to those ends not merely because of what we think, but because of who we are, then it becomes clear why recognition is for Berlin a necessary condition of equality insofar as it is achievable. The working out of ends – namely, politics – becomes a struggle between competing values and therefore identities, the struggle to achieve the forms of association and being in common that allow us to be seen for who we are.

Berlin’s two concepts of liberty are thus useful in laying out the terms on which my exploration of nineteenth-century liberal thought, action, and aesthetics depends: namely, politics, identity, representation, recognition, and difference. According to Berlin’s “ideal of freedom to live as one wishes” and the concomitant pluralism it demands (57), struggle is an inherent part of association: competing versions of the good are “in perpetual rivalry with one another” (56). The case studies that comprise this dissertation respond to the questions to which Berlin’s account gives rise: do differences always entail struggle? Does formal contradiction always signal disharmony? If by the 1950s it was more difficult to think about liberal collectivity except in terms emphasizing conflict and disharmony, I propose that the 1860s represented a moment in which liberal actors tried to think and bring about forms of collectivity and association in which difference did not inevitably lead to conflict, or at least such conflict need not necessarily lead to resolution (Berlin’s final solution). In understanding the problem difference posed to liberal collectivity as a formal one, and in looking for formal responses to the politics of representation and the relationship with equality and difference, I join a number of

literary scholars whose work reassesses the legacies of liberalism, and who are interested in the intertwining of liberal aesthetics and modes of thought.

Take, for instance, a special issue of the journal *Occasion*, published in January of 2018, which is devoted to the intersection of liberalism and the emotions, exploring “some of the ways in which the specifically affective content and function of literature promoted, confronted, or undermined liberal assumptions, values, ideals, and states of behavior over the long nineteenth century.”¹¹ Critics like Regenia Gagnier, Helen Groth, and David Ellison use feeling as a framework to explore what culture can do in exposing the limits of liberalism; in Gagnier’s case, registering the shift to neoliberalism in which “market ideology takes precedence over other values.”¹² Throughout this dissertation, feelings are an important place to think about the way in which liberals negotiate living as though they are equal with others despite their differences. Tocqueville’s idea of imagined equality, for instance, posits an equality that is thought or felt, but not experienced.¹³ The work that feelings do here, in mediating between an idealized and fictional equality and an actually existing inequality, is something these chapters explore.

In their introduction to the *Occasion* issue, Jock Macleod and Peter Denney pay rare attention to the fact that many liberals, such as Mill, were not just committed to philosophy or

¹¹ Jock Macleod and Peter Denney. “Liberalism, Literature, and the Emotions in the Long Nineteenth Century.” *Occasion* 11 (2018): 1-20, p. 7.

¹² Regenia Gagnier. “Global Circulation and Some Problems in Liberalism, Liberalization, and Neoliberalism.” *Occasion* 11 (2018): 1-14, p. 3. (*Occasion* is an online journal hosted by Stanford University’s digital salon, Arcade. Each article has discrete, not consequential, page numbers.)

¹³ See Kerry Larson’s argument that equality, for Tocqueville, is a “kind of ideology,” a “generative force” that alters the psychology of a nation as it “emerges as a generative force that cuts across multiple domains of public and private life, modifying everything it touches.” *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 1-2. This dissertation is indebted to Larson’s formulation of Tocquevillean equality as a “vast formalism,” a “grammar more than a language” (9). Understood as such in relation to liberal thought, both the possibilities and challenges of difference for liberal thinkers and activists are brought in starker relief.

letters but were “deeply engaged in the hurly-burly of public life” (8). If we recognize equality as fictional, or at best aspirational, then there is a gap between liberal theory and liberal life. What Macleod and Denney term “hurly-burly” was the underexplored attempt by liberal theorists and writers to attempt to close that gap in practice. Many of the subjects of this study – Mill, Anthony Trollope, the Langham Place group – were politicians and organizers in addition to producing the cultural products for which they are primarily known. The way they thought about difference had real political effects, and they tried to realize their ideals of representation in the lived world beyond the literary public sphere. But to what ends? What forms of commonness, association, and publicity did liberal organizing shape?

In answering those questions, this dissertation will also address a longstanding debate about the purpose of culture, specifically regarding the nature of the relationship between politics and literature.¹⁴ Isobel Armstrong identifies Catherine Gallagher as the initiator of a “brilliant and honourable” tradition of what she critiques as “default conservative readings” of literature.¹⁵ Critics such as Lauren Goodlad, Pam Morris, Patrick Parrinder, Mary Jean Corbett, and Elaine Hadley, she goes on to say, “follow Gallagher’s understanding that the poetics of the novel are shaped by politics,” and “explore histories that recognize the grip of conservative ideologies or of historical conditions that close down an inclusive and egalitarian society” (52). As Armstrong notes, Gallagher’s argument in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (1985) – that in the context of industrialism, “the debate and the fiction shape each other” – is an influential one, directing the way later critics have understood the function of literature and its relationship to the

¹⁴ On the politicization of culture, and relationship of culture to the “tensions and bonds between Liberalism’s individualist past and its collectivist future” (4), see Jordana Bailkin. *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

¹⁵ Isobel Armstrong. *Novel Politics: Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fictions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 8. Subsequent page references in text.

historical forces that shape it.¹⁶ This dissertation is indebted to, but does not follow, the models for understanding the relationship between politics and culture offered by both Gallagher and Armstrong. Armstrong's contention is that a "democratic aesthetic shapes narrative form" (3). The political novel, she claims in her analysis of George Eliot's *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866), is the wrong place to look for "political energy" (8).¹⁷ Her argument that a democratic imagination emerges through "praxis... the capacity to *image* states and conditions, not through discursive definition" assumes that politics happens elsewhere (7), not in the explicit enacting of laws but in the imagining of "the constructed fragility of social forms and how they could be otherwise" (15). Although I disagree with Armstrong's contention that the political novel is not the place to look for politics, underlying her analysis are several questions that are also preoccupations of my project. What is the site of politics? What is the relationship between politics and culture?

If, when Armstrong invokes the idea of the "democratic imagination," she means something like publicity – as her use of John Dewey's definition of democracy as a "mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" would suggest (6) – then the idea of difference raises a further question: what does associated living mean, and to what extent can we conceive of experience as conjoint, when difference threatens the premise of democratic

¹⁶ Catherine Gallagher. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. xii.

¹⁷ See also Irene Tucker's argument that "liberalism can be seen as an engagement with the variousness of individual subjects' historical location, but also with the way the process of understanding that variety, created and inflected by expressly social categories, might itself become the ground of a new sort of sociality. And in this version of the social constituted out of the common experience of an unpredictable, irreducible historicity, the realist novel, with its fictionalized—abstracted—detailing of particularities, stands not as a symptom of the desire to escape culture but as an instrument producing a subject whose imagining of his or her agency is limited and enabled not simply by its existence at a specific moment in time but by its movement through time." *A Probable State: The Novel, the Contract, and the Jews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 12.

equality? Regarding *Felix Holt*, Armstrong claims that “its designation as a ‘political’ novel is precisely what gets in the way of a radical reading, rather as the tag ‘condition of England novel’ circumscribes those texts that come under this description. To look for the radical here through political institutions is to look in the wrong place” (16). Yet if we take Armstrong’s claim that the novelist’s “egalitarian project” was to explore “the forms of thinking that enable a reimagining of the social” (28), need it follow that 1) the novel’s egalitarian project must be radical (and if so, radical in what sense) and 2) that those forms of thinking are not evident in the politics of the novel? It is my contention in this dissertation that “the forms of thinking that enable a reimagining of the social” occur in election novels like *Felix Holt* precisely in the way they think about representation, campaigning, and the public sphere: in short, in the political institutions that lack political energy in Armstrong’s estimation. Public sphere theory offers us a way of thinking about the social effects of the political that I find more compelling, as Geoff Eley acknowledges when he writes that “[w]hat I have always liked about ‘public sphere’ as a theory term, as a framework that we can take from Habermas, is that it provides a way of conceptualizing an expanded notion of the political. It forces us to look for politics in other social places.”¹⁸

Public sphere theory also complicates Armstrong’s argument against the default conservatism that “assumes a normative politics, an all-embracing dominant ideology that organizes cultural production” (54). Even relating the novel to the “unceasing” debates about the public sphere – from “the revolutionary anti-aristocratic democracy of Paineite radicalism in the late Enlightenment, to the concern with governance and representation around the 1832 Reform Act, to the obsession with universal suffrage” around the Second Reform Act (54) – “would be

¹⁸ Geoff Eley. “Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere.” *positions: east Asia cultures critique*. 10.1 (2002): 219-36, p. 231.

to forget that it is the circulation of multiple paradigms of democracy and competing readings of the democratic that drove debate. It created different possibilities for thinking. It generated democratic imaginations, not a single agenda, not a single imaginary, but many forms of thought” (54). I am not sure that Armstrong’s point redresses the assumption of normative politics so much as it indicates what has always been an element of public sphere theory. This dissertation is similarly interested in the many forms of thought democratic paradigms enable or require, but departing from Armstrong will explore the ways in which those competing possibilities for thinking are inherent in the idea of the public sphere as a space of contestation. For Michael Warner, for instance, the significance of publics is that they are a “motivating” idea, as “when people address publics, they engage in struggles – at varying levels of salience to consciousness, from calculated tactic to mute cognitive noise – over the conditions that bring them together as a public.”¹⁹ In other words, it is not in spite of engaging with debates about the public sphere that novels remind us about the “multiple paradigms of democracy,” but precisely because they do.

My interest in the motivating fiction of publics is the way the concept addresses the political question of equality in a period in which increasingly more groups of people could begin to conceive of themselves as members of the voting public. Publics, as politically effective social spaces, engaged in definitional struggles over ways of organizing, representing, and imagining a form of citizenship that could withstand its expanded sense. As Fraser notes, in any classed society we cannot genuinely commit to an uncontested notion of the common good, since consensus will have been reached by “deliberative processes tainted by the effects of dominance and subordination” (73). Reshaping the idea of not only the common good but also the common itself is what Armstrong might term an egalitarian project.

¹⁹ Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002, p. 12.

This dissertation is an account of difference that attends to form. As such, it responds to recent work that shares formalist preoccupations, loosely grouped together as the new formalist movement.²⁰ Caroline Levine's recent *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2018) is a noted example of such formalist work. Herein, Levine "makes a case for expanding our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience,"²¹ and argues that it is "the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics" (3). Despite her promise to address politics, the book is curiously drained of power and the political purchase of form. Politics is reduced to a vague notion of that which can "effect social change" (68), in the imprecise progressive ways of the liberal left. In a book that is so carefully attentive to the specificity of form, this imprecision about politics is frustrating. As Marijeta Bozovic puts it in the *PMLA* issue devoted to *Forms*, the "central argument of the book, in a sense, is that various enduring forms collide in interesting ways and that the results could well be emancipatory."²² In Levine's response, she allows questions to stand in for making (broad, sweeping) claims: "is political power really so singular and monolithic as invoking 'the structure' would suggest?"; "Will rearranging one aspect of social life distract us from deeper injustices, or will rearrangement constitute the very work of revolution, the reordering of the conditions of all our lives?"²³ She wants it to be the latter, but if her book succeeds in suggesting that we can reorder the conditions of our lives, and thereby do the "work of revolution," it is not because power is non-monolithic, but because, in her book, it is not there at all. Power amounts only to some kind of vague and imprecise homogenizing force, a "powerfully homogenizing,

²⁰ See Marjorie Levinson. "What Is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 558-569.

²¹ Caroline Levine. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 2. Subsequent page references in text.

²² Marijeta Bozovic. "Whose Forms? Missing Russians in Caroline Levine's *Forms*." *PMLA* 132.5 (2017): 1181-7, p. 1185.

²³ Caroline Levine. "Three Unresolved Debates." *PMLA* 132.5 (2017): 1239-43, p. 1241, p. 1240.

unifying order on the social” that is just as likely to be benevolent as coercive (*Forms* 80). There is no distinction between the operations of this vague force in different realms, or the way in which power might structure different kinds of lives in different ways, just a formal organization that structures everything: “Forms do organize us, but on a daily basis we are organized at once by multiple social, political, biological, and aesthetic rhythms, each imposing a different order and following a different logic” (80). The conclusion Levine seems to draw is that whatever else power does, it does not function like power:

If Barrett Browning is right – if it is true that many conflicting and overlapping organizing principles merely try to impose monolithic laws on experience, while often instead producing confusing and shapeless blots rather than integrated power – then a new formalism will have to take account of the temporal patterns of art and life as organizing and shaping, yes, but also as plural and colliding, jumbled and constantly altered, each, thanks to the others, incapable of imposing its own dominant order (81).

It may well be time to challenge the dominance of Foucauldian paradigms in literary studies, but this persistent, happy anarchy of form that invalidates the operation of power does not manage to do so effectively. It is breathtaking to watch Levine acknowledge the formal constraints that signal power’s operation and then insistently ignore the evidence of her own argument. Is not the imagined “particular person” in her chapter on rhythms, subject to the “overlaid” rhythms of life (49), also subject to the operations of power precisely because of the colliding, jumbled temporal patterns that for Levine are a celebrated resistance to power? It is the persistence of the liberal discomfort with inequality that enables Levine to depict the struggle “to balance work and school schedules, remembering when to pay the electric bill, see a probation officer, take communion, and swallow a pill, pausing at regular intervals to accommodate the need for food and sleep and to celebrate significant events on individual, family, national, and religious calendars” (49-50), and then to claim that the organizing principles that stand in for power “merely try” to impose

monolithic laws on experience. I would imagine the particular person seeing their probation officer feels subject to integrated power rather than a shapeless blot.

Levine cares about liberal equality; she cares about shaping a world in common with people subject to different temporal rhythms than she is. But to shape that world by occluding the reality of those differences does not remove them. It is a recuperative impulse that, to my mind, fails to account for the material conditions of the inequality it does not wish to see. This failure also characterizes the work of scholars who seek to redeem liberal values or Victorian liberalism more specifically. For example Daniel S. Malachuk's bid to pry the legacy of Victorian liberalism from the hands of the "communitarians" to champion "Victorian liberals' earnest convictions about ideas like the state and moral perfection,"²⁴ or David Wayne Thomas' attempt to "reassert aesthetic values without resorting to a neoconservative nostalgia for a dubiously conceived golden era of appreciation."²⁵ Amanda Anderson points to the recuperative tendencies of Malachuk in particular as a "renewed defense of individual practices of moral perfectionism and a critique of anti-Statism," and notes that such work "tends to have an individualist bias – in a sense reinscribing one of the features of liberalism itself."²⁶ This project seeks to reassess a particular mode of liberal thought without engaging in such recuperative tendencies.

Some models for this kind of project exist in the work of scholars including Anderson herself, Lauren Goodlad, and Elaine Hadley. Goodlad's careful parsing of the "conceptually protean" (3) nature of liberalism is a useful framework for this dissertation, as she shows that

²⁴ Daniel S. Malachuk. *Perfection, the State, and Victorian Liberalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 3, p. 1.

²⁵ David Wayne Thomas. *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. x.

²⁶ Amanda Anderson. *Bleak Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 144 n. 25, p. 14. Subsequent page references in text.

liberalism can mean “a democratic political philosophy; a theory of progress, freedom, equality or tolerance; a universalizing perspective; a cosmopolitan ethics; a procedural ethics rooted in theories of democratic consent; an economic doctrine; or a basis for either promoting or rejecting imperial pursuits” (4). My work benefits from Goodlad’s framing, as well as her example of bridging the gap resulting from “the tendency for ethical approaches to literature and culture to isolate themselves from historicism’s focus on material conditions and vice versa” (11). Anderson’s work, including her most recent book *Bleak Liberalism*, makes an incredibly important contribution in acknowledging the philosophical complexities attending liberal thought, which “allows us to begin to conceptualize, and to disclose, a richer tradition of liberal aesthetics, especially given the complex ways literary works both register the dual vision and give resonant expression to the lived experience of political aspirations” (4). Hadley’s remarkable book, *Living Liberalism*, is a “study of a particular historical moment’s theorization of politics as practice.”²⁷ For Hadley, liberalism is “a practical politics; it had a party, it informed legislation, and most crucially, it had individuals identifying with and expressing it as opinion” (3). My project shares Hadley’s commitment to “treat the very presumption of ‘individual opinion’ and liberalism’s commitment to diversity as objects of scrutiny in a history of becoming” (32).

Like much of the work mentioned above, this dissertation aims to contribute to recent reconsiderations of Victorian liberalism by focusing on its underexplored elements. In its attempt to explore the practical effects of liberal engagement with difference in an era of political reform, there are strong affinities with Hadley’s *Living Liberalism* and with Anderson’s *Bleak Liberalism*, both of which attend not only to the substance but also to the form of liberal thought

²⁷ Elaine Hadley. *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2010, p. 3. Subsequent page references in text.

and are consequently major contributions to the field of liberal aesthetics. Yet my focus diverges from both books in significant ways. Although the title of Hadley's book is *Living Liberalism*, its concern is largely formal, focusing on liberal practice in terms of modes of thought or formal structures like the ballot. In her chapter on body of thought, for instance, her interest is in the formal rather than psychological effects of the way that liberalizing subjects are "at odds with themselves and others," seeing this "oddness" as "a function of the logic of the individual *as form* rather than a feature of the individual's psychic richness" (66). My interest in the constitutive oddness of liberalism, however, is as the premise of life in common, underlying the specific, material ways that "liberalizing subjects" found to organize, work, and live together. I am less concerned with the form of the individual than with the practical means of liberal living, given the inevitable fact of difference and when equality is the ideology structuring life in common. I share Anderson's commitment to exploring the "formal and conceptual complexity involved in literary engagements with liberal thinking" (3), and her desire to close the gap between political and aesthetic liberalism. Yet where Anderson aims to show how literary works "register the dual vision and give resonant expression to the lived experience of political aspirations" (3-4), I am primarily interested in the lived experience itself – and in literary works as a form of lived experience that, more than simply giving expression to a politics, have a political effect. The centrality of the public sphere as a way of understanding the role of liberal aesthetics and its relation to and action in the political sphere is therefore also a departure from the aims and focus of both Anderson and Hadley.²⁸ Theories of the public sphere allow me to concentrate on the correspondence between the form of community and aesthetic form.

²⁸ Anderson notes that literary scholars, including Michael Warner, Pam Morris, and John Plotz, identify an "underappreciated liberal tradition" in the "theory of the public sphere and the practices associated with it" (13).

Victorian scholars have joined the recent wave of literary scholarship resisting a Foucauldian reading of power as discursive to attend to its material effects. An example of such work in the field of Victorian liberalism is Nathan K. Hensley's book, *Forms of Empire* (2016). Hensley resists power's "designation as a Foucauldian field of discursive or representational possibility," instead offering a "form of empire" that is "not a primarily a discursive construction or effect of language—that is, a matter of cultural representation—but material force exerted on human bodies."²⁹ My aim in this dissertation is similarly to concentrate on the specificity of Victorian liberalism as the lived experience of life in common rather than a purely discursive ideology. However, I stop short of claiming, as Hensley does, that a focus on the materiality of power can generate a practice of reading that "would maintain solidarity ... with nineteenth-century objects in all their textured specificity" and also with the "remaindered human bodies that have their own specificity," and that have been left behind by "the Victorian era's promise of inclusion" (32). Hensley's call for a "stance of renewed enchantment toward Victorian objects" that "need not cancel, but might instead invigorate a commitment to critical and political engagement now" (35) seems to me to be a form of presentism that overstates the political potential of literary criticism. The commitment to the past in the pages of this dissertation does not presume that scholarship suffices as an act of "solidarity with the human damage still accumulating in our post-Victorian modernity" (35).

²⁹ Nathan K. Hensley. *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 12. Subsequent page references in text. I appreciate Hensley's attention to the materiality of power, but he overplays the extent to which his claims depart from the "conventional" position of literary studies. For instance, his position that "Victorian progressive idealism came up against the most disorienting challenges to its core conceptual assumptions" contributes to what Leigh Boucher calls the "cottage industry of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars" who have considered the "complicity" of liberalism and empire, asking whether they were paradoxes that were "inherent" in the birth of liberalism in the eighteenth century or emerged as "its later contradiction." Leigh Boucher. "Victorian liberalism and the Effect of Sovereignty: A View from the Settler Periphery." *History Australia* 13:1 (2016): 35-51, pp. 39-40.

To be clear, this dissertation is a study of a moment in the history of liberalism, when political exigencies required a different mode of thinking to negotiate with difference as a political and cultural fact, in order to maintain the illusion of equality and cohesion despite the realities of competing interests and inequality. My focus is not on liberal ideas, or not as much on liberal ideas, as it is on liberal action: the strategies and forms of representation that evolved in order to accommodate new sets of people as political actors. In a nation comprised largely of a populace not yet enfranchised, and in the context of debates about reform, representation was both an explicitly political proposition – gesturing to questions about who gets represented on a national political level, and by whom – as well as an artistic one. Armstrong’s argument about the novel, not political institutions, as the site of political energy relies on a notion of aesthetic representation as inherently political. That raises the question: what is the goal of political practice if political energy is in art? Marxist accounts of the “structure of social formation” offer an account of political practice that deeply informs my thinking on this question.³⁰ Nicos Poulantzas, for instance, defines political practice as “the practice which transforms the unity, to the extent that its object constitutes the nodal point of condensation of contradictions of different levels within their own historicities and uneven development” (42). This is a useful corrective to new formalists like Levine who cannot see power in the very moments they describe it operating, as well as scholars of liberalism who want to redeem it from the bogeyman of collectivism or neoconservatism, in that it marks the point where literature becomes political practice. What transforms the unity of politics in the age of reform is the shifting sense of what representation means, and what citizenship could mean, which in turn changes our understanding of who can

³⁰ Nicos Poulantzas. *Political Power and Social Classes*. Trans. Timothy O’Hagan, London: New Left Books, 1973, p. 40.

make bids not for power but for representation, and how the idea of representation both enabled and prohibited bids for equality.

The methodology

This project began as a study of popular fiction, specifically the genre known as sensation fiction that emerged in the late 1850s and, by most critical accounts, disappeared by the 1870s, although sensation writers like Mary Elizabeth Braddon continued to write similar books into the twentieth century.³¹ Sensation was a feminized genre; while there were sensation authors who were men, such as Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade, women wrote and read the novels, cementing the “lesser” status of the genre. Additionally, sensation was a middlebrow genre, occupying a position between the extremely cheap penny dreadfuls and the literary works that form the Victorian canon.³² Because the genre was so marked by class and gender, the critical discussion has largely been shaped by a compulsion to discover subversion and resistance as a way to justify the study of texts that do not possess, or are not held to possess, literary merit.³³ Though recent criticism of Victorian popular fiction has moved beyond making the case for considering a text on the basis of its exclusion from the canon, so that the category of the noncanonical, in the words of John Guillory, “loses its empty significance as merely the sum

³¹ On the genre’s disappearance by the 1870s, which interestingly claims that the narrative about sensation fiction in the middle-class press displays an ideological response similar to the class anxieties that structured debates about parliamentary reform, see Jonathan Loesberg. “The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction.” *Representations* 13 (Winter 1986): 115-138.

³² These two concerns intertwine when they are not simply novels but mass cultural products that women write for a wage. See Ann Cvetkovich’s point that nineteenth-century concerns about mass production and commodification of literature registered through a discourse of aesthetic failure. *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992, p. 16.

³³ For a reaction to this conundrum, see Mary Poovey. “Recovering Ellen Pickering.” *Yale Journal of Criticism*. 13.2 (2000): 437-52, and the responses it provoked, such as Jill Campbell. “A Response to Mary Poovey’s ‘Recovering Ellen Pickering.’” *Yale Journal of Criticism*. 13.2 (2000): 461-5.

total of what is not included in the canon,”³⁴ some traces of that move remain in the oft-repeated insistence on richness in lieu of literary value.³⁵

“State of the field” discussions within literary studies and the humanities more broadly raise related questions.³⁶ Take, for instance, Michael Clune’s “Degrees of Ignorance” (2015), in which he regretted the “decoupling of instruction from disciplinary expertise.”³⁷ Clune is not against interdisciplinarity as such, merely the failures of interdisciplinary teaching to fulfil what he, following Guillory, sees as the promise of a general education to “educate all citizens broadly, to render them fit for democracy” (B8). In his more recent piece, “The Bizarro World of Literary Studies” (2018), Clune details two scandals (the Sokal hoax article published in *Social Text* in 1996 and the sexual harassment allegations against Avital Ronell in 2018) to argue that the “anti-disciplinary thought” in literary studies leads to “an empty, despised professional discourse while covering an entirely unprofessional intellectual and personal tyranny over a dwindling body of students.”³⁸ There were, of course, responses, including Sarah E. Chinn’s fair point that Clune conflates the specific circumstances and issues of his test cases, the Sokal hoax and the Ronell affair, and thereby ignores the structural factors (governmental funding,

³⁴ John Guillory. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 9.

³⁵ See Pamela Gilbert’s introduction to Blackwell’s *Companion to Sensation Fiction*, which ends with an insistence on the “rich material” such fiction provides (9). Pamela Gilbert, editor. *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*. West Sussex: Blackwell, 2011. See also Heather Love’s call to think beyond richness as an undisputed good. “Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn.” *New Literary History*. 41 (2010): 371-91.

³⁶ One of the other things that they do is risk either overstating or understanding the case for works of literature. See Rita Felski. *Uses of Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

³⁷ Michael W. Clune. “Degrees of Ignorance.” *The Chronicle Review*. December 11, 2015: B7-B8. His argument culminates in the call for a return to disciplinarity (of an arguably methodologically imprecise kind): “Literary studies should be a discipline, not a bizarro world of universal knowledge. Our object of study is literature; our method is close reading.”

³⁸ Michael Clune. “The Bizarro World of Literary Studies.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 26 October 2018.

corporatization of education, and the neoliberal workplace) that determine the state of the field.³⁹ Clune's response is an even more tenacious defense of close reading and a call for English professors to "stop doing" bad interdisciplinary work – as opposed to the good kind, of which his book, *Writing Against Time* (2013), serves as an example.⁴⁰ Clune is not wrong to demand care and rigor in interdisciplinary work; nor are his critics wrong to point to the organizational and structural matters of power and resources that can prevent scholars from doing good work, or even getting jobs at all. But the debates, like the ones that often take place about popular fiction, nonetheless begin to feel like echo chambers of infighting.⁴¹ My frustrations with the terms of these debates and, in the case of sensation, the models of work they offered led me to shift my focus from popular fiction to consider the politics of representation more broadly, and to focus not on what my chosen novels are (in class, gender, and/or generic terms) but on what they do. The work on Margaret Oliphant in my third chapter thus serves as an example of the kind of work that I would have done, were the structural organization of graduate school otherwise, on popular authors like Braddon and Florence Marryat.

Methodologically speaking, my work is interdisciplinary in ways that are, I hope, thought-provoking and rewarding, but that are also marked by some of the pitfalls Clune identifies. There are a number of critical conversations that my work gestures to and is informed

³⁹ Sarah E. Chinn. "The Real Cause of the Humanities' Woes." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 9 November 2018. See also Mark Garrett Cooper and John Marx. "Why We Love to Hate English Professors." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 8 November 2018, which makes the case that the issues Clune discusses are organizational, not intellectual, and calls for a "collaboration" (since the term interdisciplinarity has failed us) that might look like the forms of association I discuss throughout this dissertation.

⁴⁰ Michael Clune. "The Problem is Bad Interdisciplinarity." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 14 November 2018.

⁴¹ I have not mentioned, but could, similar discussions taking place within the narrower field of Victorian studies. For a sample, see Jonathan Loesberg. "Cultural Studies, Victorian Studies, and Formalism." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27. 2 (1999): 537-544. Amanda Anderson. "Victorian Studies and the Two Modernities." *Victorian Studies* 47.2 (2005): 195-203. Kate Flint. "Why 'Victorian'?: Response." *Victorian Studies* 47.2 (2005): 230-239.

by, but in which I do not wholly and rigorously participate: namely, the long intellectual histories of liberalism, democracy, and feminist activism; the extensive scholarship on literary form and aesthetics, book history, and literary genres; the intersections between affect theory and queer theory; and the substantial bodies of work by and about the thinkers and writers I discuss. Some of the more embarrassing exclusions of this dissertation – Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-72) spring to mind – can be explained only by way of reference to *Middlemarch* itself. The difficulty of making this dissertation “unimpeachable” may, indeed, weigh like lead upon my mind, but I would prefer that it, unlike the Key to all Mythologies, not remain “still unwritten.”⁴²

During the writing of this dissertation, three concepts have structured the shape and selection of my case studies: the right, the expedient, and the beautiful. These are less theoretical commitments than means of signaling the sets of questions and discussions that frame each chapter. The right deals most explicitly with political questions of equality, justice, citizenship, and empire, and is indebted to the work of historians and political scientists like Catherine Hall, Jennifer Pitts, and Uday Singh Mehta. The expedient turns to practical politics and liberal feminist organizing, and identifies questions that respond to and expand upon work by public sphere theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner to consider the significance of my archival work on the Langham Place group. The beautiful refers less to aesthetic concerns as such than to formal and artistic ways of thinking about representation, politics, and identification in three novels that, given the constraints of a dissertation, must themselves be somewhat representative.

⁴² George Eliot. *Middlemarch*. 1871-1872. New York: Penguin, 2015, p. 267-8.

The plan

I have outlined what are, broadly speaking, three approaches to the liberal response to difference between the First and Second Reform Acts that correspond to the three chapters of my dissertation. The first chapter explores the changing nature of the public sphere through an examination of the writing but also, crucially, the political practice of J. S. Mill as one of liberalism's key thinkers. I argue that an empirical uncertainty about what causes difference – whether it originated in nature or through social construction – enabled Mill to reconcile his belief in the limitless capacity of individual development and an appreciation of difference with the more hierarchical understanding of liberalism as not merely one set of values, but inherent human values that form a universal notion of the good and the ultimate goal of progress.

My second case study considers the political instantiation of the liberal public sphere through a form that offers some resistance to the model laid out by Mill: the Langham Place group, a feminist organization that gathered around their headquarters at 19 Langham Place in London's West End in the 1850s and 1860s. A collection of writers, artists, activists, and thinkers founded by Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, the Langham Place group was an experiment in reshaping the relationship between the individual and the collective, an attempt to live liberal and democratic principles through the form of the group itself.

Chapter Three considers the role of liberal aesthetics in the process of imagining a public. I explore three politically-themed novels published in the 1860s: George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, *The Radical* (1866), Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), and Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1869). I argue that the novel posed a unique solution to the problem of how to live with difference, by formalizing a structure that demands the reader encounter the text as a mass

subject, relying on disidentification and detachment as much as sympathetic identification.⁴³ By disidentification, I mean a practice of identifying that involves not being recognized or addressed at the same time as you are interpellated. As Judith Butler asks in *Bodies That Matter*, “[w]hat are the possibilities of politicizing *disidentification*, this experience of *misrecognition*, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?”⁴⁴ At a formal level – through plot structure and mode of address – these novels model ways for people to imagine a social collectivity that absorbs difference yet simultaneously tolerates inequalities despite the ideal of liberal equality they posit.

Taken together, the three chapters are an attempt to think about the legacy of the terms in which liberals (broadly defined) thought about, engaged with, and tried to organize difference. They dramatize a struggle between, or an attempt to balance, liberal representation and liberal praxis. It is possible that this study merely rehearses Hannah Arendt’s prioritization of praxis over contemplation, as she explains in *The Human Condition*:

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the condition*—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.⁴⁵

⁴³ This mode of identifying is somewhat similar to what Pam Morris describes as the discursive mode of sincerity, as one that is able to “interpellate the collectivity of ‘the people’ as simultaneously one and same and different and many.” Morris identifies the egalitarian potential of this mode, which she ultimately argues is shown by the authors she studies, including Brontë and Thackeray, to be less than utopian in practice. I am less interested in parsing whether the disidentificatory practices of these novels is utopian or not than in considering how they enact a way to live with difference. Pam Morris. *Imagining Inclusive Society in 19th Century Novels: The Code of Sincerity in the Public Sphere*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex.’* New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 219. See also José Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. 1958. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 7.

For Arendt, the condition of all political life is plurality. For the thinkers, activists, and writers in this study, it was only beginning to become so. This dissertation is thus an attempt to understand how liberals came to terms with an expanded sense of plurality as the political condition of life, and in what ways they worked to represent and live with the fundamental condition of difference structuring life in common.

Chapter One

The Idea of Difference in Mill's Conception of Liberal Equality

Introduction

In June of 1868, *The Spectator* noted a “rumour” that Edward Eyre, the former governor of Jamaica responsible for the brutal suppression of the Morant Bay rebellion, was to run as a candidate for Westminster against John Stuart Mill, who had spearheaded the Jamaica Committee calling for Eyre to be tried for the murder of British subjects.¹ “It would be well to test British feeling by a plebiscitum of that kind,” *The Spectator* remarked, “and ascertain once for all whether the Householders really desire that riotous black persons, after being quieted by the troops, should be hanged and flogged with piano-wire at the discretion of their white superiors” (695). Though the tone of *The Spectator* suggests that British feeling was likely or at least ought to fall on the side of Mill, historians like Catherine Hall note that public feeling in the later part of the century stood with the Eyre and Carlyle camp; Carlyle’s “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” (1849), which demonstrated hostility not only towards blacks but also the “twin horrors associated with abolition,” the Utilitarians and philanthropists, found a

¹ “News of the Week.” *The Spectator* 41: 2085 (13 June 1868), 693-695, p. 695. Subsequent page references in text.

receptive public in the middle classes who feared “potential anarchy” at home and abroad.²

Although, in the event, Eyre did not stand for election in Westminster in the November election, Mill did not fare well, as the two seats for Westminster went to his fellow Liberal Robert Grosvenor and the Conservative William Henry Smith and British feeling thus apparently went against Mill in the contest.

Mill’s speech on the occasion of his loss is an interesting study. Expressing regret “solely on public grounds” because accepting the honor of public office had been a constant personal “sacrifice,” he laments sending a Tory to the House of Commons to represent a constituency that had been “at the head of the Liberal interest.”³ The way Mill styles himself as a public servant, sacrificing personal comfort and desires for the public good, fits his aristocratic liberalism if not his suspicions of the public hold over the private lives of individuals.⁴ Given his focus in *On Liberty* (1859) on the Tocquevillean notion of the tyranny of the majority, Mill’s conflation of the sectarian interests of the Liberal Party with the good of the country as a whole in this speech may seem odd but reveals an important point about the way Mill conceived of difference both as a political factor and a cultural one. That is, Mill frames the Tory victory not only as a political problem, but also as a broader cultural loss: the failure of the constituency to embrace difference as a guiding principle in politics signaled an abandonment of the kind of gentlemanly politician

² Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall. *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 283.

³ John Stuart Mill. “The Westminster Election of 1868” [10]. 18 November 1868. John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXVIII - Public and Parliamentary Speeches Part I November 1850 - November 1868*. Edited by John M. Robson and Bruce L. Kinzer. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 369. Subsequent page references in text.

⁴ On the idea of aristocratic liberalism, see Alan S. Kahan. *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001.

who stood for principled opposition. Mill's tenure in political office taught the public a lesson that, he claimed, had ramifications for political representation and also public opinion:

I think it was an encouragement to young men ambitious of parliamentary distinction—it was a good lesson to them when they found that a great constituency like this was willing to be represented by a man who always told you plainly when he differed in opinion from you—who told you that he differed on a few important points, though he agreed on more, and that he should maintain his opinion by his vote, and who never, for the sake of preserving his seat, ever said or did anything which he would not have thought it his duty to if he had not been your representative (369-370).⁵

The election was not the test of British feeling about racism as *The Spectator* held, though in large part it was an indication of public ambivalence about reform.⁶ But as Mill frames it here, it also signaled a loss of a certain kind of public figure. The ideal parliamentary man as Mill depicts him is a public servant, whose duty to the public shapes his behavior, but he is also a leader, who guides rather than panders to the public. Moreover, Mill's language is interesting for what it reveals about the constitution of the public: as he slips from a specific reference to “young men ambitious of parliamentary distinction” to a specific, though abstract and universal “you,” he constitutes the sphere of public opinion as a space for those young, ambitious,

⁵ Interestingly, the way Mill frames his political service bears more than a passing resemblance to the way James Mill argued for British imperial reign over India, as a reluctantly performed duty for the good of others: “If we wish for the prolongation of an English government in India, which we do most sincerely, it is for the sake of the natives, not of England. India has never been anything but a burden; and any thing but a burden, we are afraid, it cannot be rendered.” James Mill. “Review of *Voyage aux Indes Orientales* by le P. Paulin de S. Barthelemy, missionary.” *Edinburgh Review* XV (January 1810): 363-84, p. 371.

⁶ As Mill noted in his speech on the election day itself: “If the new electors who have supported Reform care nothing about the rights that have been acquired, and desire things should go on after the Reform Act exactly as they went on before it, they will do quite right to vote for the Tory candidate; but if the old electors are as much attached to Reform as ever—if the new electors desire that their newly-acquired rights should be exercised to the best advantage—and if both new and old electors wish the Reform Bill to bring forth abundant fruits, then they will, I have no doubt, vote for the two Liberal candidates” (“The Westminster Election of 1868” [9]. 16 November 1868, p. 368).

parliamentary men. In Mill's imagined public sphere, it is possible to imagine moments of social encounter in which political difference is not only possible but gentlemanly. In this "great constituency," political difference means being unlike (differing on the "few important points"), but mostly like one another (agreeing "on more"). If political difference is conceived in this gentlemanly way, rather than rendering it as a question of violence in the way the *Spectator* takes a position on the desirability of hanging and flogging of riotous black people, then fidelity to that small element of difference in service of public duty becomes a virtue. Put differently, Mill's representation of his defeat suggests that he perceived his loss as a blow to the premise that difference could be productive instead of something to be feared.

Difference, despite its framing in the wake of his election defeat, was not always an uncomplicated, productive notion for Mill. Rather, the idea of difference posed major conceptual problems in his work (and in the various critical positions that reflect his legacy). The tensions in his work between the individual and the collective, free trade and protection, philanthropy and Malthusianism have lead him to be claimed by groups of various, and often opposing, political stripes.⁷ For all that *political* difference is a clear good for Mill in 1868, it is only a good insofar as that difference was mostly agreement – the "important points" of difference eclipsed by the fact that you "agreed on more." Moreover, it only encompasses the kind of disagreement that can be expressed among peers, the voters that Mill addresses and wishes to represent. In the context of Mill's political career, difference only exists within the parameters of a moral, liberal, gentlemanly subjectivity.

⁷ See, for instance, Jose Harris: "Pinpointing Mill's precise identity on the political spectrum was a problem in his lifetime and has been so ever since—his allegiance being claimed by free-marketeers and collectivists, social democrats and liberal conservatives, paternalists and libertarians." "Mill, John Stuart (1806–1873), philosopher, economist, and advocate of women's rights." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 5 January 2012. Oxford University Press. www.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18711.

Critics have suggested that it was precisely in the years after the Indian Mutiny of 1857 that racial difference is deployed by Mill as a political category, not loosely in the sense of cultural differences, but as a hardened, biological fact.⁸ Defined in terms of political perspective, Mill was renowned for what Dr. Brewer, the man who chaired Mill's election speech of July 1868, noted as his "liberal tolerance of differences."⁹ Brewer's depiction of Mill as the exemplum of toleration, a man with the ability to "reconcile on the one hand a thorough independence, and on the other an enlightened sense of the value and power of that kind of union which is designated by the name of political party" (329), sits uneasily with the portrayal of Mill as productive of gendered and racialized difference, or, in other words, a thinker who made meaningful differences of race and gender when it would have served his philosophy to resist such a move.

The idea of difference is thus a vexed one in the history of Mill's thought, unstable as either a good or a problem to be solved. The purpose of this chapter is not to produce a definitive version of Mill as either a liberal champion of difference or a racist apologist for it. Rather, I want to track the idea of difference across a selection from Mill's body of work, illuminating various shifts and changes in order to make the case that the two Mills must be understood as mutually constitutive. Taking 1859 and *On Liberty* as a focal point, we will see that the twists and turns of difference are folded into his conception of individuality itself. Put simply, the idea

⁸ See Uday Singh Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999 and Bart Schultz. "Mill and Sidgwick, Imperialism and Racism." *Utilitas* 19.1 (March 2007): 104-130, p. 108. See also Catherine Hall. "The Economy of Intellectual Prestige: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and the Case of Governor Eyre." *Cultural Critique*. 12 (Spring 1989): 167-96, pp. 195-6 on notion of the natural division of labor.

⁹ John Stuart Mill. "The Westminster Election of 1868." [2] 24 July 1868 *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXVIII - Public and Parliamentary Speeches Part I November 1850 - November 1868*. Edited by John M. Robson and Bruce L. Kinzer. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 329. Subsequent page references in text.

of difference as contested and unstable is constitutive of any universalizing claims Mill makes. I explore the treatment of racial difference in Mill's debate with Carlyle on "The Negro Question" (1850) as well as Mill's complex, and often contradictory, construction of the relationship between the individual and the social in *On Liberty* to propose that Mill's notion of improvement properly rests not on the idea that difference is completely constructed, as he suggested in his *Autobiography*, but on the curious admixture of difference as circumstantial, social and historical in some contexts, and innate and hierarchal in others. Whereas the question of race and gender in Mill's thought is often expressed in abstract terms, I wish to unpack them and thereby explain, as Elizabeth Povinelli puts it, how these constructs "are what organizes, disorganizes and distributes power and difference."¹⁰

Whether it serves as a vexing question, a threatening problem, or (as in his 1868 speech) an indisputable good, the complexity of difference in Mill's thought is also a matter of causality. The question that preoccupied Mill of how difference emerges in the first place continues to cast a shadow over cultural thought: is difference innate, or is it culturally constructed? We glimpse an instance of Mill's complex negotiation of the meaning of difference when, in his *Autobiography*, he wrestles with the desire to reject the notion of innate difference and the contradictory desire to retain the explanatory power of the natural:

I have long felt that the prevailing tendency to regard all the marked *distinctions* of human character as innate, and in the main indelible, and to ignore the irresistible proofs that by far the greater part of those differences, whether between individuals, races or sexes, are such as not only might but naturally would be produced by differences in

¹⁰ Kim Turcot DiFruscia. "Shapes of Freedom: An Interview with Elizabeth A. Povinelli." *Alterities* 7.1 (2010): 88-98, p. 91.

circumstances, is one of the chief hindrances to the rational treatment of great social questions, and one of the greatest stumbling blocks to human improvement.¹¹

At first blush, Mill's rejection of innate differences of character seems clear and unambiguous. However, the force of his seemingly unshakeable confidence in the cultural construction of difference is undercut in various ways by the circumspection of his language. The first thing to note is that only the "greater part" of differences are cultural; he is unclear whether the remaining part is similarly constructed but simply not supportable as such by "irresistible proofs," or whether innate factors play a smaller but still significant role. The second thing is that, even when he firmly insists on the social construction of difference, he does so in language that serves to reinscribe the natural as the final determinant of truth ("not only might but *naturally* would be"). When we consider his inability fully to abandon the natural as the explanation that undergirds difference, even as he insists on culture as the primary factor, it is clear that, for all Mill's insistence on the "rational treatment" of social questions, the question of difference ultimately eschews rationality.

Labor, empire, and naturalizing difference

In 1849, Thomas Carlyle published an anonymous article, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," in which he purports to present an "occasional discourse, delivered by we know not whom."¹² In the guise of an anonymous speaker, who undertakes the "painful" duty of commenting on West Indian affairs, Carlyle attacks two different targets: the black people of the

¹¹ John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume I - Autobiography and Literary Essays [1824]*. Edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 203. Subsequent page references in text.

¹² Thomas Carlyle. "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question." *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1849): 670-9, p. 670. Subsequent page references in text.

West Indies, sitting “with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulps and juices” and the philanthropists and anti-slavery lobby responsible for the depraved condition of blacks in the West Indies and the resulting miserable condition of British lives. Carlyle argues not for slavery as such, but for the blacks to be “servants to those that are born *wiser* than you, that are born lords of you” (676). He blames the abolitionists and philanthropists for obscuring the “true relations between Negro and White, their mutual duties under the sight of the Maker of them both” by “declaring that Negro and White are *unrelated*, loose from one another, on a footing of perfect equality, and subject to no law but that of Supply and Demand according to the Dismal Science” (677). Carlyle’s proposal, for all he proclaims otherwise, is a kind of slavery, in the form of an enforced work order by the State: “Wherever, in British territory, there exists a Black man, and needful work to the just extent is not to be got out of him, such a law, in defect of better, should be brought to bear upon said Black man!” (677). Justice, Carlyle’s language suggests, is the measure of how much “needful” work the empire can get “out of” black men, rather than any assurance of the rights, liberties, or corporeal safety of the people whose labor the British empire is owed.

Mill’s reply was prefaced, in a funny foreshadowing of his 1868 insistence on toleration of opposing views, by an editorial note proclaiming the value of impartiality and offering the publication as an object lesson to Exeter Hall in allowing the reader to form their opinions on the issue.¹³ Mill rejected Carlyle’s sketch of abolition as wrongheaded and sentimental, and the “gospel of work” – Mill calls it “cant” (27) – through which Carlyle saw the promise of salvation. Mill was particularly furious that Carlyle had given ammunition to the American opponents of abolition, lambasting Carlyle for flinging “this missile, loaded with the weight of

¹³ John Stuart Mill. “The Negro Question.” *Fraser’s Magazine*. (January 1850): 25-31. Subsequent page references in text.

his reputation, into the abolitionist camp” (31). Mill means his claim that Carlyle’s reputation bolsters his argument’s force literally, complaining that “the author issues his opinions, or rather ordinances, under imposing auspices” (25). Describing it as an ordinance not an opinion, Mill represents Carlyle’s piece as not merely advocating for slavery but enacting it, seeing in the opinion itself an example of the “law of force and cunning” that compels people to work by the whip (25). There is an elision between the opinion and the man that sets Carlyle beyond the pale of morality and justice. In questioning the source of Carlyle’s authority, Mill avows: “If by the quality of the message we may judge of those who sent it, *not* from any powers to whom just or good men acknowledge allegiance” (25). Advocating for slavery becomes, in other words, a form of slavery.

In eliding the distinction between holding the whip and arguing for it, Mill depicts Carlyle as a practitioner rather than an advocate of slavery, and therefore suggests he operates outside the realm of tolerable opinion. This is an interesting way of thinking about public opinion, largely because it makes the point that the public sphere is a place of political action and not merely rational debate. As such, Mill sees Carlyle’s article not merely as an opinion but as an act in the world: “Circulated as his dissertation will probably be, by those whose interests profit by it, from one end of the American Union to the other, I hardly know of an act by which one person could have done so much mischief as this may possibly do” (31).

The framing of Mill’s piece, which prioritizes impartiality of debate and a public discourse based on informed opinion, is arguably more properly liberal than Mill’s disgust at Carlyle for being an “instrument” of the devil (31). The suggestion in Mill’s response that not all opinions deserve to or should be publicized is all the more surprising when one considers that, despite the clear abolitionist motive of Mill’s response to Carlyle, contemporary critics have tended to conflate the distinctions between the two positions, seeing both pieces as more or less

ambivalent on the problem of race. For instance, David Theo Goldberg notes that, though Mill starkly departs from Carlyle's aggressive racism, the title of Mill's article indicates that for him too blacks "are a problem, rather than that people of African descent in the New World faced problems."¹⁴ Goldberg draws a line from Mill's ambivalence about race to the contemporary "liberal ambivalence regarding racial matters" (213), though he is less interested in asking why racial difference should pose a problem for Mill than he is in highlighting the "common thread of racist presumption and projection" that strings together Mill's racism ("polite and effete") and Carlyle's ("bald and vicious") (214). Concluding that while it is better "in Utilitarian terms to have a Mill" than a Carlyle, he notes that "with a Mill, a promoter of abolition is at once a barrier to it" (214). At stake in Goldberg's account is the effacement of a history of domination in liberalism writ large; he draws a continuity between Mill's view of racial difference and the issue of race in contemporary liberalism and, in so doing, relies on the fuzziness of resonance:

Mill's ambivalence over the inherent inferiority of 'native Negroes' even as he marked the transformation in the terms of racial definition historically from the inescapable determinism of blood and brain size to the marginally escapable reach of cultural determination has resonated to this day in liberal ambivalence regarding racial matters (213).

The presentist focus implied in the notion of resonance here risks naturalizing Mill's ambivalence by constructing his position as naively rather than deliberately racist. It would be possible, in Goldberg's estimation, "to enlighten and thus transform such a person" (214) if only we could sit him down over the dinner table and bestow upon him the benefit of critical race theory.

¹⁴David Theo Goldberg. "Liberalism's Limits: Carlyle and Mill on "The Negro Question." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 22:2 (2000): 203-216, p. 209. Subsequent page references in text.

In making the claim that Goldberg's focus on illuminating the "common thread of racist presumption and projection" (214) between Mill and Carlyle is anachronistic, I do not want to replicate Bart Schultz's insistence that "it is more anachronistic and judgmental to insist in advance on accepting the 'limits' of their cultural context" than it is to "worry about racism" in the context of a writer such as Mill.¹⁵ Of course, we cannot excuse racism on the grounds of historical sensitivity, but nor should we fail to question *why* a supporter of abolition might think in terms that threaten that project. The curious thing about Mill's ambivalence regarding race was that it was not necessarily either predictable or inevitable. Catherine Hall goes some way towards restoring the weirdness of the problem when she writes:

While Carlyle clung to a notion of hierarchy and order with white Englishmen as the ultimate arbiters in the interests of all, Mill dreamed of a more egalitarian society in the future in which all individuals, whether black or white, male or female, would have achieved civilization. His relationship with Harriet Taylor provided his prefiguring of the potential between men and women, yet in the *Subjection* he still falls back on a notion of the natural division of labor between the sexes. Whether there were similar limitations on his conceptions of relations between the races, whether there would be, in the end, whatever the degree of education achieved by the blacks, a *natural* division of labor between the races remains a problem.¹⁶

A "problem" indeed. Why is it that, though Mill could dream of an egalitarian society not governed by natural or inherent differences among people, he could not commit intellectually to such a concept? The question is not *whether* a natural division of labor exists in Mill's conception of racial equality – it is clear enough from "The Negro Question" that it does – but

¹⁵ Bart Schultz. "Mill and Sidgwick, Imperialism and Racism." *Utilitas* 19.1 (March 2007): 104-130, p. 121. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁶ Catherine Hall. "The Economy of Intellectual Prestige: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and the Case of Governor Eyre." *Cultural Critique*. 12 (Spring 1989): 167-96, pp. 195-6.

why that is so.¹⁷ When Mill wrote “The Negro Question,” the scientific conception of racial difference had not yet universally hardened into an immutable biological one.¹⁸ He was writing before the Morant Bay rebellion, and before the Hyde Park riots and the Second Reform Act provoked a fear of rebellion at home and abroad. If it was not inevitable from a scientific perspective, nor necessary from a political one, why would a thinker who was on the one hand so invested in rejecting the idea of innate or biological differences be so quick, on the other hand, to reinscribe them?¹⁹

In Mill’s 1868 speech, a loss he addresses to the general public – the “you” of the constituency – is really a loss *for* the “young men ambitious of parliamentary distinction”; the interest of that class of ambitious, public-minded, exceptional men is primarily of concern, though it is expressed in terms of the good of the whole. Similarly, in “The Negro Question,” the problem of slavery is not framed as a problem for those personally subjected to slavery, nor as a moral problem for the slave-holders, nor even as merely a question of establishing justice for the sake of the social totality; rather, slavery is significant for the opportunity it affords for distinguished men to abolish it. Mill’s primary concern in “The Negro Question,” I am

¹⁷ In other words, if for Mill equality was, as Kerry Larson writes of Tocqueville, a “natural, pre-conventional value, like the state of nature imagined by theorists of the social contract,” does he also reinscribe difference *and consequently* hierarchy as a state of nature? *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 5.

¹⁸ See Catherine Hall. “Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment.” *The Post-colonial Question*. Edited by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 65-77; Nancy Stepan. “Race, Gender, Science, Citizenship.” *Gender & History* 10.1 (1998): 26–52; and Adrian Desmond. *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

¹⁹ Hall notes the effect of the local threat of working-class uprising on the backlash against the militancy of the Jamaica Committee: “the dangers of democracy seemed imminent, and anxieties about potential anarchy at home suffused the conservative discourses on the heroic Eyre who had saved the beleaguered whites” (“Economy of Intellectual Prestige” 183).

suggesting, is not the inherent injustice of slavery as a state-sanctioned institution, but the moral quandary slavery poses for English gentlemen.²⁰ Thus, the slave trade, Mill explains,

went on, not, like Irish beggary, because England had not the skill to prevent it,—not merely by the sufferance, but by the laws of the English nation. At last, however, there were found men, in growing number, who determined not to rest until the iniquity was extirpated, who made the destruction of it as much the business and end of their lives, as ordinary men make their private interests (26).

The narrative Mill tells is a progressive one, but the goal of progress is less the amelioration of the condition of the enslaved than the expansive capacity of the “growing number” of extraordinary men whose private interests become synonymous with public ones.

That racial issues were not always primarily about race is a point Mill was to make with even greater clarity in a letter on the Jamaica question that he wrote to David Urquhart, a Scottish writer and politician, on October 4, 1866. After congratulating Urquhart and himself on their rare but “hearty cooperation,” Mill writes: “You approved of my speech because you see that I am not on this occasion standing up for the negroes, or for liberty, deeply as both are interested in the subject – but for the first necessity of human society, law.”²¹ We can see a kind of conceptual whitewashing here; the issue of slavery is never, for Mill, solely or even primarily

²⁰ It is perhaps worth noting, though I cannot pursue this line of argumentation here, the instrumental role of women in the abolitionist movement. See Clare Midgley. *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*. London: Routledge, 1992.

²¹ John Stuart Mill. Letter 1000. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVI - The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill 1849-1873 Part III*. Edited by Francis E. Mineka and Dwight N. Lindley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 1205. In a subsequent letter to Urquhart, Mill writes about “such matters as” the Eyre case and the India Mutiny as test cases to argue the point for the franchise, as the “bad feelings, or absence of good feelings” in the ruling class comes from having the vote (Letter 1003, p. 1208). The problem that Mill diagnoses in the letter is the narrow class interests that prevail when only a subset of people have the vote: “I ascribe it to the sympathy of officials with officials & of the classes from whom officials are selected with officials of all sorts” (1208); “in a multitude the general feelings of human nature are usually more powerful & class feelings proportionately less so than in a small body” (1209).

about black slaves as much as it is about British law. “His overwhelming concern, throughout the Eyre business,” Schultz stresses, “was with the rule of law” (122); and thus, it can be added, slavery is merely the occasion for discussing those first principles. In “The Negro Question,” the fact that slavery was not merely tolerated or passively accepted but sanctioned by rule of law fuels Mill’s outrage at Carlyle’s comparison of the slave-trade with the condition of Ireland. For Mill, the issue was not one of “sentiment” or “humane feeling” (26) but of the extension of British law from metropole to colony: the “iniquity” Mill refers to in the above passage is not human suffering or inequality, but specifically the legal seizure “by force or treachery” of men who were “carried off to the West Indies to be worked to death, literally to death” (26). In so shifting the focus from the suffering of the slaves to the injustice of the law, Mill makes very clear where the stakes of his argument lie: in the law and in those who craft it, and not in the issues of race that are for Mill not the salient thing but merely the stuff with which the law concerns itself.

For Mill, the form of the law matters more than the content. I want to explain this distinction by reference to Elaine Hadley’s notion of liberal formalism and the ballot box as a place where the form of opinion matters more than its content. According to Hadley, the ballot exemplifies “a concentration on form, as opposed to content, [which] evinces liberalism’s liberality” and “does not seek to dictate particular opinions but simply to formalize their expression; thus, “form in this instance makes equivalence possible.”²² My point is that Mill renders race, slavery, and abolition as the messy, real-world manifestations of the law, ultimately important not in themselves, but because the purity of the law is at stake in those issues; that is, equivalence under the law is more important than the actual freedom of enslaved people. The

²² Elaine Hadley. *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 50. Subsequent page references in text.

significance of abolition is therefore ultimately in the progress brought about by Mill's extraordinary men, rather than the effect of that progress on the lives of the enslaved. Making the destruction of slavery "as much the business and end of their lives, as ordinary men make their private interests" (26) establishes these men as a peculiar kind of person (we will encounter him again in *On Liberty*) whose interests are capacious enough not merely to align with the interests of the social totality, but to become one with them. In "The Negro Question," these are men "not numerous in any age, who have led noble lives according to their lights" (26). The qualifying phrase "according to their lights" performs an interesting shift, reinforcing the emphasis not on these men's nobility or public face of virtue, but on their individual capacities. What is most at stake in "The Negro Question" is not achieving justice for the slaves, but the naturally acquired capacity for justice of Mill's extraordinary man, who emerges, throughout the essay, as one who can absorb the greater good in his own personal sense of private good.

In a paper presented at the North American Victorian Studies Association conference in 2012, Sarah Winters suggested that, for Mill, the framing of the Eyre affair as a question of law was not only a choice, but also a mistake, as it put black subjects outside the law, and made a divide between the colonial subject and the British subject under the law.²³ By contrast, I want to suggest that the problem of difference is not the result of Mill's choice to frame the issue in this particular way, but is in fact, the driving factor. Insofar as Mill establishes the absorptive individual as the standard-bearer of good (an extraordinary person looking very much like the kind of man Mill sees himself to be), he does not differ substantially from Carlyle's position. As Catherine Hall points out, the similarities between the two men as "individuals with weight and

²³ Sarah Winter. "Networked Politics and the Mediated Political Subject: The Governor Eyre Controversy, 1865-1868." NAVSA, University of Wisconsin, Madison. 29 September 2012.

prestige who came from the new middle-class world” are greater than their differences.²⁴

However, one significant way in which they differ centers on the way in which each constructs what Hall calls their “voice of authority” (181). For Carlyle, his notion of the good is both specific and universally applicable; his writerly authority comes from defining the way of life on which happiness for all depends. In “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question,” happiness results from following or being compelled to follow what is the “everlasting duty of all men, black or white, who are born into this world.” That duty is work, specifically, the “work the Maker of him has intended by the making of him for this world,” and the doing of which whether by volition or compulsion is “the eternal law of nature for a man” (673). Mill departs from Carlyle here in almost every possible way: the emphasis he places on the unchanging, inherent, and divinely-bestowed nature of man, the idea that work in itself is the highest good or duty to which we are called, and the idea that we can be compelled to work or pursue any way of life against our own desires are all contrary to the argument Mill presents in “The Negro Question” – and throughout his work.

Of particular importance is the fact that Mill balks at the idea that it is possible to establish work – or any good – as a universal ideal for all men:

Work, I imagine, is not a good in itself. There is nothing laudable in work for work’s sake. To work voluntarily for a worthy object is laudable, but what constitutes a worthy object? On this matter, the oracle of which your contributor is the prophet has never yet been prevailed on to declare itself. He revolves in an eternal circle round the idea of work, as if turning up the earth, or driving a shuttle or a quill, were ends in themselves, and the ends of human existence (27).

²⁴ Catherine Hall. “The Economy of Intellectual Prestige,” p. 173. Subsequent page references in text.

