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'I walk pure before God!': Narrative Structure and Reimagined Negotiations in the Victorian Female Bildungsroman

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'I walk pure before God!': Narrative Structure and Reimagined Negotiations in the
Victorian Female *Bildungsroman*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

Devon Hope Boyers

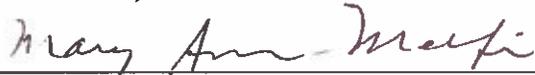
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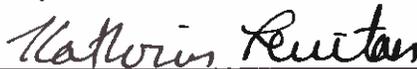
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Introduction

'By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity.'

– JEROME BUCKLEY, *Season of Youth*¹

The German term *Bildungsroman* refers to a “novel of formation,” and although German literary critics have debated its meaning, in Anglo-American criticism it generally denotes a novel concerned with the internal and social development of its main character. In his widely discussed work *Season of Youth*, Jerome Buckley identifies characteristics of the genre: “A child of some sensibility” finds “constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination,” which requires him to leave “the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence)” at an early age “to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London)”; in the city, he gains both “preparation for a career” and “direct experience of urban life,” involving “two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” that demands the reappraisal of his values to decide “the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make” (17). Once he has done this, the hero has “left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity” (Buckley 17-18). These guidelines, though generally useful, immediately pose issues when actually examined in literature of development. Novels generally considered to be prototypes of the genre do not entirely meet its criteria: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister's Year of Apprenticeship* (1795-1796) has a hero who is not a child, nor does he travel to the city, and in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, often considered a canonical English

Bildungsroman, Pip remains unmarried, although the second and more sanguine ending hints at a future with Estella. Furthermore, the fact that the *Bildungsroman* genre is already prone to a certain level of deviation becomes more complex when the main character is female—particularly in the Victorian Era.

Many of the markers of development that Buckley identifies as defining features of the *Bildungsroman* would be unavailable to middle- and upper-class Victorian women. The main career options for females would generally be restricted to the roles of mother, wife, or caretaker, though some young girls might receive an education and become a teacher or private governess. For the lower class, the prospects are even bleaker, as Caroline Healey Dall depicts in her 1859 lecture, ‘Woman’s Right to Labor’:

“Practically, the command of society to the uneducated class is ‘Marry, stitch, die, or do worse,’” alluding to prostitution (104). Even less attainable than the male-oriented concept of career is Buckley’s “two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting.” Both historically and literarily, a woman would not have the ability to participate in a “debasing” love affair without taking on the infamous designation of a fallen woman, which has narrative consequences of its own, as Nina Auerbach argues in “The Rise of the Fallen Woman”:

Conventionally, the fallen woman must die at the end of her story, perhaps because death rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honorable symbol of her fall’s transforming power. Death does not simply punish or obliterate the fallen woman: its ritual appearance alone does her justice. (35)

Even narratives sympathetic to their fallen heroines, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), support this pattern.

Thus, the neatly linear, episodic path for the hero of a typical *Bildungsroman* would not be possible for a heroine, although as Lorna Ellis argues in *Appearing to Diminish*, there may be some potential overlap, including the protagonist's participation in his or her own growth, an element of introspection and self-awareness of personal development, and an ultimate reintegration into society (25). As Sarah Maier argues, however, nineteenth-century female narratives must differ from those of men in that they "must recognize woman's need to negotiate both with and against society's expectations for 'proper' womanhood" (320). The *Bildungsroman* considers maturity to be an individual's self-development into someone who can abide by social norms and thus integrate successfully into society—an understanding of adulthood that becomes complicated when the genre is extended to include anyone for which an increase in agency and the acquisition of "a vocation and a working philosophy" might conflict with those social norms, such as what entails a 'proper' womanhood (Buckley 18). I argue, therefore, that it would be salient to consider a new literary structure for the female *Bildungsroman*—one in which personal development for a young woman, rather than following Buckley's linear path, consists of a series of dynamic negotiations with her social web concerning the nature and extent of the roles she will inhabit as a woman.

The origins of the term *Bildungsroman* add some rich insight into the idea of the "novel of formation." *Bild* means "image," "painting," "figure," or "trope," and *Bildung* was originally a theological term: "Signifying both external form (Latin *forma*) and the act of giving form (*formatio*), *Bildung*, in eighteenth-century Pietist writing, meant God's

redemptive (re)impression of his divine image on the fallen, disfigured sinner” (Redfield 192). Considering the influence of the Christian faith on Victorian culture, the *Bildungsroman* as a “novel of formation” would also involve the spiritual formation of the heroine, which complicates the element of “social integration” in the genre. If the social norms of a society fail to match those of a divine, biblical ideal—as would be desirable in a Judeo-Christian society—then the “spiritual formation” of the heroine would necessarily cause conflict as she develops into a spiritual ideal who must then reintegrate back into a fallen society, particularly one tainted by misogyny and sexual double standards for females and males. Thus, in order for reintegration to be possible, “coming of age” must involve some form of restoration or remaking of both the heroine and the society as a whole. As the young girl develops into womanhood, the social web she lives in must be “re-imaged” by her critique as an outsider first entering in to adulthood, resulting in a female *Bildungsroman* that is fluid, consisting of narratives of tension punctured by crucial moments of negotiation between the developing heroine and her surrounding community. In the Victorian *Bildungsromane* of middle- and upper-class woman which will be the main focus of this thesis, these negotiations most often concern the roles of wife and presumably mother—as is the case with Catherine Earnshaw in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* or Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, both canonical works; yet issues of class, money, virtue, occupation, intimate and familial relationships, and gender roles all become topics of negotiation in female novels of formation. Because all spheres of human life have ‘fallen’ and can thus be ‘re-imaged,’ the possibilities are as endless as the defining cultural features and concerns of the period.

In light of this, I will refer to this literary structure in female *Bildungsromane* as the *re-imaging negotiation*.

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus largely on the heroines of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), concluding with a brief examination of the literary structures in Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* (1864). The relatively close and evenly spaced publishing dates of these texts, as well as their diversity in style, themes, and authorship, facilitate a general survey of the *re-imaging negotiation* structure in female *Bildungsromane* throughout the Victorian era. Each text offers a unique angle in approaching female development: *Jane Eyre*, for instance, is the only one in which the heroine, Jane, is a child at the start of the novel. Of the three, *Jane Eyre*'s structure most closely aligns with the developmental markers of the male *Bildungsroman*: Jane is a young child when she leaves her aunt's home at Gateshead; she then receives an education at Lowood school, takes on a career as a governess at Thornfield Hall, and has two suitors, Edward Rochester and St. John Rivers. Yet her most transformative expressions of development occur in her conversations and debates with her aunt, St. John, and Rochester, particularly concerning her role as a wife. Unlike Jane's early departure from her childhood home, *North and South*'s heroine Margaret Hale does not leave her southern village of Helstone for the industrial town of Milton until she is eighteen years old and has already received an offer of marriage from her family friend, Henry Lennox. Although marital roles are a concern in Margaret's coming-of-age narrative, the issue of justice in industry is often of greater concern, and many of her negotiations involve advocating for cooperation between classes and fair treatment of all parties. Finally, the four developing characters in *The*

Small House at Allington—Johnny Eames, Adolphus Crosbie, and Isabella and Lily Dale—offer a unique opportunity to compare the different structures of the male and female *Bildungsromane*. Within this one narrative, the dynamic interactions between Buckley's developmental markers for Eames and Crosbie and the negotiations of Lily and Bell show the cooperative effects of these literary structures in guiding both genders' development. In the stories of Lily, Bell, Jane, and Margaret, I intend to trace a pattern of mutual formation between young women and the social webs to which they belong.

Independence and Regeneration in *Jane Eyre*

'I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress.'

– CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *Jane Eyre*²

Much like the male hero who finds his childhood home plagued with “constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination,” Brontë situates Jane’s childhood in an inhospitable social web, curtailing her ability to negotiate within it (Buckley 17). As an orphan living with an unsympathetic aunt and her children, Jane’s community consists of extended family related primarily by marriage rather than blood. Jane’s aunt, Mrs. Reed, houses her in honor of her deceased husband’s wishes. In her own eyes, however, Jane is “an interloper not of her race, and unconnected with her, after her husband’s death, by any tie” (Brontë 16). Furthermore, not only do the Reeds consider Jane to be an outsider rather than a legitimate member of the family, but Mrs. Reed actively resists taking on the role of a parental figure to her niece:

It must have been most irksome [to Mrs. Reed] to find herself bound by a hard-wrung pledge to stand in the stead of a parent to a strange child she could not love, and to see an uncongenial alien permanently intruded on her own family group. (Brontë 16)

As a child, Jane is powerless to convince Mrs. Reed to take on the role of a parent if she does not desire it, leaving Jane entirely dependent on the whims and prejudices of her aunt.

Similarly, Jane’s interactions with her cousins—particularly John Reed—expose her vulnerability as an unwanted member in their household. Consistently a target of his

abuse, Jane describes herself as “[h]abitually obedient to John,” such that their relationship more closely resembles a master and servant rather than cousins, friends, or peers (Brontë 10). Any attempt to resist or ‘negotiate’ this imbalance is punished with further exclusion, as well as verbal and physical abuse from John. Jane creates a space for herself by hiding behind a curtain to read a book, but John further casts her as an intruder by outlining the rights that she does not have in the family:

“You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years...” (Brontë 10-11)

In his argument for Jane’s exclusion, John uses access to and ownership of material goods as the gauge for one’s position in the home. His use of the book Jane was reading—perhaps a symbol of her impending personal and educational development—as a weapon against her further characterizes her childhood as hostile to growth.

Jane’s atypical, explosive response to John’s bullying and her resistance to her subsequent punishment in the red-room can be read as a childhood attempt at negotiation within an unsympathetic community. After he injures her with the book, Jane calls John a “[w]icked and cruel boy” and compares him to figures of abuse: “You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!” (Brontë 11). Because she is physically smaller than John, does not share his rights as a Reed, and is viewed unfavorably by their mutual authority, Jane’s approach to negotiating better

treatment looks different than it would if she enjoyed greater independence or resources. Unable to demand correct behavior from him, Jane resorts to what appears to be basic name-calling between arguing children. In the context of the *Bildungsroman*, however, I argue that Jane's outburst is a clumsy child's attempt to negotiate better treatment by comparing him to external tyrants with the hope that he may recognize the parallel and sense the weapon of her moral indignation. Name-calling is not a tactful negotiation, however, and the interaction soon devolves into chaos and pure opposition. At Mrs. Reed's order, the maids Bessie and Abbot lock Jane in the "red-room," a spare chamber where Jane's uncle Mr. Reed had died, which causes Jane immense psychological distress. Although she screams and begs to be released, Mrs. Reed disregards her request and promises to liberate her "only on condition of perfect submission and stillness" (Brontë 18). Jane is at her most childlike state in the red-room scene: effectively silenced from negotiating and physically cut off from human connection. Banished to the red-room, Jane is both figuratively and literally closer to the supernatural through the ghostlike memory of her deceased uncle—the last kind member of her family—than anyone living. Although different in nature from a Freudian reading, a *Bildungsroman* reading of Jane's emergence from the red-room might likewise suggest a kind of birth or genesis of her development. Much like a new-born baby, Jane has a "species of fit" in her isolation that requires a visit from an apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, who becomes the impetus for her leaving Gateshead to go to Lowood school (Brontë 18).

Mr. Lloyd's concern for Jane and his advocacy for her well-being foreshadow the kind of authority that Jane will one day develop for her own life. In the meantime, however, Mr. Lloyd's presense underscores how far Jane has to go to come of age. The

older Jane narrating the story acknowledges how her younger self was unable to articulate to Mr. Lloyd why she was unhappy at Gateshead:

How much I wished to reply fully to this question! How difficult it was to frame any answer! Children can feel, but they cannot analyze their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words. (Brontë 23)

The grown Jane recognizes the articulation of inner desires and experiences as a marker of adulthood, and even as a child, Jane is aware of how much she still must develop to be independent. When Mr. Lloyd asks Jane if she really would want to leave such a “splendid place,” she identifies maturity as the key obstacle for her exodus: “If I had anywhere else to go I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman” (Brontë 24). After questioning Jane about her experiences as Gateshead and her desires for the future, Mr. Lloyd becomes an advocate for Jane, negotiating with Mrs. Reed on her behalf.

Mr. Lloyd convinces Mrs. Reed to send Jane to Lowood school, which initiates Jane’s search for acceptance among a new group. Jane’s coming of age involves not only becoming a developed individual who can articulate and negotiate her own needs within that group, but it also encompasses the process by which Jane discovers and implements her own standards for her role within her community. At Lowood, Jane witnesses a new depth of companionship as she forges relationships with her teacher Miss Temple and Helen Burns, her more experienced peer and friend. Helen and Jane’s bond first forms at Jane’s moment of deepest alienation when, as a punishment for an unjust charge of lying, she must stand on a stool in front of her fellow students. Before she has lived at Lowood

long enough to connect with the other girls, Jane is symbolically and literally separated and singled out from her peers: “There was I, then, mounted aloft: I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy” (Brontë 67). The embarrassment and separation cause “sensations” so traumatic that “no language can describe” them aside from how they are “stifling my breath and constricting my throat” (Brontë 67). Just as Jane exhibits the beginning signs of panic, she experiences a moment of human connection with Helen that grounds her:

[B]ut just as [the sensations] all rose, ...a girl came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. Helen Burns asked some slight question about her work of Miss Smith, was chidden for the triviality of the inquiry, returned to her place, and smiled at me as she again went by. What a smile! (Brontë 67)

Jane’s characterization of herself as the “slave or victim” and Helen as the savior or “hero” exposes the different developmental stages of the two girls (Brontë 67). Helen has learned—at least more so than Jane—how to be content without universal regard, how literally to take be “chidden” with a smile (Brontë 67). Through Helen’s guidance, Jane witnesses how someone might be capable of acting in a manner congruent with her own nature, regardless of how that might influence the love or affection she receives—an

attitude Jane later implements in her marital negotiations with both St. John and Mr. Rochester. After Jane laments how the public punishment has likely caused “the eighty [people] I know [to] despise me,” Helen introduces the idea of maintaining individual self-worth in spite of public evaluation: “If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends” (Brontë 69). Although Jane asserts that “I know I should think well of myself” regardless of her reputation, she also argues that she does not consider that to be enough:

“[I]f others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest,—”
(Brontë 69)

Jane’s assertion that she “cannot bear to be solitary and hated” (69) starkly contrasts with her later personal manifesto that “The more solitary, the more friendless, and more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself” (Brontë 317). She arrives at this self-assured position in the middle of her critical negotiation with Rochester, in which he asks her to live with him as his mistress. The shift that occurs between these two declarations reflects the central role of community in the coming-of-age novel. Jane develops from an isolated girl whose closest relationships³ have contained such violence and abuse that she naturally associates intimacy with pain (“I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me...”) to a young woman who can walk away from the

most intimate relationship she has known because its circumstances violate her core principle, “*I care for myself*” (Brontë 69).

When Jane tells Helen that she would endure great physical pain “to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love,” she singles out these two women as her chosen community. Miss Temple invites Jane and Helen to have tea with her, and compared to the meager and shabby Lowood rations the girls are accustomed to, Jane describes the generous meal in heightened classical language: “We feasted that evening as on nectar and ambrosia” (Brontë 72). The scene is deeply warm and comforting to Jane, and she insinuates that both the food and the human interaction serve to satiate different but equally deprived appetites:

[N]ot the least delight of the entertainment was the smile of gratification with which our hostess regarded us, as we satisfied our famished appetites on the delicate fare she liberally supplied. Tea over and the tray removed, she again summoned us to the fire; we sat one on each side of her, and now a conversation followed between her and Helen, which it was indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear. (Brontë 72)

The intimacy in this scene and in others, such as when Jane crawls into bed with Helen on the night she succumbs to her illness, naturally encourages a queer reading, as Talia Schaffer points out in *Romance’s Rivals* (35). Similarly, the physical positioning of the girls on either side of Miss Temple and the image of Jane watching the conversing pair mimic what Deborah Morse calls “erotic triangulations” in “Brontë Violations” (although Morse focuses on the interactions among Jane, her cousin and suitor St. John, and wealthy heiress Rosemond, as well as Jane’s fascination with her artistic portrayals of

Rosamond and husband-hunting Blanche Ingram) (4). In an extension of both Schaffer and Morse's readings of the intimacy in these scenes, I argue that another reading rooted in the *Bildungsroman* is available: one in which the corporeal positioning of the girls is the physical manifestation of the social web in which they are actively creating and participating. Compared to Jane's earlier experiences with touch, which is essentially abusive blows from John and punitive physical coercion from the maids, Helen and Miss Temple offer a warm environment where Jane feels secure and welcome to demonstrate the connection she feels through physical expression.

Long after their small group separates—first with the death of Helen, then with Miss Temple's marriage and Jane's acceptance of a governess position at Thornfield Hall—Jane, now a young woman, returns to Gateshead to see her dying aunt, affording a convenient environment to demonstrate her development. The unwelcoming treatment Jane receives from her two cousins Eliza and Georgiana prompts her to reflect on her own internal reaction:

It had heretofore been my habit always to shrink from arrogance: received as I had been to-day, I should, a year ago, have resolved to quit Gateshead the very next morning; now, it was disclosed to me all at once, that that would be a foolish plan. I had taken a journey of a hundred miles to see my aunt, and I must stay with her till she was better—or dead: as to her daughters' pride or folly, I must put it on one side: make myself independent of it. (Brontë 229-230)

Jane's tempered response to her cousins' alienating behavior contrasts sharply with her emotionally-charged proclamation to Helen that "if others don't love me, I would rather

die than live” (Brontë 69). Her claim to independence demonstrates a shift in the role of social interaction in her life. For the first time in the narrative, Jane is able to maintain emotional integrity towards her own will and beliefs regardless of the actions of others. When she is finally able to speak with Mrs. Reed, Jane demonstrates this development further in her attempts to negotiate peace and reconciliation with her obstinate aunt. At her sick-bed, Mrs. Reed reveals that she withheld a letter from Jane containing information about some unknown relatives because “I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity. I could not forget your conduct to me, Jane—the fury with which you once turned on me” (Brontë 238). Ironically, maturity in emotional separation is the very thing that Mrs. Reed lacks. Her childish refusal not only to let go of the past but also to allow the behavior of a young girl to dictate her actions—even years later—highlights Jane’s development all the more. Mrs. Reed is, despite her more advanced age, less independent than Jane.

Despite her aunt’s hostility, Jane attempts to negotiate a reconciliation: “Dear Mrs. Reed... think no more of all this, let it pass away from your mind. Forgive me for my passionate language: I was a child then; eight, nine years have passed since that day” (Brontë 238). Jane’s statement contains a remarkable awareness of the social conventions that would contribute to a successful negotiation. She uses the intimate term “Dear” but also the formal “Mrs. Reed” rather than “aunt” or “Aunt Reed,” thus reminding her aunt of the connection they should have while also demonstrating a distant respect. Although she does take some ownership for their separation and acknowledges her “passionate language”, she does not shrink from being authoritative in her requests, directing her aunt to “think no more of all this” and “forgive me” (Brontë 238). Internally acknowledging

that her aunt is largely uninterested in hearing her appeal (“She heeded nothing of what I said”), Jane makes one final argument for the restoration of their relationship: “My disposition is not so bad as you think: I am passionate, but not vindictive. Many a time, as a little child, I should have been glad to love you if you would have let me; and I long earnestly to be reconciled to you now: kiss me, aunt” (Brontë 240). Jane’s articulation of her own character, motivations, and desires is a development from the last time she was at Gateshead, when she could not express such things to Mr. Lloyd, and further still, when she needed him to be her mouthpiece to advocate for her best interests. Jane makes one final attempt to convince her aunt to forgive her, this time through a physical expression of affection: “I approached my cheek to her lips: she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed” (Brontë 240). Yet despite this rejection, Jane honors her aunt’s right to refuse her company: “‘Love me, then, or hate me, as you will,’ I said at last, ‘you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God’s; and be at peace’” (Brontë 240). This ease of self demonstrates a significant development from the time when the child Jane declares to Helen that “if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live” (Brontë 69). No longer modulating her entire existence on the opinions and approval of those in her community, Jane is able to negotiate the state of their relationship with her aunt without being defined or destroyed by the outcome. Jane’s final words on the matter highlight the contrast between the maturity and equanimity she has accrued in coming of age and her aunt’s stagnant mindset: “Poor, suffering woman! it was too late for her to make now the effort to change her habitual frame of mind: living, she had ever hated me—dying, she must hate me still” (Brontë 240).

Not all of Jane's later negotiations meet such resistance as that of her attempt to reconcile with her aunt, although the stakes are arguably much higher in her debates with Rochester and St. John concerning the nature of her role as a wife. In her discussions with both men following their proposals, Jane labors to curtail where each suitor's ideas of who she ought to be encroach on her own nature. St. John's proposal assumes matrimony and conjugal love as means to an end: specifically, to the shared vocation of missionary work in India. This dual work-marriage proposition would not have been surprising to the original readers of *Jane Eyre*, as M. Jeanne Peterson argues in *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen*:

The details of Victorian married life, and in particular the urban gentry's arrangements of men's and women's work, confirm what marriage proposals and Victorian generalities suggest. Wives were assistants, colleagues, and partners in the work that men did. Their husbands took the public credit for the tasks performed—these were not 'dual careers,' nor was there any ideology of equality. These were 'single-career families,' but both husband and wife partook of that single career. (165-66)

St. John's offer has nothing to do with romantic passion, nor does he intend this emotion. He asks Jane to "come as my help-meet and fellow-labourer" and clearly outlines the vocational function she would perform as the future wife of St. John Rivers:

God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I

claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service. (Brontë 402)

In *Romance’s Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, Talia Schaffer argues that St. John offers what she calls “familiar marriage,” which is “a Victorian literary convention that developed out of the eighteenth-century ideal of marrying from rational esteem rather than romantic love” (2). The union would be a vehicle for the work the couple would share—one built from mutual respect and a presumably rigid adherence to conjugal rights—if St. John’s general approach to his life and work is any indication—but also one notably lacking in any romantic sentiments.

Before he makes his proposal, Jane is aware of St. John’s standards for his fellow workers, and she concedes the extent to which she already has changed herself to meet them, even in her role as a cousin: “I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation” (Brontë 398). In spite of its intensity, this prospect of devoted, hard work is acceptable to Jane, and when St. John does make the offer to join his missions work as his wife, Jane does not find the anticipated occupational challenge to be a deterrent:

Alas! If I join St. John, I abandon half myself... If I *do* go with him—if I do make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar—heart, vitals, the entire victim. He will never love me; but he shall approve me: I will show him energies he has not yet seen, resources

he has never suspected. Yes: I can work as hard as he can; and with as little grudging.” (Brontë 404-405)

Jane accepts the nature of the vocation and the personal sacrifice that St. John offers, but his stipulation of accompanying him as his wife becomes an area of contention. She does not want a familiar marriage as St. John does, and she cannot divorce the idea of romantic love from her conception of marriage. Her reservations about their union are not due to a lack of affection, as the cousins do feel mutual respect and admiration for one another, but rather for the absence of passion that would make their sexual and emotional union a duty:

Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him—not as his wife: I will tell him so. (Brontë 405)

Jane’s assertion “I will tell him so” marks the initiation of the couple’s negotiation about the kind of relationship and future they intend to form together. Her ability to know and advocate her own wishes for her life depends partially on how she views St. John, whether that be as a master she is compelled to obey as a child is, or as an equal with whom she might build a life. Her characterization of her cousin reveals the clarity and confidence of a developed mind:

[R]evelations were being made in this conference: the analysis of his nature was proceeding before my eyes. I saw his fallibilities: I

comprehended them... I sat at the feet of a man, erring as I. The veil fell from his harshness and despotism. Having felt in him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection, and took courage. I was with an equal—one with whom I might argue—one whom, if I saw good, I might resist.

(Brontë 406)

Jane might argue for her desires—she might resist taking St. John’s offer without first reworking its expectations—because she recognizes the validity of her adult concerns about her future. They are equals, and equals may negotiate terms. In novels set in a culture that offers limited options to women for how they might shape their future, the literary structure of the negotiation offers the developing woman a space to demonstrate how she has come of age: she must know herself and the kind of life and relationships she wishes to create, and—similar in spirit to the challenges a young male might face in his workplace or romantic pursuits—she must overcome or adapt to any resistance she faces.

For Jane, negotiation looks like arguing for a platonic partnership with St. John—one in which they drop his stipulation of marriage while retaining their shared endeavor of missions work in India. Attempting to establish why they should not marry, Jane insists that “for you I have only a comrade’s constancy”—an argument that only serves to illuminate their differing expectations for marriage, as St. John confidently responds, “It is what I want” (Brontë 408). But Jane wants a different marriage. St. John may be desirous of a partnership of convenience and duty, but Jane believes that marriage requires giving oneself over entirely to the other—something that she only ever wants to do with Rochester. As for St. John, Jane cannot imagine becoming one with him: “Oh! it

would never do! As his curate, his comrade, all would be right: ...my body would be under rather a stringent yoke, but my heart and mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to” (Brontë 407). Ultimately it is Jane’s unwillingness to surrender her autonomy to St. John that causes their negotiation to fail. He tries to argue that once she sees “what impetus would be given to your efforts and mine by our physical and mental union in marriage... you will hasten to enter unto that union at once” (407), but Jane remains firm in her convictions: “I repeat: I freely consent to go with you as your fellow-missionary; but not as your wife: I cannot marry you and become part of you” (Brontë 408). Jane will accept half of his proposition, but St. John will not yield, as he replies, “A part of me you must become...otherwise the whole bargain is void” (Brontë 408). Jane will not accept his all-or-nothing deal, and the two cousins part ways. Notably, Jane leaves St. John at the beckoning of a supernatural call: “I saw nothing: but I heard a voice somewhere cry— ‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’ Nothing more” (Brontë 418). This voice speaks after she “entreated of Heaven” to “Shew me—shew me the path!” (Brontë 418). The triple repetition of her name mimics the divine call of the biblical prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 3, as well as the restoration of the apostle Peter in John 21, suggesting that in spite of St. John’s claims that “if you reject it [the proposal], it is not me you deny, but God,” divine approval rests with Jane (Brontë 409).

Jane does not want to become a part of St. John, so their marital negotiation dies—but what might the negotiations of a developing woman look like when the relationship continues, as it does with Rochester? Their tumultuous interactions offer a myriad of opportunities for Jane to advocate on her own behalf and mediate expectations for the role she might play as his wife. Before either Rochester or Jane makes their

feelings for one another explicit, Rochester leads her to believe that he intends to marry the lovely Miss Ingram, prompting Jane to argue that she must leave Thornfield Hall and seek new employment:

"I tell you I must go!" I retorted, roused to something like passion. "Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? — a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you, — and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh; — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, — as we are!"

(Brontë 253)

Both Rochester and St. John receive Jane's proclamations of her equality with them, but only Rochester agrees with her, echoing her avowal, "As we are!" (Brontë 253). Yet his desire to marry Jane and his confirmation of their equality do not immediately translate to how he apparently envisions Jane throughout their engagement. Rochester loves Jane, but his characterization of her is often self-focused at best and objectifying at its worst.

Immediately after they agree that they are equals, Rochester compares Jane to a bird,

emphasizing her fragility and suggesting that she might be slipping into hysterics, but Jane resists this image:

“Jane, be still; don't struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.”

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you."

Another effort set me at liberty, and I stood erect before him. (Brontë 253)

After they are engaged, Rochester dreams about their impending honeymoon in Europe, but rather than expressing anticipation for Jane to gain new experiences or find pleasure in an expanded world, he depicts her as a spiritual cleanser of his soul, suggesting that her presence as “a very angel” would allow him to “revisit [Europe] healed and cleansed” (Brontë 260). As with the bird image, Jane resists this expectation and calls him back to an understanding of the equality she sees between them:

I laughed at him as he said this. “I am not an angel,” I asserted; “and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me — for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate.” (Brontë 260)

As they prepare for their wedding, Rochester insists that Jane choose extensive gifts of gowns and jewelry in colors and quantities that fail to take her personality into account—a process she describes as “harassing” (268). His forced generosity stirs up feelings of “annoyance and degradation,” to the extent that Jane actively wishes that she had some kind of inheritance so that she might not have to rely on Rochester’s money: “It would, indeed, be a relief...if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed

like a doll by Mr. Rochester” (Brontë 268). In her essay “Marriage and Divorce in the Novels,” Beth Lau explains how in this scene Rochester views Jane

...as a conventional, objectified female, whom he wishes to adorn with his family jewels and dress in fine silks. Although this impulse might appear to be generous, Jane perceives it otherwise, as an attempt to dominate her with displays of his social advantages, not just as a landowner but as a man. When Rochester describes the way he will “put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead ... and load these fairy-like fingers with rings” (*JE* 326), the associations are clearly with chains and confinement. (360)

Jane’s resistance to the clothes and jewels, as well as to the pet names of ‘bird’ and ‘angel’, has nothing to do with their objective value as expressions of romantic love but rather with their coded message of dependence and objectification. Negotiating the role of wife with Rochester not only entails whether or not she will marry him but also moderating and reworking the undefined expectations of the relationship that surface as they make choices for their future life.

The revelation of Bertha, Rochester’s mad wife kept hidden away in the attic, offers a new opportunity to negotiate the nature of their relationship. Rochester proposes that they simply move to France and marry there: “You shall be Mrs. Rochester—both virtually and nominally... Never fear that I wish to lure you into error—to make you my mistress” (Brontë 303-304). Yet this attempt to manufacture a geographical solution is not sufficient for Jane. Regardless of how Rochester frames the situation, Bertha is still alive, and Jane would not be his legitimate wife. Rochester would lose nothing by having

Jane as a mistress: he has kept mistresses several times before—Giacinta, Clara, and Céline—, and he is even able to keep Adèle, the illegitimate child of a past lover, as his charge without social repercussions. But Jane has yet to violate these laws—socially or spiritually. In fact it is her innocence that Rochester admires at one of their first meetings: “I might have been as good as you,—wiser,—almost as stainless. I envy you your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory” (Brontë 135). Rochester offers her a “happy, and guarded, and most innocent life” (303-304) as a false wife, but he speaks as a man who is drowning, willing to pull his savior down with him as he grasps for a “final re-transformation from Indian-rubber back to flesh” (Brontë 132). Jane perceives the falsehood of his offer and counters, “Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical—is false” (Brontë 304). Unwilling to desist, Rochester changes his tactic, appealing to her heart rather than her principles by asking her if it is worth driving him to “despair” to avoid breaking a “mere human law” when she has “neither relatives nor acquaintances” who care what she does (Brontë 317). This argument is nearly persuasive:

Feeling... clamoured wildly. “Oh, comply!” it said. “...soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?” Still indomitable was the reply: “*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and

principles are not for the times when there is no temptation. ...They have a worth—so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane—quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs.” (Brontë 317)

Though Jane loves Rochester and does not wish to be parted from him, the only union he can offer is one that would cause her to “degenerate” as he has—notably without the safety nets of a fortune, a home, or the lax social norms for male extramarital sexuality (Brontë 136). In the tempting presence of this unbalanced proposition, Jane finds clarity by turning both inward and outward, personally adhering to a sense of self rooted in external, God-given principles that allow her to transcend the immediate pressures of Rochester’s offer. Though she will not accept the role of a pseudo-wife and must leave Thornfield Hall unwed and jobless, Jane’s spiritual formation and the development of her independence is complete, and she finds an inner freedom that eclipses her circumstances: “He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace—mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety” (Brontë 317).

In her refusal to join him in betraying his wife, Jane preserves Rochester’s opportunity to be faithful to Bertha, thus indirectly facilitating his “re-transformation” or re-imaging. Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall, and Rochester’s “courage” and “kindness” prompt him to risk his own safety to help the servants before returning to “get his mad wife out of her cell” (Brontë 428-29). He calls her name and approaches her—a moment of humanization and empathy that Rochester had not previously shown toward his wife—before she jumps off the roof to take her life. Rochester also accrues serious

injuries for his compassion, including the loss of his eyesight and one of his hands—handicaps that mirror those mentioned in Matthew 5:29-30 as preventative measures against sin. Though he is physically impaired, Rochester is ‘re-imaged’ into a man who can match Jane spiritually. Rochester’s regeneration, combined with Jane’s newly inherited fortune that allows her to be “an independent woman” financially, prompts a new negotiation of marital roles. When they are reunited after the divine call prompts her to return to Thornfield, Jane declares, “I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you distained every part but that of the giver and the protector,” and Rochester replies, “Hitherto I have hated to be helped—to be led: henceforth, I feel, I shall hate it no more” (Brontë 445). The ease and joy with which Jane embraces the care of her disabled husband as full-time employment indicates that their marriage will not only be romantic for Jane but vocational as well⁴. Thus, the literary structure of the *re-imagining negotiation* can encompass a wide range of social constructs, including marriage and vocation. Jane’s transition from teacher to nurse culminates in her assistance of Adèle, who she discovers is “pale and thin” from her time spent at a “severe” school (Brontë 450). Rather than take her back as a pupil, however, Jane remains in her nursing role and makes other arrangements:

So I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system; and near enough to permit of my visiting her often, and bringing her home sometimes. I took care she should never want for anything that could contribute to her comfort: she soon settled in her new abode, became very happy there, and made fair progress in her studies. (Brontë 450)

In caring for Adèle and removing her from the Lowood-like school, Jane prevents the repetition of her own childhood as a mistreated and abandoned orphan.

This satisfying conclusion for Jane and her community comes as a result of hard-fought but ultimately rewarding negotiations, yet it would be reductive to dismiss how the success of Jane and Rochester's union comes at the price of Bertha's life. This raises an important question of the availability of the *Bildungsroman* negotiation to all young women. Jane can advocate for herself partially because she is willing to walk away if her partner will not meet her requirements, as she does both with Rochester and St. John, but she is also able to negotiate her occupation and her role as a wife because she is fundamentally desirable to both men: she is diligent, trained for employment, and possesses a capacity for expression that both men value—St. John for its practical use, and Rochester for his personal enjoyment. In contrast, Bertha's mental impediments limit the clarity of her expression, as well as curtail Rochester's interest in honoring her attempts at self-advocacy. Reading Bertha's actions throughout *Jane Eyre* as a series of failed negotiations opens up possibilities to consider deviant forms of the female *Bildungsroman*—narratives that convey the detrimental effects of societies that do not honor the needs and desires of its members who cannot advocate for themselves. In this reading, Bertha's aggression in attempting to escape her cell, setting fire to Rochester's bed, and stabbing Mr. Mason transform from the ravings of a madwoman into clumsy attempts at self-advocacy. Perhaps the most significant of these attempts occurs the night before Jane and Rochester's planned nuptials, when Bertha sneaks into Jane's room and places the wedding veil on her own head before she “rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them” (Brontë 284). Despite her incapacities, Bertha is

aware of the violation Rochester is willing to make in marrying Jane, and the destruction of a symbol of their unwarranted union is an eloquent statement of her disapproval. The fact that Jane keeps the veil-tearing in her account suggests that she recognizes the validity of Bertha's position, as does her insistence that Rochester remain faithful to his first wife regardless of her capacity to please him. Gilbert and Gubar have persuasively argued that Bertha represents Jane's "truest and darkest double" whose violent actions convey Jane's repressed anger at Rochester's patriarchal power (360). Perhaps this doubling, however, likewise conveys the varying access to self-advocacy available to young women in the Victorian Era.⁵

Personal and Public Re-Imaging in *North and South*

'In the first place, Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage.'

– ELIZABETH GASKELL, *North and South*⁶

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Margaret Hale begins to come of age as her family moves from the southern Hampshire to the industrial town of Milton in the north of England, where she brings her rural perspectives to an entirely new environment. Partially due to her interactions with mill-owner and future husband Mr Thornton and partly a natural consequence of her own concern with justice, Margaret's developmental negotiations arise in both the spheres of marriage and the interactions between the workers and the masters at the mills. By examining pivotal moments of negotiation between Margaret and her community and marking the progression of change or "re-imagining" in both parties, I hope to convey a pattern of early Christian feminism in the female Victorian *Bildungsroman* as a pillar of identity formation in both social and personal contexts.

A significant element of Margaret's development involves discarding the limited understanding of her childhood and adopting a more nuanced perspective of varied human existence. Before Margaret has a chance to engage with the people of the North, she vocalizes her bias against anyone who works in manufacturing, such as the "Gorman" family:

'Gormans,' said Margaret. 'Are those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton? Oh! I'm glad we don't visit them. I

don't like shoppy people. I think we are far better off knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence.' (Gaskell 20)

Even though the Hales are poor, Margaret holds Romantic, feudal ideas about her position as the daughter of the vicarage—ideas that she casts off in Milton, where she learns to value and endorse egalitarian relationships. When she first arrives in the new town, however, she voices a similar displeasure at her father's plans to be a private tutor to Mr Thornton:

'A private tutor!' said Margaret, looking scornful: 'What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?' (Gaskell 40).

Margaret's preliminary ideas about the origins and qualities of a man who might be considered a 'gentleman' preclude anyone of the manufacturing trade. Consequently, after her first meeting with Mr Thornton, Margaret reports to her mother that he is "not quite a gentleman, but that was hardly to be expected" (Gaskell 65). In this comment, Margaret reveals the overlap between two significant developments that characterize her coming of age: her understanding of what makes a man a "gentleman"⁷—and, more pointedly, a worthy husband—and her conviction that the society of the North falls short of the ideal. Gaskell unites the issues of marriage and master-worker relations, such that as Margaret engages with one, she also does so with the other. As Margaret's mill worker friend Nicolas Higgins explains, "Meddling 'twixt master and man is liker meddling 'twixt husband and wife than aught else: it takes a deal o' wisdom for to do ony good" (Gaskell 301). Three central figures—Margaret, Higgins, and Thornton—primarily engage in the negotiations of marriage and justice in master-worker relations. This

triangulation contains two key pairings: Thornton and Higgins as master-worker, and Thornton and Margaret as husband-wife. Thornton possesses a central position of power in both pairings, creating a parallel between the two separate issues, such that when Margaret attempts to mediate between master and worker, she also symbolically negotiates the relations between husband and wife.

The first scene of negotiation concerning marriage takes Margaret by surprise: Mr Henry Lennox, the brother of her cousin Edith's husband, suddenly proposes to Margaret during an after-dinner walk in Helstone. Although he speaks of love and pleasure, the scene is more heavily steeped in language of power: Lennox gets "sudden possession of her hand" which she has to "quietly, but firmly, striv[e] to extricate... from his grasp" (Gaskell 30). At the sight of "her lips quivering almost as if she were going to cry," Lennox reacts to the presence of emotion by commanding her to "Speak!" (Gaskell 30). Rather than immediately follow his order, however, Margaret makes "a strong effort to be calm; she would not speak till she had succeeded in mastering her voice" (Gaskell 30). Before she goes on to reject him, Margaret endeavors to master herself, to "discover the truth as it was in her own heart, before replying" (Gaskell 31). The proposal is Margaret's first invitation to negotiate social roles, and she rejects Lennox at each attempt, even as he tries to prolong the negotiation: "But I may hope, may I not, Margaret, that some time you will think of me as a lover? Not yet, I see—there is no hurry—but some time—" (Gaskell 31). His bitterness at her rejection stirs strong reactions in Margaret: she is "annoyed" and "repelled" and feels "contempt" and "disdain" at his attempts emotionally to coerce her into pitying "the mortification, not only of a lover, ...but of a man not given to romance in general" (Gaskell 31-32). Margaret's choice not to marry an eligible,

respectable man whom she does not love and her desire to master herself, rather than be mastered, mark an overlap between the *Bildungsroman* and the courtship novel. As

Kathrine Sobba Green notes:

What distinguished courtship novels from other contemporary narratives is that thematically they offered a revisionist view: women, no longer unwilling victims, became heroines with significant, though modest, prerogatives of choice and action. (2)

Lennox's proposal functions as a watershed moment in which Margaret realizes for the first time that she has "grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage," leaving her feeling "guilty and ashamed" at finding herself to be a sexual being (Gaskell 34). Although he appears to cooperate in the marital negotiation, Lennox's attempts at emotional and even minimal physical coercion demonstrate that he fails to see Margaret as a free agent in the interaction. Even years later, after Margaret has lived in the North and matured considerably, Lennox does not recognize Margaret's "prerogatives of choice and action" (Green 2):

For this time the clever and ambitious man [Lennox] bent all his powers to gaining Margaret. He loved her sweet beauty. He saw the latent sweep of her mind, which could easily (he thought) be led to embrace all the objects on which he had set his heart. (Gaskell 405).

Lennox regards Margaret as something to be gained and led, rather than an equal partner in a negotiation, and because he dismisses Margaret's agency in the interaction, he fails to persuade her to be his wife.

After her first rejection of Lennox and the Hales' arrival to the North, Margaret's initial reaction to the pace and culture of Milton foreshadows the areas in which she and her community will need transformation. Mr Hale appreciates the "sense of grandeur" in the men and machinery (Gaskell 70). Margaret, in contrast, does not find the power of Milton industry to be alluring or energizing. Rather, she notices the "one or two of those [workers] who, in all measures affecting masses of people, must be acute sufferers for the good of many" (Gaskell 70). As an outsider, Margaret has the perspective to ask, "have the helpless been trampled on?" and "has everything been done to make the sufferings of these exceptions as small as possible?" (Gaskell 70). Neither blinded by the power of human ingenuity, nor a resident in Milton long enough to become numb to the sufferings of its workers, Margaret's convictions portray her as someone who can engage with her community and be the impetus for re-imagining. Conversely, the juxtaposition between Margaret and her father reveals that Margaret does have a kind of blindness: because she enters Milton carrying "a repugnance to the idea of a manufacturing town," she does not recognize the value of the cooperation and effort necessary to produce industrial power (Gaskell 60). Similar to her prejudice against Thornton's qualification to be a gentleman, Margaret has limited ideas on how human life and society should be structured; thus, both Margaret and her community possess the capacity for positive growth: Margaret in understanding the utility of power, and the people of Milton in not being fractured by it.

In the triangulated relations between Margaret, Thornton, and Higgins, Margaret becomes a unifying figure in the midst of a debate concerning power and justice in masters and workers. Because of her friendships with the figureheads of both parties—Thornton as the owner of a mill, and Higgins as a Union leader—Margaret is able to act as a

mediator, pointing out hypocrisies and limited perspectives on both sides. In Margaret and Thornton's first manufacturing-related conversation, Margaret is "immediately repelled" when, at Mr Hale's mention of an impending strike, "Mr Thornton's face assumed a likeness to his mother's worst expression" (Gaskell 117). Thornton uses the language of war to describe the Milton masters' experiences with the workmen, describing how the masters "see the storm on the horizon and draw [their] sails," how the mill-owner Henderson tried "a dodge with his men, out at Ashley, and failed," and how the "fools" will strike because there will be no pay raise (Gaskell 117). He finishes with the battle-cry assertion, "So here we stand, waiting for their next attack" (Gaskell 177). This language of aggression reveals the underlying mentality driving the conflict: the strike may be a peaceful social construction designed to negotiate differences between masters and workers, but the two parties still see one another as enemies rather than partners in a shared endeavor of trade. Margaret illuminates this mentality by inquiring why the masters do not explain to the men that trade is not "flourishing" as they believe it to be, to which Thornton asserts that as "the owners of capital" they have "a right to choose what we will do with it" (Gaskell 117). Margaret notes that although his right to control his capital is a "human right," there are "religious" reasons that he should consider experience of the workmen as he makes decisions while withholding information (Gaskell 117-18). She continues:

All I meant to say is, that there is no human law to prevent the employers from utterly wasting or throwing away all their money, if they choose; but that there are passages in the Bible which would rather imply—to me at

least—that they neglected their duty as stewards if they did so. (Gaskell 118)

In her argument, Margaret attempts to mediate between the opposing groups by appealing to a biblical ideal that sets masters and workers on the same level. Before God, masters are not owners of capital but rather “stewards”⁸ temporarily entrusted with earthly resources who must one day “give account of [themselves] to God” (Romans 14:12, KJV). She finishes by saying,

[Y]ou are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have, whether you reject use of it or not, immense power; just because your lives and welfare are so constantly and intimately interwoven. God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless. Neither you nor any other master can help yourselves. (Gaskell 122)

Although she speaks here on the matter of the state of power relations within business, Margaret brings the element of relationship and interdependence into her argument. Rather than arguing whether the masters have a “right” to exclude the workmen, Margaret presents the two classes as equal participants with different roles who must both give an account of their actions to a higher divine authority. This discourse of business between Thornton and Margaret parallels that of their tacit sexual and marital negotiations, which do not become overt until the novel’s close. Margaret claims that any position of power, whether by capital or by the role of husband, may give someone the ability to make any choice they desire, but it does not exempt them from being

accountable to a higher authority and ultimately just as dependent on their community as those in a 'weaker' position. In a Victorian, Judeo-Christian context, Margaret's argument is markedly feminist.

Margaret's journey in becoming a more effective negotiator progresses as she discusses the strike with Higgins shortly following the death of his daughter Bessy. Mr Hale attempts to comfort Higgins in the manner he knows best, by reading him the fourteenth chapter of Job, which is concerned with the subject of life and death. The Bible holds no real significance to Higgins, however, and rather than try to force a kind of grief counseling on him that he cannot or does not want to relate to, Margaret suggests that they meet him on his terms:

“Not yet, papa, I think. Perhaps not at all. Let us ask him about the strike, and give him all sympathy he needs, and hoped to have from poor Bessy.”

So they questioned and listened. (Gaskell 225)

This humble posture allows Higgins to feel comfortable sharing what the strikers are thinking and planning with the Hales, who are essentially outsiders to their cause. As she argued with Thornton, Margaret demonstrates that productive negotiation requires a willingness to allow the other party's needs and desires to affect her approach. From Higgins' subsequent candor, Margaret learns that

[t]he workmen's calculations were based (like too many of the masters') on false premises. They reckoned on their fellow-men as if they possessed the calculable powers of machines, no more, no less; no allowance for human passions getting the better of reason, as in the case of Boucher and the rioters. (Gaskell 225)

Just as Thornton cannot see how interconnected the concerns of the masters and workers are, Higgins and the men are similarly incapable of recognizing the kind of emotional distress that the strike places on some of their fellow workmen, including one rioter in particular, Boucher. Margaret illuminates how forcing Boucher to join the Union was “tyranny” (229):

“Oh! how shocking! how pitiful!” exclaimed Margaret. “Higgins, I don’t know you today. Don’t you see how you’ve made Boucher what he is, by driving him into the Union against his will—without his heart going with it. You have made him what he is!” (Gaskell 287)

Within complex social groups, there can be multiple layers of power dynamics that are not always immediately apparent. Although Boucher’s participation in the Union and the strike seems to be of his own volition and for his personal benefit, Margaret uncovers how he was coerced by the workmen into joining upon the threat of becoming a social outcast (Gaskell 286). Higgins contends that sometimes “th’ Union finds it necessary to force a man into his own good,” which Margaret identifies as a form of systemic manipulation in an attempt to guide Higgins towards changing or “re-imagining” this unjust practice (Gaskell 286).

The triangulated negotiations between Margaret and the two men reach their climax in the scene of the strike. During an ill-timed visit to the Thornton’s house, Margaret finds herself trapped as a riot forms outside. Although thus far the tension and negotiations have been ideological, those ideas become incarnate as an angry crowd of workers seek to challenge Mr Thornton face-to-face. During the riot, Margaret acts as a mediator between the two opposing sides, calling both sides to recognize and act upon

their common humanity. When Thornton tries to hide from the increasingly antagonistic crowd, Margaret begins to negotiate on their behalf:

‘Mr Thornton,’ said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, ‘go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don’t let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man.’ (Gaskell 175)

Although the surface level interpretation of this request concerns the master-workmen relations, the gendered nature of Margaret’s call to action suggests that her negotiation contains another layer: her personal exchange with Thornton over the roles in marriage. In her commands to face the men, she positions Thornton’s masculinity on conditional statements: “if you are not a coward” and “[i]f you have any courage or noble quality in you” then he would face them “like a man” (Gaskell 175). After he does go out to face the increasingly violent crowd, however, Margaret follows him and uses her body to shield him from a potential attack, which immediately results in another debate between the two: “‘Go away,’ said he, in his deep voice. ‘This is no place for you.’ ‘It is!’ said she” (Gaskell 177). Thornton and Margaret disagree about the validity of her ‘place’ in a public space because they understand her primary motivations in different ways. To Margaret, standing between Thornton and the rioters is a moral prerogative:

Another moment, and Mr Thornton might be smitten down, —he whom she had urged and goaded to come to this perilous place. She only thought how she could save him. (Gaskell 177)

She considers herself an active agent who, having convinced someone to put himself in harm's way, will try to amend the situation. Conversely, Thornton is cognizant of how gender will influence the social interpretation of Margaret physically guarding him. After a sharp rock hits Margaret in the face, the rioters object that the projectile was meant for Thornton, but he was “sheltered behind a woman” (Gaskell 178). Thornton steps forward and declares that “[t]here is no woman to shield me here,” but in the eyes of the people, Margaret's reasoning for her protective stance is inseparable from her gender. Thornton's servants, as well as his sister Fanny and Mrs Thornton, question why she would “be so bold” to put “her arms about master [Thornton]'s neck, hugging him before all the people” (Gaskell 181). The onlookers interpret her actions as an inappropriate declaration of love, to the extent that Mrs Thornton begrudgingly guides her son to propose to Margaret, claiming that he is “bound in honour” because Margaret publicly allowed “her feelings so to overcome her” (Gaskell 186).

Despite believing her motivations to be primarily moral, Margaret's analysis of her public scene and the subsequent judgments of her community do reveal her awareness of the presence of sexuality in her actions at the riot:

‘I did some good. But what possessed me to defend that man as if he were a helpless child! Ah!’ said she, clenching her hands together, ‘it is no wonder those people thought I was in love with him, after disgracing

myself in that way...Oh how low I am fallen that they should say that of me!' (Gaskell 188)

Although Margaret has not 'fallen' in the sense of having explicit sexual relations with Thornton, both she and Mrs Thornton acknowledge that clinging to him in a public space has changed her public perception, and to some extent that change is a kind of tainting or fallenness. The fact that Margaret can 'fall' because of what "they" say of her indicates that the purity of a woman's sexual status is socially determined, rather than being reducible to a binary marker of virgin or not-virgin. This social element results in a female sexuality that is nebulous, dependent on communal opinion and impressions. Cases such as Margaret's cannot be easily delegated to either side of the *madonna-harlot dichotomy*, a term that Deborah Anna Logan utilizes in her work *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse*, to invoke "the rigidity of acceptable sexual standards, a polarization Victorian writers repeatedly prove is an unrealistic fiction" (7). Logan writes:

The prominence of the period's middle-class sexual ideology, defined in terms of angels, madonnas, and magdalens, even when its inadequacy to experience was evident, manifests itself in a powerful code of ethics that categorize deviancy in any form...as fallenness. (9)

Margaret's deviance or "fallenness" is not the product of a sexual act but rather a failed public negotiation in which Margaret and her community are at odds in ascribing meaning to a particular act. In terms of the *Bildungsroman*, this is the pivotal moment in which the protagonist's personal beliefs about the world come in conflict with

generalized social interpretations, and either the individual or the society must be re-imaged in order to co-exist.

Because she does not easily align with either pole of the *madonna-harlot dichotomy*, Margaret is more “falling” than fallen, a term that Beth Kalikoff employs in her article “The Falling Woman in Three Victorian Novels.” In this state of “falling,” Margaret must determine how she will interpret her own actions and motivations. Although she feels a “deep sense of shame that she should thus be the object of universal regard” (189), Margaret ultimately considers the weight of fostering discourse between the opposing classes to have been more morally significant than concern over her public image:

‘[My indifference to Thornton] made me the more anxious that there should be fair play on each side; and I could see what fair play was. It was not fair,’ said she, vehemently, ‘that he should stand there—sheltered, awaiting the soldiers, who might catch those poor maddened creatures as in a trap—without an effort on his part, to bring them to reason. And it was worse than unfair for them to set on him as they threatened. I would do it again, let who will say what they like of me. If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman’s work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will—I walk pure before God!’ (Gaskell 188)

Margaret’s assertions that she “could see what fair play was” and that the actions of both parties at the riot were “not fair” conveys an inner clarity that directly pertains to her development. She has accrued a set of moral principles—“there should be fair play on

both sides”—, and she assesses her community accordingly. During the riot, Margaret becomes an emblematic parent figure, ‘mothering’ the group by calling both sides to adhere to the common social principle of fairness. Margaret identifies the prevention of unnecessary violence as “a woman’s work,” which links the attributes of gender and age with justice work: a woman, rather than a man or a child, mediates and stands in the threshold, perhaps even literally, between the warring segments of a social web. She does what Thornton and Higgins cannot, fostering peace by being a bridge for communication between two unavoidably interdependent groups. Ultimately, Margaret’s femininity acts as the impetus for restorative interaction between Thornton and Higgins. Per Margaret’s suggestion, Higgins approaches Thornton to ask for a job on behalf of Boucher’s children, whom Higgins adopts after both their parents die as an indirect result of the strike. Thornton rejects Higgins’ request—until he learns that Margaret sent him:

‘So that was the lady you spoke of as a woman?’ said [Thornton] indignantly to Higgins. ‘You might have told me who she was.’

‘And then, maybe yo’d ha’ spoken of her more civil than yo’ did...’

The mention of Margaret reignites discourse between the two men, which ultimately results in a shared endeavor to build and run a dining-room for the workmen that provides “hot dinners” at a wholesale price (Gaskell 353). Although initially Thornton is wary of “interfering with the independence of [his] men,” when he recognizes that Higgins likewise had “a scheme so nearly the same” as his own, Thornton turns the plans over to him and instead “coolly took the part assigned to me, which is something like that of steward to a club” (Gaskell 353). Thus, Thornton adopts the position of a steward—the very role that, in her and Thornton’s earlier negotiation, Margaret associates with the

masters of the mills, arguing that “they neglected their duty as stewards” when they do not take their workers into account (Gaskell 118). As Margaret’s godfather Mr Bell observes both classes eating together in new-found harmony, he notes that there is “Nothing like the act of eating for equalizing men” (Gaskell 354). Higgins and Thornton’s dining-room project is the incarnation of mutual respect and recognition of interdependence—the very ideals that Margaret has argued for throughout the novel.

In addition to negotiating this set of moral principles within the communal and industrial structure of Milton, another marker of Margaret’s development is how she retains an autonomous identity separate from the group even as she engages with it. After recognizing the consequences of clinging to Thornton during the riot, Margaret notes that “I would do it again, let who will say what they like of me” (Gaskell 188). Thus, while she remains invested in her community, she is not defined by it, and the clarity of her convictions allows her to resist pressure from society without entirely rejecting it. Although distressed that she has “fallen” in the eyes of the onlookers, Margaret confidently declares, “Let them insult my maiden pride as they will... I walk pure before God!” (Gaskell 188). Despite the public’s assessment of Margaret’s sexual purity, she declares herself to be “pure” according to sacred judgment. In founding her identity on external, divine acceptance rather than societal judgments, Margaret progresses in her spiritual formation.

After both of Margaret’s parents have passed away and any chance of a marriage to Thornton seems beyond hope, Margaret practices autonomy with the new understanding that she is unlikely ever to become a wife or mother—the roles most closely associated with female coming of age. Although she eventually will marry

Thornton, she locates a sense of an adult self before their union becomes a possibility once more. When she first engages with her extended family as an orphan, Margaret is “docile to her aunt’s laws” and makes no attempt to regulate her own life (Gaskell 406). After some time passes, however, “she had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it” (Gaskell 406). Her conviction that “she herself must one day answer for her own life” echoes the biblical admonition “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12, KJV), further exemplifying an identity rooted in the divine. She does not consider herself to be solely accountable to society but rather to a God who transcends it. This conviction provides Margaret with the autonomy to gain “the acknowledgement of her right to follow her own ideas of duty” (Gaskell 406).

In her journey of spiritual formation, Margaret frequently becomes a guide for others. She counsels the exhausted Bessy that “God can give you more perfect rest than even idleness on earth, or the dead sleep of the grave can do” (Gaskell 101), and later when a “sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, overpower[s]” her, Margaret comforts herself by quoting Psalm 90:2, “For everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God” (Gaskell 390). With convictions for justice and unity that are rooted in religious devotion, Margaret’s interactions with her community naturally present her as a kind of prophet or Christ-figure, where her vision for the ‘re-imagining’ of her community, as well as her agency in guiding it toward a sacred ideal, function as markers of her spiritual formation or *Bildungsroman*. One of the most prevalent examples of Margaret’s sacred authority occurs between Margaret and her father. Before Margaret becomes the spiritual head of the Hale family, she first advances in familial leadership

when she informs her mother of their impending move to the North—a responsibility that Mr Hale considers too heavy to bear. After recognizing the disappointment and frustration that her mother feels both at the news and hearing it from her daughter instead of her husband, Margaret reflects on her father’s conduct:

It came strongly upon Margaret’s mind that her mother ought to have been told: that whatever her faults of discontent and repining might have been it was an error in her father to have left her to learn his change of opinion, and his approaching change of life, from her better-informed child.

(Gaskell 45)

Margaret not only assumes some of the responsibility that a head of the household would, but she exhibits an additional level of autonomy by assessing and evaluating her father’s actions: she asserts that he “ought” to have told Mrs Hale himself, and the fact that he relegates this difficult task to his daughter is an “error” (Gaskell 45). As it is usually the parent who tells the child what she “ought” to do, this role reversal is the first of many interactions between Margaret and Mr Hale in which Margaret takes a position of authority, not unlike her later actions at the riot. In addition to disseminating the information of their impending move to the rest of the household, Margaret also orchestrates the details of the move. She organizes the transportation of the furniture and assists her father in determining which house to rent by assessing the viability of the rooms and guiding her father towards the most salient option. Margaret reflects on the abruptness of this plethora of decisions:

She felt that it was a great weight suddenly thrown upon her shoulders.
Four months ago, all the decisions she needed to make were what dress

she would wear for dinner, and to help Edith to draw out the lists of who should take down whom in the dinner parties at home. Nor was the household in which she lived one that called for much decision. Except in the one grand case of Captain Lennox's offer, everything went on with the regularity of clockwork... Now, since that day when Mr Lennox came, and startled her into a decision, every day brought some question, momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled. (Gaskell 51)

Margaret recognizes that she is transitioning from youth into an emerging maturity by the frequency and significance of the agency she must take to survive. Notably, Margaret marks Mr Lennox's proposal—from which she realizes she has “grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage” (Gaskell 34)—as the critical event in which she ceases to identify with her cousin and peer Edith, whose main concerns include dresses and dinner parties, and begins to accept the role as a guide to others.

The biblical allusions throughout *North and South* illustrate the connection between Margaret's spiritual formation and her increasingly significant authority in her family. Mr Hale's despair at the news of his wife's likely fatal illness prompts the doctor to urge him to “Be a man, sir—a Christian. Have faith in the immortality of the soul, which no pain, no mortal disease, can assail or touch!” (Gaskell 167). Mr Hale, however, rejects this association between masculinity and emotional stoicism, which Gaskell seems to support when she describes his “deep, manly sobs, which went through the stillness of the night like heavy pulses of agony” (Gaskell 167). Margaret kneels beside her father, physically matching his posture. Mr Hale reinforces this coupling by requesting

Margaret's presence when he and the doctor form a treatment plan for Mrs Hale: 'What must we do?' asked he. 'Tell us both. Margaret is my staff—my right hand.' (Gaskell 168). This pairing of symbols—"my staff—my right hand"—marks the progression of Margaret's relationship to her father. First, she is the staff, an object that provides stability and assistance. The Christian tradition represents the staff as a marker of authority and divine approval.⁹ Similarly, it functions as a 'helper' tool, supporting the user where his own strength is insufficient. This function is not unlike the biblical reasoning for the creation of woman in the Genesis account: "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him'" (Genesis 2:18, KJV). Considering the gendered framing of the scene in which the doctor commands Mr Hale to "be a man," Margaret symbolically replaces her mother as her father's helper by remaining at his side, suggesting a kind of patriarchal approval on Margaret's fitness for the role of wife.

The second symbol, that of the right hand, presents an additional layer of patriarchal approval. The place at the right hand of the father would traditionally be preserved for the eldest son as a place of honor. Rather than giving this distinction to the absent Fredrick, however, Mr Hale identifies Margaret as the recipient of this position of favor. Margaret as her father's right hand suggests that Mr Hale sees her as his primary heir, the one who will carry on the headship, if not the name, of the family. Notably, Margaret shares this position at the right hand of the father with the Christ:

[You may know] what is the exceeding greatness of his power ... which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 1:18-20, KJV)

Before she can guide her community toward a sacred ideal as a Christ-figure, she first guides her immediate family. When Frederick covertly visits Milton to say goodbye to his dying mother, Margaret is the first to move from grief toward comforting others: “Then Margaret rose from her trembling and despondency, and became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother” (Gaskell 246). Furthermore, she becomes a literal mouthpiece for the sacred after her mother’s death as she recites the words of Christ before his own impending crucifixion:

The night was wearing away, and the day was at hand, when, without a word of preparation, Margaret’s voice broke upon stillness, with a clearness of sound that startled even herself: ‘Let not your heart be troubled,’¹⁰ it said; and she went steadily on through that chapter of unspeakable consolation. (Gaskell 246)

The power of her words “startled even herself,” as her spiritual development reaches a new degree.

Margaret’s association with Christ—the Christian ideal—reflects the progression of her spiritual maturity, yet the association holds significance beyond Margaret’s development alone. In the Christian tradition, Christ is the head of the Church, possessing the highest authority in the kingdom of God. Not only does Margaret act as the spiritual authority for her brother and father, but the Christ imagery in the pivotal riot scene suggests that she acts as such for her community as well. Her presence in the intensifying environment resembles divine judgment as she rushes to assist Thornton, “her eyes smiting them with flaming arrows of reproach” (Gaskell 176). In the Christian tradition, Christ is the divine mediator, reconciling a holy God with fallen Man. Similarly,

Margaret aims to mollify both parties as “she stood between them and their enemy” (Gaskell 176). She physically inhabits the space between two warring groups, effectively standing in as a Christ-figure vying for reconciliation. Like the Christ who made an invisible God incarnate, Margaret embodies the binding ties between two interdependent groups, knitting together the social web as it begins to tear apart. When she addresses the crowd of angry workmen, she declares, “You do not know what you are doing” (Gaskell 177), directly echoing the words of Christ on the cross: “Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’” (Luke 23:34a, KJV).

After someone from the crowd throws a “sharp pebble” that cuts Margaret’s forehead and draws blood, “She lay like one dead on Mr Thornton’s shoulder. Then he unfolded his arms, and held her encircled in one for an instant” (Gaskell 177). This rendering of Margaret, death-like with a bloody forehead and reclining in the arms of Mr Thornton, evokes a kind of gender-reversed Pietà,¹¹ in which Thornton as the Virgin Mary holds the crucified Christ. When Thornton rebukes the workmen for this violence, they reply, “Th’ stone were meant for thee; but thou wert sheltered behind a woman!” (Gaskell 178)—suggesting that the workmen’s horror with their violent actions is at least in part due to the recipient being a respectable female, particularly considering the implications from the historical use of stoning as a punishment for promiscuous women. Like Christ, Margaret’s absorption of the violence between the two groups allows them to recognize the perils of their animosity and eventually to reconcile, but the gendered nature of the scene indicates that a significant element in Margaret’s success as a mediator and Christ-figure for her social web is her femininity and the societal norms that prohibit violence against women.

Although Margaret's spiritual development reaches its pinnacle in her representation as a Christ-figure, it does not present a complete picture of her spiritual formation or *Bildungsroman*. Despite her sacrificial display at the riot, Margaret is not a perfect Christ-figure: she lies to the police, denying that she was at the train station to protect her brother Frederick, who was also present at the station despite facing severe charges for his role in a naval mutiny. This lie prompts Thornton to question Margaret's character as he observes Margaret and Frederick—whom he does not know to be her brother—embracing and later learns that she denied ever being there. Unable to explain the truth to Thornton, Margaret “stood face to face at last with her sin,” accepting that “[i]t was a just consequence of her sin, that all excuses for it, all temptation to it, should remain forever unknown to the person in whose opinion it had sunk her lowest” (Gaskell 401). When Thornton eventually learns from Higgins that the man embracing Margaret is her brother and not a lover, the couple's presumed business meeting at the close of the novel facilitates their reconciliation. They meet under the guise of discussing a loan—one in which Margaret's newly inherited capital will be the salvation of Thornton's recently failed business. Margaret's position as an heiress ensures that she and Thornton will not only be husband and wife but also business partners, making *North and South* not only a different kind of marriage plot but a more complete *Bildungsroman* as well.

While they discuss the loan, the scene rapidly takes on spiritual and romantic significance. Thornton calls her name, “Margaret!”, three times and “[a]t that third call she turned her face” (Gaskell 424). Similar to the divine call which Jane follows back to Rochester, Thornton's three calls are reminiscent of the restoration of the apostle Peter, whom Christ asked three times, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than

these?”, paralleling the three times that Peter denied Christ (John 21: 15-17, Luke 22:54-62, KJV). Contrasted with the riot scene, it is now Thornton’s turn to embody the Christ-figure to Margaret’s fallen humanity. This allusion completes the picture of Margaret’s spiritual formation, as she has engaged with her community both as an authority and a recipient of moral growth—a dynamic relationship that requires the maturity of adulthood. Additionally, considering the biblical motif of comparing the Church and Christ to a bride and bridegroom, aligning Thornton with Christ and Margaret with his disciple has the further implication of suggesting divine approval of the couple’s impending marriage and, by extension, of Margaret’s fitness for the role of wife—demonstrating how far she has developed from when she once felt “guilty and ashamed” at discovering that she had “grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage” (Gaskell 34).

Interwoven *Bildungsromane* in *The Small House at Allington*

'I've left off being a grub, and begun to be a butterfly.'

– ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *The Small House at Allington*¹²

In *The Small House at Allington*, Anthony Trollope presents a sophisticated quadruple Bildungsroman—one in which the interwoven coming-of-age narratives of Johnny Eames, Adolphus Crosbie, and Isabella and Lily Dale convey the influences of social pressure, gender, and mutual growth on guiding development. The close proximity of the four narratives serves both to exemplify the different narrative structures for developing males and females and to demonstrate how their key features—developmental markers for males and negotiations for females—merge and propel one another. This integration of structures is most evident in the triangulated relationships of Lily, Crosbie, and Eames, as each suitor's pursuit (or abandonment) of an “exalting” love affair with Lily converges with the negotiations she makes concerning her role as a wife (Buckley 17). Although Lily's sister Bell also matures in her marital negotiations, first with her cousin Bernard and later with her childhood friend Dr Crofts, her narrative exists laterally to the other three and serves as a compliment to Lily's, just as Eames and Crosbie act as foils to one another.

Trollope characterizes Eames and Crosbie as young men with different levels of charm on the same journey to establish themselves. For Eames in particular, Trollope provides commentary on his partially-developed state by tracing his transition from a “hobbledehoy” to a man:

I have said that John Eames had been petted by none but his mother...

There is a class of young men who never get petted... Such young men are often awkward, ungainly, and not yet formed in their gait... They go much about alone, and blush when women speak to them. In truth, they are not as yet men, whatever the number may be of their years; and, as they are no longer boys, the world has found for them the ungraceful name of hobbledehoy. (35)

Trollope contrasts this stereotype of the “hobbledehoy” with worldly, polished “Apollos” such as Crosbie, stating, “I regard the former as unripe fruit, and the latter as fruit that is ripe” (35). Yet Trollope calls into question whether ‘ripening’ quickly makes for the best fruit, or if “the fullest flavor of the sun is given to that other fruit—is given in the sun’s own good time” (36). Though they ‘ripen’ at different rates, both Eames and Crosbie’s stories adhere to many of Buckley’s characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*: they have each moved independently to the city, learn to navigate their careers, and gain knowledge of urban life, partially through their experience with “at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, [which] demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values” (17). The love affairs of these two young men carry much of the plot of *Small House*. Complicating this literary structure, however, is Lily’s central role in their social web as a love interest to both Eames and Crosbie. Johnny Eames’ “debasing” love affair is a brief fling with his landlady’s daughter Amelia, although he has always been “absolutely and irretrievably in love with Lily Dale...[though] he had declared it only to himself... He had not dreamed of asking her to be his wife” (Trollope 38). An element of his coming of age involves ‘ripening’ his inner resolve to cut ties

completely with Amelia and to pursue Lily directly, and though he is not ultimately successful in convincing her to marry him, Trollope does conclude his story with the assertion that he had “entered on his manhood” (653). Conversely, Crosbie’s development is more akin to over-ripened fruit that rots: he acquires his “exalting” love in an engagement to Lily but then jilts her for the worldly, aristocratic lady Alexandra, resulting in a mutually dissatisfying marriage and leaving Lily permanently heartbroken. Crosbie quickly realizes “how the bride he had rejected excelled the one he had chosen in grace, beauty, faith, freshness, and all feminine virtues,” yet social pressures prevent him from reversing his betrayal: “It had been considered but little by him, when the project first offered itself to his mind, to jilt the niece of a small rural squire; but it was not in him to jilt the daughter of a countess” (Trollope 300, 301). Crosbie’s choice to marry his “debasement” love has its consequences, however: he and Alexandra are unsuccessful in creating domestic bliss and become permanently estranged, resulting in his regression back to bachelorhood: “To be once more a bachelor, in lodgings, with six hundred a year to spend on himself, seemed to him now such a prospect of happiness” (Trollope 622). Although his domestic failure does not ruin his success in his career—“He might still be victorious at his office, having more capacity for such victory than others around him”—he is not satisfied with this outcome: “But such success alone would hardly suffice for him” (Trollope 446). His reputation as a man who jilted a woman and his disadvantageous marriage together negatively impact his social valuation, and though he is still welcome at the club, he no longer receives invitations to parties. The final picture of Crosbie is one of degeneration and failure to integrate fully into society, and thus a failed *Bildungsroman* in general.

Unlike Eames and Crosbie, Lily and Bell do not travel to the city independently to develop a career, nor do they cultivate their values through debasing or exalting sexual affairs. Instead, they remain living in the Small House at Allington with their mother, developing as they negotiate their roles in their community—particularly in the instances when they receive offers of marriage. Bell’s first marriage proposal comes unexpectedly from her cousin Bernard, whose main motivation for proposing is convenience. He discusses the matter with their uncle, Christopher Dale, and they come to a similar financially-based conclusion that Bernard later expresses to Bell: “there are so many reasons why you and I should join our fortunes together” (Trollope 141). Although he eventually conveys some “affection” towards her, the social and monetary fitness of their proposed union remains a significant element of Bernard’s argument, which he approaches with a “spirit of bargaining” concerning “how desirable it was with reference to all the concerns of the Dale family that she should endeavour to look favourably on his proposition” (Trollope 143, 402). One of Bernard’s faulty assumptions is that their uncle’s approval of the marriage as “the head of the family” would compel Bell to accept him, but she resists making a decision based on familial pressure: “I don’t care anything about the family – not in that way” (Trollope 142). Bell does not believe that the adults in her life have a right to determine her choice of husband, stating that “my uncle’s wishes could not influence my decision” (86) and that “I would accept no man in opposition to mamma’s wishes; but not even for her could I accept any man in opposition to my own” (Trollope 142). Bell does not dismiss this patriarchal—or matriarchal—will out of rebellion or spite, however; rather, she simply assumes the validity of her own desires. From the moment Bernard begins to broach the topic of marriage, “her mind was settling

itself—forming its resolution, and coming to a conclusion as to the sort of love which Bernard might, perhaps, expect. And it formed another conclusion; as to the sort of love which might be given in return” (Trollope 84). Bell resolves that she will not marry Bernard, yet she must state her position repeatedly when he continues to pursue her: “I know myself well enough to say that with certainty. It cannot be changed” (86); “In this matter I do know my own mind” (86); “If I doubted myself, I would let you persuade me. But I do not doubt myself, and I should be wrong to keep you in suspense. Dear, dearest, Bernard, it cannot be” (88); “It cannot be a question of fortune, Bernard” (141); “I do know my own mind thoroughly, and I should be very wrong if I were to deceive you” (Trollope 141).

Bell’s commitment to her autonomy despite her family’s wishes could be read as a marker of development, and in many coming-of-age narratives this would be appropriate—but not in the case of Isabella Dale. A defining characteristic of the Dale lineage is the family’s constancy. Trollope reveals at the start of the novel that Christopher Dale had once loved a woman who did not return his affections, and as a result he never married because he “had been unable to transfer his heart to another” (6). Similarly, Lily remains devoted to Crosbie even after he jilts her and marries another, prompting her uncle to remark that “The Dales were ever constant...Ever constant!” (Trollope 332). Thus, Bell’s assertion that “I do know my own mind” is a typical response for a Dale (Trollope 86). Yet the coming-of-age process—both for Buckley’s male-oriented *Bildungsroman* and for the *re-imagining negotiation*—requires a reappraisal of childhood values that may no longer serve the hero or heroine into adulthood. Bell’s response to her second suitor, the Dales’ old friend Dr Crofts, at first reflects her usual

inflexibility: “If there was anything in the world as to which Isabella Dale was quite certain, it was this—that she was not in love with Dr Crofts” (Trollope 209). Yet though she initially rejects him when he makes his feelings known, her memories from their youth and the recent shock of Crosbie’s betrayal begin to erode her determination to resist him:

[Her thoughts] ran back instantly to years gone by – over long years, as her few years were counted – and settled themselves on certain halcyon days, in which she had dreamed that he had loved her, and had fancied that she had loved him. How she had schooled herself for those days since that, and taught herself to know that her thoughts had been over-bold! ...And this man had loved her through it all – this priceless, peerless man – this man who was as true to the backbone as that other man had shown himself to be false; who was as sound as the other man had proved himself to be rotten. A smile came across her face as she sat looking at the fire, thinking of this. A man had loved her, whose love was worth possessing. (Trollope 432-33)

In comparing the characters of Crosbie and Crofts, Bell draws on the experiences of her small community to make a more informed assessment of the kind of man she might want to marry, rather than adhering obstinately to her original attitude. Bell’s reevaluation of Crofts continues to develop as he makes consistent house-visits to care for Lily in her illness, who discerns that “Bell was not altogether indifferent to Dr Crofts” as she might once have been (Trollope 460). When Bell eventually does accept Crofts’ offer, Lily’s remark to him to “Remember you have married the whole family” conveys

the successful integration of Bell's choice of husband into her social group (Trollope 664).

Though she also has two suitors, Lily's development is more complex than Bell's. Not long after they meet, Lily and Crosbie are engaged, and the nature imagery Trollope uses to describe Lily during this euphoric season hints at sexual maturity as well, such as when she "dropped a low curtsy... gently swelling down upon the ground with her light muslin dress, till she looked like some wondrous flower that had bloomed upon the carpet" (92), or when she states that she has "left off being a grub, and begun to be a butterfly" (121). Her youthful entrancement, even obsession, with Crosbie is tempered by the fact that she "fully recognized the importance of the thing she was doing, and, in soberest guise, had thought much of this matter of marriage" (Trollope 134).

Additionally, Lily views the new role as a kind of occupation: "Her hands, however, were very full of work... She would take with her to her new home, when she was married, all manner of household gear, the produce of her own industry and economy" (Trollope 219).

Before he eventually jilts her for Alexandria, Lily and Crosbie begin to debate the limits of what they might expect of one another once they are wed. Lily is usually compliant in most matters, but when Crosbie, vaguely threatened by Lily's promise to meet with Eames, directs her to avoid him, she resists:

"She felt that an injustice was being done to her and she was not inclined to put up with it, but she could not quite see where the injustice lay... yet she had a strong conviction that it would not be well that she should give way to him in everything." (Trollope 138)

Lily desires unity in her forthcoming marriage, and she “could have given up any gratification for her lover,” but she will not sacrifice her moral convictions to do so: “she could not allow herself to have been in the wrong, believing herself to be in the right” (Trollope 139). Her promise that Eames means nothing to her romantically “did not bring Crosbie back at once into a pleasant humour,” and Crosbie’s choice to bargain with moods rather than discussion forewarns potential issues:

Had Lily yielded to him and confessed he was right, he would have made himself at once as pleasant as the sun in May. But this she had not done. She had simply abstained from her argument because she did not choose to be vexed, and had declared her continued purpose of seeing Eames on his promised visit. (Trollope 140)

Sensing that they may be unequally invested in their relationship, Lily provides Crosbie with a chance to end their engagement, offering that “If you wish that all this between us should be over, I will consent” (Trollope 157). Her desire to fashion a marriage with another free, willing person is the impetus for this mature offer to exit honorably should he wish to do so. As has consistently been the case with the central female women I have been discussing in this thesis, Lily defers to external religious devotion to find stability in the midst of the relational uncertainty: “But I have a God and a Saviour that will be enough for me. I can turn to them with content, if it be well that you should leave me” (Trollope 158). Crosbie rejects her proposal, claiming that “I will agree to no parting...we are bound together” (Trollope 159)—making his later betrayal all the more damnable.

Trollope uses further spiritual allusions to underscore the disparity in character between the two lovers. Lily declares, “If I cannot be to you at once like Ruth, and never

cease from coming after you, my thoughts to you shall be like those of Ruth—if aught but death part thee and me, may God do so to me and more also,” referring to the biblical figure known for her devotion to her mother-in-law, whom she promised to remain faithful to after her husband’s death: “Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16, KJV). Similarly, Lily expresses her willingness to adhere to whatever timeline for marriage best suits Crosbie, even if their engagement lasts “For seven years” (Trollope 162)—the same length of time that the biblical patriarch Jacob worked and waited for his beloved wife Rachel (Genesis 29:1-30). The extent of these allusions stressing Lily’s spiritual maturity and faithfulness make the fact that “He still hardly understood the depth of her character” all the more stunning (Trollope 160). As Trollope explains, “He was not himself deep enough to comprehend it all” (160).

A few months after Crosbie abandons her, Lily continues to demonstrate this spiritual fidelity regardless of his behavior. Johnny Eames attempts to make “himself acceptable to Lily,” and at the urging of his mentor Lord De Guest and Lily’s uncle the squire, he prepares to ask her to marry him (Trollope 599). Since his original characterization as a “hobbledehoy,” Eames not only gains a patron in Lord De Guest after brazenly assisting the older man in escaping from an angry bull, but he also matures socially and occupationally: “Eames had risen to very high place in the social world, having become a private secretary” (Trollope 517). These developments convey a general trend that “[i]n truth his hobbledehoyhood was dropping off from him, as its old skin drops from a snake. Much of the feeling and something of the knowledge of manhood

was coming on him” (Trollope 555). Following the usual developmental markers of the male *Bildungsroman*, Eames should find success in his “exalting” love affair with Lily to complete his journey in coming of age. In fact, up until the moment that he expresses his feelings to her, he is “elated almost to a state of triumph” in dreaming of “his love-tale to Lily” (Trollope 567). In interweaving the male and female *Bildungsroman* structures, however, Trollope disrupts a predictable conclusion to Eames’ narrative. The scene that encompasses the “exalting” love marker for Eames intersects with Lily’s negotiation for the role she wishes to take on in her adult life. Leading up to his proposal, she tries to avoid the conversation entirely by refusing his request to walk together: “‘No, John,’ she said, ‘not today, I think. I am almost tired, and I had rather not go out’” (Trollope 595). Undeterred, he explicitly states his intentions, which she also rebuffs. He then hints at a counteroffer of a delayed engagement, asking, “Must it always be no?” (Trollope 595). She refuses him again, however, stating that “I cannot change myself because he [Crosbie] is changed” (Trollope 595). She chooses “a perpetual widowhood” rather than being “disgraced in my own eyes if I admitted the love of another man” (Trollope 596). Thus, Eames leaves Allington and returns to London having “failed in the great object of his life” (Trollope 598).

Though Lily facilitates Johnny’s development by embodying his “exalting” love, Trollope never reduces her to a two-dimensional literary device. According to Trollope, Johnny does not become a man when he finally develops the inner resolve to ask Lily to marry him, nor does he achieve manhood by conquering her will to remain faithful to Crosbie, but only later, when he returns to London having accepted Lily’s answer, does Trollope give him this distinction: “I must be allowed to declare that only now, at this

moment, has he entered on his manhood. Hitherto he had been a hobbledehoy” (653).

This nuanced vision of manhood defines maturity as recognizing another human’s agency and equal freedom of choice—much like what Lily offers to Crosbie during their engagement. Later, when a well-meaning friend suggests that Lily might one day change her mind, Eames’ response speaks beautifully to his understanding of respect for another grown individual: “No, no; never. I begin to know her now” (Trollope 600). Comparing him once more to Crosbie, Trollope concludes Eames’ *Bildungsroman*:

His life hitherto, as recorded in these pages, had afforded him no brilliant success, had hardly qualified him for the role of hero which he has been made to play. I feel that I have been in fault in giving such prominence to a hobbledehoy, and that I should have told my story better had I brought Mr Crosbie more conspicuously forward on my canvas. He at any rate has gotten himself a wife—as a hero always should do; whereas I must leave my poor friend Johnny without any matrimonial prospects. (653-54)

Crosbie is the hero with the “brilliant success” who has “gotten himself a wife,” yet though he is only nominally a married man, and he and Alexandria will live separately for the remainder of their lives. Trollope’s implication that Crosbie is a more successful hero than Johnny is purely ironic: there is still great hope for Johnny and his “marital prospects,” whereas Trollope leaves Crosbie in a state of permanent bachelorhood, or perhaps, more fittingly, a legally-bound widowerhood not unlike the future to which he exiled Lily.¹³

In remaining faithful to Crosbie instead of taking a new lover, Lily guarantees that she will never be ‘successful’ in adopting the role of wife and moving out of the Small

House at Allington; yet despite this, she does not remain stagnant. In fact, of all her coming-of-age negotiations, the ones that prove to be the most promising occur with her mother after she has committed to her maidenhood. Once Crosbie breaks their engagement, Lily requests that Mrs Dale promise to “never to be tired of me, mamma” (Trollope 336). Mrs Dale counters that “Mothers do not often get tired of their children,” prompting Lily to establish new norms for their relationship:

I’m not so sure of that when the children turn out old maids. And I mean to have a will of my own, too, mama; and a way also, if it be possible.

When Bell is married I shall consider it a partnership, and I shan’t do what I’m told any longer. (Trollope 336)

Though she will remain in her childhood home for the remainder of her life, Lily does not wish to continue as a child forever, stating that it would be “very stupid for a person to be dutiful all their lives” (Trollope 337). She proves this when her mother, who largely supports the prospect of Eames’ and Lily’s union, “resolved that on the next morning she would endeavor to make Lily see as she saw and think as she thought” (Trollope 627). Lily, however, makes her case that if she were to marry Eames, “I should commit a great sin... In my heart I am married to that other man” (630)—ultimately arguing that “I am as you are, mamma – widowed” (Trollope 631). After this assertion her mother begins to understand, as Eames does, that Lily will never marry, and “Mrs Dale’s argument was over now” (Trollope 631). Lily’s story does end with a wedding, as courtship and coming-of-age plots often do, but it is her sister’s wedding, not her own. Furthermore, because Lily remains in her childhood home yet redefines her role in it, Lily’s story is a kind of deviant *Bildungsroman*, in a similar manner to Eames’. In Trollope’s

Bildungsromane, respect for other persons, rather than success in any given endeavor or the acquisition of a particular role, are the true markers of maturity regardless of gender or narrative structure.

Conclusion

'His initiation is complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice.'

– JEROME BUCKLEY, *Season of Youth*¹⁴

In their compelling critical work, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland delineate how male and female plots differ in their concluding relationship to society once their development is complete:

Buckley's *Bildungsroman* plot culminates with the hero's accommodation to society, a resolution achieved after "painful soul searching" and signaling the completed passage to maturity... Novels of female development, by contrast, typically substitute inner concentration for active accommodation, rebellion, or withdrawal. (8)

Though descriptive and useful, these three manners of relating to society—accommodation, rebellion, or withdrawal—do not necessarily convey the full picture of a heroine's interactions with her community as she comes of age. Rarely do any of the novels fit perfectly into only one of the categories. By the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*, Jane's marriage to Rochester is possible because she has, in a sense, participated in all three social reactions by withdrawing from Thornfield Hall and Rochester's adulterated proposal, rebelling against St John's severe religiosity and accommodating to her new role as a nurse to a disabled husband. Similarly, in *North and South*, Margaret's bold stance at the riot, as well as her "let who will say what they like of me" attitude toward the rumors that follow, clearly evidence a rebellion against the idea that a woman in the

public sphere is inappropriate (Gaskell 188). Yet Margaret is not truly a rebel at heart: she mourns the fact that Thornton holds a misrepresentation of her character after witnessing her furtive embrace of her brother at the train station, and throughout the novel she consistently attempts to facilitate communication, empathy, and unity between classes. One could hardly say that she rejects society as a whole, nor does she withdraw from its problematic elements; rather, she engages and seeks to educate her fellow men, even as she herself becomes educated concerning industry and class differences. Finally, neither Lily nor Bell make their decisions about their future homes or relationships according to the wills and pressure of their community, though by the conclusion of *Small House*, Bell at last takes on the traditional role as a wife to Dr Crofts. Both accommodating and rebelling, Lily exemplifies a more complicated relationship with society by embracing the idea of being a wife yet continuing to cling to her first suitor longer than her family desires. She becomes an old maid not because she rejects marriage but because she accepts it too much.

Brontë, Gaskell, and Trollope each wrote additional novels of formation whose main characters have complex relationships with their social groups. Lucy Snowe of Brontë's *Villette* (1853) agrees to act in the school play at M. Paul Emanuel's request, but rather than dress in entirely male clothing to match her role as he directs, she retains her own clothing, supplementing it with enough of a costume to signify her assumed gender to the audience. Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) depicts a fallen woman with an illegitimate son—a woman who would be a social outcast, yet the compassion of the dissenting minister Mr Benson and his sister Faith, as well as Ruth's development into a hard-working, pious young woman, culminate in acceptance by her community.¹⁵ In the final installment in

Trollope's Palliser series, *The Duke's Children* (1879), Mary Palliser determines to obey but also outlast her father's desire that she not marry her lover, Frank Tregear, and they do eventually wed with the Duke's begrudging consent.

Beyond the authors explored in this thesis, other narratives of female development likewise conclude with heroines who simultaneously accept and reject certain elements of society. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) has a heroine, Helen Huntingdon, who challenges marital conventions by fleeing her dissipated husband with her young son and faithful servant to become an object of malicious gossip, yet she also reaffirms the general institution of marriage by returning to care for her dying husband and, after his death, marrying friend and confidant Gilbert Markham. In Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), willful and independent Bathsheba Everdene flirts with William Boldwood, marries Frank Troy, and reevaluates her initial perceptions of Gabriel Oak, eventually falling in love and marrying him after Troy's death—all behaviors that denote romantic agency and challenge Victorian ideas of proper maidenhood.

Throughout Victorian novels, developing young women resist, accept, and modulate—to whatever extent they are able—the desires and moral convictions of their community as they awaken to their own. Thus, rather than reducing the heroine's final developed state simply to accommodation, rebellion, or withdrawal, reading female development as a negotiation or series of negotiations intent on reshaping both the individual and the society she occupies provides language to describe the work of young women who refuse to accept every element of their social web but also do not wish to reject it entirely.

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Notes

¹ Buckley 17-18.

² Brontë 435.

³ One notable exception to Jane's generally tumultuous childhood relationships is her friendship with the Reeds' maid Bessie, who is kind to Jane and later reveals that she named her first daughter after her.

⁴ In *Romance's Rivals*, Talia Schaffer argues that "[h]elping Rochester is her new career, and it suggests a retrospective reading of Jane's life in which her real vocation has actually always been nursing, not teaching" (35). Jane's fascination with pain and injuries—from John Reed's attacks and Helen Burns' illness, to observing Bertha and recounting her own side effects from starvation—supports this reading, although Jane's sustained interest in teaching, from Lowood to Adèle, to the small village school for St. John, suggests that she likely has multiple interests.

⁵ In addition to her mental handicap, it would be impossible to consider Bertha's capacity for self-advocacy without examining the influence of race as well. The article "Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre. An Autobiography (1847)" expands on this: "Critics have seen the mad wife concealed in the attic as the embodiment of the repressed identity of women in the middle-class household. Her [Bertha's] Caribbean identity has also been taken to represent the rejection of the racial 'Other' within the imperial system" (160-61). As an Englishwoman, Jane would naturally have access to spaces that Bertha would not as 'Other.'

⁶ Gaskell 34.

⁷ Part of this development for Margaret is a change of terms. She learns to recognize how right actions such as Higgins' care of Boucher's orphaned children (i.e., being an honorable man) matter more than fitting into the social contrast of the term "gentleman." The terms that she values in discourse about manhood shift.

⁸ See the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

⁹ God directs the patriarch Moses: "And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." (Exodus 4:17, KJV)

¹⁰ "Let not your heart be troubled" alludes to the words of Christ in John 14:1.

¹¹ In "Stitching Repentance, Sewing Rebellion," Deborah Morse notes how Gaskell also reenacts the Pietà between Lizzie and little Nanny in her short story "Lizzie Leigh" (1850).

¹² Trollope 121.

¹³ Trollope preserves this conclusion in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* when Eames tries once more and fails to convince Lily to marry him (Sutherland 585).

¹⁴ Buckley 18.

¹⁵ Although Ruth begins to reintegrate into respectable society after her fallenness becomes widely known, the novel concludes with her death, brought on by her martyr-like choice to care for those sick with the fever, including her past lover Henry Bellingham who seduced and abandoned her. This suggests that death, rather than forgiveness, is the only permanent option available for social atonement.