

THE CONCEPT OF GENTILITY IN THE  
VICTORIAN NOVEL

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before embarking upon this detailed study of "The Concept of Gentility in the Victorian Novel", I would like to draw attention to the fact that, towards the end of my research, and to my great surprise, I found out that two well-informed scholars had recently completed research in the same field and subsequently published books on the subject of gentility. Robin Gilmour's The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel was published by George Allen and Unwin in 1981; and Shirley Robin Letwin's The Gentleman in Trollope was published by Macmillan in 1982. And thus I was obliged not only to avoid giving a detailed history of the idea of the gentleman as theorized in non-fictional prose writings of the period, but also to transfer or extend my interest to some female writers of the nineteenth century. In my analysis of the concept of gentility in the English novel, particularly in the Victorian novel, I have tried to depict most, if not all, of the class issues surrounding the concept as well as to expose the novelists' personal involvement in the concept.

Here I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to the following persons, without whose valuable help and encouragement the task of writing this thesis would have been far less pleasant and rewarding than it has been. In the first place, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor J.A. Banks, for his interest in this project and also for the continued advice and reassurance he has given me in looking through the first draft of this thesis. I am especially grateful to Professor P.A.W. Collins for his helpful remarks on my chapter on Charles Dickens. I should also like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Joanne Shattock and Dr. W.H. Brock for their advice and for their helpful reading of the Introduction and other parts of my thesis. I am also grateful to my friend and colleague Roger Fallon for the stimulus of his conversation on English literature in general. For her care and patience in typing the thesis, I owe a debt of gratitude to Mrs. T. Quincey.

### INTRODUCTION

Never was the 'Concept of the Gentleman' more widely employed, but equally never was the 'Concept' more confused in English social history than in the Victorian era. And never did people find it more difficult to define themselves than the Victorians. Whether in fiction, poetry, or art criticism, it is hardly possible to find two Victorians who completely agreed on a certain definition of that 'all-important being', the gentleman; even though they might have belonged to the same class, profession, or family. When Mary Palliser in The Duke's Children defends her lover on the grounds that 'he is a gentleman', for instance, her father - the Duke of Omnium - is provoked into saying :

'So is my private secretary. There is not a clerk in one of our public offices who does not consider himself to be a gentleman. The curate of the parish is a gentleman, and the medical man who comes here from Bradstock. The word is too vague to carry with it any meaning that ought to be serviceable to you in thinking of such a matter.' 1

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Duke's Children (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1963), I, p.81.

Long before the end of the nineteenth century, as James Laver maintains, the word "had come to mean the standard product of the Public Schools, and this is perhaps the most striking social phenomenon in the history of Victorian England."<sup>2</sup> By the 1890's, however, and because of the long process of revision, revaluation, democratization and vulgarization which the 'Concept of Gentility' underwent during the greater part of the nineteenth century, the word 'gentleman' lost most, if not all, of its class connotations or denotations. In the 1880's, and much more, in the 1890's, voices of dissent and reaction against the too-often-loose use of the term 'gentleman' could be heard everywhere. To give only a single example, one may refer here to the conversation that takes place between Adela Waltham and her brother in Gissing's Demos :

'What can you mean? Mr. Eldon is a gentleman. What pretence is he guilty of?'  
'Gentleman!' uttered her brother with much scorn. 'Upon my word, that IS the vulgarest of denominations! Who doesn't call himself so nowadays! A man's a man, I take it and what need is there to lengthen the name? Thank the powers, we don't live in feudal ages...' 3

In Demos, it is interesting to add, one cannot decide whether Richard Mutimer, the central character, is a worker, a semi-gentleman, or a gentleman. Partly because of the prestige Victorian society attached to wealth, but chiefly because of the ambiguity of the term gentleman, the hero - Richard Mutimer - thinks of himself as a gentleman and aspires to marry a 'Lady'. "To have a 'lady' for his wife", it is reported in the novel, "was now an essential in his plans for the future, and he knew that the desired possession was purchaseable for the coin of the realm".<sup>4</sup> The novel, however, is not, as has been generally held, an examination of the working-class character as such, but rather an extensive study of the

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<sup>2</sup>James Laver, The Age of Optimism : Manners and Morals 1848 - 1914 (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.45.

<sup>3</sup>George Gissing, Demos, A Story of English Socialism (Brighton : The Harvester Press, 1972), p.12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.138.

lower-middle class as exemplified by Nutimer. Nutimer, it should be borne in mind, is of the professional classes who must always be distinguished from the working class. As Mrs. Waltham pointed out to her daughter, Nutimer "was an engineer, and we know that engineers are in reality professional men. Remember old Mr. Nutimer; he was a perfect gentleman." But Adela, not unlike her predecessor Margaret Hale in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South, by virtue of her belonging to gentlefolk persists in her conviction that the younger "Mr. Nutimer is Not a perfect gentleman."

At any rate, society, as a modern historian maintains :

was never able to arrive at a satisfactory definition but it usually recognized as sufficient an amalgam which included gentle birth, the ownership of land and if possible of money also, some degree of education, courage and a high sense of honour, generosity and unselfishness.

Of course, the existence of some kind of relation between gentility and economic circumstances added to the difficulty of defining the gentleman; but the main cause of the difficulty was, no doubt, what a certain reviewer for the Cornhill Magazine described as "the constantly increasing disposition to insist more upon the moral and less upon the social element of the word." This insistence on the moral aspect of the 'Gentleman' is nowhere more strongly felt than in the writings of the Victorian prophet of self-help, Samuel Smiles. A true gentleman's qualities, Smiles insisted time and again :

depend not upon fashion or manners, but upon moral worth - not on personal possessions, but on personal qualities : The psalmist briefly describes him as one 'that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart'.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.129

<sup>6</sup> See my Chapter on Mrs. Gaskell.

<sup>7</sup> Gissing, op. cit., p.130.

<sup>8</sup> W.L. Burn, The Age of Equivoise : A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p.257.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.255.

<sup>10</sup> F. Stephen, "Gentlemen", The Cornhill Magazine (Vol.V,1862), p.330.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Smiles, Self-Help (London : John Murray, 1905), p.467.

What distinguishes Samuel Smiles and some of his contemporaries from previous writers on the 'gentleman' is not so much the stress they placed on the 'moral' or 'religious' aspect of the gentleman as much as the fact that they shifted the emphasis on the gentleman from the ancestral and social elements to the more personal ones. For the distinction between a gentleman's inner qualities and his social and outward appearance or belongings is as old a phenomenon as the word 'gentleman' itself. Consider, for instance, what the seventeenth-century writer, Henry Peacham, has got to say on the subject of gentility in general :

Riches are an ornament, not the cause of Nobility; and many times we see there lyeth more worth under a thread-bare Cloake, and within a thatched cottage, than the richest Robe, or statelyst Palace. 12

Or, as a contemporary of Peacham has put it again; "Gentility is not known by what we weare, but what we are." <sup>13</sup> More relevant still is Brathwait's further comment that; "it is not the Nobility of descent, but of Vertues, that makes any one a graccful and acceptable Servitor in the Court of heaven." <sup>14</sup> However, despite their sectarian differences - or, probably because of them - many a Victorian writer sought to inculcate in their readers' minds the notion "that a Christian only can be a true gentleman." <sup>15</sup> The strong hold which books like John Halifax, Gentleman had over Victorian minds is, no doubt, due to their reflecting the material and social aspirations of many a self-made man in Victorian times. But part of the fascination exercised by books - like Mrs. Craik's John Halifax,

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman (London : 1634), p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Brathwait, The English Gentleman; And the English Gentlewoman (London : 1641), p.359.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.362.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Craik, John Halifax, Gentleman (London : Hurst and Blackett), p.167.

Gentleman and Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth and Sylvia's Lovers - over the Victorian imagination can simply be ascribed to their attempts to elevate the 'Dissenting' sections of the middle class to a high level of gentility. It is of no little importance that John Halifax was brought up and apprenticed by Abel Fletcher who, according to John's description of him after the rioting mob at his door was 'well fed' and sent 'quietly home', "is a Quaker and a Christian."<sup>16</sup> Not unlike Mrs. Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell, particularly in Ruth, seems to have concentrated all her creative energies on man's good actions as the only reliable touchstone of his gentility or nobility of heart. Despite his deformity and human weaknesses, Mr. Benson - a Dissenting minister - is presented in Ruth as a real gentleman. The Bensons' influence on the heroine - Ruth - may easily be likened to the civilizing influence exerted by the Quaker Fletchers on John Halifax. During the few years which the heroine spends under the same roof with Mr. Benson and his sister, Ruth's character undergoes a radical change. Thus :

... whereas, six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal, although ignorant of their conventional etiquette ...<sup>17</sup>

In Ruth, it is interesting to note, Mrs. Gaskell draws a rather unpleasant picture of that section of the Puritan middle class whose major objective in life was to look or to be called 'respectable'. Though "respectability was a style of living understood to show a proper respect for morals and morality",<sup>18</sup> in Ruth, and as applied to both Mr. Bradshaw and his prospective son-in-law Farquhar, respectability could not be

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Gaskell, Ruth (London : J.M. Dent, 1967), p.207.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Best, Mid Victorian Britain, 1851 - 1875 (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p.257.

viewed but as an antidote to morality and decent living. These characters are presented as hypocritical and calculating and, moreover, as prepared to sacrifice their scruples and principles in order to achieve their own selfish ends. What seems to have aroused Mrs. Gaskell's deepest anger and loathing in her creation Mr. Bradshaw is no less than his sacrificing his religious belief and ideals for 'electioneering' purposes. For Bradshaw's eventual acceptance of bribery as a means of achieving his own selfish ends seems to have been an unforgiveable sin. This, at least, is the impression one gathers from Mr. Benson's decision to preach upon the Christian view of the 'duties' involved in political rights. As for Mr. Farquhar, the following remarks blurted out by Jemima tell the reader all he needs to know about him :

You are good because it adds to your business credit - you talk in that high strain about principle because it sounds well, and is respectable - and even these things are better than your cold way of looking out for a wife, just as you would do for a carpet, to add to your comforts and settle you respectably. 19

To Mrs. Gaskell, apparently, respectability was no laughing matter. This is evidenced in some of her writings, most of all in Ruth and Sylvia's Lovers. Commenting on the heroine, the narrator in Sylvia's Lovers - who can easily be identified with Mrs. Gaskell - sardonically observes :

Now she was married, this weekly church-going which Philip seemed to expect from her became a tie and a small hardship, which connected itself with her life of respectability and propriety. 20

As one gathers from the novel, Sylvia would clearly feel inclined to prefer 'a crust of bread and liberty' to a life of bourgeois respectability with its plenty of 'creature comforts' and many restraints. The same, in fact, may be said to apply to the novelist herself. It should be remarked

<sup>19</sup>Gaskell, op. cit., p.222.

<sup>20</sup>Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers (Oxford University Press : The World's Classics, 1924), p.382.

in passing that what might have appeared to Mrs. Gaskell to be a source of nausea or headache seems to have been to many Victorian writers an inexhaustible source of amusement and delight.

However, to many Victorians, the 'Gentleman' was the sphinx of modern times whose abode was not the hills of 'Corinth' or 'Thebes' but rather the colourful mountain of Victorian respectability. To climb this mountain was the greatest concern and foremost desire of almost every person in the middle and lower strata of society. Remarkably, there existed in Victorian times a multitude of gradations among what was described as 'the respectable classes'. Thackeray, in this respect, may be considered one of the best authorities on the subject and could be said to have ranked very high among Victorian novelists who engaged themselves in describing the minutiae of 'respectability'. Thus, commenting on 'the respectable classes', the writer of Letters to a Young Man About Town wonders at the fact that :

In the competition for social rank between HIGGS and BIGGS, think what a strange standard of superiority is set up! -- a shilling steamer to Gravesend, and a few shrimps more or less on one part or the other, settle the claim. 21

Higgs and Biggs are, no doubt, a good sample of the lower-class type of persons who could hardly subsist, but who could not remain untouched by the Victorian mania for social distinction. As one goes higher in the hierarchical system of Victorian society, the competition for social recognition becomes severer and more costly. Consequently, many a middle-class family found it necessary to employ a man-servant to wait at table instead of a woman-servant because it was considered both proper and decent to do so in the respectable classes. As Mrs. Budge tells her friend Marmaduke, "in families of a certain rank a man-servant commonly waits at

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<sup>21</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, Travels in London, Letters to a Young Man about Town and other Contributions to Punch (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), p.147.

table. It is proper; it is decent that it should be so in the respectable classes; and WE are of those classes."<sup>22</sup> Anyhow, and as Thackeray's works clearly show, respectability included a few other criteria besides the employment of a man-servant; criteria like the employment of grooms, butlers and coachmen, all of whom were only appendices to owning big houses in town, giving dinner parties, and purchasing carriages. Also, and alongside the old line of genteel professions ran the new line of bourgeois ones which included merchants, tradesmen, stockbrokers, tailors and bootmakers. All these, together with a few minor ones, formed the substance of what might be called middle-class gentility and were, besides, sufficient signs of respectability. But these, it should be borne in mind, were not without their negative influence on social dealings and relations. In fact, they formed a major part of the social snobbery which prevailed in Victorian times. Notice, for example, the comic effect produced by the confrontation between Thackeray's alter-ego in Vanity Fair, Dobbin, and young George Osborne :

'Your father's only a merchant, Osborne', Dobbin said in private to the little boy who had brought down the storm upon him. At which the latter replied haughtily, 'My father's a gentleman, and keeps his carriage'..<sup>23</sup>

Whether young Osborne was aware of the snobbery implied in his answer is not so significant as the fact that his father was a 'Snob' in the true Thackerayan sense. In this respect, it would be helpful to instance the case of old Osborne whose opinion of himself was by no means modest. This is clearly manifested in his own following remarks; "You shan't want, sir. The British merchant's son shan't want, sir. My guineas are as good as theirs George, my boy; and I don't grudge 'em."<sup>24</sup> Old Osborne's social snobbery is still more apparent in the following extract from the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.363.

<sup>23</sup>William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair : A Novel Without a Hero (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), p.39.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.133.

same conversation; 'But to return to the other business about Amelia :  
Why shouldn't you marry higher than a stockbroker's daughter, George -  
that's what I want to know?'<sup>25</sup>

In The Newcomes, the theme of middle-class gentility is elaborately considered. The novel, however, is a satire upon sham gentility and respectability rather than on respectability in general. Thackeray in this book seems to have been much more sympathetic and tolerant towards poor people aiming at gentility than in the previous works. A careful perusal of some unprejudiced upper-class persons' comments on respectable people in The Newcomes is likely to lead to such a conclusion. Here, it is sufficient to cite what Sir Brian says of poor Miss Honeyman on one occasion :

'My dear fellow', cries Brian, 'I have no doubt Miss Honeyman is a most respectable person. Nothing is so ungenerous as to rebuke a gentleman or a lady on account of their poverty ...'<sup>26</sup>

Yet, one cannot help suspecting that Thackeray's humane attitude towards poor, but respectable, people in this book was motivated by the fact that he was defending a personal case centred upon the fictitious characters of Clive Newcome and his uncle. Clive Newcome, it may be recollected, is a painter by profession. A great number of the difficulties with which Clive was met in his dealings in society was due to his being a poor painter. Significantly enough, in some of the dialogues held between Clive and a few other characters in the novel, particularly Ethel, one perceives the author's glorification of the artist as set against 'acres and titles of nobility'. What Ethel says to her mother in defence of Clive is illuminating: "Had he money, it would be different. You would receive him, and welcome him, and hold out your hands to him; but he is only a poor painter, and we forsooth are bankers in the City."<sup>27</sup> Part of Clive's

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>26</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, The Newcomes (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), p.161.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.357.

trouble, of course, was derived from the fact that the 'Pictorial Calling' was not yet recognized as a genteel profession. Painting as a suitable calling for gentlemen was held in low esteem by 'polite' society ever since, if not before, Henry Peacham wrote his Compleat Gentleman. "Whosoever labour for their livelihood and gaine", wrote Peacham :

have no share at all in Nobility or Gentry: as Painters, Stage-Players, Tumblers, Ordinary Fiddlers, Inne-Keepers, Fencers, Juglers, Dancers, Mountebankes, Bearewards, and the like ..." 28

Thackeray, who was fully aware of the tradition of 'gentility' which denied the title 'gentleman' to those who soiled their fingers by a manual occupation, made George Warrington, our model of the professional artist in The History of Pendennis, ashamed of owning that he wrote for a living :

'I write', said Warrington. 'I don't tell the world that I do so', he added, with a blush. 'I do not choose that questions should be asked: or, perhaps, I am an ass, and don't wish it to be said that George Warrington writes for bread.' 29

What Thackeray had in mind when he created George Warrington is not very hard to guess. But what brought about this change in Thackeray's attitude towards the artist in The Newcomes remains a matter of conjecture. However, the last word must go here to Colonel Newcome who so aptly sums up the issue in question :

'He shall follow his own bent', said the Colonel; 'as long as his calling is honest it becomes a gentleman; and if he (Clive) were to take a fancy to play on the fiddle - actually on the fiddle - I shouldn't object.' 30

This remark anticipates, though only marginally, Samuel Smiles' nourished idea of 'self-help' with its insistence on personal effort as a way of achieving one's gentility by honest means. As the author of Self-Help declares :

<sup>28</sup> Peacham, op. cit., pp.12-13.

<sup>29</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, The History of Pendennis (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), p.355.

<sup>30</sup> Thackeray, The Newcomes, p.141.

it is not the calling that degrades the man, but the man that degrades the calling. All work that brings honest gain is honourable, whether it be of hand or mind. The fingers may be soiled, yet the heart remains pure; for it is not material so much as moral dirt that defiles ... 31

However, Thackeray was not always as straightforward and sympathetic towards people making their own livings as he appears in the light of the above quotation from The Newcomes. What was it then, one may ask that made Thackeray and similar authors of the Victorian period shy away sometimes from admitting that they 'wrote for bread' - to use George Warrington's own words? Here, a few things suggest themselves to the reader; of which one may mention hypocrisy or implied dishonesty, complacency or fear of the reading public and last, but not least, 'the diabolical invention of gentility' - to borrow Thackeray's own words. "What an immense deal of pleasure, frankness, kindness, good-fellowship", writes Thackeray in 'The Proser', "we forego for the sake of our confounded gentility, and respect for outward show." <sup>32</sup> It seems appropriate at this juncture to define Victorian novelists' status as both 'men' or 'women' and artists - bearing in mind the fact that most of them were 'gentility-conscious'. The task of defining them as such is facilitated by the following quotation from Bulwer-Lytton's England and the English, 'Our English authors', says he :

thus holding no fixed position in society, often fall into one of three classes; the one class seek the fashion they cannot command, and are proud to know the great; another become irritable and suspicious, afraid that they are never sufficiently esteemed ... the third, of a more lofty nature, stand aloof and disdainful, and never consummate their capacities, because they will not mix with a world to which they know themselves superior. 33

More relevant still is Bulwer-Lytton's further comment on English literary men, particularly his assertion that :

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<sup>31</sup>Smiles, op. cit., p.311.

<sup>32</sup>Thackeray, Travels in London, Letters to a Young Man about Town and Other Contributions to Punch, p.159.

<sup>33</sup>Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English (Shannon : Irish University Press, 1971), Vol. I, pp.148-49.

A literary man with us is often forced to be proud of something else than talent - proud of fortune, of connexion, or of birth - in order not to be looked down upon. 34

Exaggerated though Bulwer-Lytton's above statements might appear; they, nevertheless, can be said to have had a deep foundation in truth. Though written before the beginning of the Victorian era - 1833 - the above remarks sound like a direct comment on Victorian novelists in general. For no writers of any other period in English literary history -- as far as my knowledge goes - were more status-conscious than the Victorians themselves. And no writers were so deformed, so to speak, by the shabby-genteel poverty of their youth as some Victorian writers were. One hardly needs to refer here to Anthony Trollope's motives behind seeking the society of the 'rich' and the 'well-born', or even to Charles Dickens' reasons for suppressing the story of his unpleasant - and what was to him, degrading - experience at the blacking factory. As I shall have another occasion to discuss both these writers' social background in its relation to the 'Concept of Gentility', I am inclined at this stage to simply assert that not a few Victorian novelists scorned the idea of being thought of but as gentlemen or ladies in both the moral and social senses. Interestingly enough, shortly after the publication of Workers in the Dawn, Gissing - who was hardly lower-middle-class - protested in a letter to his brother Algernon that; "All reviewers take me for a working-man. I fancy, tho' a careful reading of my book would show such a supposition to be grossly absurd."<sup>35</sup> However, Bulwer-Lytton's remarks, quoted earlier, indirectly deal with the problem of Victorian novelists' complexity and ambiguity as far as the concept of gentility is concerned. Although the problem cannot be wholly resolved; still one may attribute part of the ambiguity of the idea of the gentleman to the blending of the moral and psychological implications of Victorian novelists' utterances and proclamations with existing social facts or norms. A

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>35</sup> Algernon and Ellen Gissing, eds., Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family (London: Constable, 1927), p.81.

solution to the problem, in my view, should be sought in other areas than those lying within Victorian authors' conscious perception of them, and which alone can provide a clue to the driving force of Victorian writers' conscious expostulations. In dealing with such highly celebrated writers as the Victorians, anyway, it is advisable to make allowance for their failings of character which coloured their judgements and views. Also, one must not lose sight of the fact that :

a novelist (tied as he is to one social class) can only display social phenomena, taking the word in its literal sense, to his readers. What he sees are APPEARANCES, and these are dependent, even in the way in which they are perceived, on his ideology - or on the ideological contradictions which possess him. 36

Anyway, highest among those failings which characterized many a Victorian or pre-Victorian author were conformity and sentimentality. For the Victorian novelist, not unlike the English worker, "was a sentimentalist by nature; humour that side of him, and he would never dream of becoming a revolutionary." 37 Or, as Matthew Arnold preferred to put it :

'No, the English are pedants, and will proceed in the way of pedantry as long as they possibly can. They will not ask themselves what really meets the wants of a case, but they will ask what may be done without offending the prejudices of their classes and parties.' 38

Briefly speaking, it is not my purpose in this by no means comprehensive analysis of the 'Concept of Gentility' in the Victorian novel to point out the writers' inaccuracies or contradictory statements; rather, it is to bring into prominence the authors' illuminating and instructive remarks on gentility in general. Suffice it to add here that novelists contradict themselves as sometimes they will.

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<sup>36</sup> Micharl Zeraffa, Fictions : The Novel and Social Reality (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1976), p.64.

<sup>37</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Making of a Gentleman (London : Williams and Norgate, 1938), p.315.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Arnold, "The Incompatibles", in R.H. Super, ed., English Literature and Irish Politics (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1973), p.256.

In concluding this introduction, before turning to a detailed analysis of some Victorian authors from the viewpoint of gentility, I should perhaps observe that Victorian writers had a fairly clear idea of what the word gentleman meant. But, for one reason or another, they sometimes avoided giving a clear-cut definition of not only the 'gentleman' but also of other dearly-cherished notions. Well might Thackeray say, through the narrator in The Adventures of Philip :

I have a grim pleasure in thinking that Golding Square was once the resort of the aristocracy, and Monmouth Street the delight of the genteel world. What shall prevent us Londoners from musing over the decline and fall of city sovereignties and drawing our Cockney Morals. 39

It is obvious that Thackeray's source of pleasure lies in the faded haunts of the old-established social orders, but the fact remains that the author still thought it a matter of expediency to draw his 'Cockney Morals'.

Cockney morals, to be sure, figure prominently in Thackeray's novels; yet there is abundant evidence which testifies to the author's disagreement with those morals or values. The following abstract from The History of Pendennis throws much light on what might be called the author's bias in favour of the old school of gentlemen :

'What a difference there is between these men, who poison the very turnips and stubble-fields with their tobacco, and the gentlemen of our time!' thinks the Major; 'the breed is gone - there is no use for 'em, they're replaced by a parcel of damned cotton-spinners and utilitarians and young sprigs of parsons with their hair combed down their backs...' And he was not far wrong. 40

Perhaps Thackeray was not far wrong either. Still, it is doubtful that he could have ever displayed the same amount of partiality for the new species of gentlemen which he showed, throughout his novels, for the old school of gentlemen. This fact alone is quite sufficient to put us on our guard against taking Thackeray at his word, let alone against calling the novelist's

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<sup>39</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, The Adventures of Philip (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), p.113.

<sup>40</sup> Thackeray, The History of Pendennis, p.762.

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gentlemanly ideal "a modest ideal of the middle-class gentleman" - as Gordon Ray suggests. Thackeray's partiality for the old-established social orders and his endless harking back to the good old days of 'merry England' - that is to say, his personal involvement with the concept of gentility - mars his critical approach to the predominantly middle-class concept of the gentleman. But this, of course, is not good enough a reason to dismiss Thackeray's critical analysis of the contemporary concept of gentility as wrong or irrelevant to an understanding of changing social concepts and attitudes of the Victorian era. Before moving to discuss Victorian novelists' concept of gentility as portrayed in their novels, the first and second chapters of this dissertation will deal with the concept of gentility in the eighteenth-century and will attempt to present the few qualities or criteria by which it was characterized.

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<sup>41</sup>Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray : The Age of Wisdom 1847 - 1863 (London : Oxford University Press, 1958), p.430.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Eighteenth-Century Novel

It has often been asserted that the new middle-class morality which started to emerge in the eighteenth century was "an antidote or challenge to the aristocratic traditions and assumptions."<sup>1</sup> Yet, middle-class gentility, which formed an integral part of the new morality, was simply an adaptation of the aristocratic ideal of gentility. And this can be seen in the literary genre founded in the eighteenth century - the novel. When one thinks of the novels of Defoe and Richardson one thinks at once of the rising bourgeoisie. It is quite significant that Defoe and Richardson, "with some reason considered to be the fathers of the English novel, were thoroughly bourgeois characters."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Rudé, Europe in the Eighteenth Century : Aristocracy and the Bourgeois Challenge (London : Cardinal Edition, 1974), p.191.

<sup>2</sup>David Daiches, "Literature and Social Mobility", in Estvan Meszaros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p.161.

However, the new species of writing started by Defoe in England in the eighteenth century can easily be viewed as the adopted medium of expression of middle-class writers. The novel was not only permeated with the material values of the commercial middle class but also mirrored the needs and dynamic tendencies of an expanding social group. This medium of expression heralded the birth of a different species of gentlemen and came to foretell the decline of an older one. The new species of gentlemen whose cause was passionately espoused by its faithful member Daniel Defoe was most anxious to make known its demands for social, economic and, later, political recognition. While commerce provided a most favourable basis for the growth of the new species of gentlemen, the city came to be its flourishing centre. This kind of gentlemen, which attracted the attention of many writers, underwent, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a long process of development until it reached a stage of maturity at the hands of Charles Dickens. This change was an inward movement in which the emphasis on the Concept of gentility shifted from outward appearances and stress on external characteristics to the inner or moral nature of man; and where refined manners gave way to inward grace and good actions. There also appeared in the bourgeois species of gentlemen a sense of responsibility which deepened into a consciousness that started to display itself in open hostility to the old aristocratic species of gentlemen. Here, one must not forget to make allowance for the survival of a small minority of the old school of gentlemen, especially those whose ability to adapt themselves to the new social, economic and political environment was strong enough to keep them enthroned. It should not be understood from the above that the development of a new kind of gentlemen, as depicted in the English novel, followed a straight line of progress; for tradesmen and merchants, and some other middle-class professional people, kept struggling until late in the nineteenth century to be recognized as gentlemen proper. As a

modern historian has put it :

the gentlemen included, besides the nobility and gentry, the clergyman, physician and barrister, but not always the Dissenting minister, the apothecary, the attorney, or the schoolmaster; the overseas merchant but not the inland trader; the amateur author, painter, musician but rarely the professional. 3

Also, one cannot forget the attempts made in fiction by writers of the 'old school' to check the progress of what were derogatively called 'upstarts', particularly the aristocratic Henry Fielding and the gentry's advocate, Anthony Trollope. In any case, English novelists provided, and still provide, a most edifying and, perhaps, authentic description of the old and new species of gentlemen and their respective struggles to preserve, change or modify certain aspects of English social, political and economic life. A full understanding of the English gentleman, as portrayed in the Victorian novel, necessitates looking briefly at eighteenth-century English novelists and novels where the first seeds of the new responsible type of gentleman were sown.

It is worth remarking here that eighteenth-century novelists, unlike their successors the Victorians, who seem to have been so muddled about defining the 'gentleman', were confident enough to say with some decisiveness what made the true gentleman. But though some of them felt the insufficiency of the old aristocratic touchstones of blood, heraldic status and land-ownership, they were still most undecided about whether they should dismiss them as irrelevant or just add to them a few more yard-sticks by which a man's gentlemanly qualities might be measured. This was the case with both Defoe and Richardson who represent two sides of one coin. However, the eighteenth century was characterized by the slow rise of the commercial middle class. This class's social outlook may easily be described as narrow in scope for the simple reason that it did not reach further than the purchase of an estate or the dream of

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society : 1780-1880 (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p.24.

leading a life of leisure and pleasure such as that enjoyed by its traditional betters. In other words, this class's aspirations and hopes lay mostly in the province of the old-established families of English nobility and gentry. Notwithstanding, only a handful of successful merchants and tradesmen were able to penetrate this province and receive the blessings of a title of distinction. This select minority of what were called at that time 'upstarts' succeeded in penetrating the jealously guarded zone of gentility in spite of the relative class fixity of eighteenth-century English society. This social penetration and interaction took place as often as the ruling classes' defence mechanism was weakened by financial difficulties or other factors. The first English novelist who kept a keen eye on this social intermingling and who noted this upward movement of the new riches was, needless to say, the middle-class gentleman and writer Daniel Defoe. In almost all his writings, Defoe seems to have adopted the cause of 'upstarts'. Moreover, he is so often seen prompted, if not provoked, by the traditional criteria of rank and gentility to use an ironical style which served him to create a gentlemanly ideal of his own to counter-balance the aristocratic ideal of a gentleman. Defoe's creation is almost exclusively defined by money. In Defoe's writings it is predominantly money which defines social rank. The real contrast between Defoe's gentlemen and gentlewomen and aristocratic ones lay in material rather than in moral or political conditions. Throughout his writings Defoe is most reluctant to share his time's traditional concept of the qualities that identify a lady or a gentleman. At the same time, he is more than reluctant to give up the traditional notion that land-ownership is a most relevant qualification. Defoe's adherence to the traditional criterion of land-ownership, it can be seen, mars his claim to originality in matters of gentility. Nevertheless, the author may indeed be said to have been trying to create a myth around his cherished notion of the successful 'gentleman-tradesman'; a myth which

aimed at destroying or, at least, counterbalancing the aristocratic myth of the ideal gentleman.

The first corner-stone of the myth of middle-class gentlemen which Defoe was trying to establish through his writings was laid down in his satirical poem The True-Born Englishman. If Defoe's statistics are to be relied on and his testimony believed, his challenge in this poem must be considered seriously, and thus :

Of sixty thousand English gentlemen,  
Whose names and arms in registers remain,  
We challenge all our heralds to declare,  
Ten families which English Saxons are. 4

Defoe's testimony does not end here. Indeed it needs just a few more lines to become complete :

Wealth, howsoever got, in England makes  
Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes.  
Antiquity and birth are needless here;  
'Tis impudence and money makes a peer. 5

Taken together, these two extracts, ironically, sum up the new middle-class ideal of a gentleman which Defoe was trying to establish through his writings. As has been mentioned above, his concept of the ideal gentleman relies heavily on the criterion of money. Accordingly, thus, whoever gets money enough to secure him a title may easily be considered a real gentleman. The requirement of being nobly descended is almost dropped out altogether from the ideal. In Defoe's real world, to be sure, there is no room for 'born gentlemen'. The author quite often shows the absurdity of pride in ancestry by ironically proving that the most noble descendants of Adam's family were labourers and 'Mechanics'. Noble descent and family pedigrees Defoe dismisses as "Family Jargon, for  
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it is no more," and this is why they are always flung into the back-

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<sup>4</sup>Daniel Defoe, History of the plague in London, 1665; The Storm, 1703; The True-Born Englishman (London : Henry G. Bohm, 1855), p.442.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.443.

<sup>6</sup>Daniel Defoe, A Plan of the English Commerce, (Oxford : The Shakespeare Head Edition, 1927) p.5.

ground as insufficient indices of gentility. The novelist's real gentlemen are what may be called self-made men. It must be emphasized here that Defoe's creation of the self-made gentleman-tradesman is an attempt to break through the adamant lines of the aristocratic concept of idle or 'fine gentlemen'. At the same time, and as Michael Shinagel maintains :

By sweeping aside the nobility's insistence on the primacy of birth and blood, he effectively clears the way for tradesmen and merchants, men like himself in short, to aspire to the status that they were coming to covet as they grew wealthy and prominent in society. 7

It should be added here, however, that Defoe's arguments in defence of his cherished ideal of the gentleman-tradesman lose much of their effectiveness as he tries in vain to put the cart before the horse. For, though Defoe always believed "that an Estate is but a pond, but Trade is  
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a Spring," it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ultimate end of this spring is but in this little pond. Similarly in his Compleat English Gentleman Defoe maintains "that as trade ... raises innumerable families from the dust ... to great and flourishing estates, so those estates exalt these families again into the rank or class of  
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gentry". By stressing the importance of estates, Defoe, unwittingly perhaps, reduces the value of work and trade to a minimum. In other words, he exalts commerce and trade not for their own sake but rather for gentility's sake, symbolized by the estate. To Defoe, an estate was not only the clearest sign of gentility but also the greatest badge of status. And as can be seen, Defoe's concept of gentility suffers from the defect of relying heavily on the traditional criterion of land-ownership. However, since outward gentility was what Defoe cared much about, this anomaly may easily be dismissed as the natural result of the

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Shinagel, Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.55.

<sup>8</sup>Defoe, A Plan of the English Commerce, p.75.

<sup>9</sup>D. Defoe, The Compleat English Gentleman (London : David Nutt, 1889), p.266.

author's exile at a certain stage in his life from upper-class acknowledgements of his merits and claim to gentility. To round off this brief exposition of Defoe's bourgeois concept of gentility, before discussing the concept in his novels, one could do no better than consider briefly the other aspect of the concept of gentility, good-breeding, which Defoe expounds in The Compleat English Gentleman.

In this treatise on genteel education, the aristocratic ideal of gentility is heartily adopted at first only to be rejected later. Defoe acknowledges that in birth lies the essence of quality, and that "the born gentleman is a valuable man if bred up as a gentleman ought to be, that is, education in learning and manners suitable to his birth."<sup>10</sup> Thus,

good-breeding and learning, which are used synonymously by Defoe, are essential attributes of the ideal gentleman. Without good-breeding or a liberal education a man's birth or noble descent signifies nothing. Defoe was fully prepared to acknowledge birth and blood only when they were accompanied by a good liberal education that takes into account man's social and practical needs. In The Compleat English Gentleman, Defoe seems rather anxious to point out that the existing vices among gentlemen are attributable neither to the gentlemen's families nor to their birth or intellect or capacities but rather to their defective education. As Defoe ironically remarks :

Do not we English gentlemen think, that to be a good sportsman is the perfection of education, and to speak good dog language and good horse language is far above Greek and Latin; and that a little damming and swearing among it makes all the rest polite and fashionable. <sup>11</sup>

However, there is good reason to believe that birth, blood, and even ethical considerations were below Defoe's notice. They may have formed a stigma on his material outlook had he troubled himself about them.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.38.

Without money, the author seems to suggest, blood, old ancestry and gentlemanly education were empty slogans. Defoe, undeniably, envisioned his complete gentleman to be "a person of Merit and Worth; a Man of Honour, <sup>12</sup> Virtue, Sense, Integrity, Honesty, and Religion " ; but such high-sounding words become vaporous in the novelist's real world and seem to be empty pretensions. The concept of the ideal gentleman Defoe formulated is based almost exclusively on the two criteria so far discussed, that is, money joined with a good practical education which has in view the gentleman's material and social ends. True morality, a favourite theme of many later novelists, seems to have been ignored in Defoe's world of gentlemen-tradesmen. To be sure, Defoe's recommendations and ideas about the gentleman are deeply rooted in his own experience - as a tradesman - and in his own education - which he received at Morton's Academy. And like many other writers on the ideal gentleman, Defoe seems to have created him in his own image; an image that was modelled after the middle-class and <sup>13</sup> religious ideals of the seventeenth century.

Moving from Defoe's non-fictional prose writings to the world of his novels, the idea of middle-class gentility becomes crystallized through the minute details woven around the new creation of middle-class gentlemen and gentlewomen. In Defoe's fiction more light is thrown on the inadequacy of the old touchstones of birth and blood. There is an open rejection in the novels of the traditional concept of the ideal gentleman not only because of the human inadequacies of members of the old species but also because of the felt need for a reformed and more useful species of gentlemen; a species that combines good breeding and social usefulness. The characters Defoe created expose the inadequacy

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.21.

<sup>13</sup>Lew Girdler, Daniel Defoe's Theories of Gentility (Ph. D. thesis : University of California, 1950), p.394.

of the principle of noble birth and the concept of inherited titles and old families. Though Defoe's portrayal of his characters is flat, and though the new species of genteel people appears crudely drawn; the new type of gentlemen and gentlewomen, nevertheless, may be said to succeed in exciting the reader's curiosity like any other new creation or innovation. Most of Defoe's gentlemen and gentlewomen are well-practised businessmen and economists, but they seem little concerned with morality because - it may be guessed - it serves no practical purposes. In Defoe's fictional world true morality is so alien that its existence goes unnoticed.

Quite expectedly, Defoe's favourite heroes are either tradesmen or merchants, and if they happen to be of a noble origin they are seen to be engrossed in counting and calculating. The author's aristocratic gentlemen, such as Sir Robert in Roxana, are deeply infected with trade. In short, most of Defoe's gentlemen and gentlewomen's lives are centred around the only centre of gravity, trade; trade of all kinds, that is, not to exclude trade in the human flesh. As seen through Defoe's eyes, middle-class characters form the backbone of English economy and prosperity, while members of the upper classes are portrayed as parasites, so to speak, feeding on that prosperity. In Defoe's novels, Roxana in particular, the marriage policies of aristocratic gentlemen who are desirous to preserve their prestige and social security are criticized as 'mercenary'. But, in truth, they are no more so than middle-class gentlemen's policies and contrivances to enter the glamorous circles of 'high-life' society. In a word, Defoe's concept of gentility is richly coloured and, at the same time, prejudicially influenced by his social and economic background. However, the first bourgeois gentleman Defoe created is unquestionably the enterprising Robinson Crusoe. Significantly enough, Crusoe's father, we are told, "got a good estate by merchandise."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (London : J.M. Dent, 1962), p.5.

Not unlike his creator, Crusoe enjoys an acute sense of social distinctions. But in spite of this and the added promise of Robinson's father to provide for him a life of leisure and pleasure, Crusoe, Junior, prefers to rely on his own efforts and to rise by enterprise. The hero's preference for a life of adventure to a life of ease and idleness carries within it the seeds of a self-made English gentleman. Robinson, by an ironic twist of events, succeeds in the end not only to accumulate wealth but also to crown his efforts with the blessings of an estate he purchases in the County of Bedford in imitation of all the socially ambitious middle-class families. But neither the purchase of an estate nor the title that this estate secures him keeps Crusoe satisfied. He remains the same enterprising bourgeois activist who looks disdainfully upon the fact of his becoming a mere country gentleman. Crusoe is indeed the most triumphant representative of the new middle-class morality which emphasized work and personal effort.

In Moll Flanders the picture of middle-class gentility becomes more varied and colourful than it is in Robinson Crusoe. Unlike the hero of Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders is a doubtful representative of middle-class gentility. In the character of the heroine the old line of gentility is mystically reconciled to the new one. Moll's instinctive desire to become a gentlewoman does not seem convincing or natural. What is more natural in Moll is her belief in the 'Gospel of Work.' "All I understood by being a gentlewoman", remarks Moll, "was to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without going to service."<sup>15</sup> Moll's aristocratic instincts reach their highest point of development when she is possessed of a thriving estate and also when she succeeds in making her Lancashire husband - James - 'a very fine gentleman' again. As Ian Watt

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders (London : J.M. Dent, 1963), p.12.

perceptively remarks, Moll Flanders "is in her heart a rentier."<sup>16</sup> The assumption that Moll is not wholly bourgeois either in temper or inclination is confirmed by her distinction between a tradesman and a gentleman, and her preference for a husband who would be half-tradesman and half-gentleman. Commenting on this amphibious creature called gentleman-tradesman, the heroine on one occasion concludes by remarking :

I was not averse to a tradesman; but then I would have a tradesman, forsooth, that was something of a gentleman too; that when my husband had a mind to carry me to court, or to the play, he might become a sword, and look like a gentleman as another man; and not like one that had the mark of his apron-strings upon his coat, or the mark of his hat upon his periwig; that should look as if he was set on to his sword, when his sword was put on to him, and that carried his trade in his countenance. 17

This passage is also significant in that it throws light on Moll's attraction to the external symbols of gentility; a fact which renders her an easy victim to the external trappings of gentility and involves her in one difficult situation after another. Moll Flanders, who is typically representative of the author's mentality, exults in being carried away in sumptuous coaches. One easily feels the swellings of Moll's ego as she rides in a coach. In fact, rich coaches, good horses, coachmen, postilions, footmen in very good liveries never fail to attract the heroine's attention and quench her thirst for social distinction. Moll is a true picture of Defoe himself. For "Moll is unmistakably 'obsessed with gentility and keeping up appearances', as was Defoe throughout his life."<sup>18</sup> Her values and character traits may occasionally seem aristocratic, but these were also characteristics of Defoe on some occasion. Judged leniently, Moll may safely be said to belong to the new class of gentry whose members "longed for a life of ease. Not of mere ease - luxurious ease."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel : Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1968), p.119

<sup>17</sup> Defoe, Moll Flanders, p.52.

<sup>18</sup> Shinagel, op. cit., p.147.

<sup>19</sup> Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1959), p.190.

Colonel Jack, Defoe's third novel, forms the essence of the novelist's aristocratically-coloured concept of the ideal gentleman. For the novel is a good example of the author's obsession with the old criterion of land-ownership. Though Colonel Jack may justifiably be called a self-made man; he, nevertheless, is seen anxious to install the estate on a pedestal which his creator does not seem willing to bring down. Also, and having established himself as the owner of two thriving estates in Virginia, the hero embarks on a programme of self-education. Through his tutor, who is not only an excellent scholar but also a transported felon from Bristol, Jack comes to acquire a true liberal education. And this is why this fictitious character may be said to represent the author's unwavering belief in the estate - a symbol of wealth and status - and its accompaniment genteel upbringing or education. The fact that Jack is not only a born-gentleman but also educated as a gentleman renders him the best fictional hero who embodies the author's concept of the ideal or complete gentleman. It should be emphasized here, however, that Colonel Jack represents an uneven mixture of the aristocratic and bourgeois qualities which identify a gentleman. In the character of Jack the myth of the ideal gentleman-tradesman is somehow blurred by the predominance of certain aristocratic character traits. Notwithstanding, Jack may easily be called a gentleman-merchant whose whole existence depends on the driving force of money.

In his greatest moments of involvement in aristocratic traditions and customs the Colonel is always reminded of money, the great middle-class badge of distinction. In France, for instance, when Jack was confronted with the unpleasant reality of the laws of honour and when challenged to a duel it was, ironically enough, the 'Bill' and the payment of the bill more than any personal offence that caused him the greater trouble. Being a gentleman-merchant Colonel Jack finds the laws of honour operating against him in a mercantilist way; and thus he finds himself

obliged not only to fight his challenger but also to pay the bill soon after. This, indeed, is a typically bourgeois code of honour. Defoe's imagination in this novel seems to have been working miracles in adapting the aristocratic code of honour to the needs of middle-class gentlemen-readers. This adaptation was done with the least attention to ethical or moral considerations. Such attention had to wait till the time of Richardson and Fielding when the duel and the laws of honour were uncompromisingly denounced. Apparently, Defoe was too much addicted to material considerations to be able to trouble himself sufficiently about moral values. There is abundant proof in Colonel Jack that Defoe was not greatly opposed to manliness and muscularity. This is evidenced in Colonel Jack's praise of his friend Major Jack who "had a true Manly Courage, fear'd nothing, and could look Death in the Face, without any Hesitation."<sup>20</sup>

In Defoe's last novel, The Fortunate Mistress : Roxana, the concept of gentility is extended to cover a variety of gentlemen as well as to expose as many aspects of the old ideal of gentleman as possible. It is highly significant that the focus of this novel is centred upon the figure of Roxana whose father and elder brother were engaged in trade. No less important than this is the fact that Roxana's first husband was the son of a businessman who owned a brewery. In Roxana's first husband who danced well, hunted much, and who aped the life of the wealthy and leisured landed classes, Defoe presents us with a typical example of the thoughtless tradesman who is reduced to poverty by virtue of his being indolent and much addicted to high-life diversions. The obvious moral Defoe draws for his middle-class readers is that extravagant indulgence in upper-class entertainments leads to the inevitable and only result of being reduced to bankruptcy and the consequent selling of one's estate or possessions. Another genteel vice to which our attention is strongly

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Defoe, Colonel Jack (London : Oxford University Press, 1965) p.6.

drawn in this novel is 'fortune-hunting', a most distinctive feature of gentlemen of the old school. Defoe, almost naively, would have us believe that all gentlemen of the old school are needy and necessitous. Commenting on this notion, Sir Robert Clayton - a convert to the new school of gentlemen - asserts to Roxana that :

... by the humour of living up to the extent of their fortunes, and rather beyond, the gentlemen ... and the nobility too, are, almost all of them, borrowers, and all in necessitous circumstances. 21

As soon as Roxana settles down in London, she finds herself besieged by 'gentlemen they call fortune hunters'. But despite her obsession with rank and titles of distinction, Roxana is made to refuse all such proposals, that had in view her fortune, from gentlemen of good families and old estates. Possessed of an estate of £2000 a year, Roxana was able to refuse even the eldest son of a peer. Roxana's refusal of such proposals of marriage, it should be noted, was not based on any moral grounds; rather, it was due, as she herself admits, to her desire not to give up her independence, that is, her money and estate. This explains her adoption of "a crass business-like attitude to her career as a  
22 mistress," in which case she is likely to obtain money instead of losing it. As the subject of estates had always been a favourite topic with Defoe, Roxana, naturally enough, shares her creator's fondness of estates. When she was at last 'handsomely attacked' - to use her own words - by a person of honour, she proudly confesses that it was his very great estate which recommended him particularly to her. Not unlike her predecessor Moll Flanders, Roxana is a great admirer of the external symbols of gentility. To both of them, money and outward appearances are more important than personal relationships or emotional ties.

There is a clear indication in The Fortunate Mistress that spending is one of the best criteria by which a gentleman's worth may be judged.

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Defoe, The Fortunate Mistress (London : Peter Davies, 1929), p.172.

<sup>22</sup> Shinagel, op. cit., p.182.

Your quality as a gentleman, the book seems to suggest, is measured by the amount of money you are able to spend without ruining yourself. According to Defoe's spokesman in this novel, Sir Robert Clayton, "a merchant in flush business, and a capital stock, is able to spend more money than a gentleman of £5000 a year estate."<sup>23</sup> As he proceeds in his exposition on spending, Sir Robert names to Roxana merchants who lived in more splendour and who spent more money than most of the noblemen in England could singly expend. Through Sir Robert, Roxana comes to know that tradesmen in London could spend more money in their families "than, generally speaking, the gentry of England from £1000 a year downward could do."<sup>24</sup> It might be surmised from Roxana's life at Court that Defoe intended us to get an idea about the corrupt morals of the English nobility and gentry. But as we see Roxana taking an active part, if not a leading role, in the diversions of high life this surmise becomes a mere hypothesis. One should not lose sight of the fact that the novelist himself "was more than casually attracted to the fashionable diversions of high life."<sup>25</sup> Defoe may be said to have been concerned with the upper classes' morals and manners only in so far as they affected their material status. The novel clearly indicates that Defoe's critical eye dwelt more upon the luxury and profusion of the upper classes than on the ethical considerations that lay behind them.

In connection with 'titles' in the novel, Defoe seems to have come to realize at last the insufficiency of titles as a guide to one's good actions or conduct. Through the honest Dutch merchant, Defoe admits that though money purchased titles of honour in almost all parts of the civilized world; still, money :

could not give principles of honour, they must come by birth and blood; that, however, titles sometimes assist to elevate the soul, and to infuse generous principles into the mind, and especially where there was a good foundation laid in the persons. <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Defoe, *The Fortunate Mistress*, p.175.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.175

<sup>25</sup>Shinagel, op. cit., p.27.

<sup>26</sup>Defoe, *The Fortunate Mistress*, p.248

One cannot state with certainty whether Defoe here was following the same policy he adopted in The Compleat English Gentleman which aimed at attracting upper-class readers, or whether he is falling back upon the old concept of gentility with its emphasis on birth and blood. For Defoe's obsession with gentility inclines us to believe that he was too respectful at heart to some of the old traditions of gentility to be able to reject them entirely or to muster a rebellion against their stronghold.

Defoe's materialistic and externalized view of gentility may easily be contrasted with Richardson's excessively idealized and moralistic concept of gentility. In the latter's case the concept of gentility took a sudden, but by no means revolutionary, leap into the opposite direction to that of Defoe. Richardson's new approach to the idea of a gentleman moves towards man's moral nature and focuses upon his good and virtuous actions. Among good actions is included social usefulness which ranks as high as any deed relating to the gentleman's own well-being. But social usefulness, as represented in the author's novels, is by no means the same as that understood by the Victorians. It differs from its Victorian counterpart in that it does not reach beyond one's circle of friends or neighbours and is mainly centred around the few individuals who fall within this circle. In a word, it is more private than public. However, gentleness of heart, in Richardson's view, is the highest distinction of a gentleman. But Richardson's gentleness of heart is nothing other than the outworn shibboleth of eighteenth-century puritanical thinking. It is by no means the same which led foreign observers of English society in the nineteenth century to assert that :

... for real judges, the essential part of the personage is the heart ... For them, a real gentleman is a real noble, a man ... in whom generous instincts have been confirmed by straightforward reflection, and who, acting naturally well, acts still better upon principle. 27

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<sup>27</sup>T. Taine, Notes on England, translated with an introductory chapter by W.F. Rae (London : Strahan, 1873), p.175.

As will be shown later, Richardson's gentleness of heart is so impoverished by virtue of its being reduced to the narrow and outmoded phenomenon of sexual chastity. In Richardson's concept of gentility, manners are no less important in a gentleman's or a lady's character than virtue. They are often seen to occupy the second place of distinction only. Manners, thus, are considered a necessary requisite in a gentleman without which he remains incomplete. Birth, fortune and a title may help sometimes to distinguish a gentleman, but they are not essential to his claim to gentility. In fact, they appear to have been reduced at the hands of Richardson to a very low degree of worth. They become no more than the old-fashioned but still bright touchstones of gentility which dazzle the eyes more than convince the mind. Obviously, both Defoe and Richardson acted similarly when they gave a subordinate place to manners in their scheme of things, but they clearly parted ways when it came to giving priority to either wealth or virtue. Though money and puritan morality were dynamic tendencies by which eighteenth-century middle-class families were characterized, they seem in Defoe's and Richardson's different approaches to gentility like two parallel lines which never meet or which would need a providential hand to bring them together.

Richardson's middle-class origin, at any rate, does not seem to have greatly affected his notions of gentility. This accounts for his being so critical of the rising bourgeoisie and also for his unsympathetic delineation of 'upstarts' such as Mr. Solmes in Clarissa, who "is most  
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unpleasantly typical of the rising middle class". Richardson, it may be argued, found in criticizing the middle class in general an easy way of elevating himself above that class. Despite the fact that the novelist bestows a generous compliment upon the merchants of Great Britain in Sir Charles Grandison, the truth remains that Richardson's attitude towards tradesmen's claim to gentility is most undecided. One feels at a

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<sup>28</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 229.

loss when trying to decide whether this was due to the shortcomings of the middle class at the top of which comes 'apishness' and ill-breeding or whether it was due to the author's vanity and desire to be considered more genteel than the rest of his class. Upon reading Sir Charles Grandison one is led to conclude that Richardson's making his ideal gentleman a member of the landed classes was a projection of his wishful thinking to be considered a most fashionable and accomplished gentleman. Though the novel genre represents the epic of the middle classes; this, still, does not necessarily mean that it is true of each individual novel or novelist. Middle-class values may indeed find a true embodiment in the novel, but the embodiment is not always the object of praise or commendation. More often than not, it becomes the object of cynicism and ridicule. One of the first and foremost ends of criticism which a writer may have in mind is to open his readers' eyes to social ills and imperfections so that they may feel the necessity of remedying them. But in Richardson's case, as far as the middle classes are concerned, criticism becomes a way of heaping faults over already existing ones. Richardson's criticism of the middle classes tends to deepen their sense of social inferiority rather than to diminish it. In this instance Richardson seems far removed from the class in which Defoe gloried and of which he was a member.

However, the first traces of anti-middle-class gentility appear in the author's second novel Clarissa. This is clearly perceived in Clarissa's referring abusively to her undesirable suitor, Mr. Solmes, as the 'upstart man'. Later in the same novel, Miss Howe expresses her contempt for Mr. Solmes' disagreeable society as well as for his 'niggardliness' and excessive caution in money affairs. To Clarissa, it should be borne in mind, Mr. Solmes was objectionable not because of his wanting in any morals but rather because he is not the 'fine gentleman' approved of by polite society. Addressing his sister, Clarissa's

brother remarks :

Prejudice against Mr. Solmes has evidently blinded you ... since no one but you thinks the gentleman so contemptible in his person; nor for a plain country gentleman, who has too much solid sense to appear like a coxcomb, justly blameable in his manners. 29

In the final pages of Clarissa, one comes across a few passages where ridicule is generously bestowed upon tradesmen's daughters and their apish genteel manners. In the story of Sally Martin, whom Richardson disrespectfully refers to as the daughter of 'a mercer-father and grocer mother', middle-class gentility seems at its lowest ebb. Living in high and expensive ways, which forms in Defoe's novels the clearest sign of gentility, becomes in Clarissa a sign of apishness that brings upon its contriver nothing but ridicule. Likewise in Sir Charles Grandison, this apishness of the middle classes receives its due amount of criticism and mockery. As Miss Byron ironically remarks :

And the city now is as genteel, as polite, as the court was formerly. The wives and daughters of citizens, poor fellows! are apes of us gentry; and succeed pretty well, as to outward appearance, in the mimicry. 30

Ridicule aside, Richardson can be seen to have been tolerant enough toward a certain section of the middle class to pay a tribute to the eminent members of the middle class, "the merchants of Great Britain (who) are the most useful members of the community." 31 But even in this, as Alan MacKillop significantly observes, "one feels a touch of condescension." 32 His prejudices and weaknesses apart, Richardson can be said to have succeeded in presenting us with a colourful picture of genteel life and also in creating a variety of gentlemen that ranges from the

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Richardson, The History of Clarissa Harlowe (London : Henry Sotheran, 1883), I, pp. 331-32.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Richardson, The History of Sir Charles Grandison (London : Oxford University Press, 1972), I, p.331.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., I, p.455.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Dugald MacKillop, Samuel Richardson : Printer and Novelist (The Shoe String Press, 1960), p.207.

lowest type of rakes of whom Lovelace in Clarissa is a good example to the highest and most priggish gentlemen of whom Sir Charles ranks highest. There is, besides, the 'travelled gentleman' who occasionally displays a kind of British insularity which undoubtedly was also characteristic of the author himself.

In Richardson's novels, however, great wealth must always give way to virtue. Virtue, which in this case denotes sexual purity is confusingly used by Richardson to imply 'gentleness of heart.' If by virtue the author meant little more than sexual chastity, then one is justified in accusing him of misusing certain important words and expressions. A clear example of Richardson's abuse of words is the title of his first novel Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded which may safely be substituted by Pamela; or, Sex Rewarded. Richardson's misuse of certain expressions is clearly reflected on his ideas and beliefs among which the concept of gentility may be said to have suffered considerably. This can be accounted for by referring the whole matter of gentility to the writer's "feminine point of view".<sup>33</sup> This is by no means an undervaluation of the other sex's capacity to express things properly; rather, it only refers to Richardson's predominantly female society which cannot be doubted to have played a leading role in shaping some of the novelist's concepts and beliefs. Put differently, it is a suggestion implying that Richardson's understanding of what makes the gentleman was influenced by his female friends and acquaintances. One may venture to add here that most of the gentlemen Richardson created are presented in a way which reflects and suits his women friends' fantasies and wishful thinking. This is one of the reasons underlying the fact that most of Richardson's gentlemen in Sir Charles Grandison are hopelessly sentimental, if not effeminate. It

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<sup>33</sup>Watt, op. cit., p.159.

is rather usual to see Richardson's gentlemen in Sir Charles Grandison reduced to a permanent state of crying, Sir Rowland and his son, or whining, like Orme and Fowler, or even crawling as is the case with Hargrave and Greville. The fact that many of Richardson's fictional gentlemen verge on effeminacy can only be ascribed to the author's distorted feminine view of the concept of gentleman.

Concerning the old touchstones of birth and ancestry, the novelist was not as radical in his rejection of them as Defoe had been. Nevertheless, Richardson's arguments against ancient families or 'blue' blood is in many ways like those of his predecessor Defoe. In Pamela, for example, the heroine is often seen involved in discussions concerning the gentry's poor arguments in defence of their supposedly 'unpolluted' ancient blood. Pamela, convincingly enough, proves the unreliability of family records. She does not hesitate to question the gentry's certainty about their noble descent and confidently puts to them the question of how they could know, "that, supposing they could trace back their ancestry for one, two, three or even five hundred years, that then the original stems of these poor families ... were not still deeper rooted."<sup>34</sup> To Pamela, and to Richardson too, true nobility lies in virtue rather than in blood or birth. This picture which Pamela tries to establish throughout the novel becomes in Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison highly distorted and blurred. Sir Charles, Richardson's ideal gentleman, seems always to exult in being descended of ancient families. This is clearly manifested in his narration of his love affairs abroad especially when he is in company with his countrymen :

I stood in high credit with my countrymen, to whom I had many ways of being serviceable. They made known to everybody my father's affection for me; his magnificent spirit; the antient families, on both sides from which I was descended. 35

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Richardson, Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded (London : Henry Sotheran, 1883), I, pp.292-93.

<sup>35</sup> Richardson, Sir Charles Grandison, II, p.117.

Even when talking about his lady-admirers abroad, he never loses sight of noble descent and other upper-class distinctive features. It is hard to form a fair and accurate estimate of Richardson's attitude to birth and ancestry particularly when accompanied by other genteel traits and characteristics. As one moves to discuss the more important criteria of gentility in Richardson's novels, manners more than morals appear to be more closely associated with the concept of gentility, and hence more essential to an understanding of the author's seemingly new approach to 'the gentleman'. In this respect, Richardson can clearly be seen to have been influenced by the 'fine gentleman' of the Restoration period. Whenever Richardson wanted to draw a line between a gentleman's manners and his morals he would simply use 'gentility' to refer to manners and 'agreeableness' if the reference is to one's morals. This use of two distinctive words to refer to different character traits in a gentleman marks very clearly the author's distinction between 'fine gentlemen' and other gentlemen. The first instance of this sharp distinction between a gentleman's outward appearance and his inner life occurs in Pamela where the expression 'fine gentleman' is applied to Mr. B's outward appearance only. And thus we have Pamela, after Mr. B's departure, exclaiming :

I looked after him out of the window; and he was charmingly dressed: To be sure he is a handsome fine gentleman! - What pity his heart is not as good as his appearance! 36

In Clarissa, Lovelace is similarly described as the finest gentleman in the world. There lies the main difference between Lovelace, the 'fine gentleman', and Mr. Solmes, the still raw and uncultivated middle-class gentleman. And there lies the reason behind cousin Dolly's remark to Clarissa that Mr. Lovelace was a fine gentleman and that Mr. Solmes was not worthy to buckle his shoes. Lovelace's desirability and attractiveness to the heroine, thus, derives not from his moral superiority

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<sup>36</sup> Richardson, Pamela, I, p.220.

but rather from his possession of the social graces of the aristocracy and of "the very qualities which Clarissa misses in her own environment."

<sup>37</sup> In Richardson's third novel, Sir Charles Grandison, the distinction between 'a fine gentleman' and 'a scholar' is brought into sharp contrast to the disadvantage of the latter. The main difference still lies in manners rather than in morals. Richardson's feminine view of the ideal gentleman is most apparent in Mr. Walden's hint that 'fine scholars' - as opposed to fine gentlemen - will very shortly "stand no chance in the ladies' favour".

<sup>38</sup> It can be added here that the ease and elegant manners with which 'fine gentlemen' moved in polite society was a greater guarantor to winning ladies' favour than all the learning provided for scholars at universities. One wonders at Miss Byron's assertion that "neither a learned, nor what is called a fine education, has any other value than <sup>as each</sup> tends to improve the morals of men, and to make them wise and good;" <sup>39</sup> for Miss Byron does not seem less fussy about manners and elegant decorums than Richardson himself.

