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Protecting the “House Beautiful”: Eco-Consciousness in the Victorian Novel

A Dissertation Presented

by

Margaret Susan Kennedy

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Protecting the “House Beautiful”: Eco-Consciousness in the Victorian Novel by
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This dissertation discusses how literary writers of the Victorian age render toxicity and toxic behaviors visible in order to encourage reform, as well as offering models of healthy environmental engagement. This literary trend reveals what I call a rising eco-consciousness, the awareness of our relationship to the environment and the exchanges between human and nonhuman. This project emphasizes the novel, which offers a rich ground of inquiry by looking at a set of characters interacting with a space over time; in other words, it focuses on how authors mapped a complete ecology into their fiction, participating in a genre that I call “natural realism.” Literary responses to pressing ecological problems, particularly air and water pollution and deforestation, function as discursive activism, texts that seek to challenge dominant social discourse by exposing flawed assumptions or representing reality in order to rewrite the norms and practices of society. Reform may be realized through networks of communication, and I argue here that the Victorian realist novel participates in discursive activism through its use of eco-conscious discourse. The chapters in this dissertation identify four related discourses that either diagnose environmental ills or posit sustainable ways of living: 1) miasmatic discourse that employs the recognizable language of miasma theory to expose both visible and invisible environmental hazards; 2) dis-ease discourse that demonstrates the importance of healthy, green environments to mental health; 3) stewardship discourse that promotes responsible care of the environment in service of the community; and 4) kinship discourse that argues for equality between the human and nonhuman. Spanning novels from the 1840s to the 1890s, this dissertation traces Victorian eco-consciousness throughout the period, demonstrating an earlier awareness of ecological problems than is usually credited to the period and the important role of Victorian novelists in setting the stage for organized environmentalism by century’s end. While not all the novelists considered here actively campaigned for the environment outside of their literary work, these authors are none the less “prophets of nature”: those who protest the rash assault on the “House Beautiful,” the environment.

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Introduction: Prophets of Nature

In an age when science has undertaken to declaim against the soul and spiritual nature of man, and when commerce is ruining beautiful rivers and magnificent woodlands and glorious skies in its greed for gain, the artist comes forward as a priest and prophet of nature to protest, and even to work against the prostitution or perversion of what is lofty and noble in humanity and beautiful in the physical world, and his religion in its benefits to mankind is as broad and shining as the sun.

Oscar Wilde, "The House Beautiful"

I. Claims and Rationale

Although primarily a lecture on the decorative arts, Oscar Wilde's "The House Beautiful" (1882) ends with a reflection on the artist's duty to the environment. Wilde's remarks encapsulate the gain and loss of Victorian industry, which ransacks the environment to accommodate technological forces and to fuel commerce. He laments the perversion of both the physical world and the soul, identifying the three most pressing ecological problems of the age: water pollution, deforestation, and air pollution. He urges the artist to come forward to protect the physical world as a "prophet of nature." This dissertation discusses how literary writers of the age render toxicity and toxic behaviors visible in order to encourage reform, as well as offering models of healthy environmental engagement. This literary trend reveals a rising eco-consciousness, defined as an ecological sensibility: literally, the awareness of our relationship to the environment and the exchanges between human and nonhuman. The prefix "eco" points to ecology, the scientific study of organisms and their interactions with the environment. "Consciousness" points to awareness, and, more specifically, an internal knowledge. Eco-consciousness is the internalization of ecological knowledge, made possible through keen vision, what George Perkins Marsh famously distinguished as "seeing" rather than merely "looking" in

Man and Nature (1864). The term as a whole suggests an ethical perception of humanity's intermingling with the environment.

The Victorian period is more notable for its grime, noxious fumes, and toxic refuse than its eco-consciousness. In a recent *New York Times* feature, Peter Ackroyd quips, "If a late 20-century person were suddenly to find himself in a tavern or house of the period [...] he would be literally sick – sick with the smells, sick with the food, sick with the atmosphere around him" (qtd. in Anderson, 50).¹ Instead of reading dirt in nineteenth-century England as damning evidence of Victorian recklessness, we should read these literary representations as damning exposés intended to instigate reform. The Victorian novel attempts to break through the acclimatization to filth, making its contemporary readers "sick" with pollution. The social problem novel, for example, functions to expose conditions requiring reform, and as Patrick Brantlinger and Amanda Claybaugh argue, the reformism characterizes the nineteenth-century novel as a genre. The Victorian novel often challenges dominant discourse, characterized by Brantlinger as the faith in industrial growth to achieve progress (4).² Literary responses to pressing ecological problems question unrestricted industrial growth and the goal of the conquest of nature.³ The chapters that follow identify related sets of conceptual strategies that shape an overall eco-conscious discourse designed to protect the environment, the "house beautiful."

Ecocriticism studies the ways in which literature represents the physical environment, what these portrayals reveal about that particular author or culture, and how these representations

¹ In this article, Sam Anderson introduces readers to Dickens World: opened in England in May 2007, this attraction

² Brantlinger dates the heyday of the Victorian reformist novel in the 1830s, arguing that by mid-century, the optimistic dominant discourse insisted that reform was no longer necessary to control industry. This dissertation traces the reformist impulse to the end of the period.

³ My project is concerned with what John Passmore terms "ecological problems," as distinct from problems of ecology, which are the concerns of that discipline as a professional science. Ecological problems are "features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society" (44). Greg Garrard adds, "To describe something as an ecological problem is to make a normative claim about how we would wish things to be, and while this arises out of the claims of ecological scientists, it is not defined by them" (5).

affect readers' behavior towards their surroundings. Discussing environmental advocacy in Victorian literature, I investigate through an ecocritical lens reactions to the three ecological problems referenced by Wilde and models of eco-consciousness disseminated through the genre of realism. A genre that relied on representations of material fact, realism is particularly suited to foreground the relationships between human beings and the environment. Victorian realists wrote with didactic earnestness, recreating the world in order to better their readers. "Prophets of nature" directing readers' focus to environmental relationships participate in what I call "natural realism," a mode which attempts to alter cultural assumptions of humanity's superiority over or tyranny of the environment to view human beings as equal members of the ecosystem. While this does not necessarily mean human interests are always subordinated to non-human interests, it does mean both sets of interests must be considered. For instance, humanity's health depends on a clean "house." Efforts to curb pollution certainly safeguard our interests, even while asserting the larger value of the environment. Instead of asking, "what use is this animal?" or "how can I maximize the economic value of this land?", an eco-conscious society recognizes the necessity of maintaining and preserving the ecosystem, thus abandoning a dangerous and destructive anthropocentrism.

In his study of the environmental tradition in literature, John Parham asks, "Was there a Victorian ecology?" "Yes," he answers, and Victorianists are becoming increasingly interested in this question. Parham states, "literary figures, like Victorian scientists, were grasping towards ecological theory and displaying at least an intuition of both ecosystems' theory and sustainability" (158). Scholarship on Victorian naturalists and popularizers of science demonstrate the extent of the Victorians' engagement with ecology.⁴ Studies on Victorian

⁴ In *Victorian Cities*, Asa Briggs notes the role of amateurs in accomplishing social change and disseminating information, a point reinforced by Bernard Lightman's *Popularizers of Victorian Science*, which demonstrates the

engineering and sanitation reform further detail ecological ethics.⁵ This project, however, emphasizes the novel, which offers a rich ground of inquiry by looking at a set of characters interacting with a space over time; in other words, it focuses on how authors mapped a complete ecology into their fiction. In “Greening Victorian Studies,” Barbara T. Gates calls for an expansion of the nineteenth-century texts we regard as “green,” such as the work of Darwin and Huxley. She notes, “References to non-human nature are present in hundreds of texts towards century’s end, not just in William Morris or Gerard Manley Hopkins but also, in a different way, Oscar Wilde. [...] *Fin de siècle* studies could also benefit from better comparisons between the aesthetes and decadents and those still-too-often ignored nature writers like W.H. Hudson and Richard Jefferies” (13). My project, which uses Wilde as a starting point, widens the canon of Victorian “green” texts. In addition to these important *fin de siècle* authors, novelists at mid-century began to shape eco-consciousness by directly addressing the deterministic influence of nonhuman nature. Responding to writers in other disciplines (including politicians, public health officials, and journalists), novelists amplified concerns about environmental problems, which found distinct expression in fiction. While Blue books recorded horrendous working conditions and improper sanitation, novels often elaborated on these instances in vivid detail for a wider audience. The novel, designed to awaken sympathy and awareness, finds its way into the typical home and creatively, but forcefully, opens readers’ eyes to their relationship with their

important role of amateurs in shaping Victorian science. He explains how scientific theory was brought before the public by writers such as T.H. Huxley and enthusiastic lecturers like John George Wood and John Henry Pepper. Lynn Merrill’s *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (1989) discusses the methodology of natural history in hopes of restoring it to the canon of Victorian literature. Her exhaustive study of the style of natural history prose makes this dissertation possible; however, she does not address fiction. Carol T. Christ’s *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetics of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (1975), as the title suggests, examines poets looking at the world with a “microscopic eye.” See also Patricia M. Ball’s *The Science of Aspects: The Changing Role of Fact in the Work of Coleridge, Ruskin and Hopkins* (1971) and Lynn Barber’s *The Heyday of Natural History: 1820-1870* (1984). Amy M. King’s recent work on natural history and the novel complements this project; in a series of articles, she discusses the influence of the methodology of particularity on the novel, although King’s work does not address the ecological ramifications of this cross-pollination.

⁵ See particularly Stephen Halliday’s “The Great Stink” (1999) and Dale Porter’s *The Thames Embankment* (1998).

surroundings. My dissertation demonstrates an earlier awareness of ecological problems than is usually credited to the period and the important role of Victorian novelists in setting the stage for organized environmentalism by century's end.

Environmental concerns resonate in the literature of the period. Many canonical writers were publishing several decades prior to the start of the mainstream environmental movement – organized activism – in England that began in the late 1870s. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), Charles Dickens immortalizes both the mudlarks on the Thames and dust-men described by Henry Mayhew in his influential volumes *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-2; 1861), drawing attention to water and air pollution, which underscores the novel's invective against greed and materialism. Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial fiction attempts to naturalize the city, even as she illustrates Edwin Chadwick's groundbreaking *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842). Her novels realistically portray the dirt and poverty of city tenements, particularly the infectious air. Judging by published historical accounts and the periodicals of the day, eco-conscious novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Mary Barton* (1848), and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) reveal the consequences of thoughtless human interventions into or manipulation of the environment. Mid-century literature illustrates a dawning understanding about smog and unhealthiness in the Victorian age, indicating that reformist authors had grown uneasy well before legislators realized the breadth of the problem. While not all the novelists considered here actively campaigned for the environment outside of their literary work, these authors are none the less "prophets of nature": those who protest the rash assault on the environment.

II. Methods and Critical Vocabulary

i. Realist Nature

As John Stuart Mill wrote, there is perhaps no group of words with as “many meanings different from the primary one” as “nature” and “natural” (3). He laments, “it is unfortunate that a set of terms which play so great a part in moral and metaphysical speculation” should be so indiscriminately used, and the source of great confusion. Even assigning a “primary” meaning to nature is difficult. In *The Social Creation of Nature*, Neil Evernden details the unstable meanings of nature, a human concept that depends on the culture/nature and human/nonhuman antitheses. Nature, which Evernden capitalizes to emphasize its conceptual quality, does not denote our surroundings, but our created world: “For the humanist concept of ‘Human’ to exist, we must first invent Nature: our freedom rests on the bondage of nature to the ‘Laws’ which we prescribe” (60). In other words, we define ourselves against our environment. There is the human because there is the nonhuman. This is a point raised by other ecocritics such as Dana Philips and Timothy Morton, who all variously point out that “nature” is merely a social construct; thus rendering the nature/culture division arbitrary and abstract.

Aside from signaling one side of a dualism, in layman’s terms nature (lowercase n) has come to mean something more than simply our surroundings. It invokes a sense of the pastoral, the rural, the garden, or sometimes the nonhuman environment, be it a wilderness or open land. However, nature typically points to cultivated, tamed environments, whereas “wilderness” implies dangerous, unexplored terrain. By implication, nature excludes urban spaces. Thus, many ecocritics prefer the term environment because it encompasses all areas without idealizing the country as the only site of eco-consciousness. However, “environment” literally means the surrounding area, and as Cheryll Glotfelty argues, the anthropocentric term implies that which

surrounds the human being. Jane Bennett also argues that “environment” does not denote true reciprocity between participants in the ecosystem, and continues to discount exchanges and affinities between species. Thus, Bruno Latour and Félix Guattari use the terms “collective” and “assemblage,” respectively, to refer to an ecology of human and nonhuman elements. Given the convoluted meanings of “nature,” I favor the familiar term environment in this dissertation to denote representations of the actual, material environment, especially as Victorian literature features both rural and urban spaces. Nevertheless, Victorian eco-consciousness resisted anthropocentrism.

The term “nature” remains unavoidable because the Victorians themselves use the word, and one cannot discuss their predilection for “natural history” or “natural realism” without it. What did the Victorians mean by “nature”? I argue that they understood nature in the sense of what Kate Soper theorizes as “realist nature:”

nature as matter, as physicality: that ‘nature’ whose properties and causal processes are the object of the biological and natural sciences. To speak of ‘nature’ in this conception is to speak of those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary conditions of every human practice, and determine the possible forms it can take. (132-2)

Soper’s definition points to the actual environment rather than the created world, a product of our imagination. Human beings do not determine their environment; rather, the environment determines the lives and lifestyles of human beings. To regard Nature as merely a symbolic or interchangeable background trivializes humanity’s impact on the environment. When I refer to “realist nature,” I do so in a literary context to directly contrast Romantic and realist nature.

George J. Becker insists that the gap between the conception of nature of the Romantics and the realists “is a chasm which permanently separates the two schools” (5). A central difference between Romantic and Victorian depictions of nature is the Romantic retreat *from* civilization versus the Victorians’ actual engagement with the environment. While ecocriticism is now beginning to make room for the Victorians, ecocritical scholarship is overwhelmingly devoted to the Romantic poets and American literature. My project attempts to correct this oversight.

Without disputing the Romantics’ environmental ethics, one may assert that Nature in that period frequently becomes a platform for self-discovery, and that the self takes precedence over Nature. Nature functions as an interchangeable setting with value mainly in relation to the observer. Industry lurks offstage as these poems retreat into an often idealized Nature.⁶

Lawrence Buell argues certain fiction, particularly the pastoral, “tends to presuppose that the persona is the main subject, that selectivity is suppression, that represented detail is symbolic, that environmental knowledge (in either author or reader) counts for little” (96). In reference to the Romantics, Scott Hess calls this approach “the ecology of authorship,” “the idea of nature as a refuge for high-cultural practices and autonomous individualized identity, apart from the human social and economic world” (16). Representations of nature as an escape for the privileged separate the individual from society. Hess explains, “Nature in the Wordsworthian tradition has become identified with individual consciousness and identity, as opposed to social

⁶ Judith Pascoe observes that, “Romantic poetry, accurately or not, has become known for enacting an escapist aesthetic, one that permits the poet to retreat from obdurate physical reality” (3-4). The assessment that Romantic poetry turns away towards the material, objective environment towards a metaphysical, subjective one is a generalization about the period; however, conceptual Nature remains so primary in the genre that it remains accurate to juxtapose Romantic Nature with Victorian realist nature. In *The Romantic Ideology*, Jerome McGann argues, “The poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities” (1). M.H. Abrams describes the shift in the romantic period from a view of poetry as a mirror reflecting the reality of the world to a conception of poetry as a lamp that does not objectively reveal an object, but shines a sparkling light all around it so that the physical object becomes less important than the way the poet’s consciousness transforms it (52). Similarly, Mary Poovey posits that the Romantic poets “turn away from phenomenal particulars and towards the mind that contemplates those things” (327).

or communal life; with aesthetic leisure and spirituality, separated from everyday work, subsistence, and economic activity; and with ‘disinterested’ aesthetic contemplation and the forms of high culture, as opposed to more social, participative, and sensually immersed forms of culture and relationship” (3). Even today, environmentalists continue to define Nature “as a space of refuge or transcendence, pursued through high-Romantic modes of individual aesthetic and spiritual imagination” (16). Victorians, particularly naturalists, deliberately resisted these presuppositions.⁷ Choosing the primrose in direct opposition to Wordsworth (see his poem “Peter Bell”), John Ruskin describes three ranks of observers in “Of The Pathetic Fallacy” (1864):

the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel, and to whom the primrose is very accurately the primrose, because he does not love it. Then, secondly, the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose: a star, or a sun, or a fairy’s shield, or a forsaken maiden. And then, lastly, there is the man who perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is for ever nothing else than itself. (67)

The latter precisely captures the attitude of the naturalist; perceiving realist nature implies both engagement and a more objective posture of respect. Authors began privileging close observation and the wonders of the physical world revealed its “very plain and leafy fact[s]” (67).

Crucially, the “nature” in natural history and realism differs from Romantic Nature, where the capital “N” indicates an idea of nature infused with added meaning. Patricia Ball contrasts Romantic Nature and what she calls “Ruskinian” nature, using “Ruskinian” as an

⁷ In fact, this is the thesis of U.C. Knoepfelmacher’s and George Bernard Tennyson’s anthology, *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (1978). John Parham also points out the Victorians’ ambivalence to Romanticism, in his “Was there a Victorian ecology?” (2002)

adjective for particular, literal, scientific description. She explains, “To the Romantics, ‘the [natural] object had no significance in itself apart from the bestowal of, or explicit connection with, human passion’; to Ruskin in mid-century this connection was fallacious, and the object itself was the prize to be grasped as completely as possible by a concentrated study of its qualities” (2). Ruskinian, or realist nature, then, implies intrinsic value apart from human concerns. Ruskin condemns pathetic fallacy as the folly of imposing our own subjective ideas and feelings onto the environment, which produces a “falseness in all our impressions of external things” (65). Before Ruskin’s “derogatory label,” the pathetic fallacy was the primary device in poetry (Miles 6). Patricia Ball clarifies that while the experience of nature “was predominantly an emotional experience from first to last,” it “was *not* for [the naturalist, Ruskin in particular] a delight which stimulated his mind to more awareness of itself and hence of a supreme Mind” (72; my emphasis). An object may inspire emotion, but “falseness” occurs when the observer’s emotions prevent an object from being portrayed accurately or realistically.⁸ As with Latour and Bennett, I recover an object-oriented approach. Rather than privilege the individual subject (the observer), the Victorians honor the individual essence of the object: “His goal [...] is to see not vaguely, approximately, nor according to habits of generalisation, but freshly, precisely, and deeply, so that the object is known absolutely as its individual self,” in context with its surroundings (Ball 74). The target of the gaze elicits emotion, but this object and not the

⁸ Ruskin quotes from Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* to demonstrate that sea foam is not “cruel”; the adjective actually signifies the state of mind of the observer, in this case stricken with grief that distorts his vision of the world. The lyric tells us more about the state of the speaker’s mind than the actual world. However, this psychological truth charms the reader: “so long as we see that the feeling is true, we pardon, or are even pleased by, the confessed fallacy of sight which it induces: we are pleased, for instance, with those lines of Kingsley above quoted, not because they fallaciously describe foam, but because they faithfully describe sorrow” (68). In this way, the pathetic fallacy does tell the truth, and is “real”; however, realist nature is interested in factual observation of the material environment rather than emotional realities.

observer becomes the subject of the description.⁹ Josephine Miles notes that uses of pathetic fallacy in the Victorian period are sharply cut in half when compared to Romantic poets, signaling a larger shift in perception. Miles notes that while Darwin's influential *On the Origin of Species* (1859) may have encouraged this change, realist vision was already a marked cultural trend by the 1850s.¹⁰ Importantly, the Victorians did not simply focus on beautiful or sublime nature, but the dirt and grime of the environment tainted by humans, seeing nature as it was, not just as it could be if left alone. While many critics today acknowledge a continuum between the Romantic idea of nature and Victorian naturalism, Victorian prose reveals that they imagined a distinctive break with their predecessors.

In his *Studies in Animal Life* (1862), George Henry Lewes describes realist nature: "We are all 'parts of one transcendent whole.' The scales fall from our eyes when we think of this; it is as if a new sense had been vouchsafed to us; and we learn to look at Nature with a more intimate and personal love" (3). As the "scales fall from our eyes," we learn to see realist nature – our intimacy with the ecosystem – as opposed to Romantic Nature (despite Lewes's

⁹ In *Victorian Interpretation*, Suzy Anger discusses the relationship between Victorian science and Biblical hermeneutics, arguing that the interpretation of nature "was neither dreaded nor banned in significant strands of Victorian *theory* of science. Rather, among some of the most influential philosophers of science of the period, interpretation and subjectivity were recognized as the conditions of any understanding" (86). Although scientists accepted that the field was "fundamentally subjective and provisional," they nevertheless "insisted on the importance of strict measurements, careful observations, exacting experiment, and accurate images. [...] In this we can see another common Victorian attitude: the recognition of the subjective nature of interpretation, combined with a resolve to nevertheless get it right" (86). Despite the inevitability of human interpretation, science was still considered a reliable account of the actual world; correct representation of the natural world remained the goal.

¹⁰ See Miles's appendix (113) for her chart of the frequency of pathetic fallacy between the Victorian and the Romantic period. She concludes, "Observation of so small a device as Ruskin's condemned pathetic fallacy indicates, however, that Victorian language had more than a falling-off, it had a precise contribution of its own to make, and a contribution with which we are still today deeply concerned: the phrasing of sense perception through adjectives of temperature, texture, color, shape; and the phrasing of response to these with a less use of the standard terms of feeling. The poetry of such dramatic tensions as the seventeenth-century root metaphor represents had become the eighteenth-century poetry of associated object and emotion, and these standard 'universal' associations had given way to a closer look at the object, a sight of its structure and proportion, and a consequently less stable definition of response, moving eventually into realms and problems of the unconscious" (3).

capitalization).¹¹ For Victorian authors, realist nature became a moral imperative, and the foundation of literary realism as shaped by Lewes and his partner George Eliot in the 1850s.

Regarding Nature as merely a concept trivializes human impact on the environment. In his urban novels, Dickens depicts “real” smog, even while exploiting its symbolic resonances. The Victorian realist novel satisfies the definition of realist nature “by drawing attention to human transformation (destruction, wastage, pollution, manipulation, instrumental use of) [of] nature [...] referring us to structures and processes that are common to all organic and inorganic entities, human beings included” (Soper 156). Humans are not outside of nature or visitors in nature, but part of their environment. More than a setting, the environment is lived space. Realist nature (which “determines” the conditions of human life) validates the determinism that George Levine suggests is intrinsic to Victorian realism in *The Realistic Imagination*. For instance, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) can only take place on English moors; Manchester influences the lives of the Bartons and Wilsons in *Mary Barton* (1848); Hardy’s Wessex provides the common ground for all his novels, connecting his characters who live and work in the region. Victorian realism is defined by actual engagement with the environment; in other words, humans exist as part of the entangled bank, as opposed to simply appreciating nature. Becoming more than an emphasis on plot and particularity of things, realism is rooted in place;

¹¹ Darwin actually frequently personified or capitalized Nature. In the 1869 variorum of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin writes, “it is difficult to avoid personifying the word Nature; but what I mean by Nature, only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws, and by laws the sequence of events ascertained by us” (qtd. in Hyman 38). Despite the limitations of language, we see that here, too, Nature signifies the actual environment, and for Darwin, inescapable ecological law acting on all creatures. Lewes’s capitalization of Nature follows Darwin in this respect; we also see the same usage of nature in the work of Thomas Carlyle, who invokes a personified Nature to represent fixed and binding natural law. It is still accurate to call this usage realist nature. Soper further argues that, “Employed as a realist concept, ‘nature’ refers to the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the objects of study of the natural science, and condition the possible forms of human intervention in biology or interaction with the environment. It is the nature to whose laws we are always subject, even as we harness them to human purposes we can neither escape nor destroy” (155-6). She adds that although ‘nature’ is only signified in human discourse, there is no less of an ontological distinction between “the ideas we have of nature and that which the ideas are about” (151).

specific environments determine the action, which in turns leads to an enlarged sense of community that includes the land, plants, animals, and people.

Victorian realists shared the same “the spirit of truth,” the same commitment to fact, as naturalists. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault asserts that natural history, with its meticulous observing gaze, is the first and only “true” history because it is a universal subject relying on firsthand observation. Its gaze reveals a “general table of relations” which emerges “[w]hen it had at last become clear that it was impossible to fit the entire world into the laws of rectilinear movement, when the complexity of the vegetable and animal kingdoms had sufficiently resisted the simple forms of extended substance, [so it] then [...] became necessary for nature to manifest itself in all its strange richness” (142, 128). The order of things moves from a straight line to a web, the prevailing image in natural history and natural realism. This creates a different paradigm for humanity’s place in nature, that of the entangled bank. The naturalist gaze is all-inclusive, and thus humbling. Stanley Edgar Hyman credits Darwin’s image of the entangled bank that “embraces all the rich complexity of life” as responsible for supplanting the image of the Chain of Being. He explains, “The image of the great Chain of Life is ordered, hierarchic, and static, essentially medieval; the great Tree of Life is ordered, hierarchic, but dynamic and competitive, a Renaissance vision; but the great Tangled Bank of Life is disordered, democratic, and subtly interdependent as well as competitive, essentially a modern vision” (33). An ecological web ostensibly removes God’s role in organizing matter, though natural theology, for example, justifies God’s handiwork through the marvels of nature. Some naturalists, such as Charles Kingsley and Philip Henry Gosse, continually invoked God’s presence in nature, while still manifesting realist connections between species. The movement as a whole, however, favored an evolutionary order, showcasing the

value of nature in itself, though the shared – secular – heritage of human beings and primates was potentially discomfiting. Levine proposes an “enchanted” use of Darwin, applicable to natural history in general, because Darwin’s “language entangles fact and value from the very start,” morally loaded in terms of advocating the “intrinsic value” in nature (*Darwin Loves You* 30).¹² Natural history *celebrated* humanity’s kinship to all Life, and encouraged this awareness through minute perception of one’s surroundings. Victorian realists based their representations of the environment on the fact of the entangled bank, but used fiction to extend those relationships in imaginative form beyond the individual. Alongside the commitment to fact, the aesthetic experience offered by the novel allows us to image the world beyond the self, our relationship to the community or ecosystem.

ii. Aesthetics of Community

Within the ideology of realist nature, “sense of place” encourages human beings to dwell within their environment. This ecocritical term refers to personal attachment to a particular place; in Neil Evernden’s words, “a sense of knowing and of being part of a particular place” (“Beyond Ecology” 103). Evernden argues that “[t]here is no such thing as an individual” (103): we are defined by place, becoming an “individual-in-context” or “organism-plus-environment.” We see this in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) when Mr. Tulliver walks around his home, observing all the objects of the scene – the trees, the buildings, the river – and feeling them to be “part of himself” (263). The environment becomes an extension of his body, and sense of place

¹² Darwin’s science is emphatically *not* natural theology, such as the works of Gosse and Kingsley, who use nature to familiarize readers with God’s work. However, “Darwin’s religion was in nature. His son William wrote that his ‘deep sense of the power of nature may be called in his case a religious feeling [...] he had no religious sentiment.’ The texture of this feeling, deeply secular and intense, reveals that Darwin’s work of sweeping away the teleology of natural theology and subjecting all biological phenomena to scientific explanation was nevertheless fully compatible with a sense of a world deeply infused with value, enchanted” (Levine *Darwin Loves You* 31).

describes this relation of self to setting: we cannot know ourselves without the context of place. Eliot emphasizes how much we love a place “because it is known” (41): in other words, because of our eco-consciousness and attention to its distinctiveness, as much as its familiarity. In the Victorian novel, place becomes central in defining characters’ identities, and, furthermore, it is not an individual experience because shared sense of place builds community. As Evernden demonstrates, sense of place subdues our ego.