Mill rejects the notion that it is possible to define a worthy object of life in concrete and universal terms, but he does so in a way that retains a kind of universality. Thus the actual labor that we do, in its material and specific form, is not in itself what makes life inherently “worthy”; but those same activities, abstracted in the form of a universal and unspecified affect and will, can be rendered worthy: “even in the case of the most sublime service to humanity, it is not because it is work that it is worthy; the worth lies in the service itself, and in the will to render it – the noble feelings of which it is the fruit” (27-8). This perspective contradicts Davidoff and Hall’s identification of a general trend in the nineteenth century whereby work, specifically the dignity of work, replaces land ownership and birth as the indicator of gentility – or, to put it in religious terms, salvation is through what one does not what one is. In shifting to the noble feelings with which work is done, Mill is opening up the form of dignity so that gentility is not about class as such. Rather than being inextricably aligned with the upper classes, gentility becomes a classed idea, but one that is available to all who do any kind of work, including the working class and blacks in the West Indies. Notionally, Mill’s young men of ambitious political distinction are not more or less capable of such feelings than agricultural and manual laborers who do the “real labour,” only they have more leisure to allow them to “rise to the finer attributes of their nature” (28). The noble feelings (and the fruit they bear) may thus differ in *kind*, but the *form* is universal. Like the absorptive individual, whose interests can absorb the

differing ones of the people he represents, noble feelings function by establishing a general form with which one can identify while also leaving space for personal differences.²⁵

Mill's concept of noble feelings might be capacious (certainly more capacious than Carlyle's), though it would be a mistake to think of it as a pluralistic or inherently cosmopolitan account of the good. The significance of this is often lost on critics who complain of Mill's Eurocentrism. The question is not, as Schultz asks, whether Mill's "ethnocentric Eurocentric, and colonist or imperialist predilections amounted to racist tendencies" (107), but how Mill reconciled his Eurocentric universalism with his insistence on the good of diversity. To put it another way: how does Mill's rejection of the idea of innate difference in favor of explaining difference as a factor of historical circumstance enable him to reinscribe hierarchy and a naturalized division of labor instead of dispensing with these altogether?²⁶ In "The Negro Question," Mill asserts that incessant labor prevents full development of character, and therefore the poor are not inherently inferior but culturally made so (28). Even so, he excludes from this

²⁵ It is useful here to think about Raymond Williams's notion of structures of feeling as "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (*Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 132). Structures of feeling set limits on experience and action; thus here, noble feelings function as a limit within which different actions and dispositions can function. Mill ignores Carlyle's charge of laziness; to reconcile the radically different orientation to life and work posed by the image of black people sitting around eating pumpkins all day, Mill turns to feelings in order to make his argument that all people are equally worthy in potential if not in fact. Feelings, as an inaccessible core of subjectivity, allows for alterity, but forces it within a known and like form.

²⁶ This is a question of why difference is rendered in a way that makes it salient when it need not be. Another way to think about this question is through Lauren Berlant's gloss on Habermas's distinction between the public and the private (*Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). The displacement within the capitalist subject between the man of the market and the *homme* of domestic space is what "enables him to disidentify with what's aggressive in his pursuit of desire and interest in all spaces, and to see himself as fundamentally ethical because he means to have solidarity with some humans he knows" (181). Is a similar structure at work here in Mill's thought? Maintaining a sense of himself as ethical requires that he repudiate the idea of hierarchy – that he is worth inherently more than people who are different by virtue of their race (or class or gender). And yet, like the *homme* whose family life depends on his aggressiveness and lack of solidarity in the capitalist public, Mill's ability to do politics and intellectual work depends on the hierarchical structure he wants to repudiate.

category the work “done by writers and afforders of ‘guidance,’ an occupation which, let alone the vanity of the thing, cannot be called by the same name with the ... exhausting, stiffening, stupefying toil of many kinds of agricultural and manufacturing labourers” (28). Exempting intellectual labor from the category of work is an interesting move. On the one hand, it is a recognition of the materially different quality of different forms of labor. On the other hand, it reinscribes a hierarchy of work, so that intellectual labor, vain though it may be, need not be included in his subsequent call to “reduce very greatly the quantity of work required to carry on existence” (28). It is clearly work of a different, and higher, class, already compatible with the goal of rising to “the finer attributes” of one’s nature, and such workers are thus in a position to work, like the noble men of political ambition, on behalf of the inferior others.

There is not, Mill is at great pains to maintain, an inherent difference in capacity between those who perform intellectual work and those who labor; and moreover any difference that exists does not fall nicely along the lines of race. There is an obvious implied hierarchy in his call to compare the blacks of the West Indies with “black Haiti” and “white Mexico” and “white Spain,” but the hierarchical ordering depends on national identity or proximity to Britishness rather than on race alone as its crucial determining factor. Severing the inherent connection between cultural hierarchy and race is a crucial step Mill needs to take in order to combat Carlyle’s insistence on the necessity of slavery on objective, not merely moral, grounds. Whereas Carlyle asserts racial difference is an inherent difference of both ability and capacity – whites are born wiser than blacks – and therefore justifies slavery as the inevitable consequence of that fact, Mill worries about Carlyle’s argument being used by slave-owners across the pond, and so turns to the notion of character to rebut the idea of difference in natural capacity. Curiously, he attempts to put aside the question of originary racial difference entirely, as something outside of

the realm of empirical study, to focus on how character is made and becomes different in a long but crucial passage:

Among the things for which your contributor professes entire disrespect, is the analytical examination of human nature. It is by analytical examination that we have learned whatever we know of the laws of external nature; and if he had not disdained to apply the same mode of investigation to the laws of the formation of character, he would have escaped the vulgar error of imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature. As well might it be said, that of two trees, sprung from the same stock, one cannot be taller than another but from greater vigour in the original seedling. Is nothing to be attributed to soil, nothing to climate, nothing to difference of exposure—has no storm swept over the one and not the other, no lightning scathed it, no beast browsed on it, no insects preyed on it, no passing stranger stript off its leaves or its bark? If the trees grew near together, may not the one which, by whatever accident, grew up first, have retarded the other's development by its shade? Human beings are subject to an infinitely greater variety of accidents and external influences than trees, and have infinitely more operation in impairing the growth of one another; since those who begin by being strongest, have almost always hitherto used their strength to keep the others weak. What the original differences are among human beings, I know no more than your contributor, and no less; it is one of the questions not yet satisfactorily answered in the natural history of the species. This, however, is well known – that spontaneous improvement, beyond a very low grade – improvement by internal development, without aid from other individuals or peoples – is one of the rarest phenomena in history... No argument against the capacity of negroes for improvement, could be drawn from their not being one of these rare exceptions (29).

The logic of this passage seems very strange. In service of establishing difference as culturally constructed and not natural, Mill translates constructed difference into the language of natural difference by way of extended metaphor. This turn has several significant effects.

The first effect is that it establishes the development of difference as a concrete phenomenon, observable to the empirical methods he accuses Carlyle of neglecting. The metaphor makes visible the notion of progress: while we may not be able to see capacity for improvement in the figure of the Negro lounging about in the West Indies eating pumpkin, we can see that a seedling will grow, barring any acts of external aggression, into a tree. In making

progress material and thus visible, Mill imposes the teleology of natural growth onto the narrative of racial development, and as such he forces a temporal category on the West Indian blacks that is not there in Carlyle's depiction of them as indolent, static, and in some way outside of time. In Mill's rendering, unimproved native people are at a moment in the history of liberal improvement, inherently capable, like trees, of future growth in the right environment. Because "spontaneous" improvement "beyond a very low grade" is impossible, native character and its inherent capacity for improvement with the right "external influences" serves as a justification for liberal imperialism.

The second effect of this passage is how the natural metaphor functions to mute the effect of that violence. This is surprising given how insistently Mill acknowledges the violence of the colonial project. In much the same way as Darwin would later work to restore a sense of peace and fitness to the seemingly purposeless violence of the struggle for existence because it was a natural, and therefore inevitable, process, Mill's natural metaphor functions to rewrite the agent of violence not as deliberate human action but as a byproduct of the natural process of human development occurring through struggle.²⁷ Though Mill attempts to highlight the violence of the British in the West Indies, the language in which he does so emphatically conceals the active perpetration of violence. For example, Mill asks: "How many hundred thousand African men laid their bones there, after having had their lives pressed out by slow or fierce torture?" (29). This sentence, which talks back to Carlyle mourning the bones of the British men scattered under Jamaican soil, conceals the actions of the British even as it acknowledges the violent result, linguistically attributing responsibility to the Africans for their own deaths. Lives "pressed out"

²⁷ See, for instance, Darwin's conclusion to the chapter on the struggle for existence: "we may console ourselves with the full belief that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply" (*The Origin of Species*. 1859. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 66).

rather than murdered: the grammatical structure of the sentence acknowledges those deaths as a painful experience of torture while effacing the hand of the torturer. Rather, death becomes the accidental result of an inevitable, and agentless, process. The natural metaphor furthers that sense, acknowledging the unfairness of one tree thriving because it blocks the sun from another, but draining any possibility that violence could be either active or malevolent. Mill's metaphor obscures the power dynamic of the colonial relationship such that colonial violence becomes, in the end, nothing but an inevitable accident of a natural process of human development.

A third effect of Mill's extended metaphor, with its logic of the indeterminate origin of racial difference and the forces which solidify that difference into a cultural hierarchy (albeit reinforcing pre-existing natural difference), is to shift the focus of the Negro Question itself. It is evident throughout the passage that the important question for Mill is not ultimately the origin of racial difference, or why it is that black people have not progressed, according to a British understanding of progress. The question is this: with the lack of spontaneous improvement a self-evident and natural fact, in what way is it best for the noble British gentlemen to improve the lives of those inherently weaker? Ultimately, the Negro Question is neither about blackness nor about difference, as much as it is about producing and defending a certain kind of whiteness. Thus, while British agency is nowhere to be seen in Mill's account of past violence, it is inordinately consequential in how Mill sees the future of the Negro in the West Indies, the future of abolition in America, and the question of slavery across all Europe. When Mill writes that "though we cannot extirpate all pain, we can, if we are sufficiently determined upon it, abolish all tyranny" (31), he seems to be saying that pain is an inevitable consequence of being inherently weaker. What matters is not what strength has "hitherto" been used to do, but, having attained his rightful position of strength, how a moral and righteous British gentleman chooses to use it. The answer is, of course, to aid in the improvement of the weak, to implement the

philanthropic program Carlyle rails against as “the unhappy wedlock of Philanthropic Liberalism and the Dismal Science” (673). Mill is walking a tricky line: he needs to dispel the fact of natural difference insofar as he needs to restore capacity and potential to Carlyle’s figure of the hopeless, pumpkin-eating, enslaved negro by explaining his position as a culturally constructed one; but he needs to retain enough of the natural to explain the inherent superiority of those exceptional noble lives, who break the rules of history by using their strength not to keep others weak, but to aid in their improvement. Put differently, “The Negro Question” needs to both naturalize British exceptionalism (and thus white supremacy) and serve as a call to action to bring about the social conditions that allow that exceptionalism to flourish.

It is crucial that Mill swiftly dispenses with the question of what caused his two seedlings to become different in the first place: whether the greater vigor is initially a natural property or whether one seed becomes more vigorous in response to the environment. Preserving the indeterminacy of that difference is precisely the point, the lynchpin on which the rest of his argument depends. More than that, I am arguing, ambiguity about the origin of difference is not merely strange or inconvenient, but central to – or at least a central preoccupation in – all of Mill’s social theory, not just as it takes shape in “The Negro Question,” but also in his more canonical works like *On Liberty*. The seedling analogy functions to keep difference unobservable, a core of truth or experience that remains inaccessible to the empiricist gaze. The result is a positivism that avoids both the justification of slavery based on the idea of a natural and fixed difference, as well as a wholly constructionist idea of equality that would undermine the naturally existing exceptionalism that Mill never ceases to assert. If difference were understood as natural, he could not logically argue against slavery on empirical as well as moral grounds; if no amount of difference were natural, then there would be nothing inherently

extraordinary to distinguish the exceptional liberal individual. In short, Mill's understanding of the social order rests, logically and formally, on an indeterminate origin of difference.

I have spent time examining "The Negro Question" because it speaks to contemporary thinkers who puzzle over liberalism's ambivalence about matters of race. Mill's toleration and passionate advocacy for abolition are not at odds with his elitism in this essay, but they are, in a sense, what enables it. For Mill, preserving the ambiguity of the origins of difference and rendering progress visible while concealing imperial violence imposes a telos on the philanthropic project: the Negro's improvement is always happening, and always in the future. With this in mind, I now turn to *On Liberty* to demonstrate how this potentially improvable but not yet improved subject underpins the idea of the individual as a universal.

The feeling of difference: Individualism and the limits of autonomy

The idea of difference continues to pose problems to conceptualizations of democracy and the idea of equality, and it continues to be framed as a problem which liberal theory alone cannot sufficiently address. In "Multiculturalism and the Liberal State" (1995), for instance, Jürgen Habermas responds to Charles Taylor on the politics of recognition to argue that a combination of liberal theory and communitarian theory is required in order to accommodate cultural difference and maintain the project of democracy. For Habermas, liberalism "is supposed to advocate a state which is blind to skin color and other differences."²⁸ According to Habermas, liberalism offers rights and opportunities regardless of particularities: "It grants equal chances to everybody for the development of personal identities, independently of the *kind* of persons they are and their relation to collective identities" (850). In contrast, Habermas maintains

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas. "Multiculturalism and the Liberal State." *Stanford Law Review* 47.5 (1995): 849-853, p. 849. Subsequent page references in text.

that communitarianism requires that the state intervene to preserve “identity formation and maintenance” if groups whose collective identities are based on difference (national, ethnic, cultural or religious) are threatened (850). Habermas styles himself as a defender of liberal principles in this debate, maintaining that “liberalism does allow for an interpretation of equal rights that requires the state to grant the equal coexistence of majority and minority cultures” (850). However, he is also critical of liberal theory’s ability to resolve the problem difference poses to the state, advocating for a solution that melds aspects of both liberal and communitarian theory. Before proceeding, it is helpful to note his objections to liberal theory. First, it is insufficiently “intersubjectivist” and requires an acknowledgement that the “legal person is individuated through socialization processes no less than are natural persons” (850). That is to say, what liberalism in the abstract sense fails to understand is that any community is “ethically impregnated” and not neutral: “Citizens share a political culture shaped by a particular history” (851). Second, there cannot be an a priori distinction between the public and private identities of citizens. Public and private rights may be distinct, in Habermas’s conception, but must be considered as mutually constitutive: “Citizens can make adequate use of their public autonomy only if, on the basis of their equally protected private autonomy, they are sufficiently independent. They can, on the other hand, arrive at an agreement about the regulation of their private autonomy only if they make adequate use of their political autonomy” (851). Freedom in the public sphere is only possible with the presumption of equality and independence as private persons; that independence can only exist by contractually limited agreement if as a political actor the individual is also equal. Private and public equality require one another or by definition they cannot exist.

For Habermas, the problem difference poses to liberal theory lies in the shift from natural to legal personhood. While he defends the liberal self as not necessarily “atomistic, disembodied,

and desocialized concept of the person,” he proposes that we must draw from communitarian theory to think about the abstract carrier of rights as also intersubjective or socially embedded. The “members of a community of legal consociates who are supposed to recognize each other as free and equal” must equally apply – and the suggestion is that in liberal theory it does not – to “the context of those intersubjective relationships which are constitutive for their identities as natural persons” (852). The artificial persons of liberalism must be recognized as equal not in spite of but on the basis of their particularities and constitutive differences as natural persons. According to Habermas’s account of liberal and communitarian theory, then, difference is understandable within a social framework, but has still to be made understandable vis-à-vis the state. Habermas’s problem is that the salience of difference is not recognized in the supposition of “a state which is blind to skin color and other differences” (849).

Where Habermas frames the problem in terms of the relationship – and, crucially, the non-equivalence – between natural and legal persons, or the specific, particular, unique self and the abstract, equal subject, for Mill the significant relation is between the individual and the powers of domination that would suppress individuality. As Lauren Goodlad points out, the state can be, but is not alone sufficient as,

a safeguard against the further decline of individuality. Rather, civilization advances through a self-perpetuating dynamic: as the scale and complexity of the ‘general arrangements’ on which individuals depend become ever greater, power passes from individuals to masses. Political forms – for example, local as opposed to centralized government – reverse the alienation of power only insofar as they are successful in fortifying individuality.²⁹

²⁹ Lauren Goodlad. *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, p. 28. Subsequent page references in text.

On Liberty is a work that is primarily concerned with the dynamic of power between the individual and the social, rather than the individual and political (or even the political-individual and the social-individual). As Mill states in its opening pages, it deals with “Civil, or Social Liberty: the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual.”³⁰ To put it in terms from “The Negro Question,” what Mill is most interested in, over and above the liberal state as Habermas defines it, is the relationship between the “maleficent powers” of domination as opposed to “human life” (25). Although “The Negro Question” clearly ends with a political message, as Mill chastises the anonymous writer with flinging a “missile, loaded with the weight of his reputation, into the abolitionist camp” (31), the problem of difference is not merely a political question, as it primarily is for Habermas. Rather, the problem of difference and the way that Mill, in “The Negro Question,” frames racial difference as both culturally constructed and also naturalized are problems that are folded into the very definition of individualism.

To understand how this stickiness of difference shapes Mill’s concept of the individual in *On Liberty*, it is helpful to take up what Goodlad notes as a “fascinating overlap” (27) between Mill’s analysis of mass society’s saturating effect and Foucault’s work on governmentality. Goodlad’s point, that there are other ways of thinking about Mill’s relationship to Foucault than a framework based on *Discipline and Punish*, is especially apt in a consideration of how Mill constructs racial difference throughout his work. In particular, I would like to think about how Foucault considers racism as a structure underpinning the discourse of a society at war in order to identify a parallel between Mill’s focus in *On Liberty* and the “relations of domination” (45)

³⁰ John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII - Essays on Politics and Society Part I*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 217. Subsequent page references in text.

that Foucault sets out to explain in the lectures composing *Society Must Be Defended*.³¹ In the third lecture, Foucault identifies a link between relations of force and relations of truth. With the emergence in the seventeenth century of a binarized conception of society – what Foucault calls politics as the continuation of war by other means – truth is no longer a universal or neutral position, but becomes “always a perspectival discourse. It is interested in the totality only to the extent that it can see it in one-sided terms, distort it and see it from its own point of view” (52). In *On Liberty*, what Mill proposes as a universal or neutral position is, as truth is for Foucault, always perspectival. Though not ostensibly concerned with racial difference, the concept leaves its trace everywhere throughout *On Liberty*. Difference, and specifically difference as a racialized concept, can be framed as a constitutive problem for Mill, or what John Frow calls a paralogic: that which enables something impossible to exist.³²

Primarily, the social conflict in *On Liberty* is framed as a conflict between the individual and the mass: the individual’s autonomy must be maintained in spite of a social totality whose power always threatens to impinge on liberty. In the first few sentences of *On Liberty*, Mill frames this as a struggle that has long plagued humanity: “It is so far from being new, that, in a certain sense, it has divided mankind almost from the remotest ages; but in the stage of progress into which the more civilized portions of the species have now entered, it presents itself under new conditions, and requires a different and more fundamental treatment” (217). And yet for Mill, the relationship between the individual and the society is not entirely antagonistic: while his understanding of liberty requires that individuality flourish above all else, throughout *On Liberty* the individual can only be understood in the context of, and must identify with, the social

³¹ Michel Foucault. “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Translated by David Macey, New York: Allen Lane, 2003, p. 45. Subsequent page references in text.

³² John Frow. “Cultural Studies and the Neoliberal Imagination.” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 12:2 (Fall 1999): 423-30, p. 428.

whole. There is thus a deep ambivalence about the collective in *On Liberty*, an ambivalence that is, as we shall see, tied up in the problem of difference. The problem is not, as it was for Habermas, a difficulty aligning the individual in all one's particularities with the abstract individual who has a stake in the state; rather, the issue is preserving valued difference (as not all difference is equally valued) when faced with an overwhelming mass of sameness. Drawing on the Tocquevillean notion of "tyranny of the majority," Mill exhibits a distrust that echoes Tocqueville's own anxiety about the mass public and public opinion. It is intriguing to note how closely Mill's framing of Tocqueville's concept echoes Foucault's notion of the social body constituted by the racially-based antagonism of race wars, a state whose existence depends on expelling the "race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body" (61). In Mill's words:

Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still, vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant—society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it—its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries... it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself (219).

Both Foucault's "racism that society will direct against itself" (62) and Mill's image of a society at war with itself figure a social whole defined and shaped by systemic struggle. If we take Foucault's point that the "war that is going on beneath order and peace, the war that undermines our society and divides it in a binary mode" is inherently a race war (59-60), it is difficult to read Mill's description of society fighting itself without thinking about the way in which the discourse

of race struggle is encoded in the discourse of individual rights.³³ That is, the model of society Mill presents us with is a binarized depiction of the struggle between the individual and the social totality that occurs most particularly at the site of putatively peaceful or non-political moments, threatening the freedom and sanctity of the individual (“enslaving the soul”).

In “The Negro Question,” we saw that “noble feelings” functioned to both open up Carlyle’s restricted, ethnocentric version of the good to encompass class and racial difference, and retain a centralized notion of good based on Mill’s own version of aristocratic, ethnocentric liberalism. We have thus already seen the way in which feelings operate alongside gentility as a seemingly universal category, yet one that is very much particularized in raced and class terms. That the most dangerous form of tyranny of the majority is “the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling” (9) should suggest that at issue in Mill’s protection of individual independence is precisely the kind of Eurocentric individual we have already seen function as the universal standard in Mill’s writing. The capacity to withhold imposing one’s feelings on others is a signal of what we might call the absorptive individual, or the extraordinary man who is capable of making capacious his own interests to absorb the coexistence of those of others, even when they

³³ Indeed, Foucault writes of the emergence of rights discourse as an inextricable part of the emergence of this discourse of struggle: “In the general struggle he is talking about, the person who is speaking, telling the truth, recounting the story, rediscovering memories and trying not to forget anything, well, that person is inevitably on one side or the other: he is involved in the battle, has adversaries, and is working toward a particular victory. Of course, he speaks the discourse of rights, asserts a right and demands a right. But what he is demanding and asserting is ‘his’ rights – he says: ‘We have a right.’ These are singular rights, and they are strongly marked by a relationship of property, conquest, victory, or nature. It might be the right of his family or race, the right of superiority or seniority, the right of triumphal invasions, or the right of recent or ancient occupations. In all cases, it is a right that is both grounded in history and decentered from a juridical universality” (52).

conflict.³⁴ Witness the disregard Mill has for the mass of ordinary men making up the public who are incapable of so doing:

when does the public trouble itself about universal experience? In its interferences with personal conduct, it is seldom thinking of anything but the enormity of acting or feeling differently from itself... moralists ... tell us to search in our own minds and hearts for laws of conduct binding on ourselves and on all others. What can the poor public do but apply these instructions, and make their own personal feelings of good and evil, if they are tolerably unanimous in them, obligatory on all the world? (284)

After what has been called the “affective turn” in critical theory, it is worth considering just what Mill means when he uses the term feelings to describe one’s orientation toward good and evil.³⁵ Do feelings stand for a specific category for Mill, or would another term – opinion or beliefs, for instance – work equally well? The passage uses feelings to capture the part of life that is distinct from action, as this is where the idea of freedom or autonomy is most crucial for Mill throughout *On Liberty*. As far as one’s actions are concerned, the harm principle lays out the extent of appropriate moral or physical compulsion; however, compulsion or harm is harder to define in the realm of thought and opinion, where what Mill figures as a colonizing “disposition of mankind” makes one want “to impose their own opinions and inclinations as a rule of conduct on others” (227). To take just one of the religious examples Mill is fond of using: if you feel that eating pork is a sin, you cannot legitimately compel someone not to eat it; nonetheless, is it still wrong to feel that not just you but everyone should abstain from its consumption?

³⁴ Consider the example of Stoic Marcus Aurelius: his sense of “unblemished justice” in combination with “the tenderest heart”; all his failings are “on the side of indulgence,” and his writings are “the highest ethical product of the ancient mind” that “differ scarcely perceptibly, if they differ at all, from the most characteristic teachings of Christ” (236).

³⁵ See Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, editors. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Considered in this way, it may seem that feelings are commensurate with beliefs: one feels or believes that eating pork is sinful. However, a closer examination of Mill's deployment of the language of affect suggests that feelings do, indeed, function in a way that is distinct from other terms like ideas, opinions, or beliefs. Immediately before the chapter cited above, Mill explains that

a religious bigot, when charged with disregarding the religious feelings of others, has been known to retort that they disregard his feelings, by persisting in their abominable worship or creed. But there is no parity between the feeling of a person for his own opinion, and the feeling of another who is offended at his holding it; no more than between the desire of a thief to take a purse, and the desire of the right owner to keep it (283).

Here, there is quite an obvious distinction between having a feeling and an opinion; feelings are something you can have about an explicitly political position, a separate affective layer that is in addition to, and lies behind, the opinion. Hence, feelings are what steer people to form opinions in the first place: "The practical principle which guides them to their opinions on the regulation of human conduct, is the feeling in each person's mind that everybody should be required to act as he, and those with whom he sympathizes, would like them to act" (220-221). What follows is an account rather like Raymond Williams's structure of feelings, which "exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" before they are solidified as ideology.³⁶ In Mill's words:

Wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feelings of class superiority. The morality between Spartans and Helots, between planters and negroes, between princes and subjects, between nobles and roturiers, between men and women, has been for the most part the creation of these class interests and feelings: and the sentiments thus generated,

³⁶ Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 132. Subsequent page references in text.

react in turn upon the moral feelings of the members of the ascendant class, in their relations among themselves (221).

Moral sentiments are often shaped by class or social interests, not “as a matter of reason, and on their own account,” but as a “consequence of the sympathies and antipathies which grew out of them” – and in fact at times those sympathies or antipathies occur of what seems like their own accord, as they may equally have “little or nothing to do with the interests of society” (221).

Clearly, then, feelings are distinct from opinion, though perhaps not from what Williams describes as “thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity” (132); yet, feelings are not necessarily aligned with either personal or social interests, nor are they necessarily informed by reason. What we see, then, in Mill’s affective language is the creation of a space behind reason, thought and opinion, a space that is in a certain sense inaccessible to those things. Feelings are beyond reason, in fact often negates it; people “are accustomed to believe... that their feelings... are better than reasons, and render reasons unnecessary” (220). And whereas you might be able to think like or even as someone else might – that may be the only way to reach informed opinion – you cannot feel exactly as another might feel. Though we may be able to reason along the lines of thought of another person, the “enormity” of feeling differently represents a core space of inaccessible difference.³⁷

We see another instance of Mill’s use of feeling as a category distinct from thought or opinion in his description of Continental liberalism’s ideal of representative government. A mode of government that exists only in fantasy, this form of representation consists of a ruling

³⁷ See a similar characterization of feelings as something that signals the radical difference of the other person by Adam Smith: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.” *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 1759. Edited by Knud Haakonssen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 11.

power that is “identified with the people... their interest and will should be the interest and will of the nation.” Thus, the people could not be thought of as tyrannizing over itself: “This mode of thought, or rather perhaps of feeling, was common among the last generation of European liberalism, in the Continental chapter of which it still apparently predominates” (218). What does it mean to call a political position a feeling, rather than a mode of thought? Conceived of as something removed from reasoning and inaccessible to the empirical method, feeling signals a way of thinking about representative government that is only possible when popular government is something “only dreamed about” or read about in the distant past, a way of feeling that exists only in the present among those Continental political thinkers who represent the “brilliant exceptions” we have encountered before (219).³⁸ When Mill describes a political idea based on an impossible conception of government as a feeling, he harnesses something like what Sara Ahmed describes as affective stickiness to indicate a kind of bodily experience that precedes (or stands in place of) rational political thought.³⁹ Describing Bentham’s idea of pleasure, Ahmed notes that affect functions as “a bodily orientation that reveals a social orientation, a tendency to have a certain tendency” (232).⁴⁰ Following Ahmed, I want to suggest something similar is at work in Mill’s rendering of feeling: to call what would otherwise be a purely social orientation,

³⁸ The progressiveness of the form of government also recalls the temporal dimension of a nation’s advancement in the discussion, above, of the West Indies.

³⁹ “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and object”; it deals with “how things cohere *in a certain way*.” In the relationship between the affective response and the emotion that evokes it (the bodily feelings of fear, and what we call fear, for instance), the social has a role: “Before we are affected, before something happens that creates an impression on the skin, things are already in place that incline us to be affected in some ways more than others... To read affect we need better understandings of this ‘in place,’ and how the ‘in place’ involves psychic and social dimension” Sara Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 230-1 fn. 1. Subsequent page references in text.

⁴⁰ Ahmed continues: “The importance of thinking about happiness as contiguous with pleasure sensations is that it allows us to keep our attention on the bodily dimensions of happiness. I do not want to take the body out of happiness” (232 fn. 2).

which operates and has purchase in only the public political realm, a feeling is to call up a bodily orientation too. Mill thus introduces an idea about public life that is not thought or rationally tested through public debate, but felt, a kind of knowing that brings the body into a place where it would otherwise have no business.⁴¹ When politics is affective rather than rational, when we have feelings about it rather than just think about it, our bodies become strangely relevant to the way we know politics; it is thus a very strange language for Mill to use when he ostensibly argues for the irrelevance of bodily difference in the public sphere.

Why are feelings so important to Mill's conception of freedom? And what does it mean to conceive of freedom as the freedom to have a feeling unhampered by the feelings of others? Following queer theorists like Judith Butler, David Halperin, and Sara Ahmed, can we understand Mill's use of affect as a category that mediates between the personal and the public? If feelings function as the limit case of empiricism, much like racial difference in "The Negro Question," in opening up a space for difference beyond the limits of what we can know or observe, they thus allow for an amount of inequality that we need not explain away through rational means. Take, for instance, the example of the rightful owner who wants to keep his purse, and the thief who wants to steal it. The "parity" Mill refers to is not simply about who gets to possess the purse, but also about whose desire for it is the right one. The tangibility of the object makes the disparity of such competing desires fairly evident, and, in making a connection between affect and object, Mill suggests that such inequality spills over into the affective realm too. Like taste, which is intriguingly interchangeable with feelings in the example of the purse,

⁴¹ This is a way of knowing and thinking often encountered in the classroom, where language like "I feel that" instead of "I think that," or "I have feelings about" instead of "I have an opinion about," is used to present an opinion subjectively, thus making space for one form of knowledge without excluding others. That is, in those spaces it functions as a self-consciously subjective way of knowing in order to circumvent the power relations of knowledge. Mill uses the same technique to the exact opposite purpose.

feelings always connote subjectivity: “a person’s taste is as much his own peculiar concern as his opinion or his purse” (284).⁴² Some feelings (the connotation is, therefore, some people) are simply less valid than others. Indeed, feelings function metonymically throughout *On Liberty*. A world of equal feelings stands in for the notion of equality itself, and the equality of feelings is as much a fantasy as an idealized (non-tyrannical) popular government. Though it is “easy for anyone to imagine an ideal public” (283), in which each member is free from the imposition of others’ thoughts and feelings and only required to “abstain from modes of *conduct* which universal experience has condemned” (284, my emphasis), such a public has never materialized: “where has there been seen a public which set any such limit to its censorship?” Rather, the public never thinks “of anything but the enormity of acting or feeling differently from itself” and thus makes “their own personal feelings of good and evil, if they are tolerably unanimous in them, obligatory on all the world” (284).⁴³ In anticipating Ahmed’s observation that there is “a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings” (69), Mill lays out the conflict between the individual and the totality as a conflict of feelings – the individual’s right to feel as he or she wants about good and bad, versus the social imperative to feel as everyone feels. Moreover, in the affective realm, just as there are some feelings that are more powerful (the feelings of the majority), and some that are less valid (the feelings of the thief or religious bigot), there are also some feelings that are simply better than others.

⁴² On inequality of taste, see Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. For a consideration of feelings when they are not merely personal, see Sianne Ngai’s reading of tone as affective bearing or “set toward” the world. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 29.

⁴³ On the social nature of thought in Mill, see Adela Pinch: “along that line where mental freedom and the harm principle meet there opens, in Mill’s work, a space for taking a moral stance on thinking as part of social life with others.” Adela Pinch. *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 12.

Mill's sense of hierarchy is always indexed to progress, and it is no different in his account of feelings. A full account of "those who have been in advance of society in thought and feeling" (222) is given in the chapter "On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion." Whereas the ordinary man, we have seen, imposes "his own liking" as a standard of judgement on others, and cannot think beyond his own preference, the progressive individual is someone whose feelings are capacious enough to make space for the feelings of others. This appears to be a universal perspective, but one which only certain kinds of individuals can access. The "wise man" attains wisdom and good judgement because "he has kept his mind open" and listened to criticism from others, because he has tested his opinion against the fallacies of others, and because "he has felt, that the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind" (232). We might think about this individual as the aristocrat (or, since it is a gendered individual, the gentleman) of Mill's democratic society; unlike the "world" or the mass of people from which he must stand out, this individual represents the perfectibility of culture and social progress rests on his shoulders. Importantly, as Mill defines it here, wisdom comes not simply from actions, which can be learned – such as listening and thinking – but also from feeling: before he can listen, he needs to *feel* that he needs to listen. Feeling the value of an open mind is here characterized as an inherent form of knowing that precedes rationality.

When Mill distinguishes between this kind of individual, whose status and worth as a single person is defined by his distinctiveness, and the mass of ordinary people who, by virtue of their ordinariness, threaten individuality, he consigns the latter to a category that barely counts as human:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgement to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgement and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? (262)

By Mill's reasoning, worth may seem attainable depending on the use of faculties. But that leads us right back to judgement and feelings: it is the having of feeling and judgement in the first place that determines whether one is able to choose his own plan of life. What is more, Mill relies on highly racialized language in distinguishing the worthy humans from the "ape-like" mass. The de-individuating effect of public opinion is very clearly articulated as a racialized one. Writing about the morality of the time, and in particular the "philanthropic spirit" which tends to produce general moral prescriptions, Mill describes the repressive standard set by contemporary society: "Its ideal of character is to be without any marked character; to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to commonplace humanity" (271-272). There are two salient points here. The first is the construction of the mass as something dangerous that works at the site of character to produce "weak feelings and weak energies" (272). The second is the metaphor works to make racial difference a non-difference: that is, racial difference (coded as feminine, no less) is marked as a rigid and violent sameness. Commonplace, indistinguishable humanity is thus charged with the weight of racial difference whereas the ideal character/citizen is thus inherently white/English and masculine.

Progress for Mill hinges not simply on individuality, but on individuality expressed in ethnic terms. Often it is China that represents stasis, sameness, and the stultifying effect of mass

culture opposed to the “remarkable diversity of character and culture” of Europe (274).⁴⁴ And if Mill views the mass everywhere with suspicion, regarding democracy as a political form that discourages nonconformity and tends to the “despotism of custom” (272), it is nevertheless clear that China’s stasis is the inevitable result of a lack of worth or wisdom in those “sages and philosophers” who are “remarkable” for the “excellence of their apparatus for impressing, as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community” (273). Those passive minds who cannot act, but who must have knowledge impressed upon them, are not responsible for China’s stasis; that responsibility lies with the “intelligent part of the public” who allow, indeed encourage, such sameness to spread (275). Put differently, China is stultifying and static not because of its methods, but simply because it is China: even the remarkable cannot recognize the value of individuality when they see it.⁴⁵

The limits of autonomy are marked, in the end, by both feelings and by nature defined by ethnicity: liberty is possible only for those who prove themselves to be worthy, but worthiness depends on possessing the capacity for it and on feeling a certain way. If not exactly inherent, the origins and workings of that capacity are nonetheless inaccessible to the empirical eye, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily proved. Such ambiguity at the heart of the notion of capacity leads to Mill vacillating over the course of *On Liberty* on the subject of despotism. Consider

⁴⁴ “A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality” (273). Mill was of course not the only nineteenth-century thinker to use China as the representation of stasis. For instance, see Tocqueville’s reference to “the unusually static quality of mind of this nation.” *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (1835-1840). Translated by Gerald E. Bevan. London: Penguin, 2003, p. 536.

⁴⁵ Mill continues: “to see that it is good there should be differences, even though not for the better... If resistance waits till life is reduced nearly to one uniform type, all deviations from that type will come to be considered impious, immoral, even monstrous and contrary to nature. Mankind speedily become unable to conceive diversity, when they have been for some time unaccustomed to see it” (275). See also his definition of utility as the “permanent interests of man as a progressive being” (225).

three moments that express slightly different positions on whether liberty applies to those who are not worthy. First, at the beginning of the text, Mill maintains despotism is a “legitimate mode of government” when dealing with “barbarians,” if it is a means of effecting their improvement (225). “Liberty, as a principle,” Mill continues, “has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion” (224). Second, Mill denies that “any community has a right to force another to be civilized... I cannot admit that persons entirely unconnected with them ought to step in and require that a condition of things with which all who are directly interested appear to be satisfied, should be put an end to because it is a scandal to persons some thousands of miles distant” (292). A civilization that considers itself under threat of barbarism must have become “so degenerate, that neither its appointed priests and teachers, nor anybody else, has the capacity, or will take the trouble, to stand up for it” (291). Thirdly, when discussing imposing limits on the sale of harmful commodities, Mill maintains that such measures are “suited only to a state of society in which the labouring classes are avowedly treated as children or savages, and placed under an education of restraint, to fit them for future admission to the privileges of freedom” (299). And, he also maintains, “no person who sets due value on freedom will give his adhesion to their being so governed, unless after all efforts have been exhausted to educate them for freedom and govern them as freemen, and it has been definitively proved that they can only be governed as children” (299). Though this might sound like a rejection of paternalism, there is a hint that the problem is that England is not in fact paternalistic enough:

It is only because the institutions of this country are a mass of inconsistencies, that things find admittance into our practice which belong to the system of despotic, or what is called paternal, government, while the general freedom of our institutions precludes the exercise of the amount of control necessary to render the restraint of any real efficacy as a moral education (299).

Considered together, what emerges from these moments is a complex position on the working classes and other “barbarians.” Mill advocates a paternalistic approach until a sufficient capacity for freedom can be proved, but this begs the question: if that capacity is not provable, then are certain people, by virtue of their class, race or gender, permanently outside the principle of liberty?

Love and empiricism: Private feelings of a mass public

I have been arguing that freedom in *On Liberty* is a seemingly expansive though ultimately limited concept for Mill: a right reserved for the worthy, rather one which all people deserve equally. I now want to extend this argument through detailed analysis of *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which is putatively considered to fall within the tradition of liberal feminism on the basis of its argument for the equality of women, but which is difficult to reconcile with the conception of freedom that emerges over the course of Mill’s work—from which women are ultimately excluded on the basis of gender.⁴⁶ As freedom is a concept that can only apply to the individual *qua* individual, and as Mill consistently thinks about the individual in a way that excludes all but gentlemen of a particular kind, freedom is not ultimately attainable for women in this scheme.

Scholars have contrasted Mill’s feminism with his paternalistic attitude towards British subjects in the colonies and his support for empire, valorizing the former while trying to wrestle with the contradiction between an upholder of equality and an apologist for imperialism. Take, for instance, Jennifer Pitts’ discussion of Mill’s problematic support for empire, in which she

⁴⁶ John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXI - Essays on Equality, Law, and Education*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. Subsequent page references in text.

contrasts his paternalistic attitude towards Indians with what she describes as a forward-thinking position on gender:

John Stuart Mill was attuned to a degree remarkable for a man of his day to the ways in which European society and laws infantilized women, treating them as wards incapable of bearing adult responsibility. At the same time, he accepted with little question the view that Indians were similarly immature and incapable of self-government.⁴⁷

Pitts' portrayal of Mill as a "remarkable" visionary on women's rights despite his "blind spot" concerning empire is a reading of Mill that depends on viewing his position as anachronistic: at once ahead of his time and behind the times.⁴⁸ Yet neither charge – Mill as backward and racist, or forward-thinking and feminist – gives a complete, or a properly historicized, account of Mill's position. In the rest of this chapter, I argue that a similar structure of thought underlies Mill's position on both race and gender, and that both are informed by nineteenth-century ideas about rights and responsibilities. In advocating for gender equality in a fashion that rejects separate sphere ideology as oppressive and tyrannical, but nonetheless naturalizes its logic, Mill connects the concept of responsibility with the very whiggish notion of capability or capacity. No one is excluded from equality on the evidence of race or gender alone, but one must prove oneself capable of rights before one can be granted the responsibilities that rights entail.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Mill's position on women is frequently framed as "remarkable." See also Jennifer Ring. "Mill's *The Subjection of Women*: The Methodological Limits of Liberal Feminism." *The Review of Politics* 47.1 (January 1985): 27-44. Ring opens with the claim that "John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* is a remarkable document for its time" (27). See also Hollie Mann and Jeff Spinner-Halev: "What is so remarkable about Mill's analysis of gender, where he compares being a wife to being a slave, is that it is strikingly similar to contemporary radical feminist arguments made by Adrienne Rich, Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and others about the institution of marriage and the practice of compulsory heterosexuality." "John Stuart Mill's Feminism: On Progress, the State, and the Path to Justice." *Polity* 42.2 (2010): 244-70, p. 253. Subsequent page references in text.

In *Subjection*, Mill clearly imagines a world in which some men are not fit for the responsibilities of married, and perhaps civic, life. Behavior at home is indexed to a great chain of being, in which “angels” and “absolute fiends” are rare. Everyone else has their place in a progressive chain, at the bottom of which are “ferocious savages, with occasional touches of humanity... and in the wide interval which separates these from any worthy representatives of the human species, how many are the forms and gradations of animalism and selfishness, often under an outward varnish of civilization and even cultivation, living at peace with the law”; yet despite breaking no laws, these savages make the lives of the women they live with “a torment and a burden” (288). The progressiveness of this chain maps onto gender, inasmuch as we saw that it mapped onto race in “The Negro Question,” whereby worthiness and cultivation are concepts that are notionally not specific, but in the end are limited to a very particular sense of fitness.

There is, then, a structural similarity in the way that Mill treats both racial and gender differences, but there are also crucial distinctions in the way Mill handles difference in *Subjection* compared to his debate with Carlyle on the “Negro Question.” I am not suggesting a progression in Mill’s conception of difference over time; rather, I want to suggest these distinctions hinge less on temporality than on the particular orientation of gender to public and private life. Given that, as I have suggested, feelings signify for Mill a subjective space of inaccessible difference, the relationship between men and women – and men’s and women’s feelings – is significant. The relationship between the black Jamaican and the white Englishman is structured by differences of race as well as nation and thus suggests that difference is unbreachable based on geographical distance and therefore the impossibility of thinking or feeling together. By contrast, gender introduces a space of difference inside the home. When Hollie Mann and Jeff Spinner-Halev maintain that Mill “challenged the traditional liberal idea

that there is an impermeable boundary between the public and the private” (255), what is effaced is precisely the importance of the private sphere for Mill. Private relations, to put it baldly, are qualitatively different than public ones because they are based not simply on feelings of obligation, but (at least ideally) on affective bonds of love. The marital relationship thus serves a very specific purpose for Mill, one which is more complex than the framework of liberal feminism often grants it.

One way to think about the significance of marriage in Mill’s thought is through Lauren Berlant’s concept of “enabling disavowals,” which allow us to maintain the disposition she calls cruel optimism: namely, attachment to what is bad for us.⁴⁹ Berlant notes the way love has been seen to function as a “bargaining tool for convincing others to join in making a life that also provides a loophole through which people can view themselves nonetheless as fundamentally noninstrumental” (181). Arguing against Butler, who looks at how the subject chooses or refuses to reproduce the attachment to subordination, Berlant argues that the hegemonic is “not merely domination dressed more becomingly” but “a metastructure of consent.” As such, “dependable life relies on the sheerly optimistic formalism of attachment,” which is why we consent to tell a story about the good life even as it hurts us, even as we are not “the hegemons” (185). “What would happen,” Berlant asks, “if we saw subjectivization as happening historically, as training in affective sense perception and intuition?” (186). Elsewhere, Berlant poses several questions about subjectivization, including the following, which is most useful for my purposes: “how are the infrastructural activities of capital expressed in practice, experience, and subjectivity?”⁵⁰ It is this relationship – between the “infrastructural activities” of capital, figured as empire and the nation-state – that I want to scrutinize through gender in this chapter. How do gender relations

⁴⁹ Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 215.

⁵⁰ McCabe, Earl. “Depressive Realism: An Interview with Lauren Berlant.” *The Hypocrite Reader*. 5 (2011).

provide Mill with another way to structure freedom to exclude certain people? How does the intimate sphere perform a unique role in the training in affective sense perception? And how can we link the structure of the family and its affective model to Mill's establishment of a rather Darwinian circuit of cultivation: the only people who are worth cultivating are the people who are already in some sense cultivatable? And how does this circuit hinge on the idea of gender difference, as something that is both empirically thinkable and also beyond all possible reach of empirical thought?

Subjection can be understood as Mill's attempt to shift the terms of marriage from domination to consent. Difference is, as I have shown, central to the way Mill thinks about power: biological determinism may justify a degree of domination, or at the very least trouble the notion of consent, and consequently we see Mill grapple with the origin of gender difference much as he did, in "The Negro Question," with the origin of racial difference. However, Mill's ambivalence about whether, under conditions of equality, gender differences would persist – what Mann and Spinner-Halev call his "agnostic" position (254) – has often been confused with a complete refusal of natural gender differences. Mill's argument has frequently been understood to hinge on contradiction. On the one hand, he argues that, given systemic inequality, we cannot know the limitations of women based on observable behavior; and on the other hand, his claim for female equality rests on capacity proven through observable behavior.⁵¹ In asking whether Mill's argument is consistent with feminism, and if so how to reconcile the apparent "contradictions" in his work, we fail to appreciate that Mill's construction of empiricism and its

⁵¹ See Elizabeth A. Smith. "John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Women': A Re-Examination." *Polity* 34.2 (Winter 2001): 181-203, pp. 183-4 for a clear summary of these charges of inconsistency.

limits is not a contradiction at all.⁵² For Mill, empirical methods clearly show that the “feeling” of naturalness about women’s subjection to men is “dependent on custom” rather than on inherent difference: “everything which is usual appears natural” (270). That premise, that the best form of gender relations is the current form based on inequality and on women’s subjection, “rests upon theory only; for there never has been a trial made of any other: so that experience, in the sense in which it is vulgarly opposed to theory, cannot be pretended to have pronounced any verdict” (264). It is precisely not the point that Mill “did not believe that any intellectual or affective differences between men and women would hold once equality and liberty were widespread,” as Mann and Spinner-Halev argue (254-5). In fact, Mill takes pains to stress that we cannot know whether the gender differences we can see are natural or whether they are the product of inequality:

Standing on the ground of common sense and the constitution of the human mind, I deny that any one knows, *or can know*, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another... What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others (276; my emphasis).

Thus, when Mill asserts that “no one can safely pronounce that if women’s nature were left to choose its directions as freely as men’s... there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves” (305), the important point, which is so often obscured, is not that we can say with any certainty that differences would not hold under conditions of equality, but that we cannot “safely pronounce” one way or the other.

⁵² After summarizing the position of feminist critics, Smith proceeds to attempt to reclaim Mill for feminism, and attribute the perceived contradictions as evidence of Mill’s (remarkable, forward-thinking) concession to the (repressive) times.

Retaining the full sense of indeterminacy about Mill's understanding of the origin of gender difference is necessary to understand the way his empiricism works to shape a notion of freedom that is neither as remarkable nor as "limited" as some critics have characterized it. Mill's project in *Subjection* is ultimately both radical and conservative, a curious mix of feminism and benign paternalism: what would happen if we grant freedom to women, and in that event how could we direct them? When he does evoke the specter of natural difference, he does so only to question whether that difference is natural in the sense of biological, or natural in the sense of a logical consequence of repressive circumstances: "I shall presently show, that even the least contestable of the differences which now exist, are such as may very well have been produced merely by circumstances" (305). Consider his discussion of brain size. Mill rejects the idea that men's brains are always larger than women's, on the evidence of "a man who had weighed many human brains, [and] said that the heaviest he knew of, heavier even than Cuvier's ... was that of a woman" (311). What Mill rejects here is not the connection between gender, brain size and intelligence, but certainty about the degree of the connection. By "making abstraction of the great unsettled controversy respecting the appropriation of different parts of the brain to different mental faculties," Mill asserts that all we do know about the brain is that there is some connection between magnitude and capacity, and that the magnitude of the brain is not the only factor determining the capacity of the instrument (311). In effect, all the empirical method can do here is prove uncertainty: by abstracting from what we do know, all we can establish as a general principle is the fact of uncertainty regarding brain size and its relationship to mental capacity. As a result, all that remains to us is to hypothesize: it would therefore "not be surprising" to Mill "if men on the average should have the advantage in the size of the brain, and women in activity of cerebral circulation" (311). As this hypothesis accords with what we can observe in general behavior – that a woman's brain is quicker to fatigue, but also quicker to

recover; that women are quick, whereas men excel at the kind of thinking that requires “most plodding and long hammering at a single thought” – it is likely to be a difference that is biological in origin (312). However, even when these differences seem to be entirely observable, they still remain a kind of thought experiment, notionally provable but nonetheless unproven: “this speculation is entirely hypothetical; it pretends to no more than to suggest a line of enquiry” (312). Mill is quite emphatically not rejecting the notion of natural difference as such; what he repudiates is “the notion of its being yet certainly known that there is any natural difference at all” (312). The effect of this repudiation is to force the empirical gaze on what is knowable or “most accessible to speculation” (313): the “different relations of human beings to society and life” (312) or “the origin of the differences actually observed” (313).

This focus on the oppressive social relations that shape most difference is what has by turns excited and frustrated feminist readers of Mill’s work, as he seems to be making an argument that gender is constructed and difference results from “a differing socialization,”⁵³ or, as one critic puts it, he “foreshadows later ‘radical feminist’ views of sexist socialization.”⁵⁴ Yet his empiricism can just as easily turn to reinforcing innate gender differences; as Ring contends, “he is forced to present contradictory arguments from a single store of empirical evidence” (40). The explanatory framework for Mill’s consideration of gender difference is thus a peculiar kind of empiricism. It is not a search for “inductive certainty,” resting on the question of “how can we get a ‘universal law’ out of isolated and unrelated particulars,”⁵⁵ but in fact the opposite: a search for inductive uncertainty through which an isolated and unrelated particular can refute perceived universal laws without establishing competing universals to replace them. His understanding of

⁵³ Gail Tulloch. *Mill and Sexual Equality*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. xv.

⁵⁴ Bruce Baum. “Millian Radical Democracy: Education for Freedom and Dilemmas of Liberal Equality.” *Political Studies* 51 (2003): 404-428, p. 234.

⁵⁵ John Hermann Randall. “John Stuart Mill and the Working-Out of Empiricism.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 26.1 (1965): 59-88, p. 60.

gender requires that we dispense with generalizations about women's unsuitability for public life based on the evidence of a single exception. The circular logic of his pronouncement that "any woman, who succeeds in an open profession, proves by that very fact that she is qualified for it" does establish a kind of empirical certainty, but it is based on a crucial inductive uncertainty about what else women can do (301).⁵⁶ When Mill posits that "what they have done, that at least, if nothing else, it is proved that they can do," the qualifications – the "at least" and "if nothing else" – reinforce unknowability. While we know what women have done, we do not know the form and extent of natural difference and therefore the "else" remains in radical uncertainty (302). The argument is based on potential, which takes exceptional examples and uses them to refute generalizations about gender difference based on what women typically do, as follows:

Let us at first make entire abstraction of all psychological considerations tending to show, that any of the mental differences supposed to exist between women and men are but the natural effect of the differences in their education and circumstances, and indicate no radical difference, far less radical inferiority, of nature. Let us consider women only as they already are, or as they are known to have been; and the capacities which they have already practically shown (302).

Herein, Mill takes an experienced fact and makes from it an "entire abstraction." What is interesting to note is the kind of empirical generalization Mill is asking us to make, based upon the exceptional fact that surpasses the common experienced fact. In making abstractions of what is unprovable – the origin of gender difference, and consequently innate inferiority – Mill establishes that only a certain kind of evidence counts as empirical evidence: "negative evidence is worth little, while any positive evidence is conclusive" (302). What results is an empiricism which focuses not on the everyday or common experience, or the effect of subordination on the

⁵⁶ Fascinatingly, the rule of women in Hindu society is evidence for the natural capacity of all women to rule (303 fn. 1).

vast majority of women, but on the unique case. It is those unique cases – those extraordinary women who are the “fit” ones, to use the Darwinian language Mill frequently adopts – whose subordination matters more than blocking the undeserved progress of the unfit: “If only once in a dozen years the conditions of eligibility exclude a fit person, there is a real loss, while the exclusion of thousands of unfit persons is no gain” (274). As the idea of fitness indicates, the question of what evidence counts, and which particulars are generalizable, is intimately linked to the question of who can experience freedom.

It is important to note that the “loss” Mill describes as resulting from excluding the exceptional women, it is clearly just as much a loss to the social whole as it is a loss to that particular individual who is excluded. The reason for that broader social loss is the nature of the power that results in women’s subordination to men. It is, as the opening page of *Subjection* makes clear, not simply the subordination, but the “legal subordination of one sex to the other” that is at issue (261). The problem of excluding “even a few women” who may be fit for certain duties is that “the laws which shut the door on those exceptions cannot be justified by any opinion which can be held respecting the capacities of women in general” (301): it is not the fact of exclusion that troubles Mill here, but the fact that the mechanism which shuts doors to exceptional women is a legal one. The implication is that the exceptional women who suffer by being limited are less significant than the cost to the larger social whole (and the exceptional people who steer its direction) of being the form that blocks potential. This way of thinking about inequality, as equally if not primarily a problem for those who benefit from unjust laws, is consistent with Mill’s conception of liberty and his understanding of the problem of racial difference in “The Negro Question.” Difference, whether it is gender or racial difference or even difference in intellect, does not trouble Mill if it is the result of natural capacity, but is intolerable when it is created through external circumstances. What those who seek to claim Mill as a proto-

radical feminist fail to grasp is that, according to the logic of *Subjection*, the idea of inherent gender difference or different gender roles pose no conceptual difficulty, but the legal ascription of these different roles is both intolerable and unacceptable.

In one of the clearer articulations of his elitism, Mill maintains that, “in the more improved countries,” women are the only case besides royalty “in which laws and institutions take persons at their birth, and ordain that they shall never in all their lives be allowed to compete for certain things” (274). All “dignities and social advantages are open to the whole male sex,” even those attainable only through wealth, as “wealth may be striven for by any one, and is actually obtained by many men of the very humblest origin” (274). Mill’s indifference to the “insuperable” difficulties “to the majority” of acquiring wealth or status “without the aid of fortunate accidents” is a clear expression of both his whiggishness and what is for him the sticking point of nineteenth-century gender relations: that “no male human being is under any legal ban” and therefore “neither law nor opinion superadd artificial obstacles to the natural ones” (275). If we consider Mill’s notion of freedom as the ability to develop according to one’s natural capacity, and autonomy as the ability to follow one’s inclinations within the bounds set by natural capacity not artificial regulation, it is easy to see why gender relations in nineteenth-century Britain posed such a problem for Mill, and why he focused in particular on the institutional relation of marriage. Marriage is a particularly problematic relation for Mill, primarily because it undermines the logic of inherently different capacities and responsibilities by suggesting that women must be coerced into gender roles, and secondarily because it is a relation that must structure life both for those whose natural capacities are great and exceptional, and those whose natural capacities incline them to barbarism. It is particularly important to note that Mill distinguishes between two sources of “artificial obstacles”: the law and opinion. This would seem to refer to the idea of the “received opinion” which, in *On Liberty*, is grasped by the

unthinking, unempirical majority and which threatens the cognitive freedom of the extraordinary individual. Opinion serves a slightly different function in *Subjection* than it does in *On Liberty*, for women are both controlled by opinion, but also strangely aligned with it. The tension has implications for the question of whether it is possible to consider women as fully a part of Mill's conception of the universal idea of the individual.

Capacity must be allowed to develop freely, and because legal obstacles prevent this free development, they are a problem for Mill. When Uday Mehta describes the attitude of British paternalism about India as “an odd mix of maturity, familial concern, and an underlying awareness of the capacity to direct, and if need be, coerce,”⁵⁷ it is the phrase “if need be, coerce” that draws a line between a liberal paternalistic frame of mind in the British Empire, and the problem of paternalism for Mill at home – both at home in the national sense, and literally in the domestic sphere. As a legal relation, enforced on women by “foul rather than fair means,” the problem with marriage is that it defines the woman and the man as one legal unit (283). The inadequate protection afforded to a few by settlements notwithstanding, the legal consequence of marriage for women thus entails the complete “absorption of all rights, all property, as well as all freedom of action” (284). The usurpation of the rights of married women precludes the possibility that women would or even could enter into marriage willingly, as Mill's comparison of it to a business relationship makes clear: “No one would enter into partnership on terms which would subject him to the responsibilities of a principal, with only the powers and privileges of a clerk or agent” (291). Unlike a business partnership, marriage cannot be dissolved easily, and tyranny in the relationship should be prevented not through the codified designation of rights and responsibilities, but through vague and ultimately unenforceable factors like the personal

⁵⁷ Uday Singh Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 11. Subsequent page references in text.

affection “which is the growth of time” (289). Influence comes through building a common life: the having and raising children; cultivating a “community of interests as concerns third persons”; the importance of the wife to her husband’s comforts and “the value he consequently attaches to her on his personal account, which, in a man capable of feeling for others, lays the foundation of caring for her on her own” (290). Through the intertwining of lives, a married couple develops the “influence naturally acquired over almost all human beings by those near to their persons” and thus “both by their direct entreaties, and by the insensible contagion of their feelings and dispositions,” they are able “unless counteracted by some equally strong personal influence, to obtain a degree of command over the conduct of the superior, altogether excessive and unreasonable” (289-290).