Now, as concerns Richardson's 'travelled gentlemen', suffice it to say that they seem no better than lifeless products of an insular mind harping on its own chords. However, one could hardly expect much from a writer whose experience in travelling did not reach far beyond what is known today as greater London. So far as is known, Richardson "made few trips beyond what is now greater London... he never left England." <sup>40</sup> According to Morden's testimony in Clarissa; foreign fashions, foreign vices, and foreign diseases - these make up the travelled gentleman. To

<sup>37</sup> Watt, op. cit., p.230.

<sup>38</sup> Richardson, Sir Charles Grandison, I, p.55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I, p.48.

<sup>40</sup> T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, Samuel Richardson : A Biography (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1971), p.527.

be obsessed with foreign vices and foreign diseases, needless to say, could not mean to real judges of travel anything but a reflection of a diseased mind. At any rate, there is a noticeable disapproval of the Grand Tour in Richardson's books. The Grand Tour is often looked at as an event after which a gentleman carries back home with him the 'weeds' of foreign countries. Although the end of travel was improvement, this end in view is seldom achieved. As Lovelace mockingly observes; "I have a great mind to contrive a method to send James Harlowe to travel for improvement. Never was there a booby squire that more wanted it."<sup>41</sup>

Richardson's poorly-drawn picture of the 'travelled gentleman' is counter-balanced by the richly-coloured picture of country gentlemen. The impression one gathers from the numerous comments on country gentlemen and country life in Richardson's novels is that hounds, horses, hunting, racing, cock-fighting, swearing and cursing were much more important in eighteenth-century English society than politics or economics. This obsession of the English country gentleman with dogs, horses, and hunting is, it must be confessed, accountable for a great amount of the lustre and richness which characterizes English prose fiction. It is not uncommon in Richardson's novels to notice the effect of dogs and hunting on genteel communications. It is quite natural, for instance, to find a rough lover sometimes 'growling' over his mistress; or to see a certain Jocky called "one of his uncle's Foxes."<sup>42</sup> The most interesting and comic picture Richardson had ever drawn of country gentlemen occurs in the second volume of Pamela, where the heroine and her husband entertain a group of fox-hunters who happen to be well-practised in the art of cursing and swearing. As Pamela preferred to call them, these gentlemen 'were of the true modern cast of libertines and fox-hunters' who concern themselves with neither the public nor the private life of other people.

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<sup>41</sup> Richardson, Clarissa, I, p.190.

<sup>42</sup> Richardson, Pamela, II, p.352.

This 'common' Lincolnshire class of fox-hunters is typically representative of the English idle gentlemen who drink their time away and whose sense of responsibility is entirely dead. Whether this picture of English country gentry life is drawn from reality or from Richardson's second-hand sources is hard to ascertain. Still, one cannot help wondering sometimes at the important role which hounds in particular played in eighteenth-century English society and the priority they were given in everyday polite conversation. So much for dogs, horses, and country gentlemen.

It remains to add a few remarks on Richardson's attitude towards professional people in general. Upon reflection, one is inclined to think that Richardson's attitude towards the genteel professions, with the exception of the Church, is one of condescension - if not contempt. Richardson's contempt for some professions may justifiably be said to have been derived from the fact that some professional people were of a low social origin. This applies mostly to the navy and army professions. In Sir Charles' family, strangely enough, there is a covert aristocratic prejudice against earning one's living. This is manifested in Charlotte Grandison's reasonings against following a soldier's fortune into different quarters :

And shall Charlotte/<sup>Grandison</sup>(she asks herself), the daughter of the most prudent of mothers, take a step that shall make her looked upon as the disgrace of her family? Shall she be obliged to follow a soldier's fortune into different quarters, and perhaps to distant regions? 43

Charlotte's dislike of the army profession was also shared by her brother Sir Charles who, intent on hiding his prejudice against the army profession, bases his dislike on moral rather than on social grounds. In the author's second novel, the professions anticipated for illegitimate sons are "the sea, the army, perhaps the highway."<sup>44</sup> As concerns the medical profession,

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<sup>43</sup>Richardson, Sir Charles Grandison, I, p.405.

<sup>44</sup>Richardson, Clarissa, III, p.80.

Richardson was more sympathetic towards medical gentlemen than he was towards naval or military gentlemen. This, no doubt, was due to humane considerations. In Richardson's view of the profession of the clergy, merit rather than patronage is to be given precedence and priority. Richardson's conservatism is most apparent in his preference of the profession of the clergy to all other ones. The Church profession as a whole was held in high esteem by the author. Richardson's radical conservatism or leniency towards the clergy extends to cover even Dissenting ministers under the head of 'gentility'. And thus the title 'gentleman' was ungrudgingly bestowed on Mr. Milbourne, a minister of a Dissenting Congregation in Sir Charles Grandison. In Pamela again, Mr. Adams - the young chaplain - was not only considered a gentleman proper but was also pressed to accept a place at Mr. B's table. The chaplain, out of modesty of course, declined the invitation. However, in Richardson's first novel, Pamela, the institution of the Church is minutely described. The clergy's claim to gentility, despite their low origin sometimes, is vindicated. Richardson seems to have been anxious to see some bad practices among the clergy dropped; at the top of which practices comes the bad treatment which the clergy give to one another as, for instance, when some of the dignified clergy 'ill-treat' their junior brethren. Pamela, and Richardson too, seems to be of the opinion that the clergy are necessary to teach the lower orders of society to know their duties. Mr. B's invaluable contribution to the talk on gentlemen-clergymen in Pamela was his pointing out the many good and worthy families that sprung from the clergy. The only mention of the law profession in Richardson's novels occurs in Pamela where Mr. B. is visited by two lawyer-gentlemen. The lawyers, it is acknowledged, are persons of family and fortune; a thing which, ironically, renders practice in their case debasing or degrading. If Richardson's concept of gentility can be called radical or new, it is owing to the author's attempt in his fiction to demolish one of the old-

established aristocratic traditions and customs, 'the duel'. Richardson's attack on the most corrupted and prostituted word 'Honour' is very similar to that of his contemporary Henry Fielding. Honour, the plaything of the old species of gentlemen, becomes in Richardson's moralized world a murderous vile word. It is, as Miss Byron maintains in Sir Charles Grandison, the very opposite of duty, goodness, piety, and religion. One is inclined to agree with Miss Byron and Sir Charles that 'the duel' was no more than a barbarous vile custom and false honour which serves no good end. On the contrary, it nourishes 'revenge', a most repugnant and vile passion in a man who claims to be a true Christian. Richardson's concern with this old aristocratic custom cannot be doubted to have been but genuine and sincere. But he, quite unconsciously perhaps, was operating as an agent indirectly perpetuating this habit which he openly disapproved of and denounced. This is evidenced in Clarissa where the novelist shows an inability to dispose of the aristocratic Lovelace in any other way but that of the duel. Richardson's addiction to the old aristocratic way of thinking cannot be doubted to have led him sometimes to confuse middle-class notions of duty with upper-class practices. This is another way of saying that in Richardson, "what might be called an undercurrent of aristocratic morality runs alongside the current of the middle-class Christian notions of duty."<sup>45</sup>

In conclusion, Richardson's concept of gentility may simply be said to contain many of the ingredients of the old concept of gentility. Not unlike his predecessor Defoe, Richardson "typifies the English middle class, which did not so much rebel against the aristocracy as absorb it,

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<sup>45</sup>Ezekiel Bogosian, The Perfect Gentleman : A Study of an Esthetic Type in the Novels of Richardson, Jane Austen, Trollope, and Henry James (Ph. D. thesis : University of California, 1937), p.38.

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even while reserving for it a measure of cautious respect." In Richardson's dwelling upon manners and good-breeding one senses the need felt by a bourgeois intellectual for a reform in his class; a reform that tends to uproot vulgarity of behaviour and replace it by the ease and freedom with which aristocratic gentlemen moved in polite circles. This, perhaps, could be brought about by the intermingling of upper-class and bourgeois boys under the same roof of a public school; a thing implied, though not directly expressed in Richardson's arguments, in Pamela, in favour of public schooling. Richardson's endowing his ideal gentleman, Sir Charles, with gentle blood, refined manners, and land-ownership clearly testifies to the strength of the landed classes' influence on the author's social outlook. By grafting bourgeois virtues - such as honesty, usefulness, philanthropy, and even sexual chastity - on the stock of the landed gentry, represented by Charles Grandison, Richardson can be seen to have been trying to reform the landed classes with their sexual prowess and sexual licence. Nevertheless, the ethical aspect of Richardson's concept of gentility can still be said to be at its formative stage. This is due, in part, to the fact that there is almost always a literal identification, in Richardson's novels, of virtue and sexual chastity. As H.J. Shroff has put it; "not the exaltation of passion, but the conquest of passion is Richardson's subject."<sup>47</sup>

In his The English Novel, Walter Allen observes that :

Fielding, both as novelist and magistrate, was a society for the reform of manners in himself, and it was only natural that, when writing Joseph Andrews, he should not long be content with reforming Samuel Richardson's manners alone. 48

Following Walter Allen's above observation leads one to the conclusion

<sup>46</sup> Eaves and Kimpel, op. cit., p.543.

<sup>47</sup> Hormai J. Shroff, The Eighteenth Century Novel : The Idea of the Gentleman (Arnold-Heinemann : 1978), p.112.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Allen, The English Novel : A Short Critical History (London : Phoenix House, 1954), p.51

that Fielding was dissatisfied not only with Richardson's bourgeois manners and morals but also with those of his society in general. Obviously, the newly created code of values embraced by the urban middle class as well as by the urban gentry and aristocracy is marked by a narrow world view that seems to have fallen short of Fielding's hopes and expectations. Fielding was a great opponent of the city; and his novels depict the cleavage within English town society between the gentry and the nobility. The novel which represents this cleavage most clearly is Amelia where the lives of Captain Booth and his wife are set against the corrupt lives of London aristocracy. In Amelia, the reader is presented with a cutting critique of the current practices of the decadent London aristocracy and their values which are contrasted with those of the gentry rather than with those of the bourgeoisie. However, Amelia is only one of a series of panoramic views of the seemingly genteel society of London. Fielding often ironically portrays London as bestowing a kind of gentility on its inhabitants and visitors alike. In Joseph Andrews, for instance, Mrs. Slipslop "always insisted on a deference to be paid to her understanding as she had been frequently at London."<sup>49</sup> Joseph Andrews himself, shortly after settling down with Lady Booby in London, is reported, though not without some irony, to have become "smarter and genteeler than any of the beaus in town, either in or out of livery."<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the country is often presented as the only possible decent refuge from the false world of gentility. As M.C. Battestin has remarked

... Fielding's antidote for the city is the familiar classical ideal of rural retirement with a virtuous and loving wife. This is the solution recommended in all the novels and adopted by Tom Jones and Sophia, Booth and Amelia, Joseph Andrews and Fanny, and pre-eminently, the Wilsons. <sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p.19.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p.20.

<sup>51</sup>Martin C. Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art : A Study of Joseph Andrews (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1959), pp.92-3.

In Fielding's world of gentility, the city is almost always equated with corruption and false values. The history of the Man of the Hill in Tom Jones can easily be viewed as "the story of urban corruption and the subsequent retreat to rural life, to peace and tranquility."<sup>52</sup> The novelist's outright dissatisfaction with the new urban morality can simply be ascribed to his overt bias in favour of the old rural values of a once-organic community. "Fielding's preference for the country, of course, was not the product of any foolish idealism about the absence of vice in a rural setting."<sup>53</sup>

In any case, and judging from Fielding's ironic usage, the word 'gentleman' :

... had become so divorced from its 'original idea' of true gentility and from the concept of the gentleman as a useful member of society that it currently signified the mere outward show of dress and manners ...<sup>54</sup>

This point can be illustrated by reviewing Fielding's remarks on 'modern town gentlemen' and their centre of activity, the city. Fielding's 'modern gentlemen' and his comments on tradespeople in general offer us the best clue to his somehow unfavourable opinion of the new species of gentry. The novelist's hostility to town-bred gentlemen is clearly manifested in his treatment of merchants and professional people whom he occasionally mocked and satirized. Though Fielding's views on "morals and manners, good-nature and good-breeding, and the like, were hardly simple and clear-cut"<sup>55</sup>, one may safely assert that ill-breeding rather than defective morality was more crucial in shaping the novelist's dislike for the new class of gentry, the bourgeoisie. This is apparent

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<sup>52</sup>Diana Laurensen and Alan Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature (London : MacKibbon and Kee, 1972), p.203.

<sup>53</sup>Battestin, op. cit., p.92.

<sup>54</sup>Glenn W. Hatfield, Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony (Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 1968), p.117.

<sup>55</sup>C.J. Rawson, Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress : 'Nature's dance of death' and other studies (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.25.

in Joseph Andrews, where Mr. Wilson, Fielding's alter-ego, is anxious to point out that "the lower class of the gentry, and the higher of the mercantile world ... are, in reality, the worst-bred part of mankind."<sup>56</sup>

However, throughout Tom Jones, which is clearly an anti-middle-class novel, the middle class is satirically mocked, and trade is denied even the recognition of being a genteel profession. Tom Jones is, in fact, the first English novel in which the God of Mammon is scathingly attacked. Fielding's campaign against the newly emerged middle-class morality found complete embodiment in the Nightingale family. In the story of the elder Mr. Nightingale, the new middle-class morality is both embodied and exposed. Mr. Nightingale, whom Fielding ironically labels 'a gentleman', was bred to trade. Having acquired a substantial fortune, Mr. Nightingale quits trade to deal only in money. However, the picture of the estate-addicted bourgeoisie is completed by the addition of Mr. Nightingale's brother, who had likewise been bred to trade, and who :

No sooner saw himself worth 6000 l. than he purchased a small Estate with the greatest Part of it, and retired into the Country, where he married the Daughter of an unbeneficed Clergyman. 57

Confusingly enough, the narrator in Tom Jones expresses an unusual leniency towards Mr. Nightingale, junior. This lenient attitude applies to Mr. Nightingale only, and should not be taken to mean that Fielding's restraining grasp on middle-class gentry is relaxed. According to the narrator, however, Mr. Nightingale

... was in the ordinary Transactions of Life a Man of strict Honour, and what is more rare among young Gentlemen of the Town, one of strict Honesty too; yet in Affairs of Love he was somewhat loose in his Morals; not that he was even here as void of Principles as Gentlemen sometimes are. 58

In Tom Jones again, when the hero refers to surgery as 'a trade' rather

<sup>56</sup>Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p.133

<sup>57</sup>Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (New York : W.W. Norton, 1973), p.594.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p.579.

than as a profession, Benjamin -- the barber -- violently protests that  
 'A Surgeon ... is a Profession not a Trade'.<sup>59</sup> Quite remarkably, Fielding  
 often employs people of a low social status to criticize the rising middle  
 class; a method which doubles the effectiveness of his satire and furthers  
 the distance between middle-class people and the world of gentility. The  
 character of Benjamin is the clearest example of this technique, but he  
 is not the only agent employed to lower the standing of the middle class  
 as a social group. A further example is the 'waiting-gentlewoman' who  
 insulted a certain 'Landlady' by offering an indignity to her 'House' when  
 she supposed that "none but Tradesmen and Grafters ever call here."<sup>60</sup>  
 Being married to tradesmen in Tom Jones is considered no worse an  
 indignity to people of sham quality than is calling at inns to people of  
 a mediocre social standing. When Mrs. Miller expresses her hope of some-  
 body finding 'a good tradesman' for her daughter, Mr. Nightingale protests  
 by exclaiming; "A Tradesman! ... you shan't undervalue my Nancy. There  
 is not a Nobleman upon Earth above her Merit."<sup>61</sup>

As is the case in Joseph Andrews, London in Tom Jones seems to  
 Londoners the only place where gentility and good-breeding are acquired.  
 Having been told that Sophia Western is 'the daughter of a country booby  
 Squire', and has been in town only about a fortnight, Lord Fellamar --  
 addressing Lady Bellaston, exclaims: "Upon my Soul ... I should swear  
 she had been bred in a Court; for besides her Beauty, I never saw any  
 Thing so genteel, so sensible, so polite."<sup>62</sup> The difference between the  
 new urban gentry and the old rural gentry is on occasion presented by  
 portraying country gentlemen being plundered by Londoners. As Squire  
 Western angrily retorts; "All the Londoners were like the Court, and  
 thought of nothing but plundering Country Gentlemen."<sup>63</sup> Such plundering

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p.321.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p.410.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p.542.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p.603.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p.679.

to which Squire Western refers is no other than the purchase of estates by the wealthy middle class from impoverished country gentlemen. This interchange or plundering between Londoners and country gentlemen is also seen in the pursuit of alliances, through marriage with rich middle-class families, by country gentlemen. In the final pages of Tom Jones, Blifil, a country gentleman, is reported not only to have started to lay aside £200 a year in order to purchase a seat in the next Parliament, but also to have "lately turned Methodist, in hopes of marrying a very rich Widow of that Sect."<sup>64</sup> Though Blifil turns Methodist, there is not the least evidence in the book to suggest that his claim to the title of 'gentleman' - in the social rather than in the moral sense - is invalid. This clearly indicates that a gentleman could turn Methodist and still retain the title 'gentleman', but it in no way implies that a man who is originally a Methodist has any claim to the title of 'gentleman'. This can be ascribed to the Anglicans' unjustified prejudice against the dissenting middle class; a prejudice that may easily be said to have been started by Charles II according to whose verdict "dissent was no religion for a gentleman".<sup>65</sup> In Tom Jones the prejudice takes the form of slighting comments dropped mainly by Squire Western. For example, when his sister deplores his country ignorance, the Squire replies: "And I pity your Town Learning, I had rather be anything than a Courtier, and a Presbyterian, and a Hanoverian too, as some People, I believe are."<sup>66</sup> Fielding's attitude towards the protestant religion in Tom Jones testifies to his discrimination in favour of the Church of England. As a sign of respect to members of the Church of England, Mr. Supple, the curate at Mr. Allworthy's parish, is often seen entertained at Mr. Allworthy's dinner table. Of more significance still is the fact that

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.759

<sup>65</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., p.192.

<sup>66</sup> Fielding, Tom Jones, p.209.

Tom Jones, besides being a well-wisher of the Protestant religion, turns out to be the son of Mr. Summer, the son of a clergyman of great learning and virtue. What Fielding meant by virtue in this context is, in opposition to what he calls 'a set of religious, or rather moral writers'; "A certain relative Quality, which is always busying itself without doors, and seems as much interested in pursuing the Good of others as its own."<sup>67</sup> Here one perceives a **subterranean** movement which tends to undermine the middle-class morality - propagated by Richardson and Defoe - with its emphasis on individualism.

The theme of middle-class gentility is resumed in Fielding's novel Jonathan Wild. In this novel it is not always easy to tell when the author is being ironical in his labelling of people; for the whole structure of the book is built upon irony. However, according to the "Great Mr. Wild" the community is divided into "those that use their own hands, and those who employ the hands of others. The former are the base and rabble; the latter, the genteel part of the creation."<sup>68</sup> Under the first category fall, "the yeoman, the manufacturer, the merchant, and perhaps the gentleman";<sup>69</sup> and under the second fall, "conquerors, absolute princes, statesmen, and prigs."<sup>70</sup> From the first categorization, it is to be understood that the class of gentlemen excludes the other three classes mentioned at the same time. This clearly signifies that the claim of the middle class to gentility is void. But Mr. Wild himself, one might exclaim, is a middle-class man. Mr. Wild the elder, it is clearly stated in the book, was a tradesman in good business'; but due to his extravagance and gaming he was reduced to a much lower economic status. This dilemma can only be avoided by accepting the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.601.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Fielding, Jonathan Wild; The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon (London : Dent, 1964), pp. 41-42.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.42.

ironical situation, that one becomes a gentleman the moment one stops being a tradesman or a merchant. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Mr. Blueskin becomes a gentleman after resolving to quit the mercantile profession, which seemed to him too tedious, in order to join Mr. Wild's gang of "top-hatted" gentlemen. Jonathan Wild, however, is an exception among Fielding's novels in that it explicitly insists on a gentleman's usefulness as a member of society. The gentleman thus deserves respect in recognition of his merit. Fielding, like Jane Austen, recognized the necessity of a profession for a gentleman; for, this diverts his attention away from harmful pursuits. This is clearly implied in the fact that Mr. Wild's gang was mainly :

composed of undone gamesters, ruined bailiffs, broken tradesmen, idle apprentices, attorney's clerks, and loose and disorderly youths, who, being born to no future, nor bred to any trade or profession, were willing to live luxuriously without labour. 71

This passage is a crucial pointer to the disadvantage of having no profession or useful career. Fielding's representation of modern town gentlemen in Jonathan Wild and elsewhere as devoid of morals and principles is an indication of his unwavering belief that morals are central to the concept of the gentleman. Fielding, to do him justice, allows that lack of morals is not uncommon among the older generations of a genteel stock, especially when they are town dwellers. Notwithstanding, Fielding's dwelling so lovingly on the "game" in his novels, his ridicule of some professions, his preference for private rather than public education, his insistence on knowledge of the world rather than knowledge of books, and his remarks concerning deference to one's social "betters", all point to his adherence to the traditions and beliefs of the old system. This is another way of saying that Fielding's concept of the gentleman, in its different aspects, leans entirely towards the old-established order. This can be illustrated by referring to a few aristocratic traditions

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p.64.

that are found almost intact in his books.

Of prime importance is Fielding's belief in inherent disposition; a thing which is clearly reflected in Fielding's delineation of both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. According to Fielding, gentlemanly qualities, such as good-nature or benevolence, are acquired hereditarily. Critics have often argued that, according to Fielding, "a lady or a gentleman must 'deserve that name' on grounds more socially relevant than those of dress, wealth, or even gentle birth."<sup>72</sup> To maintain this view one must, surely, give Fielding more credit than he deserves. One must agree with Hatfield that the heroes of both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones have to earn their own way to the title of "gentleman", but this is dependent upon their being born into gentility. Gentility, like "good-nature", is almost always subordinated to birth and heredity, and examples of this are plentiful in Fielding's books. In Tom Jones, for instance, Northerton, whom Fielding seems anxious to exclude from the "honourable" body of army officers, is discarded for having "neither the Birth nor Education of a Gentleman, nor was a proper Person to be enrolled among the Number of such."<sup>73</sup> Thus, birth forms an essential part of the author's concept of gentility. Without birth it becomes uncertain whether a man belongs to the lower or upper echelons of society, and class barriers become less rigid. As a clear indication of Fielding's acceptance of a class-structured society, "birth" and "blood" serve in his novels as a means of checking the crossing of class barriers while, at the same time, setting limits on social interrelations on the widest scale. The fact that the hero of Tom Jones is finally united with his old aristocratic circle is clearly no coincidence, but rather the consequence of a subtly-woven plot; a plot that is greatly influenced by Jones' dubious birth.

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<sup>72</sup>Hatfield, op. cit., p.120.

<sup>73</sup>Fielding, Tom Jones, p.398.

As Ian Watt aptly observes :

The ultimate task of Fielding's plot therefore is to unite the lovers without subverting the basis of the social order; and this can only be done by revealing that Mr. Jones, though illegitimate, is genteel. 74

However, the notions of birth and heredity are closely connected, in Fielding's novels, with the idea of private education. Although Fielding does not seem to believe that formal education is necessary for a gentleman; he, nevertheless, seems to insist that private education is to be preferred to public education. For this reason, public schools in Joseph Andrews are described as "the nurseries of all vice and immorality."<sup>75</sup> Parson Adams' main objection to public schools, in Joseph Andrews, is based on the assumption that they neglect the boys' morals. In Tom Jones, Squire Allworthy holds the same sentiments as Parson Adams in Fielding's first novel. Having realized that a public school was an imperfect institution, and that boys were liable to learn vices in such a place, Allworthy resolved to educate both his nephew, Blifil, and Jones in his own house. For both Parson Adams and Squire Allworthy, the ultimate end of private education is the gentleman's morals and virtues rather than his manners or social "graces". But a morally-sound or a "good-natured" gentleman, Fielding's novels seem to suggest, remains imperfect until he acquires the <sup>t</sup>virtue of prudence. By prudence is meant no less than a full immersion in worldly affairs, or what might be described as an education in the world of experience. For Fielding, human perfection, or what might be termed "real greatness", "is the union of a good heart with a good head."<sup>76</sup> Thus, in presenting Tom Jones' maturation, as an American scholar has put it :

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<sup>74</sup>Watt, op. cit., p.282.

<sup>75</sup>Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p.194.

<sup>76</sup>Henry Fielding, The Complete Works (Frank Cass, 1967), Vol. XIV, p.259.

Fielding amplifies his early theoretical notions of inherited good nature and social breeding by insisting that the moral virtue of prudence is necessary in order to govern the gentleman's rational faculties. 77

Pedantry in Fielding's novels receives as much criticism and ridicule as any other moral or social vice. Thus Mr. Partridge in Tom Jones was denied the title of "gentleman" for speaking Latin to a lady, and was further abused with the name of "a great scholar" by the lady in question. Latin, to Fielding, formed an integral part of a gentleman's education without which he remained imperfect. Nevertheless, when spoken in female company it was considered a great affront to their dignity and understanding. In Fielding's last novel, Amelia, a schoolmaster is unjustly abused and called a most consummate "blockhead" because he had never "travelled" through the Latin grammar.

In Fielding's novels, the Grand Tour completed a gentleman's education. It consisted in furnishing the gentleman with worldly knowledge as well as in providing him with a good opportunity to make comparisons between the manners of his own and other countries. Occasionally, Fielding, like Richardson, is anxious to point out the disadvantages of travel, especially when they are reflected in the gentleman's attitude to his country. In Joseph Andrews, for example, a gentleman is said to have :

... returned home well furnished with French clothes, phrases, and servants, with a hearty contempt for his own country; especially what had any savour of the plain spirit and honesty of our ancestors. 78

A travelled gentleman is, more often than not, preferred to "a sneaking fellow", who has been bred at a University. Knowledge of the world, however, can also be acquired through "conversation" which Fielding considers :

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<sup>77</sup>David J. Burt, Henry Fielding's Attitudes Towards the Eighteenth Century Gentleman (Ph. D. thesis, University of Kentucky, 1972), p.161.

<sup>78</sup>Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p.206.

So necessary ..... to the understanding the Characters of Men, that none are more ignorant of them than those learned Pedants whose Lives have been entirely consumed in Colleges and among Books." 79

Fielding's gravitation towards the old concept of gentility is further illustrated in his obsession with the "Game". Fielding was clearly in favour of preservers of the "Game". The novelist's purpose in writing of Tom Jones' sportsmanship was certainly to display the manliness and graceful bearing of his hero's inherent gentility. For, hunting and riding in Tom Jones are identified with the rural gentry of English society. Riding and hunting, needless to say, were the traditional recreations of the landed classes. It would hardly seem an exaggeration to emphasize here that gentility was measured by a man's proficiency in the art of hunting and "Horse-talk". The following extract from a conversation in Tom Jones helps to illustrate this point :

'Yes', answered the Husband, 'we have cracked a Bottle together, and a very Gentleman-like Man he (Tom Jones) is, and hath a very pretty Notion of Horse-flesh.. Indeed he is young, and hath not seen much of the World : For I believe he hath been at very few Horse races.' 'O ho! he is one of your Order, is he?' replies the Landlady; 'he must be a Gentleman to be sure, if he is a Horse-racer. The Devil fetch such Gentry; I am sure I wish I had never seen any of them.' 80

By virtue of his being an excellent sportsman, Jones was often flattered by the name "Squire Tom" -- bestowed on him by Squire Western, the greatest patron of sport in English fiction. Having mentioned this patron, I deem it necessary to add here that Squire Western's country world was dominated by dogs, horses, cock-fighting, and all the other time-consuming vices of the landed gentry. These pastimes cannot be doubted to have played a leading role in everyday genteel conversation. In Tom Jones, "Dog language" and "Horse language" are applied by Squire Western to almost everything that falls within his scope. Though Squire Western

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<sup>79</sup>Fielding, Tom Jones, p.373.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p.326.

was something of a politician and had been twice a candidate in the country interest at an election, his politics consisted mainly in venting angry remarks upon Tom's "poaching" after his daughter Sophia, and in his mastery of the language of the "hunt". As is reported in the novel,

The squire sent after his Sister the same 'Holla' which attends the Departure of a Hare, when she is first started before the Hounds. He was indeed a great Master of his Kind of Vociferation, and had a Holla proper for most Occasions in Life. 81

Contrary to what some critics believe, Squire Western is far from being "the most barbarous of all barbarous insects". 82 This, of course, does not mean that he is without faults. His greatest defect is that he loves his dogs more than his fellow-men.

It remains to add a few words on Fielding's attitude towards "money", "titles", and the "externals" of gentility.

In An Essay on Conversation, the novelist observes :

Men are superior to each other in this our country by title, by birth, by rank in profession, and by age; very little, if any, being to be allowed to fortune though so much is generally exacted by it, and commonly paid to it. 83

Throughout the Essay on Conversation, Fielding allows that due respect should be paid to "titles" and "birth"; but rarely, if ever, to money or "fortune". Yet, in Joseph Andrews, this distinction between titles and birth, on the one hand, and "fortune", on the other, is quite blurred and clouded, particularly when Lady Booby is made to exclaim :

'... We must prefer birth, title, and fortune, to real merit. It is a tyranny of custom, a tyranny we must comply with : for we people of fashion are the slaves of custom.' 84

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.255.

<sup>82</sup> M.P. Willcocks, A True-Born Englishman : Being the Life of Henry Fielding (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1947), p.34.

<sup>83</sup> Fielding, The Complete Works, Vol. XIV, pp. 257-258.

<sup>84</sup> Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p.253.

Fielding, too, may trace the preference of "birth, title, and fortune, to real merit", to custom and old inherited traditions; but it is doubtful that he is prepared to renounce the claims of titles or birth to the label of gentility. The fact that Fielding was no 'leveller' makes it difficult for one to be sure of where he stood on such matters as titles, or rank, or even gentility. However, Fielding's concern with the external symbols of gentility takes different forms in his novels. Thus, a scar on a gentleman's face denotes valour.. Also, in Tom Jones, the hero is said to have the skin of a gentleman, a feature which must be attributed to his being 'a born gentleman'. In Joseph Andrews, likewise, the reader becomes aware of Joseph's birth into gentility quite early in the novel through Betty who tells the company at the "inn" that she believed Joseph "was a gentleman, for she never saw a finer skin in her life."<sup>85</sup> In Amelia, a great conflict arose between the neighbouring "little squires" and the rising farmer Booth upon his purchase of a coach. The following remarks, of Captain Booth, on the conflict provide a fitting conclusion :

The neighbouring little squires ... were uneasy to see a poor renter become their equal in a matter in which they placed so much dignity ... they began to hate me ... and to turn my equipage into ridicule, asserting that my horses, which were as well matched as any in the Kingdom, were of different colours and sizes, with much more of that kind of wit, the only basis of which is lying. <sup>86</sup>

Booth's acquisition of the coach, it should be added, is a clear sign of his vanity and prodigality.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>86</sup> Henry Fielding, The Complete Works (Frank Cass, 1967), Vol. VI , p.169.

CHAPTER 2JANE AUSTEN

Despite the fact that they deal with a narrow range of social activities, Jane Austen's novels reflect in many ways the English social system at the turn of the eighteenth century. The questions of class and culture in Miss Austen's fiction are intimately correlated; a fact which renders any attempt at extricating them fairly difficult. Also, the impression one gathers from the novelist's books is that there were at least two distinctive cultures at war with each other instead of there being a single aristocratic one. Yet, culture, in its widest sense, was still the sole property of the traditional ruling classes, the nobility and gentry. Of the major components of the prevalent culture one observes in Jane Austen's world, manners seem to have played a leading role in deciding one's class or social superiority. It is largely through manners that Miss Austen works out the question of social worth. Though the characters created by Jane Austen may adopt different attitudes towards religion, morality or art - as manifested in personal acquirements - they all seem to meet in their view that manners are a good, if not the best, index to a person's social importance. Unlike elegance, which 'refers to the more superficial aspects of social convention', manners - as a component part of the culture Jane Austen portrays - is characterized by a significant duality

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of meaning. Thus manners may refer either to a socially acceptable code of behaviour or to a morally acceptable code of conduct. Of course, manners may sometimes have the negative effect of leading people into a wrong estimation of a man or a woman's moral value. Often enough in the writer's books, people tend to overestimate a gentleman's moral worth just because he happens to possess refined manners, while they undervalue another's on the basis of his 'rough' or 'raw' manners.

However, manners rather than morals form the cornerstone of Jane Austen's Concept of Gentility. To possess elegant and refined manners not only guarantees your admission into the polite circles of High Society but also secures you the precious title of 'gentleman' or 'lady'. Without pleasing and attractive manners a man's claim to the title of 'gentleman' remains rather doubtful, if not void. Different criteria are applied to those who may have any claim to the title on a moral basis. But to be a lady or a gentleman in the moral sense, it should be pointed out, does by no means guarantee 'high' society's recognition of your character as such; that is, as a lady or a gentleman in the established sense. For, a man might be the incarnation of all the moral connotations of the term gentleman, and yet not be able to gain admission into the assuringly cultured circles of society. This, it is hardly necessary to say, was the case with Robert Martin <sup>in</sup> Emma. Also, and of equal significance, a well-bred woman may occasionally find it easy to achieve her entrance into the charmed circles of polite society, and yet not be able to effect her material entrance into the upper strata of society. In other words, a person in possession of frank and affectionate manners may be allowed to mix freely with people from higher social strata than she or he is entitled to by virtue of her or his belonging to a lower social group, and yet find it almost impossible to achieve a beneficial introduction. This is clearly

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Nardin, Those Elegant Decorums : The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1973), p.12.

manifested in Emma again where Miss Harriet Smith, whose good-nature fits her for better things, is denied the pleasure of a higher social and material status and where her entrance is checked in due time to make way for the conventional attachment of the two social equals, Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. Here it may be commented that Jane Austen's essential disqualification as a humane writer was her want of sympathetic imagination and, at the same time, her excess of conventionality. This can easily be seen to be reflected in her treatment of love and marriage in the novels, particularly in Emma. All that Emma Woodhouse says in praise of Miss Harriet Smith's affectionate manners and simplicity of heart, to give only a single example at this stage, turns out to be empty slogans. The reader of this novel is easily trapped into believing that gentleness of heart is more important to the spirit of the community than gentility of birth or wealth. Miss Austen's nourished concept of gentility of heart in Emma turns out to be an impoverished notion, and this is due to its being reduced in the end to a simple adherence to the conventions of the established order. Besides, Emma's and hence Jane Austen's intolerance towards the bourgeois members of the community portrayed throws a rigid garment of class fixity on the whole society. This, in fact, is much opposed to society's recognition of its worthy members and to its conferment of the title of 'gentleman' or 'lady' on those members on the grounds of individual merit or worth. After all, it might be true, as Wingfield-Stratford has once put it, that "marriage was of the prose of life, love of its poetry - the two things were wholly different, and must be kept apart."<sup>2</sup>

It could be argued here, however, that for Jane Austen the cornerstone of class marriages, if allowed to take place, was mutual understanding based on a correct estimate on the part of one partner of the

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<sup>2</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., p.149.

other's exact material and social status. Finance in Miss Austen's genteel world is no less important than birth, talent and good-breeding. Though some of Jane Austen's heroines might appear to be unconsciously attracted to the old symbol of prestige and gentility, land-ownership, not a few of them are content to capture a 'landless' gentleman with a pleasing address or affectionate manners particularly if accompanied by a reliable source of income. It is quite plausible to argue that "the best fate in store for a Jane Austen heroine was to marry a landed gentleman of wealth, intelligence and goodness of heart, considerably older than herself,"<sup>3</sup> but it would be unfair to Jane Austen to maintain that a heroine like Anne Elliot, in Persuasion, could have made a better match than by accepting the landless Captain Wentworth with his "five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his position as merit and activity could place him."<sup>4</sup> Again, to argue that Jane Austen was more concerned with portraying gentlewomen in her novels than with creating ideal gentlemen is to beg the question. Being pre-eminently the lady's advocate, Miss Austen came to be noticeably more preoccupied with delineating genteel young ladies than with depicting complete or ideal gentlemen. However, her ideal gentlewoman is chiefly modelled after the complete wife who matches - perhaps it is more accurate to say who is meant to be a real match for - her male partner, not only in captivating manners but also in intelligence, sense of propriety and social responsibility. In a word, "Jane Austen's world is a woman's world, and the male characters are simply symbols of the different fates in store for women."<sup>5</sup>

In any case, at the bottom of the class-inflexibility that underlies Jane Austen's world of gentility and which throws an unpleasant lustre

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<sup>3</sup>David Daiches, "Jane Austen, Karl Marx, and the Aristocratic Dance", American Scholar (Vol. 17, 1948), p.293.

<sup>4</sup>Jane Austen, Persuasion (Oxford ; The Clarendon Press, 1948), p.248.

<sup>5</sup>Daiches, op. cit., p.291.

on her assumingly prudent and successful marriages lies the crucial distinction between those who were gentlemen and those who were not. For, to be an acknowledged gentleman in both the social and economic senses means to have easy access to the heart of a Jane Austen favourite heroine. The relevance of the idea of the gentleman to an understanding of class marriages and intermarriages in the novelist's books, thus, is by no means insignificant. Like most of the novelists who preceded and followed her, Miss Austen portrays ladies and gentlemen who reveal the two distinctive aspects of the concept of gentility; namely, the real and the ideal. Taken realistically, the writer's genteel characters are clearly seen to form an integral part of an existing social class and to reflect both its merits and demerits. Ideally speaking, a lady or a gentleman can easily be viewed in the light of a long tradition of moral theorizing and may be taken to reflect a wished-for product that is considerably purified from any class tincture or colouring. Quite often, the real and the ideal are seen to be inextricably interrelated, and thus it would be contrary to common-sense to study them in isolation. The person who best illustrates this is no other than the chivalrous Mr. Knightley in Emma. In the character of Mr. Knightley, the real and ideal are blended in a way that renders him both a desirable match for the heroine and a pattern of good-breeding. This, in fact, is another way of saying that he stands for the 'complete gentleman' Jane Austen sets out to demonstrate. As the three elements: blood, talent and wealth seem to co-exist harmoniously in the person of Mr. Knightley, it becomes obvious that the novelist was advocating a semi-aristocratic, semi-bourgeois notion of gentility.

It should be pointed out here, however, that Mr. Knightley is not as complete a gentleman as he appears to be. He, no doubt, passes the test of gentlemanliness set to him from above - by Jane Austen of course - and this he achieves on different grounds. In the first place, he is a landed

proprietor with considerable wealth. Secondly, Mr. Knightley is a born gentleman who enjoys an unquestionably high status in the community of Highbury. Besides, he has many of the gentlemanly attributes which entitle him to our highest esteem and respect. Mention could be made here of his 'gentleness of heart' and also his considerateness of other people's feelings. Though most, if not all, of these qualities meet in the figure of Mr. Knightley, his humanity suffers a good deal from class limitations. Indeed, there is a strong streak of conventionality which mars his claim to the title of the 'complete gentleman'. Mr. Knightley's attitude towards Miss Harriet Smith towards the end of the novel is striking evidence of this streak. For, through his agency, Miss Smith is made to feel that she is a social inferior, and thus must not expect from her superiors in rank more than she receives, more indeed than conventions can permit them to offer. By aspiring to win Mr. Knightley's heart and eventually his hand, Harriet makes an unforgiveable error in the eyes of judges on genteel matters, at the head of whom comes Miss Emma Woodhouse. It is not insignificant that Emma and Mr. Knightley, being the heads of an established social hierarchy, are naturally brought together in the end by sheer power of convention. Not only that, their union in the end may be said to stand for a wished-for upper-class solidarity against the intrusion of a new kind of culture, represented by the middle-class members depicted in the novel. Through the alliance of Mr. Knightley and Emma, Jane Austen seems to have been trying to re-establish the old aristocracy on a stronger basis than that of mutual interest; that is, of mutual understanding. This kind of understanding, however, does by no means exclude the married couple's full knowledge of each other's economic standing. In fact, there is a latent acknowledgement on each of these characters' side of the other's superiority of manners; a superiority which can easily be seen to be derived from their being members of a solidly-established caste. Being the guardians of long traditions of aristocratic culture, both Mr. Knightley and Emma

Woodhouse feel it their duty to combine their hands in defence of their hereditary prestige. This is achieved, symbolically at least, by joining both their hands and hearts in the end. The union of hands and hearts here symbolizes not only the meeting of similar minds but also the interchange of wealth and estates.

As has been indirectly suggested above, at the centre of the cultural heritage which both Mr. Knightley and Emma may boast of possessing lies that hard-won eighteenth-century legacy, refined manners. Manners towards the end of the eighteenth century became the accepted standard of gentility and civilization. This by no means implies that manners in the Victorian era diminished in value or became less important in social life than they had been towards the turn of the eighteenth century. On the contrary, many Victorians lamented the decline of the aristocracy on the grounds of their noble manners, and pointed out the significant place manners occupy in civilized societies. Matthew Arnold is a good example here. In his article "Equality", for instance, Arnold asserts that; "the power of social life and manners is truly ... one of the great elements in our humanisation.<sup>6</sup> Unless we have cultivated it, we are incomplete." Matthew Arnold's obsession with manners is, needless to say, strongly felt in almost all his writings. To him, noble manners are the twin companion of noble culture. This can clearly be seen in the following extract from his article "Democracy":

I cannot doubt that in the aristocratic virtue, in the intrinsic commanding force of the English upper class, there is a diminution. Relics of a great generation are still, perhaps, to be seen amongst them, surviving examples of noble manners and consummate culture."<sup>7</sup>

The affinity of Matthew Arnold to his predecessor Jane Austen is by no means inconsiderable. In fact, his writings, though written a few decades

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Equality", in R.H. Super, ed., Essays Religious and Mixed (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1972), p.288.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Democracy", in R.H. Super, ed., Democratic Education (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1962), p.15.

later, help to illustrate the kind of culture embodied in Miss Austen's books. Both writers, one perceives, attached great value to manners; and both of them, too, had no hesitation in attributing noble manners to the long traditions of aristocratic culture.

At any rate, despite the irony with which Emma Woodhouse is treated in the novel, her views on crucial matters in the end are clearly given the upper hand. Also, her marriage to the gentleman-hero of the novel is quite obviously a matter of convention rather than of sentiment or love; a convention which takes into consideration a man's importance at all levels -- be they social, economic or even intellectual. In a word, a refined lady with a solid social background like the heroine in Emma could not or must not be satisfied with a less qualified gentleman than Mr. Knightley. The biggest irony in the novel, however, and of which neither Jane Austen nor her critics seem to have been aware, is Mr. Knightley's being plunged into marrying someone who lacks all the subtle refinements of genteel status, and who may simply be described as the antidote of gentility. For Emma neither possesses gentility of heart nor can lay claim to being considerate enough of other people's feelings. In addition, she is far from being 'forebearant of the weaknesses, the failings, and the errors of those whose advantages in life have not been equal to (her) own' -- to use Samuel Smiles' own words. Behind all this, it may be conjectured, lies the power of conventions and the accepted norm from which old-established families find it hard to deviate; and behind this, too, lies the assumption that Jane Austen was more concerned with securing relatively complete gentlemen for her heroines than with securing complete gentlewomen for her gentlemen. Here, by way of resolving Miss Harriet Smith's predicament in the novel, one could argue that this poor daughter of a mere tradesman was the victim of upper-class members whose courtesy and kindness were at odds with their deeply-held set of values. In any case, Harriet Smith is not the only victim in the novel who suffers at the hands of the aristocratic bidders

in the marriage market of Highbury. Mrs. Elton, we all know, was a favourite target for Emma Woodhouse's class snobbery and arrogance. The fact that Emma is noticeably the novelist's darling heroine is no reason why she should not be criticized with respect to the above-mentioned 'upstart of a lady'. It is odd that critics should go on overlooking the savagery and malicious irony with which Mrs. Elton is treated by Emma despite the fact that Jane Austen herself seems to have shared the same feelings, towards the afore-mentioned lady, as her heroine.

When dealing with Mrs. Elton's pretensions to gentility, one ought not to forget that her social background is relatively new and is not much under the influence of the inheritors of the traditions of many generations of aristocratic culture. The disadvantages resulting from Mrs. Elton's thus finding herself surrounded by comparatively genteel families is not to be underestimated. Mrs. Elton's manners are undeniably 'raw' and 'vulgar', but this is obviously because she does not share the advantages which an aristocratic culture confers on its members. One cannot deny the refining influence an old culture may exert on its leisured members. However, and as seen through Emma's eyes, Mrs. Elton is not only vulgar but also immensely lacking in all sense of refinement and inward grace. It could be maintained here that Mrs. Elton was not entirely unaware of her disadvantageous position as a novice among the great. To avoid any metaphorical allusions, I shall simply add that this unfortunate upstart's indecorous behaviour on social occasions may be ascribed to her sense of insecurity and, at the same time, to her desire to impress others with her own significance. This might be rendered easy to understand by citing a very telling observation of Matthew Arnold in one of his later essays; and thus, I quote :

I have often heard it observed that a perfectly natural manner is as rare among Englishwomen of the middle classes as it is general among American women of like condition with them. And so far as the observation is true, the reason of its truth is

doubt is, that the Englishwoman is living in presence of an upper class, ... that is, of a class of women recognized as being the right thing in style and manners, and whom she imagines criticizing her style and manner, finding this or that to be amiss with it, this or that to be vulgar. Hence self-consciousness and constraint in her. 8

It is interesting to compare this with Emma's reaction after her first visit to Mrs. Elton. As the narrator reports :

She did not really like her. She would not be in a hurry to find fault, but she suspected that there was no elegance; - ease, but not elegance. - She was almost sure that for a young woman, a stranger, a bride, there was too much ease. Her person was rather good; her face not unpretty; but neither feature, nor air, nor voice, nor manner, were elegant. Emma thought at least it would turn out so. 9

One is at a loss here while trying to decide whether to ascribe the harsh treatment Mrs. Elton receives in Emma to a flaw in the heroine's character or to a flaw in the writer's own perception of class interrelations. In any case, and while reading Emma, one finds himself strongly drawn into a whirlpool of spiral marriages radiating from and centring around the character of the heroine who can safely be described as a most unsuccessful speculator in the marriage market. Noteworthy, there is a strong bourgeois flavour characterizing most, if not all, of the marriages delineated in the novel. This could be attributed to the fact that class marriages reached a fairly advanced stage in Miss Austen's time. As we come to consider the concept of gentility in its relation to class intermarriages in the novel, the reason behind Emma's prejudice against Mrs. Elton and the bourgeoisie in general becomes obvious. The heroine's antipathy to some prosperous middle-class members can simply be seen to stand in opposition to the social data found in historical records on the period covered by Emma. By way of explanation, one may cite here G.E. Mingay's relevant remark in his recent book The Gentry where it is asserted that :

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Civilization in the United States", in R.H. Super, ed., The Last Word (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1977), p.356

<sup>9</sup> Jane Austen, Emma (London : Oxford University Press, 1960), p.270.

Landed gentry, it is true, freely intermarried with the wealthier merchants and professional families, the superior parsons and prosperous gentleman farmers. 10

As Mingay's remark here seems to suggest, a marriage between a member of the gentry and another from the professional or trading classes was not an uncommon phenomenon in the eighteenth century. Yet, a careful reading of Emma is quite sufficient to shake our belief in the validity of such a supposition. As might be gathered from the pages of this novel, it was held as unpardonable an offence if a member of a genteel profession stooped to pick up for his wife a woman beneath him in social station as it was if he aspired to the hand of a refined lady from a higher rank than his. This clearly sums up the story of the Vicar of Highbury, Mr. Elton. The question of class marriages in Emma is, in fact, much more complicated than it appears at first. The serious complications Jane Austen attaches to cross-class marriages makes it hard for us to reconcile our conclusions on the question of class relations in the authoress' novels with Mingay's above observation. The freedom of which Mingay speaks sometimes with regard to class intermarriages is very limited in Emma, and to a lesser extent in Jane Austen's other books. Somehow, one feels that Miss Austen was merely formulating a prescription for those who were anxious to avoid the inconveniences and headaches which a cross-class marriage might bring. The prescription, of course, was to restrict one's choice of a life partner to one's social milieu as much as possible. Whatever the novelist might have had in mind when dealing with the marriage question, it remains obvious that Miss Austen was neither 'a leveller' nor a keen believer in free interaction between the classes. Fully aware of her own connections with the gentry - the class to which Jane Austen herself belonged, the novelist was rather disposed to perpetuate this class's values and way of

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<sup>10</sup> G.E. Mingay, The Gentry : The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class

(London : Longman, 1976), p.6.

living. This somehow accounts for the fact that most, if not all, of Jane Austen's heroines end up marrying landed gentlemen or members of a genteel profession - be it the Church, the army or the navy. Jane Austen's perspective, thus, reinforces traditional values "by showing the errors that result if one deviates from them."<sup>11</sup> This is the rationale behind the novelist's satirical representation of Mr. Bennet's marriage to his bourgeois wife, in Pride and Prejudice, and behind her subtle criticism of the self-seeking and worldly Mary Crawford in mansfield Park. Also, this is the rationale behind Jane Austen's sustained and scathing, though indirect, attack on Walter Elliot's extreme form of blood-worship in Persuasion. It may be remarked in passing that Jane Austen's opening satirical remarks on the peerage of the Elliots in Persuasion anticipates Dickens' similar attempt at ridiculing old descent and families in Martin Chuzzlewit.

To refer back, however, the first marriage that takes place in Emma and which bears upon the subject of gentility is that of Mr. Weston, whose social and financial background was in trade. The fact that Mr. Weston's marriage receives Emma's blessings should not surprise us in the least; for though he was once engaged in trade he is now "a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable age and pleasant manners."<sup>12</sup> To this it may be added that before he got into trade, a profession which enabled him in due time to secure the purchase of a little estate adjoining Highbury, Mr. Weston served in the armed forces and was, in addition, connected by marriage to the landed family of the Churchills. These last two things alone are enough to raise him to the indisputable rank of 'gentleman'. The desirability of a person like Mr. Weston in Jane Austen's

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Eagleton and David Pierce, Attitudes to Class in the English Novel (London : Thames and Hudson, 1979), p.29.

<sup>12</sup> Austen, Emma, p.6.

world steers from his meeting all the requirements of an accomplished spinster in a cultured society. But differently, Mr. Weston's manner of carrying himself, of walking, of speaking, of being silent, were remarkably gentlemanly, and therefore no woman with any pretension to gentility could be blinded as to his social worth. This, it may be recollected, was Emma's way of representing him to Miss Harriet Smith. Moreover, "Mr. Weston was a native of Highbury and born of a respectable family, which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property."<sup>13</sup> As regards Miss Taylor, his future wife, suffice it to say that she was more of a friend in the Woodhouse family than of a governess. From what has preceded, we may safely conclude that Emma, and hence Jane Austen, could not have thought of a better match for Miss Taylor than the one she contracts with the finished gentlemanly product, Mr. Weston. But had it not been for his warm heart and sweet temper, it may be asserted, Mr. Weston, very likely, would not have been happy or satisfied with 'a woman as portionless' as Miss Taylor. If we take the economic factor into account, as Jane Austen often does with respect to her favourite heroines, we may easily assume that our gentleman in the present case has entered into a most imprudent marriage. The reverse, indeed can be said with reference to Mr. Elton, our next gentlemanly husband.

Seen through the heroine's eyes, Mr. Elton's manners are decidedly superior to Mr. Weston's or even to Mr. Knightley's. As described by Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Elton "is good-humoured, cheerful, obliging, and gentle",<sup>14</sup> Yet he has not the immense financial power to make his advances to a Jane Austen heroine tolerable. For an amateur economist like Emma, Mr. Elton's income would do for a girl like Harriet Smith, but not for one enjoying the prestige of old descent and a large estate like herself. In addition, Mr. Elton was "not of any family that could fairly object to the doubtful birth of Harriet."<sup>15</sup> As it turns out, Mr. Elton is more prudent

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.15

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.34

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.35

than Emma thinks and, at the same time, far less prudent than the experienced Mr. Knightley takes him to be. Undoubtedly, Mr. Knightley's estimate of the Vicar of Highbury is mainly derived from his knowledge of the marriage policies of his society, and no less from some knowledge of himself. Having rightly conjectured that Emma is arranging a match between Miss Smith and Mr. Elton, Mr. Knightley, addressing the heroine, exclaims :

'Depend upon it, Elton will not do, Elton is a very good sort of man, and a very respectable vicar of Highbury, but not at all likely to make an imprudent match. He knows the value of a good income as well as anybody. Elton may talk sentimentally, but he will act rationally.' 16

Oddly enough, Mr. Knightley persists in his belief that if Mr. Elton decides to marry Miss Smith, it would be like throwing himself away. Nevertheless, he does not think in similar terms when it comes to Mr. Martin's taking such a step, despite his regard for this man's character. Perhaps, Mr. Knightley was anxious to maintain the gentlemanly ideal intact, of which the clergy as a professional class formed an integral part; and this is why he could not think of a professional gentleman lowering himself through marriage without regret especially that the gentleman in question was not likely to derive any material benefit from such a connection. As Mr. Martin was not himself of a higher social level than that to which Harriet Smith was thought to belong, Mr. Knightley was most anxious to promote a match between them; and thus he does not seem to have lost any time in pointing out the advantages of such an attachment.

After all, Mr. Elton, following the unexpressed wishes and advice of the best voice of society - Mr. Knightley - did not throw himself away "The story told well; he had not thrown himself away - he had gained a woman of 10,000 l, or thereabouts",<sup>17</sup> to use Miss Austen's own ironical remarks. But what a shock it was to the refined taste of the genteel

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.66.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.181.

members of Highbury when they discovered that Miss Hawkins - the later Mrs. Elton - was not only vulgar and unpolished but also a woman with no name, no blood, no alliance. Had Mrs. Elton been reputed for her refined and elegant manners, it may be conjectured, the genteel conscience of Highbury society would have been greatly eased. But as she did not lay claim to refinement and elegant decorums, Mrs. Elton became the subject of endless criticism and ridicule. As Mr. Knightley confessed to Emma at a later stage :

'Harriet Smith has some first-rate qualities, which Mrs. Elton is totally without. An unpretending, single-minded, artless girl - infinitely to be preferred by any man of sense and taste to such a woman as Mrs. Elton.' 18

Financially speaking, Mr. Elton's marriage was very prudent. Looked at from a cultural viewpoint, as Jane Austen seems to have done, Mr. Elton could not have made a more imprudent match. In spite of Mr. Elton's imprudent marriage, however, the community's respect for his genteel status remains virtually unaffected. In other words, he is still looked up to as a professional gentleman, or someone whose 'gentility' is in danger of being infected with the vulgarizing influence of his wife's materialism. In any case, it is doubtful if the society of Highbury would have been more tolerant of a match between Mr. Elton and Harriet Smith than between him and his present wife. For Harriet turns out to be the daughter of a mere tradesman, while Miss Hawkins is the daughter of a merchant. In a word, Miss Smith is not only less fortunate than Mrs. Elton financially, but also still lower in the social scale than the 'upstart' Mrs. Elton. Apparently, the class of merchants at that time was held in higher esteem by genteel families than the trading class. The following remarks of Miss Austen, written after the discovery of Harriet's parentage, throw some light on this point :

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.331.

Harriet's parentage became known. She proved to be the daughter of a tradesman ... Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for! - It was likely to be untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman; but what a connexion had she been preparing for Mr. Knightley - or for the Churchills - or even for Mr. Elton! - The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth would have been a stain indeed. 19

The passage is too obvious to need any further comment. However, the novelist did not in vain bring together Mr. Elton and the daughter of a merchant; for they clearly belong to almost the same social station. Nor did Jane Austen aimlessly bring together in the end the daughter of a rising tradesman and the rising gentleman-farmer, Robert Martin. Her objective was clearly to narrow the social and hence the cultural gaps between the different strata of society. By thus acting, she seems to have dreamily guaranteed the continuity of the stratified social structure. Now, it remains to add a few remarks on the remaining marriages in the novel.

The first person who suggests himself to our notice here is no other than the gentleman-farmer, Mr. Martin. As seen through Emma's eyes, Robert Martin has neither the air nor the qualifications of a gentleman. In other words, he lacks that inward grace, that innate sense of gentility, which spreads a certain radiance on a gentleman's manners and, at the same time, he has not received the education of a gentleman. As the heroine tells Mr. Knightley one day; "Nothing but a gentleman in education and manner has any chance with Harriet."<sup>20</sup> Looked at from a different perspective, "Robert Martin's manners have sense, sincerity, and good-humour to recommend them; and his mind has more true gentility than Harriet Smith could understand."<sup>21</sup> The contrast between Emma's view of Robert Martin's character and that of Mr. Knightley, just quoted, is, more or less, a contrast between manners and morals. There is little doubt that

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 81-82.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

Emma's concept of a gentleman is a chiefly Chesterfieldian one where the emphasis is placed on polish and outward appearances. Mr. Knightley's, on the other hand, is clearly opposed to Emma's in the sense that it focuses on man's moral worth. Though Emma seems occasionally to indulge herself in moments of ecstatic tenderness and warmth of heart - as, for instance, when she exclaims that "there is no charm equal to tenderness of heart ... Warmth and tenderness of heart, with an affectionate, open manner, will beat all the clearness of head in the world, for attraction"<sup>22</sup> - she remains basically a conventional kind of lady whose mind is wholly occupied with hereditary distinctions and the subordinate art of refinement and elegant decorums. This underlies her dismissal of the Yeoman class, represented by Robert Martin, as below, and equally as above, her notice. Being a leisured-class member, Emma is blind to the fact that the yeomanry are a productive force in society, and therefore have not much leisure time to enable them to cultivate genteel habits or gentlemanly manners. This, of course, makes members of this class below her notice. At the same time, and as might easily be gathered from Emma's first conversation with Miss Smith, the yeomanry are a better-off class and this makes them above the heroine's notice; for she realizes that <sup>she</sup> cannot assume the role of Lady Bountiful with its members. Unlike Emma, however, Mr. Knightley - being associated with land in a productive manner - is quite capable of realizing the true value of a rising farmer. Hence comes his praise of Mr. Martin's intelligence and his high estimate of the farmer's social worth. Mr. Knightley, it should be remembered, rarely forgets to take into account the economic factor when judging people's characters. To him, it may be asserted here, a man's moral and, consequently, social worth is greatly determined by his economic or financial status. To be a respectable member of society, you ought, in the first place, to have enough money to live on respectably. Money, thus, is an essential pre-

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

requisite of being a gentleman. The similarity between Jane Austen and Daniel Defoe, in this respect, is quite obvious.

A word must be added here concerning Harriet Smith's view on her future husband's gentility. In the first dialogue between Emma Woodhouse and Miss Smith the latter, despite her realization that Mr. Martin is not so genteel as real gentlemen, persists in her belief that her lover is a gentleman. Here, the question of cultural differences arises. According to Harriet Smith's cultural standards which, it should not be forgotten, have their basis in trade - Mr. Martin's manners are as pleasing as could be expected. But when she comes into contact with a representative of a higher culture (than her own) she is forced into modifying her views and finds it necessary to adjust herself to what are to her new, though socially very old, standards. However, it is rather odd that Emma should go on believing that Miss Smith is a gentleman's daughter despite the fact that the latter betrays considerable amount of naivety concerning the idea of a refined or aristocratic gentleman. One is at a loss when trying to decide whether to ascribe this to Emma's stubbornness or to her ignorance of the fact that there are different cultures under the banner of the predominantly aristocratic one. Put differently, Harriet Smith, though praised and seemingly beloved by all the genteel members of Highbury, finds herself in the end literally thrown into the arms of her initially-rejected lover, Robert Martin. The reason is quite simple : Harriet is a social inferior and therefore must not trespass on the territory of the 'great'. No matter how refined and elegant her manners become, she is still looked at as the poor daughter of a tradesman. It is obvious that Emma's initial objection to a match between Robert Martin and Miss Smith was based on her mistaken belief that the latter's rank in society was far superior to his. This explains her relenting towards Mr. Martin when Harriet Smith's parentage became known; for she was convinced then that Robert Martin is Miss Smith's equal, if not superior. This leaves us with little room to comment briefly on the marriage of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax.