In Benjamin Disraeli’s Condition-of-England novel *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), the working-class Stephen Morley explains to the aristocrat Charles Egremont that “[t]here is no community in England,” only aggregation, and “under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle” (64). True community requires cooperation and kinship, but “modern society acknowledges no neighbour” (65). Individuals live in a constant state of economic competition. Later, Egremont observes that in London, “We all of us live too much in a circle” (177). Morley uses the evolutionary language of “competition;” however, as Darwin makes clear, separate species compete for survival, but the survival of a species requires cooperation.¹³ Through these remarks, Disraeli defines the ideal community as a web, or genuine entanglement. As it stands, people occupy concentric circles, with little intercourse between classes. Eco-consciousness helps bring about the true community necessary for social reform. Natural history both reinforces kinship among all species, including “the two nations,” and the importance of building sustainable communities. Thus it is the naturalist, Job Legh, who can negotiate a truce between masters and men in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*. His keen

¹³ We should remember that Social Darwinism was Herbert Spencer’s adaption of Darwin’s theories. In *Descent of Man*, Darwin describes a process of “community” or “group selection”: “natural selection sometimes acts indirectly on the individual, through the preservation of variations which are beneficial only to the community,” such as altruism and the moral sense (96). In *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*, Robert J. Richards describes the evolution of the moral sense, particular Darwin’s identification of sympathy as a human instinct instrumental in our survival.

vision equips him with the sympathy requisite to heal the breach between classes, like Eliot's Farebrother in *Middlemarch* (1871-2) whose naturalism tempers religious fundamentalism in a way that endears him to his congregation. Environmental engagement fosters community.

Victorian ecocriticism offers an "aesthetics of community," an alternative to what Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* (now considered to be the founding text of ecocriticism) calls the "aesthetics of relinquishment" established by American Transcendentalists. Characterized by Thoreau's influential *Walden*, this is the experience of leaving civilization to seek wilderness or nature in hopes of self-discovery. William Cronon famously claimed in "The Trouble of Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," that "American culture has identified nature with wilderness, in a way that maintains human/nature dualism and draws attention away from the environmental effects of our everyday lives and from more ordinary, lived-in environments" (229). Scott Hess writes of American nature writers as direct descendants of William Wordsworth; figures such as Muir and Thoreau invoke the Romantic "ecology of authorship," rather than "engaging in a truly local spirit of community, labor, subsistence activity, and everyday social life" (227). In contrast, the study of Victorian authors offers an "aesthetics of community."¹⁴ By evoking realist nature, the Victorians deconstruct the nature/culture binary. Many Victorians injected a moral note into the potentially competitive concept of entanglement, and in Victorian novels, we see Darwin's metaphor of the "entangled bank" applied by literary authors to guide their plots, employing ecology to depict an inclusive sense of community.¹⁵ The emphasis on entanglements – interconnections between people, and between people and the spaces they inhabit – appears in both rural novels, such as *Middlemarch*, and urban novels, such as *Bleak House* (1852-3). This urban ecology further

¹⁴ Scott Hess uses a similar term, "ecology of community," to describe the communal spirit of labor.

¹⁵ See also Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists*.

differentiates Victorian literature from American nature writing and Romantic poetry. Rather than retreat into rural spaces to implicitly condemn unhealthy urban environments, the Victorian novel directly addresses city-life. How nature writing is defined reflects cultural attitudes towards the environment. "Nature" is connoted by the rural, but Victorian texts encourage us to think in terms of environmental writing more generally. An environmental text places human history in natural history and acknowledges legitimate interests outside the human. Buell defines this as when "[h]uman accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation," and when this environment is depicted as a "process" rather than a stable given or "framing device" (7). Despite his preference for non-fiction writing as authentically environmentalist, the Victorian novel satisfies this requirement of environment "as process" through its aesthetics of the community, where the environment acts upon its residents who in turn act upon their environment. Novelists' incorporation of the entangled bank into their fiction recognizes humanity's impact on the environment and reveals "accountability" by depicting the consequences of transgressing the laws of nature, illustrating anxiety over the loss of land or feelings of rootlessness. These strategies foster eco-consciousness in readers, and most importantly, redefine humanity's place in the ecosystem from supreme beings entitled to its resources, to applying, in Thomas Hardy's words, "'The Golden Rule' beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom" (377). When Evernden defines sense of place, he also discusses the importance of the humanities to environmentalism. Arts and the humanities are able to represent the intermingling of human and non-human in a way more effective than scientific discourse. The aesthetic experience allows us to imagine the world beyond the self, "the relationship between the individual and the environment, not simply in the object viewed, nor in the mind of the viewer. Rather than a subject-object relationship in which the observer

parades before the supposedly beautiful view, we have instead a process, an interaction between the viewer and the viewed, and it is in that joint association that the aesthetic experience lies. Instead of a detachment from the environment, we have a subtle diffusion into it” (97). Thus, Wilde argues it is the “artist,” and not the “scientist,” who comes forward as a prophet of nature.

iii. Eco-Conscious Discourse

Earlier, I explained that eco-consciousness means an ecological/ethical sensibility, and here, I want to further explain how the novel fosters this awareness in its readers. Discursive activism refers to speech or texts that seek to challenge dominant social discourse by exposing flawed assumptions or representing reality in order to rewrite the norms and practices of society. Nancy Fraser considers discursive politics “an essential strategy of political resistance” (165). Reform may be realized through networks of communication, and I argue here that the Victorian realist novel participates in discursive activism through its use of eco-conscious discourse.

Eliot’s manifesto on realism in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) insists upon fiction as a social force, telling its readers to “[d]epend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.” Chadwick recognized the power of fiction by giving Charles Dickens an advance copy of his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), counting on the author’s influence to publicize the sanitation movement.

Numerous scholars have demonstrated the role of the Victorian novel in social reform. Amanda Claybaugh asserts that social reform in the Victorian period depended on print: “Reform differed from earlier modes of social benevolence, such as charity, in its belief that social problems must

be represented before they can be solved” (2). Social reform gave rise to numerous “representations” in the form of pamphlets, newspaper exposés, slave narratives, sermons, and novels. Sheila M. Smith pinpoints the late 1830s and 1840s as the period when “writers discontented with society realized how valuable the novel could be to propagate ideas” (28), arguing that some Victorian novelists treated the novel as if it were a popular form of government Blue Books “in order to make their readers explore social problems and give them evidence to draw some conclusions” (29). Likewise in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Catherine Gallagher describes how industrial fiction specifically was influenced by and participated in the discourse of social reform, and her assertions importantly remind us that industry transforms the novel as it does the landscape. And in describing the social-problem novel, Josephine M. Guy also emphasizes the serious political intentions of the novelists: by educating the public, the novel played an important role in social and political life. However, the insistence on the novel’s power to achieve social change was not limited to certain sub-genres of Victorian realism: while not all novels were “reformist novels,” like Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, that described causes of social problems and suggested how they may be resolved, according to Claybaugh, “what the nineteenth-century novel more generally shares with the writings of reform, is a commitment to expanding the domain of representation, to depicting persons and experiences that have hitherto been ignored or treated unseriously” (6). Claybaugh identifies intemperance, prostitution, slavery, factories, slums, and disease as such topics novelists aimed to treat seriously, and we may add environmental ills like deforestation, chemical contamination, and water pollution to this list.

Whether or not novelists had a specific agenda or merely gave their support to reform, they shared a specific conception of the novel as what David Masson called the “novel of

purpose” in his 1859 *British Novelists and their Styles*, which, comprising both reformist and nonreformist novels, “was understood to act on its readers – and, through its readers, the world” (Claybaugh 7). According to Masson, “doctrinal or didactic earnestness” characterizes the Novel of Purpose (290-1). Claybaugh distinguishes the idea of “reform” from other modes of social action, explaining that for the Victorians, reform meant changes in the individual’s perception that led to social transformation. Through affective and cognitive training, the novel was interested in changing the attitudes that made poverty or pollution possible. Thus, novelists as diverse as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy may be said to share the same conviction that the novel could “inculcate” their “doctrines” and intervene in the actual world (Masson 267, 263). All of them realists, though writing in their own distinct style, these novelists disseminated eco-conscious discourse, what I define as teleological illustrations of actual ecological relationships, often involving pollution, designed to raise awareness and inspire real-world action. This meant a comprehensive way of understanding our relationship to the material environment, what Felix Guattari calls a “mental ecology.” A mental ecology involves a complete change in thought process. It requires the development of materialist ethics – an “awareness of finitude,” or the “mortality of the species, the planet and the entire universe” – to emphasize our actions in the present (Pindar and Sutton 11). Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, in their introduction to *The Three Ecologies*, note that an entire mental ecology is necessary in order not to give “our *unconscious* assent” to capitalism and its associated behaviors (5). This last point especially applies to the strategies of the Victorian realist novel, where authors often confront their readers with unexamined behaviors and new ideologies. Eco-conscious discourse aims to create lasting awareness about issues that were not immediately recognized as problems, such as

the inaccessibility of open space or the link between capitalism, conspicuous consumption, and pollution.

III. Critical Engagements and Contexts

i. Practical Ecocriticism

In his call for Victorian ecocriticism John Parham suggests, “A study of how Victorian writers attempted to balance and reconcile their writing with practical activities might then inform the contemporary ‘ecocritic’s task’” (170). By this he means attention to the ways in which Victorians’ writing achieved an impact in their contemporary world. My emphasis on the novel’s discursive activism performs “practical ecocriticism,” the term Glen A. Love uses to refer to a theoretical approach that has real-world implications.¹⁶ As Barbara T. Gates observes, “we might draw more contrasts between how Victorians thought and how we think today” (“Greening Victorian Studies” 13). By investigating how humans suffer by defining themselves against nature, and how the environment suffers from reckless human intervention, Victorian models may shed light on current attitudes in a time of climate crisis. Herbert Sussman asserts that the Victorians ushered in our modern age; we continue their love affair with technology and inherit their belief in continued Progress: “Our own machine-dominated time, like that of the Victorians, still engages the problem of how to live a human and humane life following the rise of the machine” (*Victorian Technology* xii). Just as he investigates Victorian technology as it bears on the way we live now, this project considers how we live out the consequences of Victorian choices.

¹⁶ Furthermore, Love argues, to be truly be “eco”-criticism, literary theorists must be willing to be interdisciplinary and acknowledge the science that bears on these concerns: particularly, biology and ecology.

A second aim of this project is to widen the range of Victorian ecocriticism, as Gates urges in “Greening Victorian Studies.” Ecocritical theory remains biased towards American literature and Romantic poetry.¹⁷ Only a handful of books could be regarded as “Victorian ecocriticism,” yet most of these, like Robert M. Young’s *Darwin’s Metaphor: Man’s Place in Nature* (1985), are historical studies that do not address literature. Young writes from a Marxist point of view, emphasizing the importance of learning about how the Victorians conceived of their place in nature and the ideological and sociological implications of that understanding. I take up this important question of humanity’s place in nature in my project. Dale Porter (*The Thames Embankment*, 1998), Herbert Sussmann (in his two books on the Victorians and technology), and James Winter (*Secure from Rash Assault*, 2002) show how the Victorians learned from their miscalculations to adopt environmentally friendly engineering schemes. They describe a fraught relationship with technology while ultimately endorsing the Victorian’s dominance of the environment as positive. Many studies, discussed earlier, investigate “natural historians” or “naturalists” – those who appreciate nature, as well as “sanitation reformers” – those wishing to clean up the air or water – rather than “environmentalists” or “advocates.” For instance, Anthony Wohl’s pioneering works on public health, *Endangered Lives* (1983) and *The Eternal Slum* (2001) paint a grim picture of pollution-related illness and overcrowded, filthy conditions in Victorian England. Wohl’s detailed examination of the public health movement includes discussions of pollution, inadequate sewage disposal, and disease related to these factors and to industrialism in general. These reformers worked tirelessly to safeguard public health, in the process protecting the environment; my project uncovers a more eco-centric understanding of environmentalism. Wohl’s evidence, essential in understanding the period and the wide array of

¹⁷ While these are the primary areas, ecocritical work is increasingly being done in all fields including medieval literature, Shakespearean studies, and the eighteenth century.

risk factors experienced by Victorians in their day-to-day life, informs my study; however, this dissertation distinguishes itself by examining literature.

Peter Thorsheim's historical overview, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (2006), details Victorian environmental activism, and despite its subtitle, goes well beyond coal smoke to show how an awareness of problematic intervention into the environment changes "smoke" into "pollution," a problem needing to be addressed. In *Kindred Nature* (1999), Gates showcases Victorian and Edwardian women involved in conservation and animal rights' movements. From Beatrix Potter to lesser-known women, she investigates the activism nurtured by their prose. This important ecofeminist work demonstrates the Victorian investment in protecting the environment. My project shares in these concerns as they emerge in fiction. Ecocritical works and anthologies neglect Victorian environmental writing; *Green Letters*, the journal for the U.K. chapter of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, recently published an overdue issue devoted to Victorian ecology (2012). However, a comprehensive study of Victorian literature remains necessary.

Turning to literary criticism, Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), George Levine's work on Darwin, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983), and Michelle Allen's *Cleansing the City* (2008) may all be considered ecocritical works; these were not conceived as ecocriticism, though they contribute to the field. The country/city trope is essential in discussing "realist nature;" as Williams's suggests, writers such as Dickens did to an extent idealize the country, guilty of nostalgic portrayals of a pastoral life that may never have existed. Allen's study explores the metaphorical connotations of filth when sanitation reformers moved to cleanse both the city and its population. She investigates a powerful and recurring undercurrent in Victorian thought concerning pollution in regard to both refuse and moral corruption. Her work

reveals the moral drive to purify the city, while my work focuses on more literal efforts of environmental preservation. Beer's important investigation of how Darwin's metaphors in *On the Origin of Species* are translated into literature is crucial to this study, although I wish to develop Allen and Beer's interest in metaphor by demonstrating the interplay between symbol and actual fact, investigating how ecological entanglements actually function.

Beyond environmental literary criticism, ecocritical theory includes the environmental justice movement. Environmental justice means "the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment [...] [defined] as the places in which we live, work, play, and worship" (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 4). Its advocates represent both urban and rural spaces, which is important in relation to Victorian literature. Environmental justice movements critique the world's unequal distribution of wealth and its connection to an unequal distribution of environmental devastation. Gaskell and Dickens's industrial fiction, for instance, demonstrate how laborers and urbanites suffer from pollution disproportionately to their employers or social superiors, who often migrate to cleaner, rural areas. Environmental Justice activists often politicize personal suffering to prompt citizens into action. Rather than focusing on wilderness conservation, environmental justice campaigns to maintain and protect places like public parks in urban neighborhoods. Central concerns include pollution (smog or corporate chemical dumping for instance), radiation or nuclear waste storage, and deforestation. These practices not only cause diseases such as cancer, but also disrupt traditional ways of life. This movement privileges activism over literature: environmental justice texts are often non-fiction accounts of activism, general historical studies that typically focus on specific places, or fictional narratives based on true events. Victorian social problem novels, with their focus on the impoverished, women, and children living in unhealthy conditions, clearly anticipate this contemporary American

movement. These novels attempt to make people conscious of social issues and environment as actual fact.

ii. Narrative Theory: Naturalism vs. Realism

Why focus on the novel? The plot typically unfolds in particular locations, emphasizing the connections between a large cast of characters. John Parham summarizes the arguments concerning the novel's unique ability to address ecological themes: its "temporal emphasis" "augment[s] the more conventional ecocritical emphasis on place allowing for a sustained analysis of the emergence, evolution and impact of natural or, indeed, ecologically destructive processes" (24). Storylines about pollution and the lack of open land encourage the reader to consider humanity's environmental impact. Parham acknowledges that "[w]hile this might also apply to nonfiction writing, the novel's stress on character and individual action allows specifically for questions about human agency both in relation to the presentation of human/non-human relationships and in terms of responding to fictionalised environmental issues" (24). The realist novel constructs its mimesis out of the diverse interconnections between human beings and their relations to the nonhuman, or, in other words, representing the material environment as literal fact.

Since my project makes claims about realism, narrative theory undergirds this study. Both George J. Becker and George Levine point out that although the term "realism" is freely used in various fashions, a realistic literary movement certainly emerged in nineteenth-century Europe in the 1850s guided by identifiable core principles. Although a realist tradition had existed in the past, John Ruskin first used the term in 1856, in *Modern Painters*, to describe the "mix of verisimilitude and purposefulness" characteristic of the Victorian realist novel as we

understand it today (Claybaugh 38). In his introduction to *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, Becker explains the commitment to verisimilitude and “true report,” that material for the novel was expected to be the product of direct observation. Levine, in *The Realistic Imagination*, argues that literary realism’s most defining characteristic is an “antiliterary” thrust: rather than contrived High art, a realist work attempts to be low art, or “ordinary.” In a sense, to be “literary” is to call attention to fiction, not in terms of the self-conscious narrator, but to let imagination have free rein without concern for actual facts. These criteria point to the importance of particular environments, rather than simply imagined or idealized spaces, to realism. For Georg Lukács, realism requires the portrayal of the community that shapes the characters. In *Studies in European Realism*, he writes that mimesis emerges through “the organic, indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, as a member of community” (8). By community he means primarily politics; however, his point underscores the importance of place and relationships between members of the place. The realist’s effort at accuracy often included vernacular or even vulgar speech, and honest portrayals of sexual behavior. As Becker says, the subsequent “shock effect” led many critics to deem realism as “raw” and “sensational” (27). This breaking of taboos signals the inevitable slippage between genres; though the realist novel emphasizes ordinary life, this was not always a life familiar to middle-class readers, and could thus be as shocking as the tales of bigamy or hidden identity in sensation fiction. In the realist novel, however, authors deliberately wield shock value to instill moral lessons.

I deliberately use the term natural realism, and not “naturalism.” The terms “realism” and “naturalism” are not interchangeable, and come to designate two different literary schools: realism, based in England, and naturalism, based in France. Naturalism was often equated with

“stark realism,” “that is, any account which is unpleasant, sordid, and dubious about man’s higher nature,” what Becker calls “pessimistic materialistic determinism” (35). Furthermore, naturalism came to be associated with particularly vulgar or sexual subject matter. Claybaugh’s distinction between “purpose” and “verisimilitude” helps elucidate the distinction between realism and naturalism; realism required “moral or reformist purpose” (39), and depictions of sex or immoral conduct could be acceptable if the author intended to warn his/her readers away from this conduct. The Victorians believed that naturalism either contained gratuitous vulgarity or did not explicitly set out to teach a lesson, and this centrality of moral purpose distinguishes Anglo-American realism from Continental.

While initially the author of a realist novel was expected to remain invisible, the genre came to have an explicitly voiced moral purpose. Levine notes, “The moral and evaluative commitment is always a part of the realist’s contradictory program, and always potentially disruptive” (*The Realistic Imagination* 37). Natural realism, too, is an attempt to instruct readers about proper relationships to the environment. Henry James famously asked, “What do such large, loose, baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*?” (515, emphasis in original). Rather than regard the Victorian novel as a jumble of arbitrary things and people, these organicist connections between individuals, communities, and places re-build meaning in an increasingly secular world. They mean it is essential to be aware of our particular surroundings and how they shape our lives; they mean we should live in sympathy within the ecosystem. How does an environmental stance alter our idea of Victorian literature? It shifts the focus from the social problem novel as an anthropocentric critique of irresponsible innovation and from the rural novel as a retreat from urban chaos, to an important eco-conscious questioning of our relations to the environment, acknowledging its

intrinsic value. Victorian ecocriticism not only reconsiders “realism,” it also highlights cultural assumptions relevant today.

IV. Chapter Outline

Chapter One, “Natural Realism,” situates the Victorians against the Romantics, illustrating realist nature in literature and how realism relies on eco-consciousness. To bridge the term “realist nature” with the Victorian stake in the realist mode, I coin the term natural realism. Part of the literary realism movement in England in the nineteenth century, natural realism depends on sense of place: how characters interact with actual, locatable environments. In this chapter, I compare canonical Victorian novels such as Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1850) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) with Romantic writing by William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott to demonstrate the shift from Romantic Nature to realist nature. Natural realism functions to de-idealize nature and remind readers of their vulnerability to ecological law. Although I do compare poetry to the novel, these discussions demonstrate the understanding of nature characteristic of each period, while reinforcing the novel’s unique ability to recreate an ecosystem.

The hallmarks of natural realism include 1) the naturalist gaze, a gaze that minutely examines one’s surroundings, 2) the feeling of wonder at everyday, local features of the environment, 3) dwelling, building a home within a particular place, where the dweller participates in rather than disrupts the ecosystem, and 4) organicism, the relation between all the disparate parts that create a whole, relying on the “entangled bank” to reinforce the fundamental intermingling between all actors. Through this mode, authors map what I call “geographies of conservation,” accurate illustrations of polluted or threatened environments to encourage their

readers to curb the anthropocentric, ignorant, or reckless behavior responsible for putting these spaces at risk. To discuss “geographies” of the novel suggests movement through spaces. Within a novel’s geography, characters often move between places – through the city, between the city and the country, or even abroad. Not only do Victorian novels represent urban, suburban, and rural spaces, but multiple places within the same novel. In the process, the novels illustrate what is at stake in certain environments, and the need to conserve particular areas. Geographies of conservation create of cartography of ecological problems through intersecting storylines.

The second half of this chapter discusses the overlapping plots of Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5): opening with the mudlarks scavenging the foul Thames, the novel introduces us to Old Harmon, who, despite his class status, makes his fortune by similarly scavenging London’s streets for “dust,” accumulated litter and ash. Taken together, these sights and scenes create a complete picture of filth: immediate threats to air, water, and land confront the reader in this cautionary tale. Eliot, in *Middlemarch* (1871-2), and Hardy, in *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), preserve through their novels a pre-industrial past wherein characters dwell within pure environments, a model that contemporary England should aspire to. However, even in the seemingly wild Egdon Heath, technology and the forces of industry are beginning to become disruptive. These novels offer a reiterated cautionary tale, asking readers to carefully evaluate innovation, and map the effects of pollution to illustrate the environment as an interface between human and nonhuman, establishing the geographies of conservation that I explore.

Chapter Two, “Miasma: Victorian Physical and Environmental Ills,” discusses the Victorian discourse concerning anthropogenic pollution and physical disease in both urban and

rural spaces. In the process, eco-conscious novelists demonstrate the diffuse impact of industry as well as the toxicity originating in rural environments. For most of the period, Victorians typically understood illness according to miasmatic theory, believing that dangerous diseases such as malaria, cholera, typhus, and even chlamydia, were caused by poisonous vapor or mist filled with particles from decomposed matter (miasmata): ie, putrid swamps, trash, rotting food, fecal matter, and so forth. Although germ theory – the discovery that microorganisms invading the body caused illness – gained greater credence as the century went on, novelists still relied on familiar miasmatic language to describe the spread of atmospheric and even occupational disease. Since the most basic definition of miasma is “bad air,” it accurately pinpoints the various causes of Victorian ills. Miasmatic language, which privileges sensory evidence of pollution, permeates the Victorian novel to demonstrate how fully pollution informed the Victorian experience. In mainstream literature, miasmatic theory became a lexicon and thought process to generate national awareness of not only visible or olfactory pollution, but also the underlying attitude of dominance over the environment. This shared language rhetorically reconceives toxicity as man-made, even miasma, which although organic, is tied to human obliviousness and recklessness. This chapter traces the salutary cultural anxiety over improper sanitation and contaminants that demonstrated the toxic ideological separation between humans and their environment. Authors reorient vision towards *causes* of pollution and laid the foundation for more organized activism at the end of the century.

Miasmatic language diffuses through urban fiction, such as Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-3) and Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850), both of which feature pollution and subsequent illness. At mid-century, Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) depicts respiratory illness in the character of Bessy Higgins, who suffers a fatal lung disease from working in the mills. Richard Jefferies’s

After London, or Wild England (1885) imagines the fate of London if industrial pollution continues unchecked. The city is engulfed in a toxic miasma of manufacturing chemicals that renders it uninhabitable by man or beast. Even rural novels, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1848), further show the permeability of England's districts as filth originating from the city infects pastoral landscapes. Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, Factory Boy* (1840) investigates industry in the country, revealing the pollution engulfing England's midlands. Kingsley, in his first novel, *Yeast* (1848), focuses on the pollution that originates in the country, a product of poverty and improper sanitation, destroying the myth of rural purity. As Victorian novelists emphasize that toxicity is not limited to the city, the reader understands that place, on its own, does not influence the amount of pollution: the mode of living within a place does. The country/city trope characteristic of the novel becomes the distinction between agrarian and industrial living, or between sustainable living and unsustainable living.