The idea of contagious feelings alerts us to Mill’s interest in the marriage question, specifically, what makes gender difference a problem that is structurally similar to, though in certain ways more fraught than, the question of racial difference. Mehta’s identification of the risks of cosmopolitanism elucidates one reason why this is the case. For Mehta, the risk of encountering difference is always a risk of “the possibility of being confronted with utter opacity – an intransigent strangeness, an unfamiliarity that remains so, an experience that cannot be shared, prejudices that do not readily fuse with a cosmopolitan horizon, a difference that cannot be assimilated” (22). Confronting opacity in the home is a more fraught interaction than encountering it in the public sphere, because of the closeness of the encounter. In the home, difference is assimilated bodily. In the domestic space, unlike in the public sphere in which cosmopolitan encounters take place, influence happens not through rational discussion or the struggle between the potentially tyrannous opinions of the majority and those of the minority, but through the “insensible contagion” of “feelings and dispositions,” as though a mood could percolate through the domestic space and infect even the strongest of inhabitants. This form of

influence bestows upon women an excessive form of power to which the wife has no right, and which does nothing to address her lack of freedom: “neither in the affairs of families nor in those of states is power a compensation for the loss of freedom” (290). Mill’s easy slippage between the family and the state indicates his tendency throughout *Subjection* to think about the state and the family as aligned if not exactly analogous. Yet it is by no means clear that he consistently sees the role of the family as equivalent to the role of the state. Though at times Mill’s argument rests on the family’s crucial distinction from the state and the public sphere, here its corporate function – as a unit composed of individuals, though not in the uneven sense that coverture implies – establishes the family as a form analogous to a business partnership or the state. As a corporation, then, the family becomes a site for thinking about the principles pertaining to the body politic in the sentimental or affective register the marital relationship necessitates. The transmission of affect thus cannot be considered purely a private matter, merely at play in the private space of the home; invoking the state suggests a political aspect of the transmission of feeling, and invoking notions of liberty, rights, responsibility, governance, and consent in the idea of feeling with or as someone else.⁵⁸

Politicizing feelings in this way suggests the political function of the private realm, and indeed domesticity and the family, play important roles in Mill’s conception of the state. Yet the

⁵⁸ Lucy Hartley makes a related point in her discussion of Mill’s essays on “Bentham” (1838) and “Coleridge” (1840) in *Democratizing Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Art and the Politics of Public Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. In a discussion of the tension between “the widening of interest and its ‘specialised legal and economic senses’” (6), Hartley makes the point that, when Mill describes the way in which laws should place the happiness or (its practical corollary) interest of the individual in harmony with that of the whole, “happiness becomes interchangeable with interest, and interest governs the relation between individuals and of individuals to the state” (12). The transition between the private and the political or the individual and the whole is often smoothed through feeling, as we see in the example Hartley cites of Mill treating the feeling of happiness as analogous with interest, a quality that may not be explicitly political as such but that has, as Hartley’s book shows, a clear orientation to political representation and common life.

distinction between the public and the private remains an important one for Mill. Before returning to the politics of private space, and the way *Subjection* considers the risks inherent in the encounter with radical difference in the home, I want to explore Mill's configuration of the private as a separate space. What purpose does its distinctiveness serve? Habermas points to one model for thinking about the separation of the public and private in Marx's counter-model of the bourgeois public sphere. In Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere, autonomy is rooted in "the sphere of commodity exchange."⁵⁹ In Marx's dialectical counter-model, after the extension of the franchise to include the propertyless, the public would have no interest in maintaining the privateness of society; the public sphere would "be able to realize in earnest what it had promised" (127). According to this "socialist formulation" of the liberal idea of the political public sphere, the relationship between the public and the private was reversed (128). Private autonomy is the result of publicness: "Private persons came to be the private persons of a public rather than a public of private persons" (128-9). The public "secured for itself (as composed of private persons) a sphere of personal freedom, leisure, and freedom of movement" (129). For Engels and Marx, this is the emancipation of personal, private interaction from the economic function, removing the basis for the family and its relevance to the state; no longer "saddled with any legal regulations" the family would be privatized, and the relations between the sexes would become a purely private and not a social affair (129). The liberal model conceived of the extension of the franchise in an alternative way, seeing not the emancipation of the private realm from its economic function or the democratization of the public sphere, but conciliation: that is to say, the contradiction of an extended franchise within the context of an

⁵⁹ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1962. Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, p. 110. Subsequent page references in text.

unequal class society could be solved through “conserving a relativized form of the *bourgeois* public sphere” through representativeness (131).

By Habermas’s account, the dialectical counter-model was to have exposed the Kantian model of publicity as ideological (130). The earlier, Kantian model of publicity relies on not on the “distributive sameness of all wills,” that is, the will of individuals together, but on the “collective oneness of the combined will” (108). This model made “political domination rational within the framework of a philosophy of history” (130), viewing the “social preconditions of a public sphere as an element in the political realm” as a natural order (130). Where the socialist model demonstrated that the bourgeois public sphere could not satisfy its supposed preconditions, the liberals, according to Habermas, cast doubt on the “presuppositions of a natural basis upon which the idea of a political public sphere rested” (131). But what Habermas fails to account for are the ways in which Mill continued to maintain a belief in the “natural basis for the public sphere that would in principle guarantee an autonomous and basically harmonious course of social reproduction” (130). To put this another way, progress, for Mill, is immanent in the natural order, and *in consequence* familial relations must be privatized, the organization of gender relations stemming from natural capacity and not the law. However, the privatization of the family does not point to the emancipation of the private sphere from social labor as for Marx. Instead, the liberal privatization of the family functions to resolve for Mill the contradiction of public sphere ideology: the freedom of the private sphere can be harnessed to make thinkable and indeed make natural the unfreedoms occurring elsewhere. It is only *as a space of freedom* that the private realm can enable the forms of power that take place in the public sphere.

We can see this quite clearly in Mill’s use of slavery as a metaphor for marriage. Though the comparison may seem like a stock nineteenth-century argument against the institution, and an anticipation of what has since become a feminist trope, the key point about the example is that

for Mill it is a metaphor and not a literal comparison. That is to say, slavery and marriage are analogous, but they are not precisely the same. Slavery may well be a form of tyranny and domination, but it nonetheless preserves the privatization of domesticity even for slaves, in a way that marriage, a form of legal restriction that operates in what should be the sphere of freedom and leisure, cannot do. As an institutional relation that makes freedom unattainable for women, the unfreedom of marriage penetrates the space of the private sphere, thereby upsetting the distinction between the public and the private:

no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is. Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes; in general he has, like a soldier, his fixed task, and when it is done, or when he is off duty, he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time, and has a family life into which the master rarely intrudes. 'Uncle Tom' under his first master had his own life in his 'cabin', almost as much as any man whose work takes him away from home, is able to have in his own family. But it cannot be so with the wife (284-285).

Mill's introduction here of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is curious, not least because it is, at best, a careless reading of the novel, which makes the insistent point that the slave's cabin and the lives that unfold in it are contingent and, lacking legal protection, allowable only at the whim of the slaveowner. George, a slave married to another slave, makes this point quite explicitly in the opening chapters of the novel, when he says to his wife: "Don't you know a slave can't be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can't hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us."⁶⁰ As Tess Chakkalakal writes, the slave's inability to marry legally made slavery in America "not only an economic problem of labor but also an affective problem of intimacy."⁶¹ Chakkalakal cites William Wells Brown, whose *Clotel* makes the point that, in

⁶⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 1852. Edited by Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 2010, p. 16.

⁶¹ Tess Chakkalakal. *Novel Bondage: Slavery, Marriage, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011, p. 2. Subsequent page references in text.

denying slaves the right to marry, “the slaveholder denies to his victim even that slight alleviation of his misery, which would result from his marriage being protected by law and public opinion” (2). Taken together, these points indicate why Mill’s bad reading of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* does important work for his conception of what marriage ought to do. Precisely because it is not regulated by law, slave marriage takes place entirely in the affective, familial space of the private sphere, and is defined in contrast to the economic sphere and the problem of labor rather than the legal regulation of the state. In Mill’s reading, Uncle Tom’s position in the private realm has an equivalence in the position of any soldier or any other worker whose labor is controlled by his employer; the metaphor establishes a kind of social equality not vis-a-vis the state but certainly in the private space of the home.

What slavery does, therefore, is preserve family life as a sphere free from domination, which is precisely what nineteenth-century marriage is unable to do. Whereas to an Uncle Tom, marriage represents the only place that slavery cannot touch, a site of freedom and self-determination in a life that is otherwise circumscribed, for a wife there can be no such freedom: for her, slavery operates at the level of family life itself. It is precisely because slave marriage is not regulated by law – and is thus a question of affect, intimacy, labor, and the public but not the state – that it can function in such a way for Mill. Chakkalakal characterizes Brown’s as an argument for legal marriage and consequently for abolition: recognizing affective bonds as legal ones thus renders the slave capable of bearing rights. Mill’s argument relies on making the same connection, but in reverse: making legal obligations out of affective ones enslaves women in relation to the state, and that enslavement carries over into the affective realm. Private relations become structured by political subjugation, as “every one of the subjects lives under the very eye, and almost, it may be said, in the hands, of one of the masters... each individual of the subject-class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined” (268). This form of

enslavement is harder to resist than political disenfranchisement, as it restricts solidarity among the subjected: unlike Uncle Tom, living happily with his family in his own cabin, each subjected woman lives with her master, “in closer intimacy with him than with any of her fellow subjects... If ever any system of privilege and enforced subjection had its yoke tightly riveted on the necks of those who are kept down by it, this has” (268). It is quite clear that marriage is a distinct form of captivity because it is an affective one: “men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds” (271). Mill imagines the slavery of marriage – unaccountably, unlike actual slavery – penetrating directly to the seat of liberal individuality itself, to a woman's character: “no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters,” as “conquered and slave races” may have been “more forcibly repressed,” but “whatever in them has not been crushed down by an iron heel has generally been let alone” (276). Unlike slavery and because of the intimacy of the relationship, marriage shapes women’s “capabilities” (276); the comparison suggests that even slaves have a capacity for individuality that women are denied.

That Mill sees slavery and marriage as crucially unlike implies that his conception of freedom is ultimately framed in gendered terms (notwithstanding that his objections to marriage seem to be based in ideas of universal or human rights and thus not especially marked by gender). For example, Mill’s argument depends on a rhetoric of choice, rights, and desire: a woman can never be said to choose marriage, as she is always presented with the “Hobson’s choice” to take it or leave it (281). Marriage involves the loss of all property rights, including the rights over her own person including the right to follow her own “inclinations,” the “legal rights”

to her children, or the right to live apart from her husband without being compelled to return “by law, or by physical force” (285). Arguments like these suggest that Mill is arguing for women as the subject-bearers of equal rights, equal choice, and equal freedom. That marriage impinges upon the kind of choices and freedoms that are available to women is clearly an issue, however that should not lead us to assume that, for Mill, marriage as an ideal relation rejects gendered rights entirely, or that, as Nadia Urbinati has proposed, “androgyny forms the philosophical foundation for Mill’s vision of civil and political equality between men and women and of his belief in the free development of individuality.”⁶² Reading Mill in a trajectory of liberal feminism, or even radical feminism, does not grant the crucial point that in Mill’s conception rights and obligations are and should be gendered; the legal restrictions imposed on women in marriage are intolerable because they obstruct the free operation of those gendered rights. The slavery metaphor highlights the fact that women ought to bear certain rights and do not, but it also highlights the fact that those rights are always already gendered ones. For instance, the right of refusing what Mill calls “the last familiarity” is not only an “admitted right” but a “moral obligation” for the female slave “in Christian countries,” but, as Mill says, “not so the wife: however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to... he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations” (285). Though the word “inclinations” might suggest a more universal concept of bodily determination, the context makes clear that this is a right of refusal only, and hence a gendered right. The effectiveness of slavery as a point of comparison for marriage works on the notion that there are natural and separate gender roles, and it is those which the contemporary form of marriage obstructs.

⁶² Nadia Urbinati. “John Stuart Mill on Androgyny and Ideal Marriage.” *Political Theory* 19.4 (1991): 626-48, p. 626. Subsequent page references in text.

Urbinati maintains that Mill saw sexual equality as “a precondition of individual free choice and self-determination,” which liberates men and women from “rigid distinctions imposed by sex roles” (631). This may be the most literal way to understand Mill’s analogous discussion of marriage and slavery, but, as I have argued, Mill’s problem with marriage as a form of control is not that it enchains us within the restrictions of gender roles. Rather, marriage as a legal form of subjugation imposes artificial regulation that prevents the development of natural gender roles. The “anxiety” that causes men to compel women into marriage and motherhood “for fear lest nature should not succeed in effecting its purpose” is “an altogether unnecessary solicitude”: “One thing we may be certain of – that what is contrary to women’s nature to do, they never will be made to do by simply giving their nature free play” (280). If Mill’s language sounds Kantian here, evoking the free play of imagination and understanding of the third critique, it is perhaps because the logic also is. Requiring marriage as a free choice so that what women do, absent legal obstacles, becomes proof of what they can do follows a similar kind of paradoxical thinking that is familiar to us in Kant’s notion of free play. As a “mental state or activity in which the imagination stands in relation to understanding, but without being governed by concepts,” imagination manifests the lawfulness of understanding in a way that is free or without a law.⁶³ There is a symmetrical form aligning the Kantian paradox of lawfulness without a law and Mill’s paradoxical conception of marriage. In other words, what Mill seems to be advocating in *Subjection* is marriage as a relationship based in “freedom and accordance with rules.”⁶⁴ Marriage cannot be thought about as a natural relation until it is a choice made freely and on “equal conditions” (281): “freedom of individual choice is ... the only thing which

⁶³ Hannah Ginsborg. “Lawfulness without a Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and Understanding.” *Philosophical Topics* 25.1 (Spring 1997): 37-81, p. 38.

⁶⁴ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgment*. 1790. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, pp. 241-2.

procures the adoption of the best processes, and throws each operation into the hands of those who are best qualified for it” (273). But once it is so chosen, marriage provides a system of governance which is no less gendered despite being extra-legal. Freedom is, to make the obvious point, not compatible with tyranny, but nor is it incompatible with a lawfulness based on a form of gender difference that is perceived as natural. So, in Mill’s conception, marriage ought to be a state of freedom, and in accordance with rules, not a state of tyranny and despotism. This emphasis on marriage as a relation entered into freely is not the first step towards an undoing of gender roles, as feminist readings of Mill often proclaim. It is, in fact, what establishes the principles of freedom that are a necessary condition before it is possible to reify gender roles as natural or resulting organically from natural difference, and not the product of social organization or enforced domination. Freeing the marriage relationship from despotism, regulation and the sphere of governance and the state to anchor it in the affective realm means that continued subordination must be the result of inclination and is thus sufficient proof of natural difference. It is women’s inclination and natural capacity to be subordinate, and it is necessary that women are equal in marriage in relation to the state, so that their social inequality is made possible and thinkable within Mill’s definition of liberal freedom.⁶⁵

If Mill’s conception of ideal marriage can be thought of as a lawfulness without a law, the ambivalence he displays about the origins and evolution of law makes a certain kind of sense. Like the origin of gender difference itself, Mill cannot or will not determine whether laws evolved to perpetuate an arrangement of gender relations that developed organically, or they enforced an artificial dependence on women that is not the product of a natural inequality. Because “laws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already

⁶⁵ In other words, removing the legal injustices marriage perpetrates allows Mill to redeem the family as a site of slavery, so that it can become the site of subjectivization, hence enabling what Berlant calls “training in affective sense perception and intuition” (*Cruel Optimism* 186).

existing between individuals,” the present legal subjection of women to men arose out of what Mill implies is a natural difference, based on reproductive capacity and physical strength: “from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man” (264). What follows is a long and whiggish history of social relations, in which Mill characterizes force as a barbaric and primitive mode of organizing governance, and in all respects, except for gender relations, one that has been superseded by “institutions grounded on equal justice” (265). In this account, gender difference existed in the form of a relationship between men and women, based on men’s strength and women’s value to men presumably regarding childbearing, and this naturally occurring form of difference was exacerbated and codified by subsequent legal relations. The principle that the natural determines the legal would make sense if Mill wants to reject marriage as a form of relation governed by laws and the state, because it suggests that there is no need to codify something that is naturally occurring in any case.

Though in many ways this is indeed the argument Mill makes, he does not make it without qualification. Instead, and interestingly, he complicates his position by also arguing that the difference in law is what creates inequality, by perverting the character and morals of those who live under its unfairness. In Hegelian fashion, it is the oppressor and not the oppressed who is most damaged by this relationship: “servitude, except when it actually brutalizes, though corrupting to both, is less so to the slaves than to the slave-masters. It is wholesomer for the moral nature to be restrained, even by arbitrary power, than to be allowed to exercise arbitrary power without restraint” (321). At stake in this remarkable statement is not simply the morality of men, though that is clearly a concern: relations of force and men’s assumption of arbitrary power prevents the development of what Mill calls “genuine moral sentiment,” which can only

be cultivated in “daily life” in the context of the “equality of married persons before the law” (293). But, as Mill’s argument unfolds, it becomes clear that legal equality depends on both cultivating morality and the moral legitimacy of superiority. Consider, he asks his reader, “what it is to a boy, to grow up to manhood in the belief that *without any merit or any exertion of his own* ...by the mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race” (324, my emphasis). This belief leads to the perversion of “character”: it is not simply man as a “social being” that is so affected, but man as an “individual” (325). Such an unwarranted power of domination cultivates in the boy a “sublime and sultan-like sense of superiority,” which saturates not just social and private life, but also the interior space of the mind: “men of the cultivated classes are often not aware how deeply it sinks into the immense majority of male minds” (324).

The problem of domination as a legal practice is that it thwarts the free play of capacity, and as such, it has consequences for the definition of freedom itself. As Mill’s characterization of arbitrary power as most harmful to the slave-master might suggest, it is what freedom means *for men*, rather than for the subjugated women:

Any sentiment of freedom which can exist in a man whose nearest and dearest intimacies are with those of whom he is absolute master, is not the genuine or Christian love of freedom, but, what the love of freedom generally was in the ancients and in the Middle Ages – an intense feeling of the dignity and importance of his own personality (295).

Real freedom, then, is incompatible with a social order shaped around “the right of the strong to power over the weak,” as justice will therefore “never get possession of men’s inmost sentiments; they will be working against it, even when bending to it” (326). Freedom cannot be merely the ability to command the labor of others; this is a form of rule that undermines the principle of independence that is at the heart of freedom, indeed the very notion of the sovereign subject. Thus, Mill’s objection to the doctrine of coverture is not to shared ownership as such or

even the treatment of a married couple as one unit under the law, but to the fact that the man's ownership of common goods is compelled by law and is therefore a form of intolerable dependence. The ownership of goods in common, as a concept, is perfectly acceptable "when resulting from an entire unity of feeling in the owners," but as the enforced acquisition of goods it is of no real benefit: "I have no relish for a community of goods resting on the doctrine, that what is mine is yours but what is yours is not mine; and I should prefer to decline entering into such a compact with any one, though I were myself the person to profit by it" (297). Justifiable superiority, the kind that leads to progress and that warrants elevation and legitimates governance, must be the result of character, not the law: "conduct, and conduct alone, entitles to respect... not what men are, but what they do, constitutes their claim to deference" (325). Profiting, therefore, through the law and not through merit enchains both parties.

Mill's argumentation works to produce the possibility of dominance rendered as a kind of reciprocity, a relation that is nevertheless the product of force but which does not involve a feeling of control.⁶⁶ The distribution of rights should "follow the division of duties and functions" as determined by "individual capacities and suitabilities" and not a pre-determined law (291). While this by no means suggests a perfect equality, it does avoid the association of conquest to instead describe a relation of dominance in terms that imply two free, sovereign subjects negotiating their rights on equal grounds or on the basis of best fit. Thus, the "natural arrangement" of a marriage is "a division of powers between the two; each being absolute in the executive branch of their own department, and any change of system and principle requiring the

⁶⁶ We might think of it as the opposite of the dynamic of shameless that Berlant posits here: "The structure of shamelessness doesn't necessarily involve in-your-faceness. It can involve any frank refusal to produce the affect for you that you need someone to have in order for you to feel in control of the situation of exchange. It is to take control over the making and breaking of the terms in which reciprocity will proceed, if at all" (Lauren Berlant, Sina Najafi and David Serlin. "The Broken Circuit: An Interview with Lauren Berlant." *Cabinet* 31 (Fall 2008). Web 19 April 2013.)

consent of both” (291). The language Mill uses here is not, significantly, the language of love but the language of governance: division of power, consent, executive branch. This is an important transition in language from Mill’s consideration of marriage as a (worse) form of slavery in the sense that the affective realm is replaced by the realm of governance, that is, from marriage as a relation of love to marriage as a relation within or like the state. The language therefore effects a shift away from mutuality (the idea of a community of goods merging naturally through shared feelings) and the idea of equality under the law to the concept of liberty rendered as an atomized and separate independence. The family becomes quite literally analogous with the nation, as no adult member can be happy while excluded from the “deciding authority”: “It is the same with nations. What citizen of a free country would listen to any offers of good and skillful administration, in return for the abdication of freedom?” (337). The family imagined like or as a nation suggests a very different kind of family than the one the slave metaphor proffers. Here the family does not seem to be a part of the private sphere, or what Habermas calls the “conjugal family’s internal space” (30), and in fact the language Mill uses strips the family of its intimacy. While the family may still fit two of the three aspects – voluntariness and a community of love – of the Habermasian private sphere, Mill’s family in this instance troubles the third aspect of cultivation, whereby the private sphere permits the “non-instrumental development of all faculties that marks the cultivated personality” (46-7).

Mill uses the comparison between slavery and marriage to sever the connection between marriage and the law, suggesting that the affective bonds of the family are what allows one to confront unfreedom or tyranny in the slave economy or capitalist labor market. That he then yokes the family together with the state serves as an interesting modification of the role of the intimate sphere. Whereas in comparison to slavery, the intimacy of the family is paramount, in this curious doubling of the family and the state intimacy is precisely what gets drained through

the use of contractual, non-affective language. In part, the result is to make clear something that the slavery comparison only implies: the family, even as an utterly privatized realm, is always instrumental. Making the family analogous with the state however, suggests a different kind of instrumentality than in Habermas's account of the bourgeois private sphere. For Habermas, the family is instrumental in that it gives the illusion of freedom as a boundless state of being, all the while conscripting the family and its privacy as what reproduces the capitalist economy. The freedom of the private sphere is thus a kind of false consciousness, "a private autonomy denying its economic origins" (46). For Mill, however, the private sphere is not a seemingly emancipated inner realm that in reality is constrained by its social function to mediate and ensure the reproduction of capital; instead, figuring the family *as* a state in miniature suggests instead that it is purposive and directed towards the state, even in its privatization. That is to say, there is no illusion about the non-instrumentality of the family: the cultivation it enables is always a cultivation relative to the state. This is less an audience-oriented privacy than an always already civic one.⁶⁷

When Mill proposes that "personal independence" is necessary to happiness (336), we might think that this is a form of privacy and individuality whereby the illusion of independence is perpetuated by "the intimate relationships between human beings who, under the aegis of the

⁶⁷ Audience-oriented in the Habermasian sense: "Subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience (*Publikum*) ...the directly or indirectly audience-oriented subjectivity of the letter exchange or diary explained the origin of the typical genre and authentic literary achievement of that century: the domestic novel, the psychological description in autobiographical form" (49). This form of subjectivity, transported into the realm of the public, becomes the "fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple" that enables the bourgeois public sphere (56). This is a different form of relationship than Mill's rendering of the family as a kind of condensed state. In the intimate sphere of the family, individuals occupy roles that are political roles or can be expressed as such. To speak in this way of the bourgeois public sphere proper would pierce its enabling fictions.

family, were nothing more than human” (Habermas 48). But it is as citizens, not as humans, that Mill’s family members confront each other. Having been emancipated from the restrictions that legality places on both wives and husbands, freedom need not mean the entire privatization of subjectivity; as citizens in the private sphere, freedom can be made thinkable within limits not in spite but because of its emancipation from legal regulation: this is what Mill calls “rational” rather than “lawless” freedom (336). The idea of rational freedom is thus built on the discursive construction of marriage, unfettered by an artificial hierarchy imposed through legal regulations, as the coming together of two sovereign subjects, between whom power is divided according to capacity. The equality of those subjects is necessary in the first instance to establish the conditions of possibility for marriage, but it is also in principle impossible given the limitations women’s “disabilities” impose on the development of their capacity. As a result of this double bind, the pertinent question for Mill is how it is possible to limit individual freedom, without that individual being “fettered and restricted” (338)? How is it possible to take a paternalistic attitude towards certain groups, without being explicitly paternalistic or ascribing that paternalism to the category of difference? Mill’s answer is to think about freedom as a feeling, which is universally felt in particular ways depending on capacity. The intrinsic good is a principle of self-governance, such that no one should *feel* managed even if that management is in their best interests.

Take the boy for whom the “administration of his interests by a tutor” fails to “satisfy his feelings,” or the “citizen of a free country” who desires freedom and not skillful administration: “the consciousness of working out their own destiny under their own moral responsibility” is a compensation “to his feelings for great rudeness and imperfection in the details of public affairs” (337). Individual happiness lies not in the best arrangement of public affairs – as impossible as it is to imagine Mill advocating for imperfect administration of anything – but in the raising of the

individual “as a moral, spiritual, and social being.” At this point we come up against a double constitution once more: the “ennobling influence of free government” cultivates the individual, and the cultivated individual with an “unselfish public spirit, and calmer and broader views of duty” is the only individual who can perfect government as a good and ennobling force (337). But the freedom – or the feeling of freedom – has to be extended to all people, regardless of gender or ability. The taking up of responsibilities is imagined as the release from painful bondage, and it is, Mill admonishes, universally felt as such by “any” man and therefore any “human being” including women: “Let any man call to mind what he himself felt on emerging from boyhood... and entering upon the responsibilities of manhood. Was it not like the physical effect of taking off a heavy weight, or releasing him from instructive, even if not otherwise painful, bonds? Did he not feel twice as much alive, twice as much a human being, as before? And does he imagine that women have none of these feelings?” (337). Once he establishes the desire for freedom as a universal feeling, however, Mill introduces capacity as a concept that regulates it, so that it becomes at once possible to understand freedom as a universal good that means different things to different people. If happiness is the result of feeling free, unhappiness is the result of feeling one’s capacities are wasted, the “feeling of a wasted life” (340). It is, of course, important that it is the *feeling* of a wasted life, rather than a wasted life in and of itself. Scaling happiness and unhappiness to feelings (rather than the things in themselves) anchors them to the notion of capacity: it is not the “restraint on the freedom of conduct” merely which wastes a life, but enforcing a “disproportion” between capacity and the allowable field of action (340). Happiness and unhappiness are the universal consequence of freedom and waste. But what defines freedom and waste are feelings stemming from capacity, which is entirely subjective, and hence Mill establishes room for radical relativity within the context of putative universality.

In so thinking about the family and the state as analogous forms, and forcing the partners in a marriage to confront each other as citizens desiring happiness and freedom, Mill posits freedom itself as a quality that is notionally universal, but actually specific and therefore can be gendered. Women can be recognized as sovereign subjects worthy of freedom in theory, however the question remains as to whether that translates into a recognition of women's sovereignty in practice. Certainly it did for some, like the women he cites as examples of those with the "capacity for originality" who have been able to undertake the "long process of climbing" the "edifice" of distinction (315). But given he cites perhaps half a dozen of such women throughout *Subjection*, it seems apropos to wonder about the rest. Women in general, inasmuch as Mill maintains they have rights and responsibilities vis-a-vis the state and indeed the family, are governed by opinion. Unlike their husbands who are genuinely thinkable as individuals even when they have not particularly distinguished themselves, the capacity of women for sovereignty is undermined by being so tyrannized by public opinion. The Mary Somervilles of the nineteenth-century world clearly have the capacity for originality, though even then, it is an "originality of its own," a "conception of the mind itself" rather than "those great and luminous new ideas which form an era in thought" (314). Yet the counterpoint to these rare individuals is, according to Mill, the figure with whom most women are aligned: Mrs. Grundy – the eminent Victorian representation of groupthink. As the very pattern of conventionality, Mrs. Grundies might have the ability to exert their homogenizing will on others, but this form of power, Mill constantly reminds us, pales in comparison to freedom as well as the autonomy and self-control that are the corollaries of sovereign subjectivity.

Throughout *Subjection*, the critical distance between social restraint and conscience is a necessary property of the cultivated individual and is figured as something entirely out of reach for all but the most exceptional women. When Mill notes that "the communities in which the

reason has been most cultivated, and in which the social duty has been most powerful, are those which have most strongly asserted the freedom of action of the individual – the liberty of each to govern his conduct by his own feelings of duty, and by such laws and social restraints as his own conscience can subscribe to,” the language is the least interesting way in which this kind of liberty is gendered, even (or especially) as Mill argues that it should be accessible to women (336). If liberty is defined as the ability to choose which forms of social restraint are worth consenting to, then liberty is entirely out of reach for most women who are so aligned with social restraint that they are imagined as embodying it. Indeed, one of the arguments Mill makes to reassure his readers that legal regulation is unnecessary to ensure women will not take up professions *en masse*, and thereby abandon marriage and household management, is that public opinion can so easily regulate their conduct: “these things, if once opinion were rightly directed on the subject, might with perfect safety be left to be regulated by opinion, without any interference of law” (298). In light of Mill’s concern with the tyranny of public opinion in *On Liberty*, this may seem like a bizarre claim to make; it is also puzzling, to say the least, in light of the way he vaunts self-government as an intrinsic good. The suggestion that opinion will govern women’s behavior if the law can be restrained from so doing thus undermines the entire concept of women’s self-governance, or at least ensures that the form of women’s self-governance is contingent on opinion in a way that might be concerning for the individual. Though there is “latitude” for the adaptation of “general rules to individual suitabilities,” for the “greater number of married women” – those for whom it will “in general be understood” that she manages the house and does not seek to govern her conduct outside the usual private realm of the home – regulation by opinion sounds much more like “skillful administration” (298) than it sounds like women “working out their own destiny” (337).

What can at best be considered Mill's apathy, but is perhaps more like endorsement, about the regulating effect of public opinion where women are concerned places women in his thought in the mass, rather than as the individual who is threatened by it: "The wife's influence tends, as far as it goes, to prevent the husband from falling below the common standard to approbation of the country. It tends quite as strongly to hinder him from rising above it. The wife is the auxiliary of the common public opinion" (331). Although when men are "weak," a wife is or can be an improving force, once "we ascend higher in the scale, we come among a totally different set of moving forces," which is to say the wife is a flattening, homogenizing, degrading influence. If the husband "differs in his opinion from the mass," or if, "feeling in his heart truths which [the mass] nominally recognize," he wants to act differently and better, then the wife acts as a stultifying force: "Whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs. Grundy" (331-332). As suggested, wives of the Mrs. Grundy type are not just the "auxiliary" of public opinion; they embody it. In fact, Mrs. Grundy functions mimetically as well as metaphorically: at once a particular figure and the universal shape of every woman, Mrs. Grundy reinforces the fact that Mill, even as he wants to assert women's ability to bear rights, cannot quite make the leap to seeing women as individuals rather than individuality's antitheses. Women squash all signs of individuality whether or not they intend to do so: "with such an influence in every house, either exerted actively, or operating all the more powerfully for not being asserted, is it any wonder that people in general are kept down in that mediocrity of respectability which is becoming a marked characteristic of modern times?" (333). As the force that prevents the development of individuality, women are exactly what the individual needs to struggle against in order to be free: holding respectability as a good over cultivation or even duty and aspiring to mediocrity rather than exceptionalism, women exemplify the mass which threatens to engulf individuality.

Mill's despair at the mediocrity of modern times suggests that, if feelings are dangerous because the proximity of family life allows them to bypass reason to influence others through a process of "insensible contagion," perhaps the most dangerous thing about this contagion is that it seems to work most powerfully in the wrong direction (290). That is, in a family that feels differently as a result of "the broad line of difference which those disabilities [of women] create between the education and character of a women and that of a man," women cannot live up to Jane Eyre's famous declaration that women feel just as men feel (333). There is a certain quality of selfishness and inability to think with the public interest – despite being so aligned with public opinion – that prevents women from feeling interested in the same way as men can. Thus, when a man wants to sacrifice personal interest for public good, he "always hopes that his sons will feel as he feels himself," but his wife and daughters "can participate in none of the enthusiasm or the self-approbation he himself may feel, while the things which he is disposed to sacrifice are all in all to her" (331-332). Mill parses two different kinds of sacrifice here: the wife whose "whole life" has been made a "continued self-sacrifice" for her family and position, and the husband whose sacrifice is simultaneously less personal and conceived of in terms so large the wife cannot comprehend it. Whereas he sees the social as the broader good for which things are sacrificed, for her the family is the larger good: "She has sacrificed her whole life to it, and her husband will not sacrifice to it a whim, a freak, an eccentricity," threatening the loss of the family life "for no reason of which she can feel the cogency" (332). The wife cannot feel the cogency, that is to say, of reasons which put the social whole first, as the people she immediately knows define the social and she is unable to see beyond this vision of the private or small-scale public good. Simply put, women have what we may think of as a local, rather than properly social, conception of the public. This narrowing of the field of the social, "the feeling that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty," is both

inculcated in women by “all the education which women receive from society” and a quality that is inherent to women’s nature (321). This capacity is both learned and a natural “gravitation of women’s minds” (306), a “capacity” for intuitive perception lends them to attend to the local better than the general: “their intuitive sagacity makes them peculiarly apt in gathering such general truths as can be collected from their individual means of observation” (305). Harnessing this characteristic ambiguity establishes a kind of division of labor whereby Mill aligns women with intuition, practice, experiential fact, “dealing with things as individuals rather than in groups,” a “more lively interest in the present feelings of persons,” and the ability to take action, and men with speculation, theory, general principles, and the reflective mode of deep constant thought. This achieves several things. First, it reconciles gender differences as part of a necessarily complementary whole, whereby each corrects the other’s errors, and a man can do no better than go over his thoughts in the presence of a “superior” woman (306). Second, it once more highlights the Darwinian notion of fitness, so that anyone, regardless of gender, should fulfill the role for which they are best fit; and though these are likely to fall along gendered lines, they need not. Finally, it establishes that the only solution to inequality is paternalism. As women think in particulars rather than generalities, they are less able to connect their circumstances to broader issues of social inequity: each woman “complains of her own husband” but does not “complain of the power of husbands” in general (322). Because, then, women “cannot be expected to devote themselves to the emancipation of women, until men in considerable number are prepared to join with them in the undertaking,” it falls to men like Mill himself first to make women aware of the general system of oppression under which they suffer, and then to steward them into whatever kind of freedom for which they prove themselves fit (322).

There is, of course, a definite sense of hierarchy attached to Mill's conception of fitness; it maps onto the “ladder” that spans the distinctions between barbarism and civilization (254).

Although Mill characterizes this ladder as a chain of individuals, “where every individual is either above or below his nearest neighbour,” elsewhere it seems quite clear that not all of the rungs represent individuals (294); there is a distinction between the “worthy representatives of the human species” and the unworthy rest, who are not distinguishable as representatives of anything, but are clumped together as a big mass of “forms and gradations of animalism and selfishness” (288). Despite existing largely as an assemblage of baseness and barely distinguishable as individuals, those on the lower rungs are unable to think beyond the limits of their own feelings to consider the social good. Thus even though a “stupid person’s notions and feelings” are not really his own, but can “confidently be inferred from those which prevail in the circle by which the person is surrounded,” such a person is less able to conceive of society duty, unlike those who are truly individuals and “whose opinions and feelings are an emanation from their own nature and faculties” (278). Women’s alignment with the mass is as much a class matter as it is anything else, as individuality is clearly counterposed to the “common” in both the sense of mass or general and the sense of lower class. Hence the woman who drags her husband down into mediocrity strips away that very solidly middle-class virtue, “aspirations,” so that “after a few years he differs in no material respect from those who have never had wishes for anything but the common vanities and the common pecuniary objects” (336). Though what Mill calls the “selfish propensities” like “self-worship” and “unjust self-preference” seem to be largely a matter of gender difference – that is, he asserts they “have their source and root in, and derive their principal nourishment from, the present constitution of the relation between men and women” (324) – in many ways class is a more intractable problem than gender, as women of a high class can easily rise above the limitations of their gender to feel interested in the social whole, as with Mill’s princesses, who, “being more raised above the generality of men by their

rank than placed below them by their sex,” have “been allowed to feel the liberal interest natural to any cultivated human being” (304).⁶⁸

Against the stultifying effects of the mass and its selfish propensities, what is needed for progress is the social feeling of Mill’s intellectual elite, the exceptional group who can feel ahead of the law, steering society towards progress. It is this “intellectual elite” who sees “the futurity of the species,” and the “still rarer elite” who has “the feelings of that futurity” (518). If Mill sees the oppressive laws governing marriage as having arisen organically out of pre-existing relationships based on gender difference, humanity would become stalled in those oppressive circumstances without these future-feeling elites who can live beyond existing laws and drive progress forward: “laws never would be improved, if there were not numerous persons whose moral sentiments are better than the existing laws” (295). In removing the legal obstructions to possible equality, and extending the “mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity,” we should not make the mistake of assuming that Mill intends to upset the balance between the “mass” and the “elite” (326). Rather, in freeing all who are distinguished by their capacity of feeling the future, the family will be turned to account as a “school of sympathy in equality” (295), with all the need for training and character development that a school connotes. Where citizenship “does not come near the daily habits or inmost sentiments,” the family “justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom,” allowing those with the capacity to fulfill their destiny as individuals (295).

Freedom and equality in the civic realm alone are insufficient to cultivate a nation’s citizenry. The “true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals”: individuals

⁶⁸ Indeed, the problem of marriage is in a way a problem of class distinction as well as gender difference. That is, it is largely a problem because, as Mill asserts, it is a mass relation, not “an institution designed for a select few” – it is the “bad” men who cannot be trusted to live in the spirit rather than the law of marriage (287).

needs to be fit for equality before they exercise its benefits in relation to the state (294).

Subjection, in arguing for the family as the necessary site of cultivation, amounts to a doctrine of self-help in which self-improvement is both a personal and a civic duty: “self-respect, self-help, and self-control which are the essential conditions both of individual prosperity and of social virtue” (330). *Subjection* conforms to the paternalistic mode of the self-help genre. Because it is first necessary to be “fit” for living in equality, the relation between Mill’s elite and the mass can only ever be a relation of a compassionate but nonetheless coercive paternalism. The family is an important site for Mill given women’s inherent qualities, both their innate ability to cultivate their family and their natural cultivability. Uniquely positioned as “diffusers of moral influences,” women possess a heritable “nervous temperament” – which is also transmitted to sons, though it is “possible, and probable,” that it is more often inherited by women (308). Thus, women’s characters are of the kind that is shaped by “what is meant by *spirit*” (308). This excitability is a powerful social force if channeled correctly: “Strong feeling is the instrument and element of strong self-control: but it requires to be cultivated in that direction” (309). If not correctly cultivated and let loose undirected on the public realm, women’s “share of influence” will only ever be a perverted and damaging one, giving a “tone to public moralities” that reflects the “disinterestedness in the general conduct of life” resulting from women’s limited sphere (329). The narrow thinking that is the “habit inculcated by their whole life” hampers women’s natural strong feeling and its consequent inwardness; women thus myopically look to “immediate effects on persons, and not to remote effects on classes of persons,” and thus the “increasing mass of unenlightened and short-sighted benevolence” blocks progress because it takes “the care of people’s lives out of their own hands,” when what is needed is to “induce people to take care of themselves” (330-331). We can see in this example how hard Mill’s ambivalence about natural difference works to shore up his intellectual elitism, establishing

leadership as the civic duty of the already-fit, while simultaneously rendering inferiority as the natural state of the unfit – as the “disagreeable consequences of their own acts” from which we should not relieve them (330). Restraining freedom is an undisputed evil, one which “leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the individual human being” (340). But Mill’s point is not that freedom will result in the erasure of hierarchy or of difference. Towards the end of *Subjection*, he explains we must not “suppose that these differences of feeling and inclination only exist because women are brought up differently from men, and that there would not be differences of taste under any imaginable circumstances. But there is nothing beyond the mark in saying that the distinction in bringing-up immensely aggravates those differences, and renders them wholly inevitable” (334). Happiness, we learn by the end of Mill’s text, is not about eliminating evil or smoothing out all the “inevitable imperfections” of life; it is submitting to a world in which we do not “add to the evils which nature inflicts” (340). This is a Darwinian world indeed, where the happy survive and multiply, and the unhappy are left to be happy that there are no laws preventing them from attaining the inferior position for which they are fit.

I am suggesting that Mill’s “fountain of human happiness” establishes difference as a necessary condition for sociality (340). But it is a form of difference that is remade through its empirical ambivalence, so that it can be made compatible with the form of freedom liberalism values, as a political ideal based on an individuality that becomes inherently possible in all who inhabit the social world. In a defense of liberalism’s complexity and ethical commitment, Amanda Anderson contrasts liberalism as a “body of thought and a lived political commitment” with the position of liberalism’s critics, who deem it a “structural illusion” that “disavows its own interests and violence and serves to perpetuate forms of subjectivity and thought that

entrench established interests and mask operations of power.”⁶⁹ The critique of liberalism flattens what Anderson wants to draw out as liberalism’s “complex history,” in order to refute the critique from radical theory that “liberalism, insofar as it disavows its own ideological complicity with the status quo, is a bankrupt mode of critical political thought, because it does not seriously confront the question of violence and the fact of its own interests” (227). What I have suggested in examining the operation of difference in Mill’s thought is that understanding Mill’s political commitment in its full thickness and historical specificity requires also a consideration of how it masks the violence of its interests. In other words, if the critique of liberalism Anderson dismisses is indeed a reductive mode of reading realism, so too is a recuperative reading of liberalism’s history, which in turn disavows how deeply liberalism as a lived political commitment is – even or especially when it makes least sense for it to be so – intertwined with subjectivization. Reading Mill’s work as a discursive form of “training in affective sense perception and intuition,” to borrow Berlant’s phrase again, exposes the way it masks its own labor, which is to say the “operations of power,” not because it is “morally bankrupt,” but as the necessary condition of living its political commitment (186).⁷⁰

There is some of the nuance Anderson wants to see, an appreciation of the constitutive tensions of liberalism, in Mill’s determination to strip difference of its inherent inferiority, to open up the categories of freedom and justice to a form of universality, while simultaneously resting intensely hierarchical ideas about character and fitness on a sense of innate difference.

⁶⁹ Amanda Anderson. “Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism.” *New Literary History* 42 (2011): 209-229, pp. 211-12. Subsequent page references in text.

⁷⁰ See E. P. Thompson on commitment in politics: Commitment “entails the assumption of the fullest human responsibility available to men in class society – a responsibility entailed by the tissue of human relationships into which we are committed by the very fact of birth – the purposive and sustained action, in association with others, to bring class society itself to an end.” *E. P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left*. Edited by Cal Winslow. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014, p. 114.

Perhaps the refractory nature of difference indicates what Anderson refers to as “a pessimism or bleakness that derives from an awareness of those forces and conditions that threaten the realization of liberal ambitions” (213). In any case, Mill’s occasionally perverse attachment to the natural as an explanatory framework for differences of gender as well as race makes difference productive, exalting as the necessary condition for progress the capacity to think beyond oneself. This expansive interest is the property of the forward-thinking elite, represented for instance by the “judge who gives a just decision in a case where his feelings are intensely interested on the other side, derives from that same strength of feeling the determined sense of the obligation of justice, which enables him to achieve this victory over himself” (309). The judge’s strong feelings are what make him an individual *and* what allow him to adopt the best interests of the social whole as his own; thus, his strong feelings are both what spur him to justice, and what are sacrificed in the name of justice – that is to say the social whole. Marriage in its best form enables this, because of the way it allows difference, for good or ill, to change its practitioners. In many ways, the very intractability of difference in the private sphere is what functions to resolve the question of how to live with difference: “When each emulates, and desires and endeavours to acquire, the other’s peculiar qualities, the difference does not produce diversity of interest, but increased identity of it, and makes each still more valuable to the other” (335). Between equal spouses, difference expands one’s empathetic capacities. You can acquire the other person’s peculiarities, and they yours; the result is not less difference, but an alignment with the other person or a form of assemblage based on the “increased identity” of interest. Love enables difference to remain different, while also rendering it assimilable, but only when no one is “much the inferior of the two” (335). It is not clear what exactly comprises a marriage of people “between whom there exists that best kind of equality” (336), because Mill says he “will not attempt to describe” it: “To those who can conceive it, there is no need; to those who cannot,

it would appear the dream of an enthusiast” (336). The judge’s mode of identification, and its underlying premise of thinking and feeling beyond the self, may be enabled by Mill’s ideal form of companionate marriage among equals. But this kind of equality can, after all, tolerate an indeterminate amount of inequality. Perhaps, then, the problem of difference for Mill is ultimately a problem of recognition: a confrontation with difference demands that, in order to adopt the judge’s social feeling and sense of justice, we do the work of making the people who are not honestly equal into people we can nonetheless recognize as equals.⁷¹

⁷¹ Recognition in this mode requires conscripting difference to enable the continued operation of power. See Berlant: “Self-transforming compassionate recognition and its cognate forms of solidarity are necessary for making political movements thrive contentiously against all sorts of privilege, but they have also provided a means for making minor structural adjustments seem like major events, because the theater of compassion is emotionally intense. Recognition all too often becomes an experiential end in itself, an emotional event that protects what is unconscious, impersonal, and unrelated to anyone’s intentions about maintaining political privilege (*Cruel Optimism* 182). Another way of putting this is to suggest that what Charles Taylor sees as a particularly modern problem has its antecedents in the nineteenth century: “What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail.” “The Politics of Recognition.” *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Edited by Amy Gutman. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994: 25-73, p. 35.

Chapter Two

A “Woman’s Squabble” or Ideal Public Sphere? The Women of Langham Place

Introduction

In 1859, Lady Theodosia Monson took the lease of premises at 19 Langham Place to establish a kind of ladies’ club.¹ It was billed primarily as a social space, for the “convenience” of women shopping in the West End, as “attached to the Reading Room is a Luncheon Room, and a room also for the reception of parcels, for the use of subscribers only.”² As Barbara Caine points out, though the premises at Langham Place were modelled on the idea of the gentlemen’s club, they were crucially different, located not amongst those clubs in Pall Mall or Mayfair, but in the shopping district of the West End.³ The *Saturday Review* excoriated the reading room as a modern-day enactment of Ecclesiastusa or Lysistrata: sexual depravity was clearly the only possible result of any public gathering of women as a group, the necessary consequence of “ladies imitating a masculine institution.”⁴ As such resistance suggests, the rooms had a function beyond providing respite for middle-class women from the toils of West End commerce. The

¹ “Lease for 21 Years 1. James Fergusson Esq. of Langham Place, Regent Street. 2. Theodosia, Lady Monson, WID. Of 29 King Street, St. James’s.” London Metropolitan Archives. London ACC/0086/009.

² Cited in Pam Hirsch. *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel*. London: Pimlico, 1999, p. 197.

³ Barbara Caine. “Feminism in London Circa 1850-1914.” *Journal of Urban History* 27 (September 2001): 765-778.

⁴ Cited in Hirsch. *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, p. 197. Subsequent page references in text.

lease provided a name and a geographical center for the group of organizers and activists that came to be known as the Langham Place group.

The previous year, Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829–1925) and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827–1891) had founded a joint-stock company in order to publish the *English Woman's Journal*, a feminist journal designed, as Teja Varma Pusapati claims, “to bring various strands of the women’s movement together.”⁵ Although members had already been engaged in activist work, establishing a site at Langham Place organized the women as a collective political force in an unprecedented way. From those offices, the Langham Place group worked to shift public opinion and effect change on a wide range of issues affecting women. Its members founded the first degree-granting college for women in Britain, advanced the accreditation of women professionals, pioneered female entrepreneurship, founded the first women-owned and operated press, organized women’s labor, and were instrumental in the franchise debate. Yet the Langham Place group was not, itself, an organized movement.

The Langham Place group (hereafter LPG) was an informal gathering of women based on personal relationships in a specific locale. As such, it was distinct from other committees working to promote the position of women, even though many were affiliated with Langham Place and were also staffed by some of the same people. The Society for Promoting Employment for Women (SPEW), established by Adelaide Procter and Jessie Boucherett in 1859, kept meeting minutes and attendance records, and listed its fifteen-person membership in its early promotional materials; it also relied on the involvement of prominent men such as Lord

⁵ Teja Varma Pusapati, “Novel Networks: The ‘Specialite’ of *the English Woman’s Journal*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47.4 (2014): 597-613, p. 607. Subsequent page references in text.

Shaftesbury, Monckton Milnes, Arthur Kinnaid and Sir Francis Goldsmid.⁶ The LPG did not formally organize its meetings in that way and, although men were shareholders of the joint-stock company in order to comply with British law, the group itself was run by women. As Jordan and Bridger note, the “informal organisational style” of Langham Place was based on “personal ties of friendship and loyalty” rather than the SPEW model of decision-making by a formal (and mixed-gender) committee (398).⁷ If Mill’s task was to render different people recognizable as equals, this chapter will explore how the LPG effected this in practical terms: how did they forge a concrete form of association that could absorb differences without erasing them, in order to reshape the public sphere to include women?

Most accounts of the LPG’s history trace its origin to one personal relationship in particular: the 1848 meeting, and ensuing friendship, of Parkes and Bodichon.⁸ Their friendship, made possible by the similarities of their progressive, Unitarian backgrounds, established a precedent for the way in which personal connections could, as Lynne Walker writes, supply a “private, social matrix for public, political action.”⁹ Both women came from Unitarian families, steeped in a culture of dissent and radical politics.¹⁰ They shared a commitment to art – Leigh

⁶ Ellen Jordan and Anne Bridger. “‘An Unexpected Recruit to Feminism’: Jessie Boucherett’s ‘Feminist Life’ and the importance of being wealthy.” *Women’s History Review* 15:3 (1996): 385-412, p. 392. Subsequent page references in text. Although men, including Samuel Cortauld and Peter Alfred Taylor, were shareholders of the limited liability company that owned the *English Woman’s Journal*, the Langham Place group was comprised of women, who were, as Jane Rendall notes in her *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on the group, mainly single.

⁷ However, the shareholders of the *English Woman’s Journal* did include male sympathizers like Samuel Courtauld and Peter Alfred Taylor.

⁸ For an account of the friendship, see Hirsch, and Jane Rendall. “Friendship and Politics: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827–91) and Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829–1925).” *Sexuality and subordination: Interdisciplinary studies of gender in the nineteenth century*. Edited by Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall. London: Routledge, 2002: 136-170.

⁹ Lynne Walker. “Locating the Global/Rethinking the Local: Suffrage Politics, Architecture, and Space.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. 34.1/2 (Spring 2006): 174-196: 182.

¹⁰ Though Parkes converted to Roman Catholicism in 1864, possibly as a result of her friendship with Adelaide Procter.

Smith to painting, and Parkes to poetry – and read books together which they discussed in their letters to one another. Their friendship was in many ways a typical one for women of their class background, though they took pleasure in pushing the boundaries of Victorian conventions. Bodichon’s biographer Pam Hirsch recounts the letters they wrote while on an unchaperoned trip they took in 1850 through Belgium, Germany, Austria and Switzerland, joking gleefully about the way their appearance repelled would-be suitors; Bodichon wore her famous dark-tinted glasses to deal with an eye problem, and they both wore “short black boots with coloured laces and skirts lopped off four inches above the ankle for ease of walking” (44). Their differences stemmed largely from what Hirsch describes as Bodichon’s “rather ambiguous social position”: her parents had not married, and part of her father’s side of the family refused to acknowledge her and her siblings – which “allowed her an unusual social mobility” (viii). The friendship between Parkes and Bodichon therefore made space for unconventionality that was not possible in Parkes’s very conventional family life. This space afforded the pair a glimpse of what *could* be possible for women given different social arrangements. As Jane Rendall notes, it was the realization through their friendship of “a world of experience, of sexuality and politics, from which they were themselves excluded” that politicized their activities.¹¹

The friendship between Parkes and Bodichon modeled a way of bridging social difference, and managing the operations of the broader group to which it gave rise. It was not just that Parkes and Bodichon had an extensive and varied social network, which counted among its numbers prestigious Victorian thinkers, activists, and artists, but that those social ties formed the basis of the political work both women accomplished. They were strongly influenced, for instance, by their friendship with the art historian and writer Anna Jameson, who styled herself as a kind of aunt to the two younger women. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to receive a

¹¹ Jane Rendall. “Friendship and Politics,” pp. 136-7.

medical degree in America, was Parkes's cousin and a good friend to Bodichon, who pressed her to give lectures in Britain; it was those lectures that inspired Elizabeth Garrett, the first British woman to qualify as a physician (Hirsch 352). Bodichon introduced Garrett and Blackwell at a party at Blandford Square on March 2, 1859, and this social introduction was the "founding moment" of Garrett's medical career (Hirsch 55). The social connection had a clear political effect that demonstrates how much of the change originated by the group was driven by social ties rather than an explicitly political agenda. In addition, the group's social reach amplified its audience, with Parkes' and Bodichon's social circle extended to the arts, including such luminaries as George Eliot and the Pre-Raphaelite painters. This influential network of connections is partly why critics can plausibly claim that the LPG had an influence that extended beyond the circulation of the group's mouthpiece, the *English Woman's Journal*, the subscriptions to which numbered initially only in the hundreds.¹² If, following Teja Varma Pusapati, the *English Woman's Journal's* "discursive framework" is seen to accommodate "contradictions and inconsistencies" in order to shape itself as a "collective, developing endeavor" (605) it is reasonable to ask whether the same can be said of the LPG as a whole. To what extent was it possible to make claims in the general interest of all women, without compromising the ability of women to make claims as liberal individuals? Did the group sustain individual differences in light of the supposed universality of the liberal individual?

In Chapter One, I gave Mill as an example of the way in which the liberal relationship to difference in the Victorian period was profoundly ambiguous. As something extraordinary that differentiates the few from the many, difference was seductive, providing the spark of

¹² Pauline Nestor. "A New Departure in Women's Publishing: The *English Woman's Journal* and the *Victoria Magazine*." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 15.3 (1982): 93-106, p. 95.

uniqueness that is a necessary condition of liberal subjectivity.¹³ Yet the fact of difference in Victorian society often functioned to obstruct the liberal supposition of equality, and its persistence challenged the eternal progressiveness of the liberal individual. The elision of difference – in other words, the liberal abstraction of universality – was thus always an expression of the fundamental challenge that difference posed. One of liberalism’s constitutive conundrums is that difference is simultaneously the cornerstone of the liberal individual and what must be abstracted in order to transform the private individual into the rights-bearing subject. In Elaine Hadley’s superb account of this process, she notes the importance of transcending difference to achieve a position of liberal disinterest. The manifestation of disinterest through the process of devil’s advocacy (Mill’s dialogic practice necessary to achieve an opinion that is individual rather than the received opinion of the masses) “fosters a cognitive expression of social alterity, and, as an internal form, it organizes the otherwise incommensurable contents of social difference, renders their cacophony... into a privately beautiful concordance.”¹⁴ In Hadley’s account, the discordant noise of so many differences requires proper organization to attain the beauty of liberal individuality.¹⁵

This, and the next, chapter of this dissertation explore various attempts to undertake that beautiful organization, to achieve a form of collectivity or collective thinking that resolved difference into Hadley’s privately beautiful concordance. Herein, I offer an analysis of LPG’s politics, seeking to illuminate how they asserted their ability to assume political and civic rights

¹³ See Angelique Richardson. “‘The Difference Between Human Beings’: Biology in the Victorian Novel.” *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Edited by Francis O’Gorman. Malden: Blackwell, 2005: 202-231.

¹⁴ Elaine Hadley. *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 81. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁵ See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: difference as antagonism, defined as the point that constitutes the limits of the social; “mutually contradictory belief systems” and the formal means of managing contradictory belief systems into one within which we can live. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 1985. London: Verso, 2001, p. 124.

not merely as individuals but specifically as women. The gist of my argument is as follows. The LPG represented a bid to think about how the democratic public sphere might be sustained through the production of difference as the basis for forging collective bonds. That requires a mode of alignment based not on identification but on disidentification, a concept used by queer theorists to describe the experience of situating oneself within and against the identifications to which we are interpellated.¹⁶ As such, the LPG functions as an important test case to think through the questions John Frow asks in “Cultural Studies and the Neoliberal Imagination”:

“What remains of the liberal vision of a common public culture in a world of asserted differences? What mechanisms of consenting or dissenting identification sustain a democratic public sphere when politics becomes spectacular” – that is, where representation replaces rational debate as the primary political mode?¹⁷

Of members and mobilization

The emergence and the historical significance of the LPG has received a fair amount of critical attention, usually in relation to particular women and their roles in shaping liberal feminism. As Jane Rendall observes with reference to the friendship between Parkes and Bodichon, the “awakening of self-consciousness” and “different kinds of feminist activity” cannot be understood merely as a public or political fact, but must be related to “personal histories and networks of friendship which underlay the slow growth” of the nineteenth-century women’s movement.¹⁸ This is an important point, because the nature of the group depended on

¹⁶ See Judith Butler: “What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?” *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex.’* New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 219.

¹⁷ John Frow. “Cultural Studies and the Neoliberal Imagination.” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 12:2 (Fall 1999): 423-30, p. 423.

¹⁸ Rendall. “Friendship and Politics.” p. 163.

an informal organizational structure, lack of focus on a single issue or even consensus on where to direct efforts, and reliance on personal connections. Margaret Forster, in her account of grassroots feminism, points to the tendency to keep issues separate so that public opinion on one matter would not affect how another was perceived, resulting in a “cult of personality” among feminist leaders. One of Forster’s examples is Langham Place member Emily Davies (1830–1921), who abstained from much of the group’s active suffrage work in order to focus on education initiatives.¹⁹ Forster suggests that this need to keep issues “clean” was largely strategic. I wish to enlarge on this point by suggesting that the diversity of focus and emphasis on personalities was also symptomatic of the way in which the early feminist movement thought about collectivity and solidarity, and how those concepts could crystalize around the question of what it meant to identify as a group of women. Collectivity, for the LPG, did not require resolving differences into a unified aim or position in order to achieve gains; diversity of focus and character was, as I shall argue, a necessary corollary of the way the LPG organized based on a politics of friendship.

The LPG did not compose its membership by recruiting for a specific political purpose. Rather, the group evolved by bringing together women who shared an unspecified dissatisfaction with their position and the desire to do something to address it. Its members thus came from very different backgrounds and had a diverse set of experiences, including various levels of exposure to any form of activism. Some of the first members included the poet Isa Craig (1831-1903), the daughter of a Scottish hosier. Craig became involved in the group through her friendship with Parkes, as did Matilda Hays (1820?–1897), one of the group’s more radical members. Hays, who went by the name of Max and wore men’s clothes above the waist, was the daughter of a corn

¹⁹ Margaret Forster. *Significant Sisters: The Grassroots of Active Feminism 1839-1939*. London: Random House, 2004, p. 3.

merchant, and sacrificed a literary career to act beside the American actress Charlotte Cushman, with whom she was romantically involved. Emily Davies, one of the group's most unlikely activists, was the daughter of an evangelical Anglican clergyman who met Bodichon in Algeria in 1858 while she was nursing her brother as he recovered from tuberculosis. Unlike Bodichon, Davies had little exposure to political ideas, but developed her own convictions through friendship with Bodichon, who was quick to lend Davies the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and reassure her of the existence of a network of women who shared Davies' sense of dissatisfaction with restrictions of domestic life.²⁰

As the group grew, women were brought in by the group's activities rather than personal friendship. Even so, the broad range of opinions and investments of the members allowed for a wide range of ideological positions. For instance, Jessie Boucherett (1825–1905), who sought out the women after reading an issue of the *English Woman's Journal*, was a staunch Conservative. With Helen Blackburn, she formed the Freedom of Labour Defence League in the 1890s to oppose the introduction of the Factory Acts, on the basis that it would restrict women's freedom in the marketplace and therefore their earning potential. In so doing, she clashed with other members of the LPG who advocated association and cooperation rather than liberal individualism as the answer to women's disadvantaged position in the labor market. My point in tracing these connections is that the group's informal structure meant that it grew from general social principles rather than specific political goals, and that this, in consequence, enabled the membership to remain one characterized by difference: ideological, religious, and political differences, differences in marital status, and class differences. The LPG was a collective comprised of people who might not otherwise associate with one another, and who often profoundly disagreed on moral or ideological grounds; as such, the broad commitment to general

²⁰ Forster. *Significant Sisters*, p. 140.

principles was a crucial aspect of the group's formation and a necessary condition of its function. Of necessity, the group did not cohere around commitment to a particular cause but came together around the general principle of furthering the position of women in society.