In the writer's delineation of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax one detects a mind that is almost entirely occupied with manners and studied behaviour. The marriage of Mr. Churchill and Jane Fairfax may be said to reflect a major aspect of the aristocratic culture about which Miss Austen was undecided - in this novel at least - that is, manners that are considerably divorced from morals. There is little doubt that Mr. Churchill in Emma represents the widely-known Chesterfieldian type of gentleman. For, underneath his captivating qualities, one discovers, lurked the hypocritical Chesterfieldian gentleman whose major objective behind cultivating himself was to get on in life. Unlike the prudish Mr. Knightley, Frank Churchill has much charm to recommend him to the notice of a young inexperienced heroine. His interest in pleasant rural rides, in art, in balls and dancing was not lacking; a thing which goes a long way towards winning a young lady's heart. Though it might be quite valid to say that Jane Austen was trying her hand at creating the well-known eighteenth-century gentleman-rake in the figure of Frank Churchill, this gentleman, nevertheless, appears a fairly more tolerable rake than his predecessor Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility or even his fictional ancestor Lovelace in Richardson's Clarissa. The reason is not hard to guess : Jane Austen's feminine mind, it can be argued, could not be hardened against a highly accomplished and charming gentleman like Frank Churchill; this is partly because of her great respect for elegance and refinement, but chiefly because refined manners were a distinctive feature of the culture she highly esteemed. Two significant, though seemingly trivial, things in the novel may be cited here to illustrate the predominantly feminine point of view Miss Austen adopts. The first is related to Emma's difference with Mr. Knightley on the subject of Mr. Churchill's handwriting :

'Mr. Frank Churchill (says Emma) writes one of the best gentlemen's hands I ever saw.'

'I do not admire it,' said Mr. Knightley. 'It is too small-

wants strength. It is like a woman's writing.' 23

Despite Emma's and also Mrs. Weston's vindication of Mr. Churchill's style, Mr. Knightley would not give in and persists in his ungentlemanly opposition to his female contenders. This, of course, can easily be seen to be due to Mr. Knightley's jealousy of his rival Frank Churchill, and also to his sense of deficiency in respect of genteel refinements. The other incident or thing referred to above, relates to Emma's jealousy now rather than to Mr. Knightley's. This concerns Miss Woodhouse's instinctive dislike and avoidance of the accomplished Jane Fairfax :

Why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer; Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself; and though the accusation had been eagerly refuted at the time, there were moments of self-examination in which her conscience could not quite acquit her. 24

Thus commented Jane Austen. Viewed objectively, Emma's dislike of Miss Fairfax is a most irrational act; yet, the heroine's jealousy of this newcomer into Highbury can easily be accounted for. Everything considered, Jane Fairfax is Emma's superior in every respect, but wealth; and this is quite sufficient to stir the heroine's deepest recesses of envy and dislike. Miss Austen's description of Jane Fairfax's social and intellectual background testifies to the truthfulness of such an observation; I quote :

Living constantly with right-minded and well-informed people, her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture; and Col. Campbell's residence being in London, every lighter talent had been done full justice to, by the attendance of first-rate masters. 25

Though Jane Austen may at times seem to be very hostile to London society, she, nevertheless, could not help paying a tribute to the kind

<sup>23</sup>Austen, *Emma*, p.297.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.166.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.164.

of culture it fostered. The novelist's turning her back, in her writings, on the corrupt morality of London is moderated by the fact of her glancing admiringly at the kind of culture and the refined manners such a society was capable of producing. However, from the events circling around George Knightley and Emma Woodhouse, on the one hand, and Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, on the other, it may safely be concluded that the first couple's relative antipathy to the second derives mainly from a sense of inferiority and, at the same time, from the fear of being imposed upon by members of a higher culture. In Emma's initial attraction to and flirtation with Frank Churchill and her subsequent repulsion one feels that there was a kind of 'scur-grapism' involved. The refined and cultivated gentleman, Mr. Churchill, is finally dismissed from the heroine's mind and heart on the basis of his unsuitability or defective morality. No doubt, Emma finds great consolation in the end in the fact that she is not left out in the marriage market. Her marriage to the dignified and wealthy, though uninteresting, gentleman Mr. Knightley is clearly a matter of expediency rather than of heart-felt inclination. Perhaps it is more accurate to state that their union is more conventional than otherwise. It is not insignificant that Emma could not forgive Frank Churchill so readily for flirting with her, particularly after his secret engagement to Miss Fairfax had been revealed; and that her consenting to marry Mr. Knightley, the only eligible gentleman left in the marriage market of Highbury, came at a time when she was being haunted by the fear that soon he would marry the familyless Harriet Smith.

I have tried, in my brief analysis of Emma, to demonstrate in concrete, though sometimes only indirect, terms how the structure of Miss Austen's social portrayal is undermined by her social group's values

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<sup>26</sup> See in particular Mansfield Park, where London is presented as a vulgar and acquisitive environment and also as a centre of moral and social instability.

and standards. Having learnt her standards in a parsonage, and having mixed on equal terms with members of the landed classes, Jane Austen could not help looking at life from the point of view of the ruling class. If one were to attempt to describe the attitude Miss Austen adopted towards class and social issues one would have to say that it was both partial and complacent. That much of the social criticism in the novelist's books is not that of a cool, detached, impersonal observer, few of us

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can doubt. Jane Austen, to be sure, was not without her prejudices and complacencies. For, in Emma, as elsewhere, the writer's handling of social phenomena is clearly marred by her not-often-subtly-disguised partiality for or against existing social norms. This is mostly felt in her attitude towards the marriage policies of her society, on the one hand; and in her condescending, and often unsympathetic delineation of the bourgeoisie, on the other. Having said this, I deem it necessary here to comment briefly on the novelist's attitude towards bourgeois gentility in general.

In Jane Austen's novels representatives of the bourgeoisie are tolerated as long as they do not offer any threats to the stability of the old-established social orders, the nobility and gentry. All goes well, Miss Austen seems to suggest, as long as you do not act counter to old landed families' wishes and beliefs, and so long as you do not live pompously or obtrusively. The assimilation of members of the middle classes into the old-established order is easily achieved provided that they accept, and eventually adopt, the landed classes' conventions and ideals. The Gardiners in Pride and Prejudice, and the Coles in Emma are outstanding examples in this respect; and, I hasten to add, Fanny Price in Mansfield Park. Commenting on the Coles, the novelist observes :

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<sup>27</sup>D.J. Greene, "Jane Austen and the Peerage", Publications of the Modern Language Association (Vol. 68, No. 5, December 1953), p.1028.

The Coles had been settled some years in Highbury, and were very good sort of people - friendly, liberal, and unpretending; but, on the other hand, they were of low origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel. On their first coming into the country, they had lived in proportion to their income, quietly, keeping little company, and that little unexpensively; but the last year or two had brought them a considerable increase of means ... with their wealth, their views increased; their want of a larger house, their inclination for more company. They added to their house, to their number of servants, to their expenses of every sort; and by this time were, in fortune and style of living, second only to the family at Hartfield. 28

Jane Austen's attitude to the Coles in *Emma*, and to tradespeople in general, was not that of simple acceptance. It is true that the Coles' claim to stand on an equal footing with the best families in Highbury is fully acknowledged in the novel, though not quite so by *Emma*; and that they are well treated by Jane Austen, "but all the time it is clear that they are so because they keep their place."<sup>29</sup> However, in their pursuit of gentility and luxurious ease, the bourgeoisie in Jane Austen's world seem to have found it easier to achieve their objective through marriage than through the ownership of land. The best course of action a middle-class heroine should take in order to be assimilated into the landed classes, *Mansfield Park* seems to suggest, would be through adapting herself to landed families' traditions and assumptions. This naturally entails a good deal of respect for the kind of culture embraced by old landed families. In this way, *Mansfield Park* can be seen as a study of adaptation rather than as a detailed analysis of the ways in which the *Status quo* was being maintained. When brought to live at Mansfield Park, Fanny was only a ten-year-old child; and, thus, she could hardly be described as the embodiment of a rival ideology - namely, that of the bourgeois - threatening the moral and social authority of the landed gentry. Despite her lower-middle-class origin, Fanny, having spent a few years at Mansfield Park, comes to hold opinions and views which seem more

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<sup>28</sup> Austen, *Emma*, p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> T.B. Tomlinson, *The English Middle-Class Novel* (London : The Macmillan Press, 1976), p. 32.

genteel than those normally held by the gentry class. In the novel, it is the genteel world of rural conservatism that helps to shape the heroine's moral values and standards rather than the city-Portsmouth -- where her original home is. Befriended and taught by her cousin Edmund Bertram, who truly represents the solid virtues of the Established Church, the heroine develops a kind of consciousness which fully accords with the class consciousness of the landed gentry rather than with that of the bourgeoisie. When Fanny visits her family in Portsmouth, she is seen dismayed by the vulgarity and indecorum of their lives. This is quite significant in view of the fact that she is a member of the bourgeoisie. Here, I am inclined to disagree with critics who insist that the middle classes were important to Jane Austen "because she realized that they had developed an alternative bourgeois ethic that posed a serious threat to the moral authority of the landed classes."<sup>30</sup> The reverse, in fact, may be said to be true. For, in their quest for improved status, bourgeois characters in Jane Austen's novels seem to be more willing to adapt themselves to the landed classes' traditions and values than they are to challenge them. In Mansfield Park, to give only a single example, it is through her complacency and acquiescence<sup>see</sup> in the social structure of rural England that Fanny Price secures the social status which she comes to occupy in the end. Fanny's marriage to the baronet's son, Edmund Bertram, is simply a proof of the gentry's ability to absorb and accommodate newcomers from the lower ranks of society. The Bertrams' willingness to receive the heroine into their fold, it should be emphasized, is not so much due to their recognition of her merits as much as it is due to her respecting their rank and adopting their manners and values. There is much truth in what Lionel Trilling says about Fanny, particularly his

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<sup>30</sup>David Monaghan, Jane Austen : Structure and Social Vision (London : The Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 6.

assertion that "the shade of Pamela hovers over her career."<sup>31</sup> Virtuous though Fanny might appear, it is not - one suspects - for virtue's sake that she puts herself out of the way; but for marriage, the goal of all ambitious and respectable middle-class girls. Summarily, Jane Austen's interest in and emphasis on the bourgeoisie may simply be said to have been sharpened and accelerated not only by her unique interest in class stratification and distinctions but also by her unique attraction to the absurd. This is most exemplified in the novelist's amused attitude towards the 'genteel' ladies of Netherfield who, though by origin middle-class themselves "would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well bred and agreeable "<sup>32</sup> as Mr. Gardiner. However, though Jane Austen might appear to be biassed in favour of the landed gentry, her critical analysis of the other classes - the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie - is by no means insignificant. Her achievement as a social critic lies chiefly in her reporting of minute details which serve to illustrate the changing social structure of English society at the turn of the eighteenth century. It should be pointed out here, however, that Miss Austen's social criticism and commentary was engrafted upon the gentlemanly ideal she nourished in a way which made the two things seem inseparable. But the ideal was in no way a middle-class one. Throughout her writings, the novelist seems to have been striving to reach a redefinition of the gentleman which would extricate it from the outmoded aristocratic trappings and which would seem acceptable to the rising middle class. This is evidenced and exemplified in her growing belief - particularly in her last novel, Persuasion - in the deceptiveness of manners and the danger

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<sup>31</sup>Lionel Trilling, The Opposing Self, Nine Essays in Criticism (Secker and Warburg, 1955), p. 212.

<sup>32</sup>Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 139.

of judging people from what they appear to be in 'Society'; and, at the same time, in her insistence on the necessity of a profession or a useful pursuit which safeguards the gentleman against falling into dissipation and uselessness in the social sense. The novelist's books are abundant in evidence of the significant role occupations could play in shaping a gentleman's social behaviour and responsible actions. To conclude briefly, the important place Jane Austen's novels occupy in English fiction is due to the fact that they not only reflect a crucial stage in the process of the middle classes' adoption of the aristocratic ideal of gentility but also anticipate many of the class and social issues the Victorian novelists dealt with. It is hardly an exaggeration to assert that the "'Evangelicals' reformation-of-manners campaign"<sup>33</sup> was adumbrated by the publication of Miss Austen's novels, Mansfield Park and Persuasion. This is clearly implied in the novelist's subtle criticism of Sir Thomas Bertram's way of bringing up his daughters :

They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments - the authorized object of their youth - could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility .....<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York and London : W.W. Norton, 1973), p. 183.

<sup>34</sup>Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (London : Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 463.

### CHAPTER 3

#### CHARLES DICKENS

As a finishing touch to his last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend, Dickens, significantly enough, winds up the discussion held at the Veneerings's by allowing the gentlemanly Twemlow to voice Society's right judgement on the question of the upper-middle-class Eugene Wrayburn's marriage to the working-class girl Lizzie Hexam :

'I say', resumed Twemlow, 'if such feelings (of gratitude, respect, admiration, and affection) on the part of this gentleman induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say that when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man.' <sup>1</sup>

This passage from Our Mutual Friend highlights Dickens' adopted version of the concept of <sup>a</sup>gentleman. It depicts very precisely one of the constitutions which he laboured, throughout his novels, to restore, if not perfect. Through the haze of the various types of aristocracy - whether of birth, of talent, or of wealth - which not only dominated the social

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1952), pp. 819-20.

scene of Victorian England but also helped standardize the gentlemanly ideal Dickens came out with a brand-new ideal defined by feelings and derived from what may be termed Aristocracy of Heart. The author's creation of a different and well-adapted - to the Victorian standards of morality - kind of gentleman can easily be said to have resulted from his life-long struggle with the 'dark forces' of gentility that wreaked their damage on his tender feelings, while still a youthful boy. What Dickens created, or at least perfected, was neither an effect of a flash of genius nor the outcome of a moment of true insight. Rather, it was the product of years of inward struggle and spontaneous reflection on those forces. The novelist's concept of gentility underwent constant revision and revaluation. In other words, the new product was regularly subjected to a purifying process until it came in the end to be purged of much of its class tincture and rid of what clung to it from past generations. It should be pointed out here, however, that though Dickens could gesture towards an emotional force that transcends class and class-barriers, as is exemplified in the cross-class marriage of Eugene Wrayburn to the factory-girl Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend, his attitude towards working-class aspirants to social status in general was often influenced and unfavourably coloured by the outlook of the commercial middle class to which he belonged. Dickens' condescension and paternalism towards some lower-class characters, in his novels, despite the fact of their possessing that 'nobleness of heart' which he raised above all things, attests his deeply-ingrained prejudice in favour of his social milieu. For that matter, the conflict between the gentlemanly values and notions inculcated in his youthful mind and the harsh lessons of bourgeois reality which he was forced to learn later cannot be denied to have left a lasting negative effect on his 'emotional outlook' or 'philosophy'. This somehow accounts for the inconsistencies that are easily detected in his theory of an immaculate nobility of heart. I shall further discuss this point

when I come to look more closely at the concept in the novels themselves.

The best thing one could do to start this brief analysis of the novelist's concept of gentility is to define the gentleman as ideally seen through Dickens' own eyes. In his Little Dorrit, to begin with, Dickens envisages his ideal gentleman to be an honest, gentle, generous and wise person. To possess all those qualities and to exercise them in the most graceful outward manner are considered sufficient proofs of a man's high quality. A gentleman's actions, thus, are guided by a high sense of moral responsibility towards his fellow-beings, regardless of their class or station rather than by any importance that might be attached to his birth, manners, or social status - economic or otherwise. According to the author, a gentleman is characterized by a genuine love for others and also by a disinterested concern about their well-being. His most distinctive traits are truly reflected in Dickens' alter-ego, Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit, who is described in the following terms :

He was ... a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without ... a man of honourable mind and open hand...Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.     2

As might easily be deduced from the above-enumerated qualities, Dickens' concept of gentility is an internalized process of analysis that attaches little value, if any, to men's exteriors. The emphasis of this concept is chiefly laid on man's emotions and better feelings which find a true embodiment in his transactions and dealings with others. What Pip, in Great Expectations, learns from Herbert Pocket is that "no man who was

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1953), p.165.

not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true  
gentleman in manner."<sup>3</sup>

At this early stage of my analysis of Dickens' treatment of the theme of gentility, I deem it necessary to observe that some critics, in their eagerness to do the author justice and, at the same time, to defend him against the traditional charge made on behalf of his inability to portray a gentleman properly, carried their arguments so far as to emphasize certain points which does the author more harm than justice. In her article "Twemlow : Knight of the Simple Heart", to give only a single example, Mary L. Pendered<sup>4</sup> gives a false colour to her argument when she concludes her study of Twemlow's character by asserting that Twemlow's "Blood is up, the blood of a true aristocrat." One wonders whether the writer of such an article's blood was up by the time she approached her conclusion or whether she was simply carried away by her enthusiasm to do justice. The writer's reference to Twemlow's aristocratic blood, needless to say, is most injurious to a right appreciation of Dickens' representation of true gentility. Blood is a very misplaced term in the context in which the authoress applied it. This by no means implies that Dickens' portrayal of the theme of gentility is above criticism and that his fictional gentlemen were classless men. This is not so; and a detailed study of the concept of gentleman as depicted in Dickens' novels will, it is hoped, prove the contrary. Before involving myself in a detailed study of the author's books, I deem most convenient to add a few more remarks on Dickens' personal involvement with the idea of gentility.

First of all, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Dickens' mind in some of his writings, instead of assuming some

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1953), p.171.

<sup>4</sup>Mary L. Pendered, "Twemlow : Knight of the Simple Heart", The Dickensian (No. 205, December 1927), p.21.

objective criterion, becomes conscious only through its own subjective need and irreconcilable difference from the outside world. Dickens's unconscious clinging to gentility, as can be seen from parts of his early novels, was a natural result of his unsettled family background; a background that nourished in him dreams and illusions far beyond his means or class. Dickens's early false social awareness was no doubt engendered by the aristocratic prejudice of his father. In his famous biography on Dickens, Edgar Johnson perceptively remarks that :

... John Dickens's pretensions had led his son to regard himself as a young gentleman, to whom this descent into drudging among common boys with uncouth manners was unspeakably humiliating. 5

It is hardly necessary to add here that Johnson's remarks relate to Dickens' unpleasant experience at the blacking-warehouse which, as is well known, left deep scars on the author's memory. Anyhow, not till late in his career did the author manage to separate gentility from class consciousness and class conflict. There are many signs in Dickens's novels which point clearly to his belief in the immutability of class divisions and distinctions. Mr. Dombey's marriage to Edith, in Dombey and Son, can be cited here as an illustration of this point. What could be said about Dickens in this respect could also be said about his lower-middle-class successor George Gissing. The world of both writers, it can be maintained, is governed by the 'laws of nature'. It is only by violent wrenching of the 'laws of nature' that Adela and her husband in Gissing's Demos, and Edith and Mr. Dombey in Dickens's Dombey and Son came together. This violent wrenching of the laws of nature signifies but one thing: the struggle for survival is the only struggle that exists in the world. To limit ourselves to Dickens only, we can easily assert that class struggle in Dickens' 'economics of nature' is

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<sup>5</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens : His Tragedy and Triumph (London : Victor Gollancz, 1953), p.33.

metamorphosed into a struggle for survival. Genteel marriages, in the great majority of the novelist's books, appear to be the exclusive property of genteel families. This point will receive sufficient consideration at a later stage. At present I shall content myself with simply observing that marriage to a genteel woman was entirely forbidden to working-class men. A good deal of prejudice is displayed on Dickens' part in the novels against lower-class aspirants to gentility. Some working-class men's attempts to raise themselves socially through marriage were, more often than not, met with nothing but ridicule on the author's side. The genuine passion Dickens expressed for some of them sometimes is, unfortunately, marred by a touch of condescension and patronage - to give only one or two examples, Mr. Guppy in Bleak House, and young John Chivery in Little Dorrit.

However, as an idol of Victorian worship 'the gentleman' came to occupy Dickens's mind no less than it did his contemporaries'. But despite his insistence on the primacy of a gentleman's feelings, Dickens could not help attaching some value to the old touchstones of gentility; namely, blood and refined manners. This is more apparent in the author's novels of the early period, prior to writing Dombey and Son, than in his later books. The early phase of Dickens's preoccupation with the concept in question is characterized by a strong leaning towards the traditional attitudes towards 'the gentleman'. In the early novels, the author was more concerned with observing and echoing society's traditional views on gentility than with formulating his own judgements and conclusions. In other words, the author at this stage seems to have been attuned to the moral and social vestiges of gentility and, hence, unable to question their validity. This is not to say that Dickens did not have any original thoughts or ideas on the subject at all. In the second phase of the writer's concern with the concept under consideration - the period

extending from Dombey and Son to the year preceding the writing of Great Expectations - the emphasis is placed on middle-class gentility mainly and the bourgeoisie's strife to compete with the older species of gentry. During this time, Dickens' attention is focused upon the rising middle classes rather than on the old species of gentlemen with their fast-fading manners and pursuits. The old touchstones of blood and land-ownership in the novels of this period serve as emblems of a decaying code of values and are sometimes seen to be giving way to a more efficient and modern code of values. New responsibilities are reflected as arising, a fact which necessitated the creation of new criteria by which a man's claim to the title of 'gentleman' can be measured. Moreover, class-consciousness is seen lingering in the background and only occasionally is allowed to come to the foreground in the shape of a clash between old and new moralities and sets of values. New houses arise as old ones rust and fade into oblivion. This is the picture Dickens creates in his novels of the middle phase and which he uses as a convenient means of explanation of the world of gentility, old and new.

By the time Dickens came to write his masterpiece on Gentility, Great Expectations, his patience with the delayed hopes of happiness that was to be conferred on him by his hard-won genteel status had long been exhausted. The gentleman-writer in this book seems no less disillusioned about the promised happiness than his poor misguided hero, Pip, whose aspirations and ideals were dictated to him by the social forces which moulded his early youth. In the fictitious, but by no means, unreal world of Great Expectations false gentility is annihilated and replaced by 'true gentility of heart'. Dickens's concept of gentility of heart in this novel, it is worth remarking, is echoed fully in the author's last finished novel, Our Mutual Friend. The importance of Great Expectations derives from the fact that it marks a turning point in the history of

that most frequent word in the English language, the 'gentleman'; and, at the same time, points clearly to the author's own disillusionment with gentility as a conducive power to happiness. In this novel, the author at last comes to grips with gentility and ends his battle by condemning its pursuit. It may be commented in passing that Defoe's life-long cherished concept of 'an aristocracy of wealth', ironically, met its end at his middle-class fellow-novelist's hands. What Defoe **strived** all his life to create; namely, an image of a middle-class gentleman defined by money, was ruthlessly shattered by Charles Dickens. The moneyed middle-class gentleman who found in Defoe an ardent defender and an iconoclast found in Dickens a destroyer and a sworn enemy. In this respect, Dickens's last two novels, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend, may be said to represent an antidote to the prevalent kinds of gentility worship in Victorian times, particularly those based on blood and wealth. It is appropriate to add here that the undisguised obsession with gentility that characterizes both Defoe and his fictional characters becomes subtly disguised in the case of Dickens and his protagonists, excepting Pip, of course. This should not be taken to mean that Dickens took gentility as Defoe had done; that is, as the ultimate end of individual aspiration. Unlike Defoe, Dickens sees gentility as a means to an end; but the end, however, may not necessarily be the same in each individual case. This can easily be illustrated by introducing an extract from a conversation that takes place between young David and little Emily early in David Copperfield :

'You would like to be a lady?' I said.  
 Emily looked at me, and laughed and nodded 'Yes'.  
 'I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then ... we would not mind then, when there come a stormy weather - Not for our own sake, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help 'em with money when they come to any hurt.' 6

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Oxford : The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1978), p.35.

Everyone would, no doubt, feel inclined to applaud Little Emily's generous impulses towards 'the poor fishermen', but only a few, if any, would withdraw their sympathy from her when she falls victim to the external trappings of gentility embodied in Steerforth's refined manners and genteel appearance. Despite her tender age and her inexperience of the big world Emily, by asserting her unselfish reasons for wishing to become genteel, reflects a moral sensibility which none of Defoe's protagonists can lay claim to. The difference between Defoe's heroes and heroines and those created by Dickens can best be understood by comparing it to J.S. Mill's distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding sentiments. What Dickens's Emily, for instance, understood by being a lady sharply contrasts with Moll Flanders's understanding of the synonymous word 'gentlewoman'. "All I understood by being a gentlewoman," Moll remarks, "was to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without going to service."<sup>7</sup> The remark is self-explanatory. Still, the real contrast between Dickens's concept of gentility and that of Defoe, it could be maintained, lies deeply embedded in moral rather than in material conditions. Although both novelists seem to have been addicted to material considerations, in either fictional or real life, Dickens, unlike Defoe, never lost sight of morality. In Dickens's world of true gentility ethical considerations, in contrast to Defoe, form part and parcel of the concept of gentility. However great the differences between Dickens's and Defoe's moralities and conclusions on the theme of gentility may appear, the psychological approaches which both writers adopt towards gentility in general are almost identical. Quite interestingly, neither novelist seems to have been aware of the inherent deviousness of his psychological tactics. This manifests itself mostly in the authors' mocking attitude towards birth and hereditary status and also towards

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<sup>7</sup>Defoe, Moll Flanders, p.12.

members of the upper classes who are often portrayed as parasites - so to speak - feeding on English prosperity and economy. It is in Martin Chuzzlewit that Dickens's affinity to his predecessor Defoe is at its highest. The same methods and techniques which Defoe follows in his treatment of ancestry and old blood are followed by Dickens. The opening satirical remarks of Dickens in Martin Chuzzlewit are, more or less, true echoes of similar remarks uttered by Defoe more than a hundred years back. The first passage in the novel is quite sufficient to give the reader a general idea about the Chuzzlewits' gentility :

As no lady or gentleman, with any claims to polite breeding can possibly sympathise with the Chuzzlewit family without being first assured of the extreme antiquity of the race, it is a great satisfaction to know that it undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve; and was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest. 8

To some extent, this compares with a passage from Defoe's A Plan of the English Commerce where the author insists that "Tradesmen and the Gentry should never cap pedigrees, since the most noble Descendants of Adam's Family ... were really Mechanics". 9

To gain a full understanding of Dickens's method of portraying ladies and gentlemen in his novels, it is necessary first of all to comment, by way of introduction, on Dombey and Son; the author's first significant book on class conflict between the upper and middle strata of Victorian society. Apart from its being a detailed study of the benumbing power of capitalism on wealthy men, the novel can be described as an exploration of the relationship that exists between finance and the social structure. The book is most plain in its handling of class, relationships and their economic or material interrelations. The contracted marriage between the wealthy merchant Mr. Dombey and the aristocratic Edith acts as a resting place from which Dickens observes

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1951), p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Defoe, A Plan of the English Commerce, p.5.

class relations. When Dickens set out on his mission to study class relations, through class and cross-class marriages, he was not doing anything revolutionary. Class marriages and intermarriages, needless to say, are as old a theme of fiction as Dickens's predecessor Daniel Defoe. Since the days of Defoe this method of exploration has always been a favourite one with fiction writers. Besides, and so far as our knowledge goes ;

the proportion of economic marriages increased in the sixteenth century when the merchant was anxious to be allied to blue blood, and the needy gentleman (or lady) was anxious to be allied to money. 10

It can be argued here, however, that Dombey and Son poorly mirrors a major aspect of Victorian Society: namely, that dealing with the mercantile class's desire to improve their social status by allying themselves, through marriage, with the old aristocracy and gentry. In this novel, Dickens betrays a certain amount of ignorance of historical facts relating to the interrelations between the nobility and gentry, on the one hand, and the commercial middle class on the other. In Dombey and Son, Dickens seems to be unable or, let us say, unwilling to diagnose the various ways in which the individual's social, economic and personal desires could be correlated with the demands of the social structure. This last statement, no doubt, needs to be amply qualified. In dealing with the eighteenth-century novel, in the first chapter of my thesis, I have noted the emergence of the commercial middle class as a significant social force. The interaction between the nouveaux riches and <sup>their</sup> traditional betters, the nobility and gentry, has been duly pointed out. In spite of the relative fixity of eighteenth-century English society, a considerable, though small, number of merchants and tradesmen managed to penetrate the jealously-guarded zone of gentility - which had long been the monopoly of the old ruling classes. Some novelists, at the head of them comes Defoe, were keenly observant of this social intermingling and noted in their books

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<sup>10</sup> L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London : Chatto and Windus, 1937), p.125.

this upward movement of the new riches. This class's ability to join the ranks of the upper levels of society was partly dependent on "the decline and disappearance of some old-established families through political misfortune, extravagance, ineptitude, or mere failure of male heirs",<sup>11</sup> but mostly due to landed families' weakening financial position and their readiness to enter into contracts and alliances with them to save themselves from further embarrassments. As G.E. Mingay maintains :

Merchants and other newcomers could more easily ally themselves with country society through marriage, and there were always some down-at-heel nobility, and more gentry willing to improve their fortunes by the judicious infusion of a handsome dowry, even though it might be somewhat tainted by contact with trade. <sup>12</sup>

The contracted alliances presented a kind of compromise in which one of the contracting parties offered finance while the other party's share in the bargain was confined to the bestowal of a family name and sometimes the traditional prestige attached to their encumbered estates. Now, in Dombey and Son the reader encounters a similar situation, to that just described, centred around the wealthy city magnate Mr. Dombey and the impoverished upper-class Edith. It is quite significant that the first thing Mr. Carker learns from Major Bagstock is the fact that Edith :

was of a fine family .... That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her ... and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune. <sup>13</sup>

When he wrote Dombey and Son, Dickens, no doubt, had in mind the process which involved the displacement of the older gentry by rising merchants and manufacturers. The class and psychological conflict that arises between Mr. Dombey and Edith after their marriage, therefore, cannot be viewed without much incredulity, on the reader's part, especially after one takes into consideration the fact that the novel was written

<sup>11</sup> Mingay, The Gentry, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1953), p.376.

at a fairly advanced stage of social flux in English society. The ghastly failure of the alliance between the enterpriser Dombey and the status-conscious Edith can only be attributed to a failure or a blur on Mr. Dickens' understanding of the interrelations between the upper and the middle strata of his society. For the novelist in this book makes it much harder for Dombey to bridge the class gulf that existed between him and his wife than was usually the case. It is likely that there existed a certain degree of hostility between the wealthy middle class and the old class of gentry at the time Dickens wrote his novel, but this possibly operated at a personal or even a political level rather than at a social one. In his English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century, Mingay notes that merchants and manufacturers started displacing the older gentry as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that "until the end of the eighteenth century there was no great social fissure<sup>14</sup> between the new and old gentry." To my knowledge, this fissure became even less apparent towards the beginning of the mid-Victorian era. To refer to Mr. Dombey's marriage, however, it can be said that in the natural order of things the match should have superseded the class difference, like many other marriages of that nature; but Dickens interferes with his super-imposing morality and ends it disastrously. This could easily be ascribed to the fact that Dickens, in his desire to bring about the triumph of his cherished notion of Aristocracy of Heart, resorted to the only alternative open to him; and that was to sacrifice fact to fiction. Dickens's desire to create a fable of regenerated bourgeois culture, in Dombey and Son, seems to have blinded him to the fact that the displacement did not take place by force on the part of the bourgeoisie; rather it was the outcome of a fully considered consent on the part of the impoverished aristocracy or gentry. Hence emerges the danger of

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<sup>14</sup> G.E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p.106.

considering Dombey and Son, particularly the aspect dealing with class-conflict between the upper and the middle classes of England, as an authentic or reliable description of early mid-Victorian class interrelations.

One cannot help entertaining the unfavourable, though by no means unjust, opinion that Dickens is most unreasonable in presenting class-consciousness in such an exaggerated and unrealistic light. If the power of money induced the aristocratic Edith to act against her better feelings, it was no fault of Mr. Dombey that she could not adapt herself to the materialistic values of his milieu. Edith, though she might not appear to have sought the ill-fated alliance, was no less guilty in accepting and entering into the marriage contract than the high-bidder in the marriage market - Mr. Dombey. After deriding her mother's devious ways to catch her a husband and after sufficiently mocking the fact underlying Mr. Dombey's 'Commercial solicitations' concerning herself, Edith is commented on in the following terms :

There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone, when she went on to say, with a curled lip. 'So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be be made rich by those means.' 15

Obviously, Edith's unexpressed desire was to get the best of two worlds without in the least compromising her pride. But this was not the usual way things worked in reality. In a way, Edith's rebellion against the material supremacy of Mr. Dombey is most unrepresentative of the declining class of gentry who were constantly being assimilated into the ascendant new class of gentry. Her case is much more typical of the fast-vanishing species of gentry who could not adapt themselves to the new social, economic, or political environment than of the class of gentry who recognized and acknowledged the financial superiority of the new aristocracy of wealth and came to fraternize and co-operate with its members.

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<sup>15</sup>Dickens, Dombey and Son, p.395.

Viewed objectively, Edith's class could in no way be held accountable for her own mature actions and decisions. Her power of discrimination between good and evil, between what is proper and what is improper could by no means be said to have been under the influence of her mother or class. To argue that her decision to marry Dombey was dictated to her by her scheming mother is to reduce Edith to the status of a puppet in the hands of a skilful master. For Edith, one easily perceives, is far from being a puppet or a naive simpleton. Seen from the angle from which she is presented, Edith was a victim of both the mother and the class in which she had been nurtured; and what she did was not what she would have done had she been brought up lovingly. This is implied, though not directly expressed, in Dickens' many remarks and comments on the genteel Mrs. Skewton. This conclusion appears more relevant in the light of what Mrs. Skewton herself once said :

'What I want', drawled Mrs. Skewton, pinching her shrivelled throat, 'is heart'. It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. 'What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and free play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial.'

We were, indeed. 16

The question that remains to be asked here is: why is it so that Dickens was prejudiced in favour of the upper-class Edith rather than with the bourgeois Mr. Dombey who was nearer to him in origin and station. To give a full and satisfactory answer necessitates our looking back, with a critical eye, at the author's earlier novels and trying to trace the origins of Dickens's interest in the theme of gentility and the effects it exerted on class relations.

Birth in Dickens's early novels is highly significant and decisive, despite the apparent inconsistency with which it is delineated. Its infusion into the whole structure of Dickens's fictional world is likely

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.289.

to remain an element of discord among the author's readers. This is complicated by the fact that not a few of Dickens's favourite heroes and heroines prove to be of gentle birth, not to mention their possessing gentle manners and refined sensibilities. Added to this is the perplexing fact that the criterion of blood always formed a favourite object for Dickens' mockery and contagious humour. However, there is an implicit acceptance, in Dickens's early novels, of the criterion of blood; a thing which clearly attests to the novelist's unconscious adherence to the old aristocratic concept of gentleman. Oliver Twist is a good sample of the early period during which Dickens' obsession with gentility was at its apex. The novel can simply be viewed as a testimonial against the novelist's inability to extricate himself from the traditional views on gentility. Right from the very outset of Oliver Twist, Dickens makes it clear that; "nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's  
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breast". According to this statement, the hero's nature is definitely decided at birth. Young Oliver, no matter how frequently he is exposed to the economic or sociological influences of his environment remains fundamentally the same. Nurture, in view of the way it is represented in the novel, is insignificant; and social classes are, thus, both determined by and concerned with heredity and birth. The fact that Oliver's parents were of a genteel extraction meant quite simply that he should be considered genteel, too. By implicitly accepting the fallacious notion that a man's spiritual or moral qualities are transmitted to him through heredity or birth, Dickens committed the grossest error possible for a man of his calibre. The only plausible explanation one may think of in this case is that, when he wrote Oliver Twist, Dickens was still under the illusion that he himself was a born gentleman and that the traditional views on gentility were sound enough not to be violated. Added to this is the fact that the author at that time was unable to

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<sup>17</sup>Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1953), p.5.

question the aristocratic concept of the birth-right of gentility. In other words, he was more concerned with echoing his society's ideas on social distinctions and privileges than with researching the social data that lay behind them. In a word, Dickens was less preoccupied with fact than with fiction. Of course, one could justifiably argue here that Oliver is one "of Dickens' favorite fairy-tale conceptions".<sup>18</sup> For, he is not only pure and simple but also 'a prince in disguise'. Also, the fact that Oliver Twist is portrayed as an orphan who comes into his just inheritance at the end of the book makes it equally justifiable to maintain that :

The universal appeal of the orphan in fiction ... along with Dickens' own identification with the plight of oppressed children ... suggested to him (Dickens) the foundling story as a vehicle for his parable of society. 19

As concerns the subject of Respectability in Oliver Twist, Dickens may indeed be credited with more objectivity in delineating the 'respectable' Noah Claypole than in the case of Oliver. Having left his apprenticeship in the country as a coffin-maker, Claypole, accompanied by his master's maid-servant, headed for the City of London purposely to become a gentleman. As he told his Charlotte after their arrival at 'The Three Cripples' in London, Noah's dream was to lead a gentleman's life. What the word gentleman meant to him was, as though in keeping with the general tone of the novel, emptying 'pockets, women's ridicules, houses, mail-coaches, banks' - to use his own words. In a word, the idea of a gentleman meant, more or less, thievery in all its forms. Towards the end of the novel, we are told, Claypole, having met with no luck in his first job as a thief ;

Went into business as an Informer, in which calling he realises a genteel subsistence. His plan is, to walk out once a week during Church time attended by Charlotte in respectable attire. 20

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<sup>18</sup> Harry Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World : Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making (London : The Macmillan Press, 1980), p.103.

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose (Bloomington and London : Indiana University Press, 1968), p.119.

<sup>20</sup> Dickens, Oliver Twist, pp. 413-14.

It is hardly difficult to detect the ironical touch here. And, so much for the 'concept of <sup>a</sup>gentleman' in this early novel.

In Nicholas Nickleby, the novelist's attitude towards gentility in general is clearly seen to have undergone a considerable amount of change and readjustment. Nicholas in this novel may easily be said to be a projection of the author's psychological reality. In the person of the hero many of the character traits that characterized the young struggling writer seem to meet. In him the author's shabby-genteel poverty, while still an inexperienced youth struggling out of his social obscurity, is clearly reflected. Right from the beginning of this novel, again, Dickens seeks to instil in the readers' minds that Nicholas is a born gentleman and therefore must be recognized for what he is. But, despite the fact that the hero's social status is fully established early in the novel, his social origins remain dubious. The ambiguity of Nicholas' social origins arises from the fact that his father, though a member of the lesser gentry and living on a small landed estate in the County of Devonshire, came to be deeply involved in commercial speculations which lay mainly within the rising middle class's field of activities. No less important than this is Dickens' attempt to make the social status of Ralph Nickleby - Nicholas' uncle - more ambiguous still. For the hero's uncle can hardly be said to belong to any of the recognized genteel professions; old or new, aristocratic or middle-class. According to Dickens' representation of him :

Mr. Ralph Nickleby was not, strictly speaking, what you would call a merchant, neither was he a banker, nor an attorney, nor a special pleader, nor a notary. He was certainly not a tradesman, and still less could he lay any claim to the title of a professional gentleman ... 21

However, Nicholas Nickleby is clearly concerned with depicting the middle class's quest for gentility and improved status. The main theme

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<sup>21</sup>Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1953), p.6.

of the novel, as Edmund Wilson maintains, "is the efforts of Nicholas<sup>22</sup> and his sister to vindicate their position as gentlefolk." It is not for no purpose that Nicholas is presented as a born gentleman. The protagonist's reliance on his own efforts to rise by enterprise is undeniably middle-class in spirit, but one must not lose sight of the fact that the 'Gospel of Work' was by no means unfamiliar or alien to members of the upper classes. It is true that the hero moves in a predominantly mercantilist society, but this movement was not confined to middle-class members only. Younger sons of old landed families had been engaged in commerce as a source of income long before Dickens came to write his novel. Nicholas Nickleby does not stand a fair chance of being called a bourgeois gentleman. He is a most doubtful representative of the new class of gentry. In this respect, he is no less doubtful than Daniel Defoe's semi-aristocratic or semi-bourgeois heroine, Moll Flanders. In his character the old line of gentility is mystically reconciled to the new one. Moreover, Nicholas can clearly be seen to stand for all the traits which characterize the old school of gentlemen. The most remarkable thing about him is that he is well-adapted to an age of middle-class dominance; and, therefore, could easily be mistaken for a bourgeois gentleman. Dickens' attempt, in Nicholas Nickleby, to adapt and redefine 'the gentleman' in such a way that would extricate it from the outmoded aristocratic trappings may easily be likened to that of his contemporary W.M. Thackeray, for Thackeray, not unlike Dickens, was unconsciously following the old code of gentility and, at the same time, was trying to modify the old concept of gentleman in a way that would seem acceptable to the rising middle classes. At any rate, Dickens' efforts to redefine the concept of gentleman in Nicholas Nickleby were not in vain. His triumph over the external trappings of gentility, however, does not seem

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<sup>22</sup>Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (London : Methuen, 1961),

to be complete. This is evidenced in the novelist's lingering attraction to the old great symbol of gentility, the Estate. What happens at the end of Nicholas Nickleby tends to confirm us in our belief that Dickens could not help but fall an easy prey to what his society looked upon as a good criterion of genteel existence. Anxious to keep his reader at arm's length; that is, to prevent him from forming an unfavourable view of the case, Dickens resorts to an indirect method of acquainting him with the fact of Nicholas' purchase of his father's (symbolic) estate. The following helps to illustrate the point :

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children; it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed. 23

Here, one immediately recalls Defoe's prosperous heroes and heroines who end up with buying an estate in conformity with many rising middle-class families. More importantly, the above quotation throws some light on Dickens' own purchase, later in his life, of the genteel establishment at Gad's Hill. However, Dickens's delineation of his protagonist Nicholas as such - as a thriving merchant with a landed estate - may be interpreted as a kind of wish-fulfilment disclosing much of the author's aristocratically-coloured mentality during this period of his life. By thus portraying the character of Nicholas, Dickens can also be said to betray a considerable amount of love and deference for the old symbols of gentility. To judge Nicholas from a traditional point of view, one does not need much to be convinced of the plausibility of such a line of thinking. What stands against considering the hero as a bourgeois gentleman is the fact that the whole course of events in the novel is engaged in revealing how strongly aristocratic Nicholas' actions and appearance

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<sup>23</sup>Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p.830.

seem to be. Plenty of evidence may be cited here in support of this argument. First of all, and according to the 'genteel' Mr. Lillyvick, Nicholas "is gentlemanly, very gentlemanly - in appearance."<sup>24</sup> Lillyvick's verdict, as can be seen, is quite superficial and covers only the protagonist's manners and demeanour. In other words, the hero's true character is still only vaguely defined. Dickens, in this respect, is very helpful and may be relied on for a true estimate of the hero's personality. The novelist's following remarks are all what one needs for the matter in question :

And here it may be observed, that Nicholas was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a young man of high spirits. He would resent an affront to himself, or interpose to redress a wrong offered to another, as boldly and freely as any knight that ever set lance in rest; but he lacked that peculiar excess of coolness and great-minded selfishness, which invariably distinguished gentlemen of high-spirit. In truth, for our own part, we are disposed to look upon such gentlemen as being rather incumbrances than otherwise in rising families. <sup>25</sup>

This passage is significant in that it high-lights what has been mentioned above about the protagonist's being adapted to an age of bourgeois dominance. At the same time, it shows the novelist wavering between the two classes of gentry, old and new, in a state of undecided allegiance. Irony apart, it is obvious that Dickens does not see Nicholas' lack of high-spiritedness as a major shortcoming which he must try to overcome. The removal of such a moral defect, it is implied, is not a necessary step which the protagonist must take in order to be able to advance his future prospects. This point is worth emphasizing for the simple reason that it carries within it the seeds of a new middle-class morality that lays much weight on work and personal effort. This, again, invites comparison between Dickens and his predecessor Defoe. Both writers were great propagators of the Gospel of Work, and both of them came to look

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.183.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p.202.

disapprovingly upon inherited social or economic status. Sometimes, the two novelists would lapse into subordinating a meritoriously acquired social or economic position to the traditional code of values as embodied in the gentlemanly ideal. Economic status quite often coincides with the moral or, more specifically, gentlemanly status in some of Dickens's writings. This is clearly exemplified in Nicholas Nickleby where Dickens establishes his hero in a prosperous profession, at the Cheerybles', in such a way that leads to his re-establishing himself as a leisured-class gentleman. Once he is established as a leisured member of society, Nicholas would not only be reassured of his status as a landed gentleman but also would be able to fortify his ancestor's old castles with all the externals of genteel living - to speak metaphorically. Put differently, he would be confirmed in his "belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without" - to use Dickens' own words with reference to Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit. This sounds like harping on old chords, but it is the bare truth which lies behind the novelist's endowing his hero with all the "chivalrous" qualities that "a Christian Knight" could boast of possessing. So much for our young hero's divided self and mistaken identity.

However, and apart from centring upon Nicholas Nickleby's innate gentility and graces, the novel deals with the notion of middle-class "respectability". The Kenwigs in this book are, in fact, the first middle-class family on whose members the author lavished his criticism and mockery. The Kenwigs are exemplary descendants of the class that came to pay great attention to "refinement" and social "formalities". The key word to a full understanding of Dickens's scathing attack on the Kenwigses and many other middle-class families is "pretension". Mrs. Kenwigs, to begin with, is a social climber who takes it upon herself to introduce into her little narrow world any genteel symbols which might detract from others an acknowledgement of her gentility. As

described in the novel :

Mrs. Kenwigs ... was quite a lady in her manners, and of a very genteel family, having an uncle who collected a water-rate; besides which distinction, the two eldest of her little girls went twice a week to a dancing school in the neighbourhood. 26

Mrs. Kenwigs, to be sure, was not the only one who suffered from Dickens's ironical twists. Mr. Lillyvick, the water-rate collector, has been endlessly ridiculed by the author on the basis of his moderate calling. Apparently, tax-collecting was not good enough a profession to be included among the new genteel professions; nevertheless, Mr. Lillyvick always insisted on being recognized as a professional gentleman. His pretensions to a genteel status were distinctly coloured by a streak of snobbery and self-importance. Anyway, the Kenwigses' pretensions to gentility appear trivial when compared with Mrs. Wititterly's professed attraction to the fine arts and high-life entertainments. Mrs. Wititterly not only loves 'the opera, the drama, the fine arts and the nobility' but also thinks that they are intimately correlated. To be an artist, according to her, means to be aristocratic by nature. Her importance in the novel, however, derives from the fact that she represents a large section of bourgeois gentle-folk; namely, those living in areas similar to Cadogan Place which is located between the East and West Ends of London. Dickens's description of the place just mentioned is rather interesting :

Cadogan Place is the one slight bond that joins two great extremes; it is the connecting link between the aristocratic pavements of Belgrave Square and the barbarism of Chelsea. The people in Cadogan Place ... affect fashion ... and wonder where the New Road is. Not that they claim to be on precisely the same footing as the high folks of Belgrave Square and Grosvenor Place, but that they stand, with reference to them, rather in the light of those illegitimate children of the great who are content to boast of their connexions, although their connexions disavow them. Wearing as much as they can of the airs and semblances of loftiest rank, the people of Cadogan Place have the realities of middle station. 27

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-63

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 264-65.

This is all that need be said about the 'genteel' Mrs. Wititterly and her fashionable neighbours of Cadogan Place. In Nicholas Nickleby, there is still another kind of bourgeois gentility which is solely concerned with professional gentlemen. Under this category both the schoolmaster, Wackford Squeers, and the 'genteel' hairdresser may be said to fall. Each of these two characters pretends to be genteel, and each of them is portrayed as an amusingly colourful picture of hypocrisy and conceit. Their false sense of social station leads them not only into overestimating their own significance but also into a parallel underestimation of other men's importance and professional capacities. When these professional 'gentlemen' made their initial appearance in the novel, the first of them, Mr. Squeers, "appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable,"<sup>28</sup> while the hairdresser is seen defending his 'highly genteel establishment' against the verbal attack of a coal-heaver who makes a business call at a very inappropriate moment. In concluding this section on Nicholas Nickleby, one could do no better than introducing fully the classic dialogue between the seemingly genteel hairdresser and his disappointed client, the coal-heaver :

'You won't get shaved here, my man'.

'Why not?' said the coal-heaver.

'We don't shave gentlemen in your line', remarked the young proprietor.

'Why, I see you a shaving of a baker, when I was a looking through the winder, last week,' said the coal-heaver.

'It's necessary to draw the line somewheres, ry fine feller', replied the principal. 'We draw the line there. We can't go beyond bakers. If we was to get any lower than bakers, our customers would desert us, and we might shut up shop. You must try some other establishment, Sir. We couldn't do it here.'<sup>29</sup>

For fear of breaking the charm of such a reported status-conscious encounter, the quotation had better be left uncommented on. This leads

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.685.

us neatly into Dickens' next novel The Old Curiosity Shop.

In this novel, the theme of middle-class gentility is pursued to its minutest details. Nowhere in his early novels does the author occupy himself more devotedly and minutely with depicting the ambitious middle class's anxieties to move up in the social scale than in The Old Curiosity Shop. It is fairly easy to perceive that Dickens is at his ease in dealing with this theme. As a result of this ease, he is clearly seen to be much more successful in depicting its minutiae than in the other case; that is, in portraying upper-class aspects of gentility. However, the softer tone Dickens adopts in tackling the theme of bourgeois gentility is indicative of his belief that the kind of gentility which occupies, for instance, Richard Swiveller's mind in this novel is in no way similar to the dangerous type which occupies Mr. Brass's mind. Obviously, Dickens anticipates little harm, if any, to come from Dick Swiveller's kind of genteel snobbery. Richard Swiveller, needless to say, is his creator's pet and favourite; and "the real hero and heroine of The Old Curiosity Shop are", as Chesterton pointed out, "of course Dick Swiveller and the

<sup>30</sup> Marchioness." In the story of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness one is continuously confronted with the theme of gentility and the desire to be considered 'genteel' and 'refined'. Swiveller's pursuits and strenuous efforts can easily be seen to be aimed at one object: access into the world of gentility. In the novel, Dickens not only attributes to him all the amiable qualities his art is capable of creating but also bestows on him - jokingly, perhaps - the title of 'a literary gentleman'. However, gentility with Richard Swiveller becomes an obsession which colours his ways of thinking and behaving. It forms the axis around which all his thoughts and speculations seem to circulate. Right from the very

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<sup>30</sup>G.K. Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens (London : J.M. Dent, 1911), p.55.

beginning of the novel, Swiveller is presented as harping on his favourite instrument, Gentility. He is pictured in the light of an important personage trying to attract attention to himself. His first subject of talk, which is specifically chosen by him to impress others, bears upon the upper classes; namely the young gentlemen of Westminster and Eton. Shortly after this, the author, keen on rendering his picture of Richard Swiveller most entertaining, draws attention to Dick's reference to his single chamber as :

... his rooms, his lodgings, or his chambers: Conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space, and leaving their imaginations to wander through long suites of lofty halls, at pleasure. 31

Richard Swiveller's obsession with gentility can be better viewed through another medium of communication and that is through the hero's recurrent use of the expression 'polite circles'. The expression is familiarized through Swiveller's conversation touching upon decorum whenever there is a departure from the accepted norms of behaviour in genteel circles. For instance, when Little Nell's brother - Fred Trent - uses the common word 'Bah', Swiveller hastens to correct him by remarking that "in the polite circles ... this sort of thing isn't usually said to a gentleman in his own apartments".<sup>32</sup> Fred, it seems, was always in need of a reminder of his friend Swiveller's gentlemanliness and good breeding. However, the first step in Swiveller's actual realization of a recognized social status can be said to have been made when he accepts 'the humble station of a clerk' at Mr. Brass's office. But it was not before long when he started complaining about his distance from the status of a professional gentleman. He knew fully that his calling was not as half good as the other recognized genteel professions. Besides, Dick's resorting to earn his own living came as a pressing necessity and after all other sources of unearned income were suddenly cut off. There is, in fact, only one way

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<sup>31</sup>Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (London : The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1951), p.53.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p.54.

in which Dick Swiveller's state of affairs can be described or understood and that is to view him as a middle-class upstart whose ambitions and talents were thwarted by an acute sense of class distinctions and prejudices. His need to live by his own efforts caused him a great deal of restlessness and dissatisfaction. What raises Dick Swiveller above the rest of characters in the novel is his possessing a big heart. His affectionate nature together with his tendency to stand by the poor and oppressed place him on a high pedestal, in Dickens's eyes as well as in the reader's. In a word, Richard Swiveller in The Old Curiosity Shop stands for all the values implicit in the author's notion of an 'Aristocracy of Heart'. Though he cannot be viewed but as a comic character, his decision to rescue the lower-class 'Marchioness' out of her poverty and ignorance may be said to anticipate to some extent the upper-middle-class Eugene Wrayburn's similar decision to educate and raise the working-class girl Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend. Both gentlemen are nursed by the object of their sympathy and both of them, too, express their gratitude and thankfulness to their 'guardian angels' by marrying them. Unlike the genteel Wrayburn, however, Swiveller suffers a good deal from his lack of gentility, in the traditional sense of course. To compensate for this lack, and to force the recognition of his gentility on others, Swiveller bestows the title of 'Marchioness' on his working-class sweetheart. Not only this :

After casting about for some time for a name which should be worthy of her, he decided in favour of Sophronia Sphynx, as being euphonious and genteel, and furthermore indicative of mystery. 33

This is indeed the last we hear about Dick's manoeuvres to draw attention to his gentility. To conclude Swiveller's story, one may assert here that Dick in The Old Curiosity Shop embodies many of the yearnings and

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.551.

heart-felt desires of the author when he wrote this novel.

As concerns social snobbery in The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens seems to have overlooked it in the upper classes to the great disadvantage of the middle strata of society. The writer's motive behind doing that could have been to magnify unfavourably the middle class's vanity and conceit. Notwithstanding, Dickens still may be said to have dealt his first blow to the class-oriented nature of the concept of gentility - old and new, aristocratic and middle-class. Class-parasitism, to begin with, figures clearly in the novel, and its true embodiment, Miss Monflathers, is duly exposed. While calling at the Boarding and Day Establishment, Little Nell - to her greatest dismay - discovers that human behaviour in such a genteel institution is greatly determined by the social station to which a person happens to belong. In other words, everyone knows his or her place and tries not to step out of it. If one attempts to step out of the position which his or her social station dictates, such a person is liable to be severely lectured by Miss Monflathers. As presented in the novel, Miss Monflathers is a dispenser of justice, and her criterion is class. What seems to have incensed Dickens most about this all-powerful Head-mistress is her inclination to favour the rich at the expense of the poor. This is evidenced in the novelist's following remarks :

Why the gayest feather in Monflather s' cap, and the brightest glory of Miss Monflather s' school, was a baronet's daughter - the real live daughter of a real live baronet - who, by some extraordinary reversal of the Laws of Nature, was not only plain in features but dull in intellect, while the poor apprentice had both a ready wit, and a handsome face and figure. 34

Dickens's sarcastic remarks are not as much directed against class distinctions as against the aforementioned head-mistress' blind following of the rich, titled and otherwise. Miss Monflather s' willing-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.237.

ness to preach the ruling classes' doctrines and slogans greatly qualifies her to the title of 'a toady'. Her instrumentality is clearly exemplified in the following remarks which she addresses to Little Nell, the 'wax-work child' :

'Don't you feel how naughty it is of you ... to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country, of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence ... Don't you know that the harder you are at work, the happier you are?' 35

The above remarks, it should be noted, are applicable to poor people's children only; for genteel children follow a different 'Gospel of Work'. To refer to the same authority on work and education, work in the case of genteel families' children was confined to painting on velvet, fancy needlework, or embroidery.

However, Dickens' criticism of the false forces of gentility in this novel is by no means restricted to Miss Monflathers' genteel establishment. The writer's latent contempt for certain aspects of genteel existence manifests itself clearly in his presentation of Mrs. Jarley and her great attachment to her assumingly genteel calling. When asked by Nell if 'Wax-work' was funnier than Punch, Mrs. Jarley protestingly replied :

'It isn't funny at all ... It's calm and - what's that word again - critical? - no - classical; that's it - it is calm and classical. No low beatings and knockings about, no jokings and squeakings like your precious Punches, but always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility.' 36

It is hardly difficult to perceive the double-edgedness of this retort. Mrs. Jarley, who was the delight of the Nobility and Gentry, finds herself empowered to slight and mock Punch for its low standards and, at the same time, its failure to appeal to people's cultivated tastes; but she does not realize that those shortcomings are no worse than the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.203.

monotonous repetitiveness and frigidity of aristocratic arts. This is, in fact, only one of not a few interpretations that can be given to Dickens' insertion of the expression 'unchanging air of coldness and gentility'. Anyhow, this is not the only place where Dickens associates coldness with gentility. Dombey and Son, for instance, abounds with associations of this nature. Dickens' discreetly disguised criticism of Mrs. Jarley's type of gentility is paralleled by an openly hostile one when he comes to delineate the professional character of Sampson Brass.

As seen through Dickens' eyes, Brass is a real portrait of the villain-gentleman whose powers of mischief in society are masked by the prestige and social recognition bestowed on him by virtue of his belonging to one of the genteel professions - the Bar. The most distinctive feature of Sampson Brass's character is his insistence on being recognized for what he is not; that is, for a gentleman in the true sense. Though Dickens manages to develop this character gradually and convincingly his representation of the aspect concerning Brass's clinging to the strings of gentility could hardly be viewed as realistic or objective. To say the least, Brass's boastfulness of both his social and professional status is too exaggerated to be credible. This is facilitated by the following appeal made by Brass to Mr. Garland and his son Abel :

'Gentlemen', said Brass, laying his right hand on his waist-coat, ... 'Gentlemen, I appeal to you - really, gentlemen consider, I beg of you. I am of the law. I am styled "gentleman" by Act of Parliament. I maintain the title by the annual payment of twelve pound sterling for a certificate. I am not one of your players of music, stage actors, writers of books, or painters of pictures, who assume a station that the laws of their country don't recognize ... If any man brings his action against me, he must describe me as a gentleman, or his action is null or void.'

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Viewed in the light of the above remarks, Mr. Brass is undeniably a con-founded snob. For, if Brass was indeed a solicitor in the real sense, he

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p.449.

would have simply contented himself with thinking that people would, sooner or later, come to recognize him as a gentleman. The question that remains to be asked is whether Brass's kind of snobbery ever existed or whether it existed in the author's own imagination only. In any case, it was not unusual to withhold the title of 'gentleman' from musicians, actors, writers and painters, but it was quite unusual to see somebody of Mr. Brass's professional capacity feeling obliged to assert his claim to the same title. The fact that Dickens makes a big issue out of Sampson Brass's pretensions to gentility does not render the character of the solicitor more credible or life-like. After all, what witless and conceited being ever spoke as Mr. Brass does? Brass is a caricature rather than a real human being; but he is no more so than many other characters found in Dickens' later books, most of all in Barnaby Rudge - our next novel.

Barnaby Rudge, Dickens' first historical novel, mostly reflects the spirit of its author rather than the spirit of the age it portrays. Dickens' subjectivism in this novel may be said to be at its worst. It not only affects his representation of reality but also puts the reader on his guard against considering the views expressed in the book as social comments in the true sense. No matter how hard the novelist tries to suppress the personal elements in his stated opinions on the class system of the late-eighteenth century, it is beyond doubt that he could not portray a group of people or even a historically-proved fact without letting his moralizing tendencies protrude in a distorting manner. Nothing in the whole sphere of social portraiture in the novel can be said to suffer more from the writer's self-centredness than the concept of gentility itself. Dickens' approach to the concept in Barnaby Rudge is fully charged with the moral and psychological implications of his seemingly naïve idea of social existence in the eighteenth century. What the novel appears mostly to convey is the novelist's personal perceptions of life as well as his inwardly formulated views on the prevalent patterns of

genteel living in eighteenth-century England. The viewpoint from which Sir John Chester is observed in the novel, for instance, is basically designed to let the author's prejudices and dislikes come into full play. Also, the overall make-up which distinguishes Dickens' attitude towards gentility in Barnaby Rudge is purely moral. In other words, the author does not look upon the main issues and ideas which dominated the late-eighteenth-century social scene with the eyes of an objective or unbiased historian; rather, he chooses to view them with the eyes of a moralizing Victorian. Objective reality in Barnaby Rudge is in some way or other subordinated, if not sacrificed, to an alien morality which the author tries to introduce. Dickens in this so-called historical novel not only authorizes himself to punish and condemn what does not suit his Victorian taste but also assumes the role of a social prophet on whose shoulders falls the burden of pulling down society's old foundations and replacing them by stronger ones. Presumably, the new foundations are to be built upon a stronger and, at the same time, more responsible bourgeois ideology. To put it briefly, Dickens, in Barnaby Rudge, is too involved in the whole course of events to be able to see things as they are. At the time the novelist wrote his book, he was undoubtedly still under the class influences of his early upbringing. His commitment in this novel could easily be attributed to his sympathy for the middle classes' cause and his dutiful feeling to support it whole-heartedly against the upper classes' prejudices and malicious social attitudes. This is illustrated by the following extract from a conversation that takes place between Sir John Chester and his son :

'Her father was at least an eminent lawyer, Sir', said Edward.  
'Quite right, Ned; perfectly so. He stood high at the bar, had a great name and great wealth, but having risen from nothing - I have always closed my eyes to the circumstance and steadily resisted its contemplation, but I fear his father dealt in pork, and that his business did once involve cow-heel and sausages - he wished to marry his daughter into

a good family. He had his heart's desire, Ned...' 38

The reference here, it must be clear, is to John Chester's late wife who was of a middle-class origin. One could easily imagine Dickens' disgust with Sir John's slandering remarks on his own wife's family circumstances. This cannot be doubted to have induced Dickens to dismiss the upper classes' marriage policies as mercenary. As seen through the novelist's eyes, aristocratic marriages are no more than contrivances which aim at preserving upper-class gentlemen's affluence and social prestige. The odd thing about the subject in question is that Dickens seems as if he were unaware of the duality of people approaching a marriage based on interest. This unawareness entices him to credit John Chester's wife's ancestors not only with high 'merit' and great 'wealth' but also with much honesty. Dickens' bias in favour of the middle classes in this novel blinds him to the fact that they, represented by Chester's wife and her relations, are no less mercenary than John Chester in their designs to be related to an old family. In truth, both parties are blameable for having interested designs on each other. This kind of thing, as we all know, was not unusual in marriages between the classes. In most cases, one of the contracting parties is content to gain material comfort, while the other thinks it sufficient to be related to an old family name.