The primary perceptual feature of eco-conscious discourse is keen vision: rendering visible the less apparent conditions of dis-ease. Chapter Three, "Malaise: Victorian Mental and Environmental Dis-Ease," moves from miasma to malaise, a linguistic slippage that links physical and mental disease caused by toxic environments. Wilde laments the "perversion" of the soul caused by technology and commerce, tying the destruction of humanity's spiritual qualities to its destruction of the environment. The Victorian motto for perfect health, *mens sano in corpore sana*, encapsulates the need for a pure environment to ensure mental well-being. The novels in this chapter illustrate the consequences of prolonged alienation from open or green space. Environmental disengagement often manifested itself in malaise: an overall, hard to quantify state of ill-being. Dickens's Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times* (1854) feels continually "muddled"; Gaskell's John Barton in *Mary Barton* (1848) suffers from a "moody heart"; and

George Gissing's Clara, a denizen of *The Nether World* (1889), experiences near constant "nervousness." These characters feel continually uneasy, but none of them is completely conscious of the cause. Their malaise is symptomatic of the perversion of the soul described by Wilde, what John Ruskin calls "dis-ease," specifically separating the word into its two parts: "dis" – the absence of – "ease." In "Of King's Treasuries" (1865), Ruskin connects this sense of uneasiness and alienation to conspicuous consumption, arguing that dissatisfaction results when we exist separately from the natural world and attend to superficial, artificial desires rather than real needs. I regard dis-ease as lack of eco-consciousness; according to the contemporary ecocritic Wendell Berry, dis-ease signifies a failure to engage with the environment and the cultural ignorance of where our clothes, food, and resources actually come from. The novels in this chapter function to diagnose dis-ease, to reveal the cause of malaise as consumer culture and alienation from the environment. The popular realist novel traces the material environment's determining influence on character to uncover and critique a toxic manner of life.

I discuss three related conceptions of the city as dis-eased place: 1) the capitalist city, 2) the carceral city, and 3) the cancerous city. The first section investigates conspicuous consumption, the showcase of monetary worth through ostentatious purchases. Not only does conspicuous consumption create waste, it sickens the consumer who remains alienated from the land. In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Arthur Huntingdon returns from London to his country estate to continue his decadent habits, finally burning himself out through his insatiable extravagance. Though conspicuous consumption is associated with the decadent living of the upper classes, this chapter shows how all classes participate in consumer culture. In *Mary Barton*, factory workers suffer from a wage economy, where they must toil for limited pay to purchase their basic needs of food, clothes, and lodging. The phrase "carceral city" refers to

the way the city literally imprisons its residents in the urban, industrial world. As in Gaskell's portrayal of Manchester, novels like Dickens's *Hard Times* and Gissing's *The Nether World* underscore the shortage of open space in the city; its denizens are separated from the environment by stone and soot. The uniformity of Coketown suffocates its inhabitants, and the railway journey to the country enjoyed by the wealthy Bounderby is an impossible expense for his workers. The jeweler and amateur naturalist Sidney Kirkwood feels depressed in London, dissatisfied by a profession that sustains conspicuous consumption. He wishes to retreat into the countryside, only to find that industry threatens the land there, too. Kirkwood confronts the cancerous city: the unchecked growth of industrialism, the spread of urban values into rural England, explored in detail by Hardy in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), as Tess experiences an increasingly migrant existence as she searches for work. All these novels reveal that 'industrial' ways of living are not isolated within the city and infiltrate England as a whole.

Chapter Four, "Watchfulness: The Victorian Parable of the Wise Steward," explores how the notion of stewardship, humanity's duty to preserve, protect, and manage resources, appears as another rhetoric of environmental advocacy in the Victorian novel, particularly those set on the country estate. Stewardship is linked to land ownership in two ways: traditionally, the term comes from God's bequest of the Earth to Adam, for his use, but also as a sacred trust; secondly, as the Enclosure Acts increasingly moved common lands into the hands of private owners, it became the responsibility of the landed (i.e., the wealthy) to preserve their resources. This chapter considers Victorian interpretations of the stewardship parables, primarily from the Gospel of Luke, and the opposing relationships with the environment represented by the figures of the wise and foolish stewards. The wise steward tends the land for God and their community.

Importantly, stewardship divests the individual of actual ownership, as land is held in trust for others.

In the Victorian novel, the type of the foolish steward emerges in characters such as Anthony Trollope's Lizzie Eustace (*The Eustace Diamonds*, 1871) and Mr. Sowerby (*Framley Parsonage*, 1860) who recklessly misuse their property to maintain a sumptuous style of living. Not only does their behavior threaten the personal fortune of a landed family, it threatens the preservation of ancient woodland that the community relies upon for subsistence or for the opportunity to experience nature. In contrast, wise stewards such as Gaskell's Squire Hamley (*Wives and Daughters*, 1864-6) and Eliot's Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch*, 1871-2) safeguard the environment. The Squire refuses to regard the oaks on his property as "so many pounds sterling." In other words, he does not assess their economic value; instead, he recognizes their intrinsic worth as features of the landscape and objects of reverence. This wise stewardship mitigates the dominion over the nonhuman environment inherent in traditional stewardship, as the Squire insists on a moral need to preserve the land. In the same novel, Lord Cumnor actively oversees the work on his property, carefully maintaining the environment that provides for his dependents and his own family. Dorothea also recognizes her dependence on the land and the laborers who cultivate it, and, in *Middlemarch*, plans to build "model cottages" on her Uncle's estate that will provide healthy housing for the tenants. Dorothea feels entangled with the earth and with her fellow human beings, and moves towards democratic stewardship by first using her wealth to serve the community and finally relinquishing it altogether to pursue a life of philanthropy with Will Ladislaw.

Chapter Five, "The Victorian Golden Rule: The Creed of Kinship," continues from Dorothea's model of democratic stewardship to directly consider the Victorians treatment of the

nonhuman, particularly animals. Wilde describes the “beneficial” religion of the prophet of nature, which we may view as the Creed of Kinship, the belief in the kinship, and consequently the equality, between human and nonhuman. This creed relies on a “land ethic,” the assumption that community includes human beings *and* soils, waters, plants, and animals, a concept voiced by minister Holman in Gaskell’s *Cousin Phillis* (1864) when he prays “for the cattle and live creatures.” The Holmans regard livestock as their kith and kin, worthy of respect beyond their economic function. The novels in this chapter break down the hierarchical relations of stewardship and move towards eco-centrism (nature-centeredness), horizontal relationships with the environment.

In Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*, the lawsuit at the novel’s center questions the entitlement human beings feel toward natural resources, as Mr. Tulliver goes to law against any neighbor who infringes on his “legitimate” share of water power. While historically Tulliver’s assumption that his prior claim should allow him unmitigated use of the Ripple was legitimated by legal precedent, he loses the lawsuit and becomes bankrupt. Eliot seems to chasten the town’s attitude of domination over the river, which ultimately floods the town as a reminder of its uncontrollable power. Eliot gives voice to the river: its agency humbles the complacent residents of St. Ogg’s. Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) continually confronts its characters with the indifference of the environment to human interests. Gabriel Oak’s ability to read nature’s language and his sympathy to animals makes him an essential employee. His close relationship to his dog, George, showcases the spirit of kinship with the nonhuman, reinforced by the episode where a dog comes to Fanny’s aid when she struggles to reach Casterbridge. In Hardy’s last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Jude comes to realize that a society that acts cruelly to animals

is incapable of achieving real progress or humanity. Throughout his life, Jude avoids committing unnecessary harm to his fellow creatures, even if this compromises his social position.

In my concluding chapter, “Protecting the ‘House Beautiful’: Morris’s Geography of Conservation,” I discuss William Morris’s eco-topia, *News From Nowhere* (1890), which effectively unites the various strains of eco-conscious discourse into a narrative. Morris imagines a healthy future environment resuscitated by eco-consciousness, significantly in an actual place (England). Morris’s future reveals what can be achieved by reform in the present. Although *News from Nowhere* is generically science fiction, his tale follows the tradition of natural realism by describing in great detail this possible vision of an agrarian economy based on eco-socialism. The protagonist William Guest awakens in London in 2003, after the Socialist Revolution scaled back England’s economy to a pre-industrial way of living, rejecting harmful technology in favor of sustainable methods of production. Morris’s attempt to naturalize the city points to the Victorians’ lasting contribution of an urban ecology. He offers a model of how to build a city in harmony with the environment through the intersecting ideals of craftsmanship and conservation, in the process condemning the cancerous city and the filth it produces. Morris’s ecotopia answers the cries of the texts in this dissertation, creating a geography of conservation in the future that may be actualized through eco-consciousness. Wilde urged “prophets of nature” to “work against the prostitution or perversion of what is lofty and noble in humanity and beautiful in the physical world,” a goal achieved through literary stewardship, art that compels its readers to purify the earth, the “House Beautiful.”

Chapter I: Natural Realism

Most discussions of Victorian realism rest on the famous passage in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), "in which the story pauses a little" while the narrator explains his/her artistic aims. The narrator's purpose is "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" (164-5). The novelist must "creep servilely after nature and fact" (164), which is, not incidentally, the method of Victorian natural history: the science, practiced by professionals and amateurs alike, devoted to identifying, describing, and labeling specimens, particularly arcane beauties. Indeed, before turning to fiction, Eliot would write "The Natural History of German Life" (1858) as she enjoyed a holiday at Ilfracombe with George Henry Lewes, traipsing through tide pools collecting specimens, learning to "see" the natural wonders all around her.¹⁸ Eliot deliberately brings natural history and fiction together in her essay, proposing tenets for realism that would come to typify the genre in the Victorian period. Eliot suggestively puts "nature" before "fact" as the subject of realism; implicitly, she indicates the importance of faithfully describing the actual natural world. This chapter will explore what I call the "natural realism" of the Victorian novel, a merger of the period's emerging eco-consciousness with the ethical stake in accurate description. Natural realism may be defined as writing using precise and minute description, with a sense of place, foregrounding landscapes which determine action, organically tracing ecological connections between the nonhuman and human, and inculcating a similar perception in readers. Taken together, these characteristics

¹⁸ Seaside adventures were popularized by Philip Henry Gosse, whose "brand of observational natural history, with its continued commitment to identification, description, and classification" became the paradigm (King "Reorienting the Scientific Frontier" 155).

acknowledge equality among organisms and the intrinsic value of environments. This genre relies on “realist nature,” defined as un-idealized, deterministic environments. Adopting the naturalist gaze, natural realism privileges keen vision that reveals everyday environmental wonders, modeling how to properly dwell within the ecosystem. More than simply participating in a shared literary mode, the realist novels cited in this chapter map geographies of conservation: truthful illustrations of either polluted or diminishing environments to rally for their protection. According to George Perkins Marsh in his influential *Man and Nature*, “Sight is a faculty; seeing, an art,” which may be cultivated “by well-directed practice” (10-11). These Victorian novels endeavor to develop readers’ eco-consciousness.

I. Natural History and the Novel

The art of seeing, the art of knowing what you see; the art of comparing, of perceiving true likenesses and true differences, and so of classifying, and arranging what you see: the art of connecting facts together in your own mind in chains of cause and effect, and that accurately, patiently, calmly, without prejudice, vanity or temper – this is what is wanted for true freedom of mind. But accuracy, patience, freedom from prejudice, carelessness for all except the truth, whatever the truth may be – are not these the virtues of a truly free spirit? Then, as I said just now, I know no study so able to give that free habit of mind as the Study of Natural Science.

– Charles Kingsley, *Town Geology* (1872)

In his 1859 study of the British novel, David Masson identifies the trend at that time towards “resolute and careful attention” to facts observed by the authors in their local environments, and their willingness to explore unfamiliar areas “in search of acts and characters” (258). Realist novelists, Masson says, remain indifferent to “traditional ideas of beauty” and depict everyday, even “disagreeable” subjects in their fiction (258, 259). In short, the realist proceeds “on the theory that the British Novel, in its totality, should be a Natural History of British life,” and individual novelists “[work] out separately the natural histories of separate counties and parishes” (259). Masson enumerates the traits of the realist novel that correspond to

natural history: careful attention, field observation, valuing local environments, common occurrences and ordinary characters, an expanded definition of beauty, and the commitment to truth and accuracy.

As the title of Eliot's manifesto suggests, the motivation towards realism was inextricably linked to the overwhelming interest in natural history; in fact, these methodologies intersected in many ways. Lynn Merrill observes that in Victorian England, "Natural history was in the air. It was a topic of discussion and debate at social gatherings and in the periodical press. It generated fads and hobbies; it shaped decorative tastes. Naturalists appeared as characters in children's stories and in novels" (viii). Recall the familiar opening pages of *Jane Eyre* (1847), where Jane seeks refuge reading Bewick's *History of British Birds* (1797-1804). Lynn Barber notes that natural history books "were only marginally less popular than the novels of Dickens" (14). Among the most beloved naturalists was Philip Henry Gosse. Today Gosse is best known as Edmund Gosse's stern father, but in the Victorian period, his popular natural history texts made him a household name; his many publications were instrumental in spreading this pastime, which "amounted almost to creed" (Merrill 4). The legacy of natural history significantly shaped how the Victorians conceived of nature, and in turn, their stake in art. Extremely popular as a hobby appropriate for all social classes, ages, and genders, natural history emphasized keen vision, particularity, and facts.

Natural history precipitated the nineteenth-century shift from viewing nature as symbolic background to non-symbolic or semi-symbolic foreground. Significantly, the "nature" in natural history differed from Romantic Nature, where the capital "N" indicates an idea of nature: Romantic authors often depicted idealized environments, or else the actual land receded into the

background, while the observer's response became the central focus of a text.¹⁹ The naturalist, however, pursues "realist nature," representations of the material environment rooted in fact. As Charles Kingsley explains in *Town Geology* (1872), the naturalist seeks out "truth," learning the art of "seeing" and "knowing" what he/she sees. This ability to see into the heart of things was embodied by the microscope, which literally "open[s] the path to the myriad wonders of creation" that are "unseen by the unassisted eye" (Gosse 3). In his popular *Evenings at the Microscope* (1859), Gosse praises the ability of the microscope to reveal "a far more extensive prospect" of the earth's glories (3). Kingsley, too, promises his reader that, "The microscope will reveal to him in the tissues of any wood, of any seed, wonders which will first amuse him, then puzzle him, and at last (I hope) awe him" (*Town Geology* 12). This "microscopic" standard of vision, what Foucault regards as the observational (naturalist) gaze, allows an observer to see "Life" – cellular structure, genetic make-up – thus exposing human beings' relation to other organisms.²⁰ This is a *dual* vision: observing the minute, aided by the microscope, in turn reveals a whole new world, expanding the range of vision. Merrill explains, "[b]y virtue of its all-inclusiveness, natural history embraced entire landscapes in addition to objects – the totality of impression, the long view – of landforms, weather, vegetation, color, and light. The aesthetic of natural history was thus dialectical, moving from particulars to panorama and back again" (15). Kingsley tells us to look at "any" specimen in our immediate vicinity, because these local objects teach us about the larger environment. Connecting the parts to the whole, making

¹⁹ The next section, "Wonder on the Shore," further illustrates the difference between "realist nature" and Romantic nature, which emphasizes self-discovery instigated by nature.

²⁰ The 19th century microscope could, in fact, see DNA, which was first isolated by the Swiss physician Friedrich Miescher in 1869, when he discovered a microscopic substance in the pus of discarded surgical bandages. Miescher called it "nuclein," since it resided in the nuclei of cells; it was dubbed DNA in 1919 by Phoebus Levene.

connections between all species – animals, plants, and humans – was the primary mission of natural history.²¹

Kingsley hopes that the connections revealed by the naturalist gaze will “awe” the observer, who becomes aware of what Charles Darwin describes as the “entangled bank:”

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. (360)

These final words of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) disclose the connections and dependencies among creation, becoming for the Victorians emblematic of an ecosystem composed of diverse forms of life, expressly including human beings within the entangled bank. Realist nature in natural history and the novel frequently points to what I call “entanglements,” this type of intermingling with the ecosystem and symbiosis between human and nonhuman. Similar to networks, meshes, or webs, “entanglements” suggest the ways human lives are wrapped up in all surrounding matter.²² Darwin’s tone wonders at how creatures “so different” are nevertheless so “dependent on each other,” evidence of “complex,” efficient natural laws.

²¹ Merrill discusses the “closet-field division” of naturalists (81): “the field naturalists as a type descended from the observant country pastor, Gilbert White. Field naturalists watched living organisms in their environment, precursors of the science that today goes by the name of ecology, often referred to in the nineteenth century as the ‘economy of nature.’ Closet naturalists, on the other hand, tended to be comparative anatomists,” particularly adept at identifying fossil bones (81). Merrill describes tension between the broad view – “natural ecology, the landscape as a whole, objects within their setting” – and the narrow view – “anatomical details, microscopic focus, the object as isolated” (81). This distinction also helps us to understand the difference between natural history and specialized science: we can think of this as being in the field as opposed to the lab. Natural history resembled biology until science was specialized and professionalized: one could not be a licensed naturalist. Though considered a “hobby,” the study nevertheless contributed largely to science by the wealth of collectors who identified new species and did the necessary legwork for discoveries. Scientists analyze and theorize, using specialized or technical language; naturalists collect and describe in vernacular language.

²² John Glendening investigates the historical usage of the words “entanglement” and “web,” noting that before the nineteenth century entanglement was understood in a negative sense, implying disorder rather than simple

Darwin's writing demonstrates the emotional component of natural history, which distinguished the discipline from professional science.²³ Merrill explains that the sense of kinship among species imbued naturalist prose with emotions such as "sympathy, love, and care" (90). Even while assuming an air of objectivity, naturalists succumbed to their feelings, such as Kingsley's reaction to an English shore in *Glaucus, or the Wonders of the Shore* (1855). The book's title suggests awe:

Often, standing on the shore at low tide, has one longed to walk on and in under the waves, as the water-ousel does in the pools of the mountain burn, and see it all but for a moment; and a solemn beauty and meaning has invested the old Greek fable of Glaucus the fisherman: how eating of the herb which gave his fish strength to leap back into their native element, he was seized on the spot with a strange longing to follow them under the waves, and became forever a companion of the fair semi-human forms with which the Hellenic poets peopled their sunny bays and firths [...]. (113-4)

Kingsley is so overcome by the beauty of the shore that he fancifully longs to become a part of the sea. Though this added a personal element to natural history, the primary emotion excited was wonder: wonder at a particular specimen, at the marvels of nature and its intricate processes.

interconnectedness. Darwin divested the term from its negative associations, conceiving of the entangled bank "as an attractive network of interdependencies" (9). In the climactic concluding paragraph of *Origin*, "organicism and the romantic veneration of nature, undercurrents in the history of the word 'entanglement,' unite with the idea of dynamic interaction, partially derived from natural history" and the Romantic usage of "entangle" to signify nature's harmony (13). Though, as Glendening notes, late Victorian fiction writers sometimes reverted to the use of "entangle" to mean entrapment, confusion, or disorder, Darwin's endorsement of the word influenced the widespread use of the word to mean networks of interdependencies. Such entanglements help theorize an expanded notion of community, which the Victorians believed was integral to social welfare. Entanglements put "culture" back into "nature," eliminating hierarchical worldviews privileging human interests. I discuss this "Creed of Kinship" in Chapter 5.

²³ See Merrill's remarks on Darwin (Chapter 3): "Darwin's *Journal of Researches* is natural history at its best" (61), because his responses to nature are "unabashedly emotional, though not sentimental" (61). Merrill notes, too, that "many rather regrettable works of natural history pepper the Victorian era [...]. Subjectivity sometimes distorts too much: seeing nature not for itself, or as itself, but as a pathetic fallacy, a moral example, a series of set-pieces for human edification and quaint parables" (67). This was most often the case in children's books, such as Margaret Gatty's *Parables from Nature* (1855-71).

“Wonder” became the watchword of natural history, but should not be conflated with sublimity.

²⁴ The positive sublime moment is one of self-realization induced by an awe-inspiring natural sight, but often the particular view is unimportant (substitute Mont Blanc for the Pyrenees or Apennines). In this moment, connecting to nature benefits the observer, but s/he transcends the scene. However, wonder simultaneously takes a person outside of him/herself while reinforcing his/her place in the entangled bank. I focus on “wonder” as part of the naturalist’s creed, for its ecological implications. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger introduces the term “wonder” in relation to Being; wonder, or environmental awe, humbles the observer, preventing the self from becoming the central focus. He designates Man as the “shepherd” of Being; s/he must let other beings “be.” Wonder is the experience of staring up into a starry sky, overwhelmed by our smallness and unable to imagine the universe. Although our consciousness inevitably creates the way we see the world, we cannot control the earth’s processes. This sense of wonder reveals the mutual need between humankind and the environment and prompts us to take care of the earth.

Importantly, anything may inspire wonder. While it seems foolish of Gosse to devote a whole section in *The Romance of Natural History* (1860-1) to justifying belief in mermaids, naturalists felt that this was no more preposterous than a majestic tree emerging from a tiny seed.²⁵ “Any” object may delight the naturalist. As Kingsley explains, “Why not, then, try to discover a few of the Wonders of the Shore? For wonders there are around you at every step, stranger than ever opium-eater dreamed, and yet to be seen at no greater expense than a very

²⁴ There are at least twelve references to the feeling of wonder, particularly objects that “excite” wonder, in Gosse’s *Romance of Natural History* alone: for instance, “a process which excites our wonder and which is quite beyond our comprehension” (158), while new discoveries “invariably excite wonder and curiosity” (354). Kingsley’s *Glaucus*, including the title, contains about 57 references to wonder or wonderful: wonders as marvels or inspiring wonder.

²⁵ Gosse’s title is also significant, alluding to both the romance in fantastic objects and also their fascination as a story.

little time and trouble” (*Glaucus* 3). Just as Mr. Farebrother eagerly shows visitors a new spider (rather than say a butterfly or rare flower) in Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, naturalists saw the beauty in all creatures. Not only do Kingsley and Gosse promote minute observation, but their principal contribution to the field, unlike Darwin’s exotic adventures on the South American coast,²⁶ was the point that wondrous specimens could be found “in every humble hedgerow or puddle” (Merrill 5). Kingsley’s all-inclusive naturalist gaze detects objects of wonder all around him; his emotions always point to the value in different environments, and the importance of “seeing” them in their particularity. Thus, the term wonder signifies the reverence for the environment, or eco-consciousness, that epitomizes both natural history and natural realism.²⁷

The inclusion of emotion may seem to contradict the naturalist’s pursuit of objective truth. Here, it is important to differentiate between an emotional and a wholly subjective response, what John Ruskin labeled “the pathetic fallacy.” Patricia Ball clarifies that while the experience of nature “was predominantly an emotional experience from first to last,” it “was *not* for [the naturalist, Ruskin in particular] a delight which stimulated his mind to more awareness of itself and hence of a supreme Mind” (72; emphasis added). Rather than privilege the individual subject (the observer), the Victorians honor the individual personality of the object: “His goal [...] is to see not vaguely, approximately, nor according to habits of generalisation, but

²⁶ *The Voyage of the Beagle*, originally published as Darwin’s *Journal and Remarks* (1839).

²⁷ Ironically, wonder led to overzealous collecting. While natural history is responsible for getting people outdoors, reminding them of their kinship with all creatures, and inspiring reverence for nature, the appetite it piqued could be voracious. Merrill describes the “hunt” for specimens: “One must never squander a chance to acquire a new novelty, which, although new, may yet be identified, classified, and minutely examined” (30). The rhetoric of acquisition, or possession, is clearly problematic. By going beyond description, the practice of collecting, labeling, and displaying specimens is an exercise of control. Gosse and George Henry Lewes attracted attention to the seaside and to the environment where they collected specimens, but their published works drew tourists in droves who wished to repeat their explorations, decimating environments. Soon, amateur natural historians (and Gosse himself) could not find the same specimens. Merrill defends Gosse, however: “That Gosse sees animals as animals – vibrant with their own life – and not as specimens – dead and disjointed – is evident in his more technical work” (204). The care taken to re-animate specimens – preserve them in such a way, as Alfred Russell Wallace puts it, makes them “come to life” (113). Charles Kingsley, too, satirized the “hubris involved in seeking a new species of animal or plant” (223). Seashores were ravaged by collectors who literally drove species to extinction by hunting down samples, like the overhunted bison of 19th century America.

freshly, precisely, and deeply, so that the object is known absolutely as its individual self,” in context with its surroundings (Ball 74). The object of the gaze elicits emotion, but remains the subject of the representation. Insofar as naturalists saw nature as instancing moral values (sympathy, kinship, mindfulness), realist nature may not be so diametrically opposed to Romantic Nature: in other words, naturalists color their depiction of the ecosystem with a ‘grand,’ ‘enchanted,’ or ‘marvelous’ view of life. For Darwin, at least, this optimism served to make his ideas more palatable to the public, and for popular writers including Gosse and Kingsley, a celebratory tone aided their ethical intention of inspiring readers to enjoy their own personal engagement with nature. However, these emotions inspire wonder in order to “see” and “know” the actual environment. Despite its emphasis on grandeur, natural history accounts for brutal or indifferent nature as well. Darwin’s *Origin* presents, in John Glendening’s words, “a story focused on ‘survival of the fittest’ – on chance, competition, predation, death, and extinction” (13), where evolution occurs by self-directed processes, indifferent to human interests. Since the wondrous environments that naturalists described could be beautiful, cooperative, or “red in tooth and claw,” they presented a balanced version of nature.

Significantly, naturalists believed that a “scientific habit of mind” would improve society. Kingsley prefaces his *Town Geology* with an assessment of the social value of natural history. In learning to see realist nature, the observer must free him/herself of “prejudice, vanity, or temper” (14). Natural history allows one to “escape” from bigotry and narrow-mindedness (14), uniting humanity into a common brotherhood. The ability to see realist nature will ensure future “health and wealth” (10). To practice natural history, Kingsley continues, one does not need expensive apparatuses, simply common sense. He insists that people risk ruining the country by refusing to “learn [or] obey those physical laws of the universe, which (whether we be conscious of them or

not) are all around us, like some walls of iron and of adamant” (9). Their “unreason,” “greed and haste” has led to the expected results of “superstitions, persecutions, wars, famines, pestilence, hereditary diseases, poverty, waste – waste incalculable, and now too often irremediable – waste of life, of labour, of capital, of raw material, of soil, of manure, of every bounty which God has bestowed on man” (9). Kingsley’s reference to the “physical laws of the universe” once again points to realist nature: the set of adamantine natural processes human beings are beholden to. He worries that without a proper understanding of realist nature, human beings will continue to squander environmental resources and pollute the earth, and therefore themselves.

We can see, then, an ethical agenda in common between natural history and the literary genre of realism. As Amanda Claybaugh argues, the Victorian novel “was understood to be actively working for the social good” (7), enacting a type of affective and cognitive training on the reader, who in turn acts on the world. To return to Eliot’s requirements for realism, the novelist must not flinch from representing mundane or ugly realities in his/her task to record the truth; adopting the naturalist gaze, the novelist represents interactions between human beings and the material environment. Similar to natural history, the realist novel magnifies local environments to inculcate larger lessons about social duty and environmental responsibility, typically focusing on everyday life. The term “natural realism” points to authors’ strict adherence to natural fact fused with an ecological consciousness. Amy M. King writes, “Just as the prestige of the detail in natural history comes from believing that every manifestation of life, however humble, demands not only attention but reverence, the prestige of the detail in literary realism comes from an ethical impetus to capture the truth of the everyday and commonplace” (“Reorienting the Scientific Frontier” 156). Natural history was considered both an intellectual and moral pastime, just as Victorian realism was an ethical mode. For Eliot, faithful

representation is a moral mission. Using religious wording, she calls the artist's task "sacred," warning that unrealistic representation "is a grave evil" ("The Natural History of German Life" 110). She contends that all walks of life ought to be portrayed in art. In *Adam Bede*, she insists: "These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are" (165). Natural realism, as adopted by Eliot, Dickens, Trollope, and others, faithfully demonstrates realist nature as it determines the lives of characters.