The group's initiatives were varied. Along with the *English Woman's Journal*, SPEW was headquartered in the Langham Place premises. Inspired by an anonymously-published article by Harriet Martineau, "Female Industry," which appeared in the April issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, the founders of SPEW wanted to address the problem of so-called "superfluous" women, the half-a-million unmarried women Martineau estimated were eking out a living as governesses or seamstresses in the absence of familial support. At 19 Langham Place, SPEW held classes in arithmetic, bookkeeping and shorthand to equip women with the skills they needed to join the workforce in the way the society advocated: as professionals and valuable participants in public life, not as poorly trained, ineffectual and barely genteel governesses.²¹ The organization also functioned as a kind of employment agency, maintaining a register of women seeking work and helping women in other industrial efforts, for instance by lending money to a group of women china-painters to start their own business after the company that employed them elected not to rebuild their business following a fire.²²

One of the points of tension in Langham Place was how to approach the question of married women. Married women's status was a major point of tension in feminist and liberal

²¹ See Rendall. "Langham Place group (act. 1857–1866)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, Oct 2005.

²² Michelle Elizabeth Tusan. "'Not the Ordinary Victorian Charity': The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women Archive." *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000): 221-230, pp. 225-6.

circles in the decades-long agitation for female suffrage.²³ Parkes initially wanted to avoid discussing the issue in the pages of the *English Woman's Journal*. It could not, however, be permanently avoided, and in 1864 the periodical published extracts of Harriet Taylor's "The Enfranchisement of Women." The risks of including married women in other bids for opportunities for women, including enfranchisement, would have been clear following the failure of the Married Women's Property Bill of 1857. As Ben Griffin has documented, the debates about married women's property acts – not only in the 1850s but in the second attempt to pass a bill over a decade later – tended to focus on the effect on the home, rather than the principle of sexual equality (62). The disagreements were largely of a practical, rather than a theoretical, nature: would the immediate inclusion of married women in the push for suffrage doom the fate of single women? Emily Davies was of this opinion. She was, says Andrew Rosen, optimistic about the efficacy of a petition signed by 1,499 women that she and Elizabeth Garrett presented to John Stuart Mill in 1866, and wanted to limit the initial demand for the vote without specifically excluding married women.²⁴ As she wrote to Helen Taylor, "I do not see that in *limiting* our claim, we necessarily pronounce any opinion upon the rights of other people, outside that claim... When the wedge is inserted, we can go on for more, including liberty for married women in other directions."²⁵ Taylor, on the other hand, felt very strongly that any case for female suffrage must be put forward on behalf of all women; any less would be capitulation to

²³ See Rendall. "John Stuart Mill, Liberal Politics, and the Movements for Women's Suffrage, 1865-1873." *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*. Edited by Amanda Vickery. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 168-200. Also see Ben Griffin. "Class, Gender and Liberalism in Parliament, 1868-1882: The Case of the Married Women's Property Acts." *The Historical Journal*. 46.1 (2003): 59-87. Subsequent page references in text.

²⁴ Andrew Rosen. "Emily Davies and the Women's Movement, 1862-1867." *Journal of British Studies*. 19.1 (Autumn 1979): 101-121, p. 112. Subsequent page references in text.

²⁵ Ann B. Murphy and Deirdre Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p. 188.

the forces of inequality that introducing a bill to Parliament was designed to fight.²⁶ These negotiations indicate the way in which the LPG defined what it meant to have a collective category of “women” in and through these strategic discussions about which forms of differences among women were to count in the political context, and which would not.²⁷

The status of married women was the source of disagreements of policy and approach, at times having a relatively small effect on the workings of the LPG, and at other times the source of major divisions, indicative of vastly different philosophical approaches to social questions. It was, in part, Emily Davies’ disinclination to include married women in petitions for electoral reform that saw her turn away from the push for female suffrage and focus on what was another major issue for the LPG: education.²⁸ Davies was instrumental in the founding of Girton College, which later became part of Cambridge University; she and other members of Langham Place were also actively involved in many different campaigns to increase educational opportunities for women throughout the 1850s and 1860s.²⁹ Inadequate education, and especially the social ills

²⁶ Andrea L. Broomfield asserts that this was less an ideological difference than a matter of Taylor’s idiosyncrasy and self-importance (“Walking a Narrow Line: Helen Taylor’s Literary Contribution to the British Women’s Rights Movement.” *Women’s Studies* 26 (1997): 259-83).

²⁷ See Barbara Caine. *English Feminism, 1780-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 546 and Forster. *Significant Sisters*, p. 2. Both the issue of suffrage and the issue of married women’s rights more broadly were, of course, also deeply affected by class. As Griffin notes, “by preserving the system of trusts the wealthy classes were able to opt out of a reformed common law which gave married women considerably more freedom than they had hitherto enjoyed. In this way rich and poor continued to be governed by different legal systems, yet MPs were able to present the Married Women’s Property Bills as removing class differences” (82).

²⁸ For an account of Davies’ disagreements with Helen Taylor, see Rosen. His account focuses on reclaiming Davies’ legacy in the suffrage movement, and thus he makes some remarkable comments about Taylor; for instance, that she was “too uncompromising and too eccentric” to be “merely an additional member” of a suffrage committee headed by Davies (115), though the letter he cites, in which Taylor declines to subscribe to the committee given its exclusion of married women was a major philosophical sticking point, is in fact quite generous and diplomatic in tone.

²⁹ Barbara Bodichon was also an advocate of women’s education, having used some of the money her father settled on her at the age of 21 to found the Portman Hall School, an experimental school that was co-educational, non-denominational, and attended by children of different class backgrounds. See Hirsch (76).

caused by the problem of governessing, was an issue for the LPG from the beginning, but became an especially important issue for Davies as the decades progressed. Motivated by Elizabeth Garrett's inability to matriculate at London University in the early 1860s, Davies began her work on education reform. The attempt to open up the Cambridge Local Examination for girls was one of the first campaigns spearheaded by Davies, a "means to an end" of opening up higher education for women.³⁰

In the debates about the exams there was more at stake than the question of whether the exams could or should be administered to women. The discussions about increasing educational opportunities for women turned on the very nature of gender difference. Detractors were quick to point to the perceived inherent gender differences, questioning whether girls' brains were capable of attempting such examinations without causing great harm to their physical and mental health. Even among the supporters there was dissent about whether girls should take the same exam as it was administered to boys attending school, or whether they should sit a specialized exam tailored to female strengths such as art and needlepoint. According to Margaret Forster, Davies insisted on maintaining exactly the same curriculum for her female students as male students took, even at the expense of innovation (153). There was also conflict about the goal of such education: was it simply to prepare girls for their domestic duties as wives and mothers – by taking arithmetic they could better balance the household budget, for instance – or was it to extend the opportunities for employment outside the home?

Education reform, as historians have amply document, reflected broad shifts in the cultural values of nineteenth-century Britain. The shift from small-scale, private schools to public institutions was also a shift from a patron-based, individualized system of education

³⁰ Josephine Kamm. *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2010, p. 126.

towards a much more egalitarian, meritocratic system. In a study based on the Taunton Commission's investigation into the state of education in 1864-8, Joyce Senders Pederson explains that the larger schools established towards the end of the nineteenth century were structured around a form of universalism, as they applied a common standard to all pupils, rather than tailoring educative goals to the specific personalities of each student, as earlier private institutions had. In cultivating broad skills that were applicable beyond the domestic sphere, the girls' public schools and women's colleges established in the later part of the nineteenth century broadened their focus beyond the structure of the family, organizing their pupils into peer groups rather than perpetuating a hierarchical arrangement based on the social position of the girls' families. The universalism that resulted from the imposition of such common standards to all pupils – with which Davies's project of extending the university local exams to women had a great deal to do – also functioned to create an environment of competition, where individual achievement, rather than family background, was the measure of success.³¹ In this light, the LPG's work on education reform can be understood as contributing to the shift away from older models of social difference that prioritized group identity in order to create new forms of difference on an individual basis. This shift contributed to the form of collectivity which Langham Place made possible, one which relied on the language of individual achievement to promote a universalism that could absorb certain differences at the expense of others.

That being said, the sprawling commitments of the group and the different, often conflicting, viewpoints of its members are often viewed by scholars as liabilities, factors central to the group's eventual dissolution. As the 1860s progressed, the collectivity at Langham Place was put under increasing pressure both external and from within. The internal tensions

³¹ Joyce Senders Pederson. "The Reform of Women's Secondary and Higher Education: Institutional Change and Social Values in Mid and Late Victorian England." *History of Education Quarterly* 19.1 (Spring 1979): 61-91, particularly p. 81.

(“bickering,” as one critic calls it), such as personality clashes and arguments about religious differences, made it difficult to set long-term goals.³² The disagreement about legislation to protect women as a special class of workers is another example of a frequently recurring question over the direction of the group: should it continue as an organization focused on and led exclusively by women (Parkes’ position) or did it require a mixed membership and an involvement in broader campaigns and voluntary associations (Emily Davies’ position)?³³ External pressure came in the form of financial difficulties that had plagued the group since its inception, as well as resistance from the public and the families of the women who were involved.³⁴ It was a largely independent organization of women and naturally, there were concerns about exceeding the bounds of sexual morality. Parents were concerned about the intimacy of women’s friendships, and those concerns were not quietened by several well-publicized scandals involving some of the group’s members, such as the divorce case in which Emily Faithfull was named, or the rumored romantic relationship between Max Hays and Adelaide Procter.³⁵ By the mid 1860s, the LPG had dissolved, though its members continued in their activist work, and the literary endeavors of the *English Woman’s Journal* were carried on by Emily Faithfull’s Victoria Press, Parkes’ *Alexandra Magazine*, and Boucherett’s *Englishwoman’s Review*.

³² Sheila Herstein. “The Langham Place Circle and the Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s.” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26.1 (1993): 24-7, p. 25.

³³ See Rendall. “Langham Place group (act. 1857–1866).”

³⁴ The *English Woman’s Journal* folded in late 1863, after a lengthy correspondence between Parkes and Bodichon over its financial troubles. See Herstein p. 25. See also Bessie Rayner Parkes’ “A Review of the Last Six Years,” in which her description of “the humble but ceaseless struggle of all these years” is an oblique reference to the fact that the journal did not succeed as a money-making publication comparable with the “rest of the periodical press.” *The English Woman’s Journal* 12.72 (1 February 1864): 361-368, p. 364-365.

³⁵ For the Faithfull case, see Martha Vicinus. “Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage: The 1864 Codrington Divorce Trial.” *The Journal of British Studies* 36.1 (1997): 70-98. On the relationship between Max Hays and Adelaide Procter, see Caine. “Feminism in London.” p. 769.

It is primarily because of these simultaneously generative and destructive differences that the LPG is relevant, indeed central, to the project of this dissertation. I attempt to explain the significance and the legacy of the LPG through a sustained focus not on the arguments they made to advance the cause of women's rights, but the way they encountered the liberal public sphere through making competing demands on the basis of the specificity of individualism and the generality of universalism.³⁶ My claim is that the form of the group, the way in which the women organized themselves into a collective and represented that collectivity in the *English Woman's Journal* which they produced from 1858, can be considered as an attempt to create sustainable difference: a form which made difference plausible in conjunction with coalition, the idea of equality, and the supposition of universality. Simply put, I wish to propose that one of the LPG's significant achievements was formal. For the LPG's liberal feminism, individual differences were to be nurtured, not simply effaced or transcended; they were also a threat to the liberal ideal of equality. To maintain the belief (or what some theorists call the fiction) in an equality despite difference, it was necessary to create a form that could make difference productive and compelling: privately beautiful concordance. Even when its arguments were neither entirely original nor entirely satisfactory – neither to their activist contemporaries, nor subsequent generations of feminist scholars – the group nonetheless effected change through its attempts to mediate between the specific and the general and harmonize discord as beautiful agreement. The women of Langham Place sought, in other words, to create a space in which

³⁶ Nancy Fraser's careful definition of the Habermasian public sphere is a useful point of reference throughout this chapter. As she defines it, the public sphere "designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive production." The Langham Place group was formed to function along precisely these lines, creating a discursive space for political participation on behalf of a category of people whose contribution to the body politic was, at least ideologically, expected to take place in the private life of the home. See Nancy Fraser. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80, p. 57.

difference was sustainable in the context of a collective politics based on transcending *but not erasing* those differences – and for a time they succeeded. They also succeeded in embracing the importance of gender difference by claiming rights specifically as women, and in asserting that women’s capacity to think and feel as the liberal individual made the fact of gender entirely inconsequential. In short, gender was simultaneously politically irrelevant *and* politically necessary.

The place of women in public

According to the rhetoric of Victorian domestic ideology, women’s contribution to the social and moral fabric of the British empire was based on purported innate and absolute difference between men and women. Women shaped public life not by participating in it, but by cultivating what Sarah Stickney Ellis called “the domestic character of England—the home comforts, and fireside virtues for which she is so justly celebrated.”³⁷ Of course, scholars have significantly complicated the ideal of separate spheres in accounts like Ellis’s, or Ruskin’s rhapsodies about the “queenly power of women.”³⁸ Scholars have highlighted women’s agency in the public sphere and undermined the simple equation of domesticity and oppression; others have complicated the very framework of separate spheres, particularly through the lens of an

³⁷ Sarah Stickney Ellis. *Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*. London: Fisher Son & Co, 1839, p. 10.

³⁸ John Ruskin. *Sesame and Lilies*. 1865. Edited by Deborah Epstein Nord. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 69.

analysis of social class that decentered the middle class and its domestic ideology.³⁹ That women's particular difference defined their social place was therefore an assumption against which the LPG struggled; yet, in claiming rights as women, to be able to mobilize around gender difference was also a foundational organizing tactic. For instance, in an article called "The Use of a Special Periodical," Bessie Parkes reflects on the "motives for amalgamation" in working for the rights of women; it is with no sense of irony that she begins the article by defining women as a "special" group, and concludes it by maintaining that "it must not be forgotten that women are not a class, a set, a specialité in whose service we are setting up an organ, but just half the race."⁴⁰ The paradox of this position – or rather, Parkes's willingness to embrace two contradictory positions at once – reflects the awareness of the Langham Place activists that asserting women's existence as a class or generality challenges their capacity to bear the rights of the liberal individual with particular differences, preferences, and capacities. To claim recognition as a "class" was both necessary and problematic: it formed the basis of the claims for the inclusion of women into the public sphere and political life of the nation, but it threatened both the attempt to carve out a space for women's individuality and the underlying premise of liberal universality according to which differences had no purchase in political and public life.

The physical location of the LPG was a crucial factor in its ability to enable women's association despite social difference. As I have mentioned, the women advertised the premises as

³⁹ On the first point, see Nancy F. Cott. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. 1977. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997; Anna Clark. *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*. 1995. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1997; Mary Poovey. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen*. 1984. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. On the second point, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1750-1850*. London: Routledge, 2002; Mary P. Ryan. *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. 1990. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

⁴⁰ Bessie Raynor Parkes, "The Use of a Special Periodical," *The Alexandra Magazine & English Woman's Journal*, 4.1 (September 1864): 257-63, p. 262. Subsequent page references in text.

primarily a social space with a reading room, luncheon room, and parcel room for subscribers coming in from shopping. Framing the premises in this way made explicit women's use of public space, naming and politicizing what would otherwise be the private, domestic affairs of individual women shopping and conducting household business. In hailing individual women shoppers as part of a new collectively-identified group, the advertisement both pointed to what already existed, and what the group aspired towards, namely a new way of using public space, or more specifically, making available that space for women in the same manner as it was used by men. The reading room served as a potent symbol of the possibility of claiming participation in public life *as a woman* – simultaneously creating a separate class based on gender difference, and maintaining that there was no gendered difference in the use of space.⁴¹ In formalizing the space in this way, the group established its premises as a space where women would enter not merely as consumers or in relation to normal social life as a kind of public spin on the house call, but specifically as part of a collective of women.⁴²

In carving out a physical space for women in this way, the group gave a new relevance to the category of women in civic life. They also had to make certain choices about what kind of publicity would count: was this a moment in which cross-class identifications would take hold, or would “woman” be synonymous with “lady”?⁴³ It might seem at first blush that 19 Langham Place served merely to replicate the exclusions of the public sphere, in marketing itself towards

⁴¹ For an analysis of how a different space afforded “‘possibilities’ across class and gender hierarchies as well as across literary forms,” see Susan Bernstein. *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 2.

⁴² See John Frow: “Consumption, that is to say, offers something like an alternative (and “neoliberal”) form of citizenship, one that can recognize and valorize difference in a way that an abstract belonging to a commonwealth cannot do” (428).

⁴³ For a brilliant account of the afterlife of this conundrum, see Ruth Livesey's account of the women factory inspectors in the late 1890s in “The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops.” *Women's History Review* 13:2 (2004): 233-262.

the members of the middle class: the women who shopped, and who could afford the guinea a year a subscription cost (or two guineas, if one wished to bring non-subscriber guests). By claiming a space in public life for women, and yet by limiting access to that space based on very specifically classed categories, the group seemed to be limiting the universality of its claims to a gendered collectivity. Yet in practice, it was not so simple: alongside the reading room, the space hosted a register of employment, which was imagined as a kind of public noticeboard to be printed in the *English Woman's Journal*, "that Mrs A. might recommend an excellent matron or school teacher, and Mrs B. hear of her through our simple plan."⁴⁴ It quickly expanded, and the register was overwhelmed with applications from women, "all of them with some claim to the title of a lady," as Bessie Parkes wrote (114). What becomes clear, as Parkes elucidates the types of women who applied, is that "lady" was a more inclusive category than it might seem: "young girls of seventeen finding it necessary to start in life;" "single women who found teaching unendurable as life advanced;" "married ladies whose husbands were invalided or not forthcoming;" "widows who had children to support;" "tradesmen's daughters, and ... people of condition fallen into low estate" (114).

The employment register, and Parkes' later discussion of it at the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS), clearly represents the contradiction that characterizes the group as a whole. It is true that the group's ethos was typically middle class, and its concern for working women was often based in charity rather than solidarity, displaying an ethnographic interest in the poor and a middle-class concern for social amelioration rather than the sense of a shared position and struggle. Even so, the group's physical location brought together people whose social backgrounds were more different than the two-guinea fee for the reading room

⁴⁴ Paper read at the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, August 1860. Reprinted as and reprinted as "A Year's Experience in Woman's Work." *The English Woman's Journal* 6.32 (1 October 1860): 112-21, p. 113. Subsequent page references in text.

would otherwise suggest, demonstrating a more expanded sense of who the collective could accommodate than the group's representations of itself indicate. Although the tension persists between the idea of women in its most common sense, and the mission of the group as a philanthropic organization, the group's physical space accomplished what it did not always do discursively: it brought together difference women to create an expanded sense of a women's public. The group's philanthropic agenda might have relied on absolute differences of class and character in theory, yet the associations the group enabled defied that sense of absoluteness in practice. The LPG supported the Ladies Sanitary Association, founded by NAPSS, whose goal was to carry out "a social and sanitary crusade" into the homes of the poor.⁴⁵ Both NAPSS, or the Social Science Association as it was also often called, and the Langham Place circle were part of a broader shift in the late 1850s and 1860s from older models of philanthropy to the professionalization and bureaucratization of the management of social problems.⁴⁶ The space afforded by the LPG provided a moment of transition, in which it was if only briefly possible for working-class women and educated women to imagine themselves on, and indeed to occupy, the same employment noticeboard.

This is not to say that the LPG successfully resolved the liberal tension about difference. As the *English Woman's Journal* makes clear, the members' engagement with the concept shifts not only throughout the journal's publication, but within each piece. Parkes's "A Year's Experience in Woman's Work" is an example of this. It makes the case for a solution to the surplus women problem that crudely reshapes the feminine caretaking role to fit new ideas about women's professionalism. Her answer is to train highly-educated women to be able to carry out

⁴⁵ Parkes cited in Rendall 2005.

⁴⁶ Ellen Jordan usefully details this shift in her *Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Routledge, 1999. Tusan deftly documents the way in which one particular organization, SPEW, is positioned in this shift. ("Not the Ordinary Victorian Charity").

“moral superintendence over women” (117) – a typical example of philanthropic paternalism and very much of a piece with the NAPSS philosophy. Yet her use of the term “highly-educated women” is significant, relying on training rather than birth to provide moral authority. The phrase suggests, or at least leaves room for the possibility, that this is a scheme in which definitions – what it means to work, what it means to be a lady – are less rigid than Parkes herself maintains. Parkes writes: “I am in this paper considering the needs of educated women; — of women who have been born and bred ladies — it is a real distinction from which, even in America, the most earnest democrats cannot escape, and which in England, however much the strict edges of the lines of demarcation between class and class may be rubbing off, still exists in full force” (115). For all Parkes’ insistence on the “real distinction” separating a lady from the women who were not, her article cannot keep the categories straight: in one moment, “tradesmen’s daughters” have definitely “some claim to the title of a lady,” but in the next moment they are “not what we mean by ladies; they belong to tradesmen’s families” (116). Parkes’ struggle with the category of lady in this piece is characteristic of the way in which the LPG negotiated the idea of difference by implicitly asking how far it was possible to imagine commonness with people who lived differently. For Parkes, the line of identification seems to cease at fifty or seventy-five pounds a year, and only then if the subject is “perfectly unencumbered” and can not only “look like a lady” but also “live like one” (116).

My claim is not that the LPG sought or managed to forge a sense of sisterhood that transcended all differences, particularly those of class, but a much more modest claim: to the extent that the group successfully expanded the sense of what it meant to assert solidarity as women (or as ladies), its success was in large part due to the forms of association the group, particularly in its use of physical space, enabled. As Emily Davies wrote to Barbara Bodichon, one of the clear achievements of the group was that Parkes, because of her role as editor but not

necessarily in that capacity, became a focal point for all kinds of women from all over the city: “it is no doubt something to have somebody sitting in a certain chair in a certain room at fixed hours every day & it might possibly be turned to some account by & by.”⁴⁷ The LPG functioned as a space where associational ties were able to accommodate difference, where a common purpose could be imagined, even across those lines, like the rigid distinctions of class, that seem to forbid ties of allegiance and recognition. Often in spite of its own rhetoric, as we have seen in Parkes’ discussion of the employment register, the group was the physical manifestation of a space where difference met. The premises thus functioned as a formalization of liberalism’s potential to embrace difference, even as its rhetoric is also a symptom of liberalism’s fear of difference’s disintegrating effects.

The English Women’s Journal in the literary public sphere

In “Rethinking Recognition” (2000), Nancy Fraser identifies a shift in the way in which social movements have made – and are making – their claims. Feminism, for instance, “previously foregrounded the redistribution of resources,” but now makes claims on the basis of recognition. For Fraser, the question of why “so many movements couch their claims in the idiom of recognition” is a profoundly contemporary one, a product of neoliberalism and globalization.⁴⁸ The resulting rise in mass communication and migration have the effect of “hybridizing and pluralizing cultural forms” (108); this reifies group identities, “hypostatizing culture,” and so serves merely to address the “freestanding cultural harm” caused by misrecognition, while obscuring and neglecting its economic injustices (110). The paradigm Fraser advocates – a consideration of both the cultural politics of recognition, and a focus on

⁴⁷ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 14 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/10. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

⁴⁸ Nancy Fraser. “Rethinking Recognition.” *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 107-120, p. 107.

redistribution to address economic inequality – has come under question by other philosophers, including Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young.⁴⁹ However, it is not the specificity of her argument that is relevant to my discussion, but the terms in which she lays out the gulf between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution. What I am trying to show in my discussion of Langham Place is that recognition has a longer history in the feminist framing of rights, identity, and politics than Fraser’s article acknowledges. Recognition is, in other words, as central to understanding the relationship of feminism to liberalism as to neoliberalism.

Mass cultural forms and increasing global mobility were two factors that profoundly shaped the way the Langham Place women considered the problem of difference, and the ways in which they challenged the practical politics as well as the ideological organization of mid-Victorian society. The tension between recognition and redistribution, albeit in markedly different terms, is everywhere evident in the attempts to form the LPG as a site from which to challenge the social, legal, political, and economic injustices facing women in the mid-nineteenth century. It is not merely that cultural forms drive the shift to recognition Fraser identifies, but that bids for recognition and subjectivity grounded in and through cultural forms are central to the way the women of Langham Place organized themselves as a collective, and, further, that they laid claim to the universalism of the liberal position and the individualism of liberal subjectivity on the basis of collective identification; in short, how they lived with the democratic ideal and its contradictions. My focus on the forms of their claims, rather than simply the claims themselves, avoids attempts to categorize the group as either liberal or feminist, driven by recognition or redistribution, as radical or progressive (if not reactionary).

⁴⁹ See Jacinda Swanson. “Recognition and Redistribution: Rethinking Culture and the Economic.” *Theory Culture Society* 22 (2005): 87-118, p. 87.

One of the persistent tendencies in criticism of the LPG is the desire to frame the group as the originary point of British feminism, often stressing its organization as a way of accounting for the breadth and extent of the group's achievements. We see this, for instance, in Sheila Herstein's claim that "the origins of organized British feminism can be traced to the Langham Place offices of the *English Woman's Journal*," or Ellen R. Jordan's point that the LPG was an "institute [that] was the closest the Women's Movement as a whole came to a formal organization."⁵⁰ These attempts to establish the organization of the LPG obscures what I will claim are its most interesting aspects: its informal and in many ways disorganized mode of organizing its work, and its dedication to the process of argumentation rather than the development of a cohesive, unified political platform. In large part, this informal formalism can be attributed to the locatedness of the group: the centrality of the Langham Place premises as a focal point to bring together women with disparate goals and commitments. But, while the group's physical space was important, it was also a limitation the group needed to transcend, as the LPG's vision of its work was always as a mass movement, and not one confined to London's West End. The periodicals the group produced were crucial means by which the women sought to influence the nation. In a period in which the "general" reader was understood to be male, and only "family" publications or "class" journalism (that is, publications directed at a special interest group) were produced for a female audience, the attempts by members of the LPG to normalize publications produced for and by women is another significant way in which the group worked to reshape the public sphere.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Herstein. "The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s," p. 24. Jordan. *Women's Movement*, p. 157.

⁵¹ See Laurel Brake. "Gendered Space and the British Press." *Media History* 3.1-2 (1995): 99-110.

The *English Woman's Journal* reflects some of the tension that characterizes the group as a whole: between the desire to be a mass movement and the fact that some of the possibilities the group afforded depended on its particular, small-scale physical space; between individual assertion and collective identity; and between what Jürgen Habermas calls the “literary public sphere” of the eighteenth century and the “mass public of culture consumers” of the twentieth.⁵² There were several other periodicals associated with LPG. Members were responsible for the *Alexandra Magazine*, *Victoria Magazine*, and, after 1866, the *Englishwoman's Review* (the merged product of the *English Woman's Journal* and *Alexandra Magazine*).⁵³ The *English Woman's Journal* came about through the partnership of Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Parkes. In 1858, after dabbling in editorial work with the Glasgow periodical, the *Waverley Journal*, they formed a limited liability company, of which Bodichon was the majority shareholder by virtue of her unmarried sister, who could hold shares in her own right – something which Bodichon, who had married in 1857, could not legally do given the status of married women's property rights.⁵⁴ The company functioned both as a source of employment for women and to bring together a community of women activists. Many of the women who would make up the LPG, including Max Hays, Emily Faithfull, Maria Rye, Jessie Boucherett and Adelaide Procter, were initially attracted by the work of the journal (Rendall 2005). Shortly after the periodical's first issue ran in March of 1858, Monson had established the premises at 19 Langham Place, and Emily Faithfull had launched the Victoria Press, which was entirely staffed by women – the only press in the

⁵² Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 167-8. Subsequent page references in text.

⁵³ For details of these publications, see Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, editors. *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*. Gent: Academia Press, 2009.

⁵⁴ On the status of women shareholders in nineteenth-century Britain, see Mark Freeman, Robin Pearson, and James Taylor. ““A Doe in the City”: Women Shareholders in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain.” *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 16.2 (2006): 265-291.

country to be so staffed.⁵⁵ Thereafter, the *English Woman's Journal* was printed by Faithfull's Press, making it a journal that was run by women, and largely owned by them (unlike the *Waverley*). The *English Woman's Journal* therefore differed from many other special-interest journals of the period because it created, in the words of Pauline Nestor, "a wide and varied community of women" with influence that reached far beyond the pages of the journal itself.⁵⁶ While it was influential in providing a voice for the women of Langham Place in print, it was equally important as an example of a female-initiated corporate venture.⁵⁷ Ironically, though, the journal was never a financially successful project. In 1859, Parkes wrote to Bodichon that she had come into an inheritance providing an extra 150 pounds a year, the interest of which she could use to pay for the journal.⁵⁸ The journal's financial viability, or lack thereof, was an ongoing theme in the letters between the women. Yet, despite its financial problems, the journal was an important part of the burgeoning women's movement as a space that was both discursive and physical.

In a case study of SPEW drawing from the organization's archive housed at Girton College, Michelle Elizabeth Tusan contends that the "urban-based groups" like SPEW and the Langham Place circle "attracted like-minded participants who went on to promote the

⁵⁵ Brake and Demoor, editors. *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*, p. 204.

⁵⁶ Nestor. "New Departure," p. 95.

⁵⁷ It is also worth noting that the material published in the *English Woman's Journal* was discussed in other periodicals and newspapers. Bodichon's pamphlet, *Women and Work*, for example, was initially published in the *Waverley* (Hirsch ch. 9 fn. 2) and republished in the *English Woman's Journal*. Subsequently, an article discussing the tract and echoing many of its sentiments was published in *The Leader*, a radical periodical that billed itself as a publication for "All classes, all people." (Laurel Brake. "The Leader." *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*. Kings College London. www.ncse.ac.uk/index.html.) These cases, though insufficient to map the spread of ideas published in EWJ, nonetheless speak to Nestor's point that the influence of the journal cannot be judged by circulation figures alone.

⁵⁸ "Letter from Bessie Rayner Parkes to Barbara Bodichon." 30 January 1859. GCPP Parkes 5/88. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

‘advancement of women’ through the establishment of a female-centred associational life.”⁵⁹ The heavily philanthropic bent of the work done by organizations or collectivities like SPEW and the LPG suggests that difference was just as often understood to form the basis of what Dinah Birch and Mark Llewellyn term “mutual interests and destinies” as it was considered to be a force that fractured the collective potential of such associations.⁶⁰ Indeed, the LPG resists an understanding of their associational life as one based on like-mindedness, and the discussions about the purpose and direction of *English Woman’s Journal*, preserved in the group’s letters, reveal the limits of reading the periodical as a reflection of the group’s common goals. The journal’s importance lies precisely in the way it serves to question whether it was possible to think about common goals, and how much the interests of individual women could be reconciled with the interests of women in general. The use of the singular term in title of the journal (the *English Woman’s Journal*) raises two questions lying at the heart of the LPG’s work: to what extent can collectivity be imagined as a unity? When is difference too different to be thought together? That Bodichon, as a married woman who could not legally enter into contracts on her own behalf, could not therefore under the law own the journal she helped found indicates how these questions took on a particular urgency for women in the 1850s and 1860s.⁶¹ In the context of the debates about the Married Women’s Property Acts, the journal’s statement of unity on its title page offers a different model of incorporation than the institution of marriage offered, one in which women’s individuality is explicitly named and also forms the basis for solidarity. The journal, in

⁵⁹ Tusan. “Not the Ordinary Victorian Charity,” p. 221.

⁶⁰ Dinah Birch and Mark Llewellyn, editors. *Conflict and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 2.

⁶¹ See Griffin on the way the debates about the Married Women’s Property Acts in the 1850s and 1860s were not merely about the principle of equal rights, but also about the problem of redefining a woman as an individual rather than an incorporated part of her husband. Griffin cites Philip Muntz, the Radical MP for Birmingham: The Act “would certainly cause great difficulties in all the domestic arrangements of life. It would cause antagonism between those who we were taught to believe were one” (62).

addressing itself to the singular “woman,” hailed each of its readers simultaneously as individuals and as members of the collective pool of its readership.

The articles to which I now turn are significant for both the Journal and the “woman” it recognizes and redistributes in the sense that they provide a form capable of negotiating between a kind of exemplary individuality and a collective understanding of womanhood.⁶² The first article in the journal’s first issue, “The Profession of the Teacher” (the annual reports of the Governess’ Benevolent Institution from 1843-1856), is characteristic in its uncertainty about the parameters of its audience, reflecting the *English Woman’s Journal’s* competing impulses towards inclusivity for all women and the narrower focus of middle-class paternalism.⁶³ The argument is not particularly remarkable in its recommendation of a doctrine of liberal self-help mitigated by the compassion of Christian charity. Yet the manner in which it seeks to transcend individual differences is illustrative, both of the form of representative individuality the article ultimately endorses, and in the way it struggles to define the collective voice in which it speaks. Does the author speak on behalf of all women, or only the middle- and upper-class women who are the subjects, rather than the objects, of the philanthropic mission? Teaching, the author maintains, is of importance, not merely because it was a gendered occupation, but because it was an occupation of general, rather than specifically classed, interest: unlike domestic and factory work, “the teaching profession touches everyone as either they had a governess or have a relative or friend in the business” (1). The teaching profession may register class differences, as the

⁶² See also Pusapati’s mention of the July and August 1859 publication of two articles called “Things in General” signed by “Nobody in Particular” (606).

⁶³ “The Profession of the Teacher.” *English Woman’s Journal* 1.1 (1 March 1858): 1-13. Subsequent page references in text. The article is unsigned; Kathryn Hughes attributes it to Bessie Parkes; Mary Poovey attributes it to Jessie Boucherett. I will refer to the author, rather than attempting attribution; the ambiguity of the author’s identity is, in many ways, my point. Kathryn Hughes. *The Victorian Governess*, 1993. London: Hambledon and London, 2001, p. 213. Mary Poovey. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 232.

“platform on which middle and upper classes, meet, the one struggling up, the other drifting down” (1), but, in its general relevance, can transcend the particularities of those differences. The figure of the governess has often been read as a sort of projection-screen for anxiety about the fluidity of class identities that this statement suggests.⁶⁴ Yet, the tone of this article betrays little anxiety about the fluid class location of governesses. The ability of the universal dilemma of the governess to transcend the specificity of problems peculiar to one class is crucial, because it is on that basis the issue could use a particular case as a wedge issue to make space for a discussion about the training and employment of women more broadly. Because the governess’s problems transcend the particular problems of rank, using the governess as a test case functions to shape women’s employment as a national issue rather than the particular problem of a certain class or sector.

Like many articles in the journal, “The Profession of the Teacher” depends on certain exclusions to create solidarity among women. In particular, it draws on an understanding of race and nation in which a progressive potential defines the English in comparison to inferior races. The article is prevented from becoming an entirely typical example of liberal feminism’s worst tendencies, defining collectivity based on the image of its white, middle-class proponents, only because the supremacy of the English is proven by the working classes of England rather than the middle-class producers of the journal. It is the hardworking nature of English men and women that elevates the nation above other, indolent races: the “Hindoo” who “pecks rice, sleeps, bathes, fights, and embroiders coats of many colours,” or the “Mohammedan Arab” who “sits cross-legged in the sun and plays endless games of backgammon” (10). Against this background of casual racism, the English or Anglo-Saxon man is notable for his industry because

⁶⁴ See Poovey’s chapter on the governess in *Uneven Developments*, in which she in fact cites this sentence from the report.

his “*spécialité* of function” is labor: he “digs and ploughs, spins and weaves, buys and sells” (10). As the “feminine counterpart to these fine sterling qualities,” Mrs. Bull possesses “good common sense” and “a motherly body”; she “not only looks after the children, but after the storeroom too,” as she “weighs the cheese and bacon, and metes out the flannel” (10). The provincial Mrs. Bull, a working woman from the “country districts,” is made to stand for a generalized form of Englishwoman upon whom the hopes of progress are pinned.⁶⁵ As such, she registers precisely the ways in which the journal’s idea of common womanhood both embraces and refuses difference. Compared to the genteel reader whose fear of not being a gentlewoman keeps her from the hard work necessary to “clear the path to new occupations,” Mrs. Bull’s difference is the basis of her exemplarity; yet her exceptionality as “intelligent female labour” is only legible against the endlessness of the Arab’s backgammon-playing (9-10).

In the article, then, feared difference scorned to promote a narrative of English exceptionalism, and celebrated difference is embraced in the figure of Mrs. Bull. This establishes a general form of womanhood whose distinctiveness and progressive potential stems from her proven ability to work. The figure of Mrs. Bull represents an individual who works in a specific location and at specific tasks, but also represents the entire nation of English women who share her capacities. In this way, the figure does what the article as a whole aspires to do: mediate between the particularity of the (English) individual woman, and the collectivity of all the nation’s women to which she belongs. This occurs at the level of the article’s language, for the writer creates a sense of inclusiveness at certain times and distance at others. For instance, the writer advocates that the reader ought to go out and “*try* how far society would support her if she entered a telegraph office, or opened a stationer’s shop, or took a place as a show-woman in any

⁶⁵ Recall Mill’s representative married woman, Mrs. Grundy: “Whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs. Grundy” (331-332). Mrs. Bull also, of course, evokes *Punch* magazine’s John Bull cartoons.

of our enormous clothing establishments” (11). In considering the possible results of this experiment, the author writes that if “one” tries and is shunned, one could “stay at home by the fire of one’s own earning... holding comfortable converse with Dickens and Thackeray, Tennyson and Mrs. Browning... as a compensation for living people whom we have not met because they would not meet us, — because we kept a shop!” (11-12). The slip between the singular “one” and the plural “we” weaves together the single individuals, sitting alone and rejected but buoyed by the fires they have provided for themselves, into an imagined community of working women, whose individual efforts combine to shift social opinion, and whose solidarity is crafted through those efforts and in the consequences of potential social failure. Moreover, it seems to me not incidental that reading plays a visible role in this imagined collectivity: like the role the LPG imagined for the journal itself, the novels and poetry hail their readers not merely as individuals, but as a community.

What is clear in the “The Profession of the Teacher” is how hard the author needs to work in order to achieve any kind of a balance between the one and the many. This reflects the difficulties in reconciling an insistence on women as liberal individuals capable and deserving of work that is “healthy” and “exciting” and that pays a living wage (10), with the still unrecognized fact that the problem of women’s work was a problem of scale: a social problem affecting “*tens of thousands*” of women (9), rather than an individual problem.⁶⁶ Social change “on the required scale” is effected by the accretion of individual efforts: “every young woman who must ‘go out’ from the domestic hearth asking herself, ‘Is there nothing else which I can, for better pay than that of a governess, undertake at the cost of a little courage?’” (12). These

⁶⁶ The author refers to an article in February’s *Blackwoods*, written by a man of “much sense and kindness” but a “strongly conservative tendency” who argues that the problem of women’s unemployment is exaggerated (12); the author thus clearly feels it is still necessary to convince the reader of the view that unemployment was in fact a general social problem.

individual examples of “the intelligent female labour of the Anglo-Saxon race” are to be fed into what the author calls “the general stream of business, . . . whose tributary rivulets are of different complexion in different localities” (12). As a metaphor, the general stream of business works to characterize the approach to difference in the journal. Made up of “tributary rivulets,” which are characterized by their specificity and “different complexion,” the general stream absorbs but does not negate those differences. In particular, in the general stream of business, intelligent female labor becomes merely another kind of intelligent Anglo-Saxon labor. Unlike race, gender becomes something that is not a significantly or qualitatively *different* difference.

The women who, as representative individuals, are to go out and seek their livings as businesswomen have their precedents in the pages of the journal. Specifically, the first issue also saw the publication of an article called “Miss Bosanquet,” an article which was to function as “a legitimate preface to a series of biographies which we hope to publish in this journal.”⁶⁷ These biographies indeed appeared throughout the journal’s run; other subjects included Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, Rachel Felix, and Rosa Bonheur.⁶⁸ The series both assumes, and works to convince, that the lives of the subjects are significant “for public and for private interest,” as the author of the Bosanquet piece writes (35). The subjects of the biographies are women committed to a purpose, who excel in their fields, and for the most part exhibit an “unwavering conviction of duty, and an earnest desire to be useful to her sex and to her kind,” as

⁶⁷ “Miss Bosanquet.” *English Woman’s Journal* 1.1 (1 March 1858): 28-36, p. 28. Subsequent page references in text.

⁶⁸ On representative individuality, see the biography of Madame de Girardin: “The lives of certain persons seem to have grown out so naturally from the social sphere in which they were passed, and to have belonged to it so completely, that we cannot even imagine their having occurred elsewhere. Such lives may almost be considered, in their own way, as ‘representative;’ so truly do they reflect the peculiarities of their place and time.” *English Woman’s Journal* 6.31 (1 September 1860): 11-21, p. 11.

Anna Blackwell wrote of her sister.⁶⁹ Cumulatively, the series offers its subjects as representative individuals, empirical proof of women's subjectivity and capability. Her sister achieved so much, Anna Blackwell writes, not out of a craving for notoriety but with a drive that grew "naturally out of the experiences of her life" (80). This characterization of the subject as fulfilling her unique and innate capacities at once establishes her specialness and individuality and, as it is assumed if not explicitly stated in similar biographies, also stands as evidence of the universality of her potential and by implication the potential of all women. Miss Bosanquet, for instance, is significant because of the strength of her religious convictions, which the biography maintains she discovered on her own, and which isolated her from her parents. The extremity of her Methodism might have been as distasteful to the journal's readers as it was to her parents; thus the author is at great pains to point out that Bosanquet (later Mrs Fletcher) was "democratic," that "the spirit" of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher's "exertions was immeasurably wider than their creed, and that was not bigoted, though devoutly orthodox" (35). To stress her individuality, the author needed to draw out Bosanquet's piety and the extremity of her religious devotion, but retain a catholic spirit in order to appeal to all of the journal's readership.

As a series, the biographical pieces must function to present the subjects in all their particularities while simultaneously suggesting that these figures represent not just themselves but in some sense the capacities of all women. Because of these contradictory purposes, the biographies often establish the particularities of each women's attitudes or behaviors – the extremes of their commitments – only to neutralize them with qualifications. As we have seen,

⁶⁹ Anna Blackwell. "Elizabeth Blackwell." *English Woman's Journal* 1.2 (1 April 1858): 80-99, p. 80. Note that this article is signed because of the author's proximity to the subject; most in the series are not signed, but it was not uncommon for the author to mention their closeness to the subject. See, for example, "Rosa Bonheur," in which the author writes about being charmed catching her in a nap. *English Woman's Journal* 1.4 (1 June 1858): 227-243. Subsequent page references in text.

Miss Bosanquet is simultaneously the picture both of extreme religious devotion, choosing to leave the family home rather than compromise her religious commitments and sense of Christian charity, and of liberal toleration at its finest:

For those who differed from her in controversy she had sweet courtesy and clear statements of her own views; for those who were of one faith with herself she had sympathy and tenderness unbounded; for those who agreed with her neither in belief nor in practice she cherished hope and charity up to the farthest limits possible to one of her decided creed (36).

The portrait of Rachel Felix is similarly conflicted. Much is made of her prima donna qualities: her fondness of gambling and anger at losing, her love of excess and grand display, and her “economical predilections,” which the author attributes, in barely veiled anti-Semitism, to her Jewishness. However, the author seeks to balance these aspects of her character with more savory characteristics.⁷⁰ For instance, Rachel’s “reputation for economy almost amounted to the accusation of avarice, yet she could be generous and liberal to those whom she loved or wished to serve and encourage” (159). Particularly at the moments when the subjects of the biographies appear at their most particular, the series takes pains to modify the extremities of the women’s characters, instead stressing their goodness and their “liberal” nature. While these pieces do celebrate the individuality and unique quirks of their subjects, when read together over the course of the journal, they begin to seem like variations on a single theme. The women depicted lived remarkably different lives, yet their *portraits* are rendered in similar ways. Devotees of the anecdote long before new historicism, the portrait authors sought to highlight the originality and particularity of each subject. But collectively, the particular quirks of these women – whether it is Miss Bosanquet’s lifelong devotion to a Methodist faith she discovered in spite of her parents,

⁷⁰ “Rachel.” *English Woman’s Journal* 1.3 (1 May 1858): 158-162, p. 161. Subsequent page references in text.

or Elizabeth Blackwell marching around the room carrying a man who had just declared it impossible that a woman could lift him – begin to seem less like unique characteristics than the formulaic and predictable proof that women are capable of individuality.

The series thus has two effects. First, these biographical articles suggest that the differences among women – the particular foibles of liberal individuals – render collectivity possible; they establish the personality of their subjects as specific enough to highlight their uniqueness, and also general enough to establish the fact of difference as what all women have in common. In so doing, the second effect of the series is made clear: the articles bring to light the complexities of the LPG's engagement with difference. If difference is the basis of commonness, how is it possible to preserve difference without smoothing its edges away in sameness? Are there limits to difference rendered in this way? Miss Bosanquet's biography articulates this point. In the way that she cherished Christian charity and liberal hope for progress "up to the farthest limits possible to one of her decided creed," her toleration of difference was largely a wish for sameness. The claim invites the charitable reading that the article's author undoubtedly intended: to prove the capacities of a gentle, devout woman, who transcends her own boundaries every time she encounters someone with differing views. Yet it also invites a more skeptical reading, one which points to the limits of the journal's construction of a subjectivity that could only embrace the working class by caricaturing Hindus and Arabs: just how far, the reader might be moved to question, are the farthest limits of a creed which is so decided? What is the purpose of charity when undertaken in the hopes that the differing one will to see the light and come into the proper fold?

If the journal reveals the limitations of engaging with difference as much as it represented its possibilities, how did the LPG cultivate associational ties founded on difference? The answer, I suggest, is in the form of the group itself, and the ways it sought to craft a collective identity of

its members that was, in practice, genuinely democratic: a unity forged through the coming together, but not the merging, of individual voices.

Incorporated aesthetics

The artistic work of the group's members in this period constantly rehearses different forms of this kind of togetherness, resulting in what I want to describe as an incorporated form of art. Parkes's 1858 poem, "Two Graves," provides one such example. It gives an account of visiting the graves of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley within the span of a year. The poem's first two stanzas focus on the distance between the graves, "a thousand miles apart," and the difference of the surroundings: his grave "beneath the Roman rose," and hers "where the tenderest snowdrop blows."⁷¹ The final two stanzas depict the spiritual merging of the two figures, among the "heavenly lilies," where the "long-dissever'd lives entwine." As literary endeavor, "Two Graves" is remarkable only for its mediocrity, indicating the reason why, as Kathleen McCormack notes, Parkes's verses "never achieved for her much fame as a poet."⁷² As thought-experiment, however, the poem plays a role among other attempts in the journal to negotiate between separateness and togetherness, and to think through what it means to have a collective identity. The poem insists that the "living law" of the Shelleys was "to know one soul, one heart," yet insistently reminds us of the separateness of the two lives: the focus on the physical separation of the graves; the note preceding the poem of the date of each writer's death, reminding the reader of the thirty years Mary Shelley outlived her husband; and finally, the very title, which gives precedence to the two individual deaths, rather than the poem's romantic image of the everlasting life in heaven of the couple's merged heart and soul.

⁷¹ Bessie Rayner Parkes. "Two Graves." *English Woman's Journal* 1.2 (14 March 1858), p. 123.

⁷² Kathleen McCormack. "Bessie Parkes's Summer Sketches: George Eliot as Poetic Persona." *Victorian Poetry* 42. 3 (Fall 2004): 295-311, p. 295.

I do not mean to suggest that Parkes chose the grave as a deliberate metaphor for the project of imagining a feminist collectivity, but that the poem reflects a tension between the integrity of the individual and the possibility of collective identification.⁷³ A sketch, “Ye newe generation” (c. 1854), is another example of the way in which the group’s members used art to explore the relationship between the one and the many. The sketch (see below) is attributed to Barbara Bodichon, and is included in the collection of her personal papers at Girton College.⁷⁴



Figure 1: [Barbara Bodichon?]. “Ye newe generation” (c. 1854).

However, the sketch is both unsigned and undated, and Deborah Cherry notes that it was one of a “handful of drawings for private circulation,” and perhaps made by “one of her circle of family and friends.”⁷⁵ Lacking clear attribution, the sketch has the effect of playing with the expectation

⁷³ The poem also stands for the difficulties of many of the members’ position on marriage: preserving the notion of a spiritual and religious unity, while rejecting the legal concept of unity which deprived married women of their personhood.

⁷⁴ “Ye Newe Generation.” c. 1864. Self-portraits and sketches, all undated, together with related correspondence, 1912. GCPP Bodichon 8/6. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

⁷⁵ Deborah Cherry. *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 46.

of art as the unique product of an individual artist.⁷⁶ It also evades our attempts to assign individuality to the figures it depicts. There are six figures in the crude sketch: four women in the foreground, wearing the loose, practical clothing associated with feminist activists, and wielding an artist palette, paper, an umbrella (which was to become “one of the most circulated signs of the feminist campaigner, according to Cherry),⁷⁷ and what Alexandra Wettlaufer identifies as a maulstick;⁷⁸ a woman in the background, covering her face with her hand; and the unfinished figure of a bull, at whom the umbrella and art paraphernalia are being brandished. The four women in the foreground are identified by Cherry and Wettlaufer as Bodichon, Anna Mary Howitt, Eliza Fox, and Parkes.⁷⁹ Meritxell Simon-Martin, however, notes that Hirsch identifies Jane Benham in Fox’s place,⁸⁰ and therefore claims that “as neither Bodichon nor her friends are easily recognisable, the drawing could be interpreted as Bodichon having in mind a collective understanding of the new generation of professional women.”⁸¹

For Wettlaufer, the sketch represents “an image of solidarity and forward movement,” as the clothes of the women “merge together” to present an admittedly “comic” united front, four women artists against the bull’s “symbol of aggressive masculinity and stubborn stupidity” (132). Simon-Martin agrees that the sketch symbolizes a “collective understanding of the new generation of professional women,” but notes that Bodichon’s “feminist outlook” was tainted by

⁷⁶ As do the articles in the journal that are initialed, but by authors whose association with the journal is not known, so the uninitiated reader, both then and now, has no idea to whom to attribute the piece.

⁷⁷ Cherry. *Beyond the Frame*, p. 46

⁷⁸ Alexandra Wettlaufer. “The Politics and Poetics of Sisterhood: Anna Mary Howitt’s *The Sisters in Art*.” *Victorian Review* 36.1 (Spring 2010): 129-46, p. 132. Subsequent page references in text.

⁷⁹ Wettlaufer. “Politics and Poetics of Sisterhood,” p. 132. Deborah Cherry. *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*. London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 47-8.

⁸⁰ Hirsch. *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, p. 118.

⁸¹ Meritxell Simon-Martin. “More Beautiful Than Words & Pencil Can Express: Barbara Bodichon’s Artistic Career at the Interface of her Epistolary and Visual Self Projections.” *Gender & History* 24.3 (November 2012): 581-99, p. 589. Subsequent page references in text.

a “problematic bourgeois standpoint,” excluding members of the working class and especially women of color from its liberal individualist ethic (589-90). Both critics are right to focus on the sketch’s representation of collectivity, though when read in light of the group’s other work, it become more than simply a comic representation of feminist artists taking on John Bull. Like the series of biographies published in the *English Woman’s Journal*, the attempt to depict women as representative individuals – a unique person, who also stands for the potential of all women to be so unique – functions to erase the particularities it attempts to represent. That we no longer know the historical figure for whom each of the figures is a representative makes the risks of this form particularly evident. The journal’s, and the group’s, desire to make the womanhood it represented *representative* – always to stand for someone more than herself – risked losing individuality in the desire for collective identification. The LPG’s form of imagined solidarity was not perfect, and Simon-Martin’s reminder of its exclusions is fair. But to see those exclusions as the same kind of exclusions we look for in contemporary, post-identity-politics media representations fails to grasp the power of the form. A reminder comes from the contemporary critical response to women’s art such as, by example, Anna Mary Howitt’s *Boadicea Brooding over her Wrongs* (1856). The painting, since destroyed, took Bodichon as a model, with Howitt no doubt intending to draw a parallel between Boadicea’s wrongs and those of women in the mid-nineteenth-century. The *Athenaeum* published a review in which the author asked, “What is this but an angry woman, whose wrongs we only know by the Catalogue?”⁸² In seeking resentfully to reduce Boadicea/Bodichon to merely “an angry woman,” instead of a figure representing the wrongs of a community of women, the reviewer implicitly acknowledges how powerful it was to depict women as representative individuals in the 1850s. Focusing on the exclusions of specific representation thus misses the point. The importance of the artistic representations of the LPG

⁸² Cited in Wettlaufer. “Politics and Poetics of Sisterhood,” p. 141.

was not because they represented a specific collectivity in which named groups were either included or excluded, but because they rendered artistically the form of collectivity as such.

In her chapter on the *Fortnightly Review*, Elaine Hadley describes the way in which the journal's use of signatures formalized a liberalism in which the content of one's opinion mattered less than the liberal process of mind that led to one's having an opinion in the first place. This formalism, Hadley argues, ultimately "reveals the extent to which eclecticism becomes *liberal eclecticism*" – that is, it reflects not the "diversity of society" but rather "the diversity displayed through the liberal form of thought and opinion" (172). Although theoretically anyone can form an opinion regardless of social position, this is an exclusionary formalism, which disenfranchises and effectively dehumanizes those whose commitments or resources prevent their adherence to these formal rules of liberal cognition. One of the remarkable achievements of the LPG was to challenge this exclusionary formalism: to live and work as a collective that attempted to bend the formal abstraction of liberal opinion to address the question of social diversity. The group formalized a way of addressing the exclusions of the liberal public sphere and the political form of liberal subjectivity. We can perhaps most fully appreciate the achievement of the LPG only if we consider the embodied aspect of liberal universality. The supposed abstraction of the public sphere allows the liberal individual to suspend the particularities of the self, and especially the body with its physical signs of difference, to participate in a true meeting of the minds.⁸³ Of course, critics have long pointed to the ways in which this rhetoric functions to magnify

⁸³ See John Frow: "The public is thus a space of the suspension of the self such that real differences can be treated as virtualities. It is this suspension that makes possible what I would call the *generous indifference* that is the hallmark of democratic civility" (427).

differences, even as it purports to make them most inscrutable.⁸⁴ In Hadley's account of liberal embodiment, the reason this construction perpetuates the exclusions of marginalized groups is evident. As she notes, the signature on articles in the *Fortnightly* embodied "not the actual person in his entirety or even his personality" but the abstract category of his singularity: "the signature functions as a public manifestation of liberal individuality as embodiment, extracting the *character* of the life of the mind without exposing the *man* of character" (160). Behind the putatively unmarked category of character stood the very distinctly marked man. In making their claims upon the liberal public sphere, the LPG was challenged by this abstracted embodiment: how could they lay claim to an unmarked universality, when to point out the fact of their difference was also to point out their distance from the liberal embodiment of individuality?

If the "weighted body must only be implied" because the liberal individual is constituted not by the body but by a person's capacity to "abstract himself into disinterestedness" (160-1), the women of Langham Place were in a bind. So much depended on the body, or more specifically on proving that women's bodies were no less physically capable of the challenges of work and especially of thought.⁸⁵ Take, for instance, the anecdote of Elizabeth Blackwell marching around the room with a man over her shoulders to prove women's physical capacity.⁸⁶ On the one hand, both the act and the subsequent recounting of it in the pages of the journal serve as bids for equality, as evidence that a woman's physical capacity is equal to any man's. On

⁸⁴ For just one of a vast string of examples, see James B. Salazar, "The rhetoric of character thus promoted a democratic vision of self governance and upward mobility that legitimated and secured existing social hierarchies through the very gesture of overcoming them." *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America*, New York: New York University Press, 2010, p. 19.

⁸⁵ One could look to any number of articles in the *English Woman's Journal* on the issue of schooling for girls. See, for instance, "The Society of Arts Examinations." *English Woman's Journal* 1.5 (1 July 1858): 326-332.

⁸⁶ Blackwell is an interesting figure to think about this through, given not only her gender but her subsequent blindness: how much does disability disrupt Hadley's narrative of embodiment?

the other hand, because it highlights the woman, and not merely her character — her body, and not merely the abstract imprint of it in the form of the signature — the anecdote risks reinscribing women’s alignment with what Hadley calls concrete embodiment rather than the abstractness of the liberal individual. Consequently, the LPG needed to challenge the form of abstract liberal embodiment, to break the string of associations that composed abstract liberal subjectivity: the implication of a handshake in the signature, “that the handshake is ‘evoked’ by the hand,” and that the hand “‘stands in for’ the private individual” (Hadley 160). That is precisely the function the group’s art performed. Through pieces like “Ye Newe Generation,” the group troubled the easy flow of liberal association. The signs of individuality in the significantly unsigned sketch – the artist’s palette or writer’s notebook – have an excess of meaning beyond standing in for the particular private individuals the figures represent. They stand in also for all the other private individuals that could be represented, and ultimately even for the principle of abstraction itself: that women can be represented in this metonymic fashion. The sketch effects what the form of the LPG also does: its artistic practice makes liberal individuality a collective prospect without thoroughly undermining the entire sense of liberal individualism, and it does so by crafting gender as a form of difference that was simultaneously politically salient and politically irrelevant.

Democratic letters

The members of the LPG disagreed with each other. The facile nature of this statement belies the potential magnitude of these disagreements. The debate over whether to include married women in the push for the vote, for instance, had at stake no less than the political voice, indeed identity, of many of the group’s members. What Hadley refers to as a “dutiful respect for differing opinions” (172) might understandably falter in such circumstances. However, the

group's letters reveal that, although there were clashes that led to irrevocable fractures, for the most part conflicting opinions were respected. The women who detailed those conflicts were often the very members supporting the dissenting member; and those conflicts were allowed to exist without needing to be reconciled in some higher liberal version of truth. The democratic form evident in the group's letters is important not because it necessarily does what it promises, but because it gives form to a way of embodying the liberal individual whose relationship to the public sphere need not involve a disinterestedness that requires us to divest ourselves of our particularities. The letters show how the group developed a politics of friendship, which modelled a way of relating to otherness by investing of one's particularities while simultaneously occupying them most intensely.

The challenge was to extend this model beyond the circle of friends, especially given the high stakes of disagreement. The issues that the LPG debated had material and practical consequences for the lives of its members, and for women in general: the franchise, the extent to which it was right or expedient to include married women in the push for the vote and work, and educational and employment opportunities open to women. The group never achieved consensus on these issues.⁸⁷ Discord encompassed major disagreements about policy as well as personal disagreements, and though the latter were as crucial to the group's significance as the former, little has been written about them. Like the reviewer who refused to see Anna Mary Howitt's *Boadicea* as anything other than the representation of a lone angry woman, most critics have seen the disagreements of the LPG as merely squabbles among women: less a significant aspect of their politics than petty and destructive infighting. This was a risk of which the group itself was well aware. In a letter about working to establish a women's college, Fanny Metcalfe wrote

⁸⁷ The role of married women, for instance, was never agreed upon: Parkes could never advocate for the explicit inclusion of wives in the category of the worker, whereas Boucherett and Faithfull did. See Rendall. "Langham Place group (*act.* 1857–1866)."

to Barbara Bodichon of her fears that “the whole thing threatens to merge into what the scoffers of the other sex will call a woman’s squabble.”⁸⁸ Parkes, too, felt that the success of the journal was necessary to prevent the group being “talked of” in London, “America & Paris,” as “one more failure in women’s attempts at working together.”⁸⁹ Relatively little has been written about the tensions and disagreements of the group, in part because of the tendency to view them, as Metcalfe worried that they would be viewed, as feminine “bickering.”⁹⁰ Given the importance granted to the LPG in the historiography of the emergence of an organized feminist movement in Britain, the reluctance to engage with the potentially unproductive and disintegrating effects of such personal and political disagreements is understandable; even (or perhaps especially) feminist scholars of the group tend to see the failure of solidarity in such disagreement.