However, Dickens' preoccupation with the concept of gentility in Barnaby Rudge centres largely around the character of Sir John Chester, who seems to embody all the vices and character traits of the old species of gentleman. The task of understanding John Chester more intimately can be made very easy by introducing the author's satirical description of him after his being knighted and becoming Sir John :

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (London : The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1975), p.118.

John Chester, Esquire, M.P., attended court - went up with an address - headed a deputation. Such elegance of manner, so many graces of deportment, such powers of conversation, could never pass unnoticed. Mr. was too common for such merit. A man so gentlemanly should have been - but Fortune is capricious - born a Duke : just as some dukes should have been born labourers. He caught the fancy of the kind, knelt down a grub, and rose a butterfly, John Chester, Esquire was knighted and became Sir John. 39

#### John

Dickens' portrayal of the city-bred Sir/Chester is clearly biased and prejudiced. It is mainly based upon the novelist's barely disguised opposition to the traditional rulers of English society. Dickens's caricature of Sir/Chester can easily be taken as an indirect expression of his own protest against the unmerited privileges enjoyed by an indiscriminately chosen group of aristocrats. In other words, Dickens' implied antipathy to gentlemen of John Chester's stamp forms an integral part of the middle classes' increasing dissatisfaction with the exclusiveness of aristocratic rule. The dislike Dickens exhibits for John Chester in this novel cannot be doubted to have been enhanced, if not engendered, by his class's antipathy to the upper classes' political stronghold. It should be pointed out here that Dickens' contempt for the old species of gentlemen in Barnaby Rudge is by no means confined to the city only. The novelist goes so far as to portray country gentlemen in a much more unpleasant light than that in which the city-bred John Chester is presented. This is most exemplified in the unsympathetic treatment which the 'justice of the peace' receives at the hands of his delineator. As seen through Dickens' eyes, this 'thorough-bred Englishman's' greatest qualifications were :

that he was more severe on poachers, was a better shot, a harder rider, had better horses, kept better dogs, could eat more solid food, drink more strong wine, go to bed every night more drunk and get up every morning more sober, than any man in the country. In knowledge of horseflesh he was almost equal to a farrier, in stable learning he surpassed his own head groom, and in gluttony not a pig on his estate was a match for him. 40

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.302.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.358.

John

To return to Sir/Chester, however, one may argue that Dickens' critical analysis of his personality is greatly conditioned by the fact of his adopting a different set of values and ideals. This implies that Chester's morality was in many respects so opposed to the writer's adopted version of morality. It should not be concluded from this that Chester's old code of values was by any means anti-social or even could be described as better or worse. Morality is a matter of variability. What was moral or socially acceptable to the First World War generation, for instance, might have little bearing or none on the kind of morality we follow in our dealings nowadays. The trouble with Dickens is that he failed or, let us say, refused to recognize that what was not morally approved by the Victorians did not necessarily mean that it should have been considered otherwise by eighteenth-century English society. Fortune-hunting in cases of marriage, for example, was looked upon by many Victorians as immoral; on the other hand, this same kind of proceeding was rarely questioned, on moral grounds, in some walks of life. The reference here is to trade, commerce, and other types of business which depended for their survival on competition and the elimination of the lesser trades. Dickens, it seems, did not realize his falling into the same trap which he built for Sir John Chester, and which is clearly meant to lower this latter character in the reader's eyes. To cut a long story short, Dickens, unconsciously perhaps, deals a heavy blow to the professions on which bourgeois/<sup>society</sup> arose when he lets John Chester defend his advice to his son to marry for money, in the following terms :

'A mere fortune-hunter!' cried the son, indignantly.  
'What in the devil's name, Ned, would you be!' returned the father. 'All men are fortune-hunters... The Law, the Church, the Court, the Camp - see how they are all crowded with fortune-hunters, jostling each other in the pursuit. The stock-exchange, the pulpit, the counting-house, the royal drawing-room, the senate, - What but fortune-hunters are they filled with? ... If you are squeamish and moral, Ned, console yourself with the reflection that at the very worst your

fortune-hunting can make but one person miserable or unhappy. How many people, do you suppose these other kinds of huntsmen crush in following their sport - hundreds at a step? or thousands?' 41

The passage is self-explanatory.

It remains to add here that Edward Chester, Dickens' favourite hero in the novel as far as gentility is concerned, is 'a born gentleman'. He is clearly a new convert to the Dickensian school of gentility which places much value on morality, a first-rate criterion of gentility, and work, another criterion of bourgeois gentility. As can be seen in Barnaby Rudge, Edward is metamorphosed, as if by magic, into a bourgeois gentleman who is most willing to give up the idle luxury he is accustomed to and go instead into the big world seeking his own fortune. The fact that Edward's character sounds most unconvincing is partly because he is suddenly shown to have acquired a momentary deep insight into the nature of his good breeding and liberal education and also to have abruptly realized the uselessness of his former acquisitions as well as the futility of his gentlemanly pursuits. Edward Chester is clearly a most unrepresentative gentleman of either his class or his age. He is a product and a projection of the novelist's subjective modes of thinking. In spite of all this, one may justifiably argue that some of Dickens' remarks and observations in Barnaby Rudge sometimes verge on accuracy and exactness. They are nevertheless stereotyped and often seem like little cuttings from old newspapers. The following quotation helps to illustrate this point :

Gaming, the vice which ran so high among all classes (the fashion being of course set by the upper) was generally the cause of disputes; for cards and dice were as openly used, and worked as much mischief, and yielded as much excitement below stairs, as above. 42

No one could fail to notice that the remark just quoted is extremely commonplace. However, it is interesting to compare it with a similar observation from Thackeray's historical novel, Esmond :

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.123.

(It) was a point of honour with the fine gentlemen of those days to lose or win magnificently at their horse-matches, or games of cards and dice - and you could never tell from the demeanour of these two lords afterwards, which had been successful and which the loser at their games. 43

The difference between Dickens' approach to gaming and Thackeray's is quite obvious. The idea of gaming in Dickens' case is, as we can see, referred to morality while in Thackeray's case it is noted on purely social grounds. It can further be added here that Thackeray's representation of his point is rendered more interesting by virtue of its being brought out in the course of a lively conversation between a group of characters. Dickens, on the other hand, states his point in an uninteresting and abstract way.

Regarding respectability in Barnaby Rudge, the Varden family in this novel is very 'Respectable'; and the pride of all its members is, furthermore, called a 'Workshop'. What is more interesting to know, still, is the fact that the Vardens' type of bourgeois gentility is magnificently Victorian. When dealing with the Vardens, Dickens often forgets that he is writing a historical novel which is meant to depict certain aspects of social and political life in the late-eighteenth century rather than in the Victorian era. In fact, there is hardly any noticeable difference between the Vardens and the rest of middle-class families depicted in the author's other books which deal with the Victorian age mainly. Mr. and Mrs. Varden's Victorianism manifests itself on many occasions in this novel. Significantly, Mrs. Varden is portrayed as both an Evangelical of the strictly Victorian school and an active member of the respectable classes whose workshop ethics were incompatible with drinking habits. Mrs. Varden's <sup>te</sup>teetolitarian tendencies are clearly manifested in her impassioned speech touching on the Willets' running of the Maypole Inn, where drinks of all descriptions are served.

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<sup>43</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, The History of Henry Esmond, Esq. (London : The Harry Furniss Centenary Edition, 1911), pp.105-106.

Addressing Joe Willet, Mrs. Varden angrily observes :

'You're the cruelest and most inconsiderate people in the world ... I wonder old Mr. Willet, having been a married man himself, doesn't know better than to conduct himself as he does. His doing it for profit is no excuse. I would rather pay the money twenty times over, and have Varden come home like a respectable and sober tradesman.'... 44

All licensed victuallers, according to the respectable Evangelical Mrs. Varden, are 'poachers' among Christian men ; and thus they are duly dismissed as 'sinners in Holy Writ'. Mrs. Varden's respectability, it seems, is very dependent on her fighting evil in its roots and also on exhibiting a most antipathetic disposition towards whoever does not appear inclined to conform with her ideas on morality and Christian virtue. Though Mr. Varden seems to have caught the mania for respectability from his wife; he is nevertheless, portrayed in a rather more favourable light. Occasionally, he would appear as a real bourgeois snob, but his kind of snobbery is by no means ill-natured. It is balanced by his openness and honesty. Amusingly enough, Mr. Varden often finds himself in the position of being obliged to remind others of his assets. Mr. Varden's appeal to the head-jailor at the beginning of the riots throws some light on this point; "But I am not one of them", said Gabriel. 'I am an honest man, Mr. Akerman; a respectable tradesman -  
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Gabriel Varden, the locksmith." Being a respectable tradesman, Gabriel Varden is anxious lest he might be identified with the agitated and agitating 'mob'. For this reason, Mr. Varden emphasizes both his honesty and respectability to his hearers, at the head of them being the head-jailor. The Vardens, to be sure, can easily be classified among the best of Dickens' creations. This, no doubt, is because the author feels at home when delineating 'middle-class gentry'. Another successful and comic creation in the book is Mr. Dennis, the hangman. Ironically, Dennis would not be convinced that his 'calling' was not genteel. For, right to the

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<sup>44</sup> Dickens, Barnaby Rudge, p.104.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.489.

end of the novel, he persisted in his belief that his adopted calling was as genteel as any gentleman in England could desire. When asked by Mr. Tappertit if he were apprenticed to it, the hangman's reply was :

'No. Natural genius ... No' prenticing. It comes by natur'. Muster Gashford knows my calling. Look at that hand of mine - many and many a job that hand has done, with a neatness and dex-terity, never known afore.' 46

As we move away from the perturbed days of aristocratic rule in Barnaby Rudge to the following novel of Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, we are transported to a world of unmitigated egotism and snobbery; a world, moreover, that is overflowed with unmerited gentility and social distinction. The theme of gentility in this book is noticeably given an unprecedented prominence among Dickens' novels of the early period. The novelist's satire and mockery of old families' pride in ancestry is the first thing which arrests the reader's eyes in this novel. The tenour of Dickens' arguments regarding the Chuzzlewits' old ancestry is that the Chuzzlewits might indeed brag of their extended and old ancestry, but this does not raise them morally above the rest of humanity. This, also, does not exempt them from being accountable for their immoral or harmful actions. The Chuzzlewits' moral defects, it can be added, are prone to rank them equally with other people, high and low. This is facilitated by the following comment of Dickens :

It is remarkable that as there was, in the oldest family of which we have any record, a murderer and a vagabond, so we never fail to meet, in the records of all old families, with innumerable repetitions of the same phase of characters. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general principle, that the more extended the ancestry, the greater the amount of violence and vagabondism. 47

However, Dickens' anxiety not to offend his readers lies behind his avoidance of any kind of comparison between two or more social gradations. Instead, he chooses to magnify, through the use of irony, a certain

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.297.

<sup>47</sup> Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, p.1.

class's moral weaknesses. By thus behaving Dickens early manages to impress the reader with his seemingly objective presentation of the Chuzzlewit family. The word seemingly has been emphasized simply because, in truth, the author appears - at a deeper level - to appreciate the fact of his young hero's being a born gentleman. Lest any ambiguity might arise here, I hasten to add that Dickens might appear sometimes very opposed to family pedigrees and noble descent, but deep in his heart there was always a soft spot for the old criterion of gentility - high birth. It is likely that the principle of high birth was viewed by the novelist as an inadequate touchstone of gentility, but this criterion, it should be added, held a significant place in Dickens' concept of gentility - at least in novels of the early period. One must not lose sight of the fact that Dickens was no 'leveller'.

However, though Dickens' irony in the first chapter of Martin Chuzzlewit can be seen to strike effectively at the root of the upper classes' supremacy and dominance; it, nevertheless, appears to be a most unsuccessful method of criticism. As I have noted in the first chapter of my thesis, land-ownership formed an essential part of Defoe's concept of gentility and, moreover, was viewed by the author as a most reliable touchstone of gentility. In Dickens' novel, on the other hand, the whole idea of land-ownership is not only challenged but also battered to insignificance. The way Dickens achieves such a supreme victory over this old criterion is, to be sure, admirable. Quite simply, the novelist reduces history to an easily digestible joke, and thus the task of erasing the value placed on land-ownership is accomplished. How marvellous! One may ironically exclaim. The Chuzzlewits, to begin with, are said - or at least one of them is said - to have come over with William the Conqueror. This illustrious Conqueror, as can be deduced from the author's comments, can also be said to have landed on the English soil with no clear notion of land-ownership, for his "family do not seem to

have been ever greatly distinguished by the possession of landed  
<sup>48</sup>estate." Having stated this important fact, Dickens then raises his  
 weapon of irony against the memory of this 'monarch' not on the grounds  
 of his ignorance of landed estates, but rather on the basis of his  
 (Dickens') belated moral considerations. The following helps to illustrate  
 this :

And it is well known that for the bestowal of that kind of  
 property upon his favourites, the liberality and gratitude of  
 the Norman were as remarkable as those virtues are usually  
 found to be in great men when they give away what belongs to  
 other people. <sup>49</sup>

Thus, William the Conqueror, Dickens would have us think, was a  
 mere large-scale thief and his dependants were receivers of illegitimately  
 or immorally acquired property. One is at a loss here while deciding  
 whether to be grateful to Dickens for presenting us with such a shabbily,  
 though entertainingly, implausible interpretation of important historical  
 events or simply overlook the weaknesses of portrayal which often arise  
 from the writer's overweening moralizations. Now, if we take Dickens  
 at his word, his opposition to old families such as the Chuzzlewits must  
 be rejected as powerless and ineffective on the grounds that it takes the  
 form of abstract negation. What I mean by this is that there is in the  
 novel an apparent and great disparity between theory and practice, between  
 what is said and what is seen.

In the opening chapter of Martin Chuzzlewit, for instance, the  
 reader is made to think or believe that the Chuzzlewits are an old  
 family connected with the landed interest, but the whole course of events  
 in the novel tends to show them as a money-grabbing bourgeois family. It  
 would be contrary to common-sense to argue in defence of the Chuzzlewits'  
 belonging to the landed classes. For the novel is full of references to

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p.1.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

the Chuzzlewits' middle-class tendencies and pursuits. The following comment on Jonas Chuzzlewit throws some light on the point in question :

The education of Mr. Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance. The very first word he learnt to spell was 'gain', and the second (when he got into two syllables), 'money'. 50

Concerning the young hero of Martin Chuzzlewit, however, there is little doubt, if any, that he belongs to the new class of gentry to which Robinson Crusoe also belongs. As Jerome Buckley has pointed out, Martin is a "distinctly bourgeois (gentleman) struggling to make way in a mercantile society."<sup>51</sup> He is clearly a middle-class gentleman who, significantly, has a good deal of artificial embarrassment about money and status. Although Dickens' presentation of young Martin cannot be said to be a self-portrait, it, nevertheless, throws some light on the author's coyness about money as well as on his pride of status. When on board the 'Screw', and when urged and goaded by his manservant - Mark Tapley - to move away to the 'after-deck', for instance, Martin retorts by asserting :

'... I lie here because I don't wish to be recognized, in the better days to which I aspire, by any purse-proud citizen, as the man who came over with him among the steerage passengers. I lie here because I wish to conceal my circumstances and myself, and not to arrive in a new world badged and ticketed as an utterly poverty-stricken man. If I could have afforded a passage in the after-cabin, I should have held up my head with the rest ...' 52

Not unlike his fictional character, Dickens always prided himself on being a gentleman; and like Martin, too, he was always afraid of associating with people whom he considered to be lower than him in the social scale. Narrating his experience - to his friend John Forster - at the blacking warehouse, Dickens observes :

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>51</sup> Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper : A Study in Literary Culture, (London : Frank Cass, 1966), P.29.

<sup>52</sup> Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, p.252.

'No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast.' 53

The quotation is too obvious to require any further explanation. Whether Dickens was aware that he showed much of himself in his fictitious character is not very certain. Yet, one may assuredly say that Dickens' life was greatly influenced by his sense of social superiority or what might be described as his status-consciousness. This may be held to account for the novelist's leaning more in his early novels on the old criteria of gentility than on the later ones. At any rate, though Martin Chuzzlewit is supposed to belong to the old school of gentlemen; he, nonetheless, can be seen to be directed and controlled by the middle-class code of values which laid much stress on self-improvement as a passport to the world of gentility. The key word to understanding Dickens' gentlemanly ideal is, in fact, the Victorian virtue of self-help. This is implied in almost all Dickens' novels of the early and middle periods. As we come to discuss the concept of gentility in Dickens' novels of the middle period, the picture of the author's attitude towards self-made gentlemen becomes clear.

Before proceeding to tackle the concept of gentility in Dickens' remaining novels, I find it appropriate first to point out that middle-class gentility was synonymous with respectability. To be respectable, or even to be called respectable, was the epitome of human happiness to many a lower and middle-class family. All respectable men, ironically enough, "wanted to be called gentlemen, but few were chosen."<sup>54</sup> However, owing to Dickens' ironic usage, the word 'Respectability' had become so divorced from its original attributes of :

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<sup>53</sup>John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (London : Chapman and Hall, 1872), Vol. I, p.33.

<sup>54</sup>Best, op. cit, p.260.

Sobriety, thrift, cleanliness of person and tidiness of home, good manners, respect for the law, honesty in business affairs and, it need hardly be said, chastity. 55

In Dickens' fictional world, 'respectable' or 'earnest' is rarely a term of approbation. The author's presentation of Mr. Vholes in Bleak House is exemplary :

Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes, or are making them, to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice; which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability. He is reserved and serious; which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. 56

Dickens, contrary to what is commonly held and believed of him, adopted a rather unsympathetic attitude towards the 'respectable' classes. Their abortive efforts at genteel living rarely escaped his cynicism and mockery, despite the fact that "his emotions and his ambitions were deeply those of the respectable middle class."<sup>57</sup> His reason for repeatedly attacking middle-class respectability is that it kills the basic instincts of friendliness and kindly sympathies and replaces them by self-regarding sentiments and values. This is the motive behind Dickens' indirect criticism of the self-seeking and socially-ambitious Headstone and Charley Hexam in Our Mutual Friend : And this, too, is the rationale behind the novelist's scathing attack on worldly opportunists, like Mr. Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit, and pompous materialists, like Gradgrind in Hard Times or Podsnap in Our Mutual Friend. Still, one must not go to the extreme of saying that Dickens' delineation of bourgeois gentility was always cynical and unfavourable. Contrariwise, the author's criticism of some aspects of middle-class modes of living was often

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<sup>55</sup>Altick, op. cit., p.175.

<sup>56</sup>Charles Dickens, Bleak House (London : The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1975), pp. 547-48.

<sup>57</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 313.

constructive and tended towards reform. This shows, if it shows anything, Dickens' deep concern and sense of responsibility towards the general well-being of his society. It is not insignificant that Dickens makes the idle gentleman Harold Skimpole, in Bleak House, reject the idea of becoming 'respectable' on the grounds that respectability is always connected with 'responsibility'. More light is thrown on this point by Mr. Skimpole's remarks addressed to Esther Summerson :

'Now when you mention responsibility', he resumed, 'I am disposed to say, that I never had the happiness of knowing any one whom I should consider so refreshingly responsible as yourself. You appear to me to be the very touchstone of responsibility. When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined to say to myself ... that's responsibility.' 58

This leads us neatly into a comparison and a contrast between the old and the new species of gentlemen and their modes of living in the different strata of society as portrayed in Dickens' novels of the middle and later periods.

Dickens' observations of aristocratic and middle-class genteel life covered a wide scope of activities and interests. It is necessary to allude here to the fact that Dickens' highly involved style of the early period as a writer, say until 1848, became less and less committed as he grew older in years and grander in social eminence. This marked change in the author's tone was accompanied by a significant one in Dickens' social views and attitudes. His views and opinions of the period after 1848 were more lofty, if not aristocratic. This by no means implies that Dickens' conscientious concern with his society disintegrated considerably after the novelist's entree into the aristocratic circles of London society. As Chesterton pointed out, "it was about the period of Dombey and Son that Dickens began to be taken up by good society."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Dickens, Bleak House, p.531.

<sup>59</sup> Chesterton, op. cit., p.123.

As a result, most of Dickens' aristocratic gentlemen, in novels of the periods in question, are drawn with care and sympathy. This is not to say that the touch of irony is always missing from portraits of aristocratic gentlemen. What one marvels at in Dickens' later writings is the apparent dualism with which the author portrays class stratification and distinctions. The author sometimes would be seen defending idle or indolent gentlemen, like Eugene Wrayburn in Our Mutual Friend; at other times, he would be seen as a well-wisher of the industrious classes defending their rights and championing their cause. Mr. Rouncewell, the ironmaster in Bleak House, is a case in point.

However, though Dickens' novels are not our best guide to an understanding of the Victorians' attitude towards the gentleman, past and present; they, nonetheless, give us much insight into some of the Victorians' ways of thinking and behaving. One of the distinctive features that characterizes Dickens' attitude to the concept of gentility, old and new, is the great antipathy shown towards fashionable society. This is most exemplified in his presentation of the Boffins, in Our Mutual Friend, who are clearly a satire on genteel or fashionable society. One could easily detect a pure stream of Christian morality underlying the author's description of the Boffins whom he describes as 'a hopelessly Unfashionable pair'. This is illustrated by the following quotation :

These two ignorant and unpolished people had guided themselves so far on in their journey of life, by a religious sense of duty and desire to do right. 60

Alongside this stream of Christian morality runs another stream of irony and sarcasm mainly directed against those who not only take too much pride in their gentility but also preoccupy themselves with its minutiae

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<sup>60</sup>Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, p.101.

to the extent of neglecting their duties towards their families, let alone towards the rest of society. Dickens' derision of Mr. Turveydrop, in Bleak House, Mr. Dorrit, in Little Dorrit, and Mrs. Pocket, in Great Expectations, derives not so much from their obsession with gentility and family pedigrees as much as from the fact that they neglect their duties towards their children. Mr. Turveydrop, for instance, is shown to be more concerned with gentility or deportment than with bringing up his only surviving son. Mrs. Pocket, on the other hand, is also shown to be more concerned with family pedigrees and baronetcies than with attending to her children's needs and upbringing. As for the 'Father of the Marshalsea', Mr. Dorrit, his preoccupation with gentility is reflected in his inability to exercise the simplest paternal function. Dickens' derision and mockery of his social system's preoccupation with gentility reaches a climax in David Copperfield, particularly when he makes Miss Mowcher utter the following remarks :

'I said, what a set of humbugs we were in general, and I showed you the scraps of the Prince's nails to prove it. The Prince's nails do more for me in private families of the genteel sort, than all my talents put together. I always carry 'em about. They're the best introduction. If Miss Mowcher cuts the Prince's nails, she must be all right... Upon my life, "the whole social system" ... is a system of Prince's nails!' 61

In almost all his major novels, Dickens' restraining grasp on 'High Society' is rarely, if ever, relaxed. Society's absurdity and superficiality is nowhere else in Dickens' novels more clearly embodied than in Bleak House; where everybody boasts of being genteel, or connected with genteel people, or even subservient to gentle-folk. Mr. Badger, in Bleak House, is an exemplary representative of the subservient class of people who try to rise socially not by virtue of their own merits but rather by praising other people's merits. This is most exemplified in

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<sup>61</sup>Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 330.

his praise of Mrs. Badger's former 'genteel' husbands :

'And most remarkable men!' said Mr. Badger in a tone of confidence. 'Captain Swesser of the Royal Navy, who was Mrs. Badger's first husband was a very distinguished officer indeed. The name of Professor Dingo, my immediate predecessor, is one of European reputation.' 62

Dickens' dissatisfaction with the state of affairs of his society, it appears, arose from his sense of disgust : caused by seeing too much deference paid by the subordinate part of society to their 'betters' or superiors in station. It should not be understood from this that Dickens was seeking to annihilate the class-structure of his society; rather, what Dickens really desired "was emancipation from the 'accursed gentility' and entronement of privilege that blighted England." 63 Closely connected with the novelist's mocking attitude towards 'High Society' in his derision of 'blood' and 'family pedigrees'.

Dickens' attitude towards people who pride themselves on their old blood or old ancestry was by no means complimentary. Unlike his contemporaries Thackeray and Trollope, Dickens did not hesitate - in novels of the middle and later periods - to brush aside the old criterion of blood or birth as a necessary touchstone of gentility. The importance of high birth or gentle blood is less apparent in his post - Dombey and Son period than in the earlier one. However, Dickens' unfavourable attitude towards 'aristocracy of blood' with its stress on the criterion of birth as a pointer to gentility, may be illustrated by citing one or two examples from the novelist's books. At the Waterbrooks' dinner party in David Copperfield, for instance, David's discontent and boredom is shown to be increasing as the conversation takes an aristocratic turn. His boredom reaches a climax as he listens to 'the simpering fellow with

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<sup>62</sup>Dickens, Bleak House, p. 173.

<sup>63</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 316.

the weak legs' - to use his own words - stating the question of 'Blood' decisively :

'Oh, you know, deuce take it,' said this gentleman, looking round the board with an imbecile smile, 'we can't forego Blood, you know. We must have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know, may be a little behind their station, perhaps, in point of education and behaviour, and may go a little wrong, you know ... but deuce take it, it's delightful to reflect that they've got Blood in 'em! Myself, I'd rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd be picked up by a man who hadn't!' 64

Much as Dickens criticized 'blood-worship' and 'old-descent', he could not help viewing 'genealogy' and 'family pedigrees' with an amused smile.

This is evidenced in his description of the Wilfers, in Our Mutual Friend, who "were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House." 65 The description in question is worth quoting :

Reginald Wilfer is a name with rather a grand sound, suggesting on first acquaintance brasses in country churches, scrolls in stained-glass windows, and generally the De Wilfers who came over with the Conqueror. For, it is a remarkable fact in genealogy that no De Any ones ever came over with Anybody else. 66

But despite Dickens' disparagement - direct and indirect - of old descent and high birth, and despite his satirical representation of many aspects of aristocratic traditions and assumptions, his attitude towards the old school of gentlemen, as portrayed in his novels of the 1850's and 1860's, remains more favourable than his attitude towards the bourgeoisie in general. The novelist's protestations against the privileged classes in his early novels, represented by figures like Sir Mulberry Hawk in Nicholas Nickleby and Sir John Chester in Barnaby Rudge, was simply a way of alleviating his inner frustrations as well as his sense of social

<sup>64</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, pp. 374-75.

<sup>65</sup> Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

inferiority. Some light is thrown on this point by the following extract from the heated argument between Nicholas Nickleby and Sir Mulberry :

'You are a villain', said Nicholas.  
 'You are an errand-boy for aught I know', said Sir Mulberry Hawk.  
 'I am the son of a country gentleman', returned Nicholas,  
 'Your equal in birth and education, and your superior I trust in everything besides...' 67

The extract is quite obvious and does no more than high-light what has just been said concerning the author's sense of insecurity. On the other hand, and particularly after writing Dombey and Son, Dickens gradually inclines towards the conventional attitude respecting the leisured classes. This manifests itself clearly in Our Mutual Friend. However, in books of the Dombey and Son period and of the later one, upper-class characters, with a few exceptions, are shown as having more decent values than those possessed by the bourgeoisie. Handicapped by circumstances from playing any effective part in the world, though some of them might appear aristocratic, gentlemen like Cousin Feenix, Sir Leicester Dedlock and Twemlow are shown as chivalrous and high-minded. That such aristocratic figures are endeared to the reader by virtue of their eccentricities and oddities is not as important as the fact that their values outshine those of their bourgeois counterparts. It was not for no purpose that Dickens endowed them with chivalrous instincts and showed them as having decent values. The novelist's motives for acting thus are not far to reach, and his novels are our best guide in this matter.

It should be pointed out here that whenever Dickens impinged upon territories of social criticism and tried to tackle social problems in his books, the gentlemanly element would creep, in one way or another, into the whole thing and diffuse itself into the texture of the issue in question. This is evidenced and exemplified in Dickens' portrayal of

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<sup>67</sup>Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p.417.

<sup>68</sup>O.F. Christie, Dickens and His Age : An Essay (London : Heath Cranton, 1939), p. 124.

class-conflict in Our Mutual Friend.

It need hardly be added that Dickens' glorification of the old species of gentlemen - represented by gentlemanly figures like Eugene, Mortimer Lightwood, Twemlow and the Reverend Frank Milvey - in Our Mutual Friend forms a substantial part of his social commentary and documentation. The most important thing about these characters is the great sympathy they gain from their delineator. However, despite his antipathy to middle-class virtues and pursuits, Eugene Wrayburn stands out as an undoubted hero in the Dickensian sense of the word. His thematic significance derives from the fact that he, as a representative of aristocratic values and ideals, offers an alternative rather than a threat to bourgeois virtues like 'earnestness' or 'respectability'. In dealing a heavy blow to the respectable schoolmaster Dickens can clearly be identified with the upper-middle-class Eugene Wrayburn who is given the upper hand in the class-marriage affair that takes place in the novel. Though it is not easy to tell whether Dickens was trying, through Eugene, to install the upper strata of society on a new pedestal, one may assert that Dickens' faith in the bourgeoisie had completely collapsed by the time he came to write Our Mutual Friend. Of course, one may still come across sympathetically-created bourgeois gentlemen in Dickens' later novels, but these gentlemen are too idealized to be true. Mention could be made here of Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit and John Harmon in Our Mutual Friend. The role such gentlemen usually play in Dickens' world is simply acting as agents for the regeneration of middle-class culture. Dickens' loss of faith in the middle classes, it could be maintained, is ascribable to their material arrogance towards each other and, no less, to their lusting after power and status. A great deal of natural kindness and sympathy, Our Mutual Friend in particular seems to suggest, is sacrificed for the sake of might be described as becoming respectable or genteel in the scale of society. This is implied throughout the novel,

especially in Dickens' treatment of the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone, and his pupil Charley Hexam. Ample light is thrown on this point by Charley Hexam's own following remarks :

'However, I have made up my mind that I will become respectable in the scale of society, and that I will not be dragged down by others. I have done with my sister as well as with you. Since she cares so little for me as to care nothing for undermining my respectability, she shall go her way and I will go mine.' 69

When society measures its members by a money-standard, Dickens seems to argue in this book, the natural result is likely to be lack of love and deep understanding on all sides concerned. As might be expected, this would not be without its disruptive effects on social dealings and personal relationships. This is the tenour of the author's arguments against pursuing respectability or gentility for its own sake. Perhaps Thackeray was not far wrong when he asserted that "gentility is the death and 70 destruction of social happiness amongst the middle classes in England."

However, it is not always difficult to tell whether Dickens, the son of impoverished gentleman, is criticizing from a purely objective viewpoint or from an unjustly coloured one. The amount of criticism and ridicule some middle-class and lower-class people receive at his hands can in no way be described as just or constructive. This is most apparent in his treatment of Bradley Headstone, again, who is always put on the defensive by the indolent Eugene Wrayburn. To give an example, one may refer here to the class-conscious confrontation that occurs in Our Mutual Friend between Eugene Wrayburn and the schoolmaster. The incident just referred to is worth emphasizing because of its obvious bearing on the subjects of gentility and social acceptance. The following extract is illustrative :

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<sup>69</sup>Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, pp. 712-13.

<sup>70</sup>Thackeray, Travels in London, Letters to a Young Man About Town and other Contributors to Punch, p.159.

'The sister - who is something too much upon your lips, perhaps - is so very different from all the associations to which she has been used, and from all the low obscure people about her, that it is a very natural ambition'.  
 'Do you throw my obscurity in my teeth, Mr. Wrayburn?'  
 'That can hardly be, for I know nothing concerning it, Schoolmaster, and seek to know nothing'.  
 'You reproach me with my origin', said Bradley Headstone;  
 'You cast insinuations at my bringing-up. But I tell you, sir, I have worked my way onward, out of both and in spite of both, and have a right to be considered a better man than you ...' 71

At the heart of this class skirmish lies the Victorian malady, Gentility, with its multiple intricacies; a skirmish, one may add, that is fed to explosion by a strong sense of some unmerited injury and injustice. The relevance of this extract to any criticism of the novelist's attitude towards the rising bourgeoisie is by no means little. Set beside the extract already quoted from Nicholas Nickleby, concerning the status-conscious confrontation between the protagonist and Sir Mulberry, it shows Dickens as a willing victim of the infectious social snobbery about him regarding self-made men's attempts at genteel living. The novelist's awareness of the importance Victorian society attached to being of the 'leisured class' can be seen to act as a hindrance to his viewing the ambitious section of the middle class other than condescendingly. His sneering at those he often described as 'respectable' is by no means fair or justifiable. For, indeed, their way of living was not dissimilar from his own before he was welcomed into the charmed circles of 'Society'. As for lower-class people looking forward to join the upper grades of genteel society, their lot was not more fortunate than that of the middle class. Even when Dickens portrayed the lower class with kindness and sympathy, as he sometimes did, he could not help displaying a considerable amount of paternalism and condescension. The novelist's attitude towards the 'turnkey', John Chivery, in Little Dorrit is characteristic. Commenting

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<sup>71</sup> Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, p. 293.

on this character's good behaviour on some occasion, Dickens observes that "this was native delicacy in Mr. Chivery - true politeness; though his exterior had very much of a turnkey about it; and not least of a gentleman".<sup>72</sup> In any case, Dickens' lusting after an easy life and, at

the same time, his mockery of those who aimed at achieving the same end is perplexingly contradictory. One must not lose sight of the fact that Dickens' "passion for money had its origin in his passion to rise out of the shabby gentility of his lower middle-class circumstances, his passion to be somebody".<sup>73</sup> The moral here is not that Dickens falsely tried to be somebody; rather, it is that Dickens' sense of his importance led him to play down other people's feelings and ambitions. This is evident in Dickens' questioning of the value of self-help or self-betterment, the staple of Bradley Headstone's and other characters's pursuit of respectability and improved status. It is also evident in the novelist's questioning of the desirability of gentlemanliness and in his engrafting it upon criminality - as embodied in the figure of Magwitch in Great Expectations. On the other hand, Dickens' presentation of the 'art profession', in David Copperfield, as a genteel one is a good clue to his personal involvement in the concept of gentility. By raising the artist as a 'gentleman' to an unprecedented high level of distinction, both morally and socially, Dickens can be seen to have been acting on purely selfish grounds. Though Dickens might indeed be said to have added a new dimension to the 'notion of gentleman' as a professional artist, it still does not necessarily mean that his presentation of social reality was impartial or unbiassed. But, of course, this is no reason why we should not study the novelist's attitudes and beliefs with a fair amount of detachment and objectivity.

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<sup>72</sup>Dickens, Little Dorrit, p. 721.

<sup>73</sup>Ada Nisbet, "The Autobiographical Matrix of Great Expectations," The Victorian Newsletter (No. 15; Spring, 1959), p. 11.

## CHAPTER 4

ELIZABETH GASKELL

'I take it that "gentleman" is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as "a man", we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow men, but in relation to himself, - to life - to time - to eternity. A Castaway lonely as Robinson Crusoe - a prisoner immured in a dungeon for life - nay, even a saint in Patmos, has his endurance, his strength, his faith, best described by being spoken of as "a man". I am rather weary of this word "gentlemanly", which seems to me to be often inappropriately used, and often, too, with such exaggerated distortion of meaning, while the full simplicity of the noun "man", and the adjective "manly" are unacknowledged - that I am induced to class it with the cant of the day.'

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This extract from a conversation between Margaret Hale and Mr. John Thornton in North and South exemplifies a general trend which pervades Mrs. Gaskell's novels towards the concept of the gentleman. Specifically in this novel, the triumph of the bourgeois gentleman, otherwise self-made man, appears to be complete. Nowhere in her books does Mrs. Gaskell come closer to an objective presentation of the concept of Gentility than in North and South; yet the total picture with which the reader is presented can hardly be seen to be free from the writer's class bias and colouring. It is true that Mrs. Gaskell is much less obtrusive in her fiction than other writers of the same period, but this by no means implies that her portraiture of contemporary life is done "in all its complexity and detail, with the absolute minimum of selection and distortion",<sup>2</sup> as W.A. Craik maintains.

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South (London: J.M. Dent, 1967), p. 158

<sup>2</sup>W.A. Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 92.

For all her sympathetic imagination and honesty of intention, there is always something in Mrs. Gaskell's books which is, if not stamped with her own personality, at least tinged by her conception of life. However, since our concern is with the novelist's books rather than with Mrs. Gaskell herself, we had better restrict ourselves to the characters portrayed in her novels only.

To refer to the above quotation from North and South, one may simply state that Mr. Thornton's dismissal of the word gentlemanly as 'cant of the day' is not supposed to be taken at its face value. Gentlemanly, as Richard Faber points out, was indeed "an overworked word and there was a good deal of cant about its use"<sup>3</sup>; but John Thornton, contrary to what Richard Faber is inclined to think, is not in my view the right person to pass such a dismissive judgement on this term. Of course, John Thornton was quite justified in dismissing 'gentlemanly' on the basis of its being 'inappropriately used, and often, too, with such exaggerated distortion of meaning' - to use his own words - but my disagreement with the above critic arises from the fact that Mr. Thornton himself, as can clearly be seen in the novel, was so anxious and keen on being thought of as a gentleman of independent means. The legitimacy of the manufacturer's attack on gentlemanliness in this book is greatly undermined by the fact underlying his pursuit of the Classics. This will become fairly obvious in the course of my subsequent analysis of the Concept of Gentility in Mrs. Gaskell's novels, particularly in North and South. It must be pointed out first, however, that the emphasis Mrs. Gaskell places on the word 'man', through the fictional hero John Thornton, can only be interpreted as an attempt to lessen the prejudice exercised by the upper strata of society against self-made men's claim to the title of 'gentleman'. As this point has been insufficiently considered by John Lucas in his article, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood,"

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Faber, Proper Stations : Class in Victorian Fiction

(London : Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 139.

further elaboration of it is, therefore, deemed quite necessary. In this article Lucas is both right and justified in stressing Margaret Hale's prejudice against manufacturers of John Thornton's cast, especially as they attempt to pursue the accomplishments of gentlemen. But somehow, John Lucas credits Mrs. Gaskell with more intelligence in uncovering class prejudices than she deserves. This critic's view on the matter in question is worth citing here:

It would be quite wrong to dismiss this as a superficial prejudice and certainly it would be unfair to Mrs. Gaskell, one of whose most commendable achievements is to show just how deep the prejudice runs in determining attitudes not only of the people who hold the prejudice but of the people against whom the prejudice is held. 4

Lucas' observation is quite unsettling; but it is no more so than that of his fellow-critic Richard Faber when he insists that though "it is possible to detect some bias in Mrs. Gaskell towards Toryism and gentility, her basic attitude is that of unprejudiced sympathy with all classes."<sup>5</sup>

I am not by any means implying that both critics' views are wrong or irrelevant. This is not so. Doubtless, both critics have their solid grounds on which they must have based their various estimates of the matter in question. Still, it could easily be maintained here that both critics' remarks are only partly true. Perhaps, it would be more accurate to suggest that Lucas's and Faber's above-mentioned conclusions are more complementary than otherwise. As far as I can see, Mrs. Gaskell is no less guilty of bias toward the old-established orders, the aristocracy and the gentry, than she is toward the new capitalist class, the bourgeoisie. Her partiality for the still not-sure-of-itself bourgeois manifests itself in different ways in North and South.

In the first place, the novelist turns the gentility-conscious Margaret Hale's brother into a merchant; and secondly, she betrays a middle-

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<sup>4</sup>John Lucas, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood", in David Howard and others, eds., Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p.195.

<sup>5</sup>Faber, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

class favouritism when she brings her genteel heroine to accept the bourgeois values embodied in the character of John Thornton, 'Man.' The finishing touch to the favourably-presented bourgeois picture the novelist draws in this book can strongly be felt when Margaret Hale comes to prefer, towards the end of North and South, the word 'man' for the misused term 'gentleman'. Miss Hale's gradual conversion to the new creed of the bourgeois with its idealization of work, though not without some insight into its merits, is an admission on the part of the class she represents of the middle class's superiority and legitimate ascendancy over its ill-adaptable rivals, the declining aristocracy and gentry. To avoid any misunderstanding and, hence, to avoid being accused of any implausibility, I shall base my discussion of Mrs. Gaskell's concept of gentility on a few remarks and observations from North and South itself; and, at a later stage, from the writer's other books. Special emphasis will be placed on the characters of Mr. John Thornton and Margaret Hale, the two significant figures that render North and South a battle-ground of conflicting class sympathies and allegiances.

In the figure of Mr. Thornton, to begin with, Mrs. Gaskell tries, somewhat unsuccessfully, to bring together the old and new attributes of a gentleman. Mrs. Gaskell's plunging her fictitious manufacturer into the whirlpool of the classics is by no means a successful or easy step. As might easily be gathered from the case of Mr. Thornton, Mrs. Gaskell can be seen to have been trying to reconcile two incompatibles : industry versus leisure. The writer's attempt at reconciling the two extremes of old and new stands as a major setback in her development of the character of John Thornton in North and South. This is simply because it renders the personality of our fictional hero a battlefield of conflicting desires and allegiances. Right from the beginning of the novel, for instance, Mr. Thornton is understood to represent and symbolize industry and the bourgeois 'Gospel of Work'. This has been emphasized time and again in North and South itself. It is hardly difficult to realize that John Thornton

has descended in a direct line from the first and most individualistic grandfather of bourgeois gentlemen in English fiction, Robinson Crusoe. This is evidenced in this character's high admiration and esteem for the hero of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. As one perceives from the opening quotation, Crusoe represents for Mr. Thornton all the good qualities embodied in the higher and 'completer being than a gentleman' - to use the manufacturer's own words - MAN. More light is thrown on this matter by the following extract from a conversation that takes place between Mr. Thornton and the Hales :

'I would rather be a man toiling, suffering-may, failing and successless here (says John Thornton) than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society in the South, with their slow days of careless ease.' 6

Here, one immediately recalls Crusoe's preference for a life of adventure and enterprise to a life of idleness and elegant ease promised to be provided for him by his father. It should be remarked in passing that the attraction of the middle-class picture, drawn in North and South, to the reader owes much of its richness and strength to the manufacturer's only surviving parent who, unlike Crusoe's father, encourages her son in his industrial schemes and launches him in the right direction for bourgeois success. This is clearly indicated in Mrs. Thornton's retort to Mr. Hale on some occasion :

'I have no doubt that classics are very desirable for people who have leisure. But, I confess, it was against my judgement that my son renewed his study of them. The time and place in which he lives, seem to me to require all his energy and attention. Classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in villages; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of today.' 7

The passage is too obvious to require further comment.

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<sup>6</sup> Gaskell, North and South, p.76.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.107.

What has just preceded makes it apparent that Mr. Thornton is meant to stand for the new energy and dynamics of the Industrial revolution or, alternatively, the new creed of gentility which embraces all things that fall under the categorized words 'manliness' and 'enterprise'. In a word, he represents the triumph of the middle-class concept of gentility.

Nevertheless, Mr. John Thornton is often seen as a leisure-class member with plenty of time on his hands that enables him to pursue the 'classics'. For, besides his not a few social engagements, he still finds enough time to read with a private tutor. Catechized by Mrs. Slickson on the subject of gentility, a thing that is brought about by the presence of the genteel-looking Hale family, after a dinner-party held at the Thorntons, Fanny - the manufacturer's sister - volunteers to tell the lady in question that her "brother John goes to him (meaning the private tutor, Mr. Hale) twice a week." <sup>8</sup> However, and while still deeply immersed in learning the 'classics', Mr. Thornton is almost suddenly seen to be converted into a most zealous opponent of Greek culture and, at the same time, of the defenders and perpetuators of classical learning at Oxford and Cambridge. Incensed by being described as spending life in gathering together the materials for life, and accused to his face of striving for money without knowing how to enjoy oneself - a thing which is tantamount to saying that he is vulgar and narrow-minded - John Thornton, addressing himself to both Mr. Hale and the Oxonian relict Mr. Bell, retorts as follows:

'Remember we are of a different race from the Greeks to whom beauty was everything, and to whom Mr. Bell might speak of a life of leisure and serene enjoyment, much of which entered in through their outward senses. I don't mean to despise them, any more than I would ape them. But I belong to Teutonic blood... We retain much of their language; we retain more of their spirit; we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion.'

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There is much truth in what John Thornton says here; but, also, there is a good deal of implied hypocrisy which mars the truthfulness of his whole utterance.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.159.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.324.

My objection to Mr. Thornton, as far as the above remarks are concerned, is directed in the main to his statement 'I don't mean to despise them, any more than I would ape them'; for John Thornton is not qualified enough to despise the Greeks - even if he wished - nor is he justified in denying the fact of his 'aping' them. Clearly, Mr. Thornton had too much respect for the Gospel of Work to admit the civilizing effect and the moral advantages that could be gained from a training in the classics. As R.H. Wilkinson aptly observes: "To the gentleman, and those who respected him, classical culture was supposed to confer moral advantage<sup>10</sup> by providing select access to past wisdoms."

Here arises the central issue raised by Margaret Hale early in North and South, particularly when she asks her father: "What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?"<sup>11</sup> I am quite disposed to comply with John Lucas's suggestion, in the same article quoted above, to strike out the 'or'; for, as he says, "classics and literature are the accomplishments of gentlemen, and manufacturers as manufacturers can, of course, want<sup>12</sup> nothing to do with them." Still, this does not seem to resolve the problem posed here and which relates to Mr. Thornton's statement pointed out above. The fact that must be stressed here is that John Thornton does one thing while he professes an entirely different one. The result is, a great apparent disparity between what he does and what he states or seems to believe. He is opposed to the old Greek culture and style of living, yet he is anxious to recall his old knowledge of their literature which he had received at school. If Mr. Thornton was indeed true to himself, he would not have compromised his love for his Teutonic origin, which exalted work above all, by trying to renew his knowledge of the classical

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<sup>10</sup>R.H. Wilkinson. "The Gentleman Ideal and the Maintenance of a Political Elite," in P.W. Musgrave, ed., Sociology, History and Education (Methuen, 1970), p.128.

<sup>11</sup>Gaskell, North and South, p.34.

<sup>12</sup>Lucas, op. cit., p.195.

heritage of the Greeks. The manufacturer might not appear to be aping the sensual Greeks or their way of life, but he is far from being able to deny aping his 'betters', the nobility and gentry, whom he claims to look down upon. For classical learning is the same cultural heritage that had been successively safeguarded and preserved by the Nobility and Gentry of old England.

It may be wondered here why John Thornton was so keen on learning the classics since he was very proud of belonging to 'Teutonic blood' and to a people who - to use his own words again - 'do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion.' To put it in different terms, Mr. Thornton is 'a man' who was born for action and exertion and therefore he had no need for the classics which seems to be an alien element infused into the 'Gospel of Work' which he highly esteems. One is at a loss while trying to decide whether this contradiction in terms is attributable to Mr. Thornton himself or to his creator, Mrs. Gaskell. No doubt, the manufacturer's various attacks on leisure and pleasure and, no less, on the idle rich in general are partly due to his suspicion about the spending motive but mainly to feelings of envy and distrust. Some light might be thrown on this point, perhaps, by citing W.E. Houghton's following significant observation :

The truth is, however paradoxical it may seem, that the business-man who thought of work as a supreme duty dreamed of retiring from work - into idleness; and those who made the idle aristocrat an object of scorn found him also an object of envy".<sup>13</sup>

In addition, one may venture to say here, Mr. Thornton knew too little of Greek culture to be able to appreciate it fully. This, no doubt, explains why he came to depreciate it on the only occasion on which he felt almost forced to put forward his own ideas and beliefs and to prefer insulating himself in a narrow circle of 'Teutonic blood.' Briefly speaking, John Thornton was too proud of being a wealthy manufacturer and a representative

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<sup>13</sup>Houghton, op. cit., p.169.

of the workshop of the world to be able to realize his own personal deficiencies of which one might simply mention his unintellectual temper. In a way, Mr. Thornton is an underdeveloped version of Dickens' Mr. Podsnap in Our Mutual Friend who is aptly described by Edgar Johnson as,

British insularity contemptuous of foreign<sup>n</sup>ess and everything 'Not English'. He is the incarnate materialism of a monetary barbarism that masquerades as civilization". 14

It is rather doubtful that men of Mr. Thornton's temper were ever capable of recognizing J.S. Mill's distinction between the higher and lower pleasures. Regrettably in North and South, Mrs. Gaskell is more concerned with delineating John Thornton's character than with his mind.

On the other hand, it can be argued here that Elizabeth Gaskell in this book was trying to prove that bourgeois or self-made men are not incapable of learning the classics and thus should be treated on the same footing as upper-class gentlemen. In other words, they are no less intelligent than their upper-class fellow-men. If this be the case, then one may easily assert that Mrs. Gaskell was quite unfortunate in her choice of the classics as a means of showing this equality between the different strata of Victorian society. For Mrs. Gaskell's emphasis of the classical element in North and South is, more or less, an admission on her part of the reliability of learning the classics as a criterion for measuring one's class superiority or one's degree of gentility. In fact, this is tantamount to asserting that the only way out for the middle classes, if they wish to distinguish themselves either socially or culturally, is to follow the old standards laid down by their traditional superiors, the Nobility and Gentry. Further proof of this point is provided in the novel by the fact that Mr. Thornton's eventual salvation and humanization is achieved at the hands of Miss Margaret Hale who is intended as an embodiment of the social and moral values of the Cultured South. This renders a full discussion of the part played by Miss Hale and 'Family' in modifying and redefining the

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<sup>14</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p.1028.

bourgeois 'Concept of Gentility' quite necessary here.

In his famous book on Mrs. Gaskell, Edgar Wright passes the following significant remarks on both Margaret Hale and her creator :

Margaret Hale is a projection of the attitudes which Mrs. Gaskell felt she ought to take; she attempts to defeat her prejudices by dealing with them in fiction, making the novel a fantasy substitute for a failure in reality. 15

How far Edgar Wright is justified in thus assessing Mrs. Gaskell and comparing her to the heroine is not quite certain. Yet, it can be maintained, Mrs. Gaskell's attempt to defeat her prejudices in fiction does not necessarily mean that she succeeded in achieving the end aimed at, or even that she made acceptable amends in fiction for what formed in reality a personal deficiency. However, the important thing which ought to be noticed while considering the character of Miss Hale is that she stands for all the old traditions and accepted standards of genteel behaviour. This does not exclude the fact that Margaret Hale shares most of the old-established social orders' prejudices and pre-conceived notions. An example of this is the heroine's bias in favour of the traditionally acknowledged genteel professions. This is facilitated by Margaret's own remarks to her mother one day :

'I call mine a very comprehensive taste; I like all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions, as they call them. I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers nor bakers, and candle-stick-makers, do you, mamma?' 16

It need hardly be said here that Miss Hale's apparent prejudice is not something new in English fiction. To the mid-Victorian Nobility and Gentry, as a mere acquaintance with Victorian literature is likely to reveal, tradespeople were more hated and persecuted than their trading predecessors of the eighteenth century. The reason, perhaps, is because they posed a real threat to the ruling classes' supremacy and ascendancy.

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<sup>15</sup> Edgar Wright, Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London : Oxford University Press, 1965), p.136.

<sup>16</sup> Gaskell, North and South, p.100.

To understand the nature of the relationship that existed between the gentility-conscious Margaret Hale and the self-made manufacturer John Thornton, one may do well to keep in view Mrs. Gaskell's own remarks and occasional authorial comments. Obviously, status-consciousness was taken for granted by Mrs. Gaskell; and this is why she was able to portray class-interrelation more realistically than George Eliot, for instance. Thus, in the first encounter that occurs between the genteel heroine and Mr. Thornton our attention is forcibly drawn to the class-consciousness which conditions and underlies both characters' future attitudes towards each other:

While he looked upon her (remarks the novelist) with an admiration he could not repress, she looked at him with proud indifference, taking him, he thought, for what, in his irritation, he told himself he was - a great rough fellow, with not a grace or a refinement about him. 17

The daughter of a learned gentleman who had once been a clergyman in the Church of England - a thing which reminds one of Mrs. Gaskell's own father - and the representative of the social and moral values of the rural South, it would seem only natural that Margaret Hale should look down upon the unrefined manufacturer John Thornton. Being culturally superior, a thing that can only be ascribed to Margaret's long attachment to the aristocratic values of the South, particularly to those belonging to the country gentry, the heroine's attitude towards the manufacturer is basically that of a social superior. This is most evidenced in her persistence in the conviction that John Thornton is 'not quite a gentleman'. Describing the manufacturer to her mother, Margaret insists that he is; "about thirty - with a face that is neither exactly plain, nor yet handsome, nothing remarkable - not quite a gentleman, but that was hardly to be expected".<sup>18</sup> By thus voicing the aristocratic view that John Thornton is 'not quite a gentleman', Miss Hale indirectly expresses her social and cultural superiority. After all, Margaret is only her own mother's daughter and is not likely to drift far

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.58

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.59

away from the values inculcated in her by this parent who is best described as 'a bit of a fine lady with her invalidism', to use Mrs. Thornton's own words.

It must be stressed here, however, that Margaret's awareness that she is a lady is not "derived from the sense of propriety that is best expressed as a consciousness of social responsibility",<sup>19</sup> as Coral Lansbury would have us believe; but rather from a sense of class superiority which enables her, despite her poverty, to assume the role of Lady Bountiful. Paternalism or condescension, an element which characterizes her social milieu, is her most prominent and predominant quality. She, quite unconsciously sometimes, exploits it on more than one person down the social ladder. The poverty-stricken Higginses in North and South are a case in point. Even her reconciliation with John Thornton, with all its symbolic connotations, is not devoid of that same element, paternalism. There is a great deal of truth in Mrs. Thornton's resentful remarks on Miss Hale, particularly her observation that Margaret

'seems to have a great notion of giving herself airs; and I can't make out why. I could almost fancy she thinks herself too good for her company at times.' 20

Oversimplifying considerably, one could maintain that Mrs. Gaskell betrays a good deal of bias towards 'gentlefolk' despite the fact that she is trying here to put her prejudices aside. Her prejudice, however, is early anticipated in the book particularly as she refers to Mr. Hale as 'a complete gentleman':

Mr. Hale returned from his morning's round, and was awaiting his visitor just outside the wicket gate.... He looked a complete gentleman in his rather threadbare coat and well-worn hat. 21

This appearance of gentility together with the innate sense of grace that characterizes Mr. Hale never depart from him till his dying day. The fact that

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<sup>19</sup>Coral Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell : The Novel of Social Crisis

(London : Paul Elek, 1975), p.107.

<sup>20</sup>Gaskell, North and South, p.136.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.21.

Mrs. Gaskell's favourably drawn picture of Mr. Hale is based on her father's having once been a clergyman in the Church of England admits of no doubt here. Moreover, the novelist's attempt at preaching egalitarian notions in North and South, through eliminating the concept of gentleman and hence class barriers, is doomed to fail by virtue of her using the 'classics' as a criterion for measuring one's social superiority. Those subtly disguised prejudices could easily be said to betray Mrs. Gaskell's latent sense of class superiority. What mars most the writer's vision of an ideal society that is to be based on merit and hard-work is the attribution of sound moral principles to the gentry class represented by Margaret Hale.

Though Margaret can be seen to have come to terms, in the end, with the manufacturer's social standards and values, she, nevertheless, remains the acknowledged repository of Christian values to which Mr. Thornton owes his humanization and eventual salvation. The reference here is by no means to formal religion or to Christianity in the conventional sense, but rather to good conduct which consists of kindness, benevolence and the virtue of 'Pathos'. This, perhaps, is what lies behind R.W. Emerson's apt assertion that - "The religion of England is part of good-breeding"<sup>22</sup> - and this, too, is what lies behind Mrs. Gaskell's attempt to imbue the 'raw' and 'uncultivated' manufacturer with the social and cultural graces of his social superiors. Through his association with the Hale family, Mr. Thornton not only learns to come to terms with the social values of the classes above him, but also realizes the urgent need for sympathetic understanding, the moral staple by which social as well as industrial relations should be supported and sustained. Symbolic though John Thornton's marriage to Margaret might appear, it cannot be denied that the manufacturer's bourgeois morality was partly shaped but chiefly modified by the aristocratic traditions of the South. In this way only, middle-class morality can be seen as a continuation

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<sup>22</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, English Traits Representative Men and other Essays (London : J.M. Dent), p.110.

of, rather than as 'an antidote or challenge' to the aristocratic 'code' of values. More light is thrown on this point by Elizabeth Gaskell's other novels where a compromise between the old and new values is achieved (arrived at), but not without a struggle. It behoves us now to follow the development of the 'concept of gentility' in the novelist's other books.

In Mary Barton, to begin with, the middle class's indebtedness to the higher social strata - as far as social and moral values are concerned - is only indirectly touched upon. Mainly concerned with depicting class conflict in an industrial town, there is hardly any mention in the book of the older class of gentry. What we have instead is a partly-developed portrait of the fully-established new class of 'gentry', the bourgeoisie. Class conflict here is no longer between the rising bourgeois and the traditional rulers of England, the Nobility and the Gentry, but rather between the middle class and the ambitious section of the working classes. It need hardly be said that the 'Radical' lower class attitude towards 'gentlefolk' is represented by John Barton whose antipathetic stance from the upper and middle classes in general can be discerned in his preference for his daughter's earning 'her bread by the sweat of her brow...(to being) like a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon.'<sup>23</sup> However, the main theme worked out in the relationship between Mary Barton, the bourgeois Carsons, and Jem Wilson, is the falsity and insignificance of class or social distinctions. What we see in Mary Barton is no more than a crude presentation of the artificiality of 'genteel living', and an indirect denunciation of the 'false substances' on which it is founded. "While he contemplated the desire after riches, social distinction, a name among the merchant princes amidst whom he moved," Mrs. Gaskell remarks on the older Mr. Carson as he sits deliberating upon the objects of his life, he "saw<sup>24</sup> those false substances fade away into the grave of his son." The

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<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Barton (London : J.M. Dent and Sons, 1964), p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.359.

fundamental question posed in the novelist's delineation of the older Carson, after the loss of his only son, is that social distinctions are based on a rather shallow and shifty ground. The desire after riches with its resultant social distinction is a mere fantasy that vanishes with the fading away of the people on whom we hang up our hopes and aspirations. Ironically enough, though Harry Carson's mother was herself 'a factory girl', her son finds it inconceivable to marry a working-class girl. The belief in marrying someone of one's own class is shared, in the novel, by no other than Harry's own father. This is most exemplified in the younger Carson's dialogue with the gossip-monger, Sally, on some occasion :

'My father would have forgiven any temporary connection, far sooner than my marrying one so beneath me in rank'.

'I thought you said, sir, your mother was a factory girl', reminded Sally, rather maliciously.

'Yes, yes! - but then my father was in much such a station; at any rate, there was not the disparity there is between Mary and me.' 25

Mary Barton, thus, can simply be seen to be concerned with the gradual disillusionment of not only the Carsons but also of the heroine about the desirability of 'genteel' living.

To elaborate this conclusion further, it could be argued here that if John Barton's attitude towards 'gentility' is characterized by repulsion, his daughter's is simply one of attraction. Noteworthy, Mrs. Gaskell's attitude towards the heroine of Mary Barton is quite similar to that adopted by George Eliot towards Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede. Backed by her experience of working-class people in Manchester, the writer here exhibits a considerable amount of insight into the character and nature of Mary Barton's aspirations. According to Mrs. Gaskell's presentation,

Mary was ambitious, and did not favour Mr. Carson the less because he was rich and a gentleman. The old leaven, infused years ago by her Aunt Esther, fermented in her little bosom, and perhaps all the more, for her father's aversion to the rich and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.130

gentle. Such is the contrariness of the human heart, from Eve downwards, that we all, in our Adam state, fancy things forbidden sweetest. 26

It is hardly difficult to detect the ironical touch in the above authorial comment. Whatever Mary's motives for wishing to become a lady may have been, her ambition clearly lies beyond her class or means. It cannot be doubted that the centre of her attraction to Harry Carson is the fact that he represents for her the dream-world into which she yearns to be admitted. In any case, whether the desire to become a lady was fostered in her by her fallen Aunt Esther or not is not so much significant as the fact that Mary was early infected with the Victorian mania for social recognition. As is early anticipated in the novel, Mary's genteel aspirations turn into **For building castles in the air,** feelings of bitterness and remorse. \ to use the novelist's own words, the heroine 'was doomed in after days to expiate with many tears'. But why, it may be asked here, should Mary Barton be doomed to expiate for aiming so high when we all know that many a nobleman or gentleman married a girl beneath him in social station? To avoid complicating things more than necessary, one could simply assert that this attitude reflects Mrs. Gaskell's belief in the rigidity of social distinctions. It remains to add a few remarks on both Harry Carson and Jem Wilson, the two rivals who help - somehow indirectly - Mary Barton to modify her views on gentility.