Eliot adopts the didactic naturalist persona in the first chapter of Book IV in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), where she describes the peculiar native customs of the town:

[Y]ou are irritated with these dull men and women, as a kind of population out of keeping with the earth on which they live – with this rich plain where the great river flows for ever onward, and links the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's mighty heart [...]. I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie [...]. [F]or does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life (273).

While Eliot does not approve of the "narrow" and conventional lifestyle of St. Ogg's, she explains that environment determines character, and thus both must be mutually understood, while justifying her focus on ordinary folk through the lens of natural history. She studies their habits as rooted in English culture; as Eliot poses as an anthropologist, her realism passes as non-

fiction. The same way naturalists recorded their observations with, in Gosse's words, "minute truthfulness," realist authors committed themselves to accurately portraying everyday life.²⁸

Realism, in fact, relies on realist nature, thus validating the determinism that George Levine suggests is intrinsic to Victorian realism, where humans exist symbiotically with the environment rather than simply appreciating nature.²⁹ Environmental concerns are human concerns. Indeed, natural history often included anthropological details, especially in travel accounts that described native customs. In *Glaucus*, Kingsley does not "merely [speak] of the rare birds which may be shot, the curious facts as to the habits of fish which may be observed, great as these pleasures are. I speak of the scenery, the weather, the geological formation of the country, its vegetation, and the living habits of its denizens" (15). Just as natural history illustrates how environments determine habits, natural realism identifies ecological connections and the consequences of exploiting, transgressing, or simply disregarding these connections. The Victorians deliberately resisted idealized or symbolic representations of the environment. In his novels, Charles Dickens depicts "real" smog, even while exploiting its symbolic resonances; the elemental forces of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) suggest Heathcliff's inner turmoil, while authentically representing Yorkshire; the smoke and damp filling the garrets of Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848) depict the actual consequences of an unequal class system; Thomas Hardy plots how rustic Wessex shapes a literally "down to earth" sensibility in contrast to an artificial culture of consumption.

Becoming more than an emphasis on plot and particularity of things, realism is rooted in specific environments that determine the action.³⁰ The Victorian novel is an "intensely-local

²⁸ Gosse uses this phrase throughout *A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire Coast* (1853).

²⁹ See *The Realistic Imagination* (1981)

³⁰ The emphatic emphasis on detail becomes a way to account for both Victorian materialism (their well-documented emphasis on things) and changes in literary taste, which had formerly "predisposed people to snub

chronotype” or, as King affirms, an “*ecology* – a place in time that considers the natural world as well as the human world” (“Stillness” 95, 96). Studying a particular area, like Middlemarch, Manchester or Casterbridge, cultivates what ecocritics call a “sense of place,” an intimate connection with the environment, and what Yi-fu Tuan calls “topophilia,” the affective bond between people and place. This can be any place dignified with detailed description that fosters a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging, but it is often connoted with a “home,” or native place. Richard Jefferies, the popular Victorian nature writer, contends:

it would be a very noble thing indeed if the true English feeling for home life should become the dominant passion of the country once again. By home life I mean that which gathers about a house, however small, standing in its own grounds. Something comes into existence about such a house, an influence, a pervading feeling, like some warm colour softening the whole, tinting the lichen on the wall, even the very smoke-marks on the chimney. It is home, and the men and women born there will never lose the tone it has given them. Such homes are the strength of a land. (“After the County Franchise” 240)

The “life” that gathers about the house includes the warmth of the sun, plant life, and the native people. The human and nonhuman materially act on each other: the land gives the dwellers a specific “tone,” while the lichen growing on the walls reminds us of the exchanges between built and natural environments. To make land a home is to protect what Oscar Wilde calls the “house beautiful,” the earth. Jefferies’ philosophy is closely tied to Heideggerian “dwelling,” a term appropriated by ecocritics to mean living practically within the environment, coexistence, and duty and responsibility to the earth. Tracing the origins of the word, Heidegger explains “*bauen*”

details in favor of ideas” (Merrill 64). See for instance Asa Briggs’s *Victorian Things* (1988) and Elaine Freedgood’s *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006).

means to dwell: “This signifies to remain, to stay in a place”, or to lay down roots (“Building Dwelling Thinking” 348). The word “dwell” also characterizes the existence of humans.

Heidegger continues, “The old word *bauen*, which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen*, however, *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine” (349). Thus, to dwell is to preserve and protect:

[T]he basic character of dwelling is safeguarding [...]. Mortals dwell in that they save the earth [...]. Saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save properly means to set something free into its own essence. To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from boundless spoliation.³¹ (352)

Dwelling cultivates (*bildung*) us as human beings, expanding our appreciation of the world, allowing it to appear in all its mystery and inexhaustible wonder. If to properly dwell is to protect, realistically recording how characters live and engage with their environment potentially demonstrates either problematic or appropriate interventions into the environment. Sense of place is the cornerstone of the Victorians’ eco-consciousness.

Natural history shaped discourse, which in turn, shaped habits. Launching an obsession for hobbyists nationwide, it trained the public to “see” and experience, both as a solitary and social activity. The hobby gave people incentive to go outdoors, to become more observant. Similarly, the realist novel trained perception and emotional responses: sympathy for all fellow-creatures, and attention to the commonplace, however flawed or ugly. For Masson, realism

³¹ Dwelling, an eco-consciousness, is a secular version of stewardship. Heidegger’s term is to “spare” the earth: “The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare” (351). He says, “To spare and preserve means to take under our care, to look after the fourfold [earth, sky, divinities, and mortals] in its essence” (353). The “fourfold” describes an ecology that humans are part of, rather than apart from: “Mortals dwell in the way they safeguard the fourfold in its essential unfolding” (352).

amounted to “purpose”: though doctrine may differ among British novelists, they wrote with “didactic earnestness” (290-1). The “didactic aim” of the natural realists discussed in this chapter is the non-symbolic or semi-symbolic representation of a totalizing ecosystem and an attention to how that system determines social relationships in a manner that underscores the need to conserve it. Though the mode’s representations of the environment emphasize literal fact, we see that natural realism imbues nature with intrinsic value: in ethics, the value an object has ‘in itself’ or ‘for its own sake.’ Masson admits that “[i]t is impossible [...] for the Novelist or for any other artist to limit himself to the mere function of representing what he sees. However dis-passionate his mind, however determined he may be to regard the facts around him as so many objects to be observed, studied, represented, and nothing more, there will always be more or less of purpose blended with the representation” (262-3). “Purpose” does not necessarily reduce nature to its symbolic value, or cause the author’s beliefs to overshadow the facts. Though the emotions of awe and wonder underlie descriptions in natural history, the author aims to represent the environment as objectively as possible, as literal fact; in so doing, s/he inculcates the doctrine of eco-consciousness within the reader. Novelists, too, negotiate between morally-charged description and empiricism. Natural realism develops the ethically generative outcomes of the mediation between “truth” as objective fact and didactic representations that invest the environment with intrinsic value.

II. Wonder on the Shore

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven is on the sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make

A sound like thunder -everlastingly.
Dear child! dear girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.
William Wordsworth (1802)

In the difficulty of hearing anything but wind and waves, and in the crowd, and the unspeakable confusion, and my first breathless efforts to stand against the weather, I was so confused that I looked out to sea for the wreck, and saw nothing but the foaming heads of the great waves.... There was a bell on board; and as the ship rolled and dashed, like a desperate creature driven mad, now showing us the whole sweep of her deck, as she turned on her beam-ends towards the shore, now nothing but her keel, as she sprung wildly over and turned towards the sea, the bell rang; and its sound, the knell of those unhappy men, was borne towards us on the wind.
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850)

Sense of place – be it landscape or seascape – inspires wonder in the everyday. An examination of Romantic nature and realist nature is fruitful to understand the difference between place functioning as a generic backdrop for human drama and place functioning in a deterministic manner. In his poem, “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,” as William Wordsworth looks out upon the sea, he sees beauty and tranquility, inspiring his meditation on the “dear girl” beside him, teaching her to respect and reverence nature.³² Nature was a religious experience for many of the Romantic poets like Wordsworth who praised its healing properties, and Coleridge who, yearning to take a walk, compares the land to a cathedral: “The many-steeped tract magnificent/ Of hilly fields and meadows.”³³ Much, though not all, Romantic

³² Likely his 10-year-old daughter, Caroline, born to his French mistress.

³³ “This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison” (1797).

poetry is characterized by the worship of Nature.³⁴ The Victorians would maintain this reverence, while grounding their response to environment in a unique sense of place.³⁵

Oscar Wilde remarked, “Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hid there” (“The Decay of Lying” 1078), often producing his best work when he returned home from his walks. Without disputing the Romantics’ eco-consciousness, one may assert that Nature in that period usually becomes a platform for self-discovery.³⁶ Nature as a setting has value mainly in relation to the self, so that the setting can often be substituted without altering meaning. Industry lurks offstage as the poems retreat into idealized nature. In “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” Wordsworth watches dancing daffodils to cure his malaise, before returning to his home.³⁷ The industrial city disturbs Wordsworth, a circumstance left in the margins when he chances on the host of flowers. Despite this latent anxiety, “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” a memory of a blissful moment in nature remembered by the speaker in his home, ignores the social world surrounding the flowers, as

³⁴ Both M.H. Abrams and Northrop Frye emphasize this religious quality of Romantic poetry: Frye declares that, “The Romantic poet’s mind is normally in a state of pantheistic rapport with nature (*Anatomy of Criticism* 56), while Abrams suggests that God becomes absorbed into “sacramental nature in communion” with the human mind (*Natural Supernaturalism* 139).

³⁵ In the 1850s, Masson distinguishes between the “ideality” of Romanticism and the “reality” of Victorian prose; in the 1960s, George J. Becker asserts that the view of nature as either metaphysical or material is the “chasm” that divides the Romantic from the Realist school. Contemporary critics continue to consider how the Romantic poets turn away from the physical world. For further study, see Marjorie Levinson, Mary Moorman, and Raymond Williams on Wordsworth. Levinson writes that, Wordsworth’s poetry “rebukes even the gentlest material interest” (10), referencing Tintern Abbey which notably ignores the titular abbey and its social realities of poverty and neglect, and, as Moorman points out, fails to mention the industrial presence and pollution. Williams similarly discusses Wordsworth’s “retreat” into an “idyllic landscape” as characteristic of Romanticism (*Culture and Society*, 80, 37).

³⁶ This is, of course, a generalization. Poems such as John Clare’s “Mouse’s Nest” portray the ordinary with the stance of an objective observer.

³⁷ The waves beside [the daffodils] danced; but they

Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:

A poet could not but be gay,

In such a jocund company:

I gazed---and gazed---but little thought

What wealth the show to me had brought (lines 13-18). Wordsworth’s gazes through rose-colored glasses; his personified daffodils are not actual objects. Though his response is “real,” he is the subject of the poem. We see this more clearly by looking at his sister’s Grasmere journal entry of 15 April 1802, where she describes the same scene. She remains focused on the flowers although both writers employ pathetic fallacy to describe the “dancing” daffodils.

well as pollution and the negative side effects of human expansion on nature, while, as I will show, play an important role in Victorian representations of the environment.

After personifying Nature in a non-specific setting, Wordsworth discovers a sense of optimism and faith, comparable to the experience registered in “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free.” Scott Hess explains that, “Although Wordsworth is famous for walking, his most heightened moments of imagination typically take the point of view of the stationed, ‘halted traveler’, when the walker stops in a way that physically separates him from his environment in order to compose and capture it as image from a fixed outside point” (30). The specific visual details of the scene, “which [remain] typically quite sparse,” matter less than “the mutually constituting relationship between a pictorially composed nature and an autonomous viewing self” (30). While the speaker of “I wandered lonely as cloud” begins in motion, “the poem depends on his stopping at this specific, stationed point of view,” preventing him from entering “into any form of active, bodily relationship with his environment. Instead, he maintains a sense of physical separation and distance” (25). The speaker’s primary purpose is to discover his autonomous self in nature, yet this rests on the separation of the observer from his or her environment.³⁸ Wordsworth undoubtedly admires nature, and his belief in the curative powers of nature and the importance of environmental engagement in discovering our best self influenced other writers well into the Victorian period, and continues to influence modern environmentalism. However, Wordsworth’s focus remains predominately aesthetic and individual rather than “ecological,” such as Charles Kingsley’s consciousness of the ways natural

³⁸ Through Wordsworth, Hess describes Romantic Nature “as a space of refuge or transcendence, pursued through high-Romantic modes of individual aesthetic and spiritual imagination” (16). Individual consciousness and an aesthetic focus create an idea of nature separate from social life and work. Harold Bloom goes so far as to say that Wordsworth’s poetry is “anti-nature poetry” (7): rather than reconcile man with nature, Wordsworth asserts “the power of the mind over outward sense,” or the imagination’s superiority over the actual environment (8).

laws act on the human, and the diverse sets of relationships one can readily observe with an attentive, embodied eye.

Wordsworth's poetry exemplifies a Romantic trend. John Keats, similarly, used natural settings as a starting point for his own personal reflections. He may have been inspired by an actual nightingale, but "Ode to a Nightingale" muses on Keats's mortality via the enviable creature.³⁹ As Daniel Cottom suggests in his study of Romantic novelists, Romantic landscape "serves to bring into focus the relationships, values, and overall structure of [the author's] own art" (37). In an Ann Radcliffe novel, for instance, the Gothic setting augments and mirrors the inner turmoil of her characters, while valorizing those who commune with Nature, such as Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). In what T.S. Eliot called "objective correlative," character is revealed through reactions to Nature, once again idealized or imagined. The settings of Romantic literature are familiar – the "few miles above" Tintern Abbey, Mont Blanc, "Gothic" Italy – each exuding a type of beauty or sublimity. In reference to Romantic poets specifically, Lynn Merrill asserts that they and their readers, "by and large, preferred that descriptions of nature be beautiful, that is, in accord with accepted limits of poetic diction. The Victorian naturalist, on the other hand, felt no such constraints. For the naturalist, every fact mattered, every detail inspired amazement" (7).⁴⁰ This included the ugly, flawed, ordinary, and even the dangerous.

³⁹ Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath (lines 51-54). The poem is hardly about the nightingale at all, who only appears as a catalyst to Keats's meditation.

⁴⁰ Merrill's distinction between the Romantic poet and Victorian naturalist simplifies many of the complexities of Romantic poetry in order to emphasize a difference of vision between the two modes. Wordsworth attacks elevated poetic diction in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and includes unsavory details in his poetry. Nevertheless, I agree with Merrill's point that a general "preference" exists between the subject matter of Romantic poetry (idealized nature) and the naturalist's objects of study (realist nature).

The contrast between Romantic Nature and realist nature emerges in *David Copperfield* (1850), Charles Dickens's most personal novel.⁴¹ In the above passage, as David looks out upon the sea, he wonders at its power. The deafening wind jostles him forcefully enough to take away his breath. David's description does not privilege vision, referencing sound and sensation to emphasize his embodied experience. The sea is visceral, raw, physical – a force to be reckoned with. David fights with the wind as he watches the sinking ship and the men in peril, feeling fear and anxiety rather than fascination or excitement. Often a heroic figure, the sailor braves the high seas for glory and riches. The hazards of the job are the source of legend; the sailor's roughness and hardihood signify true "manliness." Yet, Dickens's sailors contend with the elements for their livelihood rather than for sport. In this extreme case, being pulled down by a storm, the sea humbles humanity. It is capable of inflicting actual physical injury or death. In their anxiety to reach shore safely, the men toss off board the goods (fruit and wine) sought from coastal Europe (Spain or Portugal). The wreck reveals the risk of importing goods. Most importantly, the confusion in the scene is not a product of mental anguish, or David's grief over his wife Dora's death. In the moment, the reality of the storm possesses him.

David is born in Blunderstone, Suffolk, but lives in various places including London and Canterbury; his visits to Yarmouth, a seaport, are arguably most formative. The sea in Yarmouth, where "the town and the tide" are "mixed up, like toast and water" (40), continually reminds the townspeople of their reliance on the environment. We see how the sea materially affects the residents as they make nosegays of seaweed and mirrors framed with oyster-shells. The smell of fish permeates the area. David is captivated by the Peggotys' home, "a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat [...] with an iron funnel sticking out of it for a

⁴¹ His eighth novel, many of its elements follow events in Dickens' own life, and it is probably the most autobiographical of all of his novels. In the preface, he calls the text a novel of "personal confidences, and private emotions."

chimney and smoking very cosily [sic]" (41). This "real boat," "which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times," emblemizes the impact of the sea on the family. Here, seafaring literally creates the Peggotys' dwelling, in the Heideggerian sense. By recycling the ship, the family has resourcefully and literally laid down roots out of the means of their subsistence. Though the shore provides recreation, signaling their comfort in the place, the residents live in a precarious peace: the sea "is cruel" (46). Emily startles David when she admits that she is "afraid of the sea. [...] I have seen it very cruel to some of our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house, all to pieces" (46). Collecting shells and pebbles, Emily boldly navigates the wooden pier, balancing near the edge. David confuses her familiarity with the area with carelessness, but Emily is acutely aware of both the beauty and the perils of sea-life. Both Emily's father, Tom, and Ham's father, Joe, drowned at sea, imparting onto their offspring an early appreciation for the risks of maritime life. Through David's awestruck responses, Dickens resists idealizing the sea and inauthentic representations that would undercut its danger.

The industry of Yarmouth relies on its coast. Most of the men fish to fulfill their day-to-day needs, but also sell their wares to in-landers and import luxury goods. This potentially hazardous relationship with realist nature crafts the rough but earnest ways of Mr. Peggoty and his nephew.⁴² The relationship between material outcome and how environment is regarded is most pointed in the comparison between Ham, the true sailor, and Steerforth, the adventurer, where the sea proves to be a test of character. Ham is "sturdy" (324), of a "rough" build like his uncle, who observes that Ham has "a good deal o' the sou'wester in him – wery salt – but, on the whole, a honest sort of chap" (322). A hard worker who possesses the working knowledge of the sea, in his love for and loyalty to Emily, he emerges as one of the heroes of the novel. However,

⁴² Dickens returns to this thread in *Dombey and Son* (1846-8), differentiating between the exciting stories about nautical life, and the desirability of actually going to sea.

David's "bad angel," James Steerforth, looks down upon Ham and his family as "animals," separated from his class by their labor and lack of intellect. Steerforth's good graces hide the faults in his character: snobbery, egotism, and frivolity. An idle gentleman without a steady occupation, he constantly looks for ways to amuse himself. David continually laments that, as "a person of great power," Steerforth does not apply himself to any of his talents. Though "a good sailor" (327), Steerforth's excursions are just another diversion: David "knew that his restless nature and bold spirits delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other means of excitement that presented itself to him" (327). Emily sadly becomes another game for Steerforth, who wins her from Ham, the worthy suitor.

Steerforth takes to the sea when Emily leaves him, rather than returning to his upper-class life; just as David needs travel and activity to mourn the loss of his wife, Steerforth finds solace in hard work. This tragedy resolves itself during one of the novel's crucial moments, the storm – the object of David's gaze in the epigraph – fittingly enacted off the shore of Yarmouth, bringing high winds and rain, "like showers of steel," endangering the men on the sea. David describes it: "The tremendous sea itself, when I could find sufficient pause to look at it, in the agitation of the blinding wind, the flying stones and sand, and the awful noise, confounded me. As the high watery walls came rolling in, and, at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if the least would engulf the town [...]. I seemed to see a rending and upheaving of all nature" (794). David wonders at the "awful" and humbling power of the storm. The town immediately takes action, even as they realize they are no match for the waves: "the sea, sweeping over the rolling wreck made a clean breach, and carried men, spars, casks, planks, bulwarks, heaps of such toys, into the boiling surge" (798). Ham mans the lifeboats and refuses to stay on shore, being swept up by the wreck on his fourth journey into the water, as he rushes to the aid of a solitary man

clinging to the mast. When the sailor's body washes ashore, David recognizes Steerforth. The sea does not discriminate with its victims, taking both the able and virtuous Ham and the disgraced Steerforth. While Ham's death is clearly dramatic, he shares the same fate as his father and uncle; though tragic, it is commonplace. Ham, with little will to live of his own, uses his skills to save those he can; Steerforth, the novice, is killed after only a few weeks at sea, but seems to find peace as he waves his cap to David before his death.

This dramatic moment exemplifies realist nature; both men succumb to an implacable reality, whether or not Dickens deliberately plots the timing of the storm. Nature may seem to act as the helpmate of Fate, admittedly a trope in Dickens' novels. George Levine remarks, "Of all the Victorian novelists, Dickens is the most reckless with passions, but they inhere for him in the minutiae of the most trivial experience. While he needs no metaphorical mountains or rivers, he has quite a few, and he will often use Nature at its wildest (as, for instance, in the death of Steerforth) to act out passions not legitimate within society" ("High and Low" 148). This "storm of the century" is part *deus ex machina* to punish Steerforth and part natural occurrence. (Ham's death, a sad but not atypical fatality, underscores this point.) In London, the site of both David's overindulgence and Emily's shame, the Thames is arguably a metaphor for moral filth, in stark contrast to the cleansing properties of the sea. In *Cleansing the City*, Michelle Allen cites Martha (a friend of Emily's), who goes to the river to commit suicide, as an example of the prostitute allying herself with the polluted Thames as a mirror of internal corruption.⁴³ Allen argues, "Deploying the comprehensive conception of pollution that informs Victorian sanitary discourse, Dickens sets up an exact equation between Martha's tainted moral condition and the

⁴³ In *Cleansing the City*, Allen argues that sanitation reform was a means both to cleanse the literal filth of the city, and purify moral filth. In reference to Martha, Allen observes, "the nadir of the prostitute's degradation, her ultimate moment of tragic suffering, is repeatedly represented as taking place on the Thames. When a sexually suspect woman makes her figurative fall, she comes to a halt quite literally on the banks of the river, the lowest point in London in both geographical and social terms" (63).

river's defiled physical condition. In the passage, the figures of the sexually suspect woman and the river are used reflexively to describe and define each other's degeneracy" (64). As the polluted river is Martha's logical fate, the sea arguably both cleanses and punishes Steerforth, a suitable death for defiling the sea-nurtured Emily. Nevertheless, the undisputed actual pollution forges a literal connection between moral corruption and environmental pollution. In his introduction to Dickens's novels, E.D.H. Johnson insists that Dickens "never allows the symbolic overtones adducible from the settings of his later novels to obscure their literal immediacy in furthering the narrative, illuminating character, or focusing social criticism" (163). Waste and reckless industry, immoral practices, pollute the river just as they exacerbate poverty. *David Copperfield* illustrates "pure" and "polluted" environments – here Yarmouth and London – juxtaposing ways of living and their environmental impact. While Dickens exploits the symbolic resonances of water, the filthy Thames and the risky sea are part of his natural realism.

III. Dwelling on the Land

Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) provides an excellent contrast to Dickens in its use and description of Nature. The novel illustrates Romantic Nature with the Scottish Highlands setting the stage for Edward Waverley's mental transformation. Scott creates a flawed hero who must learn to quell his overactive imagination. Edward finds excitement away from home, in Scotland, the "ideal world" of his dreams (54), in opposition to "well-ordered", cultivated England (130). Edward's impression of Scotland is more important to the novel's purpose than the reality, contributing to its thesis that revolution, while exciting, belongs to the past. The wild Highlands, home of thieves and adventurers, is the site of rebellion as Fergus MacIvor, the Chief of the Highlanders, fights to restore the "true" King, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. Not

surprisingly, Edward falls in love with the exotic Flora MacIvor, who, in their first meeting, leads him to a picturesque view, characteristic of the region. Like “a knight of romance,”

Waverley

was conducted by the fair Highland damsel, his silent guide [...]. [T]his narrow glen [...] seemed to open into the land of romance. The rocks assumed a thousand peculiar and varied forms [...]. [P]assing under the bridge which he had viewed with so much terror, the path ascended rapidly from the edge of the brook, and the glen widened into a sylvan amphitheatre, waving with birch, young oaks, and hazels, with here and there a scattered yew-tree. (176)

Notice the repeated use of the word “romance,” employed in the generic sense (legendary, extraordinary adventures), and clearly unrealistic. Edward does not feel genuine terror, fully aware that he is in no real danger with the sure-footed Flora. The scene seems artfully arranged, as, in fact, it is:

At a short turning, the path [...] suddenly placed Waverley in front of a *romantic* waterfall [...]. The borders of this *romantic* reservoir corresponded in beauty; but it was a beauty of a stern and commanding cast, as if in the act of expanding into grandeur. Mossy banks of turf were broken and interrupted by huge fragments of rock, and decorated with trees and shrubs, some of which had been planted under the direction of Flora, but so cautiously, that they added to the grace, without diminishing the *romantic* wildness of the scene (176; emphases added).

These sublime crags are intimidating but aesthetically pleasing: artful, not natural. Significantly, the view is only wild in appearance, not in the sense of “pristine” (untouched by human hands). Flora subtly alters the landscape, indicating that Nature’s function is to delight. The scene serves

to charm Edward with the Highlands and stoke his imagination. In love with the exoticism (more than Flora in herself), Edward joins the rebellion. The soldiers, thieves, and difficult journeys are part of the allure. The scenery mirrors this stage in his development, in a way untrue of *David Copperfield* when David confronts similar landscapes. Though each author contrasts the foreign and the domestic, the comparison in *Waverley* is much more deliberately symbolic. As Flora's manipulations of the landscape show, Scotland is an imagined construction. Ultimately a wealthy gentleman, Edward is materially unaffected by the land and the accompanying occupations; through his travels, he merely sows his wild oats, coming to value his native land. He marries the domestic Rose, and will inherit Waverley-Honour (his family home) a better and wiser man.⁴⁴ Scott juxtaposes the apparently "wild" Highlands and "cultivated" England. Scott's imaginary Scottish environment does not actually shape the lives of the characters so much as provide an appropriate background for Edward's maturation. England represents the "real," the stable and domestic, but it is not the subject of the novel. Instead, Nature as the ground for self-discovery concerns *Waverley's* pages, while Dickens, in contrast, focuses on realist nature's material impact on his characters.