The disagreements are nevertheless important in understanding the group’s operations and significance, particularly if we consider, as I am proposing, that the group primarily functioned as a structure to hold together dissenting voices, disparate politics, and conflicting visions. The letters that passed between the group operated, like the physical space at Langham Place, as what Birch and Llewellyn call “a holding ground for dialectical positions” – of personal difference, political differences, and different priorities and strategies (4). The space of the letters worked to balance what Regenia Gagnier argues “constituted the anxiety of liberalism after a

⁸⁸ “Letter from Fanny Metcalfe to Barbara Bodichon.” 28 March 1875. GCPP Bodichon 3/22. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

⁸⁹ Parkes’ view presented by Davies. “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 3 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/5. Girton College Archive, Cambridge. Davies disagreed: “In everything Bessie says, I am struck with her amazing ignorance of what other people think & feel about things in general. If she had been brought up among either Church people or orthodox dissenters, who between them, constitute the great mass of English society, she would know there is nothing at all new in women’s working together. ... The new and difficult thing is, for men & women to work together on equal terms, & the existence of the EWJ is no testimony with regard to that.”

⁹⁰ Herstein attributes the group’s dissolution to “Bickering among the Langham Place feminists” as well as financial difficulties (25).

century of its development”: the “tension of independence versus interdependence, specifically of individual development threatening the functioning of the whole.”⁹¹ If, as Jacques Ranciere writes, politics is “the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious,” we can perhaps understand the group’s disagreements not as mere squabbles but as the working out of a politics.⁹² It recalls, too, Mill’s insistence on the importance of conflict and discussion in the formation of collective decisions. As Bruce Baum points out, talking is crucial for Mill in order to foster “deliberation regarding ‘every interest and shade of opinion’ so that collective decisions will involve all parts of the political community.”⁹³ In crafting the group as a space where disagreement and conflict, rather than merely a uniform voice, shaped the group’s activism, the LPG enabled a form of democratic association in which all voices have equal power and collectively contribute to make up the whole. Derrida reminds us that there “is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the ‘community of friends’, without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal.”⁹⁴ Such a politics of friendship was central to the LPG’s attempt to forge a community based not on liberal forms of abstraction and disinterest but on the affective ties of friendship and also difference; the challenge was to attempt to extend this form of association on a mass scale.

⁹¹ Regenia Gagnier. *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859–1920*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 3.

⁹² Jacques Rancière. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 14. See also: “Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part” (11).

⁹³ Bruce Baum. “Freedom, Power and Public Opinion: J.S. Mill on the Public Sphere.” *History of Political Thought* 22.3 (2001): 501-24, p. 508.

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida. *The Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins. London: Verso, 2006, p. 22. See also Leela Gandhi. *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, and Raymond Williams. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London: Verso, 2007.

In her account of meeting the Leigh Smith sisters, Emily Davies describes the revelation that came from feeling connected to others who shared her discontent with the place of women in society:

After making acquaintance in Algiers with Annie Leigh Smith (Madame Bodichon's sister)—the first person I had ever met who sympathized with my feeling of resentment at the subjection of women—I corresponded with her and she introduced me to others of the same circle and kept me up to what was going on. In 1858 the first organized movement on behalf of women was set on foot.⁹⁵

These common sympathies drove much of the work of the group, rather than a definite program or concrete set of goals. What many historians describe as the instrumental or pragmatic approach of the burgeoning women's movement might thus better be described as a growing sense of cohesion: the bringing together of a movement based on shared feelings.⁹⁶

The importance of shared *feelings* is the space they allow for disparate *opinions*. We can see this in the way the group wrote about each other. In January of 1863, for instance, Emily Davies wrote to Barbara Bodichon of Bessie Parkes' "amazing ignorance of what other people think & feel about things in general," and yet reports in the same letter that in the management of

⁹⁵ The editors of Davies' *Collected Letters* note that this is cited by Barbara Stephen in *Emily Davies and Girton College* (1927) p. 29 but is missing from the manuscript. Ann B. Murphy and Deirdre Rafter, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p. xxvi.

⁹⁶ On the pragmatic nature of the group, see Caine's description of the "instrumental and pragmatic approach" of the women's movement ("Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth-Century Women's Movement." *Women's Studies International Forum*. 5.6 (1982): 537-550, p. 540); Jordan and Bridger's description of Jessie Boucherett's position on labour laws as "pragmatic rather than doctrinaire" (403); Andrea L. Broomfield on Harriet Taylor's strategic "tiptoeing" around the question in "Walking a Narrow Line: Helen Taylor's Literary Contribution to the British Women's Rights Movement." *Women's Studies*. 26 (1997): 259-83, p. 266; Jane Rendall on the suffragists's decision to focus on the claims of propertied and self-dependent women as "quite simply a strategic and expedient one" ("Citizenship, Culture and Civilisation: The Languages of British Suffragists, 1866-1874." *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*. Edited by Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan. New York: New York University Press, 1994: 127-50, p. 134).

the journal, “Bessie is quite willing for me to take any line of thought I like, so long as Miss Cobbe, whom she considers most dangerous, is well looked after!”⁹⁷ It might seem that this letter is evidence of the group’s tendency to suppress, rather than embrace, dissenting opinions, and other letters do give a similar impression. Discussing Emily Faithfull, Davies writes: “I could get on with Miss Faithfull. Her views, so far as she has any, are the same as mine, I don’t think there is any fear now, of her working out badly.”⁹⁸ Despite these avowed preferences for those with similar opinions, in practice it seems that the group tended to accommodate more than it suppressed divergent opinions. Affection overcomes disagreement when Parkes writes that “I like Miss Cobbe *exceedingly*, but I don’t agree with her as she very well knows”; moreover, according to Sally Mitchell, Parkes was the editor who booked Cobbe to write for the journal despite their disagreements, which were mostly about religion and therefore not insignificant, especially given that for Parkes the integrity of religious belief was the sure ground that made individual opinion possible.⁹⁹ Davies was herself a famously “formidable” and obstinate woman, yet the letters show that she could dissent, and still advise following the path of her opponent (Forster 159-60). As she wrote: “I have quite come to the conclusion that Bessie’s ideas and mine are different, tho’ not antagonistic, & that they cannot be worked together. . . . Bessie offers all sorts of concessions, which however, I feel unwilling to accept. I don’t think the Journal can be

⁹⁷ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 14 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/10. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

⁹⁸ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 3 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/5. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

⁹⁹ Parkes cited in Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p. 120; Mitchell pp. 120-1. On religious disagreements, see “The Use of a Special Periodical,” p. 258: “The ground which each individual, and each writer or reader will feel to be *sure*, will be precisely that involved in his or her religious creed.”

vigorously worked on a system of mutual concessions, and as *my* idea would know no chance, except under a variety of unattainable conditions, I believe it is best to adopt Bessie's."¹⁰⁰

Different though not antagonistic is a fairly good description of the way in which the group organized itself around dissenting opinions. There were, however, limits to how far this kind of balancing could go, for instance in the group's ability to accommodate Max Hays, whose romantic relationships with other women caused problems given the group's desire to change minds on a mass scale, and therefore their need to distance themselves from what would compromise their respectability. Davies wrote of the "revulsion" of some of the other women, noting that Hays' connection with the journal "did a great deal of harm," and in December of 1862 reported that Hays "has entirely left, & taken away all her things."¹⁰¹ Parkes, who was fond of Hays, nonetheless noted the improvement after her departure, writing to Bodichon that with Hays' resignation, "All well at Langham place."¹⁰² Davies subsequently noted the need to set and maintain the boundaries within which productive disagreement could take place, and when she took up the editorship of *Victoria Magazine*, wrote about the agreement she and Emily Faithfull put together: "I have no notion of friendly vagueness in matters of business, & I believe a great deal of the trouble at L. P. has been caused by the want of distinct, definite arrangements."¹⁰³

The expulsion of Hays reveals the limits of the expansiveness of which the group was capable, which I will explore further below. Nonetheless, the records of the group show their

¹⁰⁰ "Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon." 26 February 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/12. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

¹⁰¹ "Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon." 3 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/5. Girton College Archive, Cambridge; "Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon." 3 December 1862. GCPP Bodichon 2/2. Girton College Archive, Cambridge; "Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon." 28 December 1862. GCPP Bodichon 2/3. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

¹⁰² "Letter from Bessie Parkes to Barbara Bodichon." 18 December 1862. GCPP Parkes 5C/116. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

¹⁰³ "Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon." 12 March 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/13. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

commitment to seeking a form that was simultaneously broad enough to accommodate disagreement and specific enough to reflect a position; one not necessarily characterized by the vagueness against which Davies protested, but certainly by the friendliness. Besides Hays, the varied personal commitments that might have obstructed the cohesiveness of a more formal organization, such as Bessie Parkes' Catholicism, were not the forces of disintegration that they could have been, due to the associational ties of friendship on which the group was based.¹⁰⁴ In fact, it was religion around which many discussions and negotiations of the group's platform centered: not merely because the group attracted women of different backgrounds, but also because of the extent to which religion is linked to ideas about freedom, the tyranny of the majority, and the formation of opinion. For Parkes, religion was more or less synonymous with individuality itself, or at least to the authenticity of the individual; as she wrote, it was the one subject which "each individual... will feel to be *sure*."¹⁰⁵ Yet, through a non-denominational but clearly religious perspective, religion was also the means through which the group sought to overcome the divisions among its readers and bring them together in one coherent group.

Religion is at once pure difference, indicative of the deeply personal and subjective, and a necessary mechanism preventing difference fracturing into complete isolation. Too much of any religion was potentially divisive, but a lack of religious commitment could similarly hamper the group's attempts to build a readership and to function democratically, bearing out Adam Phillips'

¹⁰⁴ On Bodichon's fear of losing Parkes to Catholicism, see Ruth Brandon. *Governess: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres*. New York: Walker, 2008, p. 250. On the liberal fear of Catholicism in particular, compromising its position of religious toleration, see Alan Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ "Use of a Special Periodical," p. 258

point that “too much consensus, just like too little, is the enemy of democracy.”¹⁰⁶ As Davies wrote:

Lizzie Garrett finds the tone of the Journal ‘atheistic.’ I think this is too strong an emphasis, but at the same time the careful elimination of all distinctive religion must I think lower the tone, & destroy the heartiness of even the best writers. At the same time I don’t see how a Company, composed of persons of very different opinions, can leave its Editors & other contributors free.¹⁰⁷

Frances Power Cobbe, Davies reports, maintained “that to be interesting we must leave off balancing between parties & take up one decided line of religious thought. That as a matter of policy, the most effective line at this time would be what she calls Broad Church. That to get good writing, we must pay high.”¹⁰⁸ Taking a broad church position reflects the desire to be broadly marketable, but the insistence on good writing was of course a question of class, a desire to separate the *English Woman’s Journal* from the cheaper periodicals designed for mass publication.¹⁰⁹ It is no coincidence that in both Cobbe’s and Garrett’s arguments the question of a religious policy is entangled with the quality of writing; underlying both these issues were questions of scale and balance. The group’s concern about the quality of the writing reflects both a desire to craft the journal as a mass publication, and a very liberal reluctance to be associated

¹⁰⁶ Adam Phillips. *Equals*. New York: Basic Books, 2002, p. 6. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁰⁷ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 3 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/5. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

¹⁰⁸ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 14 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/10. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

¹⁰⁹ See Davies’ distaste for the periodical *Queen*, “which takes our views of things, in a vulgarized form.” “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/9. Girton College Archive, Cambridge. In its ambivalent relation to mass publication, the journal is positioned in the middle of what Habermas characterizes as the shift to the commercialized press, according to which the press shifted from “an institution of private people insofar as they constituted a public” to “an institution of certain participants in the public sphere in their capacity of private individuals,” that is as “the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere” (185).

with the mass. The penny press was characterized by its depoliticized and entertaining nature as much as it was characterized by accessibility – and those were qualities with which the LPG’s journal could not, by definition, afford to be associated.¹¹⁰ The group’s discomfort with too much religious difference is not, or not only, what some critics term the failure of liberal toleration as theoretically boundless, but practically limited.¹¹¹ Rather, religion was an obvious testing ground on which to work out the extent to which difference could be accommodated, and how much individuality could be embraced while still maintaining a group identity and collective consciousness. Without religious guidelines, the group would disintegrate into potentially free but entirely atomized individuals; too firm a group position, and the space religion makes for individual conviction, interiority, and authenticity would be entirely eroded.

The group’s discussion about both these issues, the journal’s quality and the journal’s religious platform, suggests that the form of the journal, as an aspiring mass publication that could still function as an organ of critical debate, was at least as important as the individual pieces it published. The question was how best to frame the different and conflicting views it represented: how could the journal achieve a form that could bring so many different people together while not just preserving but creating space for women’s differences and individuality? The group’s ability to weave together the thoughts of people “of very different opinions”

¹¹⁰ See Habermas: “The mass press was based on the commercialization of the participation in the public sphere on the part of broad strata designed predominantly to give the masses in general access to the public sphere.” The penny press “paid for the maximization of its sales with the depoliticization of its content” (169). Habermas’s ambivalence about the popular press is quite clear, and in implying the congruence between something that is common and inferiority, echoes many of the assumptions underpinning the Langham Place group’s thoughts I discuss here: “Under the common denominator of so-called human interest emerges the *mixtum compositum* of a pleasant and at the same time convenient subject for entertainment that, instead of doing justice to reality, has a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in stimulating relation than to a public use of reason” (170).

¹¹¹ Alan Kahan. *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003, pp. 3-4. Subsequent page references in text.

depended on a politics of friendship based on intimate, personal relationships such that Parkes was able to disagree with Cobb, yet still like her exceedingly. To preserve this form while extending its reach on a mass scale in order to meet its goals, an intellectual commitment to critical debate and always, obviously, social change, was a task which gave rise to a fundamental question: if it was friendship that gave form to a collective that could accommodate difference, how would that model sustain itself on the wider scale of a community of women or, more broadly, the liberal public sphere?

This question is a particular version of the liberal ambivalence about difference, the problem of perceiving as equal an expanded sense of the body politic. If a democratic way of thinking is, as Adam Phillips implies by way of Winnicott, entering “imaginatively and accurately” into another’s “thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears” (30), then the journal itself provides a hint of how this might be possible beyond the intimate sphere of friendship in “Chance Encounters,” an article published in November of 1860.¹¹² The article’s author, A., records the glimpses of human life she perceives when bored and looking around her. In particular, she reads the faces of women as a record of the misery shaping their lives; the misery she sees on one woman’s face becomes an accretion of the misery of all women, and in that capacity the particulars of each woman’s misery become legible. The author vacillates between what she imagines is true of the women she encounters (one “must be” the wife of a shopkeeper), and what she knows is true (the shopkeeper’s wife has no ownership over her own labor or money). What we get in the article is not quite the democratic psychoanalytic mode of Winnicott and Phillips, as there is no way of knowing how accurate the author’s assumptions are. Yet the article is also not what it initially seems to be: namely, the unwarranted imposition of a history or

¹¹² “Chance Encounters.” *English Woman’s Journal* 6.33 (1 November 1860): 179-85. Subsequent page references in text.

a tragedy on the lives of others in a very liberal form of colonizing directed particularly at the poor who, the author maintains, live their emotions openly, unlike the “educated classes” who “conceal their feelings better” (182). The author acknowledges the limitations of her imagining, granting that she “may sometimes have guessed wrongly, and given more sympathy perhaps than was needed” (185). This is a tolerable risk in the creation of a world in which the important thing is to try to rend the “thick conventional cloud” which conceals emotions and isolates sufferers, making the suffering shopkeeper’s wife a lone picture of misery rather than a link in a great chain of suffering women.

Sympathy in this account is of limited use, as liberal sympathy so often is, but not because it fosters, as D. Rae Greiner writes, an “approximate and virtual” rather than “identificatory and fusional” form of thinking with the other.¹¹³ This is a closer form of sympathy, which recognizes the limits of its fusional aspirations, but nonetheless tries to catch the “pathetic glimpses of inner life, hear many an unspoken world, and give to many unconscious hearts a thought of loving sympathy and compassion” (185), in order to build a world in which miseries are common and not isolating, and the intimacies that enabled the coming together of the LPG could be imagined to extend to strangers. A more obviously political way of putting this is through the language of representation. In 1863, Davies wrote to Bodichon that “it would be a great presumption for a few women, up in London, to pretend to represent anybody but themselves. Let us adopt some distinct, unwavering line of policy, & then, if a good many people *feel* themselves represented by us, why so much the better.”¹¹⁴ Like the author of “Chance Encounters,” Davies here recognizes the limitations of the group in her claim that they

¹¹³ D. Rae Greiner. “Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel.” *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (Spring 2011): 417-26, p. 424.

¹¹⁴ “Letter from Emily Davies to Barbara Bodichon.” 14 January 1863. GCPP Bodichon 2/10. Girton College Archive, Cambridge.

could not speak for those beyond the circle of the “few women.” Yet this way of thinking about representation is intriguing: by occupying a position, other people who do not occupy that position could nonetheless somehow feel represented by it. By this account, the special interests of the journal could become general interests only by remaining firmly special interest. As Davies writes in the same letter, it would do no good to abandon the journal to try to publish more broadly in the mainstream papers: “I think there are some things we want to say, that we could not get said in Magazines over which we have no control, & that if we really knew what we were about & people knew where they had us, so to speak, we might experience some influence over public opinion.” By taking a particular line of thought, the group can hope that the feelings of others will match; without speaking for all, the group can effect change on “public opinion” and, by implication, the composition of the public itself through these feelings of being represented. What Davies is expressing here is a desire for a collective movement of women that is not premised on sameness, hence preserves the differences of those women who are not the few women up in London.

This kind of collective identity, which preserves difference and the nuances of individual interest but does not atomize its constituent parts, achieved formal realization in the letters the group wrote to each other. We can understand the letters themselves as a democratic form, as they are composed of different voices and viewpoints without necessarily requiring that any one voice emerges as the sole decision-maker or winner, even in letters that are arguing for a certain course that the journal or the group should take. What the letters also do is strategize about the role of the individual voice; a particularly apt example of this is evident in a series of letters

exchanged about the issue of including married women in the vote.¹¹⁵ In this series of letters, members of the group position themselves in relation to Mill, as a proponent of female suffrage and the person who would deliver petitions organized by the group to Parliament; these letters reflect a shift in terms of the group's assessment of Mill's value and ultimately reveal a changing sense about the potential of the manly liberal individual.

The letters were part of a series exchanged by the group on the fraught question of whether married women would be included in the bid for the vote. As the prospect of female citizenship challenged the legal justification of married couples as a single unit, it was not hard to see why there were concerns that this could also extend to the spiritual and religious conception of marriage. Given the liberal ambivalence about the language of rights,¹¹⁶ the decision about how to frame the push for the vote was a difficult one: should it be made in the name of universal human rights, which would align the cause of female suffrage with working-class reform measures, or was it to endorse implicitly the logic that equated citizenship rights with property rights?¹¹⁷ As the 1860s progressed, the group's work on suffrage was conducted with an eye to the risks and benefits of aligning with Helen Taylor, whose firm position on including married women in all bids for the vote has been well documented.¹¹⁸ For instance, in August of 1866, Emily Davies wrote to Barbara Bodichon about the possibility of establishing a formal committee to agitate for the vote. Davies is quite clear both about the necessity for such a

¹¹⁵ Andrew Rosen. "Emily Davies and the Women's Movement, 1862-1867." *Journal of British Studies*. 19.1 (Autumn 1979): 101-121, p. 112. His account focuses on reclaiming Davies' legacy in the suffrage movement, and thus he makes some remarkable comments about Taylor; for instance, that she was "too uncompromising and too eccentric" to be "merely an additional member" of a suffrage committee headed by Davies (115), though the letter he cites, in which Taylor declines to subscribe to the committee given its exclusion of married women was a major philosophical sticking point, is in fact quite generous and diplomatic in tone.

¹¹⁶ See Kahan. *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁷ See Jane Rendall. "John Stuart Mill, Liberal Politics, and the Movements for Women's Suffrage" and Griffin. "Class, Gender and Liberalism in Parliament."

¹¹⁸ See, for instance, Broomfield. "Walking a Narrow Line."

committee, and the need for careful, strategic thought about how it should be composed. She reports having seen Mrs Taylor – Clementia Doughty Taylor, who, together with her husband, Peter Alfred Taylor, supported many radical causes – who volunteered as Treasurer for the new committee. Though Davies remarks that “Personally, I feel sure that Mrs. Taylor will be good to work with,” and that she would “always ‘take’ the reasonable side,” she is nonetheless aware of the risks of Taylor’s involvement: “I told her frankly the one objection to her (the Reform League &c.) & she said she would of course leave it to us.”¹¹⁹ The letter is but one example of the way in which members of the LPG thought carefully about how they aligned themselves, and the consequences that formalizing certain relationships would have on the strapped finances of the group’s activities, and the public image of the immediate issue of votes for women, as well as the broader cause of women’s rights.

The group’s letters reveal a strong focus on the expediency of formalizing relationships, especially given the parliamentary support Mill could offer, as well as a consciousness of the impact those relationships would have on the public perception of the group’s activities. The August letter from Davies to Bodichon brings up two issues: connection with reform, as we see in her reported conversation with Clementia Taylor; and the issue of how to deal with married women and the vote. The connection with Helen Taylor was particularly fraught, as, unlike Clementia whose name “need not be prominent,” Helen’s name along with that of her stepfather’s would inevitably and publicly be associated with the work of the committee. The political disagreement between Davies and Taylor was seemingly a pragmatic one, over the strategy that would most likely result in extending the franchise – to push immediately for total inclusion, or to begin with a limited claim that could be challenged through attacking the status

¹¹⁹ Letter to Barbara Bodichon. August 10, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 190.

of married women's property rights. Yet the disagreement between Helen Taylor and Davies went beyond merely the strategic. It was also the negotiation of a position that dictated the ideological basis of the push for votes for women. The question of whether married women would be explicitly included in the bid for the vote (and to what extent) was the question that revealed on what grounds the claim for female citizenship could be made: whether it was made in the name of universal human rights, or whether it was to endorse implicitly the logic that equated citizenship rights with property rights. In the discussion around the petition presented to Parliament, Davies' position was "to leave it open"; to "limit," as she wrote in a letter to Helen Taylor, "our demand definitely to unmarried women & widows," as so doing would "strengthen our position so very much with most people, that one feels tempted to adopt it, if it could be done honestly & without embarrassing future action."¹²⁰ If we take seriously Davies' seemingly incongruent position that to limit a claim could be synonymous with leaving it open, her position begins to look less like the accommodationist politics it is frequently read as, and more like a particular way of formalizing interest and inclusion. Davies saw Taylor's staunch insistence on principle as not only uncompromising but risky: "She does not seem to understand the case as to limiting our claim. If there is a loophole for wives, as to which the law is not indefinite, (& that seems to be agreed.) the only way to keep them out of the discussion is to limit our claim, without expressing any opinion as to the rights of other Claimants."¹²¹ If no difference was to be recognized between married and unmarried women in the push for the vote, the legal status of wives would undermine *all* women's claim to the vote. Davies' argument was to lead with the pragmatic position, and then follow with the principle — once unmarried women had the vote,

¹²⁰ "Letter to Helen Taylor." July 18, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 183.

¹²¹ "Letter to Barbara Bodichon." August 10, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 190.

the argument to exclude married women would have less force. The petition that Mill had presented to Parliament in June excluded any overt reference to married women, instead making a claim to extend the franchise “without distinction of sex” to women whose possession of property would have entitled them to vote if they were men.¹²²

While Taylor’s concern was principle, Davies was focused on what later theorists would call building a public, and a mass one at that. Her aim was to cover, as she wrote, “a wide field & bring the matter before everybody who may possibly be interested.”¹²³ As Michael Warner notes, a public is constituted through address to both onlookers and interlocutors: “The known element in the addressee enables a scene of practical possibility; the unknown, a hope of transformation. Writing to a public helps to make a world insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it.”¹²⁴ Davies was quite aware that the LPG was not merely collecting signatures of existing supporters, but attempting to shape the public which it addressed.¹²⁵ It was, as she recorded, an expensive endeavor that would “necessarily involve a great waste of printing & postage. If we knew beforehand what sort of people would be likely to respond, we might confine our appeals to them, but we have not the materials even for a

¹²² The petition was presented to Parliament by Mill in June, and excluded any overt mention of married women, instead claiming rights on the basis of sameness. The wording of the petition ultimately read: “For extension of the electoral franchise to all householders, without distinction of sex, who possess such property or rental qualification as may be appointed for male voters.” from Barbara L.S. Bodichon and others. (No. 8501, 1521 signatures, printed in App. 747, p. 305; *The Times*, 8 June, p. 5.) John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXIX - Public and Parliamentary Speeches Part II July 1869 - March 1873*. Edited by John M. Robson and Bruce L. Kinzer. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 575.

¹²³ Andrea L. Broomfield asserts that this was less an ideological difference than a matter of Taylor’s idiosyncrasy and self-importance (“Walking a Narrow Line”).

¹²⁴ Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002, p. 91. Subsequent page references in text.

¹²⁵ See Warner: “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world through address” (114).

guess.”¹²⁶ The likelihood of achieving any success in a bid for the franchise was dependent on the kind of support that could be garnered within Parliament, and consequently also on the support of members of the press who might influence Members of the House of Commons.¹²⁷ The debate about how best to achieve any gains rested on competing ways of rethinking the liberal process of abstracting from one’s particular interest in order to include women in the conception of liberal citizenship. This also involved a negotiation of the conception of collectivity, and how best to think about a collective understanding in relation to the representative voice of the individual. The moments in the letters track the decreasing importance of the representative voice of individual men, and the increasing importance of the democratic and collective form of the women’s letters. These letters show the development of a different way of representing liberal individuality than the one-to-one chain of equivalence of liberal signification of a vote or a signature or an opinion standing for one man.

The first moment I want to examine is a letter of December 28, 1862, written by Davies to Bodichon.¹²⁸ Davies begins the letter by updating Bodichon on the news from Langham Place, then turns her attention to the journal itself, presenting a range of opinions about the role and future of the journal. Davies transcribes the opinions of various members of the group on the utility of the journal as a means of affecting public opinion of what Ellen Drewry calls “our especial social question.” The form of this letter, in bringing together so many voices, represents the form of the group itself, as a collection of individual voices, which, though they express

¹²⁶ “Letter to Helen Taylor.” August 4, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 186.

¹²⁷ In a later letter, written just two days before the petition was presented in the House of Commons, Davies writes about the usefulness of having a list of Members of the House, as well as newspaper writers, “as we can mark the names that are most likely to influence them.” “Letter to Helen Taylor.” June 5, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 173.

¹²⁸ “Letter to Barbara Bodichon.” December 28, 1862. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, pp. 11-18. Subsequent page references in text.

some points of dissent about the role of the journal in the formation of a feminist public, nonetheless come together to make up a coherent whole. Drewry's passage makes specific reference of Mill's support, as she notes: "Even when a great minded man like Mill takes up the subject, it is not so much the masterly treatment that is useful, as the moral support that the question gains from such a name" (16). There is a tension here between Drewry's point, that it is Mill's name rather than the content of his contributions, that can draw people, and the democratic form of the letter, which gives space to many voices and absorbs their conflicting views.

Davies' letter, in reporting to Bodichon a variety of different views about the future of the *English Woman's Journal*, shows that the group was highly conscious of the need to "spread our ideas" and change opinions, as Davies wrote, and to "work on the public mind," and cultivate its public (17). In pointing to the use that could be made of Mill's name, Drewry argues that the ideas of Langham Place would best be propagated by mainstream media – "the best daily papers" – rather than through the limited capacities of a special-purpose periodical. She writes: "Vexatious as it seems that an enterprise which has dragged on a tedious & insipid existence for so long, should die as it were on the very eve of a promised improvement, I can conscientiously see no sufficient basis for a Journal." Davies, writing that it "would be very difficult to point out any definite conversion effected by the instrumentality of the Journal alone," imagined that the journal would primarily reach those already convinced of its necessity (16). However, other opinions offered in the same letter expressed a sense that the existence of the journal, by the mere fact of its repeating its claims, could do real social and political work. This is the view presented by Lizzie Garrett, for instance:

I feel extremely incapable of judging how far such an organ will really advance the principles we contend for, however good it may be, but I should think the experience of past reforms & how they have been gradually won by drumming facts & arguments (which must have seemed superfluous enough to the drummers) upon the public ear, may be taken as tolerably conclusive that a well-worked organ does promote the advance of

reforms in time... I should fancy most of the people actively interested in the principle, are taking it in now, as I was, not so much for its own sake, as for the principle. If it gets decidedly better, every one will rejoice, & will at least lend it about & recommend it more heartily, so that perhaps in this way new people will be brought in thro' it. But as long as it is decidedly special in character, I fancy we must not look for a very large circulation (13-14).

In pointing to those who buy the journal for its “principle” rather than its own sake, Garrett identifies the public of the journal as a group defined by its political motivations. Suggesting that the public would expand to encompass a “new,” general audience if it were “better,” Garrett joined her voice to the many members of Langham Place (and friends of the group, including George Eliot) who advocated for the publication of good serial literature to transcend the narrow interest of the journal: “A good tale would take off its ‘special’ character, so perhaps it would be as well to compromise on this ground, by giving a novel to attract the public,” she wrote (14).

The question of the journal’s aesthetic practices, tied as it was to its orientation to a special or general interest, was intimately bound up in the question of its political alignment. In the same letter, Davies presents the views of Miss Gimingham, who maintained that a “respectable circulation” for something “of real & vital importance” ought to be possible, given that “the trash now published under petticoat patronage (real or supposed) finds a market... Social questions command attention.” The journal could reach a wide audience, and appeal even to “old-fashioned folks,” if they could “identify it with some steady-going moderate party ... a nucleus once formed, a thousand different channels would open & extend the circulation. But it must have a business & not a charity foundation. By this I mean, people must subscribe for it to please themselves, not for friendship; & the trade must be got to promote its circulation” (16). If in this letter Mill represents a single, authoritative voice with the power to command the attention of the public, in contrast to the many voices of Langham Place whose interests were too

narrow and closely-aligned with the issue to hail a public, there is a slight shift in the second letter I want to examine in which Mill's name is evoked.

Writing to Anna Richardson in July of 1865, Davies comments on Mill's political campaign: "Some people, including Mrs. Lewes, don't care about his getting into Parliament, thinking that he will gain no more influence by it, but I cannot help wishing to have all the best men in the governing body, even tho' there seems to be not much for them to do at present."¹²⁹ Like Drewry in the earlier letter, Davies here suggests that the transmission of influence depends not on the specificity of what he says or the political platform in which he says it, but on his exemplarity. Intriguingly, however, Mill's greatness is only a representative example of a collective form of greatness; he is but one example of "all" the best men who should hold office. Mill, in this example, stands for a form of collectivity that, as I will argue, is extremely important to the LPG, which still grants individuality to each (exceptional individual) voice composing it. Interestingly, Davies' use of Eliot functions here in much the same way. "Mrs. Lewes" represents her own opinion that, as Eliot herself wrote in a letter to Clementia Doughty Taylor, "I am not anxious that he [Mill] should be in Parliament: thinkers can do more outside than inside the House."¹³⁰ She also, in Davies' letter, stands for the other people whose opinions hers represents: the group of "some people" that includes her.

The final moment I want to highlight is from the letter Davies wrote to Bodichon in August of 1866. "I hope the mischief of the riots is dying away. I fancy the Reform League has had a lesson," she writes of the recent Hyde Park riots, arguing that "it clearly will not do to identify ourselves too closely with Mill. The Guardian (Liberal Church) remarks that the weight

¹²⁹ "Letter to Anna Richardson." July 5, 1865. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 157.

¹³⁰ George Eliot's 1865 letter to Mrs. Peter A. Taylor, *Letters IV* 196 cited in Avrom Fleischman. *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 142.

of his support has much diminished since he has shown that he can be as often & as vehemently wrong as other people.” Mill’s involvement with the Reform League was controversial, in particular his association with what many perceived to be the violent excesses of a mass gathering and a symbol of the “threatening power of the working men’s movement.”¹³¹ This marks a distinct shift in perception, both the public perception of Mill and the LPG’s perception of Mill’s utility. His support for female suffrage has become something of a liability, not only because of the taint of mass uprising his support of the Reform League carried, but also because his support risked being construed as a personal pet project rather than a collective movement. As Davies wrote in another letter about ten days later, on August 21, 1866: “In anything that we do now, I shall be inclined to omit Mr. Mill’s name. The newspapers have got into a way of treating the question as an individual crotchet of Mr. Mill’s. That secures to us all the support that his name can bring. What we must show is that it is not a personal crotchet of anybody’s... we get mixed up in the public mind with Jamaica & the Reform League, which does us no good.”¹³² Mill’s association with the Reform League began to represent to the LPG the unattractive extremes of both the single voice and the crowd: the extreme individualism that

¹³¹ See Hall, McClelland, and Rendall. *Defining the Victorian Nation*, p. 4.

¹³² “Letter to Barbara Bodichon.” August 21, 1866. Murphy and Raftery, editors. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, p. 195. Interestingly, in his autobiography, Mill framed his involvement in the Reform League as entirely a matter of personal crotchet, as his version of events installs him in the role of the lone savior of civilization: “I have entered thus particularly into this matter because my conduct on this occasion gave great displeasure to the Tory and Tory-Liberal press, who have charged me ever since with having shown myself, in the trials of public life, intemperate and passionate. I do not know what they expected from me; but they had reason to be thankful to me if they knew from what I had, in all probability preserved them. And I do not believe it could have been done, at that particular juncture, by any one else. No other person, I believe, had at that moment the necessary influence for restraining the working classes, except Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright, neither of whom was available: Mr. Gladstone, for obvious reasons; Mr. Bright because he was out of town.” John Stuart Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume I - Autobiography and Literary Essays*. Edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 278-279.

comes from exalting one voice or personality above all others, and the equally extreme form of violent mass movement that drowns out the representative individual voices. Moreover, Mill's involvement with the Reform League and the Jamaica Affair compromised the *distinctiveness* of the cause of votes for women, threatening to engulf it in a wave of disenfranchised people.

Although these moments in the letters reflect an increasing suspicion with the form of liberal individuality associated with the authoritative voice of the best men, they also reflect an ambivalent relationship to the idea of the common, as the unhappy circumstance of being as “vehemently wrong as other people.” In a sense, the group anticipates Hannah Arendt's point that the mass society, particularly mass hysteria, can threaten a sense of commonness as much as total isolation can. When people “suddenly behave as though they were members of one family,” Arendt writes, the difference of each person can no longer be seen or appreciated. Everyone is “imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience” (58). Between the two extremes of isolated individualism and Arendt's familial model where differences are completely erased, the LPG sought to find a middle ground: a politics of friendship, which would allow for the possibility of difference and disagreement, but which could nonetheless provide a form in which those differences could be thought together.

Incorporated form of the LPG

I have already referred to “The Use of a Special Periodical,” the article Bessie Parkes published in the first joint issue of the *English Woman's Journal* and *Alexandra Magazine*. The article was a stocktaking of sorts, an account of the goals of each journal and Parkes' editorial practices at the *English Woman's Journal*. It is a clear articulation of the need both to establish the “special” needs of women as a group, namely, the goals of the journals could not be trusted to the “diffusion of ideas through the general press” (258); and to establish the generality of

women, that they are “just half the race” rather than a separate “class” (262). It is also an acknowledgement of the dissension among the group: that Parkes “tried, as far as possible, to admit both sides of the controversy” (258) on the various topics it discussed, and that the people who put out the journal had views which “differed in detail, but who were united in a desire to investigate the great mass of female misery and indigence existing in England” (257). The journal is figured as an “embodiment” that draws together “a great amount of scattered energy,” incorporating these separate parts even in spite of themselves: its value is not less, she writes, “because the separate parts of the working body are sometimes convinced that they would get on as well, or even better without it” (258).

As an incorporation that “threaded the separate parts of the movements” together, the journals are both a part of the masses of women and a tool to speak to them. If, for Matthew Arnold, the business of criticism was to “know the best that is known and thought in the world,” Parkes’ vision in “Use” is more democratic, seeking “the best thoughts of the best people; if expressed with genius or with force, so much the better; but if expressed somewhat loosely and colloquially — better so than not at all” (259).¹³³ This in part reflects the target audience of *Alexandra*, “women who are actually working for their livelihood” (259), but there is also a sense that the “thinkers and the workers” (257) who are brought together by the form of the journals have things to learn from each other. Unlike Arnold’s suspicion of a mass audience satisfied by inadequate ideas, Parkes’ piece emphasizes the vital role of a broad audience in spreading ideas. The merging of the two journals was designed, Parkes wrote, to garner the energies of the LPG into a mass movement, to “secure the diffusion of practical principles over a larger class of society, and in a cheaper form” (257). The cheapness of the *Alexandra* would

¹³³ Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” was published two months after Parkes’ piece, in November 1864. Matthew Arnold. *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Edited by Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 36.

receive “an accession of thought” (258) from the contributors of the *English Woman’s Journal*, but without a mass audience there is no spread of ideas, as reiteration is more important than even the most brilliant productions of a lone pen. The journal functions as a “living link between human intelligence,” not a machine but an “organic” mechanism to bring together the mass into a unified form: “worked out not by one but by many, under a certain supervision by one” (259).

Yet this article, which spends so much time trying to create this unified world and asserting that women are not special or separate, ends with a claim for the special skills of women in “organising, ruling, adapting, supervising” and that these skills are what fit women for “responsible social usefulness” (263); that is, it is women’s distinctness which is the basis for their claim for social rights. It is in response to claims like this that Barbara Caine asserts that the philosophical framework of liberalism provided the foundation for the demands of the women’s movement, with its “essential individualism, ... notion of men as rational and self-interested beings and its belief in the importance of men following their own perceived self-interests” (1982 540). The application of liberal ideas to women, according to Caine, led to a set of demands based not on “rights in any abstract way,” but the assertion of “full adult status” for women: not “the equality of men and women in any substantive way but rather the entitlement of women to equality before the law and the freedom of women to develop themselves – often along lines which were seen to be quite distinct from those of men.”¹³⁴ To Caine, the claim or set of claims that resulted from feminists’ engagement with liberal ideas was based on a “combination” of two notionally separate beliefs: “belief in the particular nature of women” and the inherently masculine form of “liberal individualism” (540). Departing from Caine, I wish to challenge the notion that these ideas (women’s distinctiveness and women’s sameness) were in

¹³⁴ Barbara Caine. “Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement.” *Women’s Studies International Forum*. 5.6 (1982): 537-550, p. 540. Subsequent page references in text.

fact separate. By my account, their alignment formed the constitutive tension of the LPG and the basis of the group's incorporation of difference. At stake was how to demand the recognition of women as individuals and potential citizens, and thereby assert the irrelevance of gender in the political realm, while also forging a common politics based on the importance of gender as a political force. At stake, too, was how to position themselves as individuals unmarked by difference *and* a distinct collective of women, as political actors with particular experiences as women *and* citizens with common experience of public and political life.

The tendency to understand the relationship between Langham Place and liberalism as one based primarily on conflict is a prevalent one, even when the relationship is conceived of in other terms than the broadly philosophical, as in Caine's account. For instance, Jane Rendall's carefully wrought historical account of the relationship between liberalism and women's suffrage highlights the interpersonal tensions that fractured the relationship between liberalism and the nascent feminist movement. According to Rendall's account, liberal circles were not the only influence on the women of Langham Place – she notes, for instance, the importance of the radical unitarian set among which Parkes and Bodichon travelled¹³⁵ – but it was an important relationship, one based on philosophy, the parliamentary politics of the Liberal party, and the social connections between prominent liberals like Mill and Harriet Taylor and the Langham Place set. Like Caine, Rendall stresses both the confluence and the conflict of liberalism and nascent liberal feminism: as she says, Mill's "ideal of citizenship" shaped the way the women imagined female citizenship could be, as it was based on the key liberal ideals of progress, "education and cultivation," as well as the notion that one needed to be fit to be a citizen (176-8).

¹³⁵ Jane Rendall. "John Stuart Mill, Liberal Politics, and the Movements for Women's Suffrage." *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*. Edited by Amanda Vickery. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 168-200, pp. 181-2. Subsequent page references in text.

Despite the philosophical importance of liberalism, however, the alliances between the members of Langham Place and key liberal figures was more often fraught than friendly, and by the mid-1860s Rendall perceives an evident split on practical and ideological grounds due to the “sharp differences among the women and men involved, and more especially between the Mill-Taylor axis and the Langham Place women... both in terms of organizational strategy and in principle” (175).

The critical accounts that highlight the tension between two opposing camps of liberalism and feminism result in an understanding of mid-nineteenth-century liberal feminism as fundamentally compromised: the goal of equality was sacrificed in order to embrace a masculine liberal ideal.¹³⁶ Although recent work has aimed to restore complexity to our understanding of liberal feminism, the implication of it as an inherently compromised movement persists. As recently as 2012, Barbara Korte makes precisely this point in an article about the travel writing of the *English Woman's Journal*, arguing that a piece by Barbara Bodichon on travel in Algiers demonstrated how the journal “oscillated between confident displays of female agency and tendencies to downplay the traveller’s sex, thus responding to cultural anxieties about the threat to domestic values suggested by female travel.”¹³⁷ Korte points to Bodichon’s piece as making a

¹³⁶ For typical examples, see Sarah Dredge. “Opportunism and Accommodation: The English Woman’s Journal and the British Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement.” *Women’s Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal* 34:2 (2005): 133-157; and Janet Rendall’s summing up of the legacy of the LPG in her *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry, which stresses the “complexities” – which can more or less be read as a euphemism for limitations – of liberal feminism: “Although some individuals led unconventional lives, there was no public confrontation of the sexual double standard or codes of propriety. ... Their analyses and their solutions were derived from the perspectives of the reforming middle classes, as was the concept of female citizenship with which, as individuals, they mostly continued to work.” Recent critics who have challenged the perception of liberal feminism as inherently limited include Livesey, whose excellent work sees the class-based problems as a concerted political position rather than the result of ideological blindness.

¹³⁷ Barbara Korte. “Travel Writing in The English Woman’s Journal (1858–1864): An Area of Leisure in the Context of Women’s Work.” *The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals*. 45.2 (Summer 2012), p. 166. Subsequent page references in text.

radical claim for gender equity (both men and women could travel to Algiers) before lapsing into the use of the generic male pronoun to soften the impact of gender difference. The line Korte points to as marking gender difference, apparently the lone spot of vocal radicalism, reads:

If any enterprising English lady or gentleman wishes to see another quarter of the globe in addition to their own Europe before they die; if they wish to get out of Christendom; if they wish to see strange beasts, strange plants, and new races; if they wish to ride on camels, to eat porcupine and wild boar; in fact, to put down without much trouble and no danger in a perfectly new world, there is only one place within seventy-eight hours of travelling from London which will answer this purpose.”¹³⁸

For Korte, marking gender, as an explicit assertion that women could travel, is a display of female agency; failing to do so is an attempt to defuse the threat posed by female travelers, and is therefore an attempt to pander to mainstream values. I want to propose a different reading of Bodichon’s slippage between gender-neutral language (by which in this context I mean either the singular “they” or the use of masculine pronouns as generic ones) and language that clearly insists on women’s capacity as potential travelers. To characterize Bodichon’s piece as by turns brashly assertive and meekly dissembling is a misreading of her tone, and Korte’s proposal that readers “to whom the author was truly anonymous” might have assumed male authorship and consequently a male traveler is both irrelevant and unlikely, given the mode and values of the *English Woman’s Journal’s* production as well as the composition of its readership. Bodichon’s language, both when it is gendered and when it is not, is less an attempt to conceal the author’s gender or make a polemical point about women’s agency than it is an insistence of the irrelevance of gender to travel: both men and women can occupy the perspective of the traveler. The significance of Bodichon’s piece is not, as Korte claims, that she argues that women could

¹³⁸ Barbara Bodichon. “Algiers: First Impressions.” *English Woman’s Journal* 6.31 (1 September 1860): 21-31, p. 21.

travel or attempts to mitigate any perceived threats to domesticity posed by the figure of the female traveler. Rather, it is the concerted statement the article makes about what kinds of differences matter, and when gender registers as a meaningful difference and when it does not.

Bodichon's piece barely registers gender difference, as Korte notes. What it does instead is catalogue in minute detail the differences of race and nation that an English traveler will encounter in Algeria. Among the fascinations Algeria offers for Bodichon is the presence of so many different people, and what that mix can tell us about national characteristics and how they compare; as Bodichon writes, "[h]ere they are altogether, and can be compared with ease" (25). The significant opposition in Bodichon's piece is not the difference between the male and female traveler, but the difference between the universal voice of the traveler and the particularities of the "striking and amusing... motley crowd which he will see from his window." The traveler possesses both an individual voice in a specific position – the view is what he can see when "fairly and comfortably installed in his hotel on the Place" – and a perspective as an observer that removes him from, and elevates him above, the ethnographic details of the scene. The people encountered by the traveler in Algeria, on the other hand, lose all distinguishing characteristics as they signify the group of which they are a part: a "mass of Arabs," for instance, or a long figure like the "Kabyle, who has taken kindly to French civilization," whose singularity indicates not individuality so much as it does representativeness. Instead of understanding the masculine language the piece uses as an attempt to mute the radical potential of women travelers, the language functions to isolate gender as a kind of difference that, in the imperial context, does not matter: the lady traveler could also occupy the judging voice of the cultivated Englishman. In the face of racial difference, the English lady can occupy the universal perspective of the liberal subject just as well as the English gentleman would; rather than softening the impact of gender difference, Bodichon's piece shapes it as a special form of difference. If her article diminishes

the significance of gender, it does so not to make concessions or weaken its claims for gender equality, but as a bid to expand the capacity of the cultivated liberal subject. The article establishes that the universal perspective of the liberal subject, often structured precisely to exclude women, is in fact able to encompass differences of gender; and it does so by ascribing the otherness of difference to the object of the traveler's gaze, the racial others one encounters in Algeria.

The ability to shape gender as both inherently political and a form of difference that did not matter in the political and public spheres thus comes at the expense of other kinds of difference. Alan Kahan argues that liberals used the discourse of capacity to mediate between the hierarchy of aristocracy and the universal rights of democracy (4-6). The LPG used the connection that we see in Chapter One between Mill's empiricism and the language of capacity in order to make their case about the particularity of gender as a form of difference. An article by Bessie Rayner Parkes, appearing in two parts in 1860 in the September and November issues of the *English Woman's Journal* provides an example of this.¹³⁹ The piece deploys Mill's empirical indeterminacy about difference in order to make a case for the rights of women as a group, and for the removal of legal and social obstacles preventing women's progress as students, employees, and citizens. If difference read as inferiority is inherently unprovable given conditions of inequality, then any measure of achievement or progress is proof of women's capacity for citizenship. Parkes' piece begins by establishing Mill as a representative individual, and uses the logic of his argument to create a space in his construction of liberal subjectivity for an individual who might look like the reader of the *English Woman's Journal*. Parkes' article functions to make gender a productive form of difference, reshaping the form of the liberal

¹³⁹ Bessie Rayner Parkes. "The Opinions of John Stuart Mill." *English Woman's Journal*. 6.31 (September 1, 1860): 1-10. Subsequent page references in text.

individual so that its defining quality is what Bourdieu calls “cultural competence” rather than gender (2).

Parkes begins her article with a claim for Mill’s importance – “There is no name in England which carries with it so much weight” – to Oxford and Cambridge, as well as in “the two Houses of Legislature.” Positioning Mill in the context of scholarship and politics, Parkes invokes the authority of “all classes of thinking men all over the country”; but, in claiming the Irish Encumbered Land Act as the proof of his “high principles, his unbiased judgement, and his practical good sense,” also aligns him with the disenfranchised (1).¹⁴⁰ As such, Parkes constructs Mill as a figure who mobilizes people based on capacity – “all classes of thinking men” – rather than inherent social position. He is an elite thinker, addressing the “most educated minds of our time,” and yet the effect of his thought is deeply democratic, reaching “indirectly every individual, however ignorant.” He at once guides public opinion, shaping the minds of journalists and determining the rightness or wrongness of any “political measure” in the minds of the thinking public; and yet his writing is above the fray of the ignorance of the mass, as “what he has written is founded on reason, and stands like a solid rock amidst the shifting sands of public opinion.” Parkes’ representation of Mill cultivates a kind of exclusivity, encouraging her audience to identify with the “educated minds” of the time, and suggesting – though those minds are clearly gendered male throughout the first passage – that not only are women capable of so identifying, but also that it is vital for the activist readers of the *English Woman’s Journal* to do so: “It is not a little important that women engaged in the present movement for extending the

¹⁴⁰ Though the Act had unanticipated effects, Mill spoke of it as an act of “statesmanlike measure,” which “to a great extent liberated Ireland from the great evil of needy landlords.” “The State of Ireland” Parliamentary speech. March 12, 1868. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXVIII - Public and Parliamentary Speeches Part I November 1850 - November 1868*. Edited by John M. Robson and Bruce L. Kinzer. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, p. 253.

right to work to their sex should know exactly what the opinions of such a man as Mr. Mill upon this question and all connected with it” (1).

In large part, the first half of Parkes’ article in the September issue is directed at undercutting the notion of women’s incapacity, that women “cannot understand such books, that they have not logical intellects, that they cannot follow consecutive reasoning, and that such studies are altogether unfeminine.” Drawing on Mill’s empiricist logic, Parkes argues that to counter such claims, women ought simply to read Mill, and thereby prove it a feminine endeavor: “To read it properly, and thoroughly to understand it, is quite an education to the logical faculties of the student” (2). If one acquires this education, one proves implicitly that one is capable of it.¹⁴¹ Parkes states that “We picture to ourselves” a female reader – specifically, “a well-educated girl of eighteen or twenty” (4) – who sits down to read Mill’s work, “having perused carefully and with great interest... rather anxiously looking out to see if any method will prove her logically incapable of understanding what she is about” (2). Parkes makes a case for this educated, and educable, girl as a potential subject and citizen of the nation as much as part of the household, highlighting the similarities rather than the distinctions between the private and political spheres: “Political Economy is to the nation what domestic economy is to the family” (4). This imagined female reader, who would “enjoy mastering” Mill’s work (with the “exception of the chapters on currency and the calculation of chances”), is evoked by Parkes on behalf of a collective “we” who “believe any woman who chooses to apply herself to the study can understand everything which Mr. Mill has written” (2). The imagined reader “anxiously” scans

¹⁴¹ Indeed, the logic of those who call learning unfeminine is given by Parkes as the perfect example of the logical flaw *petitio principii*, or begging the question: “Can there be a better example [of it] ... than the constant assertion which puts down so much young effort by asserting it to be unfeminine, and insisting that a woman must not be unfeminine, and all the common verbiage to that effect. Best to be answered by doing the right thing bravely, and proving it, therefore, feminine” (3).

the pages of Mill's work, "looking out to see if any method will prove her logically incapable of understanding what she is about, or any paragraph insinuate that the great master himself holds such an opinion" (2). Not finding any such proof of incapacity, her capacity to understand Mill's reasoning is proved; and this proof – which is both imagined, in the figure of the girl, and demonstrated by Parkes herself, and the women readers of the journal who are presumably following Parkes' gloss on Mill – allows Parkes to generalize about the potential capacity of all women as a class, using the evidence of one to make a claim for inclusion: "She feels she understands perfectly; and she reasons logically enough from this instance of her own consciousness, that other women also can understand it" (2).

Much of the proof that Parkes finds in Mill's work is either assumed proof such as the above, or proof she extrapolates to apply to women from general principles. For instance, a passage from Mill's *Logic* on the flawed thinking of those who posit inherent difference of intellect on the basis of race or sex: as such propositions are unable to be substantiated except by removing from the differences that we can see those difference which "have existed in the outward circumstances" of the subjects, "residual" or "ulterior original distinction" cannot be proved (3). Parkes cites this passage as showing, "distinctly enough – if we rightly understand it, and think it out in all its bearings – what are the opinions of John Stuart Mill upon the education of women, and our female student ought to feel a bound of joy, and will go on with her studies with renewed courage and spirits" (3). In her parenthetical attempt to think Mill's statement out in all its bearings, Parkes makes a fairly large conceptual leap from refuting the idea of an innate difference in intellect based on social factors to education policy. In assembling Mill's indeterminacy about proof into an assertion that the denial of rights is only appropriate where incapacity can be proven, Parkes puts difference in the service of politics in order to claim education as an inherent right, and to infer a support from Mill's words that is not particularly

implied. Therefore, Parkes does not merely use Mill's text here in order to prove theoretical equality (or, more precisely, the absence of proof for originary or biological inequality, which is not quite the same thing) but, rather, she turns to it to prove there is a distinct necessity for action in the field of concrete rights. As such, it is a good example of the way in which the LPG used the logic of liberalism to make room for gender difference in the construction of the individual and his or her rights. When turning to Mill's explicit focus on women in the labor force, Parkes initially claims that the science of political economy is a necessity for women as it "bears directly on all philanthropic efforts," in which women, of course, take "so large a share" (4). At the very least, this is an argument for women's involvement in the public sphere based on the domestic virtues that define their philanthropic role; it is because of women's "philanthropic efforts" that it is their "duty" to educate themselves and "study scientifically all the laws of national wellbeing" (4). Women's participation in the public sphere seems to be in the form of a gendered contribution to the national good. Yet as the article progresses, Parkes complicates this view significantly.

Parkes builds on Mill's argument that the submission of working women to working men is one of reasons "of the misery and poverty of the lower classes," and that the lower wage women's work attracts is about the social role of women's labor rather than the nature or quality of the work itself (4). Observing that "we would draw particular attention to the line which we have marked in italics," Parkes uses Mill's words to make the case that there is no argument to be made for the exclusion of women from the liberty of competing in the labor market. Yet it is in her commentary on this point that Parkes makes the most interesting claim:

referring to the preceding sentence about the effect of custom in determining the wages of certain classes of women, we must not forget that custom is simply the aggregate of individual opinion for which we are each of us responsible. It is literally the *self-respect* of workers which in the long run keeps up their price in the labour market... And this self-respect, being intimately connected with the standard of public opinion among

women, should be a matter of moment to each one – each should remember that on this point she contributes a quota to the influences which bear on the female working population (6).

In one sense, it is quite easy to see how arguments like this would become the elitist form of liberalism and liberal feminism, charged with making oppressed classes responsible for their own oppression under the guise of a discourse of self-help individualism. However, this paragraph is doing complex work with liberal ideas about individuality and the mass. In *On Liberty*, for instance, Mill writes of the way in which “public opinion now rules the world... The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of masses.” Against this stultifying, mediocre tyranny of opinion, the individual is the only hope of salvation: “The initiation of all wise or noble things, comes and must come from individuals.”¹⁴² Parkes’ definition of the public sphere is significantly more democratic, imagining a public opinion in which every woman has the capacity of the individual, and which women, as a mass composed of individuals, therefore have the power to shape.

The power women have to change the social organization thus stems *both* from their domestic life as well as their place in the public sphere. To negotiate this position, Parkes argues for the importance of introducing the morality of religion, which she equates with the domestic, into the logic of the market. She gives the example of the daily governess, to whom a family may give an extra 10 pounds a year out of Christian charity and a knowledge of her personal circumstances, though the same principle is not applied to the man, to whom there exist no personal ties, who sells material for the family’s clothes:

¹⁴² Mill. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII - Essays on Politics and Society Part I*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 268.

We have thus two truths to consider;—the truth which holds good in regard to the action of masses of people on one another, and the other truth, that individuals must and do act on Christian principles towards those with whom they come in separate contact. In the market we must buy and sell at market price, because our finite natures cannot possibly take in the moral condition and physical necessities of those who have produced the goods we want to acquire; but in the domestic relation of employers and employed, a certain margin is cut off from the rule of political economy, and embraced within that of religion (7).

Underlying Parkes' two truths, in light of the fact that it is "hopeless to imagine that individual efforts could ever raise the market price of needlewomen's work" (7), is the acknowledgement of the structure of capitalism that circumscribes the conditions of labor, especially for the working women who have the least say over their own conditions of employment. Yet, as it is "the bounden duty of every mistress of a family not to beat down those she comes in contact with below the point where their labor gains a wholesome maintenance" (7), Parkes argues that a strategic alliance of female householders and female laborers is possible; that is, she asserts that the bonds of gender have some stronger form of interest than are apparent in other forms of everyday action in the capitalist marketplace.

In building on the familiar supposition that we have the most sympathy with those to whom we are closest, Parkes also carves out a space between the interactions which guide the "masses of people" and those that govern individual actions based on Christian principles. That mediating space is based on the gendered and religious principles of domestic space, and in so doing makes a political claim for that space. Though political economy is "the rule of true self-interest; it is in itself neither moral nor immoral; it represents the laws by which we are swayed in dealing for ourselves and for our families with the outward world of strangers, of whom we know nothing." Parkes argues for enlarging the capacity of "our circle of interest and affection" so that the "boundary beyond which we treat other human beings scientifically without any self denial" recedes (7). For Parkes, to imagine the collectivity of women as an enlarged one based

on the feelings of the home is also to imagine a body politic of an “ideal nation” which mitigates the harshness of the capitalist “principle of getting everything as cheap as possible” (7). What would result as “the more completely society is infused with those ideas which modify the action of purely scientific laws” is the realization of a bourgeois public sphere that includes women. Moderating the rationality of economics with the affective values of the domestic sphere will make it “easier” for women to work without being “crushed” by the machinery of society: “the more human creatures cast behind them the savage theory that might makes right, which may be termed the political economy of wild beasts, the more possible become the independent labours of the gentler sex” (7). This does not entirely challenge the assumption of the public sphere that private interests should be bracketed in favor of the common good, but it figures gender as a special case, less as a form of difference that has to be encountered than a structuring relation that enables a better form of commonness. Parkes asserts a vision of the public sphere that, when structured by these gendered principles, better realizes its own ideals.¹⁴³

If we saw in the debates about the journal a model of cooperation that embraced difference and disagreement, it should come as no surprise that cooperation is in these articles an important concept for Parkes, one that forms the crucial basis of her assent to Mill’s ideas about social progress. She notes Mill’s mention, in *Principles of Political Economy*, of the necessity for insurance to mitigate the effects of “vicissitudes of fortune which arise from inevitable natural calamities,” and which thus afford the individual some degree of protection and stability (9).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ If we consider that liberal feminism is typically criticized for being a form of feminism that, in prioritizing individual equality, neglects to think about structures, my objection to such criticism of the Langham Place group should become clearer in my argument that something more complicated is occurring in Parkes’ article: an acknowledgement of the complex structures of power that govern an individual’s access to the public sphere, or the opportunities afforded to the privileged liberal individual — and a belief in gender difference as a competing structure that can ameliorate the exclusions of the public sphere.

¹⁴⁴ Parkes is citing, as she tends to do, long passages from Mill himself.

Drawing a parallel between Mill's remarks on insurance, and remarks on "the principle of co-operation to women" made by Elizabeth Blackwell in her lectures in England, Parkes notes that it is "interesting" that these "two long-sighted seers look forward to the extension of the same principle; the one desirable for the sake of professional women; the other as necessary for the progress of society" (9). The version of cooperation Parkes considers, based on Blackwell and Mill, is not an endorsement for the combined labor power of a women's trade union, but rather the application of Mill's argument for the progressive potential of the "more extensive and more skillful employment of the joint-stock principle" to women (10). Through cooperation, Parkes asserts, the "small means and more delicate physical powers of women" may be utilized even where "each by herself would have failed" (11).¹⁴⁵ This physical capacity of women causes Parkes to part ways with Mill in advocating protective legislation in the form of Factory Acts, as the "very nature of the work" is so taxing as "fairly to claim legislative consideration" (10). This is an important point of divergence for Parkes, as Mill's position, which she cites, was that for "improving the condition of women, it should, on the contrary, be an object to give them the readiest access to independent industrial employment, instead of closing, either entirely or partially, that which is already open to them" (11).

Quite apart from the substance of their disagreement, Parkes' departure from Mill is rhetorically interesting, given that she grants him the final word in this first part of the article. In so doing, Parkes allows the opinion of a man whose opinion of right and wrong, she had begun by observing, sways the opinion of thinking men, to stand until the second part of the article was published two months later. Yet in ending with Mill's words, she also highlights the role of voice

¹⁴⁵ Here Parkes alludes to the issue of factory legislation, that is, the amount of government regulation of unmarried women conducting unsafe labor in factories and mines that could be consistent with a liberal model of a free labor market. The introduction of Factory Acts would become increasingly an issue throughout the 1870s and into the 1890s, and would in many ways fundamentally reshape the structure of the feminist movement.

throughout the article, underscoring her own among the authoritative voices she cites in this rare moment of disagreement with Mill. Moreover, although the topic of the debate is work, Parkes' rhetorical strategy highlights the importance of voice rather than the actual activity of labor. As labor, the issue of work is an issue of class merely; as a question of voice – whose voices determine how labor is discussed and legislated about – gender supplants class as a framework for thinking about the issue.

This point, implicit in Parkes' position in "The Opinions of John Stuart Mill," is made quite clearly in SPEW report presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Social Science on October 24, 1860, and later published in the *English Woman's Journal*. In attempting to ameliorate the condition of working women, SPEW notes that it would target the "lower ranks of the middle class" – the "very independent" class, as the *English Woman's Journal* states elsewhere, who "willingly accept help," but "cannot endure patronage"¹⁴⁶ – as "we could for a time do nothing" for highly educated women, and "women of no education could do nothing for us." However, by inserting a "wedge" into the issue in this most productive sector, progress would result for all.¹⁴⁷ By elevating the most productive subjects of this self-help scheme, competition would be reduced in the starvation industries, and the lives of working-class women would also improve. It is not in the labor market where gender equality is possible, but in the meetings to discuss the state of the labor market: "The sexes here find their right place, side by side with each other, and we hail this as the commencement of the breaking down of that

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Bodichon. "Middle Class Schools for Girls." *English Woman's Journal* 6.33 (1 November 1860): 168-177, p. 173. A paper presented at the meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, Glasgow, 1860.

¹⁴⁷ "Special Meetings at Glasgow and Edinburgh, With Reference to the Industrial Employment of Women." *English Woman's Journal* 6.33 (1 November 1860): 146-159, p. 147. Subsequent page references in text.

unnatural barrier between them which, separating the interests of men and women, acts in a thousand pernicious ways on the moral health and well-being of the community” (145).

Another of Parkes’ *English Woman’s Journal* articles, “A Year’s Experience,” presents in many ways a fairly predictable argument about the problem of female unemployment: the overstaffing of certain fields like governessing; the fact that the normal wages for women’s work are not generally sufficient if a woman is encumbered with dependents; and the fact that much work is impossible given the limitations of a womanly frame. The solution the piece ends by presenting is, again, the unsurprising solution of better-assisted migration schemes, to aid in the placement of women in the colonies where they “are wanted in every social capacity,” and where women might be trained in the “functions of administrative benevolence,” which, though employment, are actually only the “development of household qualities,” and the “larger, the more generous, and equally distinctive part of woman’s work in the world” (121). What is interesting about Parkes’ argument here is not that she makes her case for the employment of women as merely an extension of her domestic function in the home, but the way in which she lays out the problem of female underemployment as not a gender problem, but a class one: though “lines of demarcation” between the classes still exist, the problem is they are increasingly becoming blurred (115). In the case of governessing, for instance, the primary concern is a problem of indistinction, that ladies occupy the title along with tradesmen’s daughters; the profession brings together in one class those “who are very unequal” in qualifications and salary (116).

The article advocates encouraging the entry of women into “hitherto unaccustomed businesses and trades” (116). For young and single women, “it is highly desirable to extend and encourage” occupations in the semi-mechanical arts such as law-copying “in every way, taking great care in the formation of model classes, or new businesses, to harmonize them as much as

possible with the physical and moral conditions of female workers” (116). For the highly educated women “to whom the keeping up of a social position has become a moral necessity” (116), the answer to their employment is a moral one: “*moral superintendence* over women” (117). Their locatedness in the class system of their proper place allows women-as-workers to transcend their status as mere translators of the domestic realm into the world of work. This is not as simple as saying that Parkes ignores the dynamics of class in favor of thinking about gender, as a typical critique of liberal feminism would have it; rather, it is that she uses ideas about fitness and right place in a classed society in order to smooth the transition between women as domestic carers (even if that care takes place in the public realm) and women as political actors and participants in the public sphere of critical debate.

The second part of Parkes’ article on Mill, which appeared in the *English Woman’s Journal* two issues after the first, continues her focus on work, but takes up and makes central the issue of cooperation. Cooperation, by the November issue, had become a kind of mantra to the LPG. It was mentioned and advocated in Parkes’ earlier piece on Mill, and was frequently argued for elsewhere in the pages of the journal – in Bodichon’s piece on “Middle Class Schools for Girls,” for instance, in which she advocates that ladies pool their skills in order to develop more effective schools on a cooperative basis. Mill, Parkes writes, is the “apostle of co-operation” – an intriguing reading of Mill given his recent publication of *On Liberty*, his paean to individuality.¹⁴⁸ Parkes’s point highlights the centrality of cooperation, not so much to Mill’s ideas of individuality, but to those of the LPG; the key question is not whether cooperation is useful – it is a concept “peculiarly useful to women” – but whether it is achievable: “the extent to which it can be carried out by the actual men of this work-a-day world” (193).

¹⁴⁸ Bessie Rayner Parkes. “The Opinions of John Stuart Mill.” *English Woman’s Journal* 6.33 (1 November 1860): 193-202, p. 193. Subsequent page references in text.

For Parkes, the concept of cooperation is what distinguishes the capacity of white, Christian women: cooperation is “peculiarly useful” to women, because women are peculiarly suited to it. Their inherent ability to cooperate, and thus to progress, renders gender a special form of difference in comparison to the uncivilized non-Christian others. Unlike what Parkes refers to as Eastern “hordes,” a cooperation acts as a body with common interests, but does not subsume the distinguishing characteristics and individuals within it: “The savage cannot cooperate in a sphere higher than that of the yelling war-dance. The submissive hordes of Eastern despotisms were ranged in ranks under one master, but they did not co-here in mutual activity” (194). Self-government is the crux of cooperation: without it, cooperation would not be possible, as the mass would swallow the individual, as in the uncivilized “war dance,” in which the participants merge so completely as to become one. This Eastern, non-cooperative merging exists as a totally asymmetrical power relation, as the despot rules over a horde incapable of thinking individually, able only to act in concert as a buzzing mass. What cooperation allows, given the importance of self-government, is a peculiarly liberal form of power. It conforms quite neatly to the definition of the bourgeois public sphere by merging interest, without necessarily granting everyone an equal stake. Thus, in the commercial cooperative endeavor of the joint stock principle:

this common fund may be used or divided in various ways; the shares may be equal or unequal, the government of the different parts of the concern may be federal or strictly democratic; and so on. Only it is necessary that there shall be shares, and proportionate profits, and that in some way the concern shall be self-governed. Self-government is the root of the idea, for which reason Mr. Mill says, ‘the peculiar characteristic, in short, of civilized beings is the capacity of co-operation.’ And this refers to all moral as well as to all commercial co-operation (194).

The problem of cooperation, then, is to ensure it can fulfill its ideal function in an increasing mass society, that is, one in which production occurs on an increasingly larger scale, and thus

risks segmenting into what Mill identifies as “two parties with hostile interests, employers and employed, the many who do the work being mere servants under the command of the one who supplies the funds, and having no interest of their own in the enterprise, except to fulfill their contract and earn their wages” (196). Parkes proposes the joint stock principle as “capable of solving this problem” though “its battles have been most severe, partly on account of its apparently democratic tendency, partly because it early became mixed up with moral and social questions with which it has properly no necessary concern” (196).

Despite its association with socialist ideas (the moral and social questions with which, Parkes lamented, it had unfortunately become associated), Parkes asserts that it is possible to reconcile cooperation with the moral framework laid out in the first part of article. Cooperation is “moral” and “religious” as much as it is a matter of commerce. In fact the moral meaning “lies at the basis of the commercial meaning” as trust is required: those who practice cooperation need to “agree on principles” and “keep their tempers one towards the other,” and “civil peace” is necessary to conduct transactions in “peace and quietness,” in order to apply the “principle of united action to greater profit” (194). Though Parkes insists that the moral meaning contributes to the commercial, her clarification of the principles of cooperation suggests that the commercial principle also feeds into its moral meaning. That is, the values of agreement, civility, peace, and trust that seem to be involved in the moral idea of cooperation highlight that the concept involves a group of individuals who consent to act in a single entity. Contractual ideas and moral ones are therefore mutually constitutive, further reinforcing cooperation as an exclusively Christian principle. Moreover, the progress it both is a sign of and contributes to is likewise out of reach for non-Christians: “Even in Pagan nations these combined secular and religious influences have sufficed to create vigorous social life. But the triumph of co-operation in its more extended moral sense was reserved for Christianity to declare” (194). Cooperation is both evidence of a capacity

for progress and what brings it about. Parkes cites Mill's assertion that "there is no more certain incident of the progressive change taking place in society, than the continual growth of the principle and practice of co-operation" (194). In typically circular Milleian logic, cooperation has the potential to mitigate the miseries of capitalist production "as soon as civilization and improvement have so far advanced that what is a benefit to the whole shall be a benefit to each individual composing it" (196). Progress is possible when progress has been achieved; thus, despite experiments tried in Paris, it is in "England, conservative England, that the great triumphs have been achieved" (197). The attractiveness of the principle of cooperation for Parkes is that it models a kind of collectivity based on balancing the individual and the mass, and perhaps even more importantly, that it does so in a way that addresses systemic inequality without advocating revolutionary politics.¹⁴⁹ Cooperation provides not equality of opportunity, but an opportunity for all to progress: "It may be said that in a free country all men are free to save and take an even chance of becoming capitalists. It is true that they are so far on an equality; yet would it not be far better if, instead of having, as now, an equal chance of standing on a summit, all honest and industrious men could calculate on a more even remuneration, and be raised to a higher level?" (196). By making progressive potential a peculiarly English quality, Parkes locates all subjects with potential for equality (here, honest and industrious men, and only by implication women) quite specifically in the national body politic.

¹⁴⁹ It is a diagnosis of how capitalist power works that trusts in the reason of the powerful, but still requires a countermeasure: "the man with capital is not merely a double man, but a tenfold man: he is not merely a man and money, but a moneyed man. His power has increased in a geometrical ratio" (195). His advantage is "perfectly fair" and it is "unlikely that he will do anything very unreasonable. He has his interests and also his character to consult... All I wish to point out is, that he actually does possess an enormous power; that thousands of his fellow-creatures are in his hand" (195). The question is: "What then can be done to balance this new power?" (196)

Parkes includes a lengthy excerpt from a paper on “Co-operative Societies,” written by Owenite Dr. John Watts, which advocates the application of principles of cooperation in ventures such as the Rochdale Co-operative Association, a cooperative endeavor comprising three shops, offices, and a library and reading room devoted to “educational purposes.” As the “solid and practicable remnant of the teaching of Robert Owen,” such cooperative endeavors “are proof of the wisdom of attempting only such improvement at any time as society is fit for and can appreciate” (199). Watts promoted only what was “practicable” about Owen’s society theory, attributing the ultimate failure of Owen’s endeavors to the fact that his “proposed economical arrangements did not fit in” (199) with the progressive, Darwinist account of social organization he outlines. Watts’ is quite clearly a liberal vision of progress, in which the success of the cooperation must be simultaneously held up as an improving force, and as the proof that its members are capable of the responsibilities of citizenship. Thus, he commends that “men who were formerly of dissipated habits, women who were extravagant and troublesome to their husbands, have all been wonderfully improved” while also lamenting the fact that out of 3,100 houses in the Rochdale community, less than 200 confer the vote. Consequently, the disenfranchised majority are “shut out from any part in the business of the nation” despite being “intelligent and moral enough to appreciate, adopt, and manage large trading concerns” (200). The principle of cooperation, to Watts, is thus both the mechanism for the development of the “well-being” and “independence of character” of the working-classes (201), and the proof that they are capable of such improvement.

For Parkes, Watts’ paper “strongly impressed” her with the applicability of its “principle to female labor” (201). In a mere paragraph of conclusion following Watts’ several pages, Parkes sums up “in a most practical manner”: “If twenty ladies in any town would club together £5 a-piece, they might open a stationery shop, to which, if they gave all their own custom, they might

secure a profit after employing a female manager, and if the business increased, female clerks also” (202). The proof Parkes uses to bolster her argument is the proof that cooperation has been an effective strategy for men; it is only by analogy that she can propose it as a uniquely female solution. That the article has functioned as a lengthy analogy should remind us, too, that as an example of a woman’s public voice, it is a curious object. Composed almost entirely by cobbling together the voices of influential men, giving most space to men’s cooperation in order to prove its applicability to women, Parkes’ article suggests that gender difference can ultimately be understood by models of sameness, and thus what it offers is a form of incorporation that structures more equal relations in the public sphere.

Forty years after the Combahee River Collective published its famous statement of Black feminism pointing out the interlocking nature of oppression, it is impossible not to acknowledge the great cost to subjectivities marked by other forms of difference in the claims made by the LPG that, in Margaret Forster’s words, “[n]either class nor money made the kind of difference it might be expected to make: being a woman transcended other differences” (4). This has led to a fundamental misapprehension of the significance of the LPG’s project, such that in 2014, it was still possible to publish articles in which the main stakes of argument is that the group was “unabashedly feminist” (Pusapati 609). This is the familiar and problematic legacy of second wave feminism: the unsustainability of relying on a set of universalizing claims grounded in the premise that women have inherent similarities as women, and the resulting implication that their status as political beings depends upon those qualities and shared struggles. The legacy of the LPG has tended to be weighed against this received understanding of liberal feminism. In the 1990s, feminist critics were frustrated by what they saw as the group’s moderate position (not claiming as many rights for women as they could have); more recently, scholars have been frustrated by the way the group was primarily a middle- and upper-class endeavor, and tended to

perpetuate, rather than challenge, the injustices of the imperial project in replicating assumptions about the liberal individual's whiteness and Britishness.¹⁵⁰ The presentism that inheres in this way of thinking about the group's work – its claims, as well as its organization – tends to flatten the historical specificity of the group, and risks overstating or minimizing, or vastly mischaracterizing, its significance. Moreover, it imposes a telos on the group's social contribution by assuming a kind of inevitability about the development of feminism: liberal feminism began in either naive or malevolent disregard of difference, which we then learned to think about correctly in the more enlightened twentieth century.

Underlying much of this work is an assumption that the fit between liberal ideas and feminist ones is somehow an imperfect one.¹⁵¹ Insofar as liberal feminism can be said to have a coherent ideology or platform, which is precisely not what I have argued of the LPG in this chapter, the received critical narrative holds it to be a philosophy based on the struggle of competing parts: the insistence on seeing the structuring force of gender (feminism) against the faith in the universality of the unmarked, individual, rational rights-bearing subject (liberalism). This chapter has reassessed this story about liberal feminism, though not in the service of a vindication of their politics or a redemption of the liberatory potentials of their claim to

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Forster is an example of the first tendency, Meritxell Simon-Martin and Lynne Walker of the second.

¹⁵¹ This is an assumption that runs deeper than work on mid-nineteenth-century British feminism. See, for instance, Anne Phillips' "Feminism and Liberalism Revisited: Has Martha Nussbaum Got It Right?" *Constellations* 8.2 (2001): 249-266: "The relationship between feminism and liberalism has always been an uneasy one. In the first instance, this was because liberals were so hesitant about recognizing that their new understanding of politics had implications for women's equality" (p. 249). See also Joan W. Scott: "'Women' came into being as political outsiders through the discourse of sexual difference" (Joan Wallach Scott. *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 3). Yet, in writing about this paradox as constitutive of feminism, Scott is still subordinating the struggle of the feminist paradox to the republican one; that feminists were "marked by the paradox" of difference was because they "carried" the "ambiguities of the republican notion of the individual" into "feminist arguments" (11).

universality. The exclusions and inconsistencies of the LPG are often as surprising as they are distasteful to a contemporary feminist analysis. Whose feminist sensibilities would not be affronted by encountering the glowing review of Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House*, now synonymous with the oppressions of Victorian middle-class domestic ideology, in an early issue of the *English Woman's Journal*?¹⁵² Rather than seeking to champion the arguments or strategies of the group, my intention has been to show that the development of liberal feminism was the contingent product, rather than inevitable result, of the way the LPG oriented itself towards and thought about difference.

¹⁵² The way in which many of the arguments for female emigration anticipated the claims of W.S. Greg, whose journalism has also been taken to task by feminist critics. These strange alliances and arguments are hard to make sense of, if we persist in thinking about the LPG in presentist terms.

Chapter Three

Aesthetic Liberalism: Election Novels of the 1860s

Introduction

If liberal politics and activism in Victorian Britain in the wake of reform was always and deeply marked by the struggle of relating to difference, as I have been arguing, literature of the period was no less so marked. To some extent, the ways in which literary works dealt with the specter of reform mirrored liberalism's general struggle with difference: after all, no less than politics, the arts "have traditionally excluded certain kinds of people as well as certain kinds of experience," as John Carey succinctly points out.¹ The rise of popular fiction in the nineteenth-century challenged the view of literature as the production and appreciation of elusive works of individual genius. For example, Matthew Arnold's definition of criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" set apart from the "mass – so much better disregarded – of current English literature" stands as an example of a view of culture that bears more than a passing resemblance to Mill's understanding of political office as a special and rarefied sphere reserved for the individual genius, a notionally meritocratic but predictably exclusive sphere.² Reform and its consequences had its effect on the

¹ John Carey. *What Good Are the Arts?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. x.

² Matthew Arnold. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." 1864. *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*. Edited by Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 50.

literary sphere, resulting in rising literacy rates, lower publishing costs, and increasing numbers of people with the money to buy a book and the time to read it.³

As the first two chapters of this dissertation have explored, the 1860s were a period in which political shifts in and involving the nation brought the fact of difference into close proximity, and as a result of which the body politic had to contend with reimagining citizenship on a broader scale. Beyond the political sphere, the question of difference manifested itself in the literary public in the period, as writers responded to what was taking shape as a mass readership on an unprecedented scale. The mid-nineteenth century saw the emergence of the blockbuster novel, with all its associated merchandise, and these commercially successful novels cultivated a large, varied, and unknown readership. This was, in a sense, an epiphenomenon of reform: namely, the increasing pressure of a public sphere that needed to contain a larger variety and multitude of people who previously had not needed to come together in any particular kind of relation.

It was clear to contemporary writers and thinkers that this new, expanded sense of the public was changing the literary landscape in powerful and unpredictable ways. Perhaps the most well-known account is Wilkie Collins's "The Unknown Public," published in Dickens' *Household Words* in 1858.⁴ In the essay, Collins investigated the hitherto unknown public of penny press readers, a group of people whose literary practices had been operating without the knowledge of the Victorian literary establishment, and presented his findings for the middle-class reader of Dickens' journal. Critics have tended to read Collins' piece as a sign of anxiety

³ For an account of this development and its effect on the structure of the novel from a narrative theory perspective, see Alex Woloch. *The One vs. the Many* makes the case that the "logic of inclusiveness" of the nineteenth century becomes "increasingly central to the novel's form." *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 25.

⁴ Wilkie Collins. "The Unknown Public." *Household Words* 18.439 (21 August 1858): 217-222.

over the popularization of a middlebrow form of art, but this is hard to understand when one reads the piece itself closely.⁵ Despite Collins' clear elitism, the tone is overwhelmingly one of excitement, and unmistakable glee at the opening up of a new market – the “great, unparalleled prospect” that awaits the “coming generation of English novelists” (222). Part of Collins' excitement in “Unknown Public” stems precisely from a dizzying sense of boundlessness, and the possibilities this afforded for the extension of *his* public. This is not the problem of scale conceived as a purely political question; culturally and commercially, the scale of the unknown public offered unprecedented potential.

Margaret Oliphant wrote about this new public with a similar mix of snobbery and sense of potential for *Blackwood's* in the same year. In her article, “The Byways of Literature: Reading for the Million,” Oliphant describes the purchase of six penny journals and discovery of the contents of those “unauthoritative, undignified, unlearned broadsheets, which represent literature to a great portion of our country people, despite of all the better provision made for their pleasure.”⁶ Unimpressed with what she reads, Oliphant initially frames the rise of this new public as a symptom of the improved mechanics of printing and the degradation of thought: the “flimsy pages” prove that “good sense, good thought, truth, excellence, or refinement of any kind, are by no means included in what is called the spread of literature” (202). Rejecting the idea that the

⁵ For instance, Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and John Plunkett claim the piece “exemplifies the anxiety created by the realization that the fiction market was becoming divided between the ‘popular’ and the ‘literary’.” “The Pre-History of the ‘Little Magazine.’” *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines Volume 1*. Edited by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 33-51, p. 40. Such a position belongs to the tendency to read sensation fiction purely in terms of its transgressive impulses or lack thereof. Critics like Patrick Brantlinger, D. H. Miller, Lynn Pykett, and Jenny Bourne Taylor, writing in the 1980s and 1990s, set the terms in which sensation novels would be discussed, largely unchanging, for the next twenty years.

⁶ [Margaret Oliphant.] “The Byways of Literature: Reading for the Million.” *Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine* 514.84 (August 1858): 200-216, p. 201. Subsequent page references in text.

newly literate masses should be applauded for mere literacy, Oliphant argues that the “spread of education,” the “diffusion of knowledge,” and the “constantly increasing extent of ‘reading for the million’” necessitate a “stricter standard” (202); as such, it was necessary to examine what is being read before we move to “give the masses all credit for their gift of reading” and “glorify ourselves over the march of intelligence” (202-3). Oliphant characterizes the literary realm in terms that strongly evoke its role in comprising the public sphere, and which also underscore its political nature. The “oligarchies and democracies of that Republic of Letters” function, for Oliphant, to claim “throughout its ranks a noisy equality, pleasantly varied by the arrogance of individual despotisms. Let us not delude ourselves with the idea that literature is fully represented by that small central body of its forces of whom everybody knows every individual name” (203). This is liberal elitism at its finest: an ambivalence for both the noisy democratic equality of the masses and the tyranny of famous individuals is ultimately weighted in favour of the “heroes” against the “undiscriminated multitude” (204). The “everybody, who is nobody” generating “deep-rolling subterranean universal applause” for the unknown penny journalists is notionally excluded from the “we” who “never knew of it” (211).

Of course, for Oliphant as much as for Collins the beauty of the noise is how receptive the indiscriminate masses are to the right message; the “multitudinous public” is a blank, conquerable public that “opens its own mind to us, all unawares and unconsciously, by means of those penny papers” (204). The mass, curiously in possession of a single mind among them, passively waits for interpolation by the right authors; Oliphant advocates for authors like Dickens and Thackeray to hold direct court with these readers, lifting them up by virtue of their ability to craft appealing and improving narratives. Yet “Byways” also functions to undo the distinctions it makes between the indistinct mass and the individuated middle-class readers; there are moments in which Oliphant transcends, or comes close to transcending, her elitism. In her

claim that “people whose understanding of poverty does not mean a smaller house, or fewer servants, or a difficulty about one’s butcher’s bill, but means real hunger, cold, and nakedness are not people to be amused with abstractions” (205), she demonstrates a hint of empathy for readers looking for distraction from real, immediate suffering. Such distraction requires a different form of identification than the concerns of the wealthy; what penny journal readers seek is not a literature in which “their own trials are shadowed—their own sentiments expressed—their own life illustrated by the fictitious representation before them (207), but one in which they can imagine themselves elsewhere. Oliphant briefly abandons the ethnological language typical of the genre to which her article and Collins’ belong, and imagines a universal feeling in response to the real stress of living in poverty: “In our nobler and loftier sorrows, it comforts us to hear of others who have borne the like affliction; but in our more sordid and petty pangs do we prefer to escape rather into regions where such things are impossible, to forget our mean surroundings in imaginary splendour” (207). Ultimately, Oliphant never strays too far from conventional platitudes about improving the masses through literature, but in her understanding of the desire for distraction from real care the mass readership is humanized in a way that Collins’s unknown public is not. The readers of penny journals may display no taste for the abstractions of philosophy, but everyone can identify with their desires: “We suppose, though it is rather contrary to the theory which brings poetry—and fiction as a development of poetry—most close to the heart when it expounds what that heart itself feels without being able to express—that this too is a natural sentiment” (207).

For Oliphant, the desire to read is a natural one, and it renders the noisy, indiscriminate mob legible as individuals and members of the wider “we” that encompasses not just bourgeois but all readers. That being the case, can literature uniquely effect a certain kind of identification where politics and practical reform fail? Oliphant’s article suggests that it can, serving as a kind

of object lesson for the way in which literary form possesses the unique ability to address the challenge of imagining oneself in the position of someone with whom one otherwise has little in common – a persisting problem for liberalism as a politics and reform as a practice. This is somewhat like, but not precisely the same as, D. Rae Greiner’s definition of sympathy as “a set of formal protocols for *feeling ourselves thinking* with real people and fictional ones.”⁷ But where “fellow-feeling” is, for Greiner, a vicarious sense, this chapter explores how fiction cultivates practices of identification that are at once more identified and more removed than sympathy; that is to say, not just thinking *with* but thinking *as*, as we see Oliphant doing for a brief moment in “Byways.” Despite an obvious aloofness, “Byways” cannot help but imagine a collectivity that includes all readers when it comes to the reasons we turn to fiction. In the context of a political and cultural moment in which we do not know exactly who the people are with whom we must learn to think, the novel negotiates identificatory practices that make this form of identifying possible.

As we saw in “Byways,” and as the very terms “unknown public” and “reading for the million” suggest, the democratization of politics and culture in the period of reform gives rise to a troubling lack of differentiation. If an enlarged readership presents an opportunity, by removing the distinction between its various classes of readers, literature’s mass circulation also threatened to bring into being a mass culture that was atomized and meaningless and, above all, uncultured. Yet by explicitly addressing its audience as a mass public, and modeling the abstraction of differences not as an atomizing but as a productive force, the novel could also offer its public what David Halperin describes in another context as “ways of being, feeling, and relating” that transcend differences, giving form to the possibility of living as equals although

⁷ D. Rae Greiner. “Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel.” *Victorian Studies*, 53.3 (Spring 2011): 417-26, p. 419.

one's differences are not equal.⁸ Although the working-class readers consume the inferior narratives published by the penny press, that they are drawn towards stories that distract them from their real-world cares is entirely understandable. If the desire for narrative is a "natural sentiment," working-class feelings become momentarily legible within the framework of "our sorrows," without threatening to subsume the individual reader within the chaos of "noisy equality."

In this chapter, I will explore three novels that not only exemplify this dynamic, but which also explicitly thematize ideas about difference, commonness, and publicity in an age of reform. George Eliot's *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866), Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), and Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1869) deal with the landscape of Victorian politics and the legacy and possibility of the Reform Acts.⁹ Trollope's novel, published in volume form after the 1867 Reform Act, handles the question of reform in the 1860s most directly through an account of Phineas Finn's political rise and fall, which hinges on his occupation of redistributed seats and his impossible position on Irish tenant rights. Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*, which, like *Phineas Finn*, is part of a series on English social and political life, was published in fifteen parts in *Blackwood's Magazine* and then in three volumes in the year before the Second Reform Act. Unlike Trollope's novel, Oliphant's novel handles politics only obliquely: electioneering is a matter of the man, and not the politics, as Oliphant's eponymous heroine often maintains. Eliot's novel, published in 1866, returns to the first moment of parliamentary reform: it is an historical novel set in the months following the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832. *Felix Holt* has been called Eliot's political novel, but as the opening of

⁸ David Halperin. *How to Be Gay*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 66.

⁹ George Eliot. *Felix Holt, the Radical*. 1866. Edited by Fred C. Thomson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Margaret Oliphant. *Miss Marjoribanks*. 1866. Edited by Elisabeth Jay. London: Penguin, 1998. Anthony Trollope. *Phineas Finn*. 1869. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

the novel makes clear, it is also fundamentally, and perhaps primarily, concerned with the way in which previously inchoate political and social differences became solidified through the agitation around the Reform Act, and the way in which “private life” is “determined by a wider public life.”¹⁰

How, and the extent to which, private life determines and is determined by public life are central questions for all three of these novels. In a sense, the novels do the work of mapping the broader political struggles and effects of reform on the individual lives they depict through the marriage plots on which each novel also hinges. For example, the process of becoming humbled and submitting herself to Felix’s “purer and stronger” vision and nature that Esther Lyon must undergo (148); the gradually unfolding realization that Lucilla Marjoribanks must allow her heart to go “off from its mistress altogether” in the matter of her marriage,¹¹ rather than allow itself to be engineered as Carlingford and its electorate can be engineered through Lucilla’s schemes; and Phineas’ decision to give up politics to marry his Irish sweetheart Mary, rather than marry for money to maintain his independence in the British parliament.

It is not merely the effect of the political or the public sphere that these novels address, however. As I argue in this chapter, the novels provide a form for negotiating between political or public and private differences. When Hannah Arendt diagnoses the problem of mass culture, the issue is not volume, or merely volume, but one of synthesis: “What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them.”¹² These novels aestheticize precisely this problem, as both the personal and the political

¹⁰ Eliot. *Felix Holt*, p. 43. Subsequent page references in text.

¹¹ Oliphant. *Miss Marjoribanks*, p. 467. Subsequent page references in text.

¹² Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. 1958. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 52-3.

plot lines in each novel are characterized by too much isolation (a lack of relation) or a form of community that is also too much (a lack of separation). We see this in the disorganized landscape of Carlingford politicking, for instance, or in Eliot's riots in which instigator and pacifist are indistinguishable. In narrating the chaos of the mass and its shift into the soothing clarity of the very personal marriage plot, these novels could be read as a retreat from the visibility of politics into the privacy and intimacy of the domestic sphere. Yet, I propose an alternative reading: as aesthetic objects packaged for consumption and ideally for mass circulation, these novels offer us not a retreat into the individual narrative but the rendering of a form of privacy in which we can all participate.

As mass products, these novels organize difference in a way that responds to the pressures of nineteenth-century reform. Consider Walter Bagehot's point that difference required the form of institutions: if the subjects of a government thought about what was useful, and if they all thought the same thing useful and could be attained in the same way, the formal elements of a constitution would not be needed. But, as Bagehot went on to note, "the world in which we live is organized far otherwise."¹³ In this otherwise-organized world, these novels represent a crucial part of the political process around nineteenth century reform, providing – like the constitution in Bagehot's analysis – a form for thinking together that makes communal life possible among people who think and feel differently. To use the terms laid out by Michael Warner, as "strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity," the readers of these popular novels become not merely an audience but a public.¹⁴ Hailed by popular novels as mass subjects, I will argue, readers learn to read through a framework of

¹³ Walter Bagehot. *The English Constitution*. 1867. Edited by Miles Taylor. Oxford: OUP, 2009, p. 7.

¹⁴ Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002, p. 12. Subsequent page references in text.

both recognition (recognizing that you are being addressed by the novel) and difference (needing to acknowledge that the text does not address you, or indeed anyone, in particular). These novels formalize difference and hail the reader as a mass subject, operating through what Raymond Williams has described as practical consciousness, and what Halperin has more recently described as practices of being: a way of feeling that is collective, premised on a shared and general affective form, rather than specific affective content (66).¹⁵ Oliphant's middle class readers may define poverty as a "smaller house, or fewer servants, or a difficulty about one's butcher bill" and the cheap periodical readers may define it as "real hunger, cold, and nakedness" (205), but the general form of feeling want enables a shared identification across the boundaries of those specific differences. This is a form within which it is possible to *feel with* through disidentifying. You need not *be* hailed by specific content to *feel* addressed by it.

Imagining citizenship on a broader scale entailed an expansion of not only the political sphere but also the constitution of the public sphere. The question of reform was not simply about voting, but also crucially about *relating*, as *Felix Holt* makes clear. Contestation about who counted as an equal in the public sphere, which played out in political form in the issues discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation, will here be considered in relation to the novels of the period. In modelling an affective structure based on general rather than individual feelings, the Victorian novel taught its readers to live with difference by learning to feel with characters, even or especially when they could not identify with them. These novels are, in other words, both theorists and symptoms of reform. In responding to the exigencies of reform, the novels provide an aesthetic form to the problems posed by a public sphere increasingly fragmented and threatened by its own expansion. As such, what they offer us is not, or not only, a moral answer to the problem of sympathy, but a practical response to the problem of liberal

¹⁵ Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 132.

politics. In short, how to conceive of a frame of mind that could encompass the different lives, standpoints, and politics invoked by reform?

Felix Holt, The Radical

Written between March 1865 and May 1866, as agitation in the lead up to the passage of the Second Reform Act heightened, and set more than thirty years earlier in the year of First Reform Act's passage, *Felix Holt, The Radical* has been considered Eliot's most contemporary novel, and as a novel whose historicity is markedly out of step with current politics.¹⁶ Whatever relation the novel is understood to have to the pressing political matters of reform in the 1860s, critics tend to agree that the political strand of the plot is less compelling or "resonant," as Pauline Nestor puts it, than the Transome plot. Underlying such interpretations of *Felix Holt* is an interpretation of the novel's form that will also be familiar to critics of *Daniel Deronda*: a novel based on separate strands, which are weaved together with more or less success. Nestor rejects the charges that the novel "lacks structural cohesion," but to her the novel is political in a general sense, showing the interrelation between public and private life, rather than a specific engagement with political questions given rise to by reform (113). Catherine Gallagher contends the novel's "imbalances and contradictions" include "Dickensian intricacies of plot" required to intertwine "individual and family destinies."¹⁷ In contrast, I argue that the novel's depiction of

¹⁶ For example, Pauline Nestor cites Blackwood claiming: "Her politics are excellent and will attract all parties. Her sayings would be invaluable in the present debate." *George Eliot*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, p. 106. Subsequent page references in text. In contrast, David Kurnick maintains that Felix's reappearance in the "Address to Working Men" is a "stark admission that there was always something amiss in this character's conception." "*Felix Holt: Love in the Time of Politics*." *A Companion to George Eliot*. Edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013: 141-152, p. 149. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁷ Catherine Gallagher. "The Failure of Realism: Felix Holt." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35.3 (1980): 372-384, p. 379. Subsequent page references in text.

individual destinies resolves questions that are at heart political, having to do with the relationship between public and private, the extent to which identification is possible across difference, and the changing social landscape as a result of reform. This reading of *Felix Holt* is thus an argument for the significance of its politics beyond the “privatization of potentially political meaning.”¹⁸

In what follows, I will read several key moments in *Felix Holt* in order to demonstrate how the novel dramatizes a particular mode of identifying that sustains a fantasy of liberal sociality: that it is possible to live as equals with those who are different. This is not, it should be said, an argument about George Eliot’s relationship to liberal thought.¹⁹ Nor is it a complete analysis of how Eliot deals with reform; I do not, for instance, address *Middlemarch*, which Gallagher has argued is the climax of the movement in Eliot’s thought for which *Felix Holt* is but a stepping stone, and in which, she claims, “reform and the 1832 Reform Bill become themselves metaphors” (384). My reading of *Felix Holt* is indebted to Raymond Williams’ proposition that, evident in the history of the novel, is the “problem of knowing a community—of finding a stand-point from which community can be known.”²⁰ In the development of the novel from Jane Austen to George Eliot, what happens is “a recognition of other kinds of people, other kinds of country, other kinds of action on which a moral emphasis must be brought to bear” (256). This is precisely the line of thinking that my argument takes up, seeing an attempt to resolve the problem of knowing an unknowable community in the way the novel figures reform,

¹⁸ Kurnick. “Love in the Time of Politics,” p. 146

¹⁹ For that, see Daniel S. Malachuk. “George Eliot’s Liberalism.” *A Companion to George Eliot*. Edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2013: 370-384. For an account of Eliot’s thought in relation to ideas about democracy and culture in Arnold, Schiller, and Mill, see Colene Bentley. “Democratic Citizenship in Felix Holt.” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24.3 (2002): 271-89.

²⁰ Raymond Williams. “The Knowable Community in George Eliot’s Novels.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 2.3 (1969): 255-268, p. 255. Subsequent page references in text.

and in the intertwining of what critics – including Williams, it must be said – typically have read as distinct political and personal plots. Williams argues that the “emphasis of want” is “specialized to Felix Holt,” and that the knowable community “comes to be known primarily as a problem of relationship: of how the separated individual, with a divided consciousness of belonging and not belonging, makes his own moral history” (262). In what follows, I want to push the boundaries of Williams’ argument. It is not only that in Eliot’s novel the problem of the community becomes the problem of the relationship; rather, the relationship poses a solution to the politics of the novel, such that Treby Magna can fail to return a Radical candidate and nonetheless be reformed through the way in which the novel solves the relationship.

David Kurnick revises Williams’ reading of the coach scene that opens the novel, in which the reader should imagine themselves on a coach thirty-five years ago wending its way through the countryside. For Williams, the coach-journey allegorizes Eliot’s style that can “register the causes of political turmoil” and then contain it “in a detached vision of rural tranquility” (143). Kurnick maintains that Williams’ point is inherent to Eliot’s text, in that part of “the interest of *Felix Holt* is the way its narrative awkwardness serves to render explicit the deeply ambivalent political and representational demands Eliot attempts to reconcile throughout her work” (144). Kurnick pays attention to what I agree is a strangely suggestive sentence closing the introduction: “These things are a parable” (11). For Kurnick, the point of the parable is about art and the excesses of the realist novel:

the sentence’s very mysteriousness highlights Eliot’s half-despairing sense of a realistic art’s potential impossibility. The gothic image of a blood-infested landscape is a parable—but of what? Behind that question we may hear lurking a larger doubt about the social relevance of creative art more generally. To what concrete reality does aesthetic language pertain? (144)

Kurnick's is one of the most interesting readings of *Felix Holt*, but I am inclined to disagree with the conclusions he draws here, perhaps because I do not see the same narrative awkwardness that he does (and other critics do) in the novel. Instead, I see the introduction as a parable of different kinds of publicity, a slippage between the known and local, where "everybody in North Loamshire knew Sampson's coach" (10), and the wide, unknowable kind, where individual stories are "unknown to the world," there is "much pain that is quite noiseless," and the "vibrations that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence" (11). This is a broader world of unimaginable feelings, and the scale of the parabolic blood is so broad that no one, and no one novel, can grasp the whole of it: "the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams" (11).

Of course, to say that Eliot's fictional project depends on representing both the specificity of private life and the generality of human existence is to render in banal terms the point she herself makes in *Middlemarch*, as the newly married Dorothea Casaubon sits sobbing: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."²¹ What is interesting about *Felix Holt* is the way in which reform problematizes mediation between the two – the coachman everyone knows, and the noiseless pains and vibrations of the general human agony that we can never know, or bear to know. Reform marks the landscape of the introduction from the beginning of the novel's second paragraph. The undeparted glory of the old coach-roads and the cozy social interactions, personified in the "smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose ostlers" go hand-in-hand with the political injustices and corruptions that reform movements intended to address: "In those days there were pocket boroughs, a Birmingham unrepresented in Parliament and compelled to make strong

²¹ George Eliot. *Middlemarch*. 1871-1872. New York: Penguin, 2015, p. 186.

representations out of it, unrepealed corn-laws, three-and-sixpenny letters, a brawny and many-breeding pauperism, and other departed evils; but there were some pleasant things too, which have also departed” (5). The shepherd can imagine his life untouched by the “mysterious distant system of things called ‘Gover’ment,’ which, whatever it might be, was no business of his,” and he can “cut his bread and bacon with his pocket-knife, and [feel] no bitterness” (6), but the reader cannot help seeing how the pressures of politics underlie and even enable this bucolic existence, creating the conditions for the very coach in which we are to imagine ourselves a passenger. The introduction enacts the difficulties of a reforming world, as we see so many different landscapes but cannot know them in their specificities. The coach takes us from the Protestant tramps, “saved from the excesses of Protestantism by not knowing how to read, and by the absence of handlooms and mines to be the pioneers of Dissent” (6) to the “trim cheerful villages” of homesteads of rich farmers, who thought of the coach as being for those “who, wanting to travel to London and such distant places, belonged to the trading and less solid part of the nation” (7); and from the coal mines, with the “pale eager faces of handloom weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week’s work” (7) and the “pious Dissenting women” who “thought that salvation depended chiefly on predestination, and not at all on cleanliness” (7) to the manufacturing town, with its “population not convinced that old England was as good as possible” (8). Linked by the coach as it traverses these different worlds, the lack of cohesion is nonetheless palpable.

The problem of this social world is that it is “easy for the traveler to conceive that town and country had no pulse in common” and that rural Englishmen’s “notion of Reform” was a “confused combination of rick-burners, trades-unions, Nottingham riots, and in general whatever required the calling-out of the yeomanry” (8). And though we are positioned with this traveler – or imagined as this traveler – the novel makes it impossible for us to replicate his

misconceptions. Government dictates the conditions of the shepherd's life, and town and country alike are shaped by reform even if the riots seem to happen elsewhere. The novel itself, in imagining a coach journey that connects the cheerful villages, the exhausting coal mines, and the town, and weaving a narrative that hangs on riots in the boroughs as well as the cities, is itself evidence for association it negates. As the novel famously tells us, "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (43).

Treby Magna is a throwback to country towns of an earlier literary period. Before the Reform Bill had thrust upon it "the new honour of being a polling-place," the town had been "quite a typical old market-town" (39). It is as if, in her characterization of Treby Magna before reform, Eliot anticipates Williams' point that, in Jane Austen's novel, all the people disappear except for those worth socially visiting (265). In no other similarly sized country town "was there a larger proportion of families who had handsome sets of china without handles" (39). It is a close-knit, socially imbricated town: "Such people naturally took tea and supped together frequently; and as there was no professional man or tradesman in Treby who was not connected by business, if not by blood, with the farmers of the district, the richer sort of these were much invited, and gave invitations in their turn" (39-40). What changes Treby Magna is not reform in the first instance, but the material conditions of labor: "there befell new conditions, complicating its relation with the rest of the world, and gradually awaking in it that higher consciousness which is known to bring higher pains" (40). As such, the town "gradually passed from being simply a respectable market-town," in which the commercial relationships were based on social ones – "where the trade was only such as had close relations with the local landed interest" – and transformed into the "more complex life brought by mines and manufactures, which belong more directly to the great circulating system of the nation than to the local system to which they have been superadded" (41). As the novel makes clear, the changed economic conditions, resulting in

a changed social landscape divorced from the social ties of an older, more feudal model of society, become solidified as political division: “when political agitation swept in a great current through the country, Treby Magna was prepared to vibrate” (41).²²

In turn, these political divisions create further social divisions where there were none, reshaping the religious landscape of the town from a small community of Dissenters “as little moved by doctrinal zeal as their church-going neighbours, and [who] did not feel themselves deficient in religious liberty” (41) into a group of “eager men and women, to whom the exceptional possession of religious truth was the condition which reconciled them to a meagre existence (41). The Catholic Emancipation Bill “opened the eyes of neighbours, and made them aware how very injurious they were to each other and to the welfare of mankind generally” (41). These “higher pains of a dim political consciousness,” helped along by the “recent agitation about the Reform Bill,” ensure that ordinary neighborly disputes become marked by the divisions of political discord (42):

It so happened in that particular town that the Reformers were not all of them large-hearted patriots or ardent lovers of justice; indeed, one of them, in the very midst of the agitation, was detected in using unequal scales... and it was undeniable that the inspector at the tape manufactory, who spoke with much eloquence on the extension of the suffrage, was a more tyrannical personage than open-handed Mr Wace, whose chief political tenet was, that it was all nonsense giving men votes when they had no stake in the country (42-3).

²² Eliot’s use of the word recalls associationism. As Shelley Trower describes, “associationism began to theorize that the external world vibrates the nerves; vibrations in the nerves transmit sensations to the brain; vibration-sensations generate ideas, feelings, memories, thought, imagination” (22). The image of Treby Magna vibrating at the beginning of *Felix Holt* is a political rendering of the kind of associationism that Trower sees in nineteenth-century physicists, physiologists, psychophysicists and spiritualists, “whereby external vibrations seem to set the matter of the body into a kind of sympathetic vibration; vibrations in the body then radiate outwards into the world beyond, in turn potentially vibrating another sensitive person” (11). *Sense of Vibration: A History of the Pain and Pleasure of Sound*. New York: Continuum, 2012.

The novel thus shows us the way in which the “private lot of a few men and women” are determined by the “wider public life” (43), and the particular influence of the Reform Bill is the way in which it hardens previously barely existing differences into codified and meaningful divisions. A petty dispute with the shopkeeper over the weighting of scales becomes political because reform creates positions that social actors occupy, thereby transforming them into political actors. What the Reform Bill does, in other words, is create not only a common world in which the “mutual influence of dissimilar destinies” unfolds, but also the conditions of possibility for both private and political events: those conditions “essential to the ‘where,’ and the ‘what,’ without which, as the learned know, there can be no event whatever” (43).

Reform thus creates the conditions for the events of the novel by creating social differences where there were none, as the Catholic Emancipation Bill gives rise to the feeling that religious liberty is wanting, instead of ensuring the civil and political rights of Roman Catholics. If the first volume enables the problem of the novel to take shape in this form, intertwining disparate social worlds through the mysteries of descent, and the third volume of the novel resolves the political questions through the private solution of the marriage plot, then the novel’s middle volume dramatizes the grounds of the struggle in its competing definitions of radicalism. George Levine figures the contest as Esther’s choice between “Harold Transome, the practical politician careless about the means to power, and Felix Holt, who, professing radicalism, is really only a radical moralist—that is, a conservative.”²³ Felix is “declassed,” in Levine’s analysis, “without a constituency, and armed only with George Eliot’s morality”; as such, Esther must choose between “corruption and surrender to the broadest and basest common denominator of human nature” (which Levine defines as politics), and the “best and most

²³ George Levine. “Politics and the Form of Disenchantment.” *College English* 36.4 (1974): 422-435, p. 431. Subsequent page references in text.

individual personal morality” (which Levine defines as anti-politics) (431). Though I disagree with Levine’s definition of what counts as politics, I take his point. The contest between Harold and Felix is a clash between two versions of radicalism, a corrupt materialism on the one hand, and Felix’s sentimental response to a material problem on the other.

We can see an example of this in the exchange between Harold’s agent, Mr Johnson, and Felix at the Sugar Loaf pub. Johnson cuts a good figure, eliciting a “general satisfactory sense that the hitherto shadowy Reform had at length come to Sproxtton in a good round shape, with broadcloth and pockets” (113-114), whereas Felix dresses like the “working man” he chooses to be (110), and is accepted by the men “as one of themselves, only much more knowing” (115). Their debate is about interest and solidarity, and the extent to which one working man’s win benefits all working men. Johnson poses what he thinks is a rhetorical question:

“There are colliers up at Newcastle, and there are colliers down in Wales. Will it do any good to honest Tom, who is hungry in Sproxtton, to hear that Jack at Newcastle has his bellyful of beef and pudding?”

“It ought to do him good,” Felix burst in, with his loud abrupt voice, in odd contrast with glib Mr Johnson’s. “If he knows it’s a bad thing to be hungry and not have enough to eat, he ought to be glad that another fellow, who is not idle, is not suffering in the same way.” (115)

In this exchange, Johnson offers a form of solidarity based on shared interest, a class-based form of identification that prioritizes traditional forms of non-voting politics like protest: “Let the working men ... join together and give their hands and voices for the right man, and they’ll make the great people shake in their shoes a little; and when you shout for Transome, remember you shout for more wages, and more of your rights, and you shout to get rid of ... the tools the rich make use of to squeeze the blood out of the poor man” (117). The form of identification Felix offers relies on the hungry man’s ability to transcend his own interest, to use his experience of hunger to imagine another man’s relief and be glad of it. At this point of the novel – we are still

in the first volume – this mode of identification has little purchase. Chubb, the pub’s proprietor, tells Felix that “love an’ harmony’s the meaning of ‘The Sugar Loaf, William Chubb.’ Folks of a different mind had better seek another house of call” (116). Johnson’s solidarity succeeds in the form of the “half-crown” (117) he lays on the table, which ensures that Felix’s message does not strike home with the good people of Sproxtton. As one of the drinkers, Dredge, remarks at the close of the chapter, “I shouldn’t know which end I stood on if it wasn’t for the tickets and the treatin’” (119).

We see a similar dynamic at play throughout the novel. Later, Felix sees a man in the “ultra-Liberal quarter of the High Street” and is attracted by the way in which he embodies manly labor, with “powerfully muscular” bare arms and the look of living “chiefly amidst the heat of the furnaces” (244). This muscular speaker is perhaps the novel’s most truly radical voice, advocating for rights beyond the limited extension of the franchise offered by reform, which he figures as a “bribe” to split the allegiances of “the people” (245). He argues for both political equality – “universal suffrage, and annual Parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts” (246) – and equality in the public sphere, claiming that “we want a freeman’s share, and that is to think and speak and act about what concerns us all, and see whether these fine gentlemen who undertake to govern us are doing the best they can for us” (245). The speaker’s version of the body politic is a complex one, in which the aristocrats are the self-appointed “brains” and the workers are the “belly that feels the pinches”; but the knowledge workers are also laborers who “must be looked after, like other workmen” (245). Despite the radical nature of his politics, the novel suggests that this speaker, like Johnson, is speaking for pay: “Felix recognized the fluency and the method of a habitual preacher or lecturer” (244). Felix, in contrast, speaks out of passion; his volunteerism is highlighted when, asked to respond, the narrator tells us he “did at once what he would very likely have done without being asked”

(247). When he speaks, the effect he makes is premised on his difference, as he is both stronger physically and more abstract:

The effect of his figure in relief against the stone background was unlike that of the previous speaker. He was considerably taller, his head and neck were more massive, and the expression of his mouth and eyes was something very different from the mere acuteness and rather hard-lipped antagonism of the trades-union man. Felix Holt's face had the look of habitual meditative abstraction from objects of mere personal vanity or desire, which is the peculiar stamp of culture, and makes a very roughly-cut face worthy to be called 'the human face divine.' Even lions and dogs know a distinction between men's glances; and doubtless those Duffield men, in the expectation with which they looked up at Felix, were unconsciously influenced by the grandeur of his full yet firm mouth, and the calm clearness of his grey eyes, which were somehow unlike what they were accustomed to see along with an old brown velveteen coat, and an absence of chin-propping. When he began to speak, the contrast of voice was still stronger than that of appearance. The man in the flannel shirt had not been heard—had probably not cared to be heard—beyond the immediate group of listeners. But Felix at once drew the attention of persons comparatively at a distance (247).

Gallagher reads this passage to argue that Felix “stands for culture, for a realm of values independent of facts but also a realm of values that are absolutely and eternally fixed, where appearances that are recognized are equated with essences” (381). What stands out more than his fixity, however, is his habitual “abstraction” and the fact of his difference – a distinction recognizable even by lions, dogs, and Duffield men. Moreover, the “contrast” he makes is figured as a difference that hails a broader public than the trades-union man, as he commands the attention of “persons comparatively at a distance.”

If Felix stands for culture, then, it is not culture as a retreat from politics, but culture *as* a politics; abstraction and publicity replace enfranchisement as the salient site of change. The vote for all is, for Felix, merely “the power to do mischief” (247), and a form of politics that “would never give you political power worth having while things are as they are now” (248). What Felix would like to “convince” his listeners is that “if you go the right way to work you may get power sooner without votes” (248). In the locomotive metaphor that he imagines as the body politic, the

“force that is to work” the “engines” of Parliament is not something so pedestrian as the vote; rather, it is to “come out of human nature—out of men’s passions, feelings, desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feelings” (248). The “greatest power under heaven” is “public opinion”:

the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That’s the steam that is to work the engines. How can political freedom make us better, any more than a religion we don’t believe in, if people laugh and wink when they see men abuse and defile it? And while public opinion is what it is—while men have no better beliefs about public duty... while men are not ashamed in Parliament and out of it to make public questions which concern the welfare of millions a mere screen for their own petty private ends,—I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition. (248)

Reading this, it is hard to argue with Levine about Felix’s conservatism, but if we take Eliot’s designation of Felix as a liberal radical seriously, it is worth parsing precisely of what form that liberalism consists. Felix and Mr Lyon are “Liberals who had neither freehold nor copyhold nor leasehold”; they share “political sympathies” and, regarding the election, there was “still something to be said on the occasion, if not to be done” (101). This disenfranchised liberalism is a form of politics that looks more like “delightful friendships” between “public-spirited” people, characterized by “much agreement, much disputation, and yet more personal liking” (101). Felix’s culture is therefore not a retreat from politics as such, so much as it locates the site of political change elsewhere: not in Parliament but in the realm of public opinion. Change will not happen in the political sphere, where self-serving politicians deploy the general interest to their own “petty private ends” or buy votes with beer, but in the public sphere, where general feeling and beliefs in right and wrong can make genuine political change.

The competing ways of thought that Harold and Felix represent is thus at least in part about the relation each offers to self-interest, which must be transcended in a particular kind of

way in order to allow for the kind of change Felix offers. The relationship between Jermyn and Johnson is a case in point. Jermyn is sure that Johnson's interest is tied to his own, so much so that he cannot conceive of Johnson's autonomy as a separate individual. Thus, when thinking about who knows about the existence of Thomas Transome, he acknowledges no other "soul except myself and Johnson, who is a limb of myself" (186). Of course, he is absolutely wrong about that, as Johnson plays both sides throughout the novel, and Jermyn's downfall does not materially affect his circumstances; as the narrator wryly notes, "Jermyn's star was certainly going down, and Johnson did not feel an unmitigated grief" (301). Public good is thus defined neither as ascribing your own interest to another nor as transcending self-interest entirely, but in usefully transcending one's own interest to act in proper unity with others; to be hungry in Sproxton and yet feel glad that Jack is fed in Newcastle. There are plenty of metaphors the novel gives us for this ideal relationship of parts and the whole; one such example is Lyon's sincerity, which might be laughable until the narrator takes it seriously as a petty heroism:

For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and present realities—a willing movement of a man's soul with the larger sweep of the world's forces—a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life. We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little—might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units; in this way we might break the sunlight into fragments, and think that this and the other might be cheaply parted with. (157)

Heroism is the right alignment of "a single life" with the "wider... world's forces." It is the kind of unity that Mr Lyon imagines as salvation, "the shout of a nation as of one man, rounded and whole, like the voice of the archangel that bound together all the listeners of earth and heaven" (46). But this is a world in which one cannot send "eyes to all corners" asking "What does brother Y. think?" (46); in order to "shout of a nation as of one man," one must know the other's mind. The trouble with this form of harmonizing, or with shining together as sunbeams do, is

that, in the world of human passions and actions, interest is so unknowable. Consider the “imaginary chess game” that opens chapter twenty-nine, in which “all the chessmen had passions and intellects,” and you might be “not only uncertain about your adversary’s men, but a little uncertain also about your own” (236). This imaginary game is easy “compared with the game a man has to play against his fellow-men with other fellow-men for his instruments. He thinks himself sagacious, perhaps, because he trusts no bond except that of self-interest; but the only self-interest he can safely rely on is what seems to be such to the mind he would use or govern. Can he ever be sure of knowing this?” (236).

The novel proves insistently how bad people are at knowing how the world appears in the minds of others. The first time we encounter Felix is in a moment of precisely such misreading. Mr Lyon is in any case a man who rarely thinks about how he might be read: “it had never occurred to him to reflect what sort of image his small person made on the retina of a light-minded beholder” (45). Although he is sensitive to others, he cannot interpret what he sees, or rather feels. Accordingly, when he first meets Felix, he feels him staring unthinkingly at a wax candle: “the minister’s sensitiveness gave another interpretation to the gaze which he divined rather than saw,” and he justifies the expense of wax by saying that Esther cannot handle the smell of tallow (51). For Gallagher, this moment is a sign of Felix’s cultured distance from inductive reasoning, as readers “must make meaning out of the low facts that Felix is too cultivated and ‘abstracted’” to notice; we get to know Esther through the detail of the wax candle, and Felix through his “attack on conventional reading” (380). Felix is not cultivated, however, so much as he is rude, dismissing the question of the candle with “loud abrupt tones” that “made the old man vibrate a little” (51). We learn less from this moment about Felix’s cultivation than about his illegibility.

Re-inscribing legibility onto this world in which we cannot know what sort of image we make on others, or what our chess pieces are thinking, is one of *Felix Holt*'s major tasks. Yet, despite the encounter with the candle, it is not Felix but Harold who is shown to be the paradigm for how not to read. A poor reader of the highest order, Harold offers us an inferior form of identification as well as of radicalism. The passage in which Mrs Transome first sees her son highlights reading in several ways, beginning with the moment in which she is arrested by "another likeness" in Harold's appearance (17). This is a foreshadowing that draws attention to the act of reading, as only the novel's re-reader could appreciate Jermyn, Harold's biological father, as the referent of this likeness. Mrs Transome takes care to dry her tears in an attempt to curate her impression on her son, but it is a useless gesture. While she is aware that "her knowledge of the youth of nineteen might help her little in interpreting the man of thirty-four," it does not cross Harold's mind to pay attention; he is not a "careful observer" (17). Although he "had no wish opposed to filial kindness," he has not the ability or the interest to try to gauge what his mother is thinking: "his busy thoughts were imperiously determined by habits which had no reference to any woman's feeling; and even if he could have conceived what his mother's feeling was, his mind, after that momentary arrest, would have darted forward on its usual course" (19). Harold's mind is a world unto itself, and the thoughts or feelings of others are powerless to arrest it on its predetermined path. That Mrs Transome's feelings are "excluded from her son's inward world" gestures to the violence that comprises Harold's despotic radicalism (19). Despite being "good-natured enough to wish that every one about him should like his mastery," his is a worldview in which other subjectivities are at best irrelevant; he was "not caring greatly to know other people's thoughts, and ready to despise them as blockheads if their thoughts differed from his, and yet solicitous that they should have no colourable reason for slight thoughts about *him*" (31). Harold's inability to enter into the thoughts and feeling of others

extends beyond his mother to encompass a general inability to accommodate difference of thought of any kind, and the connection of that inability to his desire for mastery indicates just how imperious his politics are. Politics are, of course, at the heart of Mrs Transome's "vague but strong feeling that her son was a stranger to her" (18): his announcement that he means to stand as a Radical confirms the difference she has already registered. Political differences register first as visible ones, but underlying both forms of difference is Harold's inability to read feelings, an autocratic form of feeling that the novel explicitly connects to the violence of imperialism.

Harold has a "narrow imagination which make what is admirably called the practical mind" (93). We are made to understand the full extent of the shocking brutality behind the seeming agreeableness of Harold's practical mind in a moment that contrasts Esther's attraction to difference with Harold's casual violence. Esther has a mutual, "extraordinary fascination" with little Harry, "a human specimen such as Esther had never seen before" (316). Trying to convince Esther that, despite his son, he has never loved another woman, Harold tells Esther that Harry's mother had been a slave, "was bought in fact" (352). As Kurnick notes, the "sentence's grammatical abstraction is a chilling indicator of emotional distance," making it unclear whether Harold himself was the one who did the buying (146). Kurnick sees the "condensation of affect" in Mrs Transome's character, but it is evident in Esther here too (145). Before Harold reveals his violent participation in the slave trade – whether he bought Harry's mother or not, Harry is evidence of slavery's sexual violence – Esther "began to tremble a little" (352). Harold wildly misreads Esther: "It was impossible for Harold to preconceive the effect this had on Esther. His natural disqualification for judging of a girl's feelings was heightened by the blinding effect of an exclusive object—which was to assure her that her own place was peculiar and supreme" (352). Esther's excess of feelings here gestures to a violence the text cannot explicitly acknowledge in any way other than romantic. Rendered speechless by Harold's revelation, she

knows only that flirtation has to stop, “shaken with feelings she had not yet defined for herself” (352).

Harold misunderstands Esther because he persistently reads her in light of his general ideas about women. His form of thinking is one in which general principles eclipse his understanding of particularities. Thus, he continues to believe that Esther’s feelings for Felix are “moral enthusiasm” rather than love, as he sees the “effect he produced on Esther by the light of his opinions about women in general” (378). His impressions “saved him the trouble of distinct ideas” (379). Kurnick maintains that Mrs. Transome’s psychologism signifies the way in which the personal and the political mirror each other in *Felix Holt*. Mrs Transome “must feel so many terrible things because she has been consigned the unenviable burden of representing a properly political discontent that has very little to do with her” (145). I want to go one step further: Mrs Transome’s burden, and Esther’s excessive feelings that display horror at a political reality that cannot be articulated, are part of the system of political discontent the novel establishes. They are commensurate reactions to a mode of identifying that would seem to be personal, but is in fact always already political. Esther’s shaking may be an excessive response to Harold’s “love-talk” (352), but the feelings she cannot bring herself to define register the way in which the system of sexual violence, of which Harry is the result, is part of the same imperious (and imperial) way of thinking of which Harold’s inability to read her is a symptom. To read Mrs Transome as the example of excessive political discontent – rather than, for instance, Mrs Holt, whose affect is no less excessive, but who has more obvious material grounds – is to buy into the logic of the novel, whereby explicitly political forms of action are expressed in and as liberal forms of identification.

If Harold represents a mode of identifying that is politically as well as personally oppressive – the kind of reform that destroys – then Esther and Mrs Transome stand for the two

possible responses. Mrs Transome's love ossifies through relating with and like Harold. Though initially a mother's love "enlarges the imagined range for self to move in," what it becomes requires "much suppression of self, and power of living in the experience of another" (22). Her relationship with Harold, one-sided as it is, fails to demonstrate "activity of tenderness or any large sympathy," and the result is that she "contracted small rigid habits of thinking and acting" (23). Harold's distant response leaves Mrs Transome with a decayed form of identifying, and she becomes, like her knowledge and accomplishments, one of the "old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal" (27). Mrs Transome can say that Harold displays "[n]o likeness to me now" (25), but she hardens to adopt a mode of identifying that resembles his: "Mrs Transome, whose imperious will had availed little to ward off the great evils of her life, found the opiate for her discontent in the exertion of her will about smaller things" (28). She becomes a living example of the failure of Harold's mode of radical representation.

Esther's trajectory is an opposite one, representing a shift from bounded to expansive ways of thinking. At the beginning of the novel, she has a contracted sphere of thought, her mind "not free from a sense of irreconcilableness between the objects of her taste and the conditions of her lot" (65). Esther's taste expands as her way of thinking does, so that by the end of the novel she turns to the "largeness of the world to help her thought" (388). Contemplating such largeness, she is able to encounter others in the specificity of their needs. Thus, Mrs Transome "might have gone on pacing the corridor like an uneasy spirit without a goal, if Esther's thought, leaping towards her, had not saved her from the need to ask admission" (391). Ruth Bernard Yeazell has argued in relation to *Felix Holt*, *Sybil*, and *Mary Barton* that "the courtship of the

heroine may cover a political story.”²⁴ In *Felix Holt*, the courtship *is* a political story, as Esther evolves, through her courtship, from the possession of a mind “not free” into a capacity for a form of thought in which her mind can leap from her body to Mrs Transome’s as though it is an autonomous entity. It is a form of inductive feeling, where the specific modes of feeling that Felix primes her to feel when he “raised a presentiment of moral depths that were hidden from her” enable the general form of sympathy that allows her to feel with others, like Mrs Transome or her father. Hence, when she learns the truth about her birth, “her mind seemed suddenly enlarged by a vision of passion and struggle,” and “the odd, wayworn, unworldly man became the object of a new sympathy in which Esther felt herself exalted” (214). As with Mrs Transome, the encounter with the other enlarges the capacities of her own mind.

Esther’s transformation is effected through the mode of relating that Felix represents. It would be remiss to ignore how violent that process is, as it begins with Felix’s wishing to “see if she could be made ashamed of herself” (63), and continues in Felix enacting a kind of affective mastery over Esther: the “tumult of feeling in Esther’s mind—mortification, anger, the sense of a terrible power over her that Felix seemed to have as his angry words vibrated through her—was getting almost too much for her self-control” (105). Ultimately, the solution the novel provides is to redress the balance of power, so that emotion flows both ways. We see the beginnings of this shift when Esther visits Felix to have him repair her watch, and the excess of feeling that her “mortification” occasions gives rise to a wave of tears that infect Felix (90). As a result of her tears, an “expression of sadness” appears in his eyes (90). When Felix learns to “set a high value on her feelings,” he learns to feel for others as well as think for himself, a mode of feeling rendered as fraternal: “Felix felt for Esther’s pain as the strong soldier, who can march on

²⁴ Ruth Bernard Yeazell. “Why Political Novels Have Heroines: Sybil, Mary Barton, and Felix Holt.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 18.2 (1985): 126-144, p. 144.

hungering without fear that he shall faint, feels for the young brother—the maiden-cheeked conscript whose load is too heavy for him” (261).

As a result of this process, the courtship between Felix and Esther results in a more equal mode of relating as they each learn to abstract their own feelings and think with the other. When Felix asks Esther if she can imagine “choosing hardship as the better lot” and she says yes, their “words were charged with a meaning dependent entirely on the secret consciousness of each. Nothing had been said which was necessarily personal” (224). They need not talk about personal matters in order to know them; they have the ability to know each other’s secret consciousness. Unlike the “formulas of her father’s belief,” which, being without “feeling or understanding” had no “power to touch” her, Esther’s personal relationship with Felix offers her the “first religious experience of her life—the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule” (225). What the text figures as a religious experience that comes to her “through Felix Holt” could also be thought of as a political experience, couched as it is in the language of “subjection” and “rule”: “he had seemed to bring at once a law, and the love that gave strength to obey the law” (225). In this way, the novel renders private processes as political ones. The relationship between Esther and Felix may become one in which they can encounter each other on equal terms, as when she visits him in prison and they “looked straight into each other’s eyes, as angels do when they tell some truth” and Esther understands him “‘better than I used to do.’ The words of Felix at last seemed strangely to fit her own experience” (363). Their relationship models a kind of identifying where his words apply to the vastly different experiences of each of them; where, despite her willing subjection to him, they meet quite literally eye to eye with different experiences that can nonetheless be described by the same words.

The relationship between Esther and Felix poses a solution that extends beyond their own situation. Their dynamic has a public effect. What I mean is evident in the resolution of the court case in which, as Gallagher notes, Esther saves Felix not through proving the specific details of his innocence but the general fact of his goodness (383). Seeing him in court, “when he was the centre of a multitudinous gaze, which seemed to act on her own vision like a broad unmitigated daylight, she felt that there was something pre-eminent in him, notwithstanding the vicinity of numerous gentlemen” (366). Esther’s eyes are a kind of medium for the mass gaze; her vision refracts the “multitudinous gaze” and her feelings recognize Felix’s uniqueness. This movement from the general gaze to a specific one is echoed in the way Felix looks, “first at the audience generally,” and then more specifically with “a more observant expression” (366). As Esther looks, again, in his eyes, she feels “that he bore the outward stamp of a distinguished nature” (366). His narrowed focus distinguishes Felix in Esther’s eyes, and it is this sense of his pre-eminence that allows her to abstract herself from her personal feelings and, “divested of all personal considerations whether of vanity or shyness,” testify to his goodness (374). In so doing, Esther has an elevating and unifying effect on the crowd; the “action of Esther’s” is so “beautiful” that it “conquered every low or petty suggestion even in the commonest minds” (374-5). Its more “permanent effect” is, of course, the meeting of the “magistrates and other country gentlemen” at the White Hart (376). As Harold tells Esther, “You made all the men wish what you wished” (387). Together, Esther and Felix create a movement of minds that creates change in the world: “by the co-operation of similar movements in the minds of other men whose names were of weight,” Felix’s case transcends “political partisanship” and he is freed (378).

This mode of identifying can make change in the world, but it is a particular kind of change based on liberal feeling. Accordingly, their wedding at the end of the novel has moved the feeling of the town, though not its politics: “the majority of honest Trebians were affected

somewhat in the same way as happy-looking Mr Wace was, who observed to his wife... ‘I feel somehow as if I believed more in everything that’s good’” (397). The broader social change is that Treby Magna “has since prospered as the rest of England has prospered,” but does not seem to have been altered in any other material sense:

Doubtless there is more enlightenment now. Whether the farmers are all public-spirited, the shopkeepers nobly independent, the Sproxton men entirely sober and judicious, the Dissenters quite without narrowness or asperity in religion and politics, and the publicans all fit, like Gaius, to be the friends of an apostle—these things I have not heard, not having correspondence in those parts. Whether any presumption may be drawn from the fact that North Loamshire does not yet return a Radical candidate, I leave to the all-wise—I mean the newspaper (398).

Levine claims that Esther’s story shows that “individual moral growth can occur without the compromise of public action” (430). The “imagination of community dissolves” as, when “value centers in individual perception and action, we are introduced to a moral laissez-faire in which social change becomes possible only through a widespread change of heart” (432). What I have been suggesting is that the novel establishes changes of heart as a form of public action, albeit a form of action best suited to the public sphere rather than the political one. It is a triumph of newspapers and novels over electoral politics. Political freedom cannot make us better, but being better can give rise to a publicity that allows us, through the particular kinds of relating that liberalism offers, to feel “somehow” a stronger belief in the vague proposition of “everything that’s good.” *Felix Holt* offers us Esther’s willing slavery to overcome the inarticulable horrors that make us shake to contemplate Harold’s imperial violence. Nevertheless, honest Tom remains hungry in Sproxton.

Miss Marjoribanks

Margaret Oliphant began *Miss Marjoribanks* in late 1864, when she was living in Paris, distraught after the death of her ten-year-old daughter.²⁵ The novel first appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in fifteen parts published between February 1865 and May 1866, during which time Oliphant was also working on *Agnes, Madonna Mary for Good Words*, negotiating her contract to continue translating *Les Moines d'Occident* by Charles de Montalembert, and writing reviews as *Blackwood's* "general utility woman."²⁶ The comparison between Oliphant and Eliot had already been made in the press in the early 1860s, an association about which Eliot was less than pleased, if her vehemence to assert that she was "NOT the author of 'The Chronicles of Carlingford'" is any indication.²⁷ Despite not having read them, Eliot's insistence is on how differently Oliphant's novel represent the social landscape: "from what Mr Lewes tells me, they must represent the Dissenters in a very different spirit from anything that has appeared in my books." Critics of the novel have tended to reproduce the assumption that the novelists were vastly different, if only in the tendency to position *Miss Marjoribanks* as a purely domestic

²⁵ Elisabeth Jay. "Introduction." Margaret Oliphant. *Miss Marjoribanks*. Edited by Elisabeth Jay, London: Penguin, 1998, p. xi.

²⁶ Jay. "Introduction," p. xii.

²⁷ George Eliot. *The George Eliot Letters*. Volume 4. Edited by Gordon S. Haight. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956, p. 25.

novel.²⁸ Yet the novels are perhaps less dissimilar than they have been represented to be, especially given the centrality of reform to both.

Oliphant's work has been studied in the tradition of feminist criticism that seeks to address the devaluation of feminine or domestic plots. Deirdre D'Albertis' work on the domestic drone is one such study. Following Nancy Armstrong and Elizabeth Langland, D'Albertis argues that Oliphant "invented the domestic drone from within a world of middle-class values, from within a domesticity we all too often characterize as unified and univocal."²⁹ What escapes such studies, in their important work of reclaiming novelists or novels from a literary critical tradition that sees little value in the feminine, is that in *Miss Marjoribanks*, Lucilla's management is never purely domestic. Oliphant's novel tells the story of Lucilla Marjoribanks, a girl of nineteen, who returns home from school after her mother's death determined to conquer Carlingford society. Her desire to arrange Carlingford society is not about domestic management – or not domestic management merely, as Talia Schaffer acknowledges when she describes the novel as "a comic, unsentimental account of a woman's desire for a career."³⁰ What Lucilla organizes is not merely a home, or the fabric of Carlingford polite society, but a public – the formation of which is the necessary precondition for the election the novel dramatizes. Prior to Lucilla's return, Grange

²⁸ For instance, Amy Robinson's interpretation of the novel as a rewriting of *Emma*, in that they are both stories about matchmakers (Amy J. Robinson. "Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*: A Victorian *Emma*." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 30 (2008): 67-75); Nicholas Rance's interpretation that the novel "exposes the element of rationalism inherent in domestic moralism" (Nicholas Rance. *Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists: Walking the Moral Hospital*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991, p. 49); even Deirdre D'Albertis's so-called "political history of the novel" reads the novel as a commentary of domesticity and middle-class values (Deirdre D'Albertis. "The Domestic Drone: Margaret Oliphant and a Political History of the Novel." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 37.4 (Autumn 1997): 805-29). See also David Kurnick on *Felix Holt*, as "baldly ideological" especially in the flatness of Felix's characterization (147).

²⁹ Deirdre D'Albertis. "The Domestic Drone: Margaret Oliphant and a Political History of the Novel." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 37.4 (Autumn 1997): 805-29, p. 824.

³⁰ Talia Schaffer. *Romances Rivals: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction*. New York: Oxford university Press, 2016, p. 220.

Lane is rich in “capital material,” but as a town or community, entirely atomized: “There is nothing which could be properly called a centre in the entire town... without organization, what good does it do to have a number of people together?” (20). Grange Lane before Lucilla is a set of discrete components that lack the ability to come together as a people and a public. As the remedy for “all that was wanting to Carlingford... a master-hand to blend these different elements” (21), Lucilla brings cohesion and meaning to the previously disparate residents of Grange Lane. In so bringing the community together as a community, and indeed, as a public, Lucilla serves as a model for a form of relating in politics by abstracting from her own difference in order to act for and as the good of the whole.

Oliphant’s novel tells a story of growth and change: Lucilla’s growth as a politician and leader, and Carlingford’s change from an atomized collection of individuals to a political and social community. As a teenager, freshly returned from school to look after her father after the death of her mother, Lucilla is imperious in her determining to rule over her father’s house. Her resolution to “sacrifice her own feelings, and make a cheerful home for papa” is uncompromising and leaves little space for the feelings of others (4). Her practical father reacts to his wife’s death with mild regret rather than the grief Lucilla wants to assuage, and her mode of comforting him entirely fails to take into account his feelings; thus she determines to embrace him, “forgetting, with that singular facility for overlooking the peculiarities of others which belongs to such a character, that Dr Marjoribanks was very little given to embracing” (5). Hers is an imposing character in both senses of the word, and the narrator notes that she did not “learn by this defeat to take the characters of the other personae in her little drama into consideration” (11). The novel dramatizes Lucilla’s shift from this imperious girl of fifteen, to an accomplished household manager who sets out to “establish her kingdom” of Carlingford society “with a benevolence which was almost Utopian, not upon the ruin of other thrones, but with the goodwill

and co-operation of the lesser powers, who were, to be sure, too feeble to resist her advance, but whose rights she was quite ready to recognize, and even to promote, in her own way” (79-80).

Melissa Schaub has argued that the novel is a story of Lucilla’s “growing ability” to consider others, and it may seem at first blush that this is so.³¹ Yet I would suggest that the shift in the novel does not particularly centralize Lucilla’s burgeoning sense of morality; in fact, very little changes about Lucilla, including her celebration at the end of the novel that, like Oliphant herself, she will not change her name upon marriage. The shift we do see in Lucilla’s orientation to others, then, is less about her own character development than it is about the cultivation of a particular way of relating, a shift from ruling to recognition. What really changes over the course of the novel is that Lucilla’s utopian benevolence shifts beyond the language of rights, where she can recognize and advocate for the rights of others, to a place where she can recognize and live with others’ difference. This becomes evident in her exchange with the drawing master’s daughter, Rose Lake. Rose analyzes her sister Barbara’s behavior and concludes: “Some are so different. Barbara ought to have been some rich person’s daughter, with nothing to do. She would not mind being of no use in the world. It is a kind of temperament I don’t understand” (146). Where Rose understands her sister’s difference, but struggles to account for what that difference means, Lucilla is content to see difference and leave it be: “Lucilla’s genius was broad and catholic, and did not insist upon comprehending everything” (146). In considering the sisters as they are, and making a social space for them based on their difference and how it fits in the social landscape (“She gave Rose a sudden scrutinising look, and measured her mentally against the gap she had to fill,” 146), Lucilla demonstrates a mode of relating that involves bringing

³¹ Melissa Schaub. “Queen of the Air or Constitutional Monarch?: Idealism, Irony, and Narrative Power in Miss Marjoribanks.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55.2 (2000): 195-225, p. 206. Subsequent page references in text.

people together based on a shared sociality, and which achieves the right balance between Lucilla's private interests and the interests of the whole.

That the novel establishes a distance between what Lucilla says and does, and how Lucilla is narrated to the audience, has been noted by critics. Schaub, for instance, reads this as an "ironic gap" between the narrator's voice and Lucilla's that displays that Lucilla "does not consciously understand narrative" in the same way as the reader and the narrator do (210). This is less about Lucilla's naivety than it is about demonstrating the process of Lucilla growing into a kind of identificatory practice on which the form of the liberal novel relies. As Lucilla becomes more fully aligned with the gap between her voice and the novel's narration of it, the "ironic gap" becomes a part of her characterization as she masters the art of politicking. When other characters in the novel debate about whether Lucilla is "full of feeling" – for example, at the unfaithfulness of a prospective suitor (134) – or speculate about the genuineness of Lucilla's emotions, the narrator notes that they were "not doing Miss Marjoribanks justice – as indeed few people did – for that perfect truthfulness which it was Lucilla's luck always to be able to maintain" (290). Lucilla's "perfect truthfulness" in the face of conflicting emotions marks the difference between her private feelings and her public ones, and the narrator's warning that both can simultaneously be perfectly truthful is a clear directive that we should read the distance between those feelings not as the failure of characterization or narratorial manipulation, but the successful attainment of the mode of identificatory practice for which Lucilla becomes the example. When a second suitor marries her widowed friend, Lucilla feels "a certain sense of surprised depression" (316). The "gentle sadness" she feels is dismissed by the narrator: "Not that she cared for the Archdeacon, who had thus disposed of himself; but still it was a curious fact that such a thing could be" (316). In the swift jump from Lucilla's sadness to the statement of her disinterestedness, the narrative models the process of Lucilla disidentifying from her own

feelings: the shift, in other words, from her “natural womanly vexation to see a proposal nipped in the bud” to the “sentiment of general content and satisfaction” that comes from identifying with the public interest. These are conflicting feelings to be sure, but neither are inauthentic; the disjunction is the result of the process of abstracting oneself from one’s particular position to take up the general feelings of a public subject. In other words, the narrator warns the reader not to make the same mistake in judging Lucilla as the other characters do: the ironic gap we should be heeding is not between the narrator and Lucilla’s feelings, but the necessary doubling or distance in the structure and process of Lucilla’s feelings themselves, and the space that gives to occupy the same position with very different orientations in public and in private.

Lucilla demonstrates a kind of abstraction of feeling, which is formalized in a more general sense throughout Oliphant’s novel as the narration persistently fails to articulate feelings – or, more properly, articulates the form of a feeling and not its content. Recall Lucilla’s “certain” feeling of surprised depression at the Archdeacon’s marriage. By describing it as a “certain” feeling, Oliphant manages to convey the specificity of a feeling while also evading its precise description. “To describe the feelings with which Mr Bury contemplated this little *entr’acte*, which was not in his programme, would be beyond our powers” (66); “As for Mr Beverley, his state of mind, as the newspapers say, could better be imagined than described” (223): the text is full of such moments, in which the emotion of the scene is in excess of what the text can convey. As such, Oliphant tasks the reader with imagining what it means to feel “a certain sense” of some imprecise feeling – in one notable example, all we are told is that Lucilla anticipates an event “with a certain emotion” (293). The identification it is possible to have with the character who feels such imprecise, or unapproachable, feelings can consequently only be formal; the specific content of the feeling remains inaccessible.

Miss Marjoribanks thus effects a distinction between the particularity of feeling in the private sphere, and the generality of public feeling, both within the text itself, and in the way it structures the relationship between text and reader. The third volume of the novel, which focuses on the campaign to elect the Member for Carlingford, extends this dynamic of abstraction to the realm of politics. The election is positioned as the next phase of Lucilla's career, and the "second grand period of Lucilla's life" (334). Her choice of Ashburton as the man for Carlingford is the product of a moment of intuition, based not on political but on social position: "Everybody knew everything about him, which was an ease to the public mind" (336). It is only fitting that the member for Carlingford, which exists as a public only through the exertions of Lucilla, should be selected by the same vague and imprecise, but also defined and strong, feelings that structure the rest of the novel.

Lucilla's selection of Ashburton is structured as a random moment: he "came into her mind in a moment, like a flash of lightning" (337-8), which is reinforced when the man himself manifests in front of her and "she did not know until she had almost done it, that she was walking straight into her hero's arms" (338). Despite lacking "marked political opinions" and "perhaps" not being "quite aware what Mr Ashburton's views were on the Irish Church question, or upon parliamentary reform," Lucilla's conviction that Ashburton is the man for Carlingford has the strength of the most deeply-held political platform: he springs "into her head by one of those intuitions which have such an effect on the mind that receives them" (337). Her manner of making this selection constructs the political field as a space in which the general feeling of the man, and the general feeling of the public, rather than the particularities and differences of opinion, is what drives the town's political decisions. When Mr Ashburton objects initially to standing for Parliament, he maintains:

“Sir John takes exactly the other side in politics, and I am afraid the Doctor and the Colonel are not of the same way of thinking; and then my opinions –”

“If they are not of the same way of thinking we must make them,” said Lucilla: “after having such an intimation, I am not going to be put off for a trifle; and besides, what does it matter about opinions? I am sure I have heard you all saying over and over that the thing was to have a good man. Don’t go and make speeches about opinions” (340).

The novel’s publication date locates it in the midst of major pushes to restructure the political landscape of Britain, and the novel mentions them – the “freemen of Wharfside,” “parish-rates and Reform Bills and the Irish Church” – yet the specificity of those issues dissolves in Carlingford, where what is wanted is someone who would “attend to the town’s interests... and take the lead in a general way” (452).

Lucilla’s decision to stand Ashburton is, therefore, stripped of every possible shade of political meaning, and yet the encounter between Lucilla and Ashburton is deeply imbued by the idea of political reform. *Miss Marjoribanks* is by no means a novel that advocates female suffrage, and yet the exchange between Lucilla and Ashburton dramatizes the clash of two entirely conflicting worldviews. Lucilla is delighted to have run into Ashburton, and “with a little scream” announces that her “mind was quite full of you” (338). She notes Ashburton’s “smile and a sudden look of interest,” and understands that his thoughts had turned immediately towards romance, which she immediately rejects: “‘I did not mean anything absurd,’ said Miss Marjoribanks. ‘Don’t talk any nonsense, please’” (338). As she walks Ashburton through her idea that he stand for Carlingford, he is overcome by emotion – “You are the only creature in Carlingford, man or woman, that has divined me,” he says, and presses her hand (339). Lucilla is “shy of such demonstrations,” understanding that the public tends to “keep a vivid recollection,” but calculates the moment and “accepted and returned in a womanly way the pressure of Mr Ashburton’s hand” (339). As they discuss the composition of Ashburton’s committee, and Lucilla scolds him not to “make speeches about opinions,” Lucilla is “inspired” and quite

convinced that “she was striking out a perfectly new and original line,” and Ashburton the candidate “smiled” and paid Lucilla “pretty little compliments,” thinking that “at the bottom she was only an ignorant woman after all” (340).

There are two important things to note in this scene. The first is the way in which its comedy depends on our understanding of how vastly different Ashburton’s train of thought is from Lucilla’s. His understanding of social congress does not allow him to consider Lucilla as a political actor; his mode of discussion insists on casting a romantic frame over the conversation, even after Lucilla unceremoniously squashes that suggestion; and he receives a political nomination in the spirit of a romantic one, and his voice trembles with private feeling when he declares Lucilla as the only person in Carlingford to have truly seen him. Lucilla, on the other hand, is always speaking and acting in two registers: she understands Ashburton’s language and can respond to it strategically in a “womanly way” when necessary, but the interest in Ashburton that “touched his heart” (343) never touches hers. Her politics are always “quite in earnest,” as she maintains when she rejects the issue of Reform to focus on the candidate’s colors:

As for Mr Ashburton, he did not begin to laugh until he had fixed upon her that gaze of utter amazement and doubt with which on many similar occasions ordinary people had regarded Lucilla – thinking she was joking, or acting, or doing something quite different from the severe sincerity which was her leading principle. She was so used to it, that she waited with perfect patience till her companion’s explosion of amusement was over.
(342)

Lucilla is a consummate politician, ever ready to adapt her approach to win over her audience. Thus, she fawns over her aunt’s imagined health problems, and appeals to her to define the Conservative platform, “though certainly she had a very much better notion of political matters than aunt Jemima had, to say the least” (350).

The second important thing to note that emerges in the meeting between Lucilla and Ashburton is the emergence of her proposal of a politics absent a position – that her proposal for

her candidate is not driven by pure necessity but by principle. The refusal to take a position – to stand as a Tory, Whig, Radical, or Conservative, or to make claims based on the concrete political questions occupying the nation in the lead up to the Carlingford election – becomes a position in Lucilla’s mind. A “new and original line,” Lucilla’s position attends to the structuring of the public sphere, where command of public opinion rather than pure politics decides an election (344). As the novel makes clear, this understanding of politics does not alter the franchise as such, but it makes space for a great deal of people who do not qualify to vote: the “enthusiasts” she brings to her camp are “chiefly women, and in no cases had votes; but Miss Marjoribanks, with instinctive correctness of judgment, decided that there were more things to be thought of than the electors” (344).

We could contemplate the symbolism of the colors Lucilla picks for her candidate, green and violet, and draw a connection to the chartist use of green, or the ahistorical connection to the suffragist colors, however that is precisely not the point. Political colors were local and largely random. As the report Jon Kelly notes, “the UK’s political map was a veritable kaleidoscope until fairly recently.”³² What is significant in *Miss Marjoribanks* is that green and violet are *new*. As Lucilla says, “I would not have anything to do with the old colours, for my part – they would be as bad as opinions, you know” (342). Lucilla effectively seduces Ashburton to select the colors by holding ribbons she happened to be carrying up to her face, knowing that “when a young woman who is not at all bad-looking puts up a rustling, gleaming knot of ribbons to her hair and asks a man’s opinion of the same, the man must be a philosopher or a wretch indeed who does not give a glance to see the effect” (343). That Lucilla happened to be carrying violet and green ribbons is either a coincidence, or suggests that she was carrying the ribbons around

³² Jon Kelly. “The seats where Tories weren’t blue and Labour wasn’t red.” *BBC News Magazine* May 3, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32510493.

for the purpose of choosing them for the new man for Carlingford, and Ashburton's appearance at the right moment stamped his selection as that man. Either way, the process suggests a deductive, rather than an inductive, logic: the new and original line comes first, and is followed by the new colors, the candidate, and only then specific politics, if at all.

The privileging of form over content is explicitly not political, in the sense that it evacuates the specifics of a position from the activity of politics. However, it serves an important political function, in that it smooths over difference in the public sphere so that people on vastly different sides can sit down at the same table. In a quite literal sense, we see this dynamic in play when Lucilla is entertaining the Rector's sister, Miss Bury, as well as her cousin Tom and his "amusing" companion who discuss "all kinds of profane subjects" with the outraged Miss Bury (55). When Miss Bury objects tremulously at the suggestion that a hanged murdered has no soul, Lucilla attempts to smooth the waters with a local story: "I remember quite well there was a dreadful man once here in jail for something, and Mr Bury made him the most beautiful character! Every creature has a soul. I am sure we say so in the Creed every day of our lives, and especially in that long creed where so many people perish everlastingly... It is one of my principles never to laugh about anything that has to do with religion" (57). As Elisabeth Jay's footnote to the text points out, the Creed to which Lucilla refers is the Athanasian Creed, which included an "especially damnatory clause" against those who don't hold the "Catholic faith" (503). High Churchman did not want to change the service, however the Dissenting wing of the Evangelical party (the Burys' faction) were campaigning to have it moved to the back of the Prayer Book, where it would become non-compulsory and less offensive to Nonconformists. Jay argues that in raising the debate "without declaring her own views on the matter, Lucilla is attempting both to prove her own religious credentials and discomfort her warring guests," to smooth over the fact that Miss Bury the Evangelical is troubled "'to sit down at table' with

liberalizing Broad Churchmen who questioned the historical authenticity of the doctrinal claims advanced by the Athanasian Creed” (503). In referencing the argument without taking a side, Lucilla prioritizes the form of religious observance without making any claims as to content. This enables Lucilla to reframe the fact that Miss Bury was “constrained” to sit at a table with such irreligious men as a benefit. When Miss Bury worries about the “debasement effect” of the “depravity of the young men with whom circumstances had constrained her to sit down at table,” Lucilla replies: “I had you! ... I felt it was such a blessing” (57). The “naturally mollified” Miss Bury leaves happily; the form of Lucilla’s feeling turns the constraint of sitting at a table with those of opposing viewpoints into a “blessing.”

Lucilla’s speech in this episode is rather like Ashburton importing wine and putting it in Carlingford bottles. The wine is bought directly from the growers, as “naturally his own county could not supply the actual liquor,” but as it was “put in Carlingford bottles,” there is “no mystery” about him: “people knew the kinds he had, and how much, and a hundred agreeable details” (371). Lucilla is “perfectly orthodox” (55), and as such even her radical ideas are accepted as orthodoxy. Declaring that her principle is “never to laugh” at religion is, by implication, as ungodly a statement as Tom’s blushing reply to Miss Bury that he “can’t say” he does believe in “Jove” (56): her principle is not religion itself, but the fact that she takes it seriously. The “hundred agreeable details” in Lucilla’s speech conceal her radicalism, just as the Carlingford bottles conceal the imported wine. The bottles represent a form of sameness that abstracts differences into irrelevance, and a similar dynamic occurs in Lucilla’s speech, which takes a radical position in ways that make it sound like perfect conventionality. It conceals the particularities of her position in the orthodoxy of her language.

The Marjoribanks’ Scottishness works in a similar way. Dr Marjoribanks is Scottish, and although little comment has been made of the fact of the family’s Scottishness, it fulfils an

important function in the novel.³³ Scotland leaves its traces on Dr Marjoribanks, a “philosophical old Scotchman” (187) who speaks with a “remnant of Scotch” (357), and whose admiration for his “young revolutionary” daughter stems largely from his Scotch feelings, namely the “respect for ‘talent’ in every development, as is natural to his nation” (46-7). There are several other moments in which the Scottishness of the Marjoribanks family is mentioned: Dr Marjoribanks, “being Scotch,” has a “turn for genealogy” and thus is unimpressed by the pedigree of the Cavendish family (117); Mr Cavendish, defending Lucilla to General Travers, seems to use Scottishness as a shorthand for having a good family when he says, “I dare say her family is better than either yours or mine. Scotch, you know,” (278); and when Mr Cavendish wishes Dr Marjoribanks luck in the election, saying, “I thought you Scotchmen, Doctor, always liked to be on the winning side,” the doctor replies that “[w]e have a way of making our side the winning side” (386). My point in listing these mentions of Scottishness is that they pepper the pages of the novel in a way that gestures to the meaningfulness of Scotland (“Scotch, you know”), without seeming to signal anything specific other than a vague indication that the Marjoribanks family is a good one. Dr Marjoribanks is known to be “touchy where his nationality was concerned” (386), which Jay footnotes to indicate that Oliphant was similarly touchy, remaining “fiercely proud of her Scottish origins and accent” (516 n 2). Yet there is no pride evident in the passage, only a “grim” reply and touchiness; on what precise feelings that touchiness depends remains obscure to the reader. The doctor’s Scottishness matters, but in what way it matters the reader cannot know. Everyone in Carlingford knows about the Marjoribanks’ nationality, but the nature of its importance remains private. The Marjoribanks’ Scottishness is thus not the basis of

³³ Even in analyses of Oliphant’s relation to Scotland and Scottishness, *Miss Marjoribanks* and the Carlingford novels are considered English rather than counted among the Scottish novels. See Anne McManus Scriven. “The Muted Scotswoman and Oliphant’s *Kirsteen*.” *Scotland in Theory*. Edited by Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, pp. 167-182.

a specific kind of national politics, though it signifies an indeterminate difference that is inherently good, forming the basis of Lucilla's ingenuity and ensuring whatever side the family takes is made the "winning side." Scottishness represents a private form of nationalism that manifests not in politics but in a genealogical interest and in the providential resolution of the novel that restores Marchbank to the family and ensures the line's endurance through Lucilla's marriage to her cousin.

Generalities form the basis of an apolitical politics throughout the novel in a wider sense. It is clear that Ashburton's popularity stems not in spite but because of his lack of a clear platform: "The result of Miss Marjoribanks's wise precaution and reticence was that Sir John Richmond and the Doctor and Colonel Chiley were all on Mr Ashburton's committee. They might not agree with his principles, but when a man does not state any very distinct principles, it is difficult for any one, however well disposed, to disagree with him" (371). We see the process by which Ashburton's mode of address – prioritizing general fitness and avoiding specific political views – is a more effective way to garner public opinion than Cavendish's form of address that expresses "his views very freely" when Dr Marjoribanks reads them both, side by side, in the paper (353). As he sits in his easy-chair and reads both offerings, he finds that the "force of that simple statement" – that Ashburton is the right man for Carlingford – has a "wonderful effect" on his mind that amounts to a greater influence than the fact that Carlingford's views "were precisely those of Dr Marjoribanks" (353). The doctor compares the candidate who is "right in politics" with the candidate who is "a more satisfactory sort of person" (353), and in the "ruddy and genial glow of firelight and lamplight and personal wellbeing," the distinction between the two men becomes "confused" (354), which ends, as we have seen, with the doctor forming a part of Ashburton's committee. The election itself suggests a personal resolution to the political question of the novel, as the "contest for the best man" ultimately

hangs on the “man most fit to represent Carlingford... not a man to be baited about parish-rates and Reform Bills and the Irish Church,” and “there were few so bigoted in their faith as to believe that the man who was capable of marrying Barbara Lake could ever be the man for Carlingford” (452). Despite Cavendish’s perfect politics, his “liberal principles and supposed Low-Church views” (447), in the town where politics does not “run very high,” the election is determined by his “injudicious sort of love-making” (452). Although *Miss Marjoribanks*, like Carlingford itself, would not seem to be a place where politics runs very high, the fact that Ashburton takes no position on the key issues of reform, and instead takes the lead in a general way, is precisely what makes him the ideal candidate in the age of reform. Ashburton’s general position of rightness brings the polity together, just as Lucilla reconciles competing Church interests into the only kind of harmony that could make sense at the lunch table – a harmony for which disagreement is a necessary condition, as Miss Bury’s presence was only able to be a blessing *because* of the godless men, but her presence could only have brought conflict. Specificity cannot bring together the freemen of Wharfside with George Street and Grange Lane, the Broad Church and the Low Church; the only man who can succeed in the context of reform is the man who does not take a specific position. In order to “attend to the town’s interests,” the right man must be able to “take the lead in a general way” (452). What wins the election is ultimately no man in particular but a fantasy of identification; by standing for the interests of the town in a general enough way, one can transcend the specificities of the particular.

Miss Marjoribanks is thus a deeply political novel, especially and intrinsically because of the vagueness of the actual politics it portrays. Lucilla’s platform amounts to a politics of abstraction. It is not entirely unlike Mill’s vision of the perfect parliamentarian in its elevation of character, capacity, and principles in the general sense above personal interests narrowly defined, but while the man was central to Mill’s estimation of the right candidate, the man is almost

incidental to Lucilla's campaign, and so the most significant thing about Ashburton is his overwhelming insignificance. The right man for Carlingford can be anyone, so long as he is the right man for Carlingford. The form of abstraction that this politics represents has also a social face, which is evident in the triangulation between Lucilla and the two Lake sisters. The daughters of the drawing master, Barbara and Rose are marked by their difference, a tangential place in the social landscape of Carlingford. Barbara, who has ambitions beyond her station, is so mired in her differences that she appears at the election in her completely inappropriate, "best" dress which marks her irrevocably as "not precisely a lady" (455). The inescapability of her difference cements the failure of her candidate, and ensures that Lucilla's difference is "proved" as "superiority" (110). Barbara's sister Rose, however, is capable of garnering her particular identity as an artist into a form of equality in public space, "regarding the world" with an "air of frank recognition and acknowledgement." As an artist, secure in that particular locatedness, and secure also in a "sense of confidence" in the friendliness of the public, Rose is possessed with the "confidence of her rank, which made her everybody's equal" (144). That is, Rose has a feeling for equality where Barbara has both no feelings at all (for what is right, for her place, for social appropriateness) and far too many (for Cavendish, for social success, for recognition). The Lake sisters perfectly demonstrate the social effects of Lucilla's politics. Both sisters are daughters of a drawing master, and just as peripheral to the real business of the Carlingford social scene. Whereas Barbara drowns in the specificity of her differences, Rose achieves precisely the form of abstraction that Lucilla advocates as a political platform.

Rae Greiner argues that we understand the significance of sympathy in realism as a "process rather than a feeling" (418). Yet what if we consider the mode of identification that *Miss Marjoribanks* offers as neither a process or a feeling, but an affective structure that enables the reader to identify with and maintain distinction from simultaneously? Seen as such, the novel

dramatizes the dual perspective of what Michael Warner calls the subject of mass publicity. This mode of relating to ourselves and the collective is based on “a different affect, from that which we have in other contexts” (160). In the moment of apprehending ourselves as public subjects, Warner argues, we must imagine ourselves to be indifferent to our particularities even though we define ourselves by those particularities the rest of the time, and regardless of the fact that they shape our apprehension of public discourse (165). *Miss Marjoribanks* facilitates such abstractions, establishing a general form of feeling that enables the contradictory identification of the mass subject, thus making possible what John Frow calls “democracy’s imperfect benefits” by giving form to the fiction of democratic equality.³⁴

The problem with “fictions of generality” (429) is that they enable us to have a “common public culture in a world of asserted differences” (423) but they are “of necessity, empty fictions” (429). Is not the “representation of publicness,” Frow asks, “always the performance of a division, an exclusion, a minoritization?” (423). Whereas material exclusions are always the ugly reality of practical politics, the novel allows us to indulge in the fantasy of those empty fictions and forget about the exclusions. I will give an example of what I mean by describing, twice, the ending of *Miss Marjoribanks*: first to explain its events and then to explain how those events dramatize a form of relating based on abstracting oneself from one’s own interest and fully occupying it at the same time.

After the election, it becomes clear that Mr Ashburton is going to propose. Aunt Jemima knows that Tom wants to marry her, and she wants her son to be happy, but she also wants more for him than marriage on two hundred a year. Waiting for Ashburton to arrive, we see the two women embroidering in the appearance of calm. In this quiet moment, Lucilla “temporarily lost

³⁴ John Frow. “Cultural Studies and the Neoliberal Imagination.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.2 (1999): 424-430, p. 429. Subsequent page references in text.

the entire sway and control of herself and her feelings,” and for once “she not only did not know what she would do, but she did not know what she wanted to do” (462). Both women are literally panting with emotional exhaustion, and neither woman can see the other’s excitement or understand the other’s feelings: “While Miss Marjoribanks marveled that the emotion in her breast could be invisible, and at aunt Jemima’s insensibility, the bosom of that good woman was throbbing with equal excitement... so great was the preoccupation of both that neither observed how it was faring with the other” (463). Lucilla’s is a mind at odds with itself, “like a country held by two armies” (465); as she stands, talking to Ashburton, she hears the sound of a cab pull up, and her heart “went off from its mistress altogether, and rushed down-stairs bodily to see who was coming” (467). Although Ashburton is in front of her, she is entirely absent, busy with a “crowd of thoughts” following the sounds outside until she “heard neither words nor voice, but she heard something which had as great an effect on her as either could have had” – the crash of the bowl of cards that tells her clumsy Tom has arrived to claim her hand (469). Lucilla, who has always had her suitors firmly in hand, realizes that “her feelings had never been engaged,” but as Tom does engage them she “relinquished her superior position for the time being” (474), allowing him to take control of the scene for the short moment of time in which she is overcome by emotion, until “she felt that her involuntary abdication had lasted long enough, and that it was full time to take the management of affairs back into her own hands” (475). The housekeeper Nancy, described as Lucilla’s “prime minister,” is unwilling to welcome a husband for Lucilla and is concerned about the “changed state of affairs” that would result, but Lucilla reassures her that “it shall never make any difference between you and me” (476). Nonetheless, despite Lucilla’s reassurances, the language of the passage demotes Nancy from household prime minister to Lucilla’s “faithful servant” (476). After Tom settles the question, Lucilla goes out into the hall to the place where Tom and Mr Ashburton met each other: “Miss Marjoribanks

contemplated the spot with a certain tender sentimental interest, as any gentle moralist might look at a field of battle. What feelings must have been in the minds of the two as they met and looked at each other! What a dread sense of disappointment on the one side; what sharp stimulation on the other!" (477). Aunt Jemima is overjoyed to see her son happy, and when Lucilla is almost angry that she had not said anything about his imminent return, Aunt Jemima tells her that she "had to think for you both" and "did not know what your feelings were," though she "always knew you were fond of each other, Lucilla; before you knew it yourselves" (478). The scene ends with "a vow of protection and guidance from the strong to the weak, though the last was only uttered in the protectress's liberal heart" (479).

The events begin with two women who are wholly occupied with their own positions, so much so that even when faced with her panting counterpart, the one cannot recognize that the other is feeling anything at all. When she hears the cab arriving, Lucilla is moved to abstract herself. Her warring mind splits off from her heart and she occupies two positions: she stands upstairs with Ashburton, and her heart trots off alone down the stairs to see who has arrived. It is the most graphic depiction of this dynamic in any of the three novels. Thereafter, we encounter the first exclusion: Nancy described as what she in fact is, the "faithful servant." We have seen Nancy described in these terms, when she is so affected by Lucilla's generous defense of Barbara Lake that she is moved "almost to tears" (125). Generally, Nancy is represented as an equal in the politicking of the household, as Lucilla's prime minister or her father's, as when Dr Marjoribanks looks forward to "Lucilla's struggle with Nancy for the veritable reins of government" (26). In the moment that concerns us, however, the way in which Nancy slips from prime minister to faithful servant highlights her dependency. The reins of power were never hers to win.

The second exclusion is Mr Ashburton, who in his disappointment must be made to disappear unwillingly from the novel's frame of action; thus he "went away from Lucilla's side, thinking to come back again, and clear everything up; but he did not come back" (469). All we know of his pain is the exclamation that runs through Lucilla's mind: "What feelings" must have been in his mind, what "a dread sense of disappointment." Exactly: *what* feelings, *what* dread sense of disappointment? We can imagine the form of the feeling, but the content remains beyond description, an excess that cannot be represented in the public the novel imagines. Ashburton "never said anything about his disappointment," and we never think of him again (495).

Aunt Jemima is the third exclusion in the publicness the novel establishes with its resolution. Aunt Jemima, in a "very agitated state of mind," worries about the power Lucilla has over her: "Tom had come too soon or Mr Ashburton too late, and all the fruits of her little bit of treachery were accordingly lost, and, at the same time, the treachery itself remained" (477). In an analysis of Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Raymond Williams writes that when the Squire deals with his tenants, the description of his character reveals not simply himself, but the social and material relations of the countryside: "the old Squire's way of looking is not now simply an aspect of character but of character in a precise and dominating social relationship."³⁵ This is precisely the function of what I have called moments of exclusion in this passage. We see Nancy's subordinate social position, even as the language of the passage tries to conceal it through metaphors that suggest her equality or through highlighting the affective bonds that join her to the Marjoribanks. We register Ashburton's pain, even though the nature of his feelings remain inaccessible if not unspeakable. And, evident in Aunt Jemima's plaintive plea – "you will make

³⁵ Raymond Williams. "The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 2.3 (1969): 255-268, p. 256.

my boy happy, and never turn him against his mother” – is the fact that she stands to lose the only thing that matters to her if Lucilla should ever say what she knows. The only assurance we have that she will not is the pledge made in the secrecy of the “protectress’s liberal heart” (478). The passage thus dramatizes the process by which that “liberal heart” overcomes the exclusions that are the necessary corollary of “the liberal vision of a common public culture in a world of asserted differences.”³⁶ Oliphant’s novel, in establishing a general, collective form of feeling while leaving space for its specific, individual content, achieves not the erasure of difference, but the feeling of equality.

Phineas Finn

In the general election of November 1868 – that same election in which Mill failed to win a seat for Westminster – Trollope spent four hundred pounds to stand for the borough of Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire.³⁷ Like Mill, he failed to win one of the two seats Beverley returned to Parliament, and he never again stood for election. Little has been written about Trollope’s failed bid for Parliament, possibly because critics have agreed with journalist Lance O. Tingay that the attempt “cannot be taken very seriously” (23).³⁸ Nonetheless, taking it seriously is precisely what I propose to do in this chapter, for in Trollope’s election addresses we can begin to see a framework detailing a view of statesmanship, in which the aspiring Parliamentary models a certain kind of mediation between the individual and the public sphere – a mediation that the novels of reform I discuss in this chapter also dramatize.

³⁶ Frow. “Cultural Studies and the Neoliberal Imagination.” p. 424

³⁷ Lance O. Tingay. “Trollope and the Beverley Election.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 5.1 (1950): 23-37, p. 23.

³⁸ Exceptions do exist. See, for instance, David M. Craig. “Advanced Conservative Liberalism: Party and Principle in Trollope’s Parliamentary Novels.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.2 (2010): 355-71.

In his election address, Trollope positions himself as an uncompromising party man: “I am of the opinion, – in which I cannot but think that you all will agree with me, – that the chief duty of a Liberal member in the next House of Commons will be to give a firm and continued support to the Leader of the Liberal party.”³⁹ The speech shows an affinity for party politics and procedure that will come as no surprise to a reader of the Palliser novels; he blames the Tory control of government on the Liberal members and the “deviations on their part from the straight line of Parliamentary tactics” (303). Trollope’s assumption of unity among the electors (“you all will agree with me”), naïve considering the widespread and commonly known bribery that decided the 1868 election in Beverley and ultimately ensured its disenfranchisement, is one example of the imagined forms of unity that Trollope invokes in the speech. Disraeli, under whose auspices the Reform Bill was carried out, is a man “in whom, certainly, the nation has no confidence,” whereas Gladstone is a man “on whom the whole Liberal party in England places an entire reliance” (303). What is interesting about these moments of campaign hyperbole is that the national lack of confidence in Disraeli is total, whereas the complete support of Gladstone is only partial: not the whole of England, but the whole Liberal party in England. Yet the relative positions seem equal if opposed, as though there is an equivalence between “the nation” and the “whole Liberal party in England.” The way Trollope slips between the two suggests a sort of synecdochal relation between parts and whole: in agreement, Trollope’s views are the electors’ views, which are the views of the Liberal party and also those of the whole of England. If anything, defining the nation’s confidence by its lack and the Liberal party’s reliance by its total strength suggests that the Liberal party is in a sense greater – a more powerful and unified force

³⁹ Anthony Trollope. “To the Freemen and Other Electors of the Borough of Beverley.” *Beverley Recorder*. 14 November 1868. Reprinted in Anthony Trollope. *An Autobiography*. 1875-1876. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 303. Subsequent page references in text.

– than the nation itself, gesturing to the imperial mindset that is, as Uday Singh Mehta has argued, shaped by liberal ideas.⁴⁰

The party thus becomes the vehicle for a certain kind of identificatory practice, a fantasy of unity in which sectarian interests can be transcended or abstracted in order to work as a coherent whole. In his first public speech, Trollope explicitly advocated for this model of party allegiance: “I do not think any man has a right to go into the House, and call himself what is popularly termed an ‘Independent’ member. A man going in the House is bound to make himself useful to the party to which he adheres. . . . You must work in bodies, in drilled regiments, to do any political good, or any other large work in the world. You must work shoulder to shoulder, and move step by step.”⁴¹ In part, the military-grade unity that this vision of party politics offers is a redress to the endless chaos of private opinion, where it is possible to hold an infinite number of positions on any issues; as Courtney C. Berger puts it, “politics cannot function along the lines of social differentiation.”⁴² One of the platforms on which Trollope ran in the 1868 Beverley election was state education, about which he claimed: “You are doubtless aware that the question divides and re-divides itself into so many points that it would be in vain for me to attempt to enlarge upon them within the limits of this short address. I trust, however, that my views will be found to be in accordance with those of the majority of the Electors of the Borough. There are of course various other matters connected with the programme of Liberal measures for the next Parliament, as to which it would be well that we should be in unison if you intend to do me the

⁴⁰ Uday Singh Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

⁴¹ Speech printed in *Hull & Eastern Counties Herald* November 3, 1868, reprinted in Tingay. “Trollope and the Beverley Election,” p. 26.

⁴² Courtney C. Berger. “Partying with the Opposition: Social Politics in The Prime Minister.” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 45.3 (2003): 315-336, p. 320. Subsequent page references in text.

honour of voting for me at the coming Election.”⁴³ If social questions are endlessly divisive, with as many points and opinions as there are people who could hold them, the redress to the chaos is party politics, where a general view may be “in accordance” with the majority of electors and therefore the party, which can run in perfect if fictional unity as in “drilled regiments.”

The phrase “in accordance” does a great deal of work for Trollope here, eliding the slip between the endlessness of “deviations” and the unison of working in bodies. For Berger, politics in Trollope “formalizes conviction through the open endorsement of positions, thereby demonstrating its necessity to both social cohesion and individual identity” (320), a bureaucratic form of representation in which it “no longer matters what you think or who you are, only that you fill the appropriate space” (324). There is thus a certain kind of non-position in the positionality that Trollope imagines in his election speeches, where unity with the party supersedes the genuine commitment to individual opinion, and where the mere fact of having an individual opinion is sufficient to ensure agreement. Compatibility, rather than actual agreement, is sufficient basis to abstract to the lock-step form of unity that party politics requires to “do any political good.”

The image of the committed statesman Trollope gives us in his speeches corresponds to Elaine Hadley’s identification of the shift away from the older aristocratic model of hand-picking candidates and the alignment of political interests across a “common cultural embedment in rituals and customs,” in place of which “the Liberal agenda substituted character and progress, liquidity and persuasion.”⁴⁴ The irony of Trollope’s candidacy is that character and progress – not to mention his hopes of party unity – were ultimately less persuasive than the more

⁴³ Trollope. “To the Freemen and Other Electors of the Borough of Beverley.” *Beverley Recorder*, 14 November 1868, reprinted in Trollope. *An Autobiography*, p. 303.

⁴⁴ Elaine Hadley. *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 5. Subsequent page references in text.

pedestrian pleasure of drinking Tory-bought beer. The Liberal electorate sold their votes to the Tories, returning Conservative candidates to both seats and sparking a corruption investigation that eventually led to the borough's disenfranchisement. Though the "great majority" of the voters might indeed have been "at heart Liberals," that Liberal spirit did not result in Liberal action, as neither Liberal took office and Trollope received the fewest votes of all four candidates.⁴⁵ Though Trollope euphemistically acknowledges the bribery when he writes that Sir Henry Edwards, the long-term Conservative member for Beverley, had "contracted a close intimacy with [the borough] for the sake of the seat," for the most part, he attributes his loss to the strength of his commitments to a position (300). He notes his inability to "swallow such gnats" as the Ballot bill and the Permissive Bill, a bill enabling parishes to restrict the sale of alcohol, and declares that "I would swallow nothing, and was altogether the wrong man" (302). Berger's claim in relation to *The Prime Minister*, that Parliament is imagined as a "form of bureaucracy" in which "it no longer matters what you think or who you are, only that you fill the appropriate space,"⁴⁶ also applies to Trollope's claim to be the "wrong man" – the reverse of Oliphant's right man for Carlingford. Despite his insistence that his refusal to endorse the "unmanly restraints" of the ballot or alcohol sales restriction (302), Trollope maintained that his "strongest sense of discomfort arose from the conviction that my political ideas were all leather and prunella to the men whose votes I was soliciting. They cared nothing for my doctrines, and could not even be made to understand that I should have any" (301-2). What made him the wrong man for Beverley was not the failure of his opinions in particular, but the failure of opinion in general.

⁴⁵ "Beverley Borough Election." *The Beverley Recorder*, November 21, 1868, reprinted in Trollope. *An Autobiography*, p. 304. Subsequent page references in text.

⁴⁶ Berger. "Partying with the Opposition," p. 324.

If, for Trollope as much as for Mill, the realities of electoral politics signaled the loss of the model of statesmanship to which he subscribed, Trollope found consolation in a more satisfying alternative: his novels. He makes clear the compensatory effects of literature in his *Autobiography* (1883), describing the publication of *Phineas Finn* in *St. Paul's Magazine* as a work "in which I commenced a series of semi-political tales. As I was debarred from expressing my opinions in the House of Commons, I took this method of declaring myself" (317). Most critics pay no attention to Trollope's framing of *Phineas Finn* in the autobiography, tending to follow John Halperin in reading *Ralph the Heir* (1871) as the result of Trollope's experience in the Beverley election.⁴⁷ Although Trollope is clearly referring to *Phineas Finn* as his compensatory political novel, one obvious reason the statement has not been taken seriously by critics is chronological:⁴⁸ Trollope finished *Phineas Finn* in May 1867, so he could not have known that he would not take his seat on the benches where he "might possibly have been shone upon by the Speaker's Eye" (317) when, seeking to ensure the verisimilitude of the parliamentary scenes in *Phineas Finn*, he "humbly" begged permission to observe proceedings from a seat in the gallery (321). I am of course not suggesting that we take Trollope's anachronistic claims literally. I do, however, want to take seriously his premise that he achieves something in *Phineas Finn* that he could not in Beverley. The mode of identificatory practice that underlies Trollope's politics fails in praxis but lives more successfully in the imagined world of the novel.

⁴⁷ John Halperin. *Trollope and Politics: A Study of the Pallisers and Others*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1977, p. 134. See also Andrew Sanders. *Anthony Trollope*. Horndon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 1998, p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Phineas Finn* was written between November 17, 1866 and May 15, 1867. Frank E. Robbins. "Chronology and History in Trollope's Barset and Parliamentary Novels." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 5.4 (1951): 303-316.

The image of a drilled regiment that holds opinions in accordance, rather than in agreement, is a dynamic of difference that is dramatized in Trollope's novel. As Scottishness functions in Oliphant's novel as an imprecise marker of difference – or better, a marker of imprecise difference – Irishness functions in *Phineas Finn* as a signal of difference that is both utterly irrelevant and completely meaningful. Jane Elizabeth Dougherty acknowledges as much when she claims that Irishness is “both crucial and incidental to Phineas’ characterization.”⁴⁹ The novel opens with the fact of the Finn family’s Irishness, calling attention to their locatedness in a way that highlights its distance: “Dr. Finn, of Killaloe, in county Clare, was as well known in those parts, – the confines, that is, of the counties Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, and Galway, – as was the bishop himself who lived in the same town.”⁵⁰ That the novel opens in “those” parts makes clear that Killaloe, and Ireland, are othered places, removed from the seat of power, the center of society, and the imagined community of the novel. Phineas is the Catholic son of a Protestant mother, but he wears his Catholicism loosely; it is there when the people of Loughshane desire an Irish Catholic candidate, but at other times barely perceptible as difference, as the rumours that Dr. Finn “would not be sorry if his son were to turn Protestant” indicate (2).

Trollope was himself famously ambivalent about Phineas’ Irishness, writing in his autobiography that the decision to “take” Phineas from Ireland was “a blunder... There was nothing to be gained by the peculiarity, and there was an added difficulty in obtaining sympathy and affection for a politician belonging to a nationality whose politics are not respected in England” (318). I do not read this, as others do, as a wish to disavow Phineas’ Irishness entirely. On the one hand, Trollope regrets Phineas’ “peculiarity” on the grounds that it obstructs the

⁴⁹ Jane Elizabeth Dougherty. “An Angel in the House: The Act of Union and Anthony Trollope’s Irish Hero.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.1 (2004): 133-145, p. 133.

⁵⁰ Trollope. *Phineas Finn*, p. 1. Subsequent page references in text.

character appealing or seeming sympathetic to the largest number of people; on the other hand, he attributes the novel's success to readers who could identify with Phineas. What he "intended" was that the men "who would have lived with Phineas Finn read the book, and the women who would have lived with Lady Laura Standish read it also" (318). Framed as such, Phineas' "peculiarity" makes the book more widely applicable. Had Phineas come from Lady Laura's world, the readers who "would have lived with" the characters would have been limited to that world also; Phineas' narrowed background has the effect of widening the set of readers who could identify with the novel. Phineas' characterization works because he is *both* narrowly specific and has general appeal.

The novel frames the election as a contest between two kinds of Irishness: the narrower sectarianism of the outgoing Morris, the unpopular Orange Protestant Conservative, versus Phineas Finn the cosmopolitan, rising Liberal star. Yet even so, the specifics of those designations mean very little. By the 1860s, the Orange Order was shifting to a mode of respectable politics, rather than the militant sectarianism of its history, and within the context of the novel it does not even stand for that so much as function as a meaningless sign of Irish conservatism.⁵¹ Moreover, the language of the novel institutes a possible distance between the sectarian interests with which the candidates are aligned, and the religious values they actually hold. For instance, it is not Morris himself to whom the designation applies. He is "the representative of the thorough-going Orange Protestant feeling of Ireland" (5). The phrasing leaves enough space to wonder whether Morris represents Orange Protestant feeling because he is himself an Orange Protestant, or merely popular with those who are. The phrase "Orange

⁵¹ The Orange Order "still sees itself as a unifying force among Protestants, and as such the lodges and their marches throw together people from very different parts of the social and political spectrum." Dominic Bryan. *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control*. London: Pluto Press, 2000, p. 44.

Protestant feeling” further removes the sectarian interest from any individual person: Morris does not represent Orange Protestant *voters*, but their abstract collectivized feeling. Moreover, though we are told that in Loughshane an “Irish candidate was wanted, and a Roman Catholic” (6), one wonders to what extent Phineas – the son of a Protestant mother – could really be said to fit the bill. His father, the narrator tells us, is a man “whose religion was not of that bitter kind in which we in England are apt to suppose that all the Irish Roman Catholics indulge” (2). Perhaps the most that can be said of Phineas’ religion is that it positions him in between: not Protestant enough to belong to the “high-minded” and corrupt establishment, yet not different and “bitter” enough to be entirely foreign to the interpolated English reader. As Patrick Lonergan notes, Phineas’ Irishness functions to signal Phineas’ dual insider/outsider status: “Phineas’ Irishness makes him sufficiently familiar to the English reader to excite sympathy; yet, being an outsider, he can indulge in exciting but not quite acceptable behavior.”⁵² Indeed, the more Phineas breathes the rarefied air of English political society, the more his Irishness signals both his distance and his inclusion. It is mentioned at Mr. Kennedy’s: “Why was he, Phineas Finn, an Irishman from Killaloe, living in that great house of Loughlinter as though he were one of the family, striving to kill the hours, and feeling that he was in some way subject to the dominion of his host?” (299). It is mentioned again at the gathering at Portman Square that closes the novel’s first volume: “There were there great men,—Cabinet Ministers, and beautiful women,—the wives and daughters of some of England’s highest nobles. And Phineas Finn, throwing back, now and again, a thought to Killaloe, found himself among them as one of themselves. How could any Mr. Low say that he was wrong?” (356). In the first instance, Killaloe signals Phineas’ difference, his distance from – and resentment at being subjected to – the great men and beautiful

⁵² Patrick Lonergan. “The Representation of Phineas Finn: Anthony Trollope’s Palliser Series and Victorian Ireland.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.1 (2004), 147-158, p. 155. Subsequent page references in text.

women that make up the English landowning class. The second instance registers Phineas' rise, yet also notes that he remains an outsider. He is not "one of them," but "*as* one of them."

Phineas' Irishness enables him to do everything that an insider does – go to the right dinners, socialize with Cabinet members, propose to a number of their daughters, and yet remain apart from the political establishment. Killaloe allows Phineas to take part in the political establishment, but remain not of it.

In response to Trollope's disavowal of Irishness, Hadley "concedes the narrator's avoidance of Irish details but resists the assumption that an absence of detail and the author's own disavowal of his Irish protagonist in his autobiography imply the irrelevance of all things Irish" (235). I'd like to take that approach a step further. The absence of Irish detail and the author's avowal are the very things that make Irishness work in the way it is supposed to work in the novel: as generalizable differences rather than absence. Yet it is an aspect of Phineas' characterization that critics often misapprehend. For instance, David A.P. Womble claims that the fact of Phineas' differences make up the sum total of his character: "there is no Phineas to be had if you subtract the accidents of his nationality, social position, and physical appearance. It is almost an exceptional quality in Phineas that he is so resolutely unexceptional."⁵³ My point is more or less the reverse: the differences add up to nothing, but somehow there is a Phineas there. We have a sense of who he is, despite the utter replicability of the details that make up his characterization. We are told that Phineas is handsome, and the novel is full of landladies and tutors' wives who swoon at Phineas' loveliness. But there is almost nothing distinctive in the description of what amounts to a very generic physical appearance (and certainly nothing that marks him as an Irishman). We learn about Phineas' physical appearance in relation to his rival

⁵³ David A. P. Womble. "Phineas Finn, the Statistics of Character, and the Sensorium of Liberal Personhood." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 51.1 (2018): 17-35, p. 23. Subsequent page references in text.

Kennedy, a man “with nothing in his personal appearance to call for remark” (56). The suggestion is that Phineas is remarkable in contrast, “six feet high, and very handsome, with bright blue eyes, and brown wavy hair, and light silken beard” (56).⁵⁴ This is, to my mind, an underwhelming description of a man that Mrs. Low, the barrister’s wife, finds so dangerously handsome. We know that his appearance is lovely because we are told it is, and because we see the effect it has on the people around him, but the concrete details that the novel includes of his physical appearance are hardly sufficient to make a character out of nothing. His social position is similarly generic. Phineas is the vaguely handsome son of the a town doctor of good standing in a social world defined in the novel’s first sentence as “the counties Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, and Galway” – that is to say, Dr. Finn enjoys a good reputation in a not insignificant geographical span of Ireland, yet, as the mention of Dr. Duggin of Castle Connell shows, he is not the only doctor in the four counties so positioned. For details that should compose the sum total of Phineas’ character, they are eminently replicable.⁵⁵

It is somewhat nearer the mark to say that Phineas’ characterization is based on position rather than specific opinions. Phineas is certainly no standard-bearer for any notion we have

⁵⁴ Compare, for instance, with the description of St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*: “Had he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier. He was young—perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty—tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his. He might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious. His eyes were large and blue, with brown lashes; his high forehead, colourless as ivory, was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair.” Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. London: Smith, Elder and Co. Cornhill, 1848, p. 93.

⁵⁵ For Nicholas Dames, it is Phineas’ career that is the important point in respect of which his social markers pale in significance: “his Irishness, or his class status as son of a country doctor, is strangely washed out compared to the vividness of his vertical ascension.” “Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition.” *Victorian Studies* 45.2 (2003): 247-278, p. 260.

about liberal characterization based on reason, the having of opinions, or cognition generally.⁵⁶ For Womble, the imprecision of Phineas' character coupled with his social and physical locatedness makes him a "statistical instrument" that aggregates his social circle; he reads *Phineas Finn*, accordingly, as a novel "held together" by a "kind of information technology" that "problematizes face-to-face sympathetic relations" (30). Because Phineas represents interest group formation, he stands for the shift away from the consensus-making public of debating individuals and towards the public sphere as an arena for competing, contradictory interests. What I am arguing in this chapter is rather different: because he is marked by difference enough to be "peculiar," yet imprecise enough to be unremarkable, Phineas embodies the fantasy of competing interests becoming consensus. The immeasurability of social difference becomes general agreement.

In that spirit, it is interesting to note, as Patrick Lonergan has, that Phineas' characteristics – which Womble takes to stand for the only kind of specificity about him – mean that there is no single historical referent for his character, as there arguably is for the novel's other politicians: Daubeny/Disraeli or Gresham/Gladstone, for instance. In fact, according to Lonergan's research, "Phineas closely resembles at least six real Irish politicians, and is comparable to numerous others" (149).⁵⁷ Lonergan's point demonstrates in a concrete fashion what I am trying to claim overall: the "accidents" of Phineas' nationality, social position, and appearance are not the details that form the basis of his absence of individuality; they are the

⁵⁶ For example, what Elaine Hadley in another context defines as the liberal cultivation of the self, wherein "consciousness is the privileged site of character definition and character formation: that which makes a human and that which makes a human good." Elaine Hadley. "On a Darkling Plain: Victorian Liberalism and the Fantasy of Agency." *Victorian Studies* 48.1 (2005): 92-102, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Much ink has been spilled in service of a discussion about whether it is possible to grant such one-to-one identifications of Trollope's political characters. For one example, see J.R. Dinwiddy. "Who's Who in Trollope's Political Novels." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 22.1 (1967): 31-46.

very details that obfuscate his specificity, and as such ensure that he is more generally relatable. It is not that there is no Phineas there, rather that the fuzzy boundaries of his tall, wavy, silken-bearded personhood enable a kind of condensation of all the men who could have lived with, or as, him. He embodies a better form of unity than the Liberal electors of Beverley who failed to march in step together.

The politics of the novel

The suggestion that Phineas run for Parliament is made by his friend Barrington Erle at his club. Phineas “blushed like a girl” at the “proposition” (5). Given such language, it is tempting to read the scene as a proposal, Phineas the feminized bride betrothing himself to the Liberal party. Indeed, critics have read it as such, drawing a connection to the dynamics around the Act of Union, another political event metaphorically rendered as a private act between manly English and feminized Irish parties.⁵⁸ What escapes this reading is that the scene in the novel is neither purely political nor private in nature; it is markedly social, taking place on the “club sofa” (5), a gentlemanly arrangement between Phineas – “a safe and promising young man” (6) – and Barrington Erle as the instrument of the party, over the future of the seat belonging to Loughshane, a borough owned by the Earl of Tulla, one of Phineas’ “father’s staunchest friends” (5). This is a comfortable social arrangement, demonstrating Jacques Berthoud’s claim that

⁵⁸ See Jane Elizabeth Dougherty. “An Angel in the House: The Act of Union and Anthony Trollope’s Irish Hero.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.1 (2004): 133-145. For similar discussions on *Phineas Redux*, see Cathrine O. Frank. “Trial Separations: Divorce, Disestablishment, and Home Rule in *Phineas Redux*.” *College Literature* 35.3 (2008): 30-56; and on *An Eye for An Eye*, see Jill Felicity Durey. “An Eye for an Eye: Trollope’s Warning for Future Relations between England and Ireland.” *Victorian Review*. 32.2 (2006): 26-39.

Trollope's Parliament intertwines the club and the forum, and translates the political process of representation into a more social – Berthoud uses the term “humane” – endeavor.⁵⁹

That Phineas' ascendance to Parliament is largely a social rather than a political event drains it of ideological significance. The incumbent he replaces, the “unpopular” George Morris, is the brother of the Earl of Tulla, “a fine, high-minded representative of the thorough-going Orange Protestant feeling of Ireland!” (5). It is not that Phineas – twenty-four years old, recently called to the bar, and still financially dependent on his father – possesses any particular qualities that make him the Liberal party's “safe” man. Rather, qualifications are irrelevant, dismissed as quickly as they are raised with the vague intention that “if any question were raised, that should be made all right” (6). What decides the election is a social and familial matter: Lord Tulla refuses to endorse his brother after he gave the deanery of Kilfenora to an illegitimate man rather than Lord Tulla's cousin. He chooses to support Phineas since he is friends with his father, deliberately evacuating politics from the question entirely: “I don't care a ----- for sides!” he

⁵⁹ Jacques Berthoud. “Introduction.” Anthony Trollope. *Phineas Finn*. 1869. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. xx. This is the kind of dynamic that D. A. Miller reads, in his account of moderate schism in *The Warden*, as the diffusion of institutional power across the social field. For Miller, this results in a form of institutional power that is less monolithic than it is in Dickens, but therefore more pervasive. As he writes, “the continuity between the social order and the subject who relays it makes for a supremely steady State, unstaggered by the militancy that, in the very act of diffusing, they collaborate to defuse.” D. A. Miller. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 129. I am interested, as Miller is, in the way in which Trollope portrays “a Parliament that, for all its politicking, has no politics” (116), but I am not swayed by the way he mobilizes his analysis of moderate schism to claim that “the issues are at bottom only pretexts to mobilize the novelistic population for a merry war” (115). Eve Sedgwick, in her famous critique of paranoid reading in which she both builds on and critiques Miller, recounts Cindy Patton's bored response to attempts to confirm that AIDS was introduced after the military had deliberately engineered the virus, which would therefore confirm that certain lives were valued less than others: “what would we know then that we don't already know?” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You.” *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1-37, p. 3. I can offer no better response to how, in Miller's analysis, all paths lead to the carceral. What if, runs the premise of my analysis of *Phineas Finn*, politicking without politics does not conceal disciplinarity but is rather a politics?

exclaims, when Dr. Finn nervously points out that Phineas is “on the other side” (13). It is not only that Lord Tulla’s endorsement transcends political sides, but that he does it in a manner that makes very clear that the Loughshane election, and Phineas’ win, has entirely nothing to do with politics: “We won’t discuss politics,” Lord Tulla tells Phineas when he goes to visit; “as I have already said, I am throwing aside all political considerations” (16).

Does the novel, similarly, throw aside all political considerations? An assumption that it does – that the politics of the novel is at best a smokescreen for other, literary or aesthetic considerations – has always been a part of the criticism of *Phineas Finn* and Trollope’s political novels more generally. In the 1960s, Blair G. Kenney maintained that “Trollope’s originality showed itself in his characters, almost never in his ideas.”⁶⁰ Arnold B. Fox, in the 1970s, who saw *Phineas Finn* as Trollope’s “principal achievement as political novelist and a major example of the genre,” nonetheless wrote that political problems “are seen not as large social issues but rather as the causes of personal crises,” and that readers “are left with the sense that *Phineas Finn* is a political novel only because the protagonist decided upon a political career, not because the novelist had political views he felt urgently impelled to share with his readers.”⁶¹ As David M. Craig notes, Trollope’s autobiography “conveys the sense of a man literally bursting with opinions,” which sits oddly with the critical view of the parliamentary novels that “depicted political life primarily in social terms.”⁶²

To my mind, more questions are raised than answered by such claims. Is it not an inherently political position to depict political life in social terms? Can culture – literature – be a

⁶⁰ Blair G. Kenney. “Trollope’s Ideal Statesmen: Plantagenet Palliser and Lord John Russell.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 20.3 (1965): 281-285, p. 285.

⁶¹ Arnold B. Fox. “Aesthetics of the Problem Novel in Trollope’s *Phineas Finn*.” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 8.3 (1978): 211-19, p. 212, p. 213.

⁶² Craig. “Advanced Conservative Liberalism,” p. 355.

form of political practice? If so, what does politics mean?⁶³ By way of an answer, I wish to take up Adorno's point that depicting political life in social terms is always "an apolitism that is in fact deeply political,"⁶⁴ in order to argue that the sense in which *Phineas Finn* is political depends precisely on transposing political questions into social terms. The kind of liberal politics that is worked on in the novel has not as an incidental but as a fundamental feature the initial evacuation of any political meaning. *Phineas Finn*, I want to suggest, paints the picture of a public sphere in which there are a number of possible ways to form an opinion and modes of identifying across the forms social differences the novel establishes. What makes Phineas "just the lad for Galway" (6) in the beginning of the novel is not merely his identity – Irish but not too Irish, Roman Catholic but Protestant-adjacent – but the fact that his opinions are wholly aligned with the party. It is not that Phineas is entirely without opinions of his own, as some critics have maintained, but that they are properly aligned with the collective views of the party.⁶⁵ When Barrington Erle tells Phineas that he is the perfect amount of Irish – "not a cantankerous, red-hot, semi-Fenian... with views of his own about tenant-right and the Irish Church" – Phineas, "blushing," responds with a childlike protest: "But I have views of my own," to which Barrington responds "Of course you have, my dear boy ... I shouldn't come to you unless you had views. But your views and ours are the same, and you're just the lad for Galway" (6).

⁶³ For a related set of questions (that have, it must be said, deeply informed my thinking about aesthetics and politics throughout this chapter and more broadly), see Lucy Hartley. *Democratising Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Art and the Politics of Public Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Hartley explores the modalities through which "conservative and progressive commitments to beauty meet and intersect and thereby provide a basis for imagining the private lives of individual subjects and their roles and responsibilities in public life." The rival interpretations of beauty she explores "illuminate how and why beauty matters, and fails to matter, in public life" (233). These are also trenchant questions when considered in relation to the literary arts, specifically when they take public life as the explicit topic of representation, as this chapter aims to show.

⁶⁴ Theodor Adorno. "Commitment." *New Left Review* I.87-88 (September-December 1974): 75-89, p. 76.

⁶⁵ For example, Womble. "Phineas Finn, the Statistics of Character."

If Barrington Erle had the last word on how Phineas forms opinions, there would be no novel, and, of course, there is Trollope's little joke for the re-reader when the narrator, ventriloquizing Erle, mentions the very two issues (tenant-right and the Irish Church) that spur Phineas' subsequent career crisis. Phineas learns to form opinions differently, but it is important that we see the various options presented to him throughout the novel. Erle, for one, is the party man par excellence, and the party, for Erle, is synonymous with its leader: "'the party,' by which Barrington Erle probably meant the great man in whose service he himself had become a politician" (6). Barrington Erle is an impassioned politician, but what that means is rigidly defined in familial and institutional terms. He aligns himself by expanding his sense of interest from himself, to his family (the "great man" is his uncle Mildmay), to the party, and thereafter the nation. Erle is "convinced that Liberal politics were good for Englishmen, and that Liberal politics and the Mildmay party were one and the same thing," and he "hated the very name of independence in Parliament, and when he was told of any man, that that man intended to look to measures and not to men, he regarded that man as being both unstable as water and dishonest as the wind" (15). One's interest and opinion are so firmly aligned with the party leader that political debate becomes significant only as a performance. Parliamentary debates are no forum for rational people to work out what they think, in Erle's worldview, but a direct method of social influence in a world of top-down politics: "He thought that debates were good, because of the people outside,—because they served to create that public opinion which was hereafter to be used in creating some future House of Commons; but he did not think it possible that any vote should be given on a great question, either this way or that, as the result of a debate" (15). Politics, specifically party politics, is the origin and purpose of all opinion; House debates "create" public opinion, thus shaping the electorate into party supporters who will elect the party in that "future House of Commons." The public sphere is not agential so much as a mechanical

tool of the party in this conception; it is directly acted upon by the political sphere, whose bidding it then carries out. Monk is as clear a critic as any on the ways in which the novel shows us the dangers of being so wholly identified with the party as Barrington Erle is: “‘There are forty or fifty men on his side of the House, and as many perhaps on ours,’ said Mr. Monk, ‘who have no idea of any kind on any bill, and who simply follow the bell, whether into this lobby or that. Argument never touches them. They do not even look to the result of a division on their own interests’” (ii.333). Where argument never touches, opinion is not formed, and one does not – cannot? – act in one’s own interest.

If Barrington Erle elides the distinction between public and private life in a particularly self-serving and conservative (by which I mean Liberal) fashion, Turnbull offers a similar model of identifying on the radical side. As Monk tells Phineas of Turnbull:

His fault is not arrogance, so much as ignorance that there is, or should be, a difference between public and private life. In the House of Commons a man in Mr. Turnbull’s position must speak with dictatorial assurance. He is always addressing, not the House only, but the country at large, and the country will not believe in him unless he believe in himself. But he forgets that he is not always addressing the country at large. I wonder what sort of a time Mrs. Turnbull and the little Turnbolls have of it? (167)

The problem with this mode of identifying for Turnbull is that he is not able to form opinions at all, at least insofar as those opinions pertain to specific matters. As an ideologue, he operates at the level of generalities, with a “political catalogue” that runs the gamut of issues from “Progressive reform in the franchise... equal electoral districts, ballot, tenant right for England as well as Ireland,” but his speeches need only reflect the generalities of his principles and an indications of opposition: “Having nothing to construct, he could always deal with generalities. Being free from responsibility, he was not called upon either to study details or to master even great facts” (163). And, as Monk once again shows, the end effect is that public life engulfs private life entirely, to the detriment of the evidently long-suffering Mrs. Turnbull, who even in

the privacy of her own home would be addressed not as herself but as the “country at large” (167).

The novel offers us a couple other examples of figures who fail to mediate satisfactorily between individual and general opinion, or the one and the many. Monk arguably offers a glimpse of what could be possible, but the novel makes clear that, given that his independence stems from his wealth, his is not a replicable example: moreover, the efficacy of his self-selected role as a “popular politician” – “an exponent, if I may say so, of public opinion” – unfits him for office, as he is too wholly aligned with public opinion to mediate between it and the party (ii.251-2). Monk holds office, but he is indifferent to it, and thus the narrator tells us his “public life was purely political”: he has “great ideas of his own which he intended to hold” regardless of party politics (ii.163). This is an interesting use of the word political as a description for Monk’s role, defining politics in opposition to procedure, perhaps to bureaucracy, and also to the machinations of party politics. Politics here is both a pure form of representation, and a pure form of independence, but all that means is that Monk is both too representative and too opinionated to be an effective mediator or operate practically within the system of party politics. Gresham, the Gladstone figure, offers yet another model of failed mediation. Monk remarks, with a slightly accusatory tone, that he is “so just in the abstract, – and in the abstract so generous” (ii.298). When Phineas replies that he has found Gresham to be generous to him also in detail, Monk replies: “I am not thinking of individuals exactly. His want of generosity is to large masses, – to a party, to classes, to a people; whereas his generosity is for mankind at large” (ii.298). Gresham is the right man to deal in particulars (individuals) or in absolute generalities or abstractions (mankind at large), but where he fails is in the middle: the classes, parties, and groups of people that mediate between the individual and private sphere and the grand national

political sphere – in short, the public sphere. And it is this form of mediation, I am arguing, that the novel establishes as its objective.

Womble claims that *Phineas Finn* “presents emotions and opinions not as elements of individuated character but primarily in collective form as the shared attributes of political factions and social aggregates” (17), and that Phineas, in “continually measuring and modifying himself in relation to the composite opinions and expectations of his social circle” (19), ultimately collectivizes information from his social surroundings in order to situate himself.

Womble’s is an intriguing reading of the novel, but ultimately unsatisfying in the conclusion that it draws. *Phineas Finn* belies the concept of a socially aggregate opinion where a private life exists; if you try to cultivate one you would be Turnbull, addressing the nation when he asks his wife to pass the salt. Part of the issue I take with Womble is what I would suggest is a misguided focus on Phineas’ wishy-washiness, a trait Womble associates with his Irishness (19). The idea that Phineas is a man of weak opinions comes to us in large part from Mr. Low: “He has always meant what he has said, when he was saying it. But he is weak and blind, and flies like a moth to the candle; one pities the poor moth, and would save him a stump of his wing if it be possible” (64). Low reads Phineas, as Womble does, as a man of “stereotypically Irish irresolution and impulsivity” (18). It is not that Phineas is depicted as a man of great ideas, but the process by which he forms opinion is less erratic and random than Womble or Low perceive it to be.

One of the reasons why Phineas is a successful mediator is that he is persuadable, and forms his opinions through social relationships rather than through independent thought.

Phineas had made up his mind very strongly that he would always oppose the ballot. That he would hold the same opinion throughout his life, no one should pretend to say; but in his present mood, and under the tuition which he had received from Mr. Monk, he was prepared to demonstrate, out of the House and in it, that the ballot was, as a political measure, unmanly, ineffective, and enervating (152).

Phineas' opposition to the ballot is Monk's idea, but for the time that he chooses to hold it, it is distinctly his opinion: a frame of mind that he occupies "very strongly" for as long as he chooses to occupy it. The strength of his opinion, which is not his idea, stands as a counterpoint to the effete, feminine position he opposes. Phineas comes to this masculine position by liking and disliking, rather than by any process of liberal cognition as such:

He had made up his mind to be Whig Ministerial, and to look for his profession in that line. He had been specially fortified in this resolution by his dislike to the ballot,--which dislike had been the result of Mr. Monk's teaching. Had Mr. Turnbull become his friend instead, it may be that he would have like the ballot. On such subjects men must think long, and be sure that they have thought in earnest, before they are justified in saying that their opinions are the results of their own thoughts. ... He told himself that he was at heart a true Liberal (243).

He "told himself" that he was "at heart a true Liberal": this is an affective form of liberalism that operates at a remove even from his own emotions – it's not that he *is* at heart a true Liberal, or *feels* that he is, but he *tells himself* that he is one. The imprecision here is important to enabling that feeling of equality, rather than actual political or material equality, that by now is familiar to us, a form of equality that is described first by Lady Glencora: "I am not saying that people are equal; but that the tendency of all law-making and of all governing should be to reduce the inequalities" (127); and then by Monk: "Equality is an ugly word and shouldn't be used.... But the wish of every honest man should be to assist in lifting up those below him, till they be something nearer his own level than he finds them" (128). Neither of these statements advocate for actual equality, though they would seem to. How much do laws and governance need to do to display a "tendency" to reduce inequality? Why is the tendency to reduce inequality rather than establish equality? What constitutes assistance? How much of a gap is allowable under the phrase "something nearer his own level"? My point is that this vagueness is what allow liberals to be comfortable with the discrepancy between the feeling of equality and its materiality. If

Monk were riding on the coach in *Felix Holt*, he would not be compelled to roll up his sleeves and bathe the dirty children if he could simply regard the haggard faces of the handloom weavers and wish to lift them up to “something” nearer his own level. The space between the feeling of equality and its material reality that Lady Glencora and Monk establish operates under the same logic that divorced Liberal feeling from Liberal action in Beverley, enabling the electors to drink beer, vote in Conservative members, and yet remain “at heart Liberals.”

We will return to the feeling of equality, because my contention in this chapter is that it serves a more productive purpose in the novel than it does in the electorate, but I have first to finish my point on the strength of Phineas’ opinions. Phineas may not have his own ideas, but neither is he merely a “statistical instrument,” as Womble would have it.⁶⁶ He may not have come by his opinions honestly, but they become his own individualized opinions, as we see when he attends the meeting at Mildmay’s that sets the terms for the liberal party’s strategy. Having never attended such a meeting, “Phineas did not understand whether the assent required would or would not be an individual personal assent” (153). He thinks that he will be called upon to “express individually his assent or dissent” (152). He does, in a manner of speaking, not by vocalizing an assent but by indicating it, giving “a silent adhesion” by virtue of his presence (153). Whereas under a framework of liberal cognition the idea is typically considered to be the

⁶⁶ Womble: “By continually measuring and modifying himself in relation to the composite opinions and expectations of his social circle, Phineas converts the thoughts and feelings of individuals around him into a pool of collectivized social information within which he can situate himself” (19). Hadley makes the point that Finn lacks his own ideas: “Finn is shown trying an occupational leap of faith into the political world without financial support, without his own ideas, and without a dense cultural location from which his abstracted embodiment might take shape” (271). Lacking his own ideas has consequences for Phineas’s ability to cultivate liberal personhood: “Liberal discourse was trying to imagine the design and dissemination of the good life, such that the two modalities of abstraction that constituted liberal subjectivity, that distance between the private realm of cognition (a place of impersonality) and the public realm of abstract politics (a place of nation, citizenship, empire) could be elegantly and effectively bridged” (15). The abstracted forms of liberal embodiment are the “sites where the idea becomes opinion and does its unique political work” (16).

privately conceived and held thing, and opinion its public manifestation, in *Phineas Finn* the having and displaying of an opinion becomes a silent, private, embodied thing. Thus, when Phineas is described in the novel's second volume as a "man with strong opinions, who could yet be submissive," the point is not that he is an aggregate of other people's opinions, but that he has cultivated his own private opinions and can, by virtue of those, participate in the vague general agreement that the novel figures as liberal sociality (ii.22). If liberal individualism requires masculinity and strength in its opinions, it also requires the ability to submit to other liberal individuals with equally strong, masculine opinions (or it would be despotism). It is crucial that Phineas has strong opinions; without them, to be submissive would mean to become the kind of party man Barrington Erle is, who disappears into the party, follows the bell, and always remains untouched by argument. It is only by being able to submit that Phineas' opinions remain democratic, and it is only by having strong opinions that Phineas' submission remains compatible with manly liberal individualism: he can assert himself up to, and never beyond, "the point at which self-assertion ceases to be a necessity of manliness" (ii.22).

At this stage of his career, Phineas achieves the balance of opinions and party loyalty Trollope hoped to exhibit had he been successful at Beverley. The language Trollope uses strongly anticipates his depictions of duty and agreement in his election speeches. For example, when Phineas worries about the ethics of sitting, as an "ardent reformer" for Loughton, the borough controlled by his patron Lord Brentford:

Now that Phineas had consented to join the Government [as junior Lord of the Treasury], any such considerations as these must be laid aside. He could no longer be a free agent, or even a free thinker. He had been quite aware of this, and had taught himself to understand that members of Parliament in the direct service of the Government were absolved from the necessity of free-thinking. Individual free-thinking was incompatible with the position of a member of the Government, and unless such abnegation were practised, no government would be possible. It was of course a man's duty to bind

himself together with no other men but those with whom, on matters of general policy, he could agree heartily (ii.47).

General agreement trumps individual free-thinking, but it does not negate it in Phineas, whose likeability depends on having strong opinions and being able to transcend them when duty or allegiance requires it. This may seem like an example of Hadley's conception of the "formalism of midcentury liberalism," where we encounter a great deal of how Phineas feels when he speaks but not the details of what he says; it is an "an embodied form of cognition [that] supposedly counts more than its content, where taking a stand is more important than the stand itself" (273). In characterizing liberal formalism in this way, Hadley argues Phineas is "without his own ideas" (271). Yet we know that he does have his own ideas, or strong opinions, even if we do not know what they are.⁶⁷ Opinions are private, and Phineas can have them while also submitting to the general consensus of the party under the guise of "practical usefulness" (ii.22). To say that having a stand is more important than the stand itself overlooks the importance of having an opinion in order to submit to the general opinion of the group. This form of general agreement supersedes, but does not negate, the specificities of particular difference. Phineas can have his private manly opinions, and by virtue of a general agreement, can also fulfill his duty in being "bound to make himself useful to the party to which he adheres."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Perhaps a better point of comparison is Hadley's analysis of *The Warden*, in which she reads Harding's "process of differentiation his own disinterestedness" as a formal organization of his thoughts that allows him to exist as himself as well as transcend his own particular identification to think through the narratorial third person ("as if Harding himself is thinking in and through the third-person narrative voice that thereby enables the hero to refer to himself as 'he'") (305). Similarly, Phineas can simultaneously have his opinions privately, and think through the party in public, and his ability to occupy simultaneously these two different but mutually constitutive modes of thinking forms the basis of his liberal character.

⁶⁸ Speech printed in *Hull & Eastern Counties Herald* November 3, 1868, reprinted in Tingay. "Trollope and the Beverley Election," p. 26.

What Phineas represents is a form of liberal mediation that ultimately fails as an effective form of publicity. The power of the general party position overwhelms his strong opinions, and Phineas, as he achieves his official goals, begins to feel “that he was almost constrained to adopt the views of others, let them be what they might” (ii.163). As much as I wonder what it means to be “almost” constrained, and what actual constraint would look like, what matters more is that politics disappoints Phineas in much the same way as it would disappoint Trollope. It is harder to change people’s minds on politics. Consider the moment in which he reads Monk’s letter on Reform to Mr. and Mrs. Low, a long screed in which Monk champions the character of the English, “a people thoughtful, educated, and industrious” (336), extols the beauty of the parliamentary system, and argues for the necessity of change:

One great authority told us the other day that the sole object of legislation on this subject should be to get together the best possible 658 members of Parliament. That to me would be a most repulsive idea if it were not that by its very vagueness it becomes inoperative. Who shall say what is best; or what characteristic constitutes excellence in a member of Parliament? If the gentleman means excellence in general wisdom, or in statecraft, or in skill in talking, or in private character, or even excellence in patriotism, then I say that he is utterly wrong, and has never touched with his intellect the true theory of representation. One only excellence may be acknowledged, and that is the excellence of likeness. As a portrait should be like the person portrayed, so should a representative House be like the people whom it represents. (335)

Neither of the Lows are persuaded by Monk’s aestheticized rendering of the principles of representation and the need for reform: to him, it is “just the usual claptrap,” and Mrs. Low rejects the desirability of a “portrait of ignorance and ugliness” when what “we all want is to have things quiet and orderly” (337). Putting aside Mrs. Low’s gross misrepresentation of what “we” all want, at least insofar as any character we have encountered in the novel is included in that collective, the lesson Phineas learns is that “it is not easy to convince any man or any woman on a point of politics” (338). While not often identified as such, this moment is a turning

point for the novel – a moment in which Phineas realizes the inefficacy of “an eloquent letter from a philosophical Cabinet Minister” in changing people’s minds (338). This is the node at which politics happens, in this moment of convincing or failing to convince “any man or woman” on a point of politics. It is interesting that women are included in the political realm here, though it makes sense if one is prepared to grant my argument that the novel effects social solutions to political problems. The eloquent philosophical letter, which stands as the physical sign of the entire realm of politics, argument, and rational thought, is best left in Phineas’ pocket. It is less successful in uniting people in agreement than his pretty face is.

It is not common to read the plot of *Phineas Finn* as a success narrative for Phineas; nevertheless, I intend to do so here. Phineas remains a success on the terms established by the novel, despite the failure of his political career. Political representation fails, not Phineas’ mode of representing. Phineas embodies a fantasy of electoral politics, whether he holds office or not, in the form of his person and the particular kind of imprecision he exemplifies, based on general affability rather than the kind of locatedness represented by English landowning gentry like Kennedy, or Laurence Fitzgibbon’s profligate Irishness. Phineas stands for that which, by general consent, ties people together in friendly relations. We have seen how Phineas’ imprecise beauty is established through vague description, and thus contributes in no small degree to his general ability to please. His is a comeliness that ensures his popularity: “he was a man who was pleasant to other men... Nature had been very good to him, making him comely inside and out, – and with this comeliness he had crept into popularity” (ii.22). Phineas may have strong opinions but he remains pliant, not firm and uncompromising like Kennedy is – Kennedy, who is “as stiff-necked as an ox” and who tries to browbeat his wife into adopting his opinions. As, for example, Kennedy asserts: “I think you will acknowledge that if there be a difference of opinion between you and me as to any question of social intercourse, it will be better that you should consent to

adopt my opinion” (i.209, ii.113). Phineas is notably and imprecisely pleasant; its elusiveness is a defining characteristic of Phineas’ popularity: “It soon came to be admitted by all who knew Phineas Finn that he had a peculiar power of making himself agreeable which no one knew how to analyse or define” (118). In truth, “no man seemed to know how his reputation had come” (ii.22). So general is his appeal that “nearly everybody” who “knew our hero... called him by his Christian name. There are men who seem to be so treated by general consent in all societies” (43). This quality, not his tallness and blondness or anything else we know about Phineas, is so important that the narrator remarks on it twice: “He was aware that the circle of his acquaintance had fallen into a way of miscalling him by his Christian name, as one observes to be done now and again in reference to some special young man” (302). Of course, as I have argued, what makes Phineas special is that he is not particularly special at all, and although – or perhaps because – the cause of his popularity evades analysis, he functions as a social equalizer (almost everybody who knew him calls him Phineas). As one of the women he loves remarks, “He knows how to live easily with men of all ranks, without any appearance of claiming a special status for himself. If he were made Archbishop of Canterbury to-morrow, I believe he would settle down into the place of the first subject in the land without arrogance, and without false shame” (253).

The problem of inequality is expressed as a social rather than a political problem throughout the novel generally, and political problems are in this way translated into social terms. A good example is Mr. Bunce, Phineas’ landlord and copying journeyman. According to the narrator, Bunce’s “grievances were semi-political and semi-social” (67). The substance of his grievances is that “He had no vote, not being himself the tenant of the house in Great Marlborough Street,” and that he had “ideas” about “the injustice of the manner in which he was paid for his work” (67). His subscription to his trade union and desire “to be doing some battle

against his superiors, and to be putting himself in opposition to his employers” is evidently the “semi-social” element of the grievance, but the details suggest that his antagonism is not social at all (“not that he objected personally to Messrs. Foolscap, Margin, and Vellum” [68]). Bunce’s is a highly politicized form of labor politics, but the novel renders it in social terms, reducing it to a funny difference in attitude that creates occasional disharmony in the Bunce’s marriage given his wife’s toadying inclinations. By substituting relationships or emotions for politics, the novel leaches the political out of social problems. Another such example is the moment in which Phineas identifies himself as “a reformer at heart,” and justifies running for a borough like Loughton, even as he compares it to boroughs like Gatton and Old Sarum that were disenfranchised under the first Reform Act (ii.46). His politics are reflected in what is in his heart, not in what he does in the House (or to get into the House).

Similarly, when it comes to the debates about reform, the focus is on the consequences for the personal relationship between politicians, rather than the political effects of their actions.⁶⁹ For instance, the question of the ballot in Parliament becomes a personal tussle between its advocates and opponents, and Phineas is called upon not to take a position but to rise up “before a full House to defend his great friend, Mr. Monk, from a gross personal attack” (184). The failure of Mildmay’s reform bill registers not in the effect that it has on the public, but on the relationship between Turnbull and Monk: “They might still be intimate friends, but the days of confidence between them were passed” (265). Subsequent reform debates dissolve the friendship entirely, and they “never again meet as friends” (346). It may seem as though I have been arguing that *Phineas Finn* represents a retreat from politics to the affective or social realm,

⁶⁹ See Kent Puckett’s point that “Dickens and Trollope embed formal concerns about voter aggregation not only in the elections they occasionally represent but also in different theories of character that rely on the relation between major and minor, the one and the many as relative modes of preferential intensity.” “Democracy.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 46.3 (2018): 640-645, p. 644.

but the point I am trying to make is a slightly different one. *Phineas Finn* renders political questions in social terms because it reads problems of representation, equality, and difference not as political problems but *as social problems* with social solutions. As Bunce's class problem is expressed as a social, or "semi-social," one, the novel renders the political problem of disenfranchisement as a social problem between friends, who also happen to be Parliamentarians. Posing the problem in social terms mean the solution must also be social: reform becomes about adjusting relational practices rather than enacting material political change. If politics is what one feels rather than what one does, then political practice is less about enacting legislation than it is about changing men's and women's minds. Reform in the novel is not an act of parliament but a shift in the hearts and minds of convincible men and women. As such, politics is not a field of competing interests, but a struggle between modes of relating. It is on these terms that Phineas is as much of, or more, a success as the County Cork Inspector of Poor Houses as the member for Loughshane.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to reform in the novel is not that while the London political world was "engrossed" in the problem of "the enfranchisement of Englishmen," the Loughton tradesman was "proud of his own personal subjection to the Earl" (297). Nor is it that, as Phineas discovers with the Bunces, people are difficult to convince even with the strongest reasoning in the form of a Cabinet member's letter. Rather, the problem is, as Phineas and Monk discuss towards the end of the second volume, that people can never truly know the inside of another's minds:

"It has often seemed to me that men in Parliament know less about Ireland than they do of the interior of Africa," said Phineas.

"It is seldom that we know anything accurately on any subject that we have not made matter of careful study," said Mr. Monk, "and very often we do not do so even then. We are very apt to think that we men and women understand one another; but most probably

you know nothing even of the modes of thought of the man who lives next door to you.”
(ii.178)

For liberal representation of the kind Phineas embodies, and which Trollope sought to embody in Beverley, where it is possible to disagree about details and yet agree in general, the belief that one can enter into the modes of thought of the man next door, and the ability to act on the basis of that belief, is not merely a desideratum but a necessary condition. That is, for liberalism to work at that site of mediation between the general and the specific, the individual and the many, we must be able to believe that we know our neighbors. It is fitting that Africa stands for the inscrutable, and Ireland for what should be legible under the auspices of a liberal polity, because what the novel shows us is that the only relationship that is possible without the ability to enter into another's thoughts is an imperialist one. Kennedy is the character who is fundamentally incapable of entering into another's thoughts, and the only recourse he has is violence; the threat of physical violence, and the psychic violence of attempting to force his wife to think in the same way that he does. Relationships premised on liberal fantasies of equality require believing in your ability to know your neighbor's mode of thought. Yet that belief is impossible to resolve at the political level.

In the end, both *Phineas Finn* the novel and Phineas Finn the character sustain the fiction of knowability. How that is achieved is evident in a strange passage that occurs just as the novel is reaching its resolution. It is an encounter between Phineas and Madame Goesler, the woman he would eventually marry in *Phineas Redux*, when he visits to tell her that he is leaving public life and resigning his seat:

We all know that look of true interest which the countenance of a real friend will bear when the welfare of his friend is in question. There are doubtless some who can assume it without feeling,--as there are actors who can personate all the passions. But in ordinary life we think that we can trust such a face, and that we know the true look when we see it.

Phineas, as he gazed into Madame Goesler's eyes, was sure that the lady opposite him was not acting. (ii. 316)

This is a moment of excess; there is no evident reason, at the nadir of Phineas' political career, for the narrator to take such pains to reassure us that Phineas knows Madame Goesler's care at the news that he was to leave Parliament was genuine. But it is a significant moment when we consider that Phineas gazes into Madame Goesler's eyes, and is sure of her interest – her modes of thought and feeling that we were earlier told it was impossible to know.

Because it is in private life that these liberal habits of mind are so effective, Phineas' love affairs are an important addition to the politics of the novel. We cannot quite say that his relationships with women are as inconsequential as what Hadley terms his “serial constituencies (it hardly mattered who or where he represented)” (233). It matters very much who he marries, in that it also matters very little who he marries. Mary is important the same way Ireland is important, to shape the habits of mind and form of liberalism according to which it is possible to be in two different minds at once. It is a mode of relating that he practices with Laura and Violet, but he is too changeable, forgetting his love for Laura when he falls for Violet. With Mary, it is possible to remain constant and also fall in love with someone else, as two distinct manifestations of his personhood: “He felt that he had two identities,—that he was, as it were, two separate persons,—and that he could, without any real faithlessness, be very much in love with Violet Effingham in his position of man of fashion and member of Parliament in England, and also warmly attached to dear little Mary Flood Jones as an Irishman of Killaloe” (330). When he makes his final choice between Madame Goesler and Mary Flood Jones, what we see is not his indecision, but a distance from himself that allows fluidity – a habit of mind that enables him to be in both places at once: “He had not arrived at any decision so fixed as to make him comfortable ... And yet he knew, – he thought that he knew that he would be true to Mary Flood

Jones” (ii. 297). This distance from himself is what ensures his perfect success as a mode of liberal identificatory practice, in that he becomes not just himself but a generic man with whom all other men can identify, signaled when the end of the love story slips into generic terms. They are no longer Phineas and Mary but “a man” and “a girl”: “How is a man not to tell such tales when he has on his arm, close to him, a girl who tells him her little everything of life, and only asks for his confidence in return? And then his secrets are so precious to her and so sacred, that he feels as sure of her fidelity as though she were a very goddess of faith and trust” (ii.353).

And that is how minds change. The novel leaves us with the hope that changing minds is sufficient for political transformation, but the certainty that it is achievable in private life. After the failed attempt at reform, Monk argues that though they were no nearer to tenant-right:

Such a debate and such a majority will make men think. But no;—think is too high a word; as a rule men don’t think. But it will make them believe that there is something in it. Many who before regarded legislation on the subject as chimerical, will now fancy that it is only dangerous, or perhaps not more than difficult. And so in time it will come to be looked on as among the things possible, then among the things probable;—and so at last it will be ranged in the list of those few measures which the country requires as being absolutely needed. That is the way in which public opinion is made. (ii.341)

Political change may result from the change in public opinion in due time. In private life, such change happens on a more accelerated timeline. After Mary makes up her mind to wait a long time to be married, Phineas gets a job and informs her that “your mind must be unmade” (355). What requires a long, slow evolution in public life happens instantly in private. When Lord Cantrip offers Phineas the job that will allow him to marry, the novel ends by giving the reader a curious permission to imagine Phineas’ reply: “What was the nature of the reply to Lord Cantrip the reader may imagine, and thus we will leave our hero an Inspector of Poor Houses in the County of Cork” (355). This is a very liberal proposition: we have the freedom to imagine the “nature” of the reply, but we are told of its consequences. It is an unsatisfying freedom, a

freedom of form but not content, a freedom of the heart rather than a material freedom. To the very real problem of political inequality, Trollope's novel offers us a private solution: a mind that is easily changed in private life, but the vague compensatory promise of future change in public life. The form of collectivity that fails liberals in Westminster, Beverley, and Langham Place succeeds in the fictional worlds of Loughshane and Carlingford, but at what cost? Phineas Finn is a success, but *Phineas Finn*'s success reveals the disappointments of liberalism when you can only unmake minds in private life.

Afterword

Leading up to the American midterm elections in 2018, it was possible to purchase a T-shirt bearing the phrase “Vote Like a Black Woman” (see Figure 2 below). The online retailer advertised the product with the caption: “Next time you’re in the mood to save our democracy, shout out the demographic that statistically stays showing up.”¹ Reflecting frustration about the high percentage of white women voting for Trump in the 2016 election (arguably against their own interests as women), the T-shirt was a call to vote based on the kind of disidentificatory practices I have been discussing throughout this dissertation. The shirt urged the voter to imagine themselves as a black woman, with the interests and commitments that position implies in the context of voter turnout. Yet the call to vote “like” a black woman implies that the addressee is not a black woman; the simile, not to mention the marketing image, therefore function to distance the addressee from the position with which they are called to identify.



Figure 2: *Vote Like a Black Woman*

¹ Pierre Bennu and Jamyla Bennu. “Vote Like a Black Woman Unisex Tee.” *Exittheapple Artspace* www.exittheapple.com.

As a call to action based on forging solidarity through alignment based on disidentification, the shirt suggests that being like a black woman is about the kinds of association and voting practices it invites rather than identity as such. In other words, it prioritizes taking a position over occupying it.

This is not a perfect kind of alignment or of solidarity – after all, it is one thing to vote like a black woman in Trump’s America, and quite another to be a black woman when you step outside the voting booth – and yet, as a political call to action, it seems to be working. As the *Washington Post*’s vice president of communications maintained, the “2018 midterm elections made history before a single ballot was cast because of the mobilization and activism of women,”² and the elections quite literally changed the face of Capitol Hill. Historic firsts included the first Muslim women in Congress, Rashida Tlaib (Democrat, representing Michigan’s 13th District) and Ilhan Omar (Democrat, representing Minnesota’s 5th District); the first Native American women, Sharice Davids (Democrat, Kansas’s 3rd District), and Deb Halaand (Democrat, New Mexico’s 1st District).³

In reflecting on the current state of affairs following the most recent structural transformation of the American political landscape (and, following Brexit, the European and specifically British ones), I do not mean to suggest that we have succeeded in intertwining representation and action where Victorian liberals failed. Nor do I mean to draw a concrete link

² “A New Era of Women in Politics.” *Washington Post*. November 17, 2018. www.washingtonpost.com/washington-post-live/2018/11/17/transcript-new-era-women-politics/?utm_term=.f8b1df63d583.

³ Danielle Kurtzleben. “A List of Firsts For Women in This Year’s Midterm Elections.” *NPR*. November 6, 2018. www.npr.org/2018/11/06/664951794/a-list-of-firsts-for-women-in-this-years-midterm-elections. It is worth noting, as the *Washington Post* did, that a diverse Congress is no guarantee for diversity as such. Colby Itkowitz. “Trickle-down representation: Will the most diverse Congress make Capitol Hill more diverse?” *Washington Post*. November 15, 2018 www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/11/15/trickle-down-representation-will-most-diverse-congress-make-capitol-hill-more-diverse/?utm_term=.c29862973f85.

of causality or equivalence between the debates about reform in the 1860s and those in which we are currently engaging. My claim is more modest: that during the years of reform, when the anticipatory promise of democratic equality came into conflict with ideas about difference, liberal thinkers, organizers and writers developed a mode of representing difference and a practice to encounter it.

There is, perhaps, a moment of afterlife for the kind of statesmanship that Mill and Trollope represented. In 2006, Steve Cohen, a white Democratic senator, stood for election to the House in Tennessee's 9th District – a “60 percent black district specifically designed to encourage the election of an African-American and protected by the Voting Rights Act,” as the *Observer* reported. During the primaries, Cohen, a white Jewish man, made the claim that he would vote “like a black woman” and seek membership in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), a move that the CBC met with “something between indifference and hostility,” by the *Observer*'s account.⁴ Cohen's confidence in asserting his ability to represent those who are different than him – with the corresponding concerns that implies – equals Mill's. The difference? In 2010, former Memphis Mayor Willie Herenton stood against Cohen for the 9th District seat. Herenton ran on the claim that the seat should be held by an African-American candidate. Edward Wyckoff Williams commented for *The Griot*, a left-wing publication aimed at an African American audience:

At 70-years-old, Herenton is using the politics of race in a dated context which is often reflective of people of his generation white, black or otherwise. Though we can certainly benefit from his knowledge and experience, the electorate should not be limited by his perspective. Being black is simply not enough to guarantee the African-American vote.⁵

⁴ Observer Staff. “Harold Ford and the Yassky Option.” *Observer*. 7 November 2006. www.observer.com/2006/11/harold-ford-and-the-yassky-option/

⁵ Edward Wyckoff Williams. “Memphis Congressional Campaign Shows Limits of Race-Baiting.” *The Griot*. 27 July 2010. www.thegriot.com/2010/07/27/memphis-congressional-campaign-shows-limits-of-race-baiting/.

Williams pointed out that Herenton's desire to "make the election a referendum on representation based on race" concealed a desire to profit from holding public office, pointing out that "a grand jury has been investigating accusations that Mr. Herenton benefited from his private real estate business" while he was mayor. Cohen, *The Grio* reported, stood for a mode of representing that insisted on his ability to represent difference on the basis of his particular experience: "I vote like a black woman. I don't know the black experience, but I know about being a minority and being discriminated against because of religion." This discussion occurred during the leadup to the election for the 112th Congress. Cohen still holds the seat.⁶

Presentism and Difference: Victorian Studies Now

Why, by way of concluding a discussion of Victorian liberalism, consider the present American moment? Presentism has become a topic of debate in the field of Victorian studies following the 2015 posting of the V21 Collective's manifesto, a collection of ten theses bemoaning the fact that Victorian studies has "has fallen prey to *positivist historicism*," which is defined as a "a mode of inquiry that aims to do little more than exhaustively describe, preserve, and display the past."⁷ To redress the "fetishization of the archival" and attempts to "reconstruct the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*," the V21 manifesto called for a "new openness to presentism" of a particular kind: "Presentism is not a sin," read the eighth thesis, "but nor are all forms of presentism equally valuable."

The manifesto provoked many responses, some of which were collected on the website itself as well as in special issues devoted to the topic in *Victorian Studies* and *b2o: an online*

⁶ "Biography." *Congressman Steve Cohen*. www.cohen.house.gov/about/biography.

⁷ "Manifesto of the V21 Collective." *V21: Victorian Studies for the 21st Century*. v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses.

journal. In its call for the “field” to move “from the rear of new literary scholarship,” the V21 collective made clear its goal of saving literary criticism from the casualties of the neoliberal university, and promoting the field of Victorian studies to the forefront of literary studies by making its relevance clear and by moving scholarship online to keep up with the fast pace of the digital age. David Sweeney Combs and Danielle Coriale’s definition of “strategic presentism” in their introduction to the *Victorian Studies* special issue made that clear: the “strategic ends” of the V21 collective included “the reassessing of our existing literary historical periodizations and the contesting of the fiscal austerity that threatens the survival of Victorian studies as a discipline.”⁸

Like many respondents, I enjoy the bold positioning of a manifesto. Yet despite my framing of the legacies of liberalism in this Afterword, I remain unconvinced by the V21 collective’s claim that, “in finance, resource mining, globalization, imperialism, liberalism, and many other vectors, we *are* Victorian, inhabiting, advancing, and resisting the world they made.” The manifesto makes a claim for the relevance by prioritizing continuity over change; my perception of the risks of this endeavor is addressed by Adela Pinch’s criticism of a slightly earlier mode of what she terms “engaged presentism.”⁹ In her 2014 review of the previous year’s scholarship, Pinch notes that scholars were “laboring under a need to justify their work” in response to the humanities crisis resulting from the cost of higher education and fear of underemployed English majors. For Pinch, the risk of engaged presentism is losing sight of the goal of literary criticism of past works: “detailing a literature, and a culture, that is so different – even alien – from our own” (944).

⁸ David Sweeney Combs and Danielle Coriale. “Introduction: V21 Forum on Strategic Presentism.” *Victorian Studies* 59.1 (Autumn 2016): 87-89, p. 87.

⁹ Adela Pinch. “Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century.” *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 54.4 (Autumn 2014): 943-1002, p. 944. Subsequent page references in text.

Pinch's point gestures to the challenges of writing about liberalism in historically careful ways when we are so clearly still shaped by the premises of liberal thought. One of my aims in this dissertation has been to unsettle some of what Elaine Hadley refers to as our sense of explicability of "core practices of liberalization" to restore a sense of the "weird and taxing" nature of their practices, and thereby to address the kind of presentist scholarship that is surprised by their sophistication.¹⁰ By this, I mean the kind of scholarship that estimates Mill to have been advanced or forward-thinking in his analysis of and activism around gender, or considers the LPG to have been ahead of its time for making certain claims – or, for instance in the case of the vote for married women, to have sold out for not making certain claims.¹¹ That we are surprised by the sophistication of the politics of the past reveals the extent to which we are still operating within many of their practices, and how our thinking remains structured by the way they thought about and organized around difference. On the one hand, it is a testament to the strength of their legacy. On the other hand, it is a kind of presentism that prevents us from seeing the significance of past practices and the labor that produced them. This is not to fetishize the archive, but a reminder that presentists can be equally guilty of what Hadley, in her response to the V21 manifesto, characterizes as a "Whiggish and positivist and totalizing" view of the past.¹²

It may well be that, as Jesse Rosenthal claims in his contribution to the *Victorian Studies* V21 special issue, "when we discuss texts from the past, we almost always discuss them in terms

¹⁰ Elaine Hadley. *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2010, p. 28.

¹¹ It is hard to avoid some degree of surprise when encountering the "sophisticated" political positions of Victorian liberals; one finds it even in such excellent careful work as Amanda Anderson's *Bleak Liberalism*: "The analysis of gender subordination in *The Subjection of Women* is similarly sophisticated in its understanding of power dynamics where each subject of the dominated class lives in political isolation, as it were, with a member of the dominating class." Amanda Anderson. *Bleak Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 37.

¹² Elaine Hadley. "Closing Remarks." *b2o* 1.2 (October 2016).

of how we recognize ourselves.”¹³ This is what Rosenthal calls time traveling, and he finds it to be “occasionally hermetic and unsatisfying” as well as “worryingly conservative” (104). His piece ends with a call to action that indicates how V21 affiliates see the politics of the good kind of presentism: “I don’t think it’s an accident that a field with such worrying logic has been the laboratory for so much progressive thought. And the first step to figuring out why, and how, to produce more is to understand, for better or for worse, the traditional premises of what we do” (104). The goal is thus to produce more progressive thought by understanding the “traditional premises” of what we do as Victorian scholars and literary critics. This is perhaps the least convincing strain of the V21 endeavor; I wholeheartedly concur with Elaine Freedgood and Michael Sanders’ declaration that “we will not defeat neoliberalism with literary theory.”¹⁴ To my mind, the V21 affiliates frequently vastly overstate the case for literary studies as a discipline in their attempt to justify the work. Indeed, some of the most compelling criticism of the manifesto remarks on its failure to account for studying the past beyond the boundaries of disciplinary studies.¹⁵

¹³ Jesse Rosenthal. “Some Thoughts on Time Travel.” *Victorian Studies* 59.1 (Autumn 2016): 102-104, p. 102. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁴ Elaine Freedgood and Michael Sanders. “Response: Strategic Presentism or Partisan Knowledges?” *Victorian Studies* 59.1 (Autumn 2016): 117-121, p. 118.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the alternatives proposed by historian Martin Hewitt: “The field can only renew its scholarly significance if it is prepared to grasp its extra-literaryness, to shed its infatuation with the accretion of readings, to realise that multi-disciplinary conversations are unlikely to be facilitated by premises which privilege one discipline and predicate the inadequacy of the protocols of others.” Martin Hewitt. “V21 Manifesto: Ten Alternative Theses.” *Victorian Manchester and More*. 27 March 2015. profmartinhewitt.com/2015/03/26/v21-manifesto-ten-alternative-theses/. Hewitt’s point that the V21 collective has “a particular sort of conversation in mind” in their establishment of a historicist “bogyman” must be granted when one reads, for instance, Caroline Levine’s invocation of an arguably imagined “straight line of historical periodization that relies on the separation between then and now,” which conveniently serves as the object for the radical V21 associate to “put kinks in.” “Historicism: From the Break to the Loop.” *b2o* 1.2 (October 2016).

One further response will serve to clarify my point. Andrew Miller poses the following questions: “Why study the nineteenth century? And why Britain? Imagine an undergraduate devastated by the present injustices around her. Why should she study the Victorian period?”¹⁶ He then imagines that she considers “a career studying the Victorian period as only tangentially related to the political activism she engages in when not interpreting culture of the past” (123) and “politically secondary” to it (124), but suggests that this “liberal-minded response” would be unsatisfying to his audience of Victorian scholars, who “ask of their own scholarship at least that it be more immediately responsive to present injustice” (124). Miller’s answer – by way of a consideration of how Victorian studies achieved its vibrancy over contesting the “understanding of modernity” (124) – is to imagine “not an undergraduate but a graduate student or junior faculty member reading these papers” who would find “a sense of a field both politically committed and healthily unsettled,” “a rich if under-recognized inheritance of theoretically sophisticated ways for understanding our relation to the past,” and “the idealism that Tanya Agathocleous hopes to find in collectivities – something that Jameson might call class consciousness” (125). To think of a gathering of Victorian scholars as an example of the idealism of collectivities is an overreach.¹⁷ So is making a claim for the political commitment of Victorian studies by imagining an ever smaller and more elite audience for our work (not the politically committed undergraduate but a graduate student or junior faculty member whose interests are presumably, especially in the latter case, already vested). This is not, to my mind, the way to

¹⁶ Andrew H. Miller. “Response: Responsibility to the Present.” *Victorian Studies* 59.1 (Autumn 2016): 122-126, p. 123. Subsequent page references in text.

¹⁷ Agathocleous was not doing this. Her idealism in collectivities referred to the British anti-racist journal, *Anti-Caste*, which was published between 1888 and 1895 and, she argues, along with the contemporary activist movement #BlackLivesMatter demonstrates “a stance that rejects specific visions of the future in favor of illuminating the persistence of the past in the present.” Tanya Agathocleous. “In the Present of No Future.” *Victorian Studies* 59. 1 (Autumn 2016): 90-93, p. 93.

“think critically about the past in the present in order to change the present,” as the V21 affiliates exhort.¹⁸ Victorian studies is not politics.¹⁹

Here is my attempt at strategic presentism regarding the activists and thinkers I have studied. There remains a lesson to be learned about the failures of their praxis, or indeed several lessons about the fact that the Langham Place group could not organize as a collective in the long term, although they were extraordinarily successful organizers; the fact that Mill and Trollope never intended to leave a legacy that was mainly intellectual or literary, but we neglect their praxis because of the failure of their political careers; and the fact that election novels introduced a mode of disidentifying that, when we occupy it, allows us to think we are doing something, when we are only feeling it. Lauren Berlant’s excellent explanation of the way in which a certain kind of recognition requires conscripting difference in order to enable the continued operation of power is useful here:

Self-transforming compassionate recognition and its cognate forms of solidarity are necessary for making political movements thrive contentiously against all sorts of privilege, but they have also provided a means for making minor structural adjustments seem like major events, because the theater of compassion is emotionally intense. Recognition all too often becomes an experiential end in itself, an emotional event that protects what is unconscious, impersonal, and unrelated to anyone’s intentions about maintaining political privilege.²⁰

¹⁸ Combs and Coriale. “Introduction,” p. 88.

¹⁹ There is a Miller’s discussion sounds like a depoliticized version of the debate around theory and praxis carried out by the Frankfurt School in relation to the student protests in the 1960s. In that debate, theory is what happens in universities and practice is what happens when students build barricades in the streets of Paris. The debate was about which was more politically effective; Adorno, for instance, saw barricades as an ineffective countermeasure to the bomb, and students vandalized his office at the University of Frankfurt, leaving graffiti that called him a traitor to socialism for his commitment to theory over action. My point is that a collectivity of Victorian scholars, however politically interested in the past, is not political by virtue of being a collective. For a discussion of the Frankfurt School and the theory/practice dialectic, see the introduction to Stuart Jeffries. *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso, 2017.

²⁰ Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 182.

If there is a lesson to be learned from the liberal negotiation with difference in the Victorian period, it is about using recognition as leverage for political change, rather than what takes its place.

Much like the current moment, mid-nineteenth century Britain was a moment in the history of liberalism when political exigencies demanded new ways of thinking about and negotiating the political and cultural fact of difference. These new ways of relating to difference were necessary to sustain belief in the fiction of equality and the possibility of cohesion to structure collective life, despite the realities of competing interests and inequality. I have emphasized the importance not of liberal ideas, but liberal action: that is, the strategies and forms of representation that evolved to accommodate new sets of political actors. As such, I have attempted to show how publics, as politically effective social spaces, engaged in definitional struggles over ways of organizing, representing, and imagining a form of citizenship in its expanded sense. The importance of action to my argument reflects the preoccupations of the dissertation. In short, the political claims it was possible to make in response to difference were the basis for and challenge to the liberal public sphere in mid-nineteenth century Britain.

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