As described by the author, Mr. Carson "was strikingly handsome, and knew it. His dress was neat and well appointed and his manners far more  
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gentlemanly than his father's. The emphasis Mrs. Gaskell placed on the 'externals' here should not mislead us into believing that she was much impressed by the 'external trappings' of gentility, or even that he attached greater value to outward appearances than to humane and moral values. This is most evidenced in the writer's sympathetic attitude towards the poor smith, Jem Wilson, in Mary Barton; a working-class hero whose stance from the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.63.

'externalities' of gentility can easily be identified with that of his creator. The attitude is one that upholds manliness and discards elegance and outward superiority as unreliable touchstones of social worth. Thus, in his first encounter with his bourgeois rival, Mr. Wilson is commented on as follows:

This, then, was he whom Mary loved. It was, perhaps, no wonder; for he seemed to the poor smith so elegant, so well-appointed, that he felt the superiority in externals, strangely and painfully, for an instant. Then something uprose within him, and told him that 'a man's a man for a' that, for a' that, and twice as much as a' that'. And he no longer felt troubled by the outward appearance of his rival. 28

This fully anticipates John Thornton's support of and preaching on behalf of 'manliness' in North and South.

To conclude briefly, in her delineation of 'gentility' and social distinctions in Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell exhibits a great amount of objectivity and understanding. But despite the novelist's sympathetic portrayal of social relations, some anxiety about maintaining the status quo can still be strongly felt. Religious compassion rather than reform of the socio-economic structure appears to be the writer's proposed solution to social disparities and ills. However, as Elizabeth Gaskell's fame as a novelist became fully established after the publication of Mary Barton, her strongly-felt objectivity weakened until it turned into a kind of barely disguised prejudice in favour of the upper and upper-middle classes' social values and conventions. This manifests itself clearly in the author's last novel Wives and Daughters, and to a lesser extent in her second book, Cranford.

If a term is deemed necessary to describe the subject matter of Cranford, one could find no better word than 'Gentility'. Cranford is, simply, the climax of Elizabeth Gaskell's infatuation with 'genteel' living and its 'elegant economies'. Mannerism is the key word to understanding the world of Cranford; a word that clearly indicates an old established system which judged people mostly from the way they behaved in 'refined' society and also from the way they interacted with other social groups in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.166.

the same community. In Cranford, mannerism applies not only to one's behaviour or style of life but also to one's financial status and even to one's gender. Following the Cranfordian code of values, "it was considered vulgar... to give anything expensive in the way of eatable or drinkable at the evening entertainment."<sup>29</sup> Again, and according to the supreme authority of the ladies of Cranford, money-spending or even being 'a man' was always looked upon as 'vulgar'. As the narrator modestly admits, money-spending was considered 'vulgar' by virtue of its being 'a sort of sour-grapism' and something which the ladies of Cranford had to come to terms with. On the other hand, it was considered both 'genteel' and 'elegant' to be economical. However, manners rather than morals seem to be the only accepted and acknowledged criterion for measuring one's social quality and worth.

More important, 'gentility' in Cranford becomes a battlefield where one witnesses a struggle between an old aristocratic mode of living and a new middle-class one. The conflict between the so-called aristocracy in the book and the commercial middle class is so acute that it is easily seen deeply to affect the relationships between the different social strata of the society depicted. Significantly, commerce and trade in this book are still as ill-treated as they had been in the eighteenth century. Through the narrator who is almost always identified with Mrs. Gaskell herself, we are acquainted with a number of 'genteel prejudices' held against tradespeople in general. Under a veneer of humour, the narrator's disguised aristocratic bias is early revealed in Cranford particularly as she asserts; "We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic".<sup>30</sup> From what has preceded, it should not be understood that the narrator or her creator could not or did not sympathize with middle-class people at all.

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.3.

Rather, it merely indicates the writer's adoption of an aristocratic attitude which elevates her above the middle and lower ranks of society and also which enables her to bestow sympathy where and when deserved, and to heap all manner of irony and sarcasm where it is deemed necessary. Her praise of certain 'upstarts' like Mr. Hoggins, for instance, is quite genuine, but, at the same time, it is clearly marred by a touch of condescension. The narrator's following remarks throw ample light on this point:

As a surgeon we were proud of him; but as a man - or rather, I should say, as a gentleman - we could only shake our heads over his name and himself, and wished that he had read Lord Chesterfield's Letters in the days when his manners were susceptible of improvement." 31

Largely concerned with defining social and class relations, Mrs. Gaskell here provides us with a life-like picture of the struggle between two opposed ways of living. First we are presented with a group of shabby-genteel ladies striving to maintain an outmoded code of values which has its roots in the past. On the other hand, we witness another group of people who seem to differ from the first one in both their moral values and social outlook. This latter group, mainly composed of rising middle-class members, succeed in achieving a kind of social recognition that is basically derived from their economic superiority. The change brought about by the bourgeois members of the community is by no means insignificant. Yet, the fact that the rising bourgeois of Cranford are outnumbered by their 'genteel' opponents makes the change effected relatively small. Though the bourgeois of Cranford - headed by Mr. Hoggins - manage to penetrate the jealously-guarded territory of the upper social strata, the class structure of the community remains broadly the same. But just because the social framework is sustained should not necessarily lead us into thinking that all members of the stratified community of Cranford are complacently satisfied, as Edgar Wright's following observation seems to suggest :

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.103.

All ranks, from servant to labourer to aristocracy, acquiesce in the structure; where change has to be faced, as when Lady Glenmire married Mr. Hoggins, the society is able to embrace the change by an adjustment that allows for moral and individual values and yet preserves the framework. 32

Clearly, Lady Glenmire's marriage to the 'upstart' Hoggins is more or less a financially enforced, though by no means unwelcome, kind of adaptability. I am not denying here that Mr. Hoggins did not have any good qualities to commend him to the status he attains. Rather, all I am wanting to say is that what happens within the society of Cranford is not simply a mere adjustment or acceptance of a minor change in the social structure. For the admission of a rising middle-class professional into the upper strata of society predicts more admissions from his class into the old-established families of Cranford or any other similar country-town. This could easily be interpreted as a first step in a long process of adaptability and hence of complete replacement. Once an element in a long-established tradition is broken or removed the rest of the elements of which the tradition is composed start to collapse or to make way for new and stronger ones. Piecemeal improvements and changes in a given social structure are signs of dissatisfaction with an established system - be it social, political, or economic - rather than indications of acquiescence or complacency. What we have in Cranford is, in fact, only a prelude to the overall change and consequent acceptance of the middle-class values and ideals which we perceive in Mrs. Gaskell's later book My Lady Ludlow. In both works, social amelioration results from the community's recognition of the merits of its members and not, as Edgar Wright is inclined to think, from "its recognition that society is a matter of order and hierarchy, with its members mutually respecting the rank as well as the individuality of each other." 33

To return to the original aim of my study, money in Cranford, as

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<sup>32</sup>Wright, op. cit., p.84

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.120.

mentioned above, is a sign of 'vulgarity'. Thus, if a bourgeois member wanted to detach himself or herself from the stigma which money-acquiring or money-spending confers on its agent the only way out was to seek a genteel 'fetish' which had the latent power of conferring a certain amount of gentility on its seeker. This, in fact, was the course of action followed by Mrs. Fitz-Adam who, we are informed,

had taken a large rambling house, which had been usually considered to confer a patent of gentility upon its tenants; because, once upon a time, seventy or eighty years before, the spinster daughter of an earl resided in it. 34

As far as Mrs. Fitz-Adam is concerned, it should be noted here that she was the daughter of 'Respectable' people - farmers by profession. The term 'respectable' has been emphasized simply because Mrs. Gaskell's application of it to Mrs. Fitz-Adam's parents bears the marks of approbation. This, perhaps, can be attributed to the narrator's and hence to the novelist's liking for 'all people whose occupations have to do with land' - to use Margaret's own words in North and South. The authoress's prejudice in favour of farmers is no doubt enhanced by her antipathy to the trading section of the middle classes. To facilitate this point, all we need is to glance briefly at the Miss Barkers who were, besides being 'milliners' themselves, the daughters of a mere 'old clerk at Cranford'. Seen through the narrator's eyes :

Miss Barkers only aped their betters in having 'nothing to do' with the class immediately below theirs. And when Miss Barker died, their profits and income were found to be such that Miss Betty was justified in shutting up shop, and retiring from business. She also ... set up her cow; a mark of respectability in Cranford, almost as decided as setting up a gig is among other people. 35

It is hardly difficult to miss the malicious irony here. Another example of the writer's bias in favour of the landed interest is her sympathetic portrayal of Thomas Holbrook who stubbornly refused to be called 'Esquire'.

<sup>34</sup>Gaskell, Cranford, p.63

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p.61.

Mr. Holbrook, we are told, had his own estate, but it "was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher than a yeoman."<sup>36</sup> As the course of events in Cranford clearly indicates, Mr. Holbrook could have easily pushed himself up into the ranks of the squires. But due to his belief in the insignificance of a title, and, at the same time, to his stronger belief in the dignity of labour, he insisted throughout on being called 'yeoman'. Holbrook's pride in the unassuming title of 'yeoman' together with his unpretentious way of living not only set in motion the gentility-conscious tongues of Cranford but also incurred on him the anger of both his cousin Debora Jenkyns and her father, a clergyman in the Church of England. This, as might be gathered from the novel itself, proved quite detrimental to his marriage prospects with his other cousin Matilda. Miss Matty, though quite prepared to marry Thomas Holbrook, was, like the rest of her family, fully aware of the fact of her father's belonging to a genteel profession, the Church. In a way, this accounts for her acute sense of the social status she occupied in Cranford and, equally, for her anxiety to maintain the rules of genteel behaviour laid down by her late sister Debora. All I want to point out here is that Matilda could justifiably be said to represent a younger class-conscious version of Elizabeth Gaskell herself. Regarding the narrator, there is no doubt about her representing a more sophisticated and, hence, more gentility-conscious version of her creator.

To sum up, though Mrs. Gaskell appears to have felt it imperative in Cranford to play down the prejudice exercised by genteel families against tradespeople, she, nevertheless, could not help betraying some aristocratic prejudice and snobbery towards them. Throughout the novel, the writer's spokeswoman rarely swerves in her belief in the degrading effect of trade. Despite the fact that the narrator often refers jokingly to prejudice against tradespeople, she still can be seen to have adopted the attitude of a snob and a social superior towards them. The touch of snobbery is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.28.

strongly felt in this book, even when the novelist, through her narrator, takes upon herself the task of defending and encouraging Miss Matty to sell tea. When the idea of Miss Matilda's selling tea first suggests itself to the narrator, by way of improving her impoverished state of living, she is seen reasoning in the following manner :

Why should not Miss Matty sell tea ... I could see no objection to this plan, while the advantages were many - always supposing that Miss Matty could get over the degradation of condescending to anything like trade ... A small genteel notification of her being licensed to sell tea, would, it is true, be necessary; but I hoped that it could be placed where no one could see it. 37

In a word, tradespeople in Cranford remain unto the last an object of the authoress's aristocratically-conditioned paternalism. Even though some of them - like the Hogginses for instance - prove themselves to be very meritorious and worthy people, they are often treated as mere social inferiors. Mrs. Gaskell may go on recruiting armies of admirers who are willing enough to share her unique sense of humour, but this is not good enough a reason to defend her against 'blue-blood ' snobbery. Her attitude, however, towards class divisions undergoes a noticeable change in her later novels, but this should not be taken to mean that Elizabeth Gaskell becomes completely purged of the country influences of her mother's family or of the class-tincture that characterizes her objective presentation of reality.

The clearest example of Mrs. Gaskell's changing attitude is found in My Lady Ludlow, a most explicit piece of writing on the inconsequential conflict between the surviving aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Still, despite the writer's attempt in this book to erase or, at least, lessen her society's ingrained prejudice against Dissent and the middle classes in general, she, nevertheless, appears to betray a considerable amount of partiality for the Evangelical upper strata of the community portrayed. I am inclined to agree here with John Lucas's remarks on Mrs. Gaskell, particularly his assertion that, "her liberal, middle-class pride typically gives way whenever she

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.133.

writes of 'old' families: they are nearly always seen in an exclusively favourable light."<sup>38</sup>

Significantly enough, 'Dissent' in My Lady Ludlow is used in a general sense to cover a wide range of middle-class activities and attitudes. Moreover, the novelist's lapsing into humour whenever she refers to 'dissenters' in this book is a kind of defence mechanism the motive behind which is to guard herself against being accused of bias for Nonconformists of whom she was one. At the same time, it was perhaps the safest method of appealing to her Victorian upper-class readers who wanted to be edified even if it was at their own expense. However, the novelist's apologetic and humorous approach to religious belief should not be taken at its face value. Mrs. Gaskell may indeed want us 'to be humble Christians' -- to use Miss Galindo's own words in My Lady Ludlow -- regardless of what sect we happen to belong to; but this also should not blind us to the fact that the authoress was trying to redress, in fiction at least, her religious group's grievances at the hands of some malicious or inconsiderate Evangelicals. Obviously, Mrs. Gaskell would not have referred to 'Dissent' time and again, had it not been for the fact that the subject represented for her an inexhaustible source of headache and repressed grief. Judged by the evidence provided by her books, particularly Ruth and Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Gaskell seems to have been of the opinion that Churchmen's looking down upon other religious sects as being below them in gentility is an act which could not be interpreted but in terms of 'a long inherited tradition of prejudice' -- if I may coin such a phrase. The roots of this tradition are to be found in the old Universities whose power of conferring the title of 'gentleman' on their members was taken for granted.

In any case, on her first introduction into the refined society of Lady Ludlow, the story-teller, Margaret Dawson, learns a few significant things, amongst which is that the late clergyman Mr. Mountford

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<sup>38</sup> John Lucas, The Literature of Change (Sussex : The Harvester Press, 1977), p.3.

meant kindly to everybody except dissenters, whom Lady Ludlow and he united in trying to drive out of the parish; and among dissenters he particularly abhorred Methodists - someone said, because John Wesley objected to his hunting. 39

The reference in this passage to John Wesley might have had some foundation to a particular prejudice he held; still, it cannot be doubted to have been meant as a satirical remark aimed at the section of clergymen in the Church of England who excessively indulged themselves in the gentry's pleasures of the 'chase'. If Miss Dawson's narrative can be relied on, then Mr. Mountford's appointment to his post may be said to have resulted from his winning Lord Ludlow's favour by his 'excellent horsemanship'. By thus satirizing Mr. Mountford, the novelist aims a disguised blow at certain 'genteel' habits that were fairly common among many parish clergy in the Church of England. On Brian Heeney's own showing; "The gentry of many Victorian rural parishes expected the parson to be a friend, perhaps a companion in sport as well as in society."<sup>40</sup>

As I have observed earlier, My Lady Ludlow is chiefly concerned with the conflict that existed in Victorian and pre-Victorian times between old families and new middle-class ones. Not unlike the 'genteel' ladies of Cranford, Lady Ludlow here takes upon herself the task of defending and safeguarding the old-established traditions and conventions. Similarly, she openly declares her hatred of antipathy to everything that savours of trade and commerce. Her attitude towards tradespeople and city merchants, it hardly needs to be said, is deeply rooted in her sense of their growing power as a social group as well as in her jealousy of their economic superiority:

If it had been possible she would have preferred a return to the primitive system, of living on the produce of the land, and exchanging the surplus for such articles as were needed, without the intervention of money. 41

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<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, Cousin Phillis and other Tales (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1970), p.101.

<sup>40</sup> Brian Heeney, A Different Kind of Gentleman (Ohio : Archon Books, 1976), p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow, p.124.

Lady Ludlow's attitude here is almost identical with that of her fictional successor Mrs. Cadwallader in George Eliot's Middlemarch. Also, Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of her feudalistic Lady fully / anticipates George Eliot's sympathetic delineation of the aristocratically-prejudiced Cadwallader. But despite her apparent fond attachment to Lady Ludlow's memory, Mrs. Gaskell - through the narrator - realizes the futility of desiring to revive a fast-disappearing feudal system. Furthermore, she seems to have fully conceived the inevitable approach of the more efficient capitalist system. This is perhaps going a bit too far with respect to the world portrayed in My Lady Ludlow; for, in fact, what we have in this book does not amount to more than an 'emblem' of the struggle for dominance between the old agrarian system and the new commercialistic one.

However, upon hearing of the purchase of the 'Home Hill estate' by a mere 'upstart', Lady Ludlow's aristocratic instincts are so outraged that she cannot help complaining to Miss Dawson in the following sardonic manner :

'What do you think I heard this morning? Why that the Home Hill estate which niches into the Hanbury property, was bought by a Baptist baker from Birmingham' 42

According to Mrs. Gaskell's presentation Lady Ludlow views the proximity of 'a bourgeois gentleman' to her own property as a most unwelcome change, let alone as a menace that ought to be fought away at any cost. The mere thought that her supremacy in her own hereditary stronghold, Hanbury, is likely to be threatened proves sufficient to put Lady Ludlow on her guard against any acquaintance or dealing with the bourgeois newcomer. But in spite of this, the acquaintance takes place and develops in the end into an amicable class relation. This occurs not so long after a criticism is directed - by the retired tradesman himself, Mr. Brooke - against the Lady's carefully-chosen land-agent, Captain James. Interestingly, Lady Ludlow's decision to appoint the Captain for the post of 'land-agent' did not result

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p.192.

so much from her conviction of his efficiency as much from the fact that he formerly belonged to a 'genteel' profession and that he "held opinions that were even more Church and King than her own."<sup>43</sup> Having failed to manage her Ladyship's property,

Mr. Brooke, the retired tradesman, did not cease blaming him for not succeeding, and for swearing. 'But what could you expect from a sailor?' Mr. Brooke asked, even in my lady's hearing ... it was this speech of the Birmingham baker's that made my lady determine to stand by Captain James, and encourage him to try again. For she would not allow that her choice had been an unwise one, at the bidding (as it were) of a dissenting tradesman. <sup>44</sup>

Ironically enough, to our Lady's great disappointment and displeasure; Captain James, prompted by his anxiety and desire to succeed the following year, not only seeks the Baptist baker's advice, but also goes so far as to volunteer to accept money from him by way of subscription to Mr. Gray's school. However, the subscription was eventually declined on the grounds that it came from a 'Dissenting' source. But there was another shock in store for the orthodox and aristocratic Lady Ludlow. It came through her acquaintance with the fact of her agent's growing intimacy with the 'Birmingham democrat' Mr. Brooke and, simultaneously, with his eldest daughter who ends up marrying the seemingly Churchman, Captain James. Lady Ludlow's disapproval of the match together with her grounds for objecting to it are summed up in her following remarks to Miss Galinde :

'I could not - I cannot believe it. He must be aware she is a schismatic; a baker's daughter; and he is a gentleman by virtue and feeling, as well as by his profession, though his manners may be at times a little rough.'<sup>45</sup>

'Gentleman' or 'no gentleman', and despite the aristocratic Lady's objections and disapproval, Captain James married the dissenting baker's daughter.

The turning point in the story, however, is when the Captain proposes to present his 'bride elect' to Lady Ludlow and when her 'Ladyship' accedes

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p.242. .

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p.242.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p.249.

to this proposal. Added to this is the fact that, as the story comes to a close, when Lady Ludlow gave a party - 'just like any plebeian', to use Miss Galindo's own words - Mr. and Mrs. Brooke were as welcome guests as the genteel parsons 'of clover', 'of Headleigh', 'of Merribank' and their respective 'parsonesses'. In conclusion, it may be stated that despite Lady Ludlow's opposition to 'newness' at her old aristocratic stronghold, changes take their course and bring all along with them new manners and moral values; namely, those of the rising middle class. The Lady's consequent acceptance of the newly introduced social and professional elements into the community, surrounding Hanbury, was a matter of adaptability rather than of acquiescence. The agricultural improvements effected by the 'tradesman turned farmer' - Mr. Brooke - at and around Hanbury were too remarkable to be ignored even by the aristocratic Lady of the manor. Hence, it was pointless for Lady Ludlow to keep her eyes shut to what she saw to be far better and superior than her own. This resulted in her giving in and, eventually giving up her outmoded way of living.

Since the theme of 'gentility' is fully developed in Mrs. Gaskell's last novel, Wives and Daughters, I deem it convenient to conclude this chapter with a full analysis of the subject in question. As in George Eliot's complex study of provincial life, Middlemarch, the reader in this novel is presented with a most realistic and panoramic view of the stratified society of early Victorian England. Likewise, in Wives and Daughters, the events narrated are dated back to a period shortly before the passing of the 'Reform Bill.' Moreover, the same lines of class demarcation found in Middlemarch, can be seen to be reflected in Wives and Daughters. Like George Eliot again, Mrs. Gaskell's attention here is more focussed on the fully-established and sturdy upper-middle class than on the declining aristocracy. Due to economic factors, the social structure of the community portrayed in this book starts with the upper-middle-class family of the Cumnors at the apex of the social pyramid instead of the older aristocratic family of the Hamleys whose ancestors, we are told,

had been called squire as long back as local tradition extended. But there was many a greater landowner in the country, for Squire Hamley's estate was not more than eight hundred acres or so. But his family had been in possession of it long before the Earls of Cumnor had been heard of..... At any rate, the Hamleys were a very old family, if not aborigines. 46

The Cumnors, on the other hand, are described in terms of bourgeois ethics and values. Significantly, Mrs. Gaskell early refers to the 'respectable' character of the Cumnors as well as to their being a 'Whig Family'. It may be remarked in passing that not a few critics have been misled as to the class-identity of the Cumnor family. In his famous book on Mrs. Gaskell, for instance, Edgar Wright often speaks of the Cumnors as though they had always been aristocratic. "Set in the background," observes the critic, "and representing all the power, stability and tradition of the landed aristocracy in its domain, is the Cumnor family."<sup>47</sup> What led Edgar Wright and similar critics to such a conclusion is doubtless the novelist's choosing to class the Cumnors as such and also her descriptions of them as 'Earls' and 'Lords'. The basic fact that should be borne in mind here is that the Cumnors arose to the status of a landed family through trade and commerce. In other words, the Cumnors are typical representatives of an eighteenth-century middle-class family whose members had arisen to their present status by their personal efforts rather than by heredity, as was the case with the aristocracy in general. This point is both supported and illustrated by the following remarks blurted out by the cynical Lady Harriet Cumnor while talking to her mother :

'Besides, mamma', said Lady Harriet, 'papa was saying that the Hamleys have been on their land since before the Conquest; while we only came into the country a century ago; and there is a tale that the first Cumnor began his fortune through selling tobacco in King James's reign.' 48

This passage, it must be confessed, has also been quoted by Coral Lansbury in her excellent study of Mrs. Gaskell's novels in general, particularly of Wives and Daughters. This critic's brief analysis of the subject

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Gaskell, Wives and Daughters (London : J.M. Dent and Sons, 1966), p.52.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, op. cit., p.67

<sup>48</sup> Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.580.

of 'estates' in this novel makes it fairly difficult for one to further elaborate this topic without seeming to have relied heavily on her own observations. However, as Coral Lansbury aptly remarks;

The industrialist buying an estate was not a phenomenon of the Victorian age. Those who made money in trade had always bought land as a preliminary step towards a title. 49

Indirectly somehow, this applies to the Cumnors who, besides acquiring the looked for titles, become also the 'respectably' acknowledged 'new' aristocracy of Hollingford. Backed by their industry and practical knowledge of agriculture, the Cumnors combine in their life the best of two worlds : the best that could be obtained from a decadent agrarian system as well as all that is effective and conducive to wealth in a new capitalist system based on finance. More specifically, and in opposition to the traditional Squire Hamley, Lord Cumnor is seen always to be anxious to supervise and manage the minor details of his own property despite the fact that there was a land-agent purposely chosen for the task.

Obviously, the novelist meant Lord Cumnor to represent the real aristocracy of early Victorian rural society rather than the Squire who clearly anticipates the extinction of his type. Squire Hamley's status as 'a gentleman' - used in a general sense here - proved insufficient a guarantee of his survival in a fast-developing and competitive age. The fate that awaits the Squire's type of gentlemen is doubtless the same as that met by his eldest son, Osborne. It is not for no purpose that Mrs. Gaskell often refers to Osborne Hamley as 'a fine gentleman'. The writer's use of the expression 'fine gentleman' in the present context does not in fact differ from eighteenth-century novelists' use of the same phrase whenever they wanted to describe 'a do-nothing' or 'useless' gentleman. After all, Osborne was an eldest son; a thing which clearly implied that he would inherit his father's estate. This somehow always justified eldest sons' tendency to concentrate their energies on trivial pursuits instead of

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<sup>49</sup>Lansbury, op. cit., p.184.

channelling them in a useful line of business or profession. It becomes clear now that Mrs. Gaskell's differentiation between the 'refined' Osborne and his younger self-made brother Roger is in keeping with the eighteenth-century distinction between first and second sons. In fact, this is what underlies the mercenary Mrs. Gibson's preference for Osborne. Addressing both her daughters, Cynthia and Molly one day, Mrs. Gibson emphatically observes:

'I do like that Osborne Hamley! What a nice fellow he is! Somehow, I always do like eldest sons. He will have the estate, won't he? I shall ask your dear papa to encourage him to come about the house ... The other (Roger) is but a loutish young fellow, to my mind; there is no aristocratic bearing about him. I suppose he takes after his mother, who is but a parvenu, I've heard them say at the Towers'. 50

It should be pointed out here, however, that both the Squire and his eldest son seem to have attached too much value to their 'gentility'; a thing that greatly accounts for their failure in business as well as in personal life. Squire Hamley's mismanagement of his estate can simply be ascribed to his clinging to obsolete methods of maintaining the land. Put differently, he was too blinded by his old ancestry to be able to realize that the maintenance of his property could only be achieved through practical knowledge of agriculture rather than through hoping that his eldest son would marry a rich heiress. Also, and as Mrs. Gaskell shrewdly remarks, the Hamleys

had not increased their estate for centuries; they had held their own, if even with an effort, and had not sold a rood of it for the last hundred years or so. But they were not an adventurous race. They never traded, or speculated, or tried agricultural improvements of any kind ... Their mode of life was simple, and more like that of yeomen than squires. Indeed Squire Hamley by continuing the primitive manners and customs of his forefathers the squires of the eighteenth century, did live more as a yeoman, when such a class existed, than as a squire of this generation. 51

As a representative of the old school of gentility, Squire Hamley's views on 'Blood' or 'old descent' are worth noting here.

According to the old Squire in Wives and Daughters, 'old Descent' is a most reliable touchstone of 'Gentility'. But no matter how old one's blood may be, his gentility could sometimes suffer from the blemish of

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<sup>50</sup> Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.183.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

physical imperfection or awkwardness. This is clearly evidenced in Squire Hamley's own description of himself to Molly Gibson on her first arrival at his home. To follow the Squire's description;

'here am I, of as good and as old a descent as any man in England, and I doubt if a stranger, to look at me, would take me for a gentleman, with my red face, great hands and feet, and thick figure, fourteen stone, and never less than twelve even when I was a young man.' 52

Being a veteran of the old school of gentlemen, Squire Hamley tends to look down upon all those who could not lay claim to 'gentle blood' or old lineage. Even the Cumnors, with all their wealth and grandeur, do not escape his scathing attack on people with no blood. "All those Cumnor people", he tells Molly on the same occasion, "you make such ado of in Hollingford, are mere muck of yesterday." 53

Another quality that the Squire shares with the old school of gentility is his antipathy to trade and commerce in general. To him, gentility is incompatible with money unless it is based on inherited wealth. Yet, in practice, the Squire was the first one of his family to break this rule. For his wife was herself the daughter of "a Russian merchant, and imported tallow and hemp". 54 The Squire's attitude in this respect is quite illogical, yet it is by no means unrepresentative of his class or society. As Ralph Waldo Emerson has once remarked, "England subsists by antagonisms and contradictions. The foundations of its greatness are the rolling waves; and from first to last, it is a museum of anomalies." 55

If Squire Hamley's views on gentility seem illogical or too immoderate to include but the 'gentle of blood' and the 'professional', those of Lady Harriet's Aunt can still be seen to be more restrictive and immoderate in their exclusiveness. As a spokeswoman for the new classes of aristocracy and gentry;

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p.83.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p.83.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p.183.

<sup>55</sup>Emerson, op. cit., p.47.

Any one who earns his livelihood by any exercise of head or hands, from professional people and rich merchants down to labourers, she calls 'persons'. She would never in her most slip-slop talk accord them even the conventional title of 'gentlemen'. 56

This passage together with a few others from Wives and Daughters reveals a major element with which Mrs. Gaskell seems to have been concerned, namely, the class snobbery practised by the different social strata, depicted in the book, against each other, most of all against the lower-middle class. For bourgeois gentility occupies a considerable space of the novel under consideration. The Hamleys and Cumnors apart, Mrs. Gibson - alias Mrs. Fitzpatrick - embodies in this book all that the Victorian key-word 'Snobbery' implied. According to the authoress's presentation, Mrs. Gibson was simply aping the manners of the aristocracy as far as she knew them; and therefore her views on gentility must always be looked at as subservient to the aristocracy's. As a result of her long association with aristocratic families, Mrs. Gibson is seen to have developed a tendency to turn up her nose at anybody connected with trade or anyone who has anything to do with tradespeople. The focal point of Mrs. Gibson's concept of gentility, thus, is people's manners and outward appearances rather than their tastes and intellectual acquirements, let alone their moral values. It should be <sup>noted here</sup> that Mrs. Gibson's status-based snobbery and conceit gives way whenever a chance brings her together with the trading section of the middle class. Her status - conditioned attitude, thus, could only be ascribed to her 'elegance' and 'polished manners' and also to the fact underlying her having once been married to a country curate. Herself a mere 'governess' at the Cumnors, the present Mrs. Gibson - did not find any difficulty in capturing a certain Mr. Kirkpatrick who, as she herself tells Molly Gibson one day :

'was only a curate, poor fellow; but he was of a very good family, and if three of his relations had died without children I should have been a baronet's wife.' 57

At the 'Charity Ball' held at the 'Towers', to give only a single

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<sup>56</sup> Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.164.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.33.

example of Mrs. Gibson's class snobbery, our attention is drawn to a significant dialogue that takes place between her and her daughters.

Addressing Molly, Mrs. Gibson observes :

'Your last partner was a gentleman, my dear. You are improving in your selection. I really was ashamed of you before, figuring away with that attorney's clerk. Molly, do you know whom you have been dancing with? I have found out he is the Coreham bookseller.'

'That accounts for his being so well up in all the books I've been wanting to hear about,' said Molly eagerly, but with a spice of malice in her mind. 'He really was very pleasant, mamma', she added; 'and he looked quite a gentleman, and dances beautifully!'

'Very well. But remember if you go on in this way you will have to shake hands over the counter tomorrow morning with some of your partners of tonight,' said Mrs. Gibson coldly. 58

It remains to add here that though Elizabeth Gaskell may seem to be critical of the upper social strata's prejudicial practices against the rising and ambitious bourgeois - particularly those with any pretensions to gentility, such as the land-agent Mr. Preston, for instance - she, nevertheless, portrays those misdeeds as inoffensive defects which cannot be totally uprooted or easily overcome. Hence the novelist's favourable and humorous portrayal of upper-class members. In a word, the balance of values in Wives and Daughters can easily be said to weigh heavily in favour of the upper strata of the community portrayed. The harsh treatment which some bourgeois trespassers on the territory of the 'great' receive in the book is further evidence of the writer's partiality for old-established families. Supposing that Mrs. Gaskell is operating in this novel from "a central viewpoint, that of the country surgeon on good terms with all levels,"<sup>59</sup> we clearly perceive where the novelist's allegiances are laid. To illustrate this point, one may simply quote the following self-explanatory note from Wives and Daughters:

perhaps the man of all others to whom Mr. Gibson took the most kindly - at least, until Lord Hollingford came into the neighbourhood - was a certain Squire Hamley. 60

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.282.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, op. cit., p.13.

<sup>60</sup> Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, p.52.

In my view, the authoress was not unlike the surgeon described here in the sense that she herself took sides with both Lord Hollingford and Squire Hamley against many others in the same book. This is strongly felt not only in Mrs. Gaskell's unsympathetic delineation of Mr. Preston who lacks any signs of deference to the Squire's age and position but also in her patronizing attitude towards respectable, but poor, bourgeois people. The Browning sisters and Miss Eyre in this respect are a case in point. Thus, when it came to marriage it was the somehow aristocratically-connected, though shallow and vain, Clare that Mr. Gibson decided to wed rather than the 'respectable' governess Miss Eyre who, upon Mrs. Gaskell's own showing, was a 'lady' "in the best sense of the word, though in Hollingford she only took rank as a shopkeeper's daughter".<sup>61</sup> Whether Mrs. Gaskell was, in the present case, merely reflecting society's attitude to marriage in general or was unconsciously betraying her belief in the rigidity of social distinctions is not so easy to ascertain. Still, there are enough signs in Wives and Daughters which testify to the writer's deeply-ingrained aristocratic prejudice against the lower strata of the middle class. Viewed in the light of Wives and Daughters, Elizabeth Gaskell's attitude to marriage is basically conservative. Like Jane Austen and George Eliot in her early novels, Mrs. Gaskell presents marriage here as a matter of convention rather than of love and feeling. In brief, she adopts the aristocratic attitude of restricting one's choice of a life partner to one's social milieu. Hence is her full approval of the professional Roger Hamley's marriage to the Surgeon's daughter, Miss Molly Gibson, an attitude which recognizes the two persons' similarity of taste as well as of their social and economic status.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p.47.

## CHAPTER 5

### GEORGE ELIOT

Like all the other authors discussed in this thesis, George Eliot may easily be said to have been subject to class influences and limitations. Granted that her greater courage was accountable for her ability to form and follow a higher personal morality than that followed by her Victorian fellow-authors, it still does not necessarily mean that George Eliot always managed to extricate herself from the class influences of her early childhood. Contrarily, and particularly when touching upon social issues, the novelist can often be seen to have applied a middle-class morality which both endorsed and improved the old aristocratic one. For this reason, I consider George Eliot's writings equally essential to an understanding of English social history from the vantage point of middle-class assimilation into the old-established order. However, in considering the novelist's delineation of the theme of Sentimentality in her books, one is tempted to discard the early thoughts and observations found in her earlier works - say up to but excluding Middlemarch - as somehow irrelevant. This is due to the fact that the earlier books were only reconstructions of a static society. Also, the fact that George Eliot was continually changing and developing makes it almost impossible to be sure of how far her early ideas and beliefs can be related to those embodied in Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda. I am not by any means denying the authoress the adoption of ultimate values; rather, I am simply suggesting that whatever deeply-held opinions George Eliot might have had earlier in life deepened in later years into

what appears to have become rigid dogmas and beliefs. An example of this is the transformation which her English brand of humanitarianism underwent in both Daniel Deronda and Impressions of Theophrastus Such; a transformation into what might simply be described as a racial superiority complex. One hardly needs to refer here to the authoress' essay, "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" where she - comparing nationalities and races - proudly observes :

The Hindoos also have doubtless had their rancours against us and still entertain enough ill-will to make unfavourable remarks on our character, especially as to our historic rapacity and arrogant notions of our own superiority ... though we are a small number of an alien race profiting by the territory and produce of these prejudiced people, they are unable to turn us out; at least, when they tried we showed them their mistake. We do not call ourselves a dispersed and punished people : We are a colonising people, and it is we who have punished others.     1

Here, one could barely overestimate the major role played by Darwinian theories in inducing George Eliot - and similar 'pseudo-scientific' writers of the period - to utter such remarks, the motive behind which could not have been other than to infiltrate feelings of racism into her English readers' minds. As the above quotation clearly indicates, George Eliot, together with other writers of the same period - such as Thomas Carlyle, particularly in Shooting Niagara, and Matthew Arnold in his essays on Irish politics, most of all in "The Incompatibles" - came to entertain ideas and beliefs that were ever so compatible with racist concepts such as the right of the superior races to dominate inferior ones or even with the growing spirit of imperialism which dominated British politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. The expressions of national and racial superiority found in the above-mentioned writers' later works make it, in my view, ironical to go on labelling them as 'prophets of culture'. Also, such expressions render their defence and advocacy of philanthropy in the true general sense almost void, if not absurd. From what has just preceded it

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<sup>1</sup>George Eliot, Impressions of Theophrastus Such : Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book (Edinburgh and London : William Blackwood and Sons), pp. 171-72.

becomes obvious that I look upon these authors as propagandists to whom the idea of Englishness meant, more or less, the guardianship of morality and philanthropy everywhere. In any case, the important role such ideas and expressions played in fulfilling a public as well as a personal need is too apparent to require much elaboration. The public need, and this lies outside the scope of my present study, may simply be referred to as the economic motives which deeply affected British foreign policy in the second half of the last century. As for the personal, this will be rendered easy to understand in the course of my subsequent analysis of George Eliot's preoccupation with culture, of which the Concept of Gentility forms an integral part.

Speaking of George Eliot's preoccupation with morals and manners automatically brings into mind Jane Austen's similar preoccupation with the same aspects of the culture pictured in her novels. Doubtless, George Eliot is a novelist one would readily compare with Jane Austen, though they have very little in common. For sensibility in George Eliot's fictional world equals, if not exceeds, in importance sense in Jane Austen's writings. Another marked difference between George Eliot and her predecessor is the shift in emphasis from manners to morals. Thus, whereas Jane Austen portrays good manners as a good index to one's social worth, George Eliot avoids any confusion between manners and morals, outward cultivation of one's self and inward refinement. Of course the differences between both writers' delineation of manners and morals and the degree of emphasis they place on either cultural aspect are due not only to differences in personality but also to the fact that the social and hence the cultural contexts in which both novelists lived were quite different. For George Eliot's emotional depth could easily be held to be accountable for her dwelling untiringly on the human passions and for her grading them much higher than reason or mind; at the same time, Jane Austen's apparently shallow feelings and also her cultural background are greatly accountable for conditioning her suspicion of the value of feeling in social dealings and transactions.

Thus, if Jane Austen may be said to have striven to re-establish in the country gentry the virtues of eighteenth-century sense over the frivolities of sensibility, George Eliot, by contrast, can simply be said to have striven to re-establish in her Victorian reading public the virtues of love, affection, and duty towards one's fellow-beings.

Being the emotional writer she was, George Eliot could not help sometimes looking through the mirror of her own feelings; a thing which renders her social portraiture far less reliable as an authentic presentation of social reality than Jane Austen's. It is true that Miss Austen's field of social exploration had been narrower than that of George Eliot, but this does not make her recordings of social events and activities less objective. Admitting that George Eliot is much more complex a writer than Jane Austen, or even that the writer's over-all impression about her society is more modern and psychologically advanced than her predecessor's does in no way legitimize our saying that the social environment portrayed by George Eliot is more real in its general outline than that pictured in Jane Austen's novels. What mars George Eliot's objective presentation of reality is her tendency to preach and also her commitment to moral instruction. The novelist's intrusive morality greatly invalidates the authenticity of her delineation of the social structure and reduces not a few of her characters to moral stereotypes. It is quite plausible to argue here that the moral responsibility George Eliot felt towards the public could be held accountable for the writer's digressions into different phases of human and social history. Also, it more than explains her apparent rejection in Daniel Deronda of an objective reality for an imaginative and morally-fulfilling world. As we follow the serpentine movement of the writer's mind in her last novel, Daniel Deronda, we gradually come to realize how far George Eliot's social conscience has strayed away from the corrupt objective reality of her times. This leads us neatly into a full analysis of culture and its off-spring Gentility in George Eliot's novels, particularly in Daniel Deronda - the novelist's only book on contemporary English social life.

Consequent upon the waning of traditional values and, at the same time, the upsurge of a new wave of Darwinian scientism, George Eliot, seen through the pages of Daniel Deronda, found herself called upon to establish a new form of culture that would guarantee not only the regeneration of the English upper classes but also the elevation of its members to a higher spiritual plane. Not unlike other Victorian novelists amongst whom the idea of a modified 'aristocracy of heart' was gaining in more and more force, the authoress seems to have felt it imperative to revive in her countrymen a love of culture which extols, above all, an absence of selfishness coupled with a genial regard for the feelings of others. In Daniel Deronda, as in Dickens' Great Expectations or even Mrs. Gaskell's North and South, there is a complete and an uncompromising rejection of the Gentleman as an aesthetic ideal of elegant ease. This is provided and illustrated by the contrast drawn between Grandcourt, the traditional model gentleman, and Daniel Deronda, the new model saviour of humanity. In this book, true gentlemanly values are no longer seen to be nurtured by a landed way of life, and the separation between hereditary status and duty, class identity and public usefulness is final and complete. However, in the case of the highly refined and cultivated upper-class gentleman, Mr. Grandcourt, George Eliot seems to have drawn upon the French model of the eighteenth century when :

The gentleman was civilized to the point of having his feelings so perfectly under control, that they had almost ceased to exist. Manners were not only the improvement of nature, but its complete suppression. 2

This model was later adopted and modified - to meet the needs of the English provincial gentleman - by Chesterfield whose ideal gentleman came to be characterized by a complete mastery of self, a perfect discipline of self-restraint. In this respect, George Eliot can easily be seen to stand in complete opposition to Miss Austen in whose works one senses a good deal of elevation of sense over sensibility, of mind over feeling. I do not by any

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<sup>2</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., p.220.

means imply here that the contrast just pointed out is so sharp as to allow of no overlapping in terms of emphasis. For it is hardly necessary to emphasize the relativity of comparisons or contrasts between authors who clearly belong to different artistic temperaments or ideologies, and who come from very different social backgrounds. Hence, it would be against common-sense to insist on reducing George Eliot's characterization of Grandcourt to a mere type or thesis against which the novelist wished to draw her own anti-thesis, as represented by Daniel Deronda.

Whatever the case might be, Grandcourt, contrary to what C.T. Bissell<sup>3</sup> believes, stands for upper-class decadence and 'decay'. He clearly anticipates a crumbling of a form of civilization which has grown too fond of outward cultivation to be able to pay its respects to man's fundamental essence; namely, his moral or spiritual nature. Grandcourt's moral poverty is balanced by the false facade of the material wealth surrounding his life. It would be short of exaggeration to assert here that such a cultivated person is meant to epitomise the English nation's relatively full mastery of the material world; a thing that could only be achieved either by sacrificing a lot of moral life or in the absence of a real zest for life. Grandcourt's symbolic significance and, no less, his representativeness are almost explicitly expressed in the following passage :

Grandcourt's passions were of the intermittent, flickering kind : never flaming out strongly. But a great deal of life goes on without strong passion : myriads of cravats are carefully tied, dinners attended, even speeches made proposing the health of august personages, without the zest arising from a strong desire. And a man may make a good appearance in high social positions - may be supposed to know the classics, to have his reserves on science, a strong though repressed opinion on politics, and all the sentiments of the English gentleman, at a small expense of vital energy. 4

However, Grandcourt's cold and distinguished manners, the most striking feature Gwendolen Harleth notices in her first encounter with this aristo-

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<sup>3</sup>Claude T. Bissell, "Social Analysis in the Novels of George Eliot," in Austin Wright, ed., Victorian Literature : Modern Essays in Criticism (Oxford University Press, 1966), p.160.

<sup>4</sup>George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), I, p.232.

erotic figure, are in fact only one aspect of his representativeness. The emphasis George Eliot places on Grandcourt's 'Calm, cold manners', it should be added, is the authoress' special way of criticizing and underplaying the English fondness for Reserve. According to the novelist's presentation :

.... the English fondness for reserve will account for much negation; and Grandcourt's manners with an extra veil of reserve over them might be expected to present the extreme type of the national taste. 5

Since the novel's aim is to affirm and instil more openness in dealing with others - be it through love, affection, or sympathy - it becomes evident that George Eliot sees in reserve the negation of all these virtues. Now, if we turn to the contrasting picture provided by the novel in the character of Deronda, we can easily discern that it is both distorted and exaggerated. As a representative of religious and moral earnestness, Deronda glories in upholding human feelings and family ties. But this, as can be seen, is done at the expense of material considerations. This is clearly manifested in his disdainful attitude towards inheritance and no less in his outright rejection of gentility as a way of life. **The fact** that the main objective of Daniel Deronda is to criticize the decadent morality of the materialized upper-middle and upper classes of Victorian England does not justify George Eliot's dismissal of the material basis necessary for the survival or revival of an existing culture. The religious culture which Deronda is meant to exemplify cannot be accepted as a solution to the existing ills of society; for a culture, to subsist, needs to be built on a strong material basis. Critics might argue here that the novelist was preaching, through her projected ego - Deronda, a kind of cosmopolitanism that transcends class limitations and national boundaries; but this line of argument is rendered unacceptable by the fact that Deronda, towards the end of the novel, could be pictured to be functioning exclusively for his own Jewish people's benefit. Deronda's Jewish blood, on George Eliot's showing, proves too strong a factor to be done away with. George Eliot's elaborate attempt to point out the significance of Deronda's birth in this case betrays her

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., II, p.209.

belief in inherent disposition which neither education nor environment could deeply affect. Nurture in Daniel Deronda is consciously subordinated to Nature, a thing which makes man's efforts to mould his own destiny unimportant. The greatest set-back to the over-all picture presented in the novel still is the ambivalence of the writer's own values particularly as she tries to reconcile in Deronda's case the idea of humanitarianism with the notion of usurping another people's land. The spiritual aspect of the mission Deronda undertakes to perform towards the end of the novel, much stressed as it is, takes on the symbolic significance of a new crusade which culminates, as could be gathered from recent historical events, in more violation of human rights than the old crusades had been guilty of. Whether George Eliot was, in this respect, guilty of being a propagandist by design and intention or by sheer coincidence is not so easy to ascertain, though some modern Jewish settlers in Palestine seem anxious to enlist her among the early theoretical leaders of the Zionist movement. This is most exemplified in the following words of a Jewish enthusiast :

If George Eliot was indeed a prophet, if we accept fulfillment and reality as the test of prophecy, then this Englishwoman correctly prophesied in 1876 the Return to Zion of the Jewish people. Not only did she prophesy it, but by her exhortations in the words of Mordecai, she helped bring about the actual return from the long and tormented Exile. For those who read and were inspired by Daniel Deronda and the 'Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' were indeed the builders of Zion. 6

Admittedly, George Eliot quite fulfilled the role of a prophet, but it is hardly necessary to add here that the novelist's prophetic zeal was both misleading and ill-chosen. It is misleading in the sense that it leaves the reader in utter confusion as to what measures are required for the moral regeneration of the decadent English upper classes, granted that Deronda's mission is intended as a social corrective, and it is ill-chosen because it does not do George Eliot's religious humanism much credit. By deepening the ethical implications of her study of Deronda,

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<sup>6</sup> Ruth Levitt, George Eliot : The Jewish Connection (Jerusalem : Massada, 1975), p.67.

George Eliot wished to provide a moral standard against which Gwendolen Harleth, not to mention the Victorian reading public, could judge her own egotistically-immoral actions. The value of Deronda's genteel upbringing and hence of his gentlemanly education is obscured not so much to provide "an ironical counterpart of the standard education of the English gentleman",<sup>7</sup> as to give his natural inclinations the ascendancy they acquire throughout the novel. Here I feel bound to dismiss the assertion that Deronda "becomes the recipient of a tradition which transcends the boundaries of race or nationality",<sup>8</sup> as only partly true for the simple reason that it ignores the fact that Deronda's mission is directed towards the gathering of a scattered race and therefore towards the revival of an extinct nationality. This is clearly implied in Mordecai's remarks addressed to the Jewish assembly gathered at the Hand and Banner :

.... the soul of Judaism is not dead. Revive the organic centre : let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion be an outward reality. Looking towards a land and a polity, our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life which has a voice among the peoples of the East and the West. 9

or, again :

I say that the effect of our separateness will not be completed and have its highest transformation unless our race takes on again the character of a nationality. 10

Implicitly, Deronda's philanthropic tendencies and inclinations are destined to pour out in the end in the hot pot of national fanaticism; and all the novelist's attempts to raise her fictional hero above class or race may be said to have ended up in failure. George Eliot's inability to foresee her symbolic character, Deronda, falling into the trap of race can only be attributed to her imperfect vision of things and people as they are; that

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<sup>7</sup>U.C. Knoepfelmacher, Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel : George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler (Princeton University Press : 1965), p.130.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.133.

<sup>9</sup>Eliot, Daniel Deronda, II, pp.387-88.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., II, p.390.

is, to her seeing things through the distorted mirror of her own subjectivity. The writer's theoretical understanding of human events tends to infuse itself into her visionary schemes for social reform; a thing which either throws a heavy shadow of unreality on those schemes, or - once those plans are carried out - could have a negative result. To put it in the words of W.H. Mallock :

She reminds us of an engineer or a shipwright, who may be deeply versed, to a certain extent, in the laws of motion, but who knows little of the practical difficulties caused by friction, or the various strengths and consistencies of the materials in which his designs can be carried out. 11

However, "since it is above all in visions and theories that historical realities are forged,"<sup>12</sup> it would be unjustifiable to ascribe George Eliot's propagation of Zionism in Daniel Deronda to naivety or short-sightedness. Equally unjustifiable is the view which attributes the transformation of Zionism into 'a political cause' instead of its being 'a religion or a way of life' to 'bad luck'.<sup>13</sup> By displaying an acute consciousness of history and culture, through her characters Mordecai and Deronda, George Eliot hoped to appear as an inspired seer speaking on behalf of the wronged and underprivileged and, at the same time, as a deliverer of the English upper classes from their moral and cultural stagnation. In her anxiety to gain for herself the title of a 'prophetess', George Eliot emulates - through an adaptation of literary creation to her own needs - Christ by rebelling against the traditions of the Gentiles of modern times. Mockery of the 'Gentiles' and their perverted beliefs in Daniel Deronda is intended to elevate George Eliot above the decadent morality of a Christianity that seems to have exhausted itself. This, she sought to accomplish through rousing them from a state of moral apathy into

<sup>11</sup>David Carroll, ed., George Eliot : The Critical Heritage (London : Routledge and K. Paul, 1971), p.460.

<sup>12</sup>William Myers, "George Eliot : Politics and Personality", in John Lucas, ed., Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century (London : Methuen, 1971), p.111.

<sup>13</sup>A.O.J. Cockshut, The Unbelievers : English Agnostic Thought 1840 - 1890 (London : Collins, 1964), p.55.

a realization of things that are 'higher and 'nobler'. Most probably, this is what F.R. Leavis had in mind when he observed that :

She expanded herself on the "Jewish question" because (partly, at least) of a personal emotional need working in ways of which she is not sufficiently aware, and in this the whole *Deronda* function is involved. 14

Now, it becomes necessary to expound the social implications of the writer's moral earnestness. While attempting this kind of thing, we might as well keep in mind the assumption that *Deronda* is, more or less, George Eliot's own projected ego; or what we may tolerably describe as a projection of the novelist's emotional reality. Also, it should be borne in mind that the real question of morality in Daniel Deronda consists chiefly in adapting religious belief to one's personal needs.

In his highly celebrated book on George Eliot, Bernard Paris asserts :

The fates of the men and women who people her novels are determined by the interaction of character and circumstance. The individual exists in a medium the nature of which largely determines his character and his fate. But the way in which his environment affects him is the consequence of his own nature. 15

Following Bernard Paris' own inferred theory on the interaction between circumstance and the different elements that go to form the human character, ~~we are led~~ inevitably to the conclusion that man's actions are partly dependent on his inheriting certain psychological traits. Furthermore, man's moral qualities are the product of nature rather than of the socio-economic factors which condition his life. This is facilitated by the critic's further observation that :

George Eliot, Lewes, and Spencer attribute man's apparently innate moral sentiments and modes of cognition to the biological transmission of the structural modifications produced in organisms by their experience. 16

By applying it to George Eliot's last book, Daniel Deronda, Paris' above inference is rendered doubly erroneous. In the first place, and in the

<sup>14</sup> F.R. Leavis, "George Eliot's Zionist Novel," Commentary (Vol. 30, 1960), p.321.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard J. Paris, Experiments in Life : George Eliot's Quest for Values (Detroit : Wayne State University, 1965), p.49.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.51.

case of the birth-troubled Deronda, the social medium in which the hero is nurtured does not seem to exert much influence on his character or destiny. Despite his genteel upbringing and education, Deronda's fate is seen in the end to be chiefly determined by his innate and inherited racial consciousness. Though it is early stated in the novel that "Daniel's tastes were<sup>17</sup> altogether in keeping with his nurture", the discovery of his Jewish parentage not only sows in Deronda's mind the seeds of rebellion against his English environment and culture but also transforms him into a mere executive agent functioning on behalf of his new-found race. Having discovered his Jewish ancestry, Deronda accepts his Jewish cultural heritage more readily than he could ever accept the English upper-class culture. In other words, by placing all the emphasis on the personal or psychological aspect of Deronda's actions, after disclosing the mystery behind his birth, George Eliot deprives her creation of any true social consciousness. More simply still, by bestowing a new identity on her fictional hero, the novelist denies Deronda his initial solid social background and class consciousness and thus reduces him to a mere ideology or psychological phenomenon. In this way, George Eliot can be seen to have turned into the only mode of thinking, subjectivism, likely to gratify her starved needs and desires and, at the same time, to have avoided a real, though fictional, confrontation with the crass materialism of her own society. Deronda might indeed be a good substitute for the traditional English gentleman, but the fact remains that he is too ideal or abstract to be realized. As Wingfield-Stratford has once pointed out :

..... We have to develop our ideal out of our actual and historic gentleman, and not by switching off to something totally different, however desirable in the abstract.   18

To sum up the first objection to Bernard Paris' inference, one could maintain that Deronda is far from being the product of the self-seeking society in

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<sup>17</sup>Eliot, Daniel Deronda, I, p.252.

<sup>18</sup>Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., p.39.

which he exists. Most likely, he is a projection of George Eliot's fantasies about an ideal being who embodies a dearly-cherished though most unrealized ambition. My second objection to Paris' own inference, however, is related to the critic's assertion in connection with George Eliot's subordination of morality to birth and heredity. For if indeed moral choice is not the sole resultant of economic and social conditioning, then Gwendolen Harleth, in Daniel Deronda, is not to blame for her injuriously-selfish actions as she cannot lay claim to having inherited the higher imagination, sensibility, and intelligence which are Deronda's due by birth. It does not need deep insight into George Eliot's artistic creation to realize that Gwendolen's decision to marry the aristocratic gentleman, Grandcourt, was simply the result of social and economic pressures interacting together, rather than of an absence of conscientiousness or moral discretion. This can be inferred from the novelist's own remarks on her heroine :

Whatever was accepted as consistent with being a lady she had no scruple about; but from the dim region of what was called disgraceful, wrong, guilty, she shrank with mingled pride and terror and even apart from shame, her feeling would have made her place any deliberate injury of another in the region of guilt. 19

Gwendolen is clearly one of George Eliot's highly sensitive characters. Her decision to accept Grandcourt was a desperate attempt to avoid the economic and social pressures attending her financially-embarrassed life. Ambitious and domineering though she might appear, Gwendolen's desire to marry the aristocratic gentleman - Grandcourt - was not so much due to her wish to be assimilated into the landowning classes as much as it was to her strongly-felt desire to escape from her environment and her somewhat impoverished state of living. This, again, is evidenced in the writer's own remarks on both Gwendolen and Grandcourt as they stand together watching two horses being taken round a sweep :

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<sup>19</sup> Eliot, Daniel Deronda, II, p.32.

They could see the two horses being taken slowly round the sweep, and the beautiful creatures in their fine grooming, sent a thrill of exultation through Gwendolen. They were the symbols of command and luxury, in delightful contrast with the ugliness of poverty and humiliation at which she had lately been looking close. 20

Being the worldly and materialistic girl she is, Miss Harleth perceives self-sacrifice and acceptance of one's allotted station in life to be the equivalent to self-annihilation; a thing which no energetic narcissist of Gwendolen's stamp would find to her taste. And this is why Gwendolen chooses, after some long-quieted fluctuations, to silence her scruples as regards her secret rival Lydia Glasher. Of course no one would hesitate to call Gwendolen mercenary or scheming, but when viewed objectively her actions and attitude towards the marriage market become much less objectionable than they appear at first. After all, the early Miss Harleth, not unlike her forerunner Rosamond Vincy in Middlemarch, was the product of a society that set a high value on material possessions. Like Rosamond, again, her lot was moulded by the moral mediocrity of her own social circle. In a word, Gwendolen clearly reflects the spirit of her age; a thing which renders her portrait - as a reflection of the ways her class thought and behaved - much more authentic and representative than that of Daniel Deronda, who is clearly a reflection of the novelist's spirit and mind. Being a social comment in the true sense of the word, Gwendolen Harleth's story needs to be further elaborated. It must be stressed first, however, that Daniel Deronda thrives on depicting class relations and distinctions. Here, as elsewhere, the theme of reconciling two sets of values is lengthily dwelt upon. In this novel - as in Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Felix Holt, and Middlemarch - the same pattern is followed: a middle-class heroine, consciously thrown into a web of class intrigues, finds herself torn between idealism and reality, between a man noble by nature and another who is a Gentleman in the class or social sense. The noble character,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II, p.43.

naturally, helps the heroine to modify her views in general and usually serves as a means by which the heroine arrives at a better knowledge of herself and her motives, not to mention that of her society. It is quite safe to add the name of Gwendolen Harleth to the list of George Eliot's status-conscious heroines of whom one may mention Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede, Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss, Esther Lyon in Felix Holt, and Rosamond Vincy in Middlemarch.

To return to the story of Gwendolen Harleth, however, it could be maintained here that in the heroine's married life one is presented with an explicitly drawn picture of class interrelations. In more than one way, Gwendolen is an ideal representative of the middle classes -- be they lower or upper -- and their awareness of social position. Gwendolen's ambitions and aspirations are of that class which constantly hopes to be wedded to the old-established landowning classes and which also sets a high value on Gentility. The marriage-affair of Gwendolen and Mallinger Grandcourt, thus, may simply be described as a class relationship. This marriage, it should be added, is intended to awaken in us a realization of the fact that social aspirations can only be achieved at the expense of some moral degradation. Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt turns out to be disastrous not so much because marrying across class barriers was impossible but because the novelist wanted to prove a certain point. Though Gwendolen's married life cannot be interpreted except in terms of material or economic bondage, the writer, having contrived Grandcourt's death, blurs the issue in question in a way that turns it into a moral lesson. For, according to George Eliot's representation, Grandcourt :

.... knew quite well that she (Gwendolen) had not married him -- had not overcome her repugnance to certain facts -- out of love to him personally; he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her, and these she had got; he had fulfilled his side of the contract. 21

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., III, p.189.

This together with other previously-quoted passages from Daniel Deronda leave no doubt that Gwendolen's subjection to Grandcourt was engendered by the material stress under which she had suffered before her marriage. Nevertheless, what George Eliot stresses on the social issue in the end is the belief that what was needed was moral improvement rather than socio-economic reform that could guarantee social harmony. It seems as if George Eliot could not bring herself to admit that man's morality is mostly determined by the economic forces which regulate and greatly help to shape the social structure. Gwendolen cannot reasonably be said to have blindly entered the world of the upper classes; nonetheless, her abstaining from offering any assistance to her drowning husband, when on their Mediterranean cruise, is very significant. Interpreted in terms of class ethics, the episode could simply be viewed as a rebellion mustered by a middle-class girl - who was fully aware of the fact that she had been sold in the marriage market - against the hereditary power and privileges of the idle rich. For only in breaking the marriage contract, which proved too binding for Gwendolen's nerves, could the heroine hope to emancipate herself or to achieve her own deliverance from that subtle form of slavery. When Gwendolen tells the story of her husband's drowning to Deronda, the first thing she is anxious to point out is the fact underlying her unwillingness to be taken on a boat; that is, to be treated as a slave. This is most exemplified in the heroine's own remarks :

'I want to tell you what it was that came over me in that boat. I was full of rage at being obliged to go - full of rage - and I could do nothing but sit there like a galley-slave. And then we got away - out of the port - into the deep - and everything was still - and we never looked at each other, only he spoke to order me - and the very light about me seemed to hold me a prisoner and force me to sit as I did.'<sup>22</sup>

The story told, Deronda becomes fully aware of the implications of Gwendolen's criminal desire towards her late husband. Yet, the heroine's remorse

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., III, pp. 229-30.

convinces him of her redemption. But as I hinted above, George Eliot clouds - through her fictional hero - our judgement on the issue in question by trying to present it in terms of 'guilt' and 'innocence' rather than in terms of 'exploitation' and 'revolt'. The incident just mentioned, one may venture to say, symbolizes a nation that has become almost incurably dehumanized and sterile and thus calls into account the socio-economic structure responsible for this dehumanization. Whether George Eliot was quite aware of this symbolic significance or not is not quite so easy to ascertain. Still, the novelist's sparing of her heroine betrays a latent belief in the possibility of redemption for the governing classes through moral and cultural reform. In the same way Gwendolen comes to owe to Deronda the gradual transition from tumultuous existence to the mood which could find pleasure and satisfaction in dutifulness and self-sacrifice; England, George Eliot quite dreamily must have hoped, would someday come to owe its salvation to the individual efforts of its high-minded elite. This elite, it might be guessed, would include not only highly-cultured and gifted individuals like Deronda and Herr Klesmer, but also progressive rebels of Miss Arrowpoint's stamp. Having said this, I deem it necessary here to analyse briefly the triangular relationship that exists in the novel between Klesmer, Miss Arrowpoint, and the latter's parents.

Like many a landed upper-middle-class Victorian family, the Arrowpoints rose to their present status through trade. This is quite significant in view of the fact that their customs and habits bear the closest affinity to those of the oldest forms of nobility and gentry. It is hardly an exaggeration to assert that the presence of aristocracy in the neighbourhood of Quetcham, the present abode of the sturdy upper-middle-class family of the Arrowpoints, is almost fully eclipsed. To establish the Arrowpoints' middle-class origin, all one needs is to cite part of Catherine Arrowpoint's first argument with her mother :

'You have lost all sense of duty, then? You have forgotten that you are our only child - that it lies with you to place a great property in the right hands?'  
 'What are the right hands? My grandfather gained the property in trade.' 23

However, in her delineation of the elder Arrowpoints, George Eliot seems to have come to grips with her predominantly bourgeois society. Never before, in her fiction, did the novelist come to a direct questioning of the validity of class barriers and class distinctions. Thus, it is natural to consider the author's delineation of the Arrowpoints as her most sustained and scathing attack on middle-class values and assumptions. None could fail to realize that in her treatment of the love-marriage affair between Herr Klesmer and Miss Arrowpoint the novelist found an ideal occasion to give full expression to her dissatisfaction with bourgeois complacency and conformity as regards the individual's rights and duties. Heedless of her family and class's opinion and undaunted by the threat of expulsion from the world of wealth and privileges, George Eliot's heroine - Catherine Arrowpoint - determines once for all to trample down the line of social demarcation by marrying the man of her choice, to whom her parents are strongly opposed. The great regard and esteem George Eliot seems anxious to generate in her readers' minds for her romantic rebel, Miss Arrowpoint, is due to the heroine's audacity, in the face of difficulties, to stand up to her principles and to seek happiness in the way she deems right. Where inclination and duty conflict, George Eliot seems to suggest, an individual should follow his or her better self; that is, one's own true feelings and passions. For one's class values and conventions often turn into unpleasant encroachments limiting the individual's chances of happiness. Indeed, much could be learnt from Catherine's retort to her mother particularly as she asserts: 'But I will not give up the happiness of my life to ideas that I don't believe in and customs I have no respect for.'

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., I, p.370.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., I, p.369.

Catherine's refusal to compromise her romantic idealism with the demands of her family should not mislead us into believing that she is a clear manifestation of the social group to which she belongs. Miss Arrowpoint is an exception to her class and thus her attitude is more apologetic than otherwise. Her conduct can simply be ascribed to a desire to rise above the idea of class. Still, Catherine's behaviour can be held to represent another similar attitude adopted by many a Victorian feminist. At any rate, despite this heroine's clear perception of her family and hence of her class's interests, she is unwilling to further those interests or even to be associated with them in any significant manner. A clear manifestation of this point is found in her answer to her father as he tries so hard to dissuade her from getting involved in an undesirable match with a person out of her class. This is illustrated by the following extract from the conversation just referred to :

'It will never do to argue about marriage, Cath,' said Mr. Arrowpoint. 'It's no use getting up the subject like a parliamentary question. We must do as other people do. We must think of the nation and the public good.'  
 'I can't see any public good concerned here, papa,' said Catherine. 'Why is it to be expected of an heiress that she should carry the property gained in trade into the hands of a certain class? That seems to me a ridiculous mish-mash of super-annuated customs and false ambition. I should call it a public evil. People had better make a new sort of public good by changing their ambitions'. 25

To cut a long story short, by rejecting the idea of marrying a gentleman just to satisfy her family and class and also by feeling at liberty to marry the man she loves and esteems, Catherine not only fulfils herself and satisfies her deepest necessities but also achieves a transcendence over both her class morality and the Victorian ideal of femininity. Surprisingly, no critic of George Eliot has so far attempted to consider Miss Arrowpoint's feminist tendencies and rebelliousness in terms of George Eliot's own rebellious behaviour earlier in life. It need hardly be said on this occasion that Catherine reflects in many ways her creator's

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., I, p.371.

character and mind. She is clearly the novelist's nearest attempt at self-portraiture at a somewhat advanced age. Catherine's attachment to the highly-talented musician and artist, Klesmer, bears a great affinity to George Eliot's union with Lewes; a union which "was made openly and deliberately not in defiance of the marriage laws, but in obedience to a higher personal morality that could brook no deceit."<sup>26</sup> What has just preceded renders a detailed study of Klesmer's role in Daniel Deronda indispensable.

In his first public appearance in the novel - at the Arrowpoints' archery party - the reader's attention is purposely drawn to the marked difference between Herr Klesmer's outward looks and those of the typical English gentleman. First it is reported that :

The strong point of the English gentleman pure is the easy style of his figure and clothing; he objects to marked ins and outs in his costume, and he also objects to looking inspired.      27

Immediately after this, the narrator adds the following remarks :

Fancy an assemblage where the men had all that ordinary stamp of the well-bred Englishman, watching the entrance of Herr Klesmer - his mane of hair floating backward in massive inconsistency with the chimney-pot hat, which had the look of having been put on for a joke above his pronounced but well-modelled features and powerful clear-shaven mouth and chin ....      28

Ludicrous though he might appear at first, Klesmer, throughout the novel, is favourably contrasted to the English gentleman who is presented as fully preoccupied with parade and display of outward superiority. Following George Eliot's own verdict, Klesmer, besides his artistic excellence and political idealism, "was eminently a man of honour".<sup>29</sup> It would hardly be an exaggeration to assert that Klesmer is George Eliot's picture of the ideal gentleman whose character and mind are almost in a state of perfect

<sup>26</sup> Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot : A Biography (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1968), p.543.

<sup>27</sup> Eliot, Daniel Deronda, I, p.149.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., I, p.149.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., I, p.358.

equilibrium. Again, as seen through the novelist's eyes :

Klesmer was as versatile and fascinating as a young Ulysses on a sufficient acquaintance -- one whom nature seemed to have first made generously and then to have added music as a dominant power using all the abundant rest. 30

No wonder, then, that Miss Arrowpoint prefers him to any English gentleman whom her parents might have deemed more suited to her status as the sole heiress to their estates. Despite the fact that he was a foreigner and a Jew, Catherine proceeds with her attachment to Klesmer -- heedless of society's condemnation or her parents' opposition. Thus, treated unfairly and often looked down upon by the world of English conformity, Klesmer's superior talents and high moral standards prove more than sufficient a guarantee to secure for him the haven of all mortal souls; that is, an equally high-minded and conscientious life partner. Klesmer's is the position of the intellectual outsider almost suddenly found himself in the middle of a rigid society which does not easily permit the crossing of class barriers, let alone the encroachment of aliens on its anxiously-guarded territory. As I see the matter, Klesmer's union with Miss Arrowpoint represents no more than a wished-for fusion of widely differing cultures and ways of living. In his character, moreover, the novelist seems to embody all the progressive tendencies that make for flexibility and culture in its widest sense. For not unlike his predecessor Will Ladislav in Middlerarch, Klesmer is presented as a symbol of a cultural movement that aims at the elimination of all national and racial prejudices. As indeed it is reported in the novel, Klesmer has his cosmopolitan ideas and, moreover, "looks forward to a fusion of races."<sup>31</sup> In other words, he is a member of the elitist minority on whose shoulders falls the burden of liberating mankind from its petty concerns and trivial pursuits. This minority's exalted form of culture, once adopted by the multitude of mankind, would guarantee not only the removal of social and class barriers but

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I, p.359.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., I, p.363.

also the obliteration of national boundaries on earth. Unfortunately however, this is all mere verbiage. But it is no more so than the belief that George Eliot was propagating, through her creations Ladislaw and Klesmer, the cult of cosmopolitanism. In his Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel, for instance, <sup>Knoepfelmacher</sup> / is quite right to insist - with reference to Klesmer - that "Culture to him is classless and cosmopolitan,"<sup>32</sup> but he is somehow unjustified in insinuating that George Eliot herself can be seen in the same light. The novelist's claim to cosmopolitanism in the true sense is undermined by her following remarks :

Let it be admitted that it is a calamity to the English, as to any other great historic people, to undergo a premature fusion with immigrants of alien blood; that its distinctive national characteristics should be in danger of obliteration by the predominating quality of foreign settlers. I not only admit this, I am ready to unite in groaning over the threatened danger. <sup>33</sup>

The passage is self-sufficient and need not be further elaborated. To render the picture of George Eliot's Englishness - as opposed to cosmopolitanism - more complete all one needs here is to peruse her reasons for dealing with the Jews :

They are among us everywhere: it is useless to say we are not fond of them. Perhaps we are not fond of proletaries and their tendency to form unions, but the world is not therefore to be rid of them. If we wish to free ourselves from the inconveniences that we have to complain of, whether in proletaries or in Jews, our best course is to encourage all means of improving these neighbours who elbow us in a thickening crowd, and of sending their incommensurable energies into beneficent channels. <sup>34</sup>

Anyway, since class relations and distinctions occupy an important place in George Eliot's novels, it seems appropriate to devote the rest of this chapter to a brief study of them in the writer's earlier novels.

As was the case with the other Victorian prose writers, the appeal to nostalgia proved too irresistible to George Eliot's Tory-oriented mentality. Of all the pictures of social reality seen in the novelist's

<sup>32</sup> Knoepfelmacher, op. cit., p.130.

<sup>33</sup> Eliot, Impressions of Theophrastus Such, p.186.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.191.

earlier books, the one presented in Middlemarch is the least distorted and coloured by George Eliot's own moral standards and values. Hence is its value as a socio-historical record of early Victorian England, and hence is its importance as an authentic portrait of the submergence of the old agrarian system with the new commercialistic one. Remarkably, by the time the first Reform Bill was passed, English society had already undergone a long process of silent social insurrection. It was not long before then that English society had begun to witness divisions and sub-divisions in its social structure. Not a few of those lines of social demarcation can be seen to be reflected in George Eliot's elaborate study of provincial life, Middlemarch.

What is so conspicuous about the society depicted in this novel, however, is the partial establishment of the bourgeois on an equal footing with the older social orders, the aristocracy and the gentry. More significant still, the broad lines of the middle class seem to be almost fully drawn and the moulding of its members into separate interest groups or strata is virtually accomplished. Moreover, in Middlemarch the foundations of Victorian bourgeois morality are both fully laid down and consolidated and, at the same time, the ways in which middle-class members responded to the problems which faced and disturbed their chiefly secular age are anticipated. To illustrate this point, one may simply refer to the banker's case in Middlemarch which clearly demonstrates the dilemma of a seemingly religious person caught in the intricate complexities of a largely secularized and capitalized system. But despite the fact that George Eliot achieves an unprecedented objectivity of delineation in this book; she, nevertheless, betrays a certain amount of bias against the rising middle class particularly as they attempt to climb the social ladder. This is mostly felt in the ironical undertones the novelist uses whenever the question of bourgeois gentility is touched upon. George Eliot's emphasis of the 'petty solicitude' of bourgeois gentility in this

novel could easily be seen to cover up a multitude of vulgarities characteristic of the middle class. This attitude naturally implies a good deal of contempt for the ideals embraced by the bourgeoisie and a latent belief in the worthlessness of their social aspirations. The attitude just referred to is partly supported and somehow **illustrated** by the writer's following remarks on the manufacturer's daughter, Rosamond Vincy :

And here was Mr. Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which afford vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank: a man of talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave. 35

The ironical touch here could hardly be missed. Before proceeding to discuss in some detail class and inter-class relations in the novel, it should be pointed out first that in her presentation of Rosamond Vincy's mind and character George Eliot clearly parts ways with her predecessor Jane Austen - particularly in the latter's delineation of Miss Vincy's fictional ancestor, Mrs. Elton in Emma. Though both characters belong to the rising middle class, and though both of them are treated ironically, Rosamond Vincy differs greatly from Mrs. Elton in that her manners are no longer seen to be 'raw' and 'vulgar'. Besides, the discomfort Mrs. Elton suffers in the presence of 'genteel families' in the community depicted in Emma is totally absent in the case of Rosamond Vincy. Seen through the aristocratic Emma's eyes, Mrs. Elton, it may be recalled, appears to be not only 'vulgar' but also lacking in all sense of refinement. Rosamond Vincy, on the other hand, can easily be seen as a model of refinement and ease. Viewed from the novelist's own perspective, "it was part of Rosamond's cleverness to discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank." 36 Unlike Mrs. Elton who strongly felt her disadvantageous position while being visited and her features scrutinized by the status-conscious Emma :

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<sup>35</sup> George Eliot, Middlemarch (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), I, p.177.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., I, p.252.

Rosamond was not without satisfaction that Mrs. Casaubon should have an opportunity of studying her. What is the use of being exquisite if you are not seen by the best judges? and since Rosamond had received the highest compliments at Sir Godwin Lydgate's, she felt quite confident of the impression she must make on people of good birth. 37

The reason that Rosamond Vincy and her bourgeois predecessor are juxtaposed is simply to draw attention to the shift in emphasis from manners to morals. It appears that the sufficiency of manners as a touchstone of gentility in Miss Austen's world is no longer held adequate in the world of social and moral fermentation depicted in Middlemarch. Of course, refined manners as a factor of social harmony and cohesion can still be seen to be as important in the fictional world of Middlemarch as it has been in Miss Austen's world. But to be highly significant now, manners ought to be the outward manifestation of a good nature or a moral principle. In other words, good manners should be an end in themselves rather than be cultivated as a means to an end. Once we have started banking on our good appearances, manners, George Eliot seems to suggest, stop being valuable or attractive. In fact, George Eliot's concept of good manners is quite similar to that expounded by H.D. Sedgwick in his article, "What a Gentleman Was". For clarification's sake, the above-mentioned critic's own words are thus quoted :

It may be said that manners, in part, are the superficial expression of religion. And the biographies of men greatly religious show that where there is holiness within there is courtesy without. There may be good manners without holiness, but there is no record of holiness without good manners. 38

It is necessary to add here that had George Eliot been living at the time when Sedgwick wrote his article, she would have had no cause to disagree with the above critic's use of 'religious' in a way that both implies and includes the more secular word 'ethical'.

However, as we come to consider George Eliot's views on Gentility, in the light of the various comments on class marriages and interrelations

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., II, p.241.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Dwight Sedgwick, "What a Gentleman Was", The Atlantic Monthly (Vol. 155, No. 3, March 1955), p.262.

in Middlemarch, the novelist's subtly-disguised prejudice against Rosamond Vincy and the class she represents becomes illuminated. In contrast to the society of rural peace portrayed in the writer's early novels where life could be seen as a struggle between good and evil, Middlemarch can simply be looked at from the perspective of a changing world dominated in most of its social aspects by mercantilistic business ethics. In this world the material values of the middle class, if values they might be called, seem to permeate the whole of society and, moreover, true religious and moral values seem to be receding. This manifests itself clearly in both business and social dealings, particularly in the class marriages contracted between the various ranks of society. Judged by the evidence of her own remarks and comments on the leading characters in this book, George Eliot truly turns out to be the 'belated historian' she calls herself. Of all the people portrayed in this novel, Mrs. Cadwallader appears to be a mere relic of a fast-vanishing social order. What renders the figure of Mrs. Cadwallader a little out of touch with the actual world of Middlemarch is an aristocratic conservative escapism that stands opposed to all social and historical movements. Like many a Victorian and pre-Victorian aristocratically-prejudiced person, Mrs. Cadwallader was so anti-pathetic to tradespeople and bourgeois 'upstarts' in general :

Her feeling towards the vulgar rich was a sort of religious hatred: they had probably made all their money out of high retail prices, and Mrs. Cadwallader detested high prices for everything that was not paid in kind at the Rectory. 39

In her well-bred scheme of the universe, people are divided into 'high-born' and 'low-born'; and their stations in life are thus decided by birth. Feudalistic though her nourished social system might appear, people in it can still be seen to be held together by a strong bond of sympathy. This, at least, is the view which George Eliot herself seems to adopt, and which is partly conveyed by her further remarks :

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<sup>39</sup>Eliot, Middlemarch, I, p.87.

Let any lady who is inclined to be hard on Mrs. Cadwallader inquire into the comprehensiveness of her own beautiful views, and be quite sure that they afford accommodation for all lives which have the honour to co-exist with hers. 40

Though George Eliot might, at times, appear to mock the continuing aristocratic habit of regarding society as a clearly stratified pyramid; she, nevertheless, cannot be doubted to have shared not a few of the ideas and beliefs upheld by the old social orders - the nobility and the gentry. Apart from Mrs. Cadwallader and the few other characters in the book who can still be seen to adhere to an older way of living and system of values, most of the people in and around Middlemarch may be said to exemplify different aspects of Victorian culture and society. Accordingly, their actions and transactions must be judged in terms of the changing world of Victorian England - taking into account the novelist's obtrusively prescriptive morality of course. For, in this novel, as in Daniel Deronda, George Eliot seems to suggest that one must sacrifice material things for moral and spiritual ends. This, perhaps, is partly due to her theoretical belief that no compromise could be achieved between moralistic and materialistic issues. Thus, in the same way Miss Arrowpoint, in Daniel Deronda, declares her intention of giving up her inheritance for the sake of transcending her class morality and emotionally fulfilling herself; Dorothea Brooke, in Middlemarch, is similarly made to sacrifice her inherited property in order to win in the end Will Ladislav, the romantic rebel she loves and respects. This leads us conveniently into a brief analysis of cross-class marriages in the book we are concerned with.

The first marriage that should be noted here and which has some bearings on the subject of gentility is that contracted between Dorothea Brooke and Mr. Casaubon, a middle-aged clergyman with 'a handsome property independent of the Church' - to use Mr. Brooke's own words. Being a young lady of some birth and fortune and the prospective heiress to her uncle's

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., I, p.87.

estate, Dorothea, imprudently it would appear, turns down the aristocratic Sir James Chettan who, Mr. Brooke insists, "is a good match. And our land lies together,"<sup>41</sup> and accepts the clergyman and scholar Mr. Casaubon who is not only twenty seven years older than her but also - according to

Mrs. Cadwallader's description - "a great bladder for dried peas to rattle in!"<sup>42</sup> Economically speaking, Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon can in no

way be described as 'imprudent'. Time and again, it has been emphasized that the Clergyman's income is 'good', and his house was not, as might be expected, a parsonage but rather "a considerable mansion, with much land attached to it."<sup>43</sup> It should not be understood from this, however, that

the marriage took place in accordance with the conventions of the established order; because neither Dorothea Brooke nor her creator in this book believed in the traditional attachment of social equals. Rather, it was a matter of sentiment and a misplaced admiration on Dorothea's part. In marrying the clergyman, Dorothea cannot be doubted to have followed her higher personal inclinations and brushed aside considerations of luxury and ease. As she explains her views to her uncle; "Marriage is a state of higher duties. I never thought of it as mere personal ease."<sup>44</sup> The fact that

Dorothea's first marriage turns out to be imprudent is, obviously, due to the heroine's wrong estimate of Mr. Casaubon's spiritual and cultural worth. It fails not only because Mr. Casaubon could not reciprocate Dorothea's passionate feelings and play up to her ardent nature, but also because of a gap in her understanding of human events; a thing which can only be ascribed to her tendency to over-idealize people and circumstances in certain given situations. What the young Dorothea much needed, the books seems to suggest, was her sister's practicality and worldly wisdom. Most needed still, was an immersion in the practical difficulties of life to counter-balance the lofty conception of the world engendered in her mind

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., I, p.56..

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., I, p.84.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., I, p.73.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., I, p.58.

by a long tradition of Puritanism. Thus, in Middlemarch, as Knoepfelmacher perceptively remarks, "righteousness is confirmed by experience. And in George Eliot's pulling of the strings, experience is tantamount to a reputation of all unnatural abstractions."<sup>45</sup> With reference to Mr. Casaubon, however, it should be noted here that his attempt to control Dorothea after his death - through the provisions made in his will - was doomed to failure simply because the heroine's moral guardian, George Eliot, chooses to inculcate a lesson. This, she achieves, through pointing out the way out of the money-dominated society by means of recommending love and moral ideals. From this brief analysis of Dorothea's first marriage, it may be concluded that the cornerstone of class marriages according to George Eliot was mutual understanding that had its foundations in true human feelings and sympathy. For a marriage to outlast difficulties and disappointments it has to be the result of a harmonious whole; that is, an even combination of heart and mind. Full knowledge of each other's social and economic standing, George Eliot would have us believe, does not and should not count for much. In other words, finance in George Eliot's genteel world is as little significant as birth. This, it should be emphasized, is George Eliot's own view on this question and should not be confused with that of the society portrayed in the novel. The over-all impression given by the book itself is that each class was still anxiously guarding its territories against penetration from the other classes, and members of the different social groups could still be seen to favour restricting one's choice of a husband or a wife to one's social milieu. Sir James Chettam's marriage's to Celia Brooke is a case in point. To refer back, the irony underlying Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is apparent: neither financial security, nor social status, nor even the gentlemanly honour attending a clergyman's profession is good enough a guarantee to secure love and harmony between two social equals unless, of course, there

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<sup>45</sup>Knoepfelmacher, op. cit., p.101.

existed a great similarity between their sentiments and social outlook. Genuine sympathy and, much more, selfless regard for the feelings of others are essential to a realization of a lasting bond between different persons. This conclusion is both confirmed and supported by Dorothea's second marriage to Will Ladislaw; a marriage through which the novelist aimed at reestablishing the marriage-tie on a stronger basis than that of mutual material interest or genteel status. How different all this sounds, it may be exclaimed, from Jane Austen's world of class and inter-class marriages. It seems only appropriate here to add a few more remarks on Dorothea's second attachment in Middlemarch.

In her portraiture of Will Ladislaw, George Eliot, quite unwittingly perhaps, moves away from social recording and documentation to the regions of psychological analysis. In contrast to the 'ungentlemanly' Casaubon, Will is presented as humane, spontaneous and honourably sensible. Though looked down upon by some low-bred Middlemarchers on account of his Jewish ancestry, he is, nevertheless, held in high esteem by not a few of the gentry class. Mr. Brooke, for one, is convinced that Ladislaw is a gentleman.<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding, Ladislaw's importance in the novel is more symbolic than otherwise. Not unlike his successor, Herr Klesmer in Daniel Deronda, Will represents a wished-for figure able through his cosmopolitan views to rise above class interests and social distinctions. Despite the novelist's attempts to fit him into the real social context of Middlemarch, and despite her efforts to make him an adequate substitute for Dorothea's deceased husband, Ladislaw remains a shadowy figure hardly related to the historical actuality of the society depicted. One could easily maintain here that Ladislaw is no more than a projection of the writer's emotional reality, and therefore should be dismissed as somehow irrelevant to our subject. Of more relevance to the topic I am concerned with, are the class intermarriages of Lydgate and Rosamond, on the one

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<sup>46</sup> Eliot, Middlemarch, II, p.323.

hand; and Miss Garth and Fred Vincy, on the other.

The idea that marriage between persons of two different social and economic groups was a common phenomenon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is truly reflected and embodied in the love-marriage-affair of the professional aristocrat Lydgate and the bourgeois aspirant Rosamond Vincy. Therefore, the serious complications that come to attend this relationship can reasonably be ascribed to a conflict between Lydgate and Rosamond's dissimilar class moralities and sets of values. Being a member of the rising middle class of whose first and foremost desires was securing, through marriage if possible, an influential and prestigious position in life, Rosamond could not help viewing Lydgate but as a means to that wished-for end. Deeming it unnecessary to reflect on her prospective victim's inward life, all that Rosamond thinks of when Lydgate becomes the subject of her eager meditation was the social haven he is likely to transport her to. "Of course", it is reported in the book :

he had a profession and was clever, as well as sufficiently handsome; but the piquant fact about Lydgate was his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers, and presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people, and perhaps at last associate with relatives quite equal to the country people who looked down on the Middlemarchers. 47

Judged by the evidence supplied by the above quotation, Rosamond's controlling value in life was to gain access to that middle-class heaven, rank. As a fictitious representative of the ambitious section of the bourgeoisie, Rosamond is seen throughout to be doing her best and eventually succeeding in gaining admission to that world of well-connected social group, the upper class. Upon reflecting on the case of Miss Vincy, one is inevitably led to conclude that in seeking social elevation and prestige as the ultimate end of life one risks not only her happiness and peace of mind but also betrays her better self. True happiness, George Eliot seems to

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., I, p.252.

innist, lies not in external reality but rather in moral values which are fed and nourished by a kind heart. What Rosamond's story clearly highlights is the fact that bourgeois aspirants' moral choice was often set in motion by their externally stimulated desires rather than by a true moral rationalization of social events. It should be borne in mind, however, that Rosamond's desires and selfish actions were greatly enhanced by the social forces surrounding her life; forces which can, to a considerable extent, be held responsible for fostering in her false values and wrong notions of pleasure or happiness. In the final analysis, Middlemarch appears to press the view that Rosamond's high standards of living together with the material values of her class dictate on Lydgate the necessity of maintaining those standards. And this, as the course of events in the novel tends to show, drives the young doctor in the end to gambling and, worse still, to compromising his moral and professional principles; a thing which leads to the death of Bulstrode's former colleague, Mr. Raffles. Significantly, Lydgate's downfall towards the end is clearly seen to be the result of both social and economic pressures interacting together and producing the effect they exhibit on his moral choice. Middlemarch is then unique among George Eliot's novels in that it largely reflects the web of economic interdependence which holds people of different classes in modern society fatally together. Presumably, what led to the writer's objective presentation of the interdependence of individuals on economic forces is her life-long obsession with moral values. For such a fixation often involves and leads to considerations of the social structure of a given society. Anyhow, to counter-balance the immorality and a-morality underlying Rosamond's and Lydgate's social transactions, respectively, George Eliot endows the few survivors of the pre-industrial society in this novel with true moral ideals and values. This, in fact, is the question posed by the Garth family and the few truly respectable people moving in their social orbit, like the pragmatic clergyman Farebrother, for instance. It remains to remark briefly on the third meaningful marriage in Middlemarch

between the reformed Fred Vincy and Mary Garth.

To begin with, though George Eliot betrays as much partiality for her heroine Miss Garth as she does against the lively, but frivolous, Rosamond Vincy, she cannot justly be said to have been unduly prejudiced against the bourgeois in general. As far as Middlemarch goes, there is no reason to assume that the author did not believe in the bourgeoisie's ability to acquire the 'internals' of gentility, besides the 'external' ones. This is evidenced in the novelist's rounding up her book with the completion of Fred Vincy's genteel polish, be it outward or inward. However, the fact that George Eliot was prejudiced in favour of Miss Garth is beyond doubt. This prejudice displays itself in different ways throughout the novel. One of the many clues that could be given in support of this argument is found in Mrs. Farebrother's remarks on Mary Garth as she addresses herself to Mrs. Vincy one day :

'I like her countenance. We must not always ask for beauty, when a good God has seen fit to make an excellent young woman without it. I put good manners first, and Miss Garth will know how to conduct herself in any station. 48

To avoid falling into the vulgar habit of reducing this fictional character to a self-portrait drawn by the novelist herself, I shall content myself by simply observing that Mary Garth is endowed with all the good qualities that characterize a superior being; namely, intelligence, good manners, and an innate sense of grace. Still, a careful reading of Middlemarch is likely to render an interpretation of Mary's social background in terms of the author's own family circumstances quite acceptable. This, it must be confessed, is another way of saying that Mary Garth is more or less a projection of George Eliot's attitudes towards class and religion, too. Interestingly enough, Miss Garth's attitude towards the clergy resembles that of her fictional predecessor Mary Crawford in Miss Austen's Mansfield Park. This attitude is most exemplified in the following quotation from a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., III, p.169.

conversation between our present heroine and the lax Christian clergyman,

Mr. Farebrother :

'I could not love a man who is ridiculous', said Mary, not choosing to go deeper. 'Fred has sense and knowledge enough to make him respectable, if he likes, in some good worldly business, but I can never imagine him preaching and exhorting, and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as if I were looking at a caricature. His being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility. I used to think that of Mr. Growse, with his empty face and neat umbrella, and mincing little speeches. What right have such men to represent Christianity as if it were an institution for getting up idiots genteely.' 49

To cut a long story short, Mary Garth's above views on clerical gentility may simply be said to coincide with those of George Eliot. Though the novelist's opinions on materialistic clergymen are rarely strongly expressed in her writings, it cannot be doubted that she always looked at such people with suspicious eyes. To give only a single example from her other books here, one may cite the writer's own satirical remarks on the Rev. Gascoigne in Daniel Deronda :

Indeed, the worst imputation thrown out against him was worldliness: it could not be proved that he forsook the less fortunate, but it was not to be denied that the friendships he cultivated were of a kind likely to be useful to the father of six sons and two daughters; and bitter observers ... remarked that the colour of his opinions had changed in consistency with this principle of action. 50

The important thing to be pointed out here is the fact that George Eliot was not so much opposed to Gascoigne's worldliness as much as she was to his mercenary motives.

In tackling the problem posed by the role Mary Garth plays in Middlemarch, one should always bear in mind the fact that she is the daughter of a respectable man who adopted for his creed the 'Gospel of Work' while, at the same time, he suspected the efficacy of any formal or doctrinal religion. What has just been said somehow accounts for the Garths' efforts and attempts to convert Fred Vinoy from an idle and debauched person to an

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., II, p.371.

<sup>50</sup> Eliot, Daniel Deronda, I, p.40.

industrious farmer living on the earnings of his own labour. The question with which the reader is confronted and which the novel poses in the marriage of the manufacturer's son and Miss Garth is not as simple as it appears at first. Although George Eliot makes it clear in Middlemarch that "old manufacturers could not any more than dukes be connected with none but equals."<sup>51</sup> she, nevertheless, appears practically to contradict herself when she brings about in the end the union of the Middlemarch manufacturer's son and the poor land agent's daughter. By way of explaining this apparent disparity between theory and practice, it may simply be suggested that the author - not necessarily following the same pattern adopted by Mrs. Gaskell in North and South - was trying to prove that middle-class members are not only teachable but also redeemable - teachable in the sense that their mental faculties are capable of as high cultural acquirements as their upper-class fellow-men; and redeemable in that, once schooled by a good heart, they become more moral or humane. In Fred Vincy's case, the first thing seems to have already been achieved. Thus, according to George Eliot's own description :

Fred was not at all coarse, that he rather looked down on the manners and speech of young men who had not been to the university, and that he had written stanzas as pastoral and unvoluptuous as his flute-playing. 52

These remarks are only a trifle sample representing a large body of authorial comment the motive behind which is obviously to put Fred Vincy in the light of a highly cultivated gentleman whom no one with enough sense could be blinded as to his social desirability. But as is obvious in the novel, Fred was not without some personal shortcomings. Besides, he was clearly addicted to vices that were not uncommon among the rural gentry such as, for instance, 'gambling' and 'love of horse-flesh' - as it was called sometimes. Something, then, was badly needed for his moral regeneration and ultimate reform. Thus, to be rescued from bad habits and indulgence

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<sup>51</sup> Eliot, Middlemarch, I, p.353.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., I, p.360.

in the vices of the idle rich, George Eliot seems to insinuate, Fred Vincy needed to be guided by some high moral ideals. Needless to say, this guidance was provided in the novel by the Garth family. In truth, the Garths might not at first appear to be a sufficient substitute for high moral ideals; but when thought of in terms of class stratification the Garths become emblems representing those rural values of the past held by George Eliot's own class stratum. Being vestiges of a fast-vanishing agrarian system, the Garths' role in their society is somehow seen to be subordinated to that of their traditional superiors, the aristocracy and the gentry. Consequently, their values could easily be said to have been derived from those of old-established landowners. Through the Garth family, then, George Eliot can be pictured to have been advocating an acquiescence in the old-established social structure; a thing which can only be ascribed to the author's sympathetic attitude towards the old distinctions of rank. Bluntly speaking, due to their mixing with 'gentlefolk' all their life, the Garths acquire a kind of moral and social superiority that distinguishes them from the rest of the Middlemarchers - excepting the old landed families, of course. Their awareness of social responsibility thus is derived from a latent sense of moral superiority. Assuming the role of social reformers as regards Fred Vincy is only a good proof of this point. Also, this sense of superiority is what underlies Farebrother's assertion that Mrs. Garth "was more of a lady than any matron in the town. Still," the novelist adds :

you see, he spent his evenings at the Vincys' where the matron, though less of a lady, presided over a well-lit drawing-room and whist. In those days human intercourse was not determined solely by respect. 53

It should be added here, however, that though there is no apparent ill-will on the part of the landed families towards the rising bourgeois in this book, as was the case in Mrs. Gaskell's Sylvia's Lovers, one is surprised to discover that there existed at that time a good deal of ill-feeling among the different strata of the middle class. This is clearly mani-

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., II, p.197.

fested in the lack of communication between wealthy middle-class families and less financially-sound bourgeois families. The Vincys and the Garths, respectively, are a case in point. In any case, the conclusion one arrives at regarding the union of Fred Vincy and Miss Garth is that George Eliot was trying to establish through it a more humane and hence a stronger bond between the different social strata than that based on economic superiority. This bond, the author must have hoped, would be supported by and founded on love and sympathy between all the parties or social groups concerned.

I move finally to George Eliot's presentation of 'Gentility' in her other books; an act which demands some caution in view of the fact that in those earlier works the novelist appears to have been standing on weak grounds. This is due in part to the fact that in those books the structure of George Eliot's social portrayal and analysis is undermined by her social group's moral standards and general outlook. For there the writer's handling of social and class issues is marred by her ill-disguised partiality for or against existing social norms. Nothing could be more unsympathetically biased, for instance, than George Eliot's presentation of the middle-class lawyer Mr. Jermyn in Felix Holt as :

A fat-handed, glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief; one of your educated low-bred fellows; a foundling who got his Latin for nothing at Christ's Hospital; one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen, and think they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture. 54

Furthermore, nothing could betray George Eliot's sense of social and moral superiority and, simultaneously, could be more injurious to the writer's delineation of Mr. Jermyn again than her assertion that : "Moral vulgarity  
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cleaved to him like an hereditary odour." What renders the novelist's presentation of social reality in Felix Holt no more than a personal and consequently a biased view of things is the fact that her opposition to materialism, particularly the new riches, is hardly ever seen as subtle or disguised. However, through her fictional hero Felix, George Eliot can

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<sup>54</sup> George Eliot, Felix Holt, The Radical (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), I, p.46.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., I, p.172.

often be pictured to be expressing her own disapproving attitude towards the bourgeois's pursuit of material prosperity and gain. Whether used as a mirror to reflect the novelist's deeply-held ideas and beliefs or as another exemplary figure pointing the way out of the materialistic abyss headed for by the ambitious and "pushing middle-class gentility"<sup>56</sup> - to use George Eliot's own words - is not as significant as the fact that Felix in this novel stands for the dignity of labour and honest work. Not unlike Mr. Garth in Middlemarch or Adam in Adam Bede, Felix Holt is a true embodiment of pacifism as regards the territories of the upper classes. This somewhat accounts for his advocacy of better living conditions for the poor or working classes instead of campaigning for the overthrow of the privileged classes whose hereditary status was much to blame for the existing ills of society. In any case, one of the leading roles Felix is intended to serve in the book is providing a touchstone against which existing forms of gentility can be tested. Of these forms, the oldest which derives its sustenance from the criteria of 'blood' and 'hereditary status' -- seems to have been uppermost in George Eliot's mind when she wrote Felix Holt. As a representative of the old school of Gentility, Harold Transome is endowed with all the character traits that distinguish a traditional gentleman; that is, birth, manners and good-breeding, and landownership. Commenting on Harold Transome with reference to the 'gentility-conscious' Esther Lyon who was "alive to the finest shades of manner, to the nicest distinctions of tone and accent,"<sup>57</sup> George Eliot observes : "... with a distinguished appearance and polished manners ... he suggested to her that brighter and more luxurious life on which her imagination dwelt."<sup>58</sup> But in spite of the fact that Harold Transome possesses qualities which render him a desirable match he, put by the side of the righteous Felix Holt, strikes one as being a faded gentlemanly product. Seen through the experienced Miss Lyon's eyes, after she acquires a first-hand knowledge of the gentry

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., II, p.235.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., I, p.113.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., I, p.290.

and their monotonous way of life on the occasion of inheriting the Transomes' estate, Harold appears to betray certain signs of vulgarity.

Tortured by some secret thoughts, the heroine finally concludes that :

Whatever Harold might think, there was a light in which he was vulgar compared with Felix. Felix had ideas and motives which she did not believe that Harold could understand. 59

Quite expectedly, the heroine finds herself in the end gradually reverting to the creed adopted and propagated by nature's gentleman, Felix. Disillusioned thus, Esther chooses at last to withdraw herself from 'the push and the scramble' for luxury and rank. In other words, she is finally converted to the creed upheld by Felix's class of men and which is fully embodied in the hero's following assertion :

'I would never choose to withdraw myself from the labour and common burthen of the world; but I do choose to withdraw myself from the push and the scramble for money and position.' 60

To sum up the theme of 'gentility' in Felix Holt, it may simply be remarked here that George Eliot portrays the old school of gentility, represented generally by the landed interest around the respectable market-town of Treby Magna, much more sympathetically than she does the new school of gentlemen, represented again by the prosperous and ambitious members of the rising middle class. Nevertheless, both types of gentility are seen by the novelist to be unsatisfactory; and this is why she formulates a third, and one more adapted to the needs of the changing society, kind of gentility which takes into account the interests of the various classes of the society concerned. That is to say, she creates a new version of gentility which takes the upper classes as part of the natural order of things and, at the same time, that exalts the productive section of the community to a higher moral plane in a way that secures not only its peaceful acceptance of the class structure but also its moral, social and economic salvation. In fact, this is another way of saying that George Eliot was suggesting, through her

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., II, p.249.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., II, p.36.

fictional hero Felix, to cure the ills of society by means of moral and educational reform. Ample light is thrown on this point by Felix's following remarks :

'Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning? The most of the middle class are as ignorant as the working people about everything that doesn't belong to their own Brummagem life. That's how the working men are left to foolish devices and keep worsening themselves: the best heads among them forsake their born comrades, and go in for a house with a high door-step and a brass knocker.' 61

The last word here should perhaps go to Terry Eagleton who so aptly summarizes the argument :

Felix is essentially an urban version of Adam Bede, a petty-bourgeois craftsman no more representative of the proletariat in whose name he speaks than his pre-industrial predecessor. 62

In George Eliot's remaining novels the concept of gentility is less subject to the novelist's direct moralization than in the books discussed above. Being reconstructions of the static society of eighteenth-century England, the world of gentility presented <sup>in</sup> them resembles in most of its aspects the same world portrayed by Jane Austen or even by earlier writers like Henry Fielding. Thereupon, manners are still seen to be an important prerequisite of 'Gentility'; and a clergyman thus is always looked up to as a model of refinement if not of public usefulness. In "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story", for instance, the writer reports that :

The farmers themselves were perfectly aware of the distinction between them and the parson, and had not at all the less belief in him as a gentleman and a clergyman for his easy speech and familiar manners. 63

More interestingly still, white hands, a finely-cut nostril, and also finely-turned lips are held by the lower grades of society to be a few of the outward marks of gentility and, therefore, are generally acknowledged as indications of high birth or noble blood. Surprisingly enough, George

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., I, p.94.

<sup>62</sup>Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology (London : NLB, 1976), p.116.

<sup>63</sup>George Eliot, "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story", Scenes of Clerical Life

(William Blackwood and Sons: Standard Edition), I, p.137.

Eliot herself appears to have shared society's view on this matter. This is clearly manifested in her presentation of the Irwings in Adam Bede.

According to the novelist's own description of them :

You suspect at once that the inhabitants of this room have inherited more blood than wealth, and would not be surprised to find that Mr. Irwine had a finely-cut nostril and upper lip ... 64

Of course, one should make allowance here for the fact that George Eliot in this respect was simply following a literary convention which served her own descriptive purposes. However, deference to one's betters in those early novels can still be seen as a commonplace thing. What enhanced that feeling and helped to perpetuate it among the farmers of those old days was not so much the fact that the peasantry were vulgar or unrefined as much as the fact that the gentry then were separated from them by high walls of caste. Commenting on both Squire Cass and the peasants in Silas Marner, the novelist observes :

There was something in the presence of the old squire distinguishable from that of the ordinary farmers in the parish, who were perhaps every whit as refined as he, but, having slouched their way through life with a consciousness of being in the vicinity of their 'betters', wanted that self-possession and authoritative-ness of voice and carriage which belonged to a man who thought of superiors as remote existences with whom he had personally little more to do than with America or the stars. 65

As far as 'genteel' marriages in the early novels are concerned, George Eliot's attitude can easily be seen to be conservative. Her treatment of marriage in the present case is most akin to that of Jane Austen or even Anthony Trollope. Consequently, similar culture and upbringing are presented as essential to a realization of any class marriages or inter-marriages. This is **illustrated** by the following remarks from Arthur Donnithorne's letter to Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede:

I know you can never be happy except by marrying a man in your own station; and if I were to marry you now, I should only be adding to any wrong I have done, besides offending against my duty in the other relations of life. You know nothing ... of the world in which I must always live, and you would soon begin to dislike me, because there would be so little in which we should

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<sup>64</sup>George Eliot, Adam Bede (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), I, p.78.

<sup>65</sup>George Eliot, Silas Marner (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), pp.103-104.

be alike. 66

As the extract just quoted clearly indicates, similarity in taste and modes of behaviour was a significant factor in the process of choosing a life partner. Manners, in other words, were much more important than morals; and marks of their absence were looked upon as indicative of low birth or ill-breeding. In order to widen the social and hence the cultural gulf separating the aristocratic Arthur Donnithorne from his proletarian victim, Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede, George Eliot purposely stresses Hetty's lack of 'those signs of high breeding'. Thus, captivated with Hetty's physical charms and unrestrained by his own licentious class morality Arthur, as reflected on by the author,

gazed into Hetty's dark beseeching eyes, it made no difference to him what sort of English she spoke; and even if hoops and powder had been in fashion he would very likely not have been sensible then that Hetty wanted those signs of high breeding. 67

Since Hetty's affair with Arthur Donnithorne together with its class connotations have been the subject of a detailed and valuable study by Francoise Bosch, 68 further elaboration of this point is rendered quite unnecessary. Still, it is worthwhile adding here that Hetty's plight in the novel is partly ascribable to her awareness of ambitions and dreams beyond her means and class. Put differently, Hetty's moral lapses in the book are due to her lack of education rather than to her ego-centricity and selfishness - as George Eliot would have us believe. For morality, needless to say, is one of the major elements of education. As the novelist herself points out, "Hetty was quite uneducated - a simple farmer's girl, to whom a gentleman with a white hand was dazzling as an Olympian god." 69

Now since Hetty's education was non-existent, it follows that all her moral and social transgressions were beyond her power of control. George

<sup>66</sup> Eliot, Adam Bede, II, p.65.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., I, pp. 196-97.

<sup>68</sup> See for a detailed discussion of the issue in question Francoise Bosch's book, Relative Creatures (Allen Lane : 1974).

<sup>69</sup> Eliot, Adam Bede I, p.148.

Eliot's persecution of her, thus, may simply be said to have been based on her attempt to escape from the unpleasant reality of her status as a working girl to a world more attractive. This attitude betrays the novelist's belief in the rigidity of the social structure; a thing which can only be attributed to George Eliot's unsympathetic vision of social reality in her early writing days. Alternatively, George Eliot's vindictiveness towards Hetty could be due to a certain kind of personal

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irritation, or what might be described as a not-quite-unexplainable prejudice against pretty women. As Walter Allen has once put it :

George Eliot ... was perhaps overconscious of what she construed as her own ugliness, and it sometimes appears that in her fiction she had to mortify women beautiful as she herself was not. She could not, one feels, forgive sexual passion. Hetty has to suffer because she has fallen a victim to it herself and arouses it in others. 71

However, the attitude just referred to appears to be partial and subjective particularly when we take into full consideration the fact that Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss is treated much more sympathetically than her predecessor Hetty, although she, too, transgresses against the code of values adopted by her own class and threatens indirectly to disrupt the class structure. In The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot achieves more objectivity of delineation when she attributes Maggie's personal defects, including her infatuation with Stephen Guest, to an imperfect education rather than to any inherent moral weaknesses. Maggie's wrong evaluation of things, especially when judging by outward appearances, is clearly exemplified in the writer's following comment on her heroine when a special occasion brings her together with the refined Stephen Guest :

She was conscious of having been looked at a great deal, in rather a furtive manner, from beneath a pair of well-marked horizontal eyebrows, with a glance that seemed somehow to have caught the vibratory influence of the voice. Such things

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Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction (Oxford University Press : 1956), p.356.

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Allen, op. cit., p.212.

could have had no perceptible effect on a thoroughly well-educated young lady, with a perfectly balanced mind, who had had all the advantages of fortune, training, and refined society. 72

The last thing that must be stressed here is that despite the fact that George Eliot's early novels offer many authentic pictures of respectable bourgeois families in quest of money and status, their predominant subject matter remains the unfulfilled need for a true form of morality that will counter-balance and eventually replace the prevalent imperfect and restricting class codes of values. The real question of George Eliot's early novels, and of many books written in the Victorian era, is not the gentility and unfulfilled dreams and expectations of the characters portrayed; but the immorality, exploitativeness and narrow-mindedness of a society in which human happiness is undermined by class conventions and habits. It remains to be added now that George Eliot, as seen in the light of her early writings, appears to have smiled at, if not adopted, the class values of the old-established orders - the nobility and the gentry. This is most evidenced in her ascribing the young squire's moral lapses in Adam Bede to some personal flaws rather than to his permissive class morality; a morality which, besides its tendency to justify human indecencies under the cover of dutifulness to one's class, made of the underprivileged classes playthings for idle aristocratic gentlemen. No matter how repentant Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede might appear, the fact remains that in seducing the farmer's niece he acted in accordance with the ways of living of his licentious class rather than with the roles of moral conduct. In Adam Bede, at least, George Eliot does not seem willing or prepared as Richardson was when he wrote his first novel, Pamela, to reconcile class gentility with gentility of heart. This underlies her own assertion, with regard to both Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty, that; "No gentleman, out of a ballad, could marry a farmer's niece. There must be an end to the whole thing at once. It was too foolish."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (William Blackwood and Sons : Standard Edition), II, pp.182-83.

<sup>73</sup> Eliot, Adam Bede, I, p.206.

## CHAPTER 6

### ANTHONY TROLLOPE

Interpretations of, or rather speculations on, Anthony Trollope's inner life vary as much as they do of the characters portrayed in his books. Yet, most of these considerations seem to meet in their emphasis on the elusiveness - alternatively, on the ambiguity - of such a seemingly unintellectual writer. Surprisingly, not a few Trollopian critics have, perhaps unawares, laid their finger on the key to the mystery behind Trollope's obscurity; but they unfortunately were either too timid to pursue this subject or simply found it safest to follow the lead of former critics. As one of Trollope's modern analysts has put it :

The only safe resort for the critic is to follow the labyrinthine path of the whole of Trollope's output and come to terms with a fiction of manifold ambiguities that has the true flavour of human experience.     <sup>1</sup>

By pointing out this fact about Trollope, I do not by any means want to imply that I am in complete disagreement with Trollope's critics; for in truth, I myself find Trollope the most elusive of all Victorian writers. It is no intention of mine to violate the literary traditions adhered to in discussing Trollope; rather, I simply feel disposed to adopt a somehow different approach to this artist.

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<sup>1</sup>R.C. Terry, Anthony Trollope : The Artist in Hiding (London : The Macmillan Press, 1977), p.5.

If a word is deemed necessary to disclose at least part of the mystery of Trollope's elusiveness, one could find no better term than Gentility. For gentility is not only the motivating force behind almost all the author's ambitions and pursuits but also what lies behind his desire to seek 'the society of the rich and the well-born' - to use Trollope's own words. No less than this, it is one of the main factors underlying the novelist's unwillingness to define the Gentleman. Though many modern readers of Victorian literature, and not a few historians, would subscribe to the view that "the quality of a gentleman is elusive and difficult to define, and is perhaps best captured from the atmosphere conveyed by the picture of the landed order as a whole"<sup>2</sup>, Trollope, judged by the evidence of his own writings, was not so much incapable of defining the gentleman as much as he was unwilling to do so. One reason for such unwillingness on Trollope's part to define this 'overworked' word is the adoption of the attitude of an apologist; that is, the desire to rise, in the eyes of others, above the suspicion that he is not a gentleman. Put bluntly, it is the desire to escape from the humiliating circumstances of the shabby-genteel poverty of his youth. Such an attempt at escape on the novelist's part could simply be ascribed to an inferiority complex engendered and aggravated by both his family's unsettled social background and his mixing - at school - on equal terms with sons of well-to-do gentlemen. This conclusion appears more relevant in the light of what Trollope himself has explicitly stated in the Autobiography :

My boyhood was, I think, as unhappy as that of a young gentleman could well be, my misfortunes arising from a mixture of poverty and gentle standing on the part of my father, and from an utter want on my own part of that juvenile manhood which enables some boys to hold up their heads even among the distresses which such a position is sure to produce.     3

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<sup>2</sup>F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p.16.

<sup>3</sup>Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (Oxford University Press : The Crown Edition, 1950), p.2.

Another reason why a definition of the gentleman has not been attempted by Trollope "is that it is not seemly for a gentleman to explain it."<sup>4</sup> In other words, a definition of the gentleman was avoided on the basis that it was not becoming the character of a member of the genteel classes to talk about what touched himself. Of course this reason is only implied in Trollope's works, though never directly expressed. Though a gentleman might know perfectly well what the term, as applied to his own character, meant his pride would always stand in the way of his pressing the recognition of his gentility on others. An analogy might prove serviceable to us here. Most aristocrats in Trollope's novels, for instance, are quite aware of the value of possessing good blood or of belonging to an old landed family but they are rarely, out of modesty perhaps, inclined to impose the recognition of it on their inferiors in birth. To illustrate this point, one could safely assert that despite Frank Gresham's occasional attack on blood or 'the roll of the family pedigree', in Doctor Thorne:

He loved it dearly, though he seldom spoke of it; - as men of good family seldom do speak of it. It is one of those possessions which to have is sufficient. A man having it need not boast of what he has, or show it off before the world. But on that account he values it the more. 5

However, because of his basic understanding of the unreliability of his family status, Trollope conceived his political chances to lie with the liberals rather than with the 'blood-conscious' conservatives. It does not necessarily follow, then, that his sympathies, political and otherwise, lay with the liberals whom he quite unsuccessfully tried to represent at Beverley one day. The relevance of Trollope's many references to his love for high rank or people of high social standing here is by no means insignificant. Taken as a whole, those references could easily be interpreted as a disguised attempt to convince others of his own high standing. Needless to say here that Trollope was fully convinced of this himself, or he would

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<sup>4</sup>Ruth ap Roberts, Trollope : Artist and Moralist (London : Chatto and Windus, 1971).., p.80.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Trollope. Doctor Thorne (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1971), p.367.

not have had the courage to classify himself with 'Dukes and Princes'. Speaking of the superior condition to which he had been born, Trollope proudly points out :

In this matter I consider myself to be standing on a platform with Dukes and Princes, and all others to whom plenty of education and liberty have been given. 6

Closely connected with this is his anxiety to defend himself against what was generally known as tuft-hunting. An anxiety like this, it could be maintained, reveals an unconscious fear of being looked down upon as someone who was trying to compensate for his lack of family distinction by seeking the society of the 'great'.

The author's candour and openness, as regards 'the society of distinguished people', in the Autobiography, does not, in my view, do our present novelist much credit. What they truly do is just confirm our doubts that Trollope was 'a hypocrite' - so to speak - and far from being able to confront the public with the reality of his inner life while still alive. The writing of the Autobiography, it need hardly be said, was undertaken on the understanding that it would not be published till after its writer's death. This is confirmed by Trollope's own words. The passage including this confirmation is worth quoting at length for the relevance it bears to a full understanding of Trollope's Concept of Gentility :

As what I now write will certainly never be read till I am dead, I may dare to say what no one now does dare to say in print, - There are places in life which can hardly be well filled except by 'Gentleman'. The word is one the use of which almost subjects one to ignominy. If I say that a judge should be a gentleman, or a bishop, I am met with scornful allusion to 'Nature's Gentlemen'. Were I to make such an assertion with reference to the House of Commons, nothing that I ever said again would receive the slightest attention. A man in public life could not do himself a greater injury than by saying in public that Commissions in the army or navy, or berths in the Civil Service, should be given exclusively to gentlemen. He would be defied to define the term, - and would fail should he attempt to do so. But he would know what he meant, and so very probably would they who defied him. 7

A mere reading of this paragraph is more than sufficient to enlighten us as

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<sup>6</sup>Trollope, An Autobiography, p.292.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

to the fact that Trollope was fully aware of the dangers and the detrimental effects that could have been produced by the publication of the Autobiography - while still living - on his personal interests and general welfare. The above-quoted passage, together with a few others found in the author's books, amply illustrate the nature of Trollope's evasiveness and vagueness whenever the question of 'gentility' arose. To render the picture of Trollope's evasiveness more complete all we need is to glance briefly at two modern critics' views on the relationship between writer and reader in Victorian times.

In the preface of his book Laughter and Despair, U.C. Knoepfelmacher notes that:

The Victorian novelist entered into a tacit compact with his readers. His desire to resolve personal dilemmas and private doubts was congruent with a similar desire for affirmation held by his audience; he could share his fantasies and concessions to reality with his readers, yet to do so he had to create structures that would accommodate their needs as well as his own. 8

Likewise in her book on Victorian women in society and the novel, Francoise Basch makes the following observation :

The Victorian novelist in his mission and his relations with the public rejected any romantic notion of the rebellious fringe artist. In order not to alienate his all-powerful public the novelist must strictly limit his disputes with the established order and not lay too much stress on the cruel and shocking sides of life. 9

As can be seen, both critics seem to meet in their emphasis on the interdependence between writer and reader or between novelists and the reading public. What both observations establish beyond doubt, though implicitly, is the fact that a writer's fate - be it social or economic - was inextricably linked with that of his reading public. Thus, because of his financial dependence on the audience he wrote for, the Victorian novelist

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<sup>8</sup>U.C. Knoepfelmacher, Laughter and Despair : Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era (University of California Press : 1973), p.IX.

<sup>9</sup>Francoise Basch, Relative Creature : Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67 (London : Allen Lane, 1974), p.273.

found it difficult to be indifferent to the claims and personal needs of his readers. Now, by applying the above inference to Trollope's case, with special reference to the concept of gentility, it becomes apparent that the difficulty of defining the 'gentleman' did not arise so much from the obscurity of the term itself as from the author's unwillingness to commit himself in any way that might jeopardise his chances of professional success. A commitment of this kind was sure not only to affect the writer's reputation but also to alienate many of his readers, particularly if they were covetous of social promotion or simply nourishing dreams of attaining the status of a 'gentleman'. Hence arose the need to avoid any detailed definition of a term that was lovingly embraced by the ambitious strata of Victorian society. By leaving the definition of 'gentleman' unsettled, a Victorian novelist was certain of not offending his ambitious readers' sensibility. It must be obvious by now that with Trollope it was a matter of unwillingness to define this term or to express any dogmatic views and opinions rather than of aptitude or knowledge. More light is thrown on this point by the following authorial comment on the 'low-church' clergyman, Mr. Samuel Prong in Rachel Ray :

He was a devout, good man; not self-indulgent; perhaps not more self-ambitious than it becomes a man to be; sincere, hard-working, sufficiently intelligent, true in most things to the instincts of his calling, - but deficient in one vital qualification for a clergyman of the Church of England; he was not a gentleman... I do not mean to say that he was a thief or a liar; nor do I mean to complain that he picked his teeth with his fork and misplaced his 'h's'. I am by no means prepared to define what I do mean, - thinking, however, that most men and women will understand me. 10

What lurks behind the author's reluctance to bestow the title of 'gentleman' on Mr. Prong is the fact that this clergyman does not fulfil Trollope's own idea of what constitutes the character of a clergyman of the Church of England. As I shall have another occasion to discuss the question of clerical gentility in Trollope's books, I am inclined to leave Mr. Prong's case as it is at this stage.

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<sup>10</sup>Anthony Trollope, Rachel Ray (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1924), pp.77-78.

Before proceeding to discuss Trollope's attitude towards both bourgeois and upper-class gentility, I deem it necessary first to comment summarily on the aristocratic Duke's character, Plantagenet Palliser, who is not only a 'Whig' but also what appears to be the embodiment of Trollope's idea of the Complete Gentleman. As the novelist himself has once asserted, "Plantagenet Palliser, Duke of Omnium, is a perfect gentleman. If he be not, then I am unable to describe a gentleman."<sup>11</sup> But in spite of Trollope's assertion, the Duke remains far from being the 'perfect gentleman' he is supposed to be. In fact, there is more than one good reason for not taking Trollope's remark at its face value. However, a full estimate of the character in question, let alone of the novelist's idea of the complete gentleman, when based on a single statement cannot be but prejudicial and incomplete. On his first appearance in the political novels, to begin with, Palliser's character does undoubtedly appear at its best. Throughout the pages of Can You Forgive Her? Palliser is presented as a most disinterested public servant of his country. Neither his high birth, nor his being the "heir to the highest rank as well as one of the greatest fortunes of the country,"<sup>12</sup> seems to sully his reputation as a devoted statesman to the service of his nation. Needless to add here that Plantagenet Palliser in this novel embodies the author's concept of the ideal politician in whose character one perceives that 'exquisite combination of conservatism and progress' which Trollope regards as England's 'present strength and best security for the future' - to use the author's own words in the same book. It is hardly difficult to detect some similarity between the writer's dedication to the service of his country and that of the future Duke in his first political novel.

As the Duke's character grows upon the author's imagination, while progressing through the political series, and as Trollope grows aged

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<sup>11</sup>Trollope, An Autobiography, p.361.

<sup>12</sup>Anthony Trollope, Can You Forgive Her? (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1968), p.302.

and disillusioned as to his own political aspirations, Plantagenet's character loses much of its idealism and appears, one is inclined to think, at its truest. The writer's initial liking and praise of the Duke's character begins to wane as though under the pressure of lost hope and unfulfilled ambitions. That is, Trollope seems to have arrived at a certain stage where he could not help concluding that no personal gain could be got from flattening the Whig aristocracy. Trollope's delineation of 'Planty Pall' in the last two novels of the political series can easily be said to have been motivated to a great extent by feelings of frustration on the author's part. To a lesser extent, it is instigated by the novelist's desire to appear above the money-worshipping aristocracy of modern times. This, no doubt, underlies his vulgarization of Lady Glencora Palliser in The Prime Minister as well as his innumerable, though subtly disguised, attacks on Palliser's obsession with material considerations in The Duke's Children.

It might perhaps be wise to observe that Trollope's attitude towards the liberals, whom Plantagenet Palliser truly represents, is somehow similar to that adopted by Matthew Arnold concerning the Puritan middle class. The attitude is full of praise but, at the same time, it is undermined by an undercurrent of interested criticism and attack. For comparison's sake, let us first of all consider the following remarks by Arnold :

The Puritan middle class, with all its faults, is still the best stuff in this nation. Some have hated and persecuted it, many have flattered and derided it - flattered it that while they deride it they may use it; I have believed in it. It is the best stuff in this nation, and in its success is our best hope for the future. But to succeed it must be transformed. 13

Everyone familiar with Matthew Arnold's works may well remember the author's professions to be an ardent and most disinterested friend of the 'Nonconformists' as well as his life-long attempt at transforming and perfecting them. 14

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<sup>13</sup>Matthew Arnold, "Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism", in R.H. Super, ed., - Essays Religious and Mixed (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1972), p.347.

<sup>14</sup>See in particular Matthew Arnold's own preface to his Culture and Anarchy, where he openly defends himself against the accusation of his being an enemy of the Nonconformists.

But not a few people, including his Victorian readers, are aware of the fact that he was a blind partisan of the Anglican Church. Arnold, it may be recollected, was driven on more than one occasion to defend himself against attacks from 'Nonconformists', by asserting that he was no enemy of 'Nonconformists', and what he had been striving all his life to achieve was to develop their full humanity more perfectly. As explained by Arnold himself, he was endeavouring throughout his whole career in religious and social reform, to cure the 'provincialism' of the Nonconformists. Hence came his derision and attack on them whenever an opportunity offered itself. In short, despite the Puritans' many faults, Arnold found it worth his while to appreciate this social group's strength and growing importance. Nevertheless, the truth remains that Arnold did undoubtedly share the Anglicans' hatred and persecution of the Puritans but, at the same time, he found it expedient to flatter them. Most probably, this was done in the hope of attracting this class in a way that guarantees its full participation in governing England without causing any diminution in the strength of the traditional and old-established ruling class of England. I hasten to add that I talk of traditional here in terms of Anglican rather than in terms of aristocratic or bourgeois predominance. As Trevelyan has once put it :

Politics in the nineteenth century were as much a matter of denomination as of class. The religious cleavage running through society was maintained all the more because the Whigs after 1832 failed to remedy the Dissenters' grievances about Church Rates, Burials and admission to Oxford and Cambridge. For a long time to come England was less 'class-conscious' than 'Church-and-Chapel-Conscious.' 15

To conclude my argument about Arnold, it may be stated here that this prophet of culture found it worth his while to criticize and reform the Nonconformists not so much because he liked them or preferred them to other sects as because they would, once transformed, constitute a lesser threat to the established order, in Church and State.

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<sup>15</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London, New York, Toronto :

Longmans and Green, 1946), p.515.

What has just been surmised about Arnold may, in fact, equally be said about Trollope, though not without some reservations. The reservations are due to the author's vacillating nature; that is, to his divided self and allegiances. To a great extent, they are dependent on Trollope's swaying between Tory sentiments and Whig practices. However, it is not uncommon to find a writer whose professed sympathies are with one class while his natural bent and creativity are engaged by another class. In other words; "There may be a considerable difference between theory and practice, between profession<sup>16</sup> of faith and creative ability." This is clearly reflected in Trollope's delineation of Plantagenet Palliser's inconsistency and apparent divorce between pronouncements and activities, theory and practice. Seen through the pages of The Duke's Children, Palliser's dilemma consists in his inability to reconcile his principles with the expediency of the situation in which he finds himself involved. He cannot practise what he professes to uphold without feeling almost compelled to compromise the aristocratic sentiments by which he is guided in conscience. It may be wondered here if this was not typical of the old landed interest who, it seems, felt it their uppermost duty to maintain their order against the influences of a 'levelling age' while, at the same time, they were trying to adapt themselves to the new way of life introduced by city dwellers.

The main issue which confronts the reader while trying to resolve the Duke's dilemma is whether to ascribe this disparity between Conservative idealism and liberal reality to a glaring defect in the Duke's character or to an intentional distortion by the author. Before jumping to any conclusions, a few significant things should be highlighted. Keeping in mind the above comparison with Matthew Arnold, one could initially maintain that Trollope was Tory at heart but found it expedient to flatter and praise the Liberals. To refer back to the Duke's character, however, one could maintain that no

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<sup>16</sup> Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (Hammondsworth : Penguin Books, 1970), p.98.

matter how grand his political theories might have been, it remains quite clear that he is more than reluctant to carry them through. It might be well to preach sermons on equality, as the Duke is fond of doing, but such professed equality signifies nothing if its advocate is less than willing to apply the criteria of equality to himself or to his social circle. Even a tendency shown in that direction could mean no more than an intellectual effort the object of which is to reconcile oneself to an existing reality of inequality. By asserting that a certain thing is desirable, but not as yet, is tantamount to preferring the shadow to the substance. If the Duke may thus be blamed on the grounds of his unwillingness to promote equality in practice, Trollope may equally be criticized on the score of supplying us with a most reactionary theory of equality.

Viewed from the author's perspective, inequality on earth is the outcome of some providential powers, and very little could be done in the way of removing it. Inequality, it is clearly stated in the Autobiography, "is the work of God. Make all men equal today, and God has so created them<sup>17</sup> that they shall be all unequal to-morrow." That this is the view adopted by Trollope is what his fictional works tend to crystallize. Thus, according to Trollope, attempts at removing inequalities will tend in the long run to help re-establish the aristocracy on a stronger basis. This is illustrated by the following dialogue between the Plebeian Daniel Thwaite and Sir William Patterson, the author's undoubted spokesman in Lady Anna :

'The theory of equality is very grand.'

'The grandest thing in the world, Sir William'.

'It is one to which all legislative and all human efforts should and must tend ... But could you establish absolute equality in England to-morrow, as it was to have been established in France some half century ago, the inequality of men's minds and character would re-establish an aristocracy within twenty years. The energetic, the talented, the honest and the unselfish will always be moving towards an aristocratic side of society because their virtues will beget esteem, and esteem will beget wealth, - and wealth gives power for good offices' 18

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<sup>17</sup>Trollope, An Autobiography, p.292.

<sup>18</sup>Anthony Trollope, Lady Anna (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1936), pp. 500-501.

The theory of equality is, to be sure, very grand indeed; but not, as Trollope would have us believe, for the reason that it concentrates power in the hands of the wealthy and powerful. The energetic and talented, though they may acquire wealth and power, could no more be certified to be honest and unselfish than the honest and truthful to be wealthy and powerful. Trollope is surely no advocate of equality in the true sense of the word. For, to him, it is almost synonymous with anarchy and the downfall of thrones. What I am now arguing is that Trollope's defence of his own version of equality is no more than a disguised attempt at convincing his society of the necessity to preserve the hierarchical social structure intact. To the discerning eye, Trollope is clearly a biased expounder of egalitarianism and a self-appointed defender of the 'status quo'. His so-called advanced theory of equality is, in fact, as reactionary and illiberal as could be. But it is no more so than his definition of 'Radicalism'. A 'Radical' according to his understanding, thus :

is not necessarily a revolutionist or even a republican. He does not, by reason of his social or political radicalism desire the ruin of thrones, the degradation of nobles, the spoliation of the rich, or even the downfall of the bench of bishops ... A radical may be as ready as any aristocrat to support the crown with his blood, and the Church with his faith ... No doctrine of equality is his. Liberty he must have, and such position high or low, for himself and others, as each man's individual merits will achieve for him ... He retires to a corner that an earl with his suite may pass proudly through the doorway and he grudges the earl nothing of his pride. It is the earl's right.<sup>19</sup>

To avoid turning my discussion into a political tract and hence to avoid lapsing into unnecessary theorization I shall henceforward refer to some actual happenings in the novels dealing with such highly controversial issues.

It must be stressed here, however, that the mere labelling of somebody as a 'Conscientious Liberal' - a thing which Trollope does on more than one occasion in his Autobiography - with a tendency towards equality is no

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<sup>19</sup> Trollope, Rachel Ray, pp. 340-41.

guarantee that the person described as such would act in real life in an egalitarian way. For this matter, I am disposed to believe that neither the Duke of Omnium, Plantagenet Palliser, nor his creator had the deep respect he professed to have for his outspoken liberal beliefs and ideas. As far as I can see, both writer and fictitious character were 'conservative opportunists' taking full advantage of the mystified and equally mystifying liberal atmosphere of their times. Also, the mere description of an aristocrat as a gentleman is, similarly, no good security that he would not act otherwise than a well-bred member of High Society. Concerning Plantagenet's case, it could be maintained that such a danger can be avoided by keeping in mind that Trollope's admiration for him is grounded in the belief that he represents a type most necessary to the maintenance of the gentlemanly system rather than in the assumption that characters, such as the future Duke, are indeed the culmination of gentlemanly idealism. Part of Trollope's plan while depicting gentlemen of Plantagenet's type was most probably to remind the traditional ruling classes of England of their duties and obligations towards their caste, a caste, as the novelist would have us believe, that was at the centre of England's prosperity and success. This is highlighted by the following significant passage from The Duke's Children :

To the Duke's thinking the maintenance of the aristocracy of the country was second only in importance to the maintenance of the Crown. How should the aristocracy be maintained if its wealth were allowed to fall into the hands of an adventurer! Such were the opinions with regard to his own order of one who was as truly Liberal in his ideas as any man in England, and who had argued out these ideas to their consequence. As by the spread of education and increase of general well-being every proletaire was brought nearer to a Duke, so by such action would the Duke be brought nearer to a proletaire. Such drawing-nearer of the classes was the object to which all this man's political action tended. And yet it was a dreadful thing to him that his own daughter should desire to marry a man so much beneath her own rank and fortune as Frank Tregear. 20

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<sup>20</sup> Trollope, The Duke's Children, I, pp.213-14

In considering this passage one is inclined to believe that Trollope had been indoctrinated all his life to protect the interests of the aristocracy. Still, it is hardly difficult to miss the ironical undertones of the above quotation aimed at the Duke's inconsistency. Viewed in the light of the American Miss Boncassen's remarks in the same novel, particularly those which touch upon the British aristocracy's 'natural selection', one tends to think that only a few members of the upper classes were ever willing to be connected in marriage with people lower than themselves whether in wealth or status. This, at least, is the picture provided by Plantagenet Palliser's stubborn refusal - for the greater part of the novel - to relent towards his children's association in marriage with people lower than themselves. It might be well to maintain, as the Duke often does, that the English peerage "is being continually recruited from the ranks of the people", and that "there is no greater mistake than to suppose that inferiority of birth is a barrier to success in England;"<sup>21</sup> but to be most unwilling to translate such sentiments into action, with regard to oneself or one's family, is a clear sign of hypocrisy. When one's inner feelings are kept separated from one's grand political theories, the person in whose character such a conflict exists becomes naturally guilty of the acutest kind of insincerity or hypocrisy. Trollope's own remarks on the Duke's unsettled state of mind tend, in fact, to emphasize this conclusion. In this respect, mention should be made here of Elizabeth Hughes Locke who perceptively argues that,

in the novel of manners, when the outward actions of a character run counter to his inner truths that character is usually a hypocrite like Mr. Slope or a villain like Ferdinand Lopez.      22

It is rather doubtful if Miss Locke would have been prepared to carry her argument further to include, in her list of hypocrites, not only the young Duke of Omnium but also Trollope himself.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., II, p.86

<sup>22</sup>Elizabeth Hughes Locke, Anthony Trollope and the Novel of Manners (Ph.D.thesis : Duke University, 1972), p.304.

However, when the Duke concedes to the - to him - unsuitable marriages of his children, he does not act as someone translating his theories into practice but rather as somebody who is left with no other alternative. Had it been up to the Duke, his children's marriages to their conventionally-unsuitable partners would not have been consummated at all. **The Duke has been saved as it were** - by a twist of irony - the trouble of persisting in his opposition to the matches in question through being made to recognize the changing facts of social life. For changes would and did take place, and the Duke no longer felt it expedient to oppose what he conceived to be inevitable. The Duke's aristocratic ideals and sentiments had to be suppressed in order to give way to the overwhelming practicality of the younger generation. But why, it may be asked, did the author take so much trouble to press on the reader's mind the fact of the Duke's being a liberal in theory only? Before attempting to answer this question, it is necessary first to point out that nothing can be more misleading to an understanding of Palliser's character than T.B. Tomlinson's effort to link this typically aristocratic personality to the bourgeois tradition in fiction. What is so conspicuous about Tomlinson's argument is the fact that it is carried so far as to emphasize not only Trollope's middle-class 'outlook, sympathies and tone', but also the Duke's 'middle-class ways'.<sup>23</sup> In his attempt to fit the younger Duke of Omnium into the middle-class tradition, Tomlinson is easily seen to be carried away by his own enthusiasm to the extent of assuming that Palliser's addiction to hard work makes him more of a bourgeois figure than of an aristocrat. There is nothing more erroneous than supposing that only the bourgeois have this kind of longing for the middle-class virtue of 'hard work at some useful, specific task' - to use the critic's own words. Indeed, much could be learnt in this respect from historical observations like the following, for instance :

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<sup>23</sup>Tomlinson, op. cit., p.84.

the majority of posts in every Cabinet down to 1874 were occupied by members of the nobility and the closely associated higher gentry, and many of them were not figureheads by any means. Most of the nation's domestic and foreign policy-making was in the hands of what could fairly be called a working aristocracy. 24

In a sense, Tomlinson is quite unaware of the subtle workings of Palliser's mind and, no less, of that of Trollope himself. This, however, much affects the conclusions the critic arrives at, particularly the final verdict he passes on both writer and character :

I think we may take Trollope's final position to be close to but not quite the same as, the Duke's cautious optimism when ... he explains to Phineas Finn his vision of a very gradual equalising 25 of classes in England under the influence of careful Liberal leadership.

Tomlinson's over-optimistic attitude towards both Trollope and the Duke, and also his over-simplification of the assertions regarding the issues dealt with in the political novels are somehow balanced by his fellow critic's-Richard Faber - almost accurate registering of some of the relevant facts concerning the writer's personal stance from the character of Plantagenet Palliser. The following remark typically illustrates the point just raised: "In his dealings with the higher aristocracy Trollope started with an instinctive - and 26 typically Tory-suspicion of Whig grandeur." This remark throws ample light on the question raised earlier regarding the novelist's painstaking delineation of Plantagenet Palliser as an inconsistent liberal. But it in no way gives the reader a clear idea about Trollope's motives for presenting the Duke as such. It may be true, as Faber further notes, that "If pressed 27 Trollope might have condemned the Duke's Whiggish inconsistency," but the fact remains that the novelist did not scruple to do such a thing.

It could be maintained here, however, that Trollope's motives for refraining from committing such an imprudence were far from being straightforward or honest. Keeping in mind the fact that the author's favourite social stratum was the gentry, it could be argued that Trollope felt himself called upon to defend the gentry's frontiers against any impositions from other social groups - be they higher

24 Altick, op. cit., p.23.

25 Tomlinson, op. cit., p.95

26 Faber, op. cit., p.115.

27 Ibid., p.119.

or lower, aristocratic or middle class. Not unlike his eighteenth-century predecessor, Henry Fielding, Trollope was avowedly more critical of the current practices of the wealthy aristocracy and their values than of the ordinary ranks of the gentry. Likewise, economic superiority in Trollope is presented as corrupting the aristocracy in more than one way, and even degrading its members to the level of the oft-looked-down-upon bourgeoisie. This manifests itself clearly in The Prime Minister where Lady Glencora Palliser acts more vulgarly than the 'Vulgar'. In The Duke's Children again, the massive wealth of the Duke is seen as a temptation which pulls his son Silverbridge towards gambling. In a word, Trollope's treatment of the aristocracy in his novels is by no means favourable. For most descriptions of the handful of aristocratic personalities found in his books are often undermined by a strong streak of mockery and satire.

In the Barsetshire novels, for instance, the aristocratic De Courcys are shown to be more willing to be allied to the new wealth of the bourgeois - through marriage - than gentry families; a thing which receives the greatest amount of satire Trollope could muster. In The Eustace Diamonds again, Sir Florian, as seen through Trollope's eyes, "was a grand gentleman; but surely he must have been dull of intellect, slow of discernment, blear-eyed in his ways about the town".<sup>28</sup> Also in The Claverings, the aristocracy are portrayed as a class of people whose means are rarely equal to their rank. As a representative of the surviving aristocracy in this novel,

Lord Brabazon, whose peerage descended to him in a direct line from the times of the Plantagenets was one of those unfortunate nobles, of whom England is burdened with but few, who have no means equal to their rank. <sup>29</sup>

A more unpleasant portrayal still is found in The Vicar of Bullhampton, where it is remarked of the Marquis that -

<sup>28</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Eustace Diamonds (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1930), p.5.

<sup>29</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Claverings (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1924), p.7.

his countenance would not have been bad, had not the weight of his marquissate always been there; nor would his heart been bad, had it not been similarly burdened ... he was a silly, weak, ignorant man, whose own capacity would hardly have procured bread for him in any trade or profession, had bread not been so adequately provided for him by his fathers before him. 30

Special attention must be paid here to the Dukes of Omnium, old and young. Of the old Duke, it may simply be stated here that though Trollope might appear to think, with Madame Goesler, such a character necessary to the maintenance of British aristocracy, he, nevertheless, could not help ridiculing - covertly of course - the great portrait of idle grandeur embodied in the figure of the old Duke. Trollope's ironical touch is strongly felt throughout every passage in the novels where the old Duke figures out, most of all in Phineas Redux, where special emphasis is laid upon the Duke's idleness. In spite of all, Trollope can at times be seen to have shared his characters' reverence to the Duke's princely gracefulness. Commenting on the old Duke on his death-bed, Trollope observes that,

He was wan and worn and pale, - a man evidently dying..., but still as he turned his eyes to the woman's face (i.e., Madame Goesler) there was a remnant of that look of graceful faineant nobility which had always distinguished him. He had never done any good, but he had always carried himself like a duke, and like a duke he carried himself to the end. 31

Trollope's secret admiration for the old Duke's character can, perhaps, be best explained by citing the following observation of the nineteenth-century American critic, R.W. Emerson :

The frame of society is aristocratic, the taste of the people is loyal. The estates, names, and manners of the nobles flatter the fancy of the people and conciliate the necessary support... The taste of the people is conservative. They are proud of the Castles, and of the language and symbol of chivalry... The superior education and manners of the nobles recommend them to the country. 32

With the new Duke of Omnium, Plantagenet Palliser, Trollope adopts a subtler, but by no means less denigrating attitude. This is most reflected

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<sup>30</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1963), p.118.

<sup>31</sup>Anthony Trollope, Phineas Redux (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1964), I, p.264.

<sup>32</sup>Emerson, op. cit., p.86.

in the Prime Minister's inhospitable dismissal of Major Pountney - one of his wife's guests - out of his house on the score of the latter's asking a favour of him. On the occasion referred to, it could be maintained that nothing more ungentlemanly could ever be expected from someone in such high position. The Prime Minister's conduct towards the Major renders any claim on his part as to considerateness and refinement of feeling somehow void. This again confirms one's doubt that the Duke is far from being the perfect gentleman he is meant to embody. For his dismissal of Major Pountney, though the latter might be considered a most pushing and ambitious political upstart, is a clear violation of that code of gentlemanly behaviour which insists on good breeding as a first qualification of a gentleman. As the celebrated champion of 'Self-Help' has once put it;

Gentleness is indeed the best test of gentlemanliness. A consideration for the feelings of others, for his inferiors and dependants as well as his equals, and respect for their self-respect will pervade the true gentleman's whole conduct. He will rather himself suffer a small injury, than by an uncharitable construction of another's behaviour incur the risk of committing a great wrong. He will be forbearant of the weaknesses, the failings, and the errors of those whose advantages in life have not been equal to his own. 33

Hence, it would be rather imprudent to label the Duke 'a perfect gentleman'. The Prime Minister's bearing towards the person referred to above is far from being what one expects from a true-born Englishman, let alone from one who is highly praised not only for being a most significant political figure but also for being the 'incarnation' of the author's concept of the 'perfect gentleman'. The Duke clearly falls short of that ideal of gentlemanly conduct which characterizes a well-bred gentleman. In fact, one could add a lot more by way of proving that Plantagenet Palliser is not what we are supposed to think; namely, an ideal gentleman. However, Trollope's motives for presenting the second Duke of Omnium as such can in no way be

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<sup>33</sup> Smiles, *op. cit.*, p.478.

said to have been purely aesthetic, as a Trollopian scholar seems to suggest. Rather, they can easily be seen to be grounded in moral and practical criteria. This brings us into a full study of the author's ambivalent attitude towards middle-class gentility and also to a detailed discussion of the stand he adopts towards both approved and unapproved gentlemen in their relation to class and inter-class marriages; that is, to a full analysis of Trollope's 'Concept of Gentility'.

Before embarking upon this task, I deem it necessary first to add that E.H. Locke's reference - in the passage quoted earlier - to both Mr. Slope and Ferdinand Lopez is fairly biased and quite uncharitable. Oddly enough, not a few critics can be cited here who seem to share Locke's scholarly and ill-founded prejudice against the uncouth Mr. Slope and also against the oft-misunderstood Ferdinand Lopez. As far as Mr. Slope is concerned, it is sufficient to assert at this stage that Trollope himself did not consider this 'Low Church' London interloper to be more false or hypocritical than many men of his calling might have been.

Let it (remarks the writer on Mr. Slope's attempts to gratify his own feelings of professional and social promotion) however, be asked of those who are conversant with such matters whether he was more false than men usually are on such occasions. We English gentlemen hate the name of a lie; but how often do we find public men who believe each other's words. 35

If this be not enough to vindicate Mr. Slope's normality of behaviour rather than his deviation from the norm, then no authorial comment should ever be taken seriously. Different criteria, however, should be applied to the case of Ferdinand Lopez. Here it must be admitted that I have been considerably struck by the immense injustice done to the person of Mr. Lopez by Trollopians in general.

Critics have found it expedient to follow the lead of Trollope in

<sup>34</sup>Bogozian, op. cit., p.220.

<sup>35</sup>Anthony Trollope, Barchester Towers (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1962), p.312.

condemning Ferdinand Lopez while rarely, if ever, attempting to defend him on humanitarian grounds. But those who criticize him often forget Trollope's antipathy to foreigners particularly those engaged in financial speculations. At the same time, they criticize him because they fail to appreciate his difficulties. In my view, Lopez is as interesting a 'gentleman' as any that Trollope has ever created or has shown some admiration for. By interesting here I do not by any means imply that I look at the person in question only from an artistic or aesthetic angle; rather, I include the moral and social aspects of his character. For this matter, it would be both useful and stimulating to compare Lopez who is presented as an unscrupulous adventurer - by virtue of his foreignness - with his fellow-adventurer Frank Tregear in The Duke's Children who, for obvious reasons, is shown to be most worthy of the Duke's daughter. It must be emphasized here that Trollope was a jingoist and remains so, no matter how hard critics try to vindicate him against prejudice in favour of things that savoured of Englishness. After all, to borrow the words of a modern critic of Victorian society: "The compelling idea of 'Englishness,' transcending considerations of superiority and inferiority, proved one source of the country's salvation during the Victorian years."<sup>36</sup>

Having painstakingly established the fact that Lopez is not an English gentleman, Trollope sets out on his mission to prove that his being a foreigner means simply that he is capable of doing base things which a true-born Englishman would blush to do. Such things need not be enumerated here since they are lengthily dwelt upon in The Prime Minister. To refer to Frank Tregear now, one could maintain that his character, being understood as a true-born Englishman, gains the author's full approval though he can be seen, like Lopez, to be attracted to his sweetheart's fortune as well as her rank. Despite the fact that almost everyone in The Duke's Children is aware of the greed underlying Tregear's pursuit of Mary Palliser, none

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<sup>36</sup>Altick, op. cit., p.19.

appears to be willing to speak badly of him - as is the case with his predecessor Lopez. Even Trollope himself does not appear to be inclined to stress this aspect of Tregear's personality. Frank Tregear, remarks our author,

was certainly not the man to pursue a girl simply because of her fortune : nor was he weak enough to be attracted simply to the glitter of rank : but he was wise enough with worldly wisdom to understand thoroughly the comforts of a good income, and he was sufficiently attached to high position to feel the advantage of marrying a daughter of the Duke of Omnium. 37

Comparing this passage with the tenor of the sub-plot of The Prime Minister could only lead to the conclusion that Trollope was fully convinced that the possession of English blue blood - so to speak, guaranteed not only the soundness of one's principles but also the gentlemanliness of one's actions. What the writer aims to show in The Prime Minister is that being born a foreigner renders your capacity to perform an honest deed very weak, if not totally absent. For Lopez in this work is hardly credited with any honourable motives or with any redeeming qualities by which the English gentlemanly class is distinguished. Not unlike his narrow-minded creation Mr. Wharton in the novel in question, Trollope seems to have believed that the English have unquestionable monopoly of both honesty and gentlemanliness. To Mr. Wharton, and no less to the novelist, Lopez

was distasteful ... as being unlike his idea of an English gentleman, and as being without those far-reaching fibres and roots by which he thought that the solidity and stability of a human tree should be assured. 38

It should be pointed out here, however, that Trollope's unfairness to Lopez is unfortunately shared by almost every critic with whose work I may claim to be familiar. Thus, and according to Professor Pollard's own assertion Lopez's :

<sup>37</sup>Trollope, The Duke's Children, I, pp. 27-28.

<sup>38</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Prime Minister (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1968), I, p.92.

villainy is all the more evident by contrast with the traditional values embodied in Fletcher. There is only one good thing to say about Lopez; by his suicide, it can be said of him, as it was of Cawdor in *Macbeth*, 'nothing in his life became him like the leaving it'. It is, however, so much out of character that it is hard to believe that Lopez, no matter how desperate, would have had the resolution to do it. 39

Before raising any objections to Pollard's summary verdict on this most persecuted of Trollopian characters, I feel strongly disposed to assert that Lopez is far from being the 'black sheep' he is meant to be taken. And when Lopez errs, he is seen acting as any ordinary human being would probably act under his given circumstances. Also, Lopez's manners do not by any means indicate that he belongs to a different culture from that of the society in which he moves; and, therefore, he cannot be said to embody an utterly alien morality that could easily be compared and contrasted with another one, namely, the code of values embodied in the person of Arthur Fletcher. Judged by appearances, which constitute the bulwark of any culture, Lopez is as good as any well-bred English gentleman. According to Trollope's presentation; "It was admitted on all sides that Ferdinand Lopez was a gentleman". 40

In any case, the most important thing that must be kept in view, while analysing the character of Lopez, is the fact that Trollope employs him as a touchstone against which the Conservative Mr. Wharton's belief in the superiority of the English race is tested. Trollope, however, is careful to point out in this novel that discrimination against foreigners may be a prejudice indeed; but, expectedly, he is equally careful to show that this kind of prejudice is quite justified. This can only be explained by referring to the actual happenings in the novel itself. Thus, having been asked by Mr. Wharton about his parentage, Lopez, admirably honestly, admits that his "father was certainly not an English gentleman. He was a Portuguese". 41

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<sup>39</sup> Arthur Pollard, *Anthony Trollope* (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.101.

<sup>40</sup> Trollope, *The Prime Minister*, I, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p.32.

Immediately after this, Trollope hastens to add that

In admitting this, and in thus subjecting himself at once to one clearly-stated ground of objection, - the objection being one which though admitted carried with itself neither fault nor disgrace. 42

But despite Lopez's honesty on this occasion, and despite the fact that he could have been the son of a 'Portuguese nobleman', Mr. Wharton - armed with the criterion of 'English blue blood' - persists in his objection to Lopez's suit regarding his daughter. Nevertheless, Lopez wins the day by succeeding in the end to marry the girl of his affection, Emily Wharton. But it so happens that neither Mr. Wharton nor his creator seems to have been satisfied with this result; a thing which induces the novelist to abandon his neutral stance by stepping into a more involved attitude towards the actual events of the book. This, the author commits through contriving the incident of Arthur Fletcher's letter to Emily Wharton shortly after her marriage; an act which triggers Ferdinand Lopez's not unnatural jealousy and leads his wife to re-adjust her thoughts on 'gentle blood' and 'breeding'. The passage illustrating the change that comes over Emily Wharton on this occasion is worth quoting at length :

She had once ventured to form a doctrine for herself, to preach to herself a sermon of her own, and to tell herself that this gift of gentle blood and of gentle nurture, of which her father thought so much, and to which something of divinity was attributed down in Herefordshire, was after all but a weak, spiritless quality. It could exist without intellect, without heart, and with very moderate culture. It was compatible with many littlenesses and with many vices. As for that love of honest, courageous truth which her father was wont to attribute to it, she regarded his theory as based upon legends...The beau ideal of a man which she then pictured to herself was graced, first with intelligence, then with affection and lastly with ambition. She knew no reason why such a hero as her fancy created should be born of lords and ladies rather than of working mechanics, should be English rather than Spanish or French. The man could not be her hero without education, without attributes to be attained no doubt more easily by the rich than by the poor : but, with that granted, with those attained, she did not see why she, or why the world, should go back beyond the man's own self. Such had been her theories as to men and their attributes,

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., I, p.32.

and acting on that, she had given herself and all her happiness into the keeping of Ferdinand Lopez. Now, there was gradually coming upon her a change in her convictions, - a change that was most unwelcome, that she strove to reject, - ... But now - ay, from the very hour of her marriage, - she had commenced to learn what it was that her father had meant when he spoke of the pleasures of living with gentlemen. 43

Seen in the light of what has been stated in the above quotation, 'intelligence,' 'affection' and even 'ambition' count for very little in any consideration of gentility. The author's desire to give 'gentle blood' the upper hand in matters of gentility is the main reason why such attributes are made to fade into almost utter insignificance. Yet, where an English-born gentleman is concerned these characteristics gain as much weight as 'blood' or 'gentle birth'. For this matter Trollope's harping on and defence of individual 'merit' in his novels can simply be looked at as a question of rhetoric, or just little more.

What I am trying to say is that while reading The Prime Minister one could hardly fail to notice the author's bias against Lopez. This manifests itself clearly in his grudging this foreign scapegoat the right to claim for himself the faintest notion of the feelings of a gentleman. The simple fact that Lopez was possessed of a certain amount of affection and intelligence can hardly be believed to fail to produce in him any kind of gentlemanly feeling. In spite of all, the balance in this novel can easily be seen to topple in favour of Lopez and this, most ironically, is due to Trollope's own admission that this person

had worked hard, and had won his way upwards, and had almost lodged himself securely among those people with whom it had been his ambition to live. Early in life he had found himself among those who were called gentlemen and ladies. He had been able to assume their manners, and had lived with them on equal terms. 44

As far as I can see, it is inconceiveable that a man should live with ladies and gentlemen 'on equal terms' without ever getting to share some of their refined feelings. However, the unpleasant truth that must be faced

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., I, pp. 251-52.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., II, p. 209.

here, rather than be argued away, is that Trollope's 'blue-blood-worship' induced him to go so far as to do away with 'merit', let alone with the ordinary feeling of humane decency. Trollope, it appears, had a point in mind to prove. Very likely, he wanted to show that most foreign-born gentlemen would inevitably behave otherwise than an English-born gentleman should. Put in other terms, he had a prejudice to establish firmly, through using fiction, rather than to banish out of his English readers' minds. Some light is thrown on this particular kind of prejudice by Bulwer-Lytton's following highly convincing remarks :

Our ancient dislike to foreigners was not a vague and ignorant prejudice alone, nor was it solely the growth of an insular situation in the map of the globe; it was a legacy which was bequeathed to us by our history. The ancient record of our empire is a series of foreign conquests over the natives. The Roman, the Saxon, the Dane, the Norman, successively taught to the indigenous inhabitants a tolerably well-founded antipathy to foreigners. When the soreness of a conquered people wore off, the feeling was kept alive by the jealousy of a commercial one. Foreigners settled amongst us as traders; and the industry of the Flemish monopolized for centuries, to the great disgust of the natives, a considerable portion of our domestic manufactures.<sup>45</sup>

The question of the applicability of this passage to the Victorian period is not at issue here. Yet, the agricultural depression which began in England in 1873 and lasted, though intermittently, to the end of the century cannot be doubted to have embittered many a landowner against foreigners in general but against foreign and English traders in particular - especially those who helped bring about the influx of cheap grain from America or cheap meat from New Zealand. Also, the increase of financial speculation in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the direct involvement of some foreigners in such activities can equally be held accountable for the perpetuation of the English gentry class's antipathy to foreigners of Lopez and Melmotte's type. Keeping in mind Trollope's hatred of financial speculations and speculators in general, one can easily come to an understanding of the author's presentation of Ferdinand Lopez in the way he does.

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<sup>45</sup> Bulwer-Lytton, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p.38.

In any case, despite the writer's attempt to portray Lopez otherwise than a man of spirit capable of resenting an insult aimed at his self-respect, this character, by his suicide, proves that he is able to rise above the humiliating circumstances created around him by his father-in-law, Mr. Wharton, as well as by other characters in the novel. To refer to Professor Pollard's remarks quoted earlier, however, it is unlikely that the critic has emphasized Lopez's 'villainy' on the grounds that he swears at his wife and bullies her, for the hero of He Knew He Was Right does this to excess without exciting the readers' repugnance or provoking his sensibility to the extent of bestowing the word 'villain' on him. If it is for deceiving his wife that Professor Pollard condemns him, then, one may argue that other gentlemen in Trollope's books should equally be called villains. But as it turns out to be the case, they are rarely, if ever, referred to as rogues or cads. The clearest example that comes to our mind here is the gentleman-hero of An Eye For An Eye, Fred Neville, whom no English critic would ever venture to call a 'villain' as he would do people such as Lopez or Melmotte in The Way We Live Now. The analogy in the present case is too obvious to need any further comment.

Still, it could be further maintained that had Lopez been treated on equal terms with 'English-born' gentlemen, he would most probably have found no need to resort to trickery and deception. Put more bluntly, had Mr. Wharton declared his good intention of bestowing £60,000 on his daughter at her marriage, as he would have done if the suitor were Arthur Fletcher, Lopez would have undoubtedly shown a good deal of gratitude and, at the same time, would have been redeemed to his former honesty. Nevertheless, Lopez, right to the end, maintains a certain amount of dignity which carries him through a lot of trouble and which also enables him to refuse at a later stage to go on living on the meanly-bestowed provision of his father-in-law.

Somewhat, this character grows out of the author's control, and assumes a special identity that betrays Trollope's by no means good intentions.

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Here, I am disposed to think that Ferdinand Lopez's dignity and self-respect were most decisive factors in inducing him to put an end to his life. Consequently, one could do this character no greater injustice than by asserting that he would not have had the resolution to do it. One cannot help concluding at this point that what Professor Pollard has in mind when he speaks of the 'traditional values embodied in Fletcher' and which make Lopez's 'villainy' more prominent are, more or less, the same strongly-held prejudices of the old Tory Squire Mr. Wharton. To understand those prejudices, one simply needs to peruse the following remarks blurted out by Mr. Wharton himself, and addressed to our victim Mr. Lopez :

'Well - to tell you the truth I know nothing about you, I don't know who your father was, - whether he was an Englishman, whether he was a Christian, whether he was a Protestant, - nor even whether he was a gentleman.' 46

I have underlined a few words for the simple reason that they provide a key-note to understanding not only Mr. Wharton's hard-headed and Conservative mentality but also that of many of the landed proprietors who figure out in Trollope's books.

Apparently, a Protestant English Gentleman epitomized to the average landowner the ultimate that could be wished and coveted for one's daughter in the marriage market. Why it was so is no difficult question to understand; as the following observation by Mr. Wharton to his daughter tends to show :

'I like Arthur Fletcher, because he is a gentleman, - because he is a gentleman of the class to which I belong myself; because he works; because I know all about him so that I can be sure of him ... I am safe with him, being quite sure that he will say to me neither awkward things nor impertinent things. He will not talk to me about driving a mail coach like the foolish baronet, nor tell me the price of all his wines like your uncle. Nor would Lopez do so, thought Emily to herself'. 47

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<sup>46</sup>Trollope, The Prime Minister, I, p.32.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., I, p.111.

Of course, Emily has to be proved wrong concerning Lopez, and shortly after her marriage, the author exploits some fictional devices for the purpose of proving his point. Trollope's motive for thus acting is not so much to show that her chosen partner is incapable of any deep love or feeling for her as much as to prove that her father's almost instinctive dislike for foreigners and, at the same time, his choice of the English-born Fletcher are justified. However, Mr. Wharton's, and no less Trollope's, ground of discrimination between Ferdinand Lopez and Arthur Fletcher derives from the assumption that the latter is a gentleman and Lopez is not, and not from the notion that Fletcher does or can love Emily more affectionately than Lopez does. The basis on which Trollope establishes his arguments in favour of 'the gentleman' is, to be sure, rather shaky. To comprehend this, it is sufficient to study carefully the grounds on which Arthur Fletcher's claim to the title of 'gentleman' is founded.

Seen through both Trollope's and Emily Wharton's eyes,

Arthur Fletcher was a gentleman. He would not have entertained the suspicion which her husband had expressed. He could not have failed to believe such assertions as had been made. He could never have suggested to his own wife that another man had endeavoured to entrap her into a secret correspondence. 48

Once again, this passage invites comparison with a similar situation that occurs in He Knew He Was Right. It needs hardly be said that the protagonist of this novel, if protagonist he might be called, is guilty of far more jealousy and suspicion than that ever displayed by Lopez in The Prime Minister. In spite of that, neither Trollope nor his English readers seem willing enough to consider him anything but a gentleman. Instead they seem inclined to lay the blame for his wrong deeds at the door of the whole social organism wrongly operating around him. In other words, the hero, Mr. Trevelyan, in He Knew He Was Right is seen as the victim of unidentified

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., I, p. 352.

antagonistic social forces which seem to mould his destiny and undermine his sanity. But if society in this novel may be criticized on the basis that it exerts a damaging effect on Trevelyan's actions, society in The Prime Minister may equally be criticized for Lopez's wrong doings. This is the only plausible argument one ought to follow in estimating the character of Lopez; unless, of course, we want to go on ignoring the author's obvious prejudice against Lopez's foreignness and go on being guided by his implicit condemnation of this character.

I feel strongly disposed at this juncture to express my disagreement with Trollopian critics, particularly those who are anxious to maintain that Trollope "comes down on the side of the heart," and that "he certainly disapproves of marriages made for ambition, while he is ready to favour<sup>49</sup> seemingly imprudent matches so long as love is present". My first objection to Faber's above-cited remarks arises from my close observation of Trollope's cross-class and inter-class marriages which incline me to believe that he was not opposed to marriages made for ambition so long as they were between equals. Equals in the present sense could mean no more than belonging to what Trollope considered to be a layer of the genteel classes. Secondly, though Trollope may seem to approve of 'seemingly imprudent matches so long as love is present', he, nevertheless, could not tolerate marriages where a class-gap, or let us say a cultural difference, appears to exist. Love in Trollope's books, to be sure, does not occupy as significant a place as 'gentle nurture' or 'gentle breeding'. In furtherance of the first objection to Faber's above statement, it could be argued here that Trollope disapproves of marriages made for ambition only if the person seeking an attachment of this kind happens to belong to a class of people that the novelist instinctively dislikes or has some grudges against. This includes either persons with no claim to 'high birth' and who, more often than not, belong to the trading classes, or people of a foreign

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<sup>49</sup>Faber., op. cit., p.121.

extraction, especially if they were otherwise than Protestants. Our best examples of the first category are Mr. Moffat in Doctor Thorne, Mr. Rubb, junior, in Miss Mackenzie and the tradesman's daughter, Miss Neefit, in Ralph the Heir. As for the second category, Ferdinand Lopez in The Prime Minister is an outstanding example. On the other hand, Trollope's opposition to matches made for ambition is automatically withdrawn when the case involves a person whom the author considers to belong to the gentlemanly class. The writer's books abound with representatives of this group. The most remarkable example of this group of people is no other than the Dean of Brotherton, in Is He Popenjoy? with his successfully-persistent attempts to raise his daughter in the social scale. It may be recollected that the Dean's effort to realize this ambition of his life is treated with all the delicacy of feeling the author was capable of displaying; while that of Mr. Neefit, in Ralph the Heir is presented with all the scathing satire and attack Trollope could muster. To understand the subtleties involved in such situations, the author's attitude towards both upper-class and bourgeois gentility should be analysed first.

Trollope's novels, though sometimes only implicitly, explore the problems confronting the social structure, reflect in many ways the changing aspects of English life in the nineteenth century. More or less, they describe the submergence of an old agrarian social order with all its steadfastly-maintained values into a relatively new city-based commercialistic one. This should not be taken to imply that Trollope's books mirror the whole life of Victorian society or even the life of a section within that society more than in a very limited sense. For, as it is argued in Theory of Literature,

A writer inevitably expresses his experience and total conception of life; but it would be manifestly untrue to say that he expresses the whole of life - or even the whole life of a given time - completely and exhaustively. 50

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<sup>50</sup>Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p.95.

The problem posed here is that of the position of the author himself whose heart was ever alive to the various pleasures and pursuits of rural life and whose mind was fully attuned to the way of living of the landed gentry. This problem is quite simple in view of the fact that the social panorama provided by Trollope's books is strongly coloured by the author's personal interests and outlook. Although the relation between Trollope's private life and his works is not always a simple relation of cause and effect, a close perusal of the different social pictures provided by the novelist's books leads one to conclude that Trollope used his art as a means of yielding the outlines of certain social and political aspects of Victorian England as much as he used it to express his own ideas and views. Suffice it to add here that Trollope's outlook embraced a good deal of respect for the ideals embodied in the word gentleman. Having roughly stated the author's disposition towards rural values and ideals, I deem it appropriate at this juncture to define Trollope's status as both a delineator of class interrelations and a portrayer of social types.

A common characteristic which Trollope seems to share with not a few Victorian writers is an involved concern with a capitalist economic structure and the threats it poses to an old-established order. The expanding urban environment with its emblematic representations stand out in Trollope's seemingly unperturbed agrarian society as a giant force undermining its values and threatening to submerge the cash nexus of the city with the old established traditions of the landed classes. It is hardly necessary to emphasize at this point that Trollope was clearly dissatisfied with the money-oriented urban morality; a fact that manifests itself in his unfavourable presentations of the trading classes as a whole. The author's campaign against the by-no-means newly emerged bourgeois morality is fully embodied in books dealing with city values such as The Three Clerks, The Way We Live Now and, to a lesser extent, Orley Farm and The Prime Minister. London in three of these novels is no longer looked upon as a centre of culture, as is the case with some novels dealing with eighteenth-century social life,

but rather as the entire domain and favourite haunt of adventurous people intent on financial speculation and individual self-aggrandizement. Naturally, this entails all kinds of fraud and profit by dishonest means. Also, it entails a kind of competitiveness which flourishes only at a time of moral and social readjustment, or what is commonly described as a period of flux. Whenever the city figures in Trollope's novels, there always appears to be a sort of upheaval in values and reversal of moral roles and ideals. Thus, honesty is replaced by dishonesty, generosity by greed, modesty and deference to one's superiors by snobbery and insolence, and last, but not least, 'Gentility' by 'Vulgarity'. Somehow, Trollope manages to suggest that the correlation between gentility and land-ownership is as vital as that between vulgarity and commercial wealth. On the whole, the bourgeois in Trollope's books are presented as a money-grabbing, vulgar section of society whose members are furthest removed from culture and refinement.

Throughout his writings, Trollope adopts and sustains a rather hostile attitude towards the bourgeoisie. That there is an unmerited hostility to middle-class people's attempts at social climbing and promotion in the author's world of gentility is a fact which admits of no doubt. This is partly ascribable to the writer's own antipathy to the new school of gentlemen best understood as 'upstarts', but mainly due to his 'genteel' prejudices and imperfect education. As a public-school educated son of an impoverished gentleman, Trollope may be held 'representative' of many a Victorian who had not only come to terms with the social values of the classes above them but also absorbed their likes and dislikes. Having emphasized that the author had his own prejudices, I consider it necessary to add that those prejudices were, more or less, the same ones generally held by the English landed gentry. It seems as if Trollope considered it his first duty to bind himself by ill-disguised ties of fraternity with the 'Squirearchy'. This manifests itself clearly in the great sympathy shown in Trollope's books for the older generation of squires of whom one could mention Wilfred Thorne of Ullathorne in Barchester Towers; both Squire Dale and

Lord De Guest in The Small House of Allington; Mr. Wharton in The Prime Minister; Sir Peregrine Orme in Orley Farm; Mr. Amedroz in The Belton Estate; Sir Harry Hotspur in Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite; Gregory Newton in Ralph the Heir; and lastly Roger Carbury in The Way We Live Now. In one way or another, these characters, together with a few professional Tories of the old school - like the Doctor in Doctor Wortle's School - seem to have shared with their creator the notion that England was the greatest of nations. In Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite, for instance, it is reported that had Sir Harry's son lived, his father would have inculcated in him all those notions of usefulness necessary for the survival of the landed gentry, and also would have brought him up in a manner that would secure his so living "as to do his part in maintaining the order of gentleness in England, by which England had become ... the proudest and the greatest of the justest of nations."<sup>51</sup>

However, to say that Trollope mirrors the ways of the gentry is to beg the question. As this point has been amply discussed by Professor J.A. Banks in an article published in 1968,<sup>52</sup> further elaboration of this subject is rendered unnecessary. The point that should be kept in mind here is that Trollope, when dealing with the gentry, rarely stands by and contents himself with simply depicting this social group's values and pursuits. Often enough, he is seen abandoning his role as an outside observer and offering the reader what might be called a value judgement. A clear example of this is Trollope's endorsement of whatever appears to further the gentry's interests or even what is likely to solidify and fortify their social status. This does not happen without a feeling on our part that the novelist has compromised his role as an objective delineator of reality or without the unpleasant feeling that the writer has chosen the path that can

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<sup>51</sup>Anthony Trollope, Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1928), p.5.

<sup>52</sup>See J.A. Banks, "The Way They Lived Then : Anthony Trollope and the 1870's", Victorian Studies (Vol.XII, No. 2, December 1968), pp.177-200.

only be chosen by moral theorists. Despite Trollope's overt dislike of the Aylmers' cold manners and stiff-necked style of living in The Belton Estate, for example, he could not help winding up the book with a reconciliation between this family and that composed of the warm-hearted Will Belton and his newly-wed wife, Clara Amedroz. Trollope's motive for thus acting may be rendered easy to understand by citing his own remarks on the reconciliation:

How it had come to pass that such friendships had sprung up,-- or rather how it had been revived, -- it would be bootless here to say. But old alliances, such as that which had existed between the Aylmer and the <sup>Amedroz</sup> families do not allow themselves to die out easily, and it is well for us all that they should be long-lived. 53

The implication of this passage is too obvious to require further elaboration.

It could be maintained here, however, that the message which Trollope tries hard to convey to the gentry -- through his novels -- clearly points to challenges that seem to have threatened the well-being of landed gentry families. The challenges came from outside this social group as much as they did from inside it. The threat of the 'city' in this respect is not to be underestimated, for there are good reasons to make us believe that there always existed an invasion of commercial wealth which threatened the stability of the rural-based gentry. As might be gathered from the author's books of the 1870's, the introduction of city standards of living into the countryside led by necessity to the rise of living costs; and hence came the decline of many gentry families particularly those who could not cope with the newly-introduced standards. Consequently, the gentry's decline in the later years of the Victorian era was the outcome of a rise in the standards of living rather than of competition with a strongly-established industrial system. The clearest picture of this social change is provided in The Way We Live Now where it is reported that Squire Roger Carbury "had become a poor man simply through the wealth of others."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Anthony Trollope, The Belton Estate (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1964), p.431.

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Trollope, The Way We Live Now (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1963), I, p.48.

Despite the fact that his estate was supposed to bring him in £2,000 a year; the squire found it quite difficult to catch up with his rich neighbours. To live on one's own land, as the novel clearly implies, is a luxury which only the very rich could afford. The issue dealt with in The Way We Live Now regarding the gentry is, in fact, relatively recent. For at the turn of the eighteenth century such a problem was almost non-existent. To understand this one would hardly find it more necessary than to peruse the following observation from the book in question :

In the year 1800 the Carbury property was sufficient for the Carbury house. Since that time the Carbury property has considerably increased in value, and the rents have been raised. Even the acreage has been extended by the enclosure of Commons. But the income is no longer comfortably adequate to the wants of an English gentleman's household. If a moderate estate in land be left to a man now, there arises the question whether he is not damaged unless an income also be left to him wherewith to keep up the state. Land is a luxury, and of all luxuries is the most costly. Now the Carburys never had anything but land. Suffolk has not been made rich and great either by coal or iron. No great town had sprung up on the confines of the Carbury property. No eldest son had gone into trade or risen high in a profession so as to add to the Carbury wealth. No great heiress had been married. There had been no ruin, - no misfortune. 55

If the Carburys cannot be accused of any imprudence to which their dwindling into insignificance might be ascribed, other gentry families could not be defended on the same ground. The other dimensions of the problem faced by the gentry in the later years of the nineteenth century are, however, well provided by the author's books especially The Vicar of Bullhampton. The only thing worth adding is that Trollope in this novel - The Vicar of Bullhampton - exhibits a great amount of bias against the cynical critic of the gentry, the tradesman Mr. Cockney. This can only be attributed to the author's love of all those idle pursuits which Mr. Cockney holds in contempt and also to his antipathy to tradespeople in all of whose affairs money is given more prominence than anything else. More light will be thrown on this as we come to discuss Trollope's attitude towards middle-class gentility. Here, it must be made clear that a full analysis of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. I, p.48.

of the gentry depicted in Trollope's books is rendered impossible by the limited scope of this study. From now on, and because of my chief concern with the author's 'concept of gentility', I shall restrict myself to those parts of genteel living which only directly bear upon the subject under consideration.

Further to what has been stated earlier in this chapter regarding Trollope's affinity to the landed gentry, it can be added here that the author appears to have shared both this group's beliefs and prejudices. Being the squire's advocate, Trollope was invariably opposed to 'Dissent', 'Trade', 'Foreigners' and 'Whiggery'. This partly explains the great antipathy shown in the author's books towards tradespeople in general, and also the unfavourable light in which supporters of dissent - such as the old Marquis in The Vicar of Bullhampton - have been presented. Moreover, Trollope's opposition also illustrates the unpleasant nature of his treatment of foreign people and education as well as the ironical tone he adopts when handling Whig members and their families. The best representatives of the first group are Mr. Emilius in The Eustace Diamonds, Mr. Augustus Melmotte in The Way We Live Now, and Ferdinand Lopez in The Prime Minister. As for representatives of the latter group; that is, those who symbolize Whiggery in the novelist's writings, mention could be made here of both the De Courcys and Mrs. Proudie in the Barchester novels, and even the Pallisers in the political series.

In a way Trollope was very similar to Henry Fielding whose bias in favour of the old rural values of feudal England mars his portraiture of the rising middle classes. Unlike Fielding, however, Trollope's dislike for the new class of gentlemen is more based on their defective morality than on their lack of culture or gentle nurture. At the same time, it is grounded in the assumption that a gentleman is born and cannot be made. This is, in fact, what underlies self-made men's failure in Trollope's books to acquire the full status of a 'gentleman' and also their inability to realize that wealth alone will not make of them, let alone of their

sons, gentlemen in the established sense. In Doctor Thorne for instance, Trollope's anti-middle-class disposition finds an outlet in his satirical representation of the new aristocracy of talent represented by the railway-contractor Sir Roger Scatcherd. In the story of Sir Roger Scatcherd 'aristocracy of talent' can easily be seen to have been reduced to mere energy aiming at its own destruction. Though the energetic may merit distinction for their contribution to the advancement of their country; they are, nevertheless, denied the simplest claim to intelligence or even to culture in its limited sense. Sir Roger Scatcherd, it may be recalled, had not risen to his distinguished status undeservedly; still, he is presented as uncultured, confirmed drunkard, unable to reconcile the idea of being a titled man with his proletarian back-ground. Trollope's portrayal of the railway contractor is, to be sure, biased and distorted. This character's rising to wealth and fame is undeniably realistic, but it is most inconceivable that a man of Sir Roger's talent and strong will could not resist the temptations of the 'bottle'. In any case, the picture of the unteachable bourgeois 'brute', so to speak, is completed by the addition of Sir Roger Scatcherd's son whom :

His father had determined to make a gentleman of him, and had sent him to Eton and to Cambridge. But even this receipt, generally as it is recognized, will not make a gentleman. It is hard, indeed, to define what receipt will do so, though people do have in their own minds some certain undefined, but yet tolerably correct ideas on the subject. Be that as it may, two years at Eton, and three terms at Cambridge, did not make a gentleman of Louis Philippe Scatcherd. 56

By way of commenting on this passage, one could argue that it gives a rather imperfect explanation of why this liberal education which Louis Scatcherd receives would be of no avail to a member of the working classes or the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, Trollope's concept of gentlemanly education lacks the logic which characterizes the works of objective and disinterested social critics. What 'receipt' could be of any use to a bourgeois member

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<sup>56</sup> Trollope, Doctor Thorne, pp.129-30.

intent on acquiring gentle culture, and hence on being considered a gentleman--by education at least - Trollope, of course, was unprepared to say. For this reason, many of the author's criticisms of the rising bourgeois may be said to be grounded in sheer prejudice. This prejudice, which finds expression in almost all of Trollope's delineations of middle-class people, can only be ascribed to his false class consciousness which tries to distort historical reality. In one way or another, Trollope anticipates the late Victorian novelist, George Gissing, to whom man's nature is definitely decided at birth; and no matter what kind of education a man may receive, he remains basically the same. In other words, the personal influence of education is somehow trivial, and could not be relied on to affect deeply a man's hereditary qualities. Thus, social classes and class distinctions are, more or less, concerned with heredity and birth.

That this is the perspective from which Trollope viewed the majority of the middle classes is confirmed by his portrayal of the tailor's son, Mr. Moffat, in the same book. As Sir Roger Scatcherd can be said to represent the new 'aristocracy of talent', so can Mr. Moffat be said to represent the equally fashionable 'aristocracy of wealth'. Neither of them, however, seems to have won the author's approval as he tries to be assimilated into the 'genteel' classes. Both of them, it is worth noting, are without that element 'high birth', which goes a long way in shaping the author's own idea of a true gentleman. In the case of Mr. Moffat Trollope is anxious to point out all the nuances surrounding a class marriage. Surely, Trollope was not unaware of the difficulties surrounding such matches as that which existed between Mr. Moffat and Miss Gresham, but his picture of the whole affair is less than satisfactory when viewed in a realistic light. As in Dickens' Dombey and Son, Trollope in this novel could not help acting as a restraining force by whose means the 'high-born' Miss Gresham was saved from the contaminating effect of Mr. Moffat's wealth. Although Trollope tries very hard to impress on us the fact of the Greshams' unreasonable pride of blood, he, nevertheless, could not bring himself to consummate the alliance between

aristocracy of blood and that of wealth. Obviously, and because of his Tory bias, Trollope could not help viewing the match as a misalliance. That the boundaries between the classes should be kept intact cannot be doubted to have been the author's most heart-felt desire. No matter how hard the novelist tries to extricate himself from the course of events in Doctor Thorne, there always remain enough signs in the book which clearly indicate that his sympathies were with those who were strongly opposed to the match. This manifests itself in his different commentaries on the people involved, and of which the following authorial observation is typically illustrative :

Mr. Moffat was, as we have said, a man of wealth; but we all know, from the lessons of our early youth, how the love of money increases and gains strength by its own success. Nor was he a man of so mean a spirit as to be satisfied with mere wealth. He desired also place and station, and gracious countenance among the great ones of the earth. Hence had come his adherence to the De Courcys; hence his seat in Parliament; and hence, also, his perhaps ill-considered match with Miss Gresham. 57

Due to his being a 'low-born' quasi-gentleman and to the assumption that his great fortune was earned by dishonest means, Mr. Moffat was made to act as an unprincipled, money-grabbing blackguard jilting Miss Gresham for the sake of doubling his fortune through seeking an alliance with the wealthy Miss Dunstable who got her money from trade. But natural justice, as Trollope would have us believe, takes its natural course; and thus, Mr. Moffat acquires neither the money he coveted nor the social status he sought in the first place. Ironically enough, it is the 'blood-conscious' Dr. Thorne who ends up marrying the wealthy heiress Miss Dunstable. At any rate, this is not so much a reflection of Trollope's egalitarian tendencies as much as it is a subtle expression of his prejudice in favour of affectionate and intelligent, though foreign, heiresses. Madame Max Goesler, in the political series, may be cited here as another outstanding example testifying to the novelist's apparent leniency towards foreign heiresses.

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p.223.

However, Trollope's other books abound with variations on the theme of middle-class gentility. These variations tend to confirm the writer's hostility - let alone that of the gentry class he is anxious to represent in his writings - to the values and standards of living of the rising bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie's efforts at genteel living and the attempts its members make at acquiring a genteel status, whether through entering Parliament or the purchase of land or even through allying themselves with old aristocratic and gentry families, are constant objects of the novelist's satire and cynicism. In Framley Parsonage, for instance, Lady Lufton is seen not only advising her son Ludovic to preserve the estate but also making "a little mental prayer that her son's acres might be protected from<sup>58</sup> the millionaires and other philistines". In Orley Farm, again, the Masons' commercial background is clearly seen to undermine their honesty and future transactions, despite the fact that the early members of this family, that is, Lady Mason's grandfather and grandmother, were thoroughly respectable people. Trollope's patronizing attitude towards the younger generation of the Masons in this novel is strongly felt, a fact which illustrates his low opinion of commercial activities in general. To clarify this point one needs only to look at the author's mocking attitude towards the quasi-gentleman of Groby Park, Sir Joseph Mason, who - following the writer's description :

Had been a London merchant; had made his own money, having commenced the world, no doubt, with half a crown; had become, in turn, Alderman, mayor and knight; and in the fullness of time was gathered to his fathers. He had purchased this estate in Yorkshire late in life ... and his eldest son had lived there with such enjoyment of the privileges of an English country gentleman as he had been able to master for himself. 59

Concerning the purchase of estates by members of the middle class -

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<sup>58</sup>Anthony Trollope. Framley Parsonage (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1978), p.133.

<sup>59</sup>Anthony Trollope, Orley Farm (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1935), I, pp. 1-2.

as a way of social promotion - Trollope's own opinion on the subject may easily be said to be similar to that held by Sir Peregrine Orme in the same novel. Accordingly, however -

In judging the position which a man should hold in the world, Sir Peregrine was very resolute in ignoring all claims made by wealth alone. Even property in land could not in his eyes create a gentleman. A gentleman, according to his ideas, should at any rate have great-grandfathers capable of being traced in the world's history. 60

Trollope's firm prejudice against the trading classes is given its extreme statement in Miss Mackenzie where the author's obtrusiveness is nowhere else in his novels more deeply felt. This is manifested in his excessive vulgarization of the tradesman's manners, Mr. Samuel Rubb, junior, and also in his hypocritical attitude towards the concept of gentility. To make Miss Mackenzie prefer her cousin John Ball, who is not only quite old but also rather prudish, unattractive and the father of nine children, to the young and amiable Mr. Rubb because of the latter's greasy hair and yellow gloves is an act which cannot be attributed to anything but the author's ingrained prejudice against the assumingly uncultured bourgeoisie. Not only this, Mr. Rubb, as a contemporary newspaper has put it,

is made too vulgar for his education at Merchant Taylor's School, where, having learned a little Latin and a good deal one would suppose, of the use of English words amongst fairly educated boys, he could scarcely have failed to learn that 'decorum' and 'ceremony' are not interchangeable terms, and that a man at an English watering-place would be making a blunder in complimenting ladies on having quite got rid of decorum. 61

A more disturbing element in this novel still is the writer's disposition to point out the degrading nature of trade while, at the same time, seeming anxious to emphasize that being raised to the status of a baronet is sure to cleanse one from 'the stains of trade'. Commenting on Sir John Ball

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., I, p.28.

<sup>61</sup> Donald Smalley, ed., Trollope : The Critical Heritage (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p.225.

early in the book Trollope asserts

that he had simply been a political Lord Mayor in strong political days, — a political Lord Mayor in the leather business; but, then, his business had been undoubtedly wholesale; and a man who gets himself to be made a baronet cleanses himself from the stains of trade, even though he have traded in leather. 62

Not uniquely in Miss Mackenzie, a subtle distinction is made between a merchant and a mere tradesman, in which the merchant figures out as the only socially significant of the two. This is most likely because the merchant was still looked at as someone who dealt only in wholesale business; a thing which in Victorian times would often secure a person the status of a gentleman more than it would a retail tradesman. To veterans of the old school of gentility, however, the distinction between a wholesale merchant and a retail tradesman is quite insignificant. That is, neither of them could lay claim to the title of 'gentleman' according to the standards laid down from above. Our best representative of this school is the staunch conservative Miss Marrable in The Vicar of Bullhampton. According to this relic of the old school,

when a man touched trade or commerce in any way he was doing that which was not the work of a gentleman. He might be very respectable, and it might be very necessary that he should do it; but brewers, bankers and merchants, were not gentlemen. 63

Luckily for those middle-class professionals, ladies of Miss Marrable's stamp were at the time very 'few in number' to use Trollope's own words. This does by no means negate the fact that there existed a good deal of hostility to bourgeois members' struggle for a share of 'gentility' throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The hostility, it need hardly be said, was chiefly centred amongst the two or more gentry generations — be they old or young.

To resume our chronological exposition of middle-class gentility, it may be stated here that no group of bourgeois people were more scathingly

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<sup>62</sup>Anthony Trollope, Miss Mackenzie (London : Chapman and Hall, 1865),

I, p.3.

<sup>63</sup>Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton, p.61.

attacked than those involved in politics. Trollope's books abound with sarcastic remarks heaped on the heads of middle-class M.P.'s. In Can You Forgive Her? for example, Mr. Bott - the member for St. Helens who had made calico - is maliciously described by George Vavasour as "a vulgar ass ... with no more pretensions to rank himself a gentleman than your footman".<sup>64</sup> Similarly in The Belton Estate, Mr. Amedroz is anxious to point out to his daughter that being in Parliament is no sure guarantee to one's being made a gentleman. Mr. Amedroz - remarking on Thompson, the Member for Minehead - addresses his daughter in the following terms :

'I never saw so vulgar, pig-headed a fellow in my life. Being in Parliament used to be something when I was young, but it won't make a man a gentleman now-a-days. It seems to me that none but brewers, and tallow-chandlers and lawyers go into Parliament now.'<sup>65</sup>

The thing that must be stressed here is that Trollope was in full agreement with those who voiced such opinions, though he often succeeded in detaching himself from such people and views, and managed to conceal his personal feelings from the matter in question.

In The Way We Live Now, however, Trollope's abhorrence of the new riches in politics reaches a climax; a thing which inevitably leads him to express his views on the subject openly and to abandon the detached stand for which he is quite renowned. Here, it is not unusual to see Trollope venting his spleen upon the traditional rulers of England for welcoming into their lobbies members of Mr. Melmotte's stamp. As the novelist angrily observes, "Melmotte was not the first vulgar man whom the Conservatives had taken by the hand, and patted on the back, and told that he was a god".<sup>66</sup> It is quite plausible to argue here that a close link could be established between the author's open attacks on the political representatives of the day and his own frustrated hopes in that direction. Trollope's attacks on self-made men's successful attempts to enter Parliament was partly, if not

<sup>64</sup> Trollope, Can You Forgive Her?, II, p.70

<sup>65</sup> Trollope, The Belton Estate, p.186.

<sup>66</sup> Trollope, The Way We Live Now, II, p.37.

wholly, motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy. It is as if Trollope was avenging himself on his successful self-made rivals in fiction, this is on the one hand. On the other, Trollope's relentless criticisms of the new aristocracy of wealth - embodied in the person of Augustus Melmotte - as well as of the old aristocracy of blood may be said to symbolize the bitter cry of the old generation of gentlemen on the death of an old beloved code of values. Put another way, they highlight the near death of an old agrarian 'gentlemanly' system and its replacement by an urban, morally-devoid, monetary one. So much for bourgeois 'gentlemen' in the fields of business and politics.

It remains to add a few more words here about the novelist's presentation of middle-class gentility in a social context. As a painter of middle-class social life, Trollope is much inferior to his contemporaries who revelled in depicting the minutiae of bourgeois 'Respectability'. Due to too much involvement in describing the way of life of the gentry, Trollope seems to have been unable or simply unwilling to devote much time to delineating the social nuances of the bourgeoisie. For this reason it would be unfair to compare Trollope to Thackeray and Dickens who were keener observers of social changes and more adept at reporting the respectable classes' quest for 'gentility'. But though Trollope's contribution to an understanding of Victorian bourgeois life cannot rank as high as his contribution with respect to the nobility and gentry, it is nevertheless quite essential to any understanding of English society in the nineteenth century. The above remarks, however, apply to Trollope's fictional works rather than to his non-fictional ones. For no one could deny the significance of Trollope's sociological essays on tradesmen of London, printed posthumously in book form under the title of London Tradesmen. In any case, and for brevity's sake, I shall restrict my discussion here to Ralph the Heir only, as it amply illustrates the matter under consideration.

Seen from a professional, and hence from a financial point of view, the bourgeois in this novel - represented by the Neefits and the Moggaes -

are beyond doubt well-do-do and 'respectable people'. But as social climbers, both the Neefits and the Moggses are portrayed as ambitious bourgeois families diving into disturbed waters. Besides, they are presented as status-conscious people whose sense of self-importance clearly stands in the way of their having anything to do with less fortunate members of their own class. "It was believed," it is reported in the book, "that Mr. Neefit would not condescend to measure a retail tradesman".<sup>67</sup> A similar situation, it may be recollected, occurs in George Eliot's Middlemarch where the Vincys are quite reluctant to mix with people who are less fortunate than themselves. Anyway, class distinctions in Ralph the Heir are dealt with as a rigid state of affairs which could hardly be changed or modified. The book reflects in many ways its author's belief in the rigidity of social gradations. According to the tenet propagated by the novel, like should marry like, and no crossing of class barriers should be permitted or tolerated. It naturally follows that if one was born into a trading section of the community, it is most advisable not to try to step out of that group; for, if one does, one is likely to meet with uncalled for rebuffs on every side. Though Trollope seems prepared to admit the existence of cases in which 'born' gentlemen had married tradesmen's daughters, he, nevertheless, is most reluctant to bring himself to perpetuate this state of affairs in most of his fiction. Apparently, Trollope was so opposed to the intermingling of classes, a thing which manifests itself clearly in his unwillingness to bring about class or cross-class marriages so often in his books. This will be rendered easy to understand by viewing the whole case of the Neefits' attempt at social climbing together with the contrast provided by the novel between the supposedly aristocratic Ralph Newton and the democratic Ontario Moggs, who represent two distinctly opposed touchstones against which the soundness and rationality of the Neefits' ambition is tested.

Like many Victorian novels dealing with class relations, Ralph the Heir

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<sup>67</sup>Anthony Trollope, Ralph the Heir (London and New York : George Routledge and Sons, 1872), p.32.

mirrors the middle classes' mania for social recognition. The bourgeoisie's quest for gentility is early stated in the book; when the author, introducing the breeches-maker Mr. Neefit, observes that :

He had but one daughter. Thinking of this, day after day, month after month, year after year, he came slowly to the conclusion that it was his duty to make his daughter a lady. He must find some gentleman who would marry her, and then would give that gentleman all his money, - knowing as he did so that the gentleman would probably never speak to him again. And to this conclusion he came with no bitterness of feeling, with no sense of disappointment that to such an end must come the exertions of his laborious and successful life. 68

Due to the writer's prejudice against the bourgeois in general, Mr. Neefit's aspiration in that direction is never materialized. The reason, it may be guessed, is because the Neefits and people of that stamp were able to acquire only the 'externals' of gentility while the 'internals', according to Trollope's ill-founded belief, were beyond their reach. As far as I can see, Ralph the Heir is a most biased presentation of bourgeois 'Gentility'. What makes the book a distorted reflection of social reality is the author's uncompromising denial of gentility to members of the community depicted, especially those who could not lay any claim to gentle birth and breeding. What the whole course of events in this novel tends to do is simply to confirm one in the belief that Trollope was arguing in support of a rigid class system. This is evidenced in the author's rounding up his book with throwing in Ralph Newton's way, and marrying him, the social equal Miss Gus Eardham in preference to the tradesman's daughter who is clearly much more likeable and engaging.

Evidently Trollope behaves as such in order to keep the genteel classes intact or as much élitist as possible. This no doubt makes Trollope's world of gentility appear more iniquitous than it had been in actual reality. For historical data do not seem to support the author's vision of a fairly rigid and closed class system. What makes the picture of class-marriages, in the present case, less convincing is Trollope's apparent shrinking from fulfilling the match between Ralph Newton and Polly Neefit

despite his awareness of the occurrence of such cross-class marriages in everyday life. As might easily be remembered, Ralph Newton gets drawn into an unfulfilled engagement with the tradesman's daughter. But because of the father's 'vulgarity' which can only be attributed to his low class origins, and because of the novelist's dislike of tradespeople in general, the marriage is never carried out to its logical end. Lying at the bottom of Trollope's antipathy to the bourgeois in this novel is not only their being intrinsically vulgar but also their lacking in those moral fibres which only gentle blood and breeding, combined together, are sure to bestow. This is highlighted by Trollope's description of Sir Thomas Underwood as the latter contemplates the much feared, though never realized, match between Ralph Newton and Miss Neefit :

He knew that Ralph was unaware of all the evil that would follow such a marriage; - relatives whose every thought and action and word would be distasteful to him; children whose mother would not be a lady, and whose blood would be polluted by an admixture so base; - and worse still, a life's companion who would be deficient in all those attributes which such a man as Ralph Newton should look for in a wife. 69

The implication of this quotation is quite obvious: a born gentleman could not do himself a worse injury than to marry a girl who is not certified to be a lady by birth and upbringing. Ralph Newton - if we are to follow the author's line of argument - would have debased himself beyond redemption if he were to follow his own inclinations and marry the tradesman's daughter. Birth, thus, is a most reliable touchstone of gentility without which a woman's, let alone a man's, attempts at 'genteel living' are tantamount to building castles in the air or rather to founding a social edifice on false substances. No matter how much indirect praise Trollope might lavish on Mr. Neefit, it remains certain that the latter's 'low birth' as well as his line of business stood in his way of gaining the genteel status he coveted, in the author's eyes at least. According to the doctrine advanced in Ralph the Heir a gentleman is born rather than made. This is implied throughout the whole novel, particularly in the following dialogue between Polly

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

Neefit and Ralph Newton :

'When a man is in Parliament, Mr. Newton, doesn't that make him a gentleman?'

'No.'

'What then?'

'Nothing on earth can make a man a gentleman. You don't understand Latin, Polly?'

'No. I hope that isn't necessary for a young woman'.

'By no means. But a poet is born, and can't be made.' 70

Before concluding our discussion of bourgeois gentility as embodied in the Neefit family, a few words should perhaps be said about the contrast provided by the novel between Polly Neefit's two rivals, Ralph Newton and Ontario Moggs. Of Ralph Newton, suffice it to add here that he represents the dream-world into which Mr. Neefit aspires to be assimilated. To the democratic Ontario Moggs, Ralph Newton embodies all the advantages that 'blood' and 'high station' could bestow. Seen through Moggs' eyes, Mr. Newton was :

a suitor whose hands were always clean, whose shirt was always white, whose words were soft and well-chosen, who carried with him none of the stain of work. 71

However, Ralph Newton's genteel status is depicted as enviable not because of the moral superiority which such a station is thought to bestow but rather because of the immense value society attached to the hereditary and acquired externals of gentility. Seen through this book, Trollope does by no means seem to underestimate the significance of those 'externals' of gentility. The author's attitude towards outward superiority in Ralph the Heir is clearly one of acceptance and acquiescence. Unlike Mrs. Gaskell in Mary Barton, for instance, he would have never discarded elegance or genteel external possessions and acquirements as 'false substances' in order to uphold manliness and industry. Trollope, no doubt, was fully aware of the side-effects those 'externals' had on self-made men in Victorian times. Of those effects, envy and a sense of social inferiority seem to have been very common among working people. This is most exemplified in Trollope's presentation of Ontario Moggs who, to follow the author's own description

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.177.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.127.

of him :

was as true as steel in his genuine love of Labour, - of Labour with a great L, - of the people with a great P, - of Trade with a great T, - of Commerce with a great C; but of himself individually, - of himself, who was a man of the people, and a tradesman, he thought very little when he compared himself to a gentleman. He could not speak as they spoke; he could not walk as they walked; he could not eat as they ate. There was a divinity about a gentleman which he envied and hated. 72

Viewed objectively, Ontario Moggs can easily be taken as a representative Trollopian character whose actions and beliefs as regards the pressing causes of his class cannot be seen as anything but a direct expression of the author's prejudiced attitude towards the ambitious section of the middle classes. What strikes one most about this character, however, is the inconsistency with which he is delineated in the book. For despite Trollope's representation of him as contemptuous of the gentry and fearful of the class of gentlemen, Mr. Moggs appears equally scornful of his work and original vocation.

According to Trollope's own stated opinion, for example, "It was his disgrace to be a boatmaker".<sup>73</sup> In my view, to portray Mr. Moggs - who is meant to

represent the industrious classes - as someone full of distaste for the 'Gospel of Work' embraced by his own class is an act of indiscretion which cannot be ascribed to anything but the author's desire to distort the labouring classes' traditions and beliefs. Moggs' professed contempt for the gentry indirectly accounts for Trollope's use of an ironical tone the motive behind which was to undermine the honesty and dedication of people of Mr. Moggs' stamp. To be sure, Anthony Trollope was no friend of the middle classes, especially of the ambitious section of those classes. Though Trollope might appear to have believed that ambition is not a bad thing in itself, he, nevertheless, could not tolerate it in persons who were not acknowledged to be of the 'genteel' strata of society. Ambition in the world the novelist portrays is a healthy sign, but only when originates in persons whom Trollope highly esteems. For this reason, the writer, quite often, would be seen sacrificing a marriage of love, particularly if it involved persons of unequal social

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.57.

standing, so that a more conventional marriage of equals might flourish and prosper.

As in Miss Mackenzie where the potential of love between the bourgeois Mr. Rubb and Miss Mackenzie seems much more stronger than that between the heroine and her cousin Mr. Ball, the potential of love in Ralph the Heir between Ralph Newton and the tradesman's daughter - Polly Neefit - is brushed aside in order to pave the way for the blossoming of a marriage of convenience between two social equals. The only conclusion that may be drawn from all this is that, as in Jane Austen, proximity of culture in Trollope's world of gentility should be the basis of all class marriages and inter-marriages. This is facilitated by the following highly significant passage from the writer's early book The Three Clerks :

There are those who boast that a gentleman must always be a gentleman; that a man, let him marry whom he will, raises or degrades his wife to the level of his own condition, and that King Cophetus could share his throne with a beggar-woman without sullyng its splendour or diminishing its glory. How a king may fare in such a condition, the author, knowing little of Kings, will not pretend to say; nor yet will he offer an opinion whether a lovely match be fatally injurious to a marquess, duke or earl; but this he will be bold to affirm, that a man from the ordinary ranks of the upper classes, who has had the nurture of a gentleman, prepares for himself a hell on earth in taking a wife from any rank much below his own - a hell on earth, and, alas! too often another hell elsewhere also. He must either leave her or loathe her. She may be endowed with all those moral virtues which should adorn all women, and which, thank God, are common to women in this country; but he will have to endure habits, manners, and ideas, which the close contiguity of married life will force upon his disgusted palate, and which must banish all love. 74

This extract from The Three Clerks highlights Trollope's own idea of genteel marriages. Besides, it depicts in full detail many of the intricate issues Trollope dealt with in his books regarding love and marriage in their relation to the concept of gentility. As is the case with Jane Austen, the importance of the idea of the gentleman - partly revealed in the above quotation - to an understanding of cross-class marriages and inter-class marriages in Trollope's novels is by no means inconsiderable. However, as the above remarks from The

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<sup>74</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Three Clerks (Oxford University Press :

Three Clerks clearly indicate, gentle nurture is the cornerstone of any class or inter-class marriages. Not only this, manners rather than morals appear to be a decisive factor in the process of selecting a life partner. Though this might be taken as a general rule applying to many of the marriages found in the author's books, there still remain some exceptions which defy pigeon-holing. Whatever critics may say, this at least is certain, that breeding in the Trollopian sense is a form of mannerism which rarely embraces the essential element of a gentleman's education, namely - morality. This kind of breeding is usually attained either through formal instruction or through regular contact with the class of ladies and gentlemen. But the attainment of refined manners, it should be noted, does not guarantee one's claim to the title of 'lady' or 'gentleman' unless one's blood is proved to be English, or one is certified to have been brought up from infancy within the pale of English nobility and gentry. Though Trollope might appear to ridicule some gentry families on the basis of their obsessive love for 'blood' and 'high birth', and though he might seem to argue that old descent is no safeguard against errors and corruptions in some individual cases, he, nevertheless, could not picture to himself a class of gentlemen that was separated from 'blood' -- the old touchstone of gentility. Trollope might indeed seem to be opposed to people known for their 'blood-worship', but this is chiefly because those people did not learn their 'high birth' doctrines properly. Here, one may maintain that the novelist's denigration of Sir Harry Hotspur's addiction to 'blood', in Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite, is not so much based on the author's objection to this form of worship as much as it is based on the fact that Sir Harry had entertained only 'a muddled theory' as regards old aristocratic blood. What Sir Harry seems to have neglected, and which the writer is anxious to emphasize, is the basic fact that, "good blood will bring no man back to honesty. The two things together, no doubt, assist in producing the highest order of self-denying men."

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<sup>75</sup>Trollope, Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite, p.197.

The reference here, needless to say, is to the accomplished blackguard George Hotspur whose polished dishonesty is not surpassed, in English fiction, by any other's. However, the austerity Trollope exhibits while delineating the theme of 'high birth' in Sir Harry Hotspur simply indicates that something went amiss with the defenders of 'blood' rather than with the theory underlying this kind of worship. The results accruing from Trollope's bluntness, with regard to 'blood' do not by any means do him honour or bring him credit for clarity of thought. The following remarks from the novel in question tend to emphasize the above conclusion :

Emily Hotspur was a girl whom any father would have trusted; and let the reader understand this of her, that she was one in whom intentional deceit was impossible. Neither to her father or to any one could she lie either in word or action. And all these lines and points of duty were well known to her, though she knew not, and had never asked herself, whence the lesson had come. Will it be too much to say, that they had formed a part of her breeding, and had been given to her with her blood? 76

Being one of those readers addressed here, I am inclined to affirm that what Trollope states is indeed a bit 'too much.' Apparently, Trollope seems to have believed that ethical tendencies are no less transmittable through blood than physical qualities. Accordingly thus, honesty, dutifulness and even the distinction between good and evil are hereditary advantages which only the well-born could use beneficially. And hence, Emily Hotspur should act in accordance with the high principles inculcated in her by virtue of the fact that she possessed gentle blood. But, as the course of events in the novel tends to show, Emily acts contrary to her naturally cultivated instincts and does herself an irreparable injury when she prefers - and eventually gets engaged to - the accomplished cad her cousin George Hotspur to the perfect gentleman Lord Alfred. Following the writer's theory of 'high birth,' Emily's actions should have been subjected to the saving quality of her gentle blood; but, as it were, her birth operates neither as a corrective nor even as an inward mentor. This means, if it means anything

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p.12.

at all, that gentle blood is no guarantee against one's making wrong judgements or fatal mistakes. In a word, the moral superiority which 'high birth' was thought to confer is a mere fallacy the motive behind exploiting which in fiction could not have been otherwise than to persuade the ordinary - or, let us say the 'low-born' - reader to accept indisputably his lot in life and come to terms with his 'other-imposed' social inferiority.

In any case, blood and breeding are almost inseparable in the world of gentility envisioned by Trollope. Nature in Trollope, it may be added, is as decisive in determining one's gentility or even moral superiority as gentle nurture. Some light is thrown on this point by the following comment on the Reverend Frank Fenwick in The Vicar of Bullhampton :

He has more of breeding in his appearance than his friend (Squire Gilmore), - a show of higher blood; though whence comes such show and how one discerns that appearance, few of us can tell. 77

Trollope's evasiveness in this passage is indeed a classic stroke of ambiguity, the motive behind which is not easy to ascertain. Elsewhere in his novels, however, the author adopts a more tactful attitude towards 'gentle blood' and its adherents; but his carefulness, while trying to encircle the myth of 'high birth' or 'good lineage' by an atmosphere of mystery and divinity, does in no way render the conclusions arrived at convincing. The clearest example of this occurs in Trollope's early book Doctor Thorne where the novelist asserts his belief in class distinctions by ironically showing that 'blood' is more reliable a marker of class barriers than merit or wealth. This is most exemplified in his comment on the defendant of 'merit', Mary Thorne, towards the end of the novel where he observes :

Nevertheless, could Miss Thorne have spoken her inward thoughts out loud, she would have declared, that Frank would have done better to have borne his poverty than marry wealth without blood. But then, there are but few so staunch as Miss Thorne... 78

<sup>77</sup> Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton, p.6.

<sup>78</sup> Trollope, Doctor Thorne, p.567.

Trollope's above remarks render his delineation of the spirit of democracy that Miss Thorne exhibits earlier in the novel void and ironic. The heroine's modified attitude towards the end of Doctor Thorne clearly indicates that the great lessons in 'blood-worship' taught by her uncle the Doctor have been carefully stored in Mary's mind. But why, it may be objected here, should Trollope marry Frank Gresham, whose love for his good lineage is beyond doubt, to the 'low-born' Mary Thorne if he cared that much about the criterion of 'high birth'? The answer is hardly necessary here, for the birth-gap between Frank and Miss Thorne is atoned for by the latter's genteel upbringing; that is, by her mixing on equal terms - at least before her expulsion from Greshamsbury - with the Squire's daughters. At the same time, in marrying Mary Thorne, whose inherited fortune from her parvenu Uncle Roger Scatcherd is likely to be of great service to him in the future, Frank Gresham may be seen to be fulfilling himself as the heir to an encumbered estate. This leads us neatly into a discussion of class marriages and intermarriages in Trollope's books and also to a detailed analysis of the role played by gentle nurture in such social transactions.

As has been stated earlier in this chapter, proximity of culture is the pivot around which many of the marriages found in the author's books seem to revolve. The degree of success which a given marriage may reach in the world Trollope pictures to himself is largely dependent on the amount of similarity - in thought and modes of behaviour - which two people share together rather than on the emotions or personal inclinations felt by two persons towards each other. This attitude, it appears, was adopted by the great majority of people in high rank, at least until the late 1870's when the creed of change permeated every aspect of English life. Lady Cantrip and Mary Palliser's argument on this subject, in The Duke's Children, amply illustrates the point just stated. Accordingly, however :

High rank might be a blessing or might be the reverse - as people thought of it; - but all men acknowledge that much was due to it. 'Noblesse Oblige'. It was often the case in life that women were called upon by circumstances to sacrifice their inclinations! What right had a gentleman to talk of marriage

who had no means? These things she (Lady Cantrip) said and very many more, but it was to no purpose. The young lady assented that as the gentleman was a gentleman there need be no question as to rank, and that in regard to money there need be no difficulty if one of them had sufficient. 79

Lady Cantrip's opinion, no doubt, was shared by not a few members of her class. However, Trollope's adopted stand from the subject in question in most of his novels is, more or less, the same as that conveyed by the tenour of the extract quoted previously from The Three Clerks. But the most extreme case which crystallizes the author's attitude is the controversial marriage of Lady Anna to the plebeian tailor, Daniel Thwaite, in Lady Anna.

Viewed in the light of the above-mentioned quotation from The Three Clerks, Lady Anna's decision to marry the old tailor's son instead of her cousin - the young Earl - appears to be the most natural result of the heroine's upbringing. Trollope's remarks on his heroine's mode of thinking on the occasion tends to confirm this conclusion. Having argued the matter with herself, Anna finds it most expedient to dismiss her mother's persuasion in favour of the young Earl :

What right had her mother to think that she could be fit to be this young lord's wife, having brought her up in the companionship of small traders in Cumberland? She never blamed her mother. She knew well that her mother had done all that was possible on her behalf. But for that small trader they would not even have had a roof to shelter them. But still there was the fact, and she understood it. She was as her bringing up had made her, and it was too late now to effect a change. 80

This passage is the key to understanding Lady Anna as a book on class relations. The novel is not as has been hitherto concluded, that is, a treatise on equality between 'high' and 'low', but rather an experimental attempt at bringing an uncouth, but honest, member of the rank-and-file into the mythically-enchanted circles of the upper strata of Victorian society. It is quite doubtful, however, whether Trollope did not have many pangs of conscience while trying to banish the 'high-born' Earl in order to install Daniel Thwaite on a high pedestal of matrimonial bliss. For it would seem

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<sup>79</sup>Trollope, The Duke's Children, I, pp. 225-26.

<sup>80</sup>Trollope, Lady Anna, p.110.

rather odd to picture Trollope slighting an aristocratic gentleman on behalf of an 'ambitious, discontented, sullen and tyrannical' tailor "with his half-knowledge, his ill-gotten and ill-digested information",<sup>81</sup> to use Trollope's own words. Doubtful, again, that Daniel Thwaite would have felt easy or comfortable in the upper echelons of society into which he is assimilated. The author's experimental venture, thus, could not have been other than that predicted by the contemporary Saturday Review which so aptly summarizes the whole issue :

Trollope knows his art too well to pretend that his tailor can talk or look or behave himself on any occasion at all like a gentleman. He has indeed shirked, which we think a little cowardly, showing us his hero in the posture and surrounding circumstances of his calling, but we see him distinctly, though the words are not written, sitting at the wedding-breakfast ill at ease on the edge of his chair, embarrassed in his new clothes, awkward and sullen. 82

If Daniel Thwaite's ungente nurture may be stated to have been detrimental to his ease of movement in the upper strata of Victorian society, Lady Anna's, too, may equally be said to have been detrimental to her feeling inclined to favour the young earl with her attention. However, breeding in its broadest sense in this novel appears to be more significant a factor in class marriages than outstanding material on social status. This should not be taken to imply that breeding is often found divorced from 'blood' or 'high birth'. The contrary, in fact, can be said to be the general rule. This might be rendered easier to understand by citing a few more examples from the novelist's other books. In Trollope's early novel, Orley Farm, for instance, Sir Peregrine Orme warns his grandchild, young Peregrine, against marrying below his rank; a word which he uses to signify a combination of gentle birth and upbringing. This is most exemplified in the following dialogue between the two persons just referred to :

'.... of course a fellow should marry well. I don't think much of marrying for money.'  
'Nor do I, Peregrine; - I think very little of it.'  
'Nor about being of very high birth.'

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.306.

<sup>82</sup> Smalley, ed., op. cit., p.388.

'Well; it would make me unhappy - very unhappy if you were to marry below your own rank.'

'What do you call my own rank?'

'I mean any girl whose father is not a gentleman, and whose mother is not a lady; and of whose education among ladies you could not feel certain.' 83

It should be pointed out here that Orley Farm occupies a fairly significant place among the novelist's writings in that it is almost the only book where 'aristocracy of talent' in the true sense is given much weight in the market of genteel marriages. Prudence in this novel is allowed to 'go by the board'; a thing that clearly manifests itself in the Staveleys' preference for the penniless Mr. Graham to the rich and equally aristocratic Peregrine Orme. To follow the writer's own remarks :

It seemed that they had all agreed that prudence should go by the board, and that love with sweet promises, and hopes as bright as young trees in spring should have it all her own way. 84

How different is all this, one may exclaim, from Jane Austen's idea of a successful marriage. One must not forget to add here that Judge Staveley's voting in favour of his daughter's decision to give herself to a penniless barrister was not motivated by his recognition of Mr. Graham's intellectual superiority only, but also by his understanding that Mr. Graham's upbringing was far superior to that of his unsuccessful rival, young Peregrine. Likewise in Can You Forgive Her? it is Alice Vavasor's father who first recognizes the superior breeding of Mr. Grey and who, at a later stage, helps to bring about the match between his daughter and Mr. Grey. Seen through Mr. Vavasor's eyes;

Mr. Grey was a man of high character, of good though moderate means, he was, too, well educated, of good birth, a gentleman and a man of talent. 85

Trollope's uncompromising attitude towards marriages of equals reaches a climax in The American Senator where the novelist, as seen through his book, would not tolerate even a gentleman-farmer to aspire to the hand of

<sup>83</sup> Trollope, Orley Farm, I, p.380.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., II, p.409.

<sup>85</sup> Trollope, Can You Forgive Her?, I, p.16.

Mary Masters - a lady by virtue of her late mother's being the daughter of a clergyman as well as of her father's belonging to a genteel profession, the *Bar.* In this novel, Mary Masters is presented as someone whose mixing 'on equal terms' with the yeoman Lawrence Twentyman was inevitable. This, naturally, gave rise to the yeoman's expectations as regards her own person. What turns the balance against Twentyman's hopes is the fact that Mary's early upbringing was managed almost solely by the aristocratic Lady Ushant; a thing which - as Trollope would have us believe - renders Miss Masters fit to be the wife only of a born and bred gentleman. This can clearly be seen to underly Mary Masters' preference for the aristocratic Reginald Morton to the gentleman-farmer, Larry Twentyman. Also, this gives emphasis to the point under discussion concerning proximity of culture, or gentle nurture in its widest sense. Trollope's comment on the second Mrs. Masters, whose antipathy to the gentry is deeply ingrained and whose mockery of Mary's genteel upbringing is almost endless, throws ample light on the issue in question. According to Trollope's presentation of her shortly after her step-daughter's success in capturing a true-born gentleman:

Mrs. Masters was quite overpowered... she had been wrong throughout and was now completely humiliated by the family success; and yet she was delighted, though she did not dare to be triumphant. She had so often asked both father and daughter what good gentlemen would do to either of them; and now the girl was engaged to marry the richest gentleman in the neighbour-hood! In any expression of joy she would be driven to confess how wrong she had always been. How often had she asked what would come to Ushanting. This it was that had come of Ushanting. The girl had been made fit to be the companion of such a one as Reginald Morton, and had now fallen into the position which was suited to her. 86

Apparently, Mary's gentle upbringing was a sure guarantee of her finding her proper station in life. Now, it becomes necessary for us to elaborate the question of manners; considering the important place they occupy in Trollope's 'Concept of Gentility', particularly the aspect concerning 'gentle nurture'. As Lionel Trilling has once put it, manners are "that part of a

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<sup>86</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The American Senator* (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1962), p.495.

culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable  
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 expressions of values." More simply, manners are more or less those outward manifestations of one's adopted code of values; that is, those observable or even implied forms of behaviour which distinguish one class or group of people from another. Furthermore, and as Doctor Wortle is reported to have said, "a man cannot isolate the morals, the manners, the ways of his life from the morals of others. Men, if they live together, must live together  
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 by certain laws." What the Doctor meant by those "laws" is not so easy to ascertain; yet, some light might be thrown on the issue in question by introducing Trollope's own remarks on Mr. Vavasor, in Can You Forgive Her? who :

was liberal as far as his means would permit; he was a man of his word; and he understood well that code of by-laws which was presumed to constitute the character of a gentleman in his circle. He knew how to carry himself well among men, and understood thoroughly what might be said, and what might not; what might be done among those with whom he lived, and what should be left undone. 89

What the passage just quoted tends to show is the fact that Trollope was more concerned with the manners of the gentleman than with the manners of the age he seems to have portrayed. Hence, the writer's standards and values can simply be said to have been those of the gentry whose way of life is always given some prominence in his books. This explains his anxiety to defend and protect the interests of the class of ladies and gentlemen even if it were at the expense of members of other social groups, particularly those whose interests came into direct conflict with those of the genteel layers of Victorian society. It should be remarked in passing that such apparent bias on Trollope's part emphatically places him among the class of writers whose objective view of social reality is seen to suffer from the

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<sup>87</sup> Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (Harmondsworth : Peregrine Books, 1970), p.209. .

<sup>88</sup> Anthony Trollope, Dr. Wortle's School (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1928), p.90.

<sup>89</sup> Trollope, Can You Forgive Her?, I, p.5.

intrusion of subjective moods. Put another way, the author's presentation of Victorian society is by no means as truthful as is generally agreed. However, this should not be taken to mean that the portrait drawn is unreal or distorted out of proportion, for it is hardly possible to find a Victorian writer whose art was not chiefly motivated by a personal desire to preach and instruct. No matter how hard a writer tried to appear disinterested or unconcerned about what he was depicting there always came a time when he could no longer refrain from offering the reader what he believed to be the right opinion on the issue discussed. Trollope himself was the least inclined among Victorian authors to defend his art against having some pre-conceived objectives in view. As is clearly stated in the Autobiography :

The writer of stories must please, or he will be nothing. And he must teach whether he wish to teach or no... the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own system of ethics.<sup>90</sup>

As a writer of stories, Trollope did undoubtedly have his own system of ethics. That the morals of the gentleman were what he tried to preach through his novels, few of us are willing to deny. Viewed in the light of his writings, Trollope seems to have followed a class system of values rather than a moral one. His system, therefore, is far from being what we would normally understand by the term. It is quite unique in the sense that it emphasizes the manner in which something is done rather than the moral underlying the action itself; that is to say, it is characterized by conformity to the ways of living of a certain class and not to the generally accepted roles of moral conduct. Thus, conscience in the world portrayed by Trollope becomes a misused, if not an utterly misleading, term. Plenty of evidence can be produced from the writer's books which tends to emphasize this conclusion. For clarification's sake, let us first consider the case of Fred Neville in An Eye for an Eye.

In this novel, it may be recalled, a Catholic girl, Kate O'Hara, is irreparably misused by a supposedly English gentleman. Rather than make

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<sup>90</sup>Trollope, An Autobiography, 222.

as regards to the girl he ill-treats, Fred Neville, the English gentleman, lets his conscience 'go by the board' and follows instead the dictates of his own class morality. Deeming it his highest duty to his family and country to preserve his high rank uncontaminated by the blood of a 'low-born' girl, and being the expected heir to a hereditary title, Fred Neville acts in opposition to the dictates of his moral faculty but in accordance with the class morality inculcated in him by the so-called gentlemanly system. Reflecting on his hero's state of mind - on the occasion of Fred's confrontation with Kate O'Hara's mother - Trollope, through the narrator, carefully points out :

Moralists might tell him that let the girl's parentage be what it might, he ought to marry her; but he was stopped from that, not only by his oath, but by a conviction that his highest duty required him to preserve his family from degradation. 91

Surprisingly in this book, though Fred Neville's class-oriented actions clearly conflicted with his humane feelings towards his fellow beings, not a word of condemnation or disapproval seems to have escaped from the writer's pen. It looks as though gentility and notions of duty to one's family and class in the Victorian age were not incompatible with laxity in private and public behaviour. This alone is good enough a reason to dismiss the gentlemanly system as a most iniquitous social institution. Equally justifiable is one's dismissal of the defenders of the gentleman's morality as fairly biased critics. It might be well to maintain that "an unwritten moral code governs the gentleman's conduct towards others", but it is improper and contrary to common sense to argue that; "This code consists basically of Christian morality"<sup>92</sup> - as a Trollopiian scholar seems to have done. As far as I can see, Fred Neville's conduct in An Eye for an Eye can barely be related to Christian morality in the true sense. For his behaviour is solely the product of a class system of ethics which tolerated not only sexual licence but also many kinds of exploitation and government corruption.

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<sup>91</sup>Anthony Trollope, An Eye for an Eye (London : Chapman and Hall, 1879), p.217.

<sup>92</sup>James Bryant Shrewsbury, Trollope's Concept of a Gentleman (Ph. D. thesis : The Ohio State University, 1954), p.73.

However, Fred Neville's behaviour is not the only case in point. Another example from the author's books, might, perhaps, help to ascertain this point as well as to prove Trollope's biased portrayal of 'Gentility'.

Trollope's prejudice in favour of the gentlemanly code of values appears nowhere more clearly than in Miss Mackenzie. This manifests itself in more than one way, particularly in the novelist's vulgarization of the tradesman's manners. Trollope acts as such in order to promote the criteria of blood and breeding to the highest point possible. Not only this, there is a sustained effort on Trollope's part in this novel to bring his heroine round to reject her own rationalized theory on the insignificance of social gradations and, at the same time, to come to terms with the fact of her being a lady entitled by birth to look for a husband only in the highest strata of her society. The implication of this is quite apparent in the author's remarks on Miss Mackenzie's state of mind after Mr. Rubb's departure on some occasion.<sup>93</sup> What should be kept in mind here is the fact that what Trollope aims to achieve in Miss Mackenzie is no less than reminding Victorian ladies and gentlemen to act in keeping with the genteel code of behaviour laid down by members of their own class. A careful reading of this book is sure to lead to the one inevitable conclusion that class morality, rather than Christian principles, is what ought to direct members of the upper classes' conduct and decisions on crucial issues. The last word here should perhaps go to Miss Elizabeth Locke who so aptly summarizes the argument; thus, while Margaret

may deplore that which is superficial, she herself is guided in conscience and in conduct by the principles which constitute 'being a lady'. She cannot marry Mr. Rubb, whom she truly likes, because of 'his vulgarities' and his 'little pushing ways', because he is not a gentleman. 94

Now, it behoves us to pursue the question of manners in Trollope's books down to a definite conclusion. By definite here I do not by any

<sup>93</sup>Trollope, Miss Mackenzie, I, p.62.

<sup>94</sup>Locke, op. cit., p.142.

means imply that there is a predictable pattern or system of manners which Trollope upholds or follows consistently in his writings. However, as in Jane Austen's, manners in Trollope's novels constitute the cornerstone of gentility. Similarly again, Trollope looks up to aristocratic culture as the repository of all that might be considered 'delicate' and 'refined'. It is worthwhile remarking here that in the 1870's the aristocratic culture which Trollope seems to have embraced looks as though it were starting to crumble down in the face of a social influx from below. People from the lower strata of society, it seems, were able by then to boast of possessing as refined and easy manners as 'born' and 'bred' aristocrats. And manners, as a line of demarcation between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, could be seen to have lost much of their social value and strength. Thus, the 1870's may easily be stated to have marked a turning point in the novelist's attitude towards manners as a reliable index to one's gentility. In any case, this should not be taken to mean that the intermingling of classes became much easier than in earlier decades. Conversely, the aristocracy during the period in question, according to evidence given by Trollope's novels, was more anxious than ever before to defend its frontier and hereditary privileges. It should not be understood from this, however, that delicacy of feeling and refined manners were in past decades the monopoly of aristocrats, or even that born ladies and gentlemen did always have refined manners. This is amply illustrated by the following comment from He Knew He Was Right :

When Nora Rowley made those comparisons between Mr. Hugh Stanbury and Mr. Charles Glascock, they were always wound up very much in favour of the briefless barrister. It was not that he was the handsomer man, for he was by no means handsome, nor was he the bigger man, for Mr. Glascock was six feet tall; nor was he better dressed, for Stanbury was untidy rather than otherwise in his outward person. Nor had he any air of fashion or special grace to recommend him, for he was undoubtedly an awkward-mannered man.<sup>95</sup>

Here, one cannot help suspecting that Trollope's sympathetic delineation of the 'awkward-mannered' Hugh Stanbury was motivated by the fact that he was

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<sup>95</sup>Anthony Trollope, He Knew He Was Right (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1978), p.35.

defending a personal case centred upon the fictitious character of Mr. Stanbury; who, not unlike his creator, was not only a self-made gentleman but also someone who adopted the profession of literature after having given up the law profession. Trollope's leniency towards the 'awkward-mannered man' is quite understandable. Yet the novelist would not tolerate this lack of breeding in a gentleman of a different cast of mind. The most obvious case in this respect is the author's satirical treatment of the landed gentleman Mr. Spooner in Phineas Redux.

What the case of Mr. Spooner tends to confirm is the fact that manners in the world Trollope portrayed came first and foremost in any considerations of class and inter-class marriages. Here we are presented with a member of the gentry who would have been a perfect gentleman but for his uncouth manners. The key to the secret of Mr. Spooner's failure in love and marriage is, needless to say, his somehow defective gentle breeding. Trollope's following remarks on Miss Adelaide Palliser's preference for the Irish Gerard Maule provide sufficient proof of the point under discussion :

Why she should thus despise Mr. Spooner, while in her heart of hearts she loved Gerard Maule, it would be difficult to explain. It was not simply an affair of age, - nor of good looks, nor altogether of education. Gerard Maule was by no means wonderfully erudite. They were both addicted to hunting. Neither of them did anything useful. In that respect Mr. Spooner stood the higher, as he managed his own property successfully. But Gerard Maule so wore his clothes, and so carried his limbs, and so pronounced his words that he was to be regarded as one entitled to make love to any lady; whereas poor Mr. Spooner was not justified in proposing to marry any woman much more gifted than his own housemaid. Such, at least, were Adelaide Palliser's ideas. 96

And such were, one might add, Anthony Trollope's own grounds of discrimination between the two rivals. Despite the author's efforts to detach himself from the situation portrayed; he, nevertheless, appears to have shared his characters' slighting attitude towards the person in question. However, to argue that Trollope was able to tell us about his characters' minds without sharing some of their thoughts on the subject is tantamount to misleading oneself by illusions.

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<sup>96</sup> Trollope, Phineas Redux, I, pp. 203-204.

On the other hand, Trollope's bias in favour of the pleasant-mannered, but almost penniless Irish gentleman Gerard Maule can easily be traced to some subjective or personal motives. In the person of Mr. Maule and gentlemen of this stamp, the novelist appears to have reflected an image of himself while still struggling out of his own poverty. For Gerard Maule may tolerably be said to be a projection of the writer's mentality. Often enough in the novelist's books, one comes across a situation where a young lady finds herself in the position of selecting one out of two contrasted men. Remarkably, the choice is almost always made in favour of the less fortunate, but supposedly more gifted, gentleman. It would hardly be an exaggeration to assert that Trollope was trying to relive in those chosen gentlemen the trials of his own initial poverty and his subsequent reward. Several 'gentlemen' in the writer's novels, who experienced such a fate help to illustrate the point : for example, the penniless Mr. Graham who is contrasted with young Peregrine Orme in Orley Farm; Hugh Stanbury who is contrasted with Charles Glascock in He Knew He Was Right; Paul Montague who is contrasted with no less than Roger Carbury in The Way We Live Now. Of the few separate cases where no contrast is provided one may mention here Charley Tudor in The Three Clerks, Frank Gresham in Doctor Thorne, Frank Tregear in The Duke's Children, and last but not least Phineas Finn in the political series. The only example who stands in opposition to this recurring pattern is Johnny Eames in the Barsetshire novels who despite his affinity to the author himself is left out in the marriage market. Most probably this is because of his crude and raw manners when the stubborn Lily Dale makes her final choice in favour of the well-mannered Crosbie.

Having mentioned Phineas Finn in the list of not unfavourably painted gentlemen, I deem it necessary to comment at this point on this character's gentlemanly traits. That Phineas is meant to be taken as a gentleman, inwardly and outwardly, few of us can doubt. Even characters in the books where he figures out are inclined to admit Phineas's superiority and to acknowledge his claim to be ranked among the highest public servants of

his country. Nevertheless, class distinctions, as far as his early attempts at love and marriage go, prove to be too much for his sensitive nature. Phineas, it may be remembered, fails to make any significant impact on either Lady Laura Standish or Miss Violet Effingham. This, of course, has got nothing to do with Phineas' manners; for, according to Violet Effingham's own admission :

His manners are perfect; - not Chesterfieldian, and yet never offensive. He never browbeats any one, and never toadies any one. He knows how to live easily with men of all ranks, without any appearance of claiming a special status for himself. 97

As Phineas's manners do not appear to be what lies behind his failure to be connected, through marriage, with either Lady Laura Standish or Miss Effingham, other causes must be looked into here. To highlight the issue posed here it may be stated that the difficulties faced by Phineas while trying to gain admission into the charmed circles of 'high society' are almost identical with those faced by Trollope himself at a certain stage. Both seem to have been confronted with social barriers which proved to be more difficult to overcome than it appeared to them at first. Despite their society's recognition of their merit, their 'dubious' origins appear to have stood in their way of achieving the aristocratic alliance they were seeking. To restrict the discussion to our fictional hero only, one could maintain that despite his proved old ancestry, Lady Laura, together with a few others in the same book still express their doubts as regards his 'birth'. The situation, however, is worsened by the addition of Phineas' shortage of funds or lack of fortune; a thing which almost gave our fictional hero the name of an adventurer. These two reasons are undoubtedly what lay at the bottom of Phineas' rejection by the two ladies mentioned above. The conclusion one is likely to reach here, after of course taking into full account what has just been stated, is that to be fully accepted by the upper strata of Victorian society one ought to possess - more or less - the four essential elements which constitute the character of an English gentleman;

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<sup>97</sup>Anthony Trollope, Phineas Finn (Oxford University Press : The Crown Edition, 1949), I, p.253.

that is, birth, breeding, money and position. Theoretically speaking, it should be added here, a man could do without one or two of those intimately correlated elements and could, perhaps, succeed in convincing others of his own genteel status.

It remains to discuss now the question of the claim to gentility of the clergy in general in Trollope's books. According to the novelist's explicitly stated opinions on the Anglican Church, 'a man does not live by bread alone'; and hence a clergyman of the Church of England is expected to put aside his role as a priest occasionally and to partake of the innocent pleasures of the earth :

The man who won't drink his glass of wine, and talk of his college, and put off for a few happy hours the sacred stiffness of the profession and become simply an English gentleman, he is the clergyman whom in his heart the archdeacon does not love. 98

This 'man' is also the clergyman of whom Trollope, too, does not think highly. Viewed from the author's own perspective, a member of the Church of England is a gentleman first and a preacher next. The parson whom Trollope loved most, moreover, "was almost necessarily a man who had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge"; that is, "a man who had lived on equal terms with the highest of the land in point of birth."<sup>99</sup> This somehow explains the close alliance in the author's books between 'clergy' and 'squirearchy', between religious and secular power. In a way, Trollope is very similar to his contemporary Matthew Arnold, to whom the idea of separating 'Church' from 'State' was unpalatable and disagreeably anarchistic.

Generally speaking, Trollope's attitude towards clergymen of the Church of England is aristocratically genteel. It follows, then, that our present author's approved kind of clergyman is the 'gentlemanly' type that flourished mainly in Victorian rural parishes - as opposed to the supposedly 'ungentlemanly' type whose members were increasingly recruited from the fast-growing cities of Victorian England. Also, the writer's attitude is typically

<sup>98</sup>Anthony Trollope, Clergymen of the Church of England (Leicester University Press, 1974), p.48.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, p.59.

Aristocratic in the sense that it emphasizes the decorous aspect of a clergyman's character rather than the religious or doctrinal one. This is not to say that the clergymen depicted in Trollope's novels are lacking in a moral or religious sense or are completely inclined towards only what is secular or mundane. Trollope's approved clergymen, in other words, are more concerned with worldly affairs than with matters of Christian faith. Even his most saintly clergyman, Mr. Harding, is not excepted from this concern with earthly matters, or what might be described as an involvement with etiquette and decorum in the widest sense. This is partly evidenced in his remarks to his daughter, Eleanor, regarding the town-bred Mr. Slope.:

'It would be very wicked of me to speak evil of him, for to tell the truth I know no evil of him; but I am not quite sure that he is honest. That he is not gentlemanlike in his manners, of that I am quite sure.' 100

It is not insignificant that the first thing which Mr. Harding noticed about Slope was the latter's ungentlemanly manners. This shows, if it shows anything at all, that refined manners were a major constituent part of a clergyman's character. Trollope himself seems to concur with this view. "Could Mr. Slope have adapted his manners to men as well as to women", remarks the writer, "could he ever have learnt the ways of a gentleman, he <sup>101</sup> might have risen to great things." I have underlined the last phrase simply because it seems to indicate Trollope's obsessive hankering after worldly success. It need hardly be said that Trollope was quite obsessed with rising in the world, but to apply the criterion of worldly success to those who were supposed to be the moral guardians of society, as he did, can only be viewed as a failure of imagination. This is not to suggest that the writer, while delineating a predominantly mundane idea of clerical gentility, was merely projecting a wished-for sort of reality; rather, what I am trying to show is that Trollope often gets carried away by his own desire to rise socially to the extent of measuring the worth of his fictitious clergymen by the degree of genteel status they are capable of realizing

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<sup>100</sup> Trollope, Barchester Towers, p.109.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.56.

instead of by the principles underlying their characters as Christians.

It is almost always status-consciousness that motivates Trollope's dwelling so lovingly on his socially successful clergymen and, at the same time, so critically and satirically on whomever he considers to be a social failure. This is partly illustrated by the author's own comment on the Bishop's character in Dr. Wortle's School. Thus, according to Trollope's presentation, the Bishop "had taught himself to be courteous and urbane, because he had been clever enough to see that courtesy and urbanity are agreeable to men in high places."<sup>102</sup>

However, in Trollope's delineations of clergymen of the Church of England the supremacy of manners as a criterion of gentility is reaffirmed. Mannerism in the present sense, it should be added, embraces an amalgam of purely English characteristics and prejudices. Of course, this does not exclude the brand of 'hypocrisy' for which the Victorians were distinguished and which, no doubt, underlies Trollope's idea of the clergyman as a man of breeding. Some light is thrown on this point by the writer's own observation :

It almost seems that something approaching to hypocrisy were a necessary component part of the character of the English parish parson, and yet he is a man always on the alert to be honest. It is his misfortune that he must preach higher than his own practice, and that he is driven to pretend to think that a stricter course of life is necessary than that which he would desire to see followed out even in his own family. <sup>103</sup>

It is inconceivable that Trollope should refer the clergy's defective practices to misfortune or pure chance. Still, one wonders whether he was quite aware of the contradiction inherent in the above observation. For, to be honest and, at the same time, hypocritical are things which strike one as something which only a prejudiced being would willingly accept as normal. The two things are as irreconcilable as principle and expediency; and, hence, it would seem contrary to common sense to figure to oneself a truly moral preacher who would tolerate being driven to act in opposition

<sup>102</sup> Trollope, Dr. Wortle's School, p.113.

<sup>103</sup> Trollope, Clergymen of the Church of England, p.63.

to what he strongly upholds and respects. But then, again, it might be true that the English in Victorian times were little prone 'to admit the light of reason' into their public or private life -- as Mr. Cotobed is inclined to think in The American Senator. Most likely, the English clergy, influenced by the nobility and gentry and anxious not to offend those classes upon whose patronage and benevolence they were dependent, did not have in those days any other choice but to compromise their Christian ideals and principles. As Bulwer-Lytton has once put it :

The influence of the higher classes upon religion is frequently pernicious in this -- the livings of the Church are chiefly the property of the Aristocracy; and the patron of a benefice naturally and pardonably, perhaps, bestows it, in general, on his relations or intimate acquaintances. Thus the preaching of salvation really becomes a family office, and the wildest rakes of a college are often especially devoted to the hereditary care of souls.<sup>104</sup>

So far little has been said about the clergy's place in the tradition of gentility. For that matter, and according to the picture presented by Trollope of Victorian ecclesiastics, a clergyman's claim to the title of 'gentleman' was more secured on account of his education than on that of his profession. Put more simply, a clergyman's claim to gentility on account of his profession was not as safe as it was on account of his possessing the 'Liberal' outlook which the education of a gentleman was thought to confer. Viewed from Trollope's own perspective, nothing was more likely to remove a clergyman furthest from gentility than adhering literally to Christian dogmas or simply being a zealous religious fanatic. Josiah Crawley's case in The Last Chronicle of Barset excepted, this applies to many of the cases found in the novelist's books. In fact, here lies the secret behind Trollope's withholding the title of 'gentleman' from the over-pious clergyman Mr. Prong in Rachel Ray; and this, too, is what underlies the writer's cynical attitude towards Mr. Saul -- 'that most offensive of all animals, a clerical prig' -- to use Sir Hugh Clavering's own words in The Claverings.

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<sup>104</sup> Bulwer-Lytton, op. cit., I, p.306.

The clerical gentleman envisioned by Trollope, thus, is one whose mind is amply preoccupied with courtesy and decorum rather than with piety and matters of faith. The outward and visible signs of a clergyman's character, it appears, were given more credit than his inward or spiritual qualities. That Trollope's presentation of the clergy in Victorian times was subject to all the aristocratic conventions which made it necessary for a clergyman to be decorous and gentlemanly in his habits few of us can doubt. Tracing the sources of greatness which enabled the clergyman, Mr. Gilmore in The Vicar of Bullhampton, Trollope observes, though not without a touch of irony, that :

With Mr. Chamberlaine ... it came from the whiteness of his hand, and from a certain knack he had of looking as though he could say a great deal, though it suited him better to be silent, and say nothing. Of outside deportment, no doubt, he was a master. 105

Ironically again, as reported by the writer, Mr. Chamberlaine was only a prebendary; and, besides, had absolutely never done anything useful in the whole course of his life. However, the actual case born out by the evidence of Trollope's books is that a clergyman of the Church of England did necessarily share landed gentry families' prejudices and pursuits. A true clergyman's ways in life in the Victorian or even pre-Victorian era were more or less those of the country gentry. His behaviour in society, thus, was almost always in conformity with the traditionally accepted roles of 'genteel' conduct. Occasionally, the line of distinction between the clergy and the Squirearchy - as two distinctly separate social groups - used to get blunted; as, for instance, when a clergyman happened to be a gentleman by virtue of his family status in the country. This occurred whenever a clergyman was known to be a member of a gentry family. Our best example of this case can be found in Trollope's book The Claverings where it is clearly stated that :

There is a class of country clergymen in England, of whom Mr. Clavering was one, and his son-in-law, Mr. Fielding, another, which is so closely allied to the squirearchy as to possess a double identity. Such clergymen are not only clergymen, but they

are country gentlemen also. Mr. Clavering regarded clergymen of his class - of the country-gentleman class - as being distinct from all others, - and as being, I may say, very higher than all others, without reference to any money question. 106

To render the picture of the English clergy in Victorian times more complete, one needs only to recite Trollope's own remarks on the parish parson. As described by the novelist :

He is generally a man imbued with strong prejudice, thinking ill of all countries and religions but his own; but in spite of his prejudices he is liberal, and though he thinks ill of men, he would not punish them for the ill he thinks. He has something of bigotry in his heart, and would probably be willing ... to make all men members of the Church of England by Act of Parliament; but though he is a bigot, he is not a fanatic ... he loves his religion and wages an honest fight with the devil; but even with the devil he likes to deal courteously, and is not averse to some occasional truces. He is quite in earnest, but he dislikes zeal; and of all men whom he hates, the over-pious young curate, who will never allow ginger to be hot in the mouth, is the man whom he hates the most. 107

This passage, in my view, is essential to an understanding of the Anglican Clergymen in Victorian times. For the parson described here seems too human to be otherwise. What strikes one most about Trollope's picture of the 'parson' is his dislike of creeds other than his own, or what might be described as his bigotry in favour of his own Church. This prejudice, supported by the evidence of the Victorian novel in general, he seems to have shared with most, if not all, of landed gentry families in Victorian and pre-Victorian days. By stressing this point, however, I do not mean to suggest that the gentry in those times were devout churchmen. Plenty of evidence may, in fact, be produced from Victorian novels which could lead to a contrary conclusion. The Church was only one among many factors which helped to link the clergy and the squirearchy by a sympathetic tie. "Normally, Squire and parson", as G.E. Mingay has pointed out, "presented a united front against the propertyless classes in the pursuit of shared objectives ... (though) at first the parson was very much subordinate to the squire."<sup>108</sup> Among the other factors which can also be seen to have

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<sup>106</sup> Trollope, *The Claverings*, p.351.

<sup>107</sup> Trollope, *Clergymen of the Church of England*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>108</sup> Mingay, *The Gentry*, p.38.

brought those social groups together, 'deference' appears to be most important. This is quite implied in the writer's following comment on Dean Lovelace in Is He Popenjoy? :

.... the Dean's manners were perfect. He never trod on any one's toes. He was rich, and, as far as birth went, nobody - but he knew how much was due to the rank of the Germaines. 109

Before concluding this section on clerical gentility in Trollope's writings, two important facts must be noted. First of all, the ideal clergyman whom the writer seems to revere is by no means logical, though he might be said to be fairly intellectual and also to have acquired a substantial amount of 'gentle culture' at one of the old universities. Secondly, he is a man guided in most of his actions by traditions and prejudices despite his possession of an acutely sensitive and questioning conscience. Alternatively, he is a gentleman first and a Christian next. Exceptions to this deduction or general role do in fact exist - Septimus Harding and Josiah Crawley are useful examples here - but the existence of such saintly figures does in no way invalidate the 'gentlemanly tradition' of the Church profession followed by the present author. Trollope himself, significantly, often seems to instil the idea of clerical gentility in his readers' minds. For to him the idea of the existence of a clergy that was severed from 'gentility' did not have any appeal whatsoever. In Rachel Ray, to give only one example, special emphasis is placed on the notion of gentility as far as the Church was concerned. This is facilitated by the following authorial comment from the book just referred to :

It is not the owner of a good coat that sees and admires its beauty. It is not even they who have good coats themselves who recognize the article on the back of another. They who have not good coats themselves have the keenest eyes for the coats of their better-clad neighbours. As it is with coats, so it is with that which we call gentility. It is caught at a word; it is seen at a glance, it is appreciated unconsciously at a touch by those who have none of it themselves. It is the greatest of all aids to the doctor, the lawyer, the member of Parliament ... and to the statesman, but to the clergyman it is a vital necessity. 110

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<sup>109</sup>Anthony Tröolope, Is He Popenjoy? (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1948), p.9.

<sup>110</sup>Trollope, Rachel Ray, p.78.

By gentility here it is doubtful whether Trollope meant anything other than those outward traits by which a well bred gentleman might be recognized. Of these characteristics, urbanity, geniality, and propriety of conduct occupy a significant place in the concept in question. Such extrinsic merits are, no doubt, direct results of a clergyman's 'high birth' or 'education', or both factors together. All the novelist's approved clergymen are either gentlemen by birth or persons who were educated at Oxford or Cambridge. At this final stage of my study of Trollope's concept of gentility, I feel strongly constrained to express my opposition to Trollopiian critics who try to mystify the issue of Josiah Crawley's undoubted gentility in The Last Chronicle of Barset. For no reason that I am aware of, critics tend to go to the extreme of showing their despair of being able to understand Mr. Crawley's character. Not only this, some scholars have gone so far as to interpret Crawley's renunciation of 'the social amenities' <sup>111</sup> "as a half-conscious repudiation of gentlemanliness itself". In my view, nothing could be more injurious to an understanding of the 'perpetual curate of Hoggstock' than an assertion of this kind. Josiah Crawley is indeed a rather complex character but his complexity is by no means difficult to understand. It simply arises from his unfulfilled gentility rather than from a lack of it. The curate himself is fully aware of this, let alone the other characters in the same novel. As is clearly stated in The Last Chronicle of Barset :

It was undoubtedly the fact that Mr. Crawley was recognized to be a gentleman by all who knew him, high or low, rich or poor, by those who thought well of him and by those who thought ill .... Nobody doubted it; not even they who thought he had stolen the money. Mr. Roberts himself was certain of it, and told himself that he knew it by evidences which his own education made clear to him. <sup>112</sup>

Briefly speaking, Josiah Crawley's dilemma consists in the fact that he has not got the means to support his own acknowledged 'gentility'. To appreciate

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<sup>111</sup> Shrewsbury, op. cit., p.320.

<sup>112</sup> Anthony Trollope, The Last Chronicle of Barset (Oxford University Press : World's Classics, 1967), I, pp. 208-209.

the curate's problem fully one ought to bear in mind the great demands made by Victorian society on the individual particularly if he had a certain social role to fulfil, or simply a title to support. The tenour of the whole course of events in The Last Chronicle of Barset is quite simple : a man's status as a gentleman requires a good deal of money to safeguard; it follows that money is an essential requirement of gentility. No matter how indifferent a gentleman might be to money matters, there always comes a time when this indifference could be of no avail. In other words, there is a limit to everything beyond which a man - be he high or low, rich or poor - cannot go. For the debasing effect of poverty is acutely felt by all men, especially by those whose station in life requires substantial means to protect. The story woven around the genteel, but poverty-stricken, Josiah Crawley is summed up - by no other than Trollope himself - in the following terms :

None but they who have themselves been poor gentry, - gentry so poor as not to know how to raise a shilling, - can understand the peculiar bitterness of the trials which such poverty produces. The poverty of the normal poor does not approach it; or, rather, the pangs arising from such poverty are altogether of a different sort. 113

However, to say that Josiah Crawley is a victim of ecclesiastical injustice is to beg the question. What the story of the 'Perpetual curate of Hoggstock' tends to confirm is the interconnection between wealth and station, between the need to earn a living and the desire to keep up appearances. For the Reverend Josiah Crawley was too status-conscious to be able to bear the burden of his poverty without moaning and groaning or feeling so debased. I am rather inclined to agree with R.C. Terry here as he asserts that :  
 "It is as if Trollope must relive in the Crawley situation the horrors of  
 114  
 his own family's genteel poverty." To be sure, The Last Chronicle of Barset is full of autobiographical echoes. The novel, thus, is a good

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., I, p.91.

<sup>114</sup>Terry, op. cit., p.227.

proof of the fact that any attempt to separate an author's personal life from that of the characters he delineates is certain to lead to some misconception of the writer himself, not to mention his fictional creations. And any study that does not take into full account the author's social, political and economic background remains imperfect.

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## ABSTRACT

YAHIA FADEL : The Concept of Gentility in the Victorian Novel

In my examination of the Concept of Gentility in the Victorian Novel, I do not claim to give an exhaustive literary critique of the novelists' books from the viewpoint of 'Gentility'. This study, however, is no less concerned with Victorian authors' personal involvement in the concept of gentility than with the gentility of the characters portrayed in their books. In considering Victorian novelists' delineation of the 'Gentleman' in their novels, I have taken into full consideration each novelist's family background, his education, his social, economic, or even his religious status. One of the fruitful vantage points of understanding the idea of the gentleman in the English novel - and especially in the Victorian novel - is, in fact, the conflict between the seemingly easy escape from the class of one's birth and the endless rebuffs as one made this attempt. English writers, again the Victorians in particular, can easily be said to have shared in a specific gentility-consciousness, the key to which is the sense of intrasigence in the terms of the opposition between the inner personal and subjective and the outer public and objective. A novelist, for instance, might declare himself the enemy of snobs, and yet be a real snob himself. In any case, my objective, behind juxtaposing Victorian authors' own characters with some of the characters found in their books is to throw ample light on the class identity of the 'genteel' people portrayed, and hence to reach a fuller understanding of the novelists' own quest for genteel status. I also aim in this study to show the writers' own understanding of 'Gentility', and the various attempts they made at reconciling leisure and industry, blood and money, gentility or respectability and vulgarity, humanitarianism and individualism, and even Anglicanism and Dissent. This task is accomplished through a depiction of the most relevant events and relationships that bear upon the Concept of Gentility - portrayed in the novelists' books.