Sir Walter Scott would shape the literary tastes of the young Brontës who spent their childhood eagerly reading the volumes of Scott, Wordsworth, and Southey from their father's study. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is often deemed a "Romantic" work; however, the novel enacts the tension between Romantic and realist nature, and between Nature and Culture as artificial concepts separated in the human mind. Brontë, inheriting but developing beyond a Romantic sensibility, interrogates humanity's relationship to environment: writing

⁴⁴ George Levine compares Scott's *Waverley* with the Victorian novel, to show the move towards realism, reading Scott's deliberate contrast between the seductive landscape of the Highlands with domestic England as a means to tutor readers to "reject Romantic separation" ("High and Low" 146). While the novel eventually rests in the preferred, un-idealized space, nature nevertheless remains a symbol.

within the context of industrial England, Brontë locates her novel just before the industrial revolution cemented the mental barrier between nature and culture. The varying landscapes of *Wuthering Heights* determine the characters' lives, revealing the fundamental dependency of human beings on their environment. In her book *The Brontës and Nature*, E.L. Duthie explains, "Behind the individual landscape [Emily] sees the physical universe, which is not modified by the human situation but follows its own course in accordance with its own laws" (209), just as the sea functions in *David Copperfield*. In realist nature, "[n]ature is independent of man, but man is not independent of nature" (Duthie 209). In her 1850 Preface to the novel, Charlotte Brontë writes, "With regard to the rusticity of *Wuthering Heights*, I admit the charge, for I feel the quality. It is rustic all through. It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as the root of the heath. Nor was it natural that it should be otherwise; the author being herself a native and nursling of the moors" (li). As Emily is determined by her environment so are her characters. Charlotte's word "knotty" identifies the ecological sensibility, the organicism, of her sister's novel, echoing the language of "entanglements" popularized by Darwin that re-places human beings within the ecosystem. Though they live in a circumscribed area, Emily Brontë's characters continually affect one another as they are affected by the moors. To be "rustic all through" here means representing rural manners and lifestyle, or how the characters dwell within the landscape. A secondary meaning of "rustic" is "plain", "unrefined", or un-manipulated. Brontë's rustic representation is "true": rather than simply a Romantic inheritance as Duthie suggests in the introduction to her study, the stormy quality of the book represents the actual environment. As we will see, Brontë's landscape places intrinsic value in nature, as preferable to a wholly "cultural" life – a life lived apart from nature; though she represents the environment as literal

fact, she creates a semi-symbolic landscape in the wild moors that opposes a value system separating human culture from nature.

“Wuthering” suggests wildness, but the book defines the word as “a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather” (4). The title, then, references environmental forces and their impact on the comfort and crops of the denizens. The residents of the Heights rely on their land for subsistence, despite being a wealthy family, in contrast to the cultivated family at Thrushcross Grange, who keep the outdoors at bay. Some critics argue strongly that the dual structure of the novel endorses the wild and free values of Heathcliff and Catherine, while others point to the second half of the novel, and the civilized union of Hareton and Cathy.⁴⁵ Brontë, much like Scott, chooses to end her novel by restoring order, even as Heathcliff and Catherine’s “unquiet” specters haunt the closing scene. While it would seem that culture prevails, Brontë deconstructs the binary between nature and culture, insisting humans must dwell in nature.

Arguably, the novel is best remembered for its first half, the story of the fierce Catherine, a “wild, wick slip” (42), who chooses to tame herself by marrying Edgar Linton (culture’s representative), rather than her soul-mate Heathcliff (nature’s representative).⁴⁶ Clearly this is significant gendering: Catherine, as a woman, is allied to nature. Carolyn Merchant, among others, details the history of this divide and the valuation of culture – associated with masculine qualities of intellect and reason, above nature – associated with the female, the body, and irrationality.⁴⁷ However, that Heathcliff is “natural”, too, does not serve to effeminize him, though he is intensely passionate. At one point in the novel, Catherine describes Heathcliff as

⁴⁵ For instance, Gilbert and Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*) and George Levine (“High and Low”) emphasize the rational ending, while George Haggerty (*Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*) and Edward Chitham (“The Themes of *Wuthering Heights*”) emphasize the novel’s passion.

⁴⁶ I refer to Catherine Linton née Earnshaw as “Catherine” and her daughter as “Cathy.”

⁴⁷ See *The Death of Nature* (1980).

“an unreclaimed creature, without refinement – without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (102). Just as Catherine’s gender marginalizes her, Heathcliff’s foreign origins ally him to the idea of Nature as savage or wild. Nelly first describes him as a “dark-skinned gypsy” (5); found on the streets of Liverpool, Heathcliff is considered the “Other,” which restricts his class mobility despite his wealth and education. We should remember that much of Heathcliff’s “savagery” and cruelty is instigated by Hindley, who teases and abuses the “interloper.” Heathcliff’s natural disposition is not necessarily brutal, and that he is capable of incredible love and loyalty is proven time and again by his constant love for Catherine.

Rather than reinforcing the belief that Nature and its savage and wild qualities exist outside culture, Brontë emphasizes Heathcliff’s association with nature for her own purposes. The root of Heathcliff’s name, “heath,” can be defined as follows: “Open uncultivated ground; an extensive tract of waste land; a wilderness; now chiefly applied to a bare, more or less flat, tract of land, naturally clothed with low herbage and dwarf shrubs, esp. with the shrubby plants known as heath, heather or ling” (OED). Older usages mean “cow-pasture,” which interestingly shifts the focus to agrarian uses of land. The name is also suggestive of “heathen,” or “[o]ne that has no more religion, enlightenment, or culture than a pagan” (OED). His name ties Heathcliff to the land in two ways, associating him with wilderness and labeling him a pagan, which aside from meaning savage or uncultivated, is a follower of pantheistic or nature-worshipping religions. The moors become a retreat from Joseph’s suffocating religion and Hindley’s strict rules. Wishing to better her own situation, Catherine rejects the racially inferior Heathcliff. Yet moving to the Grange, she loses her connection to the moors, her lifeblood.⁴⁸ Society polarizes nature and culture, making Nature the “Other,” and Catherine suffers when forced to choose

⁴⁸ Her subsequent decline looks forward to my third chapter, where I suggest more fully that environmental detachment may cause mental illness.

between these two elements of her being. Brontë proposes the duo's association with nature as an alternative value system, and in this way, the moors become a semi-symbolic landscape paradoxically deconstructing the boundary between civilization and the landscape.

The raging of the moors functions not just as objective correlative, a mirror of Heathcliff and Catherine's wild spirits, it determines their behavior. The novel crafts a functional sense of place. Duthie argues, "The two houses are the twin poles of the action, but the fact that they are really in such close proximity greatly increases the sense of place which is essential to the novel" (223). Brontë meticulously maps the action and charts the novel's chronology, which hinges on the seasons. C.P. Sanger has outlined its specific dates, and points out the precision of its topography: "On going from Thrushcross Grange to the village of Gimmerton a highway branches off to the moor on the left. There is a stone pillar there. Thrushcross Grange lies to the south-west, Gimmerton to the east, and Wuthering Heights to the north. The distance from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights is four miles, and Penistone Crags lie a mile and half further on. It was half an hour from Gimmerton to Thrushcross Grange" (136). And so while the novel does not tend to linger on its descriptions of the moors, in part because Nelly Dean, the primary narrator, does not indulge in frequent outdoor rambles, land constantly asserts itself. Lockwood's confrontation with the snowstorm, making two miles into four, causes the illness that prompts the story-telling.⁴⁹ His attitude towards Yorkshire changes from, "This is a beautiful country!" (3), to, after "[f]our weeks' torture," "Oh, these bleak winds, and bitter, northern skies, and impassable roads, and dilatory country surgeons!" (91). Renting the Grange for peace and relaxation, the town-bred Lockwood sours on the rough environment as he

⁴⁹ Duthie remarks, "As always with Emily Brontë, the sky and the weather are essential to her scene, but there is no obtrusive weather symbolism. It is part of nature, and the reader accepts it as such, and as a rule is hardly conscious of how much it contributes to the human drama" (238).

discovers it must actually be dealt with. His romantic idea of Nature is shattered by material realities.

Their position in the landscape shapes the Grange and the Heights, and their respective inhabitants. Wuthering Heights is a working farm. “Is Wuthering Heights as pleasant a place as Thrushcross Grange?” Linton asks Nelly. “It is not so buried in trees, and it is not quite so large, but you can see the country beautifully, all round; and the air is healthier for you – fresher, and dryer. You will, perhaps, think the building is old and dark, at first – though it is a respectable house, the next best in the neighborhood” (205). The family continues to live on their family estate, built in 1500 by Hareton Earnshaw, and their daily routine conforms to the seasonal activities of the country year. Our first glimpse of the Heights, in late Fall, shows a would-be “cheerful” environment – a large, clean kitchen with a blazing fire (10). In the corner lie “a heap of dead rabbits” – possibly a future meal, various harvest tools, and the work-dogs (11). The loyal Joseph, indispensable to the Heights welfare, is invariably seen working or returning from work. He, as Duthie suggests, “sees the values of the Heights, where a living has to be wrested from the land and fertile soil is precious” (228), which explains why he only threatens to leave when Cathy uproots the plants in his garden. Nelly’s response to Linton is significant: the family may appear of a lower class than the residents of the Grange due to their intimate relationship to the land, but they are nevertheless respectable. The old-fashioned house bespeaks a rich history, with its antique furniture and unostentatious wealth. Though it is an emotionally gloomy place, it is situated in a healthy location. The picturesque Grange, in contrast, lies in the valley, rather than adjacent to the moors. Its trees represent a barrier between the park and the wild country. Though the Grange is fairly isolated, the opulence and manners of the house indicate culture in the sense of refinement. The Lintons, too, must survive off the land;

however, they do not participate in farm work. By keeping their hands clean, they maintain a genteel appearance. In contrast to the hands-on life of the Heights, “Mr. Linton and his daughter would frequently walk about among the reapers: at the carrying of the last sheaves, they stayed till dusk” (229). In this fleeting reference to the unseen workers of the Grange, Edgar merely observes the reaping.

As the rustic Heights and the refined Grange, the two poles of the action, represent the novel’s central binary, so do the arguably pagan Catherine-Heathcliff and the civilized Edgar. Catherine tells Nelly: “I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there [Hindley] had not brought Heathcliff so low, I wouldn’t have thought of it [...]. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning or frost from fire” (81). Despite the descriptions of Wuthering Heights as a savage place, for Heathcliff and Catherine, it is a sanctuary: “it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and to remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at” (46). They feel at home on the moors: on one hand, this escape is an act of rebellion against the tyranny of Hareton and social restraint, but on the other, there is no occupation preferable to being out of doors, a stronger motive than defiance. To others, like Lockwood, the moors seem hostile. However, the children open themselves up to realist nature, forming their impression of the moors as an inviting and free place.

Since we never see Catherine out on the moors, in her element, we never see her at her best. She possesses the naturalist gaze, which re-emerges in her madness. Pulling her pillow to pieces, Catherine can identify the feathers’ origins: “That’s a turkey’s [...]. And this is a wildduck’s; and this is a pigeon’s [...]. And this is a moorcock’s; and this – I should know it

among a thousand – it’s a lapwing’s. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot – we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons” (122). In this flashback to an outing on the moors, both children closely observe their environment, aware of the birds’ habits. George Haggerty recognizes that, “Meanings, for Catherine, reside in a heap of feathers, in a lapwing, in a cloud. She sees Heathcliff in them all because he is part of her ‘I-Thou’ relation with nature. He therefore understands her; he speaks her language” (72). The novel endorses this “I-Thou” relation with nature, where Nature is *not* the Other, but part of one’s self. When Catherine gets pulled into the world of Thrushcross Grange, she adopts the artificial manners of the Lintons, renouncing and betraying her “paganism.” Nelly says, “In the place where she heard Heathcliff termed a ‘vulgar young ruffian,’ and ‘worse than a brute,’ she took care not to act like him, but at home she had small inclination to practise politeness that would only be laughed at, and restrain an unruly nature when it would bring her neither credit, nor praise” (67). Her behavior indicates that manners are merely an artificial construction; society teaches her to reject Heathcliff, while her natural inclination draws her to her fiery soul-mate. Her choice proves to be her undoing. In their reading of *Wuthering Heights*, Gilbert and Gubar describe the civilizing process she undergoes as a “fall into” ladylike grace (255), falling from what culture considers “hell” (energetic, delightful nature) into rigidly hierarchical “heaven” (255).⁵⁰ For Catherine, as Edgar puts it: “It is impossible for you to be *my* friend, and *his* [Heathcliff’s] at the same time” (117). She must choose between culture and nature, ultimately making the socially acceptable choice in violation of her instinct. Unfortunately, culture (unmediated by nature) kills her, though in *Wuthering*

⁵⁰ Chapter 8, “Looking Oppositely: Emily Brontë’s Bible of Hell” in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. These are Blakeian terms; Victorian morality demands restraint to enter heaven, while hell is equated with the uncivilized and energetic. Blake, Brontë, and Catherine choose nature as “Hell.”

Heights, the resulting problem goes beyond living exclusively in culture, which here is overwhelmingly patriarchal. Catherine wishes she “were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free” (125). She tells Nelly, “I’m sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills” (126). Catherine’s story seems to very clearly reveal the consequences of rejecting nature. Indeed, as realist nature combines the human and non-human by definition, it is impossible to live outside it.

While in *David Copperfield* engaging with realist nature is a necessary risk, *Wuthering Heights* reveals the consequences of living apart from nature altogether. Cleverly symmetrical, the novel’s second half revises the prior story when the cultivated Hareton and Cathy supersede Heathcliff and Catherine.⁵¹ Cathy is *not* her mother’s child, but her father’s: calm and intellectual. Hareton is rough, but not barbaric. Nelly says she sees “[g]ood things lost amid a wilderness of weeds [...] evidence of a wealthy soil that might yield luxuriant crops, under other and favourable circumstances” (196). He resembles land requiring the human hand of technology – farming or gardening tools – to clear away the wild bits to make him fertile. He desires to learn, to become cultured, coming to represent a mixture between nature and culture that mitigates brutishness and retains rustic elements in culture. This intermingling, here positive, between human activity and the environment typifies realist nature.⁵²

Civilization only appears to triumph over nature, as Brontë’s goal is to bridge the two, in a move that is both practical and symbolic. Hareton, the most compelling argument for culture in the novel, is “gold put to the use of paving stones” (219) until he receives an education. A

⁵¹ As Gilbert and Gubar put it, the “illegitimate Heathcliff/Catherine” are replaced by a “proper couple,” Hareton and Cathy (302).

⁵² Gilbert and Gubar argue that the Heights is converted into the tranquil Grange, and “the nineteenth century can truly begin” with brutal forces safely relegated to the past (302). According to this view, *Wuthering Heights* resembles a Scott novel: the celebration of the wild is acceptable in the past, but order ultimately needs to be restored; nostalgia lingers for nature, romance, and the wild, but those energies cannot exist at the expense of progress.

degree of civilization is therefore desirable, but does it require the loss of freedom and the rejection of nature? In fact, Hareton's rustic upbringing defines him; different from Edgar Linton, or Linton Heathcliff, who were brought up to be idle gentlemen, Hareton is, and remains, a laborer. In contrast to Hareton's hardihood gained by the occupations of the farm, his foil, Linton Heathcliff, dramatizes more extremely the effects of different environments than even Edgar and Heathcliff; the urban Linton is "a pale, delicate, effeminate boy," peevish in disposition as his Uncle, though effeminate, was not (100). Raised exclusively in "culture," Linton is weak. Hareton, the educated rustic, preserves his intimate connection to the land.⁵³ Unlike Catherine, when Hareton becomes cultured, he is not forced to give up the rustic part of himself. The cultured Cathy is also a hybrid; by growing up on the moors, she is a child of nature. Her union with Hareton unites nature and culture; meant to be equals, Hareton is raised up to culture while Catherine learns to appreciate the gritty life of the Grange. This marriage combines practical working knowledge of the land with gentility. Characters dwell in realist nature, acknowledging the material influence of the nonhuman.

Characteristic of the organicism of the Victorian novel, the novel's two halves must be taken together to create a richer whole. Edward Chitham asserts the strongest feature in *Wuthering Heights* is "the opposition and reconciliation of extremes" (39).⁵⁴ While Scott keeps the wild and cultivated, the Romantic and domestic separate, Hareton and Cathy's relationship actually deconstructs the nature/culture duality by merging the best elements of both, showing a way to maintain order without sacrificing environmental values. As Duthie notes, "Since only four miles separate the two domains, and the couple will retain ownership of both, this does not

⁵³ As I observed earlier, it is also perfectly plausible to see Heathcliff's savagery as a product of an unaccepting culture.

⁵⁴ Chitham also argues that *Wuthering Heights*, on the whole, insists on living "*secundum naturam*," which is the Stoic's motto, "according to nature" (42).

mean that the moors and the farmstead, with Joseph as tenant, will cease to be part of their lives” (240). After all, the novel’s title is *Wuthering Heights*, not *Thrushcross Grange*. Though set in rural England, the novel’s central opposition to a society increasingly divorced from nature points outward to industrial areas, where this duality has potentially more damaging effects. Though ecological problems such as pollution and deforestation remain peripheral, Brontë challenges the “Othering” of nature that has created the Victorian environmental crisis. The same forces that civilize Catherine at the expense of natural ties are those that divide people more generally from agrarianism, rural values including environmental engagement. The novel closes at the turn of the century, as the industrial revolution gathers steam; Brontë’s balanced pair offers a model to mitigate its consequences. Realist nature functions as a cautionary mechanism: remaining detached from nature leads to decadence, while reestablishing culture’s place in nature provides a model for future progress.

IV. Geographies of Conservation

[I]n these days especially, when so many of us, cooped up in cities and chained to this part or that of the crowded machinery of complex civilization, have all but lost our acquaintance with our ancient mother earth, and hardly know even the overhanging sky, except in ribbands over streets and as giving picturesqueness to chimneys – is it not well, is it not medicinal that, as in those of our narrative poets, we should be taken away in imagination from our common social haunts, and placed in situations where Nature still exerts upon Humanity the unbroken magnetism of her inanimate bulk, soothing into peace in the quiet meadows, whispering of the unearthly in the depths of a forest, telling tales of the past in some solitary crumbling ruin, moaning her sorrow in the gusts of a moor at midnight, or dashing the eternal monotone of her many voices against a cliff-embattled shore?

David Masson, *British Novelists and their Styles* (1859)

It might be worthwhile, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her.

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848)

David Masson regards each realist novel as a natural history of “separate counties and parishes” throughout England. In other words, individual novelists map a part of England so that the novel genre preserves the habits, customs, and particularities of distinct places. Masson

praises the novelist, who, “in these days especially,” depicts the natural world many readers are denied access to, thus transporting them to “unbroken” environments and, in turn, preserving “mother earth” for posterity. In this section, I discuss “geographies of conservation,” that, like Masson urges, depict wholesome environments to demonstrate the need to preserve natural spaces, or, conversely, portray environments already at risk, tracing ecological problems through intersecting storylines. As local objects described in natural history point to a shared ecological totality, the locales within the realist novel point to the relationships between places, particularly the movement of pollution throughout the city, or the threat industry poses to rural areas.

As with *Wuthering Heights*, whose two parts create a complex whole, so the Victorian novel should be taken as an organic whole, wherein all the parts exist symbiotically. For Georg Lukács, the greatest achievement of realism is that the genre “depict[s] man as a whole in the whole of society” (5); in other words, realism requires organicism to trace deterministic influences. The emerging geographies of conservation stay true to the networks of connections identified by natural history, and, of course, Darwin’s metaphor of the “entangled bank.” Gillian Beer reads Darwin’s poetics, investigating the language and metaphors characteristic of his famous texts and also the ways those metaphors and plots are carried forward into the literature of other authors, citing Dickens specifically:

Writers could no longer easily share the Shaftesburyian ethic that the artist is imitating God – illustrating the benign organization necessarily justified in shaping our ends [...]. The organization of Dickens’s novels shifts from the picaresque, which can include the random events of every day in the onward dynamism of the journey, to a profuse interconnection of events and characters so extreme as to defy any overall meaning. (40)

But there *is* a meaning here: by imitating the ecological organicism of evolution, exhibiting realist nature, these novels suggest that the value in situating ourselves in our surroundings may replace Providential modes of thought. This is the “re-enchantment” George Levine investigates in *Darwin Loves You*: he asks, “could a naturalistically described world sustain a commitment to moral, aesthetic, and social values?” (xiv). While science (particularly evolutionary science) threatens to “dis-enchant” the world of its meaning, inducing anxiety about the absence of God, Levine believes Darwin’s “naturalistic ideal” – that the world, explicable in natural terms, is just as mysterious, awe-inspiring, and meaningful – can also fill this emptiness. In other words, ecology offers an alternate morality. This interpretation of Darwin is particularly useful when investigating Victorian literature, which often narrates crises of faith.

Darwin’s “entangled bank” illustrates our literal dependency on the environment for survival, and connections that are very real. John Parham, in describing Victorian ecology, suggests, “Dickens might also be studied for his detailed analysis of how social organization, through the urban environment, shapes both the non-human and human components of the ecosystem” (170). Dickens’s remarks in *Bleak House* (1852-3) demonstrate this ecology:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom [...]? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! (256).

The character Jo has come to showcase the entangled bank of the novel: the links between London, Bleak House, and Chesney Wold. A crossings-sweep, he literally and figuratively stands at the intersections between people. Jo’s fever infects Esther, and later her mother,

illustrating the wide reach of the unhealthy environment in Tom All-Along's. Dickens establishes society's symbiosis with environment, and the permeable borders of realist nature: no place exists in a vacuum. His sketching of ecological connections is a plea to re-evaluate the ways that human beings alter the environment. Humphry House, the first critic to fully explore Dickens' "Reformism," or the social reform implemented through his writings, notes, "Both the Court of Chancery and the slums were topical subjects in 1852"; "[p]eople were then in fact dying of litigation and of cholera" (33). Paul Schacht also asserts that "Dickens cares deeply about the laws of nature" (78); their violation "is the keynote of much of his social criticism" (79). In his article, "Dickens and the Uses Of Nature," Schacht is mainly concerned with the nature-nurture debate, arguing Dickens is an "environmentalist" in terms of believing in nurture, or that environment determines personality (78). Schacht points out that Dickens himself does not attempt to pin down a concrete definition of nature, but this does not change his mandate to "follow nature" (79). Though using nature to also mean human nature (personality), the laws of nature (acceptable behavior), or specifically scientific or physical law (natural processes), it seems Dickens primarily conceived of nature as the realist nature this chapter has defined. In *Dombey and Son*, he comments, "It might be worthwhile, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her" (683). Schacht's is not an ecocritical essay, but his point about nurture explains Dickens's use of natural realism to pinpoint causes of social and environmental ills, such as inadequate sanitation, air pollution and filthy water.

Bleak House travels back and forth between London and the country, beginning with the famous description of London's fog, or more correctly, smog. The pollution is so intense it creates its own weather – "snow" flakes of ash and acid rain:

Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holburn-Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest. (13)

This is one of many instances of what Amy M. King terms “stillness,” or lingering description, the devotion to detail shared by both natural history and natural realism (“Stillness” 95).

Dickens's use of geological time widens his lens; he harkens back to prehistoric times as if to say, ‘London is so degraded, industry does not yield progress, but decadence and regression.’

The first image of London immerses the reader with mud, mire, and soot. This filth is composed of industrial refuse and not simply organic matter, a point he reinforces in the subsequent lines:

“Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city” (13). Even after this, Dickens continues to follow the reach of the fog. Prone to repetition, Dickens inserts these moments of description throughout the novel, harping on the unnaturally foul atmosphere of the city. Here we see the shipping industry fouling the Thames, in addition to what John Ruskin terms “manufacturing mist” in “The Storm Cloud of the

Nineteenth Century” (1884), which as he notes, is “more accurately plague-cloud” as the clouds are not connected to storms at all, but are the effect of industrialization (267). What Dickens truly describes is not natural fog (water vapor), but smog, the foul mixture of smoke and fog, including chemical vapor.⁵⁵ Dickens purposefully introduces us to a befouled London, indicating his readers should bear this background in mind as the story progresses. The fog is “everywhere;” its influence affects the city and country, as well as the physical health and moral health of the nation. The fog rolls into the Chancery courts, an innovation that pollutes in its own way. “[T]hus in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery” (14), the spider at the center of the novel’s web. Dickens connects behavior and environmental degradation, including bureaucracy in addition to industry as a prime culprit.

Dickens parallels the greed, the pursuit of profit over health, that causes pollution with the greed of Chancery. He describes the wasting influence of the courts – affecting residents all over London and beyond – while insisting that the Lord High Chancellor is not above the muck. The images of greed, waste, filth, and sin work as a counter-narrative to Darwin, chronicling the de-evolution of the species, even while drawing on Darwin’s ecology. Innovations such as the justice system, large-scale industry, and built-up cities fail to advance mankind. Esther notes the streets are “so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen,” to which Guppy remarks, “O dear no, miss [...]. This [fog] is a London particular” (42). Although the fog works as a symbol for the vices of Mammonism and apathy, it is no less real. Adjectives such as “lurid,” “brown,” “yellow,” and “noxious” emphasize the unnatural character of London’s air. A

⁵⁵ See also Dickens’ description of fog/smog in *Our Mutual Friend*: “Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City [...] it was rusty-black” (420). Dickens often employs a kind of corrupt natural metaphor to describe industry, such as the serpents of smoke and “melancholy mad” elephants (machinery) in *Hard Times*.

“London particular,” the fog creates an authentic sense of place, though here it is a place in need of restoration and conservation. Noxious air is pervasive and inescapable, and yet reversible, if the public would recognize their impact on the environment. House confirms Dickens’s success as a social reformer: “many readers who would be bored by reports of the Poor Law Commissioners or Garratt’s *Suggestions for a Reform of the Proceedings in Chancery* can look in *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House* for pictures of their times, and contributions to the cure of the evils they describe” (9). Dickens hopes his middle-class readers will be inspired to turn this Bleak House into a “House Beautiful.”

Leaving “the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world” (42), Esther and friends travel to Mr. Jarndyce’s residence, Bleak House, in “the real country” rather than the suburbs, “with windmills, rickyards, milestones, farmers’ wagons, scents of old hay, [...] trees, fields, and hedgerows” (79). While the salubrious country contrasts the city, Dickens does not fall into the idealized country/city trope, insisting that it is impossible to truly leave pollution behind.⁵⁶ Tom-all-Alone’s, the most debased tenement in London, “has his revenge” when Jo exports urban-contracted illness:

Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom’s corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream [...] of a Normal house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom’s slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives [...] but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. (710)

⁵⁶ As Raymond Williams explains in *The Country and the City* (1973), the pure, healthy country is the foil to the alien, foul, corrupt city. Yet, pastoral portrayals of the city are generally idealized, tainted by nostalgia rather than actual fact.

Here, poverty is tied to pollution, but this is not necessarily a sign of inherent moral turpitude. Polluted by overcrowding, these stagnant districts are allowed to fall into disrepair by an indifferent government that does not provide alternative housing.⁵⁷ Wind carries the pollution so that no one is immune to environmental degradation. The elite are equally vulnerable. This makes the city's pestilence all the more terrifying, since nowhere is safe from the reach of its contagion.⁵⁸ Thus the novel is not a straight line between country and city, or, as Zdeněk Beran writes is usual of Dickens's novels, "a simple principle of binary opposition (or contrasted parallelism) in which the thematic polarity closely correlates with the spatial arrangement of the world each novel invites its reader to enter" (27). Nevertheless, Beran insists, "There has always been a web-like map in Dickens's novels, from the various destinations of the Pickwickians' 'perambulations' to the houses, rooms, pubs, prison cells or classrooms of later novels" (30). The stakes of natural realism are clear in *Bleak House*, where pollution cannot be contained. Jo contracts smallpox from the slums and transmits the disease to Esther in the country; the "pestilential gas" festering in Tom-All-Along's threatens to infect the town at large. The novel traces the material outcomes of exposure to environments and the impossibility of containing pollution, which ultimately shapes the novel in the way uncontaminated environments shape *David Copperfield* and *Wuthering Heights*.

As natural realism depicts the need to conserve environments, many Victorian novels, like *Bleak House*, specifically address ecological problems, particularly those identified by Wilde in "The House Beautiful": water and air pollution, and deforestation. To discuss the "geographies" of the novel suggests movement through spaces. Characters often move through

⁵⁷ Dickens states this directly in *Our Mutual Friend*: "For when we have got things to the pass that with an enormous treasure at the disposal to relieve the poor, the best of the poor detest our mercies, hide their heads from us, and shame us by starving to death in the midst of us, it is a pass impossible of prosperity, impossible of continuance" (503).

⁵⁸ I discuss these types of sensational strategies of revealing pervasive toxicity in more detail in Chapter 2.

the city, between the city and the country, or even abroad. Not only do Victorian novels represent urban, suburban, and rural spaces, but multiple places within the same novel. In the process, the novels illustrate the uniqueness of various environments, and the need to conserve particular spaces. Geographies of conservation create a cartography of ecological problems.⁵⁹ *Bleak House* indicates human intervention into the environment is problematic, and, in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), Dickens goes farther to demonstrate the impact of day-to-day on the environment, and how the environment has an impact on day-to-day living.⁶⁰ Humphry House notes a change from *Pickwick* to *Our Mutual Friend*: “The very air seems to have changed in quality, and to tax the powers of Sanitary Reform to the uttermost. In *Pickwick* a bad smell was a bad smell; in *Our Mutual Friend* it is a problem” (135). Moving from faithfully depicting the environment, Dickens begins to look for solutions to ecological problems. Barbara T. Gates attributes the darker, “entropic” view of life of *Our Mutual Friend* to the influence of the recently published *On the Origin of Species* and the close of the Great Exhibition (548). I assume Gates uses the word in reference to social decline, and she argues Dickens lost faith in post-catastrophist resurrection, which is similar to the regressive depiction of humanity in *Bleak House*. However, the novel may also be interpreted as a warning or plea for purification, suggesting hope.

⁵⁹ While the denotations of “conservation” and “preservation” are nearly the same – to preserve from damage, decay, or destruction, ecocriticism theorizes two distinct meanings. Conservation implies protecting an area for human enjoyment – such as a National park, where visitors experience nature – or for human use – such as conserving trees, water, etc. Parkland is not wild; it is continually modified and “cultivated” (the 18th century term would be “improving” the landscape), from pruning trees and clearing paths, to installing walkways and restrooms. Preservation typically means to keep an area intact and undeveloped. In some ways, the concept of “preservation” is truer to realist nature, which does not privilege human activity; the authors here are interested in preserving the status quo or earlier state of certain places, to keep them healthy and habitable. I am going to use the term “conservation,” as the OED defines it: “preservation of life, health, perfection, etc.; (also) preservation from destructive influences, natural decay, or waste,” as many spaces, particularly in industrial novels, need to be repaired before they can be “preserved”, and also pointing to the fact that humans respectfully inhabit realist nature.

⁶⁰ *Our Mutual Friend* has the same ecological form as *Bleak House*, specified in the title, which refers to young John Harmon, who is literally at the center of the novel’s web. His strange history affects all the characters.

Our Mutual Friend is built on Wilde's trifecta: polluted streets, skies, and waterways. Ellen Handy notes the scope of the novel's geography which "encompasses many quarters of London as well as the Thames-side and northern slums and waste grounds [...]. Dickens sketched the degrading effects of wealth in different guises; prominent among his motifs is that of the dustheaps (and, even more grotesque, the corpses of the drowned) as a source of prosperity. Dickens represents the entire city as a functioning organism" (118). As three major ecological problems appear in the same novel, affecting each plot, they reinforce each other and indicate Dickens's conscious concern with the environmental issues sickening the city. Published between May 1864 and November 1865, *Our Mutual Friend* "began appearing in monthly installments about the same time that construction of the [Thames] Embankment was first becoming visible" (Allen 87). Michelle Allen argues this "timing is significant, for it places the novel in a period of sustained public debate about the condition of the river, a period when the Thames had become the public stage for working out the problem of filth and the desire for purity in the urban context" (87). Built literally on waste, the novel details the legacy of Old Harmon, "a tremendous old rascal," who "made his money by Dust" (13). As noted by House, Handy, and others, "dust" likely consists of both ash and fecal matter collected from London's streets.⁶¹ A heartless miser, Harmon capitalizes on the consumption of the city, making his fortune as a rubbish collector, passing it on to his employee Boffin.⁶² Boffin, nicknamed the

⁶¹ In *The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, Edwin Chadwick writes of Gateshead, "the dwellers in the courts had converted their shame into a kind of money by which their lodging was to be paid" (9).

⁶² In Volume II of *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew describes the dust-men, a dirty job necessary because of the vast accumulations of ash from house-fires and industrial coal consumption. This extraordinary amount of refuse would "lie scattered about" the streets unless it was brushed aside (218). Mayhew talks about dust in detail, and all the related tasks: dust-sweeping, dust-carting, dust-sifting. He gives valuable statistics about coal consumption and the amount of dust in London. These jobs are necessary because of the polluted, choked conditions of London; these unfortunates are driven to these jobs because of their poverty, closed out by an industrial economy benefiting only the wealthy.

“Golden Dustman” because of his luck, is the fitting recipient since it was he who actually laboriously sifted all the dust heaps.

By means of ladder and basket, Harmon:

grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust, and sifted dust – all manner of Dust (13).

Dust creates its own topography – these artificial hills are the “nature” of London, a perversion of natural processes. Calling to mind geology, Dickens implicitly suggests that while it took millennia to create the earth, humans can alter it in a matter of moments (relatively speaking). He equates dust, or waste, with money. Allen asserts, “Dickens uses the valuable Harmon Mounds to highlight the moral bankruptcy of a grasping, Mammon-worshipping society, of a society that in devoting itself to money immersed itself in filth” (86). While carrying a moral judgment on society, this remains a literal connection, also pointed out by Harvey Peter Sucksmith and Humphry House, since the Victorians’ material impact defaces the earth. As in *Bleak House*, pollution affects the poor most of all; the slums are left dirty while the poor clear away dust from wealthy areas. Gaffer laments, “distress is for ever a going about like sut [sic] in the air” (74), and of course, because of it, as the powerful find ways to capitalize on dust at the expense of the poor.

One of the novel’s threads traces the social climbing aspirations of Bella Wilfer, who resides in Holloway on the outskirts of London. Dickens maps certain locations – the shore of the Thames, the heart of the city where Mr. Wilfer works, the suburban mansion of the Boffins,

and desolate residential areas. Pollution increases in proportion with poverty as evidenced by Wilfer's walk home from the well-maintained city center to his residential district:

His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt, was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln-fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head. (33)

The Wilfers, though poor, benefit from their suburban location – the “fields and trees” offer a buffer between their home and the noxious London air. Dickens acknowledges that in the space between – the slums – “dust is heaped by contractors.”⁶³ In another passage, the narrator calls dust, “[t]hat mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails” (145).⁶⁴ Despite the attempt to sequester waste, it nevertheless pervades the entire city. This geography shows the extent and breadth of anthropogenic pollution, and, implicitly, the need to conserve more spaces from its detrimental impact.

⁶³ Here, particularly, Dickens looks forward to the environmental justice movement, which calls “attention to the ways disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 5).

⁶⁴ Talia Schaffer explains that in the 1860s when wood pulp began to replace rags as the raw material for paper, it suddenly could be manufactured in large quantities, and began to be seen as disposable instead of something to continually reuse or repurpose. Schaffer perceptively reads this scene as an expression of Dickens's own anxiety that his printed words would not survive. As a novelist, Dickens would see the wanton use of paper as a threat to his profession.

The story of Harmon's true heir is complicated by the machinations of mudlarks, scavengers searching river mud for valuables.⁶⁵ Allen captures the foul composition of the river nicely:

In the several decades leading up to the Great Stink, the Thames became the depository for an ever-greater volume of waste associated not only with sewerage but also with the accelerated development of commerce, transport, and industry in Victorian London. Industrial pollution, although more severe in the northern manufacturing towns, took its toll on the Thames: paper mills, tanneries, dye-works, and breweries all used the river as both water source and waste basin. Also active on the river and contribution to its degradation were the coal trade, gas works, and passenger steamship companies, which began operating in 1815. On the low-tech side, the reeking by-products of slaughterhouses and cattle yards continued to drain into the Thames, as they had for centuries. And, of course, London's surging population made its messy mark. (58)

These combinations of waste overwhelm the environment. "Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered," "Gaffer" Hexam and "Rogue" Riderhood, two vultures, forage for any valuables they can find in the Thames, similar to the lucrative occupation of dust-sifting. The river provides the men and their families a "living" (1), "their meat and drink" (3). They fish for refuse rather than seafood,

⁶⁵ Associated with the Thames, Mudlarks would search the muddy shores during low tide, scavenging for anything that could be resold. This occupation, also described by Mayhew, is only possible because the river is treated as a dustbin – it is full of cast-off belongings, parts that have fallen off ships, in addition to dead bodies, human sewage, and other putrid matter. People of all ages forage for bits of rope, metal, glass, bone or any treasure that might emerge in the trash: baskets, toys, possibly money or jewelry, even usable coal. Mayhew is appalled by the grimy condition of these creatures when they emerge out of the water, and by the horrible living conditions they return home to: "[I]t cannot be said that they are clad in rags, for they are scarcely half covered by the tattered indescribable things that serve them for clothing; their bodies are grimed with the foul soil of the river, and their torn garments stiffened up like boards with dirt of every possible description" (209). He feels this is the most deplorable job of all, and notes that women will only remain at this occupation until they can promote themselves to the easier life of prostitution. In "Down With the Tide" (5 February 1853), written during the serialization of *Bleak House*, Dickens recounts firsthand an evening on the Thames with a river-scavenger who he collects "a vast deal" of refuse: coal, nails, wood, ship parts, even groceries, as well as property plucked from dead bodies (350).

looking for discarded waste from an industrialized culture of consumption. The dredgers are not much different from Old Harmon, “who wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust” (84). Shipping tiers flank the shore, and the “dirty and disreputable boat” navigates between piers, bridges, steamboats, and barges; this overcrowding offers a potential surplus of rubbish for river scavengers. The novel returns often to the river, giving the reader sensory descriptions of its pollution, resonating with John Ruskin’s accusation that industry has turned “every river of England into a common sewer, so that you cannot so much as baptize an English baby but with filth, unless you hold its face out in the rain; and even *that* falls dirty” (“The White Thorn Blossom 371), just as Gaffer’s arms come out of the Thames covered in dirt.

Immediately following the opening spotlight on the river, the next chapter depicts a scene of conspicuous consumption – the home of the Veneerings: “Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were are newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby” (6). The repeated use of the word “new” signifies the attitude that everything is disposable and replaceable. This juxtaposition maps the connection between conspicuous consumption and the waste of the river: the mentality, ‘out with the old, in with the new,’ implicitly creates rubbish. Urban pollution is not simply tied to poverty and the inability to maintain a decent living but to the “decadence of a social order built upon material values” (Allen 90-1). Decadence, connoted with opulence, denotes decay, a falling off from vitality and prosperity – an unsustainable lifestyle. While the

wealthy may cordon off pollution, it is the result of conspicuous consumption. Dickens draws direct lines between disparate places to illustrate such cause and effect relationships.

Urban sources of pollution destroy the power of London's water to clean. The novel traces the river into the country, where Lizzie eventually finds work at a paper-mill. Though Dickens notes the smoke from its chimneys, the tenor of the landscape immediately changes: "Weir Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty [...]. A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees"(627). However, Dickens calls attention to the continuity of the river: "In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of the water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea" (504). Once again, the country and the city are not starkly divided, but the river abutting Weir Lock Mill is significantly cleaner when not treated as a repository for a city's worth of waste. Allen asserts, "Rather than provide a single, unified vision of the Thames [...] the novel represents the river as an assemblage of local communities, each taking on a distinctive appearance and set of associations, yet still connected within the larger totality. This reconception of the river's geography ultimately allows Dickens to work out the novel's sanitary ambitions. For as the imagery of the dustheaps and the filthy rivers make abundantly clear, a pervasive pollution threatens the world of the novel" (90). Dickens chooses a paper-mill here, rather than a dye-works, for example.⁶⁶ While necessarily having some by-products, the paper-mill (run by water

⁶⁶ In his 17 November 1822 entry in *Rural Rides*, William Cobbett rages against the paper mill in Whitchurch which prints paper-money for the bank: "This spot ought to be held accursed in all time henceforth and for evermore. It has been the spot from which have sprung more and greater mischiefs than ever plagued mankind before" (41). The mill "curses" England with its metaphorical pollution, the invidious influence of paper money. Dickens points out the literal pollution caused by the mill's byproducts; however, given his novel's emphasis on the toxicity of money, perhaps he had Cobbett's remarks in mind. On his own visit to a paper-mill, described in *Household Words* (31 August 1850), Dickens marvels at the transformation of "bales of dusty rags" into clean white paper (264). As he

power) would emit far few odors and unnatural waste. Paper was made from recycled cloth or wood pulp; this opens up the question of resource management, beyond the scope of this chapter, but Dickens likely intends to choose a natural, small-scale, and consequently more benign, manufacturing works to contrast the darkly smoking chimneys of London.

Nevertheless, the countryside also needs protection. In this rural locality, the coming railway threatens to break up the landscape, “that district of flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market gardens that will soon die under them” (218). Dickens describes the schools in *Our Mutual Friend* as

in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowsiness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick and gone to sleep. (218)

Similar to the Veneerings’ household, there is a sense of reckless manufacture: everything must be new, leaving other buildings to ruin. Builders have left projects unfinished in their haste to create the next best, bigger thing. The dying gardens are joined with fog’s disorder; pollution threatens physical land while an agrarian way of living is forced into extinction. Thus, Dickens’s geography of conservation maps various threats to the environment. His comprehensive rendering of humanity’s impact on the environment and the resulting social problems insists that reform requires conservation.

details the process, he continually references the surrounding Kent countryside, full of “wild flowers” (263), with a clear “blue sky” and “sparkling stream” (267).

Looking backwards towards a pre-industrial existence, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-2) takes place in the years leading up to the Reform Bill of 1832. Middlemarch is set at the midpoint between an agrarian past and the triumph of the industrial revolution. The impending railways contribute to the novel's anxiety – society is on the cusp of change, and is unsure of what this will mean. Dorothea must reject her austere religion in favor of religious humanism, ethics based on sympathetic treatment of others, devoid of supernatural mysteries. *Middlemarch* is considered the embodiment of Eliot's humanist beliefs, which is relevant here, as the town experiences the flux of change. A Darwinian worldview threatens despair, but, to use Levine's phrase, Eliot re-enchants the world with a sense of ecological community.⁶⁷ Henry James heard in *Middlemarch* “an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley” (“Middlemarch” 81), and in this persona, Eliot is most like a naturalist, penning what she subtitled, “A Study of Provincial Life.” Rosemary Ashton, introducing *Middlemarch*, observes that George Eliot “adopts the role of imaginative historian, even scientific investigator, one who is intent on ‘watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots’, as she describes her task, and who seeks to analyse recent political and social changes by means of the particular human stories she tells. Her method is to weave together several strands in such a way that an individual's lot is seen to be affected by those historical changes as they happen” (viii). Ashton hones in on the recurring web-like composition of natural realism, or the entanglements of realist nature, which here contextualizes characters' fates and emphasizes their interrelations with one another. While Dickens's novels

⁶⁷ T.R. Wright praises the novel “for its vivid and accurate representation of the agonies endured in the nineteenth century by those learning to live without God” (139). He asserts, “Nowhere in George Eliot's work is the absence of God so noticeable as in *Middlemarch*,” going farther than in her other novels, “in which God and Christ are more prominent though very much watered down not only in the narration but in the mouths of his believers” (139). This is significant because instead of painting natural theology – the use of wonders as proof of God's design and grandeur – Eliot leans toward a secular, evolutionary model of life. Eliot's commitment to the community has been explored by numerous scholars, such as Suzanne Graver in her book *George Eliot and Community*. Graver writes, “George Eliot's novels confront her readers with the problem of determining where to place ‘the main stress’ – on the individual or on society” (20-1). *Middlemarch* looks forward to my fourth chapter on stewardship.

tend to travel, Eliot focuses on one place, tracing the varied threads rooted to the center, Middlemarch. Eliot uses the web, as Ashton says, to “describe her own function as historian, observer and analyst [...]. The web is organic, connective, infinitely complex, and so a fine metaphor for society and the individual’s place in it” (xxi). Ashton discusses its “two-way pull of meaning”: a web can suggest the Fates weaving the future or a young woman (Rosamond) weaving romance; it is flimsy like gossamer; it is also a trap. But unlike Beer and Ashton, I see the web as literal, a function of the organicism of natural realism. Three primary stories continually intersect: Dorothea and her marriage; Lydgate coming to town; and Fred Vincy’s quest for an occupation. A cast of other characters weave in and out of the primary narratives, and Eliot remarks, “Any one watching keenly the [literal] stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another” (95). Through Middlemarch, the common ground, Eliot establishes an authentic sense of place, describing realist nature.

Like a naturalist, Eliot studies the town under a microscope, another of the novel’s recurring images: “Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom” (59-60). Her microscope both studies the minutiae of provincial life, while panning out to the larger picture. Eliot avoids hasty interpretations, knowing that closer detail may reveal new facts. I resist the word “metaphor,” because Eliot faithfully enacts this type of close vision. Rather than reduce people to certain characteristics, close vision encourages keener

comprehension, so that even distasteful characters, such as Casaubon and Bulstrode, may be sympathetic.

We see the dual vision of the naturalist directed towards landscape as well:

The ride to Stone Court [...] lay through a pretty bit of midland landscape, almost all meadows and pastures, with hedgerows still allowed to grow in bushy beauty and to spread out coral fruit for the birds. Little details gave each field a particular physiognomy, dear to the eyes that have looked on them from childhood: the pool in the corner where the grasses were dank and trees leaned whisperingly; the great oak shadowing a bare place in mid-pasture; the high bank where the ash-tree grew; the sudden slope of the old marl-pit making a red background for the burdock; the huddled roofs and ricks of the homestead without a traceable way of approach; the grey gate and fences against the depths of the bordering wood; and the stray hovel, its old, old thatch full of mossy hills and valleys with *wondrous* modulations of light and shadow such as we travel far to see in later life, and see larger, but not more beautiful. (104; emphasis added)

During this lingering description, Eliot moves between the panorama and the particular, capturing the wonder of the landscape. Details are cherished, and this scene establishes the value of land as something that must be preserved, not for its use-value, but for its intrinsic value and pleasant associations. The novel deliberately evokes natural history when Lydgate and Farebrother bond over the Vicar's collection of local specimens, bargaining for trades (172). Farebrother "is very fond of Natural History and various scientific matters, and he is hampered in reconciling these tastes with his position" (494). Lydgate implies that Farebrother finds it hard to reconcile science with supernatural religion; though beloved by his parish, he is more properly a

religious humanist than a believing Christian. Farebrother's disposition is described as unusually delicate and generous (177), as suggested in his name. "Fair brother" alludes to sympathy and kinship. The admiration we feel for Farebrother is rooted in his eco-consciousness, one that Dorothea will assume.⁶⁸

Though Middlemarchers resist change such as Lydgate's beneficial medical reform, they accept the impending railroad. Recalling the earlier emotional description of the ride to Stone Court, the landscapes in this scene are threatened by the construction. In addition to managing Sir James and Mr. Brooke's land, helping Dorothea plan her model cottages, and consulting with Mr. Bulstrode about improvements to Stone Court (such as drainage), Caleb Garth becomes involved with railroad speculators: "A projected line was to run through Lowick parish where the cattle had hitherto grazed in a peace unbroken by astonishment; and thus it happened that the infant struggles of the railway system entered into the affairs of Caleb Garth" (553). The novel's organicism is couched in a land ethic, as the ecological web extends to relations with the land to insist it should be protected. In Middlemarch, however, "claims for damages" to landed proprietors become a means to make money; little concern is shown for the land in-itself:

In the hundred to which Middlemarch belonged railways were as exciting a topic as the Reform Bill or the imminent horrors of Cholera, and those who held the most decided views on the subject were women and landholders [...the latter who] were yet unanimous in the opinion that in selling land, whether to the Enemy of mankind or to a company obliged to purchase, these pernicious agencies must be made to pay a very high price to landowners for permission to injure mankind. (553)

⁶⁸ Chapter 4 discusses Dorothea's pet project of improving housing conditions for estate-workers; in contrast to the idealized, Romantic cottage, Dorothea intends to build clean, comfortable, and ecologically sound housing, dwellings the benefit the residents who cultivate and protect the land. The novel presents the reader with realist nature in Dorothea's acknowledgement of the land's function in all people's subsistence.

Eliot's tongue-in-cheek tone belies her disapproval of men's motives. She interestingly pairs cholera with the railway, as if to suggest they are both dangerous epidemics. Noting the detrimental impact on land, in terms of its impact on their business, the landowners in fact welcome damage as a means of extorting money from corporations. Despite misgivings voiced by the workers, such as cutting up pasture-land, landowners happily accept handsome payouts for their property. One can almost hear Ruskin saying, "You cared neither for Gods nor grass, but for cash (which you did not know the way to get)"! He continues, "You Enterprised a Railroad through the valley – you blasted its rocks away, heaped thousands of tons of shale into its lovely stream. The valley is gone, and the Gods with it; and now, every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in half-an-hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton; which you think a lucrative process of exchange – you Fools Everywhere" ("The White Thorn Blossom" 369). Eliot's tone is not so direct, but her narrator questions the actual benefits of the railway. Whether or not the railway is "a good thing" as Garth insists, that greed motivates landowners to easily accept the intrusion is worrying. They do not consider the impact on land and the animals that use it to graze, and the normally reasonable Mr. Garth is too dismissive when he says, "It may do a bit of harm here and there, to this and to that, and so does the sun in heaven" (560). He notes that the railroad cannot be stopped, confirmed forty years later at the time of the novel's publication. Eliot's backward glance resembles Thomas Hardy's in her nostalgia for agrarianism and her questioning of humanity's motives for "progress" as represented by the railways.

A peculiar benefit to the railroad, however, is the transformation of Fred Vincy. As Mr. Garth measures an outlying piece of land belonging to Dorothea at Lowick Manor, Fred luckily appears to assist, initiating his new profession as "a theoretic and practical farmer" (832). Fred finds contentment working out of doors "soil[ing] his perfect summer trousers," although this

occupation threatens to ruin the landscape he loves (561). Fred tellingly finds success, not as a clergyman or in a typical “gentlemanly” calling, but by lowering himself on the social ladder (according to his father) and managing land. This noble profession wins him respect, admiration, and love. Fred ultimately fulfills his potential by assuming an agrarian way of life – by getting his trousers and his hands dirty. His marriage to Mary Garth recalls the union of Cathy and Hareton: gentility combined with practical knowledge of the land. So while the novel does not scorn progress, it emphasizes the importance of land management, subsistence rather than excess, and natural rather than artificial work. Eco-consciousness conserves the land.

Eliot’s desire to reconcile change with an impaired environment resonates in Thomas Hardy’s Wessex novels. In his autobiography, Hardy wrote that all authors are “Ancient Mariners,” meaning they are only entitled to tell a tale if it is “more unusual” than ordinary experience, but implying the tale must be eco-conscious (268). Hardy charts a far-reaching geography of conservation in his Wessex novels, adding a literal map as the frontispiece of each, so acute is his commitment to particularity of place: “Unity of place is so seldom preserved in novels that a map of the scene of action is as a rule quite impracticable. But since the present [stories] afford an opportunity of doing so I am of opinion that it would be a desirable novelty” (*Life* 126). The map establishes Wessex as a “real” locality, set in relation to other areas. Wessex is merely a fictional title for actual places rearranged by Hardy. His overall project preserves these areas and the related way of life in literature. Hardy would designate these novels, “Novels of Character and Environment,” alluding to the material impact of environment on people.⁶⁹ About *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), Suzanne B. Falck-Yi writes, “Set

⁶⁹ These include: *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867, unpublished and lost); *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872); *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874); *The Return of the Native* (1878); *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886); *The Woodlanders* (1887); *Wessex Tales* (1888); *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891); *Life’s Little Ironies* (1894); and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

against the unchanging natural cycle of the year, the story both upholds and questions rural values with a startlingly modern sensibility.” Hardy’s novels resonate with the tension between progress (education, innovation, open-minded values) and agrarianism (knowledge of the land, tradition, and conservatism). As Emily Brontë queried, is modernity desirable at the expense of “dwelling” and a sense of place?

Hardy, widely recognized for his eco-consciousness and meticulous observation of the environment, writes quintessential natural realism. As John Paterson remarks, Hardy did not define reality “as a function of the merely human and social [which] was to define it [as] ordinary and commonplace,” but built a legacy defining “it as a function of a natural universe independent of and infinitely greater than the human creature and his cities and societies,” and thus “the continuing repository of marvel and magic [...]. By reinstating the natural cosmos as a real existence and man as part of that existence [...] Hardy in effect restored the possibility of the wonder and miracle of things” (456). If Hardy borrows from Darwin, as Gillian Beer suggests, pessimism may result from knowing that the environment eclipses humanity, that it is out of our control and not looking out for us. Rather, Hardy’s novels actually “restore” optimism. We see the natural cosmos structuring his novels from the very first. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), each part corresponds to a season: Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn. This structure sets a precedent for the way the novels, collectively, follow natural cycles, suggesting humans are beholden to natural law. Beer describes Hardy’s determinism: “In reading Hardy’s work we often find a triple level of plot generated: the anxiously scheming and predictive plot of the character’s making; the optative plot of the commentary, which often takes the form, ‘Why did nobody’ or ‘had somebody...,’ and the absolute plot of blind interaction and ‘Nature’s laws’ [...]. The emphasis upon systems more extensive than the life span of the individual and little

according to his needs is essential to Hardy's insight" ("Finding a Scale for the Human" 57). Like Dickens in his description of dust's transformation of London's landscape, Hardy distinguishes between slow ecological processes and time sped up by man.

The Return of the Native (1878) articulates Hardy's ecological imperative. The landscape that "overpowered" Clym "gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun" (206). This wonder establishes Clym's relationship within the environment as one species of many. "The two major emotional and creative problems with evolutionary theory forced on Hardy were to find a scale for the human, and a place for the human within the natural order" (Beer "Finding a Scale for the Human" 67), which is ultimately solved through dwelling – to be and let be. Hardy employs realist nature in *The Return of the Native* to celebrate agrarian living. Clym Yeobright deliberately returns to Egdon Heath to pursue, like Fred Vincy in *Middlemarch*, a "rational occupation" (171). Critics, notably J. Hillis Miller, have remarked on the realistic topography of *The Return of the Native*. Miller dismisses any "real interest" in nature on the part of the Victorians in his essay, "Nature and the Linguistic Moment", but in *Topographies* he argues that "Landscape or cityscape gives verisimilitude to novels and poems. Topographical setting connects literary works to a specific historical and geographical time" (6), thus creating verisimilitude via actual physical "grounding" (9). A reader can visit Hardy's Wessex, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, or Dickens' London, places that the novel creates, just as these places create the novel. Linda M. Shires explains that *The Return of the Native* "goes to some pains to locate its invented Egdon in the real map of England of the time; its symbolic dimension as an 'untameable, Ishmaelish' reminder of the enduring force of nature is balanced by the attention to the detail of its placement, its highways and its history" (xx). Shires goes further than Miller, pointing to the ecocritical aspect of

Hardy's sense of place: rather than untamable nature "balanced" by human structures, humans interact with an indifferent environment.

Egdon Heath remains "unenclosed wild" (9), or land as yet unclaimed for private or corporate use.⁷⁰ Establishing a sense of geological time, Hardy notes, "This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday. Its condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness" (11). Resembling the moors of *Wuthering Heights*, this heathy country is by no means idyllic. The adder that kills Mrs. Yeobright signifies the tragic though realistic danger in nature. Similarly, Hardy scorns the sublime, worrying that the only nature that will survive is that which "is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind," rather than the wild but commonplace Egdon Heath (10-11). Commenting on his literary style, Hardy asks readers to "[c]onsider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture). This reproduction is achieved by seeing into the *heart of the thing* (as rain, wind, for instance,) and is realism, in fact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination it is confounded with invention" (151). I see his comment as more Ruskinian than Wordsworthian, as he emphasizes the individual personality of the natural object. Hardy's natural realism attempts to reduce obvious "invention" by particularizing places. Hardy gives his locations history and character. In turn, *The Return of the Native* preserves a way of life quickly going extinct. While Beer suggests that "Egdon is

⁷⁰ Refer to the definition of "heath" above: Egdon is just such a wild, isolated place. The quoted term refers to the process of enclosure, which, generally, restricts rights such as grazing on common land, walking through property, etc. Once enclosed, the uses of the land become restricted to the private owner. In the 18th century, the Inclosure [sic] Act was passed (1801) to put all instances of enclosure and previous legislation under one umbrella, and affecting much larger areas. Enclosure reduces open fields or "common" land, granting land to an owner (the government or a private citizen, usually wealthy). In 1845, the General Inclosure Act appointed Inclosure Commissioners who could enclose land without submitting a request to Parliament, obviously making private ownership much easier. However, the history of enclosure (or "inclosure") in England is a long one, gaining momentum in the 16th century. Land moved out the hands of the public, and the poor, to the wealthy; as suffrage was tied to land ownership, this also affected government representation. The vanishing of common land becomes an anxiety, both in the platforms of activists like Octavia Hill, and in literature; unenclosed areas were primarily rough pasturelands in mountainous areas, or small portions of the lowlands.

fitted to survive because it is not exceptionally steep or flat, and not subject to man's husbandry" ("Finding a Scale for the Human" 67), Hardy is concerned with industrial takeover. Egdon is a preserved, but fading, relic of the past: "Civilisation was its enemy" (12), and "On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day" (129). People tell time by the sun, not a universal clock, contrasting biological or circadian time with "technological time," the consciousness of the clock, factory whistle, or railway schedule.⁷¹ By slowing down the novel to geological time, he contrasts Egdon with an increasingly urban present. Using Venn the Reddleman to show that Egdon is not immune to modernity, Hardy explains a reddleman is "a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding [dye for identification] for their sheep. He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex, filling at the present in the rural world the place, which, during the last century, the dodo occupied in the world of humans" (13). Hardy echoes Darwin's rhetoric of extinction. The reddleman "is a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail" (14). Indeed, by the novel's end, Venn becomes a dairy farmer. So, too, Egdon Heath is perishing. The title of Chapter II, "Humanity appears upon the scene, hand in hand with Trouble," is indicative of the novel's eco-consciousness, the awareness of risk in modifying the environment.

Clym abandons his gentlemanly profession, a jeweler, with the intention of becoming a schoolmaster to bring education to the Heath. While he left home thinking "life here was contemptible," he soon realizes that "it was not so depressing as something I next perceived – that my business was the silliest, flimsiest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me: I would give it up, and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best" (171). As a teacher, he wishes to improve individuals while preserving

⁷¹ See Dickens's piece, "An Unsettled Neighborhood" (1854) from *Household Words*. With the advent of the railroad, a man "must keep a time-bill in his waistcoat," or railway schedule, ruled by the town clock (49).

agrarianism, to import culture selectively as in *Wuthering Heights* and Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction.⁷² Instead, he throws himself into earning a living by the "sweat of his brow" to the shame of his family (248). Clym asks his mother, "What is doing well?" (175) He defines success as useful work, such as William Morris describes in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" (1884). Not only must man take pleasure in his work, he must "better" the community (Morris 287). Clym rejects the life of consumption – "pandering to the meanest vanities" – and chooses work suited to him, despite class considerations (175). Morris suggests, "Wealth is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use" (291). In this sense, Clym is wealthy. Described as "of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than then green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on," Hardy's analogy underscores Clym's subsistence relationship to the land (270). Shires notes, "the fact that Clym abandons jewellery for furze-cutting while Wildeve surrenders engineering for innkeeping provides a hefty hint as to the balance of narrative sympathies in Eustacia's choice, and the fact that the same Wildeve is supplanted in Tamasin's life by the reddleman turned dairyman Venn produces a similar triangulation" (xix). In other words, Hardy privileges occupations that hinge on working the land.⁷³ Wildeve is not ennobled by giving up engineering. Shires suggests this is because inn-keeping is not a suitable profession, but Hardy accounts for differing dispositions, and the fact that "incongruity between the men's deeds and their environment" may be striking (229). Hardy resists oversimplifications. Similarly, Egdon, which is never alleged to be perfect, is not suited to Eustacia. She is not necessarily "bad" – she is unhappy in rural life, often remarking on how it suffocates her, asking, "But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what

⁷² Chapters 3 and 5 discuss Gaskell's urban ecology.

⁷³ In his essay, "After 'Organic Community': Ecocriticism, Nature, and Human Nature," Martin Ryle discusses natural occupation in Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, saying noble occupations are "the practitioners of the locally grounded crafts of coppice work and forestry", "labour processes that seem intimately bound up with nature" (20).

is called life – music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world?” (275). No. Eustacia cites valuable benefits to culture, including art. Neither Hardy nor a reader of the novel could say that desiring art is unreasonable.

Like *Wuthering Heights*, Hardy’s novels often contain the trope of a woman choosing between two suitors who represent nature vs. culture, or rustic vs. cultivated values. Like Catherine, Clym is doomed by choosing an inappropriate match, which J. Hillis Miller suggests leads to his blindness. Eustacia Vye pursues the city-dweller Clym in hopes of accompanying him out of Egdon. The artificial and the natural are once again opposed. Clym calls Eustacia “luxurious,” rather than “ambitious,” deliberately choosing this adjective to suggest the lifestyle of conspicuous consumption he left behind. They represent two competing value systems, and Clym tells her, “I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in hermitage here, with proper work to do” (197). Clym desires to make his wife happy, yet he cannot sympathize with her yearning after urbanity now that he has found “proper work” in rustic, remote Egdon Heath. While Hardy does not blame Eustacia for desiring culture, he condemns her for shutting her eyes to the advantages of her environment. Hardy admonishes, “To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine” (73). Hardy blames Eustacia’s limited *vision*, extolling the microscopic standard of vision, a perception Clym is well trained in: “His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band.

Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod” (247).⁷⁴ His ability to “see” strengthens his kinship with all forms of life. The novel aims to preserve this ethos in order to conserve the material environment. Clym’s marriage to Eustacia proves fatal, but an intimate relationship to the land continues to satisfy him. Soured by his bad match, he leaves Egdon to become an open-air preacher.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) also details a way of life threatened by extinction. Casterbridge, a comparatively large town compared to Egdon, teems with all kinds of organisms living harmoniously, while keeping the memory of past generations alive.⁷⁵ This description brings the rural and urban together: “Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Bees and butterflies in the cornfields at the top of the town who desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous course, but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness that they were traversing strange latitudes” (55). There is no separation between the human and non-human sphere, further demonstrated in two notable buildings, Henchard’s and Lucetta’s respective homes. At Henchard’s home, “through the long, straight, entrance passages thus enclosed could be seen, as though tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, ‘bloody warriors,’ snap-dragons, and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted grey stone-work remaining from a yet remoter Casterbridge than the venerable one visible in the street” (57). With the garden at the center, doorways become telescopes framing nature, and though Hardy cites primarily flowers, this contains a kitchen-garden as well. Henchard, a farmer, controls his subsistence. Hardy’s

⁷⁴ Compare this to Hardy’s journal entry on 28 November 1874: “I sit under a tree, and feel alone: I think of certain insects around me as magnified by the microscope: creatures like elephants, flying dragons, etc. And I feel I am by no means alone” (*Life* 110).

⁷⁵ Casterbridge is modeled on Dorchester, Dorset.

landscapes are never merely pretty or interesting backdrops, but material environments in which his characters live, work, and play.

Casterbridge bridges the natural environment with the built environment to describe realist nature. Lucetta, Henchard's former lover, moves into High-Place Hall. Her dwelling faces the main street, but has "the characteristics of a country mansion – birds'-nests in its chimneys, damp nooks where fungi grew, and irregularities of surface direct from Nature's trowel" (130). The non-human dwells just as comfortably here as the human. High-Place Hall's busy location coupled with its organic description distinguish the urban village from the manufacturing town: "Casterbridge was in most respects but the pole, focus, or nerve-knot of the surrounding country life; differing from the many manufacturing towns, which are as foreign bodies set down, like boulders on a plain, in a green world with which they have nothing in common" (59). In other words, the residents properly dwell within their environment. Hardy, too, weaves a web comprising smaller suburbs, flora, and fauna radiating from Casterbridge, the "nerve-knot." Nothing separates the townsfolk and the laborers as we see in other novels; for instance, the residents of Dickens's cities show no awareness of where their food actually comes from, but "Casterbridge lived by agriculture at one remove further from the fountain-head than the adjoining villages – no more. The townsfolk understood every fluctuation in the rustic's conditions, for it affected their receipts as much as the labourer's; they entered into the troubles and joys which moved the aristocratic families ten miles round – for the same reason. And even at the dinner parties of the professional families the subjects of discussion were corn, cattle disease, sowing and reaping, fencing and planting" (59). While in *The Return of the Native*, Clym betrays his class by becoming a farmer, and in *Wuthering Heights* the Earnshaws cannot truly shake the stigma of their brown skin and rough hands, in Casterbridge, the "aristocracy" is

as invested in the land as their “inferiors.” Hardy demonstrates that urban does not necessarily mean industrial; a “town” or “city” designation simply implies larger numbers of people living in close proximity, and in Casterbridge, the residents’ livelihood is determined by their environment just as much as in Egdon Heath. In a sense, industry threatens them on the margins, but in a way more similar to *Wuthering Heights* than Romantic poetry, because manufacturing is not being ignored; it has not yet arrived. Hardy purposely sets his tales in unfamiliar rustic terrain – in the way Eliot urges authors to widen reader’s perceptions – as landscape that the modern way of life, likely the vantage point of the reader, is driving extinct. In a footnote, Hardy remarks, “The reader will scarcely need to be reminded that time and progress have obliterated from the town that suggested these descriptions many or most of the old-fashioned features here enumerated” (58). His Wessex novels are a eulogy for a time gone by. His townspeople are accustomed to remnants of an ancient past: “Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome. It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years” (67). The novel’s sad irony is that while these artifacts remain undisturbed for centuries, they are obliterated in a short time, once industry comes to town.

Thus, Donald Farfrae is a complex protagonist. He is called an “innovator” (156), and his inventions and machinery ensure his success as a farmer. He comes onto the scene to rescue Henchard’s spoilt wheat, running it through an original contraption. He manipulates a natural process, but this ability is limited: “To fetch it back entirely is impossible; Nature won’t stand so much as that” (45). Farfrae notes this process is useful in areas where the weather is “unsettled”

(45); he does not so much want to exploit land, but discover better ways to live within it. Later, when he strikes out on his own, he brings a horse-drill (a horse-drawn planting machine), hitherto unknown to the district, but much less menacing than the steam-powered threshing machine featured in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Henchard, trying to keep up, “speculates rashly” (194); gambling with weather does not pay off. The seasons inevitably check human ambition: “The harvest had been so delayed by the capricious weather that whenever a fine day occurred all sinews were strained to save what could be saved of the damaged crops” (180). Though machinery proves useful, humans cannot completely dominate the environment.

These geographies – rural, urban, or a combination – emphasize the importance of conserving unique places. While Dickens foregrounds pollution that needs to be addressed, Eliot and Hardy showcase a way of life that should be preserved or resurrected. Each author acknowledges value in innovation, but questions how far humans should go in shaping their environment. The implicit question to be answered by the reader is, ‘what is the best way to implement change, without comprising the integrity of the ecosystem?’

V. The Ecology of the Novel

Within this chapter, we see overlapping concerns: an authentic relationship to the environment and crafting that awareness into a literary style to foster eco-consciousness, as well as issues that re-merge in my later chapters: toxicity, conservation, and community. The largess of the Victorian novel creates an authentic ecology; sustained description builds a natural history. The novels above, as well as numerous others, feature multiple intersecting stories and a sustained microscopic view of characters (Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* and Gissing’s *New Grub Street* to name just two). Contributing to this, the Victorian narrator either directly addresses the

reader, or interjects commentary. The self-conscious narrator – the observer, investigator, reporter – is another common point between literature and natural history prose, which “tends to be extremely conscious of its audience; indeed, it goes out of its way to include the audience” (Merrill 52). Masson calls Dickens a “Romantic realist,” and Eliot a “scientific realist,” yet they share the same didactic earnestness; like Georg Lukács, Masson defines realism by intention rather than style. Though the authorial voices of Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy are extremely diverse, they write with the common goal of portraying the material environment and the subsequent lesson of humility.

Amy M. King argues that Victorian literary realism is characterized by its “purely discursive aspects – [...] those moments of proliferating description made up of inductive details, rather than the architecture of plot or structure” (“Reorienting the Scientific Frontier” 156). Narrative digressions produce this, but so does the three-volume form: “Length ceases to be a simple fact of the genre and becomes rather a reflection of at least a kind of [secular] sensibility and perhaps even a religiously sanctioned ethics: to observe, to describe, to elaborate or dilate was perhaps to be reverent, even if one was dilatory, and thus to yield truth inaccessible to wider gazes” (King “Natural History and the Novel” 465). If natural history amounts “almost to a creed,” so does natural realism. Henry James famously asked, “What do such large, loose, baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*?” (Preface to *The Tragic Muse* 515; emphasis in the original). Rather than regard the Victorian novel as a jumble of arbitrary things and people, these connections re-build meaning. They mean it is essential to be aware of our particular surroundings and how they shape our lives; they mean we should live in sympathy within an inclusive community.

Chapter II: Miasma: Victorian Physical and Environmental Ills

Look round upon the world of odious sights – millions of immortal creatures have no other world on earth – at the lightest mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps, ‘I don’t believe it!’ Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every sense, conferred upon our race for its delight and happiness, offended, sickened and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter [...]. Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air, were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town.

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (1848)

Filth. Fog. Foul. Inky. Waste. Dust. Muck. Rubbish. Smoke. Squalid. Pestilential.

These are only some of the words that come to mind when recalling descriptions of the city or poor rural areas from Victorian novels and historical accounts. It would seem that minimizing pollution should have been a top priority among legislators, powerful interest groups, and the general public. Surprisingly, the Victorians accepted pollution as a part of life and possessed an exceptionally high tolerance for grime. Because of the prevailing belief in miasmatic theory in the first half of the century, the Victorians were relatively unconcerned with the appearance of filth: if smell caused disease, deodorizing the river or cesspool with large amounts of lime sufficiently eliminated risk, without actually removing sewage from the water.⁷⁶ The coal smoke clouded the air, blackened bricks and clothes and choked the lungs, but it was believed to ‘purify’ the air by killing disease particles.⁷⁷ Residents used ashes and cinders to

⁷⁶ The belief that dangerous diseases such as malaria, cholera, typhus, typhoid, and even chlamydia, originated in poisonous vapor or mist filled with particles from decomposed matter (miasmata) that caused illnesses.

⁷⁷ Smells concerned Victorians far more than smoke, which was only recognized as a public health concern near the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, smoke was long considered sanitary, believed to kill germs in the air carried by vapor. Peter Thorsheim asserts, “Although some experts in the middle years of the nineteenth century suggested that smoke caused health problems, they lacked compelling evidence to support this hypothesis” and risks were mostly ignored (18).

hide the piles of excrement in their yards, and acquiescently wore over-shoes to traverse the muddy, damp streets. In his influential *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842), Edwin Chadwick reported that in 1839 for every one person who died of natural causes or violence, eight died of specific diseases.⁷⁸ Victorians were unhealthy more often than not, suffering headaches, nausea, cramps, and lethargy, so much so that Bruce Haley argues that health became a constantly sought “holy grail” (13). The “body toxic,” an ecocritical term signifying the chemicals daily absorbed into the human body, was the usual human condition.⁷⁹ Erin O’Connor describes the “diseased body” as “symptomatic of the age: a focal point for both anxiety and exhilaration about the uncertain, shifting status of humanness in the age of capital” (19). She attributes Victorian England’s health crisis to the “rise of the factory system and the attendant growth of cities,” “subjecting people in ever greater numbers to the killing effects of economic growth” (5).

The ‘great cities’ emerging in the Victorian age became the focal point for the public discussion of pollution, not because rural areas were especially clean, but because the cities were constantly growing and changing. Even while symbolizing Victorian progress and ingenuity, towns were “regarded by many as the inevitable nexus of disease and premature death” (Wohl 3). Anthony Wohl begins his book *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* with a compelling anecdote chronicling a family’s continued suffering from toxic London: a newlywed couple suffers the overflow of their recently installed water closet into their dressing room. Their residence, adjoining the Thames, overlooks the city’s cesspools, and even with the new drainage system, the stench renders parts of their dwelling uninhabitable. Sewage frequently

⁷⁸ Chadwick’s report sold over 20,000 copies and was positively reviewed in all the leading publications (Halliday 37).

⁷⁹ Popularized by Suzanne Antonetta’s use of the term in her memoir, *Body Toxic* (2001), to describe the link between environmental contaminants and cancer.

overflows onto their lawn. The beloved husband contracts a fatal case of typhoid fever, which later threatens his wife and eldest son. Both pull through, but soon a daughter is struck down by disease. Who are these unlucky people? The Royal Family. Queen Victoria's life illustrates that pollution knew no class barriers. Charles Dickens attempts to drive this point home in the above passage from *Dombey and Son*. For Dickens, London emblemized the "misery and death" wrought by uncontrolled pollution. He urges his reader to "[l]ook round upon the world of odious sights" – the pollution human beings are responsible for creating. Dickens, influenced by the physical sciences, accentuates the connections between human health and the environment to emphasize the importance of a pure, sanitary atmosphere. He uses the familiar language of miasma – the "noxious particles" infecting the city – to dramatize toxicity, suggesting that if these contaminants could be made "palpable to the sight" it would incite action. Going beyond smell, however, Dickens's sensory descriptions of pollution attempt to shake the apathy with which Victorians regarded filth.⁸⁰ Certainly Dickens foregrounds human interests, but his anxiety about the "vitiating air" and offensive, sickening pollution covering the city is an obvious plea for eco-consciousness and reform.

Encouraging the naturalist gaze, Dickens asks his readers to see both invisible and visible causes of urban pollution. This scene in *Dombey and Son* demonstrates the inherent problem involved in representing the ephemeral qualities of toxicity. Miasma – smoke, fog, or vapor – was constantly moving and changing, making it difficult to serve as a stable rallying point for reform. Dickens converts the unseen noxiousness into an imaginary "dense black cloud," a representational irony that suggests that in authors' attempts to render toxicity "real," they revealed the challenges in doing so. Smoke, in particular, was not a static signifier. For

⁸⁰ See David Trotter's "The New Historicism and the Psychopathology of Everyday Modern Life" for a discussion of smell employed as literary trope.

Bounderby, the bombastic factory owner in *Hard Times* (1854), smoke represents financial gain. Dickens's narration, however, represents smoke in the form of menacing serpents weakening the workers. Depending on the context, smoke could connote prosperity or material and social decay. Peter Thorsheim explains that sanitation experts, urban reformers, and journalists worked to redefine coal smoke, "transforming it from an accepted part of the urban environment into a problem. The redefinition of smoke was both a scientific and a social process" (6). Participating in this process, Dickens and other natural realists ask us to see the physical threat of smoke, redefining its social meanings, not simply as "toxic," but indicative of, in John Ruskin's words, a "manner of life" requiring reform ("The White Thorn Blossom" 370). Despite the use of imaginative strategies to embody air-borne pollutants, authors nevertheless authentically portray the hazards of environmental contamination. As we saw in Chapter 1, Dickens grounds his tale in the material environment, emphasizing the connections between people and places. Victorian literature conveys an ongoing struggle to understand the combined social and natural processes through which human beings alter the world and how that new world then alters human beings, particularly in terms of physical health. Such eco-consciousness breaks down the barriers between the home and outside world and leads to an awareness of the effect of environment on character. In awakening this perception, authors blurred the boundaries of genre: as we see in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens mingles melodrama with realism as he exhorts disbelieving readers to "[b]reathe the polluted air," using provocative strategies of sensation fiction to horrify readers with the evils they have created.⁸¹ Recalling Wohl's example of sewage on Queen Victoria's front lawn, the realist novel dumps sewage on the nation's doorstep.

Both ignorance about causes of pollution and disease and what Asa Briggs in *Victorian Cities* designates "short-run thinking" delayed a unified environmentalist movement until the end

⁸¹ I will address the relationship between literary filth and sensation fiction more fully later in the chapter.

of the century. While an apathetic public, a class system, and businesses protesting restrictions on emissions delayed the unification of the public health movement, Victorian novelists voiced a powerful counter-narrative. Authors reorient vision towards *causes* of pollution and laid the foundation for more organized activism at the end of the century.⁸² A shared language rhetorically reconceives toxicity as man-made, even miasma, which although organic, is tied to human obliviousness and recklessness. This chapter traces the salutary cultural anxiety over improper sanitation and environmental contaminants. Miasmatic language, which privileges sensory evidence of pollution, permeates the Victorian novel to demonstrate how fully pollution informed the Victorian experience. In mainstream literature, miasmatic theory became a lexicon and thought process to generate national awareness of not only visible or olfactory pollution, but to demonstrate the toxic ideological separation between humans and the environment.

Thorsheim asserts that the modern idea of pollution was invented in Victorian Britain, as the “‘first industrial nation’ and the first to become predominantly urban” (2). The term “pollution” came into use after the 1870s; distinct from “dirt” or “rubbish,” this term specifically denotes problematic waste.⁸³ In other words, the Victorians “invented pollution” by regarding it as an issue requiring immediate attention.

I explore how the novel functions in this social process of ‘inventing pollution,’ as Thorsheim puts it, moving from urban to rural environments, while breaking down the barriers between. Pollution, affecting all Victorians and impossible to ignore, communicates the mutual influence between human beings and their environment; in other words, the inescapable

⁸² While certain movements, particularly sanitation reform, acted to improve living conditions at mid-century, Victorians were slow to participate in environmental activism (concerted protest pursuing political and social agendas) until Victorian literature and other print media pressured government and interest groups to reform and enforce legislation. This pressure indicates an earlier awareness of ecological problems than scholars typically credit to the period and illustrates the power of the novel in voicing a moral imperative as a vehicle for social change.

⁸³ William Cohen, following Mary Douglas, explains that “shifting social formations” transformed “the physical topography of the city,” resulting in a new, morally charged attitude towards dirt (ix).

discomfort of filth forces the public to consider their impact on the environment. A Victorian understanding of ecology begins through sustained attention to interactions with place. To take literally a popular phrase, “Shit happens” and it makes things happen – first, intolerable conditions, then responsive behavior. Forcing people to confront their filth encourages reform. Entering a literary and political discourse, the novels considered here eliminate the separation between human beings and Nature, so that there is no Nature, only the environment we inhabit.⁸⁴ This eco-consciousness leads to the realization that human beings cannot thoughtlessly pollute, for to pollute the environment is to pollute themselves.



Figure 1 *Punch*, 21 July 1855 (p. 26)

⁸⁴ See Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (2009). He argues an idealized, revered Nature prevents true environmental thinking: “nature ironically impedes a proper relationship with the earth and its lifeforms” (2). To have a properly ecological view, we must relinquish the idea of nature once and for all.

I. Representing the Invisible: Miasmatic Language in Victorian England

Sir, I traversed this day, by steam boat, the space between London and Hungerford Bridges [...]; it was low water and I think the tide must have been near the turn. The appearance and the smell of the water forced themselves at once upon my attention. The whole of the river was an opaque, pale brown fluid. In order to test the degree of opacity, I tore up some white card into pieces, moistened them so as to make them sink easily below the surface and then dropped some of these pieces into the water at every pier the boat came to; before they had sunk an inch below the surface they were indistinguishable, though the sun shone brightly at the time, and when the pieces fell edgeways the lower part was hidden from sight before the upper was under water. This happened at St. Paul's Wharf, Blackfriars Bridge, Temple Wharf, Southwark Bridge and Hungerford Bridge; and I have no doubt would have occurred further up and down the river. Near the bridges the feculence rolled up in clouds so dense that they were visible at the surface [...].

The condition in which I saw the Thames may, perhaps, be considered as exceptional but it ought to be an impossible state, instead of which, I fear it is rapidly becoming the general condition. If we neglect this subject, we cannot expect to do so with impunity.

Letter from Michael Faraday to *The Times* (July 8, 1855)

The Victorians understood toxicity through miasmatic theory.⁸⁵ Edwin Chadwick insisted, “All smell is disease”: foul odors did not merely point to a source of disease, they *were* the source. However, because these contaminants often went unseen, they went unheeded. As a result, popular discourse relied on miasmatic language to render filth visible. Its sensory language that described the minutia associated with filth—its colors and scents—was often more effective in curbing unsanitary practices than the fear of invisible contaminants.

A type of eco-conscious discourse, miasmatic language functions as toxic discourse, which, as defined by Lawrence Buell in *Writing for an Endangered World*, expresses “anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency,” (31), “an interlocked set of topoi” resulting from cultural anxiety rather than the concerns of a specific author (30).⁸⁶ I expand Buell’s definition to include toxic organic pollutants like

⁸⁵ It was not until the late nineteenth century that the germ theory of disease gained credence. History credits Louis Pasteur (in 1861), Ferdinand Cohn, and Robert Koch with discovering and perpetuating germ theory. When Koch used a microscope to identify the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* in 1883, he revealed that many infectious diseases are caused by microorganisms that are invisible to the naked eye and invade the body.

⁸⁶ Though Buell counts Victorian authors among his examples, particularly Dickens, others following him focus more on toxic discourse in contemporary fiction and film.

excrement and the bacteria and insects it nourishes. Buell's work traces the fear of a poisoned world in literature, emphasizing anxieties engendered by a discrete discourse of "chemical modification" inaugurated by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). While Buell acknowledges that versions of toxic discourse previously existed, he insists that "never before the late twentieth century has it been so vocal, so intense, so pandemic, and so evidentially grounded" (31), particularly because of the now universal threat of chemical contamination. Nevertheless, a study of Victorian literature reveals that, rather than merely alleging the risks posed by environmental contaminants, the realist novel presents cause-and-effect relationships between pollution and illness. As realism was the prevailing genre of fiction for much of the nineteenth century, one can reasonably say that the dissemination of toxic discourse was at least equally, if not more, pandemic than from 1960 onwards.

In miasmatic language, the most prevalent term, "filth," signaling both literal and figurative toxicity, became distinct from "dirt," a less condemnatory word. "Dust" came to mean excrement or litter. Fog was frequently described as "yellow," "rusty," or "brown," transforming the phenomenon into an artificial one: vapor made toxic by humanity, now known as "smog."⁸⁷ For instance, William Thackeray's Major Pendennis regrets leaving "France and sunshine" for London, "work and a *yellow fog*," (*Pendennis* 309, emphasis added), suggesting smoke's erasure of light and denoting chemical exhaust. "Damp" coupled with "stagnant" often indicated toxic moisture produced by bodily fluids or mud festering in close quarters, such as when Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* (1848) describes the "damp" cellar inadequately housing the wretched Davenport family.

⁸⁷ Unlike fog, which occurs naturally, smog denotes the mixtures of smoke and fog. The term was coined when Dr. H. A. des Vœux, treasurer of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, read a paper to the Public Health Congress of Great Britain on 'Fog and Smoke.' The *Daily Graphic* (26 July 1905) reported, "He said it required no science to see that there was something produced in great cities which was not found in the country, and that was smoky fog, or what was known as 'smog'" (qtd. in OED).

This miasmatic language, designed to stimulate and excite the senses, encouraged awareness of the current of exchange between the human body and its environment. In *Dombey and Son*, the upper classes remain not only willfully blind to the suffering wrought in the next street by pollution, but also to their own susceptibility. These contaminants, “rolling slowly” throughout the entire city, threaten all residents. Dickens exhorts the delicate woman who refuses to “believe” suffering exists outside of her purview to “[b]reathe the polluted air” and recognize her complicity. The “poisonous” impurities “offend,” “sicken,” and “disgust”:

Dickens anticipates a visceral, physical, and morally outraged response to the miasma he makes visible. His creative synesthesia focuses on smell to make the reader “see” and feel the unobserved or invisible health risks in the environment. Buell identifies the “shock of awakened perception” (35), “an awaking to the horrified realization that there is no protective environmental blanket, leaving one to feel dreadfully wronged,” as toxic discourse’s primary topos (36). As the inmates of *Bleak House* (1852-3) discover when Jo infects Esther, contagion cannot be quarantined to certain districts.⁸⁸ Similarly, the brown fog that opens the novel indicates that smoke and chemical vapour cannot be contained in the atmosphere above factories. Sensory descriptions horrify the reader by revealing the threats present in domestic, familiar spaces. Miasmatic language reveals the indiscriminate reach of pollution. Dickens’s narrative style resembles his journalism, where he also frequently addresses his reader, directly calling for a response to the horrifying scenes he describes. He asks, “Have you any distinct idea of Spitalfields, dear reader?” (294). Presumably not; thus, in “Spitalfields” (5 April 1851), he describes the “squalid streets” and “smoky air” and “soot” enveloping the houses, miasma

⁸⁸ In her compelling spotlight on Jo, Winnifred J. Pederson also argues that Jo connects “every social strata” (163), and that such encounters with Jo reveal that the disease and decay affecting the lower classes will eventually affect the upper classes unless immediate reform is taken to cure and prevent social evils “at the starting place” (164). Jo may have only half a name, but he is a fully realized character who “conveys misery convincingly” (164).

created by overcrowding and neglect. Many articles published in *Household Words* employ miasmatic language to describe the foul state of the environment. In “A Sleep to Startle Us” (13 March 1851), Dickens calls to mind the green London of his youth, before increased development brought with it “fever-stricken courts and alleys,” “noxious sinks,” and “bad” air (327, 328). Here, he is concerned with the “sickening atmosphere” of charity schools built “in the midst of taint and dirt and pestilence” (328). These details ought to “startle” the reader.

Bleak House’s Jo, a crossings-sweep, struggles to earn a living by “keep[ing] the mud off” the streets (256), literally cleaning up other people’s messes. Jo’s tragedy, Dickens tells us, is that no one will do the same for him:

Jo lives – that is to say, Jo has not yet died – in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone’s. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years – though born expressly to do it. (256-7)

In this passage, Dickens’s language exemplifies the strategic use of miasma to designate the various forms of toxicity: the “swarm of misery” suggests noxious vapor, infectious insects, and air-borne viruses and germs. The manifestations of “maggots” and “parasites” metaphorically

render contagion as they spread fever throughout the slum, even as they identify the actual hazardous presence of pests. The swarms of flies, fleas and lice multiplying on and feeding off Victorian filth – stagnant water and urine, decomposing food, unwashed textiles, the list goes on – became a miasma that carried illness through the air, over large distances. The “black” streets clue the reader in to soot and grime. While “all decent people” avoid Tom-all-Alone’s, Dickens forcefully confronts his readers with the experience of the slum, and, in fact, their connection to it as Jo comes into contact with the novel’s characters. Jo carries fever out of the slum into the respectable Victorian home. Dickens’s melodramatic language here and in *Dombey and Son* points to a sensational element in natural realism.

We can see in the epigraph that begins this section, Michael Faraday’s 1855 letter to *The Times*, that this discursive activism was not limited to the novel. Faraday warned that without action, a “hot season [will give] us sad proof of the folly of our carelessness.” “The appearance and the smell of the water forced themselves at once upon my attention,” he writes.⁸⁹ As in *Dombey and Son*, the palpable miasma communicates environmental ills, “sad proof” of reckless modification of the environment by human beings. John Ruskin employs similar miasmatic language in “The White Thorn Blossom” (1871), which graphically portrays an environment polluted by industry, overpopulation, and litter:

You can vitiate the air by your manner of life, and of death, to any extent. You might easily vitiate it so as to bring such a pestilence on the globe as would end all of you. [...] [E]verywhere, and all day long, you are vitiating it with foul chemical exhalations; and the horrible nests, which you call towns, are little more than laboratories for the

⁸⁹ This is an example of what Jane Bennett asserts as “the active role of *nonhuman* materials in public life” (2). She queries, how can things become actants (rather than objects)? The overpowering smell of sewage in the Thames communicated itself, in a sense, to the MPs, who then reacted to the smell. Bennett calls this “Thing-power,” “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (6).

distillation into heaven of venomous smokes and smells, mixed with effluvia from
decaying animal matter, and infectious miasmata from purulent disease. (370)

As part of his series of letters *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin addresses himself to laborers as the driving force behind machinery and those most affected by pollution geographically, yet these letters reached a wide audience, calling attention to the consequences of artificially-changed environments on people and places. His attention to “smokes and smells” suggests both organic refuse and toxic effluvia; words such as “damp” and “pestilential” signal dangerous environmental contamination, often describing noxious air, but also pointing to the ways in which littering the land creates effluence that in turn infects bodies of water.

Miasmatic language comprises the interrelated ecological problems that Wilde was to specify in “The House Beautiful”: air and water pollution, and land hazards, whether deforestation or accumulated litter.⁹⁰ *Punch* illustrates Faraday’s experiment of dropping in to the Thames white cards that immediately disappear into the water rendered opaque with filth (see Fig. 1). As Faraday holds his nose to “giv[e] his card to Father Thames,” the reader sees dense clouds in the background, perhaps the “feculence” rolling up from the Thames, or discharges from the smokestacks visible in London’s skyline. Dead animals float on the water, the surface of which is broken up by accumulated clutter. Father Thames is coated with sewage and refuse clings to his hair and hands. England’s rivers became receptacles for excrement, manure, slaughterhouse refuse, vegetable substances, hundreds of bodies of all kinds: animals, suicides, and the victims of murder and infanticide. These contaminants killed wildlife; in June 1833, the

⁹⁰ There are a number of historical studies that address these problems, collectively and individually, including: Stephen Halliday’s *The Great Stink* (1999), Peter Thorsheim’s *Inventing Pollution* (2006), Dale Porter’s *The Thames Embankment* (1998), James Winter’s *Secure from Rash Assault* (2002), Harriet Ritvo’s *The Dawn of Green* (2009), and Anthony Wohl’s *Endangered Lives* (1983) and *The Eternal Slum* (1977). My project, however, emphasizes the role of literature in representing and reforming these problems. Michelle Allen’s *Cleansing the City* (2008) discusses sanitary discourse in literature. She investigates the dual nature of the reform: the efforts to literally purify the city and morally purify the people. Here, I focus on the variety of discourses that worked to conserve the environment and correct the notion that pollution was linked to moral turpitude.

last salmon was caught from the Thames.⁹¹ The fish that survived absorbed the river's chemical brew and livestock became diseased from drinking polluted water. In turn, contaminated meat and shellfish frequently sickened Victorians. Ultimately, Faraday's experiment showcases anthropogenic pollution and the process by which the human body absorbs what it puts into the environment. *Punch's* caption reads, "we hope the Dirty Fellow [the Thames] will consult the learned Professor," optimistically suggesting that this dramatization of the river's sorry condition should encourage reform.

Miasmatic language blurs the boundaries between "sensation" and "realism." Buell regards toxic discourse as the "gothicization of public health issues" – lurid portrayals of environmental squalor to produce fear – citing Dickens's *Hard Times* and Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as exemplars (*Writing for an Endangered World* 43). By Gothicization, Buell means exaggerated and shocking description. Gothic fiction aimed to produce an emotional response, rather than a moral one. While Buell identifies the atmosphere as something worth considering, what he fails to recognize is the domestication of this atmosphere, a particularly Victorian gesture that characterizes sensation fiction.⁹² Patrick Brantlinger identifies the "sensation" in sensation fiction as the mysteries lurking in the shadows of every street and in the respectable Victorian home.⁹³ Often inspired by "lurid content" provided by the daily newspapers, sensation novels "questioned the sanctity of the family and the stability of middle-class mores" (Fantina and Harrison xii). Subversive by uncovering the evils hidden beneath Victorian propriety, the sensation novel exposes that "truth has been hidden,

⁹¹ Even when the threat of cholera had passed, the harm to the fishing industry pressured lawmakers to continue monitoring water pollution.

⁹² Henry James credited sensation fiction (specifically Wilkie Collins's novels) with bringing "into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors" ('Miss Braddon,' 122).

⁹³ Brantlinger resists relegating sensation fiction into a distinct character from realist fiction, instead identifying a set of distinguishing features that "both sets sensation novels apart from more realistic fictions and points to their relatedness to some other romantic and popular forms" ("What is 'Sensational'" 2).

buried, smuggled away behind the appearances” (Brantlinger “What is ‘Sensational’” 26-7). In other words, novelists interpret signs that readers have failed to comprehend in their own world.

Bleak House produces moral melodrama through murder, intrigue, and the surprising revelation of identity, captivating the reader by appealing to the senses through language.⁹⁴ In essence, these revelations dramatically expose ecology, the connections people have with each other and with their environment. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Darwin’s metaphor of the “entangled bank” at the end of the *On the Origin of Species* (1859) aptly describes the Victorian novel with its diverse characters and web-like structure drawing ecological connections. Esther’s relationships emerge as a web, as Dickens’s exposure of her parentage connects her to the novel’s various places and to characters across class lines.⁹⁵ While these coincidences and surprises may be sensational, this awareness of how individual’s lives affect others, as well as being influenced by environment, contribute to Dickens’s realism and moral purpose. Dickens uses the shock value of these revelations, particularly Jo’s ability to spread contagion, to remind his readers of the arbitrariness of class boundaries. Winnifred J. Pederson concludes her focused analysis of Jo by pointing out that although Dickens’s “treatment of Jo’s characteristics is often heavily emotional, [...] any means seems justified to convince the public” of the need for reform and the hypocrisy of pseudo-philanthropists like the Mrs. Jellybys and Mrs. Pardiggles who concern themselves with people in foreign places or pass out tracts instead of bread (167). In her

⁹⁴ Mirella Billi asserts that “Dickens has long been considered the father of sensation fiction and he undoubtedly created the genre,” despite the differences between Dickens’s style and the sensational novelists writing in his wake (178). Diana C. Archibald sees these differences as far more significant than the similarities in characterizing Dickens’s approach to the novel (55). She shows that Dickens “resisted the labels attached to his fiction,” particularly the charge that *Oliver Twist* was a Newgate novel: “To Dickens, then, the fundamental approach of his novel is antithetical to the spirit of the Newgate novel. He seeks to paint an accurate picture of criminality to deter (as well as to entertain), not to produce a romanticized vision of the life of crime that may unwittingly (or purposefully) glorify vice” (54). Dickens “wrote the novel, in part, as a consciousness-raising work” (58).

⁹⁵ Esther, the aristocratic Lady Dedlock’s illegitimate daughter, contracts smallpox from Jo, a friend of her late father who perishes in a London garret. Esther’s search for Jo introduces her to George Rouncewell, whose arrest for Mr. Tulkinghorn’s murder results in George’s reunion with his mother, Sir Dedlock’s housekeeper. Even while moving in separate circles between city and country, all these lives are intertwined.

discussion of the sensational elements of *Oliver Twist* (1838), Diana C. Archibald focuses on Dickens's psychologically realistic portrait of a battered woman, Nancy. The sensational murder scene "draws us, heart and mind, into the life of an abused woman. Sensation persuades us of the truth like no argument can do" (61). By sensory stimulation, novelists awaken perception in the reader to inspire reform. At the end of his diatribe on Tom-all-Alone's, Dickens points to the failure of government to address pollution. Presumably, it is up to the reader to "set [it] right."

Dickens identified himself as a realist, as did Anthony Trollope. Although in his autobiography Trollope divides novelists into two groups, the sensational and anti-sensational, or realistic, he is mainly concerned with truth: "Truth let there be, – truth of description, truth of character, human truth as to men and women. If there be such truth, I do not know that a novel can be too sensational" (229). According to Jacques Derrida, it is "impossible not to mix genres" (57), and many realist novels employ sensational tactics to impress on their readers the "truth" of fictional representations. The term "sensation," as Ellen Miller Casey has shown, referred to the "economic" success of the novels – a bestseller making a "sensation" – as well as their ability viscerally to affect their readers. By looking closely at the reviews in the *Athenaeum*, which reviewed nearly all major and minor sensation novels, Casey demonstrates the struggle to define the genre; however, the publication predominantly identified sensation novels "by their bodily impact on readers, who find when reading them that 'the flesh creeps'" (4). Similarly, the pernicious presence of miasma gets under the skin. In *Bleak House*, Dickens amplifies the reader's reaction to Jo's plight by calling on all our senses: we can feel the bugs crawling over our skin, hear the rain dripping through the dilapidated walls, and smell the body odors mingling with foul substances. We will see similar strategies in the novels that follow, such as Charles Kingsley's lurid descriptions in *Alton Locke* (1850) that confront the reader with the grime,

decomposing flesh, rats, and insects overwhelming a dilapidated home in Bermondsey. Thus, rather than “Gothicize” public health issues as Buell suggests, many Victorian realist authors “sensationalize” toxicity to uncover the environmental horrors in domestic spaces.



Figure 2 "A Drop of London Water" from *Punch* 11 May 1850, drawn by John Leech

Parliament did not act for another three years, and only after the press dubbed the foul stench emanating from the Thames in 1858 “the Great Stink.” A hot, dry summer baked the raw sewage on the Thames, releasing pestilential, intolerable fumes. Mr. Ratler complains to Phineas Finn, the eponymous hero of Anthony Trollope’s 1869 novel: “Think what it is to have to keep men together in August, with the thermometer at 81°, and the river stinking like, – like the very mischief” (Vol. II, 80). When the waste of upper and lower classes alike mingles in the Thames, no one is exempt from the consequences. The Great Stink resulted in “Thames Fever,” not an actual disease but a national obsession, transmitted through miasmatic language. Michelle Allen describes the phenomenon as “not a medical condition but a perceptual one: to be seized by this fever is to be seized with pervasive feelings of anxiety about the appalling state of the river”

(56). In another image in *Punch*'s continuing coverage of water pollution, an artist magnifies "a drop of London water" to reveal the contagion it carries (Fig. 2). Monstrous "pests" with claws and horns dramatize the threat of drinking the water, giving viewers a sense of discomfort as they imagine these invaders in their own bodies.

Realist novelists worked together with prose writers such as John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, journalists like Henry Mayhew, a founding editor of *Punch*, and built on the heartrending exposés circulated in Blue Books to begin shaping an eco-conscious discourse to garner the necessary support for enduring reform. These examples demonstrate the interplay between factual and fiction accounts of England's toxicity. Novelists respond to other writers across the spectrum – politicians, public health officials, journalists – amplifying concerns about toxicity for a mainstream audience. Blue books largely reported on horrendous working conditions and industrial novels often elaborated on these instances in vivid detail, which, as Sheila M. Smith has shown, allowed readers to explore social problems and draw their own conclusions from the evidence.⁹⁶ Josephine M. Guy praises the social problem novel because art provides a vivid interpretation of statistics easier to understand than raw facts. The novel opens readers' sympathies in a way that treatises and tracts cannot. One gets to "know" the characters in novels in a way they may not know their neighbors. More likely to read a novel than a Blue Book, readers were confronted with shocking truths. The novel, particularly, offers a degree of distance between the reader and the subject to allow for greater objectivity, and, in many ways, brought wretched conditions closer to home by identifying the environmental ills in middle-class environments. While readers might ignore the pollution they live in the midst of, the novel surprises them with the reality of their situation. By the late 1830s, in the wake of the first

⁹⁶ Incidents recorded in blue books such as the 1832 Sadler Committee report on children working in textile factories, the 1842 Report of the Children's Employment commission exposing mine conditions, and the 1843 Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture were widely circulated.

cholera epidemic, England cried out for sanitation reform, warning against inadequate hygiene and accumulated waste producing miasmatic smells. Improper waste disposal and contaminated water were only two factors in the impaired state of England's health; the novels in this chapter strategically employ miasma to represent both disease-carrying organic refuse and industrial contaminants, like smoke, chemical vapor, and other air-borne particles including ash and cotton fluff. As we will see, the novel redefines miasma to include a wider range of environmental dangers.

II. Sensational Toxicity in the Victorian Novel

i. "The horrible nests, which you call towns...."

I was told by a trustworthy man that not long ago he was compelled to sleep in one of the lowest (as regards cheapness) of the lodging-houses. All was dilapidation, filth, and noisomeness. In the morning he drew, for purposes of ablution, a basinfull of water from a pailfull kept in the room. In the water were floating alive, or apparently alive, bugs and lice, which my informant was convinced had fallen from the ceiling, shaken off by the tread of some one walking in the rickety apartments above!

Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Volume I (1851)

In the first volume of his enormous chronicle of London labor, in particular the section that details occupations of poor workers, Henry Mayhew describes the "lowest" lodging-houses of the region (252). These houses represent the problem of urban overcrowding, as well as the somewhat migrant condition of renters. The stuffy air and insect infestation appall the visitor to London. The city dominates sanitary narratives in the period. Tina Choi identifies an urban "subgenre" born out of the burgeoning public health movement in the 1840s and 1850s "devoted to investigating urban horrors and unveiling the city's poverty and filth for a primarily middleclass readership. The insistence of this subgenre upon the ubiquity and unavoidability of urban filth and disease-generating miasma helped construct the Victorian city as a space in which the individual must be constantly aware, not only of the presence of others, but also of the threat

of their connectedness to him or herself” (562). The city puts one “at risk”: in other words, the subject is transformed from an individual willing to “take risks” to being “at risk,” the “inevitable condition of urban life” (562). As I do here, Choi argues that filth, “impervious to the traditional distinctions of geography and class,” weaves together the disparate elements of the city (569).

Charles Kingsley’s tailor, Alton Locke, similarly sews his tale together with the common ecological problems of his age, revealing through his tapestry the interconnections between urban and rural, poor and rich. *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* (1850) captures the Hungry Forties, written on the heels of the second cholera epidemic of 1848-9, and eight years before the Great Stink would force legislators into addressing the city’s degradation. Kingsley’s graphic descriptions distinguish his fiction from both Elizabeth Gaskell’s, whose descriptions of poorly drained cellars in *Mary Barton* (1848) seem tame in comparison, and from Charles Dickens’s euphemistic use of words like “dust” for “dung.” The closest Dickens comes to recognizing filth on this scale are the “dust-heaps” in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5).

Locke, a tailor by trade and poet by inclination, suffers from damaged lungs. He regards his Cockney heritage as God’s gift “that I might learn to feel for poor wretches who sit stifled in reeking garrets and workrooms, drinking in disease with every breath, - bound in their prison-house of brick and iron, with their own funeral pall hanging over them, in that canopy of fog and poisonous smoke, from their cradle to their grave” (5-6). Each breath exposes the body to disease; Locke portrays the workshop as an infectious prison, improperly maintained by owners looking to maximize profit without regard for human health. Locke confidently identifies the cause of his toxic body as exposure to poisoned fumes and inadequate ventilation. In these passages he emphasizes smog and overcrowded spaces, “reeking with human breath,” creating a

miasma in itself. Locke identifies social causes for his disease: “I think that it was the will of the world and of the devil, of man’s avarice and laziness and ignorance [...]. A sanitary reformer would not be long in guessing the cause of my unhealthiness” (6). Catherine Gallagher suggests, “Alton seems obsessed with a great contradictory truth [...]: man is free yet determined” (95). Even while exercising free will, a person’s environment inevitably dictates the outcome of his/her decisions. Kingsley proves the suffering of the poor to be an environmentally determined evil. Humanity’s avarice, a devil embodying capitalism, creates the conditions that weaken Locke’s constitution. He views his talents as a means to expose social inequality and environmental pollution through miasmatic language, demonstrating the point early on that the poor bear the burden of pollution. Kingsley publically advocated sanitation reform in the Victorian period. Locke’s fictional autobiography exposes preventable environmental injustice to his reader’s vision, and his sensational descriptions of toxicity intend to jolt readers into action.⁹⁷ Thus, Locke regards writing about the London of his class as a moral imperative to expose widespread injustice, showcasing local concerns that reflect broader social problems.

Despite his narrow sphere of observation, Locke studies “natural objects” with “intense keenness” (9). He longs for the tropical climates described by missionaries, contrasting the exotic, wondrous scenery with his “little dingy, foul, reeking, twelve-foot square back-yard,

⁹⁷ The novel’s attention to toxicity heralds the modern Environmental Justice movement, which defends “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment,” where environment designates “the places in which we live, work, play, and worship,” pointedly including urban spaces (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 4). Unequal distribution of wealth and power causes “unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity,” unfairly targeting women, farmers, indigenous peoples, and urban residents (5). Environmental justice activists call attention to the way issues of race, class, and gender affect environmental conditions, prompting citizens to mobilize by offering politicized accounts of personal suffering. Amongst all trades, the mortality rates of earthenware and pottery workers were the highest in nineteenth-century England, but social problems novels often featured ‘domestic’ trades, such as dressmaking, that engaged large numbers of women. Catherine Gallagher investigates serialized narratives to illustrate sentimentalized accounts of women and children, whom reformers often targeted as objects for legislation. When Victorian novelists uncover the hovels of the lower class, they reveal that the British, in the words of contemporary ecocritic Mark Dowie, are not “being poisoned equally,” the central premise of environmental justice (141). Whether or not they are autobiographical, novels featuring pollution and subsequent illness, in their emphasis on individual suffering (particularly of women and children) and class discrimination, share the concerns of current environmental justice activists.

where huge smoky party-walls shut out every breath of air and almost all the light of heaven” (14). Locke’s repeated use of the word “reeking” signals his sensitivity to smell, so even when describing water, he frames the problem as toxic air using miasmatic theory to create a sense of claustrophobia. He attempts to study his local “pond,” in truth the building’s water supply, dirty fluid “crusted with soot and alive with insects, to be renewed only three times in the seven days” (14). As he searches for specimens, “all of a sudden the horror of the place came over [him]; those grim prison-walls above, with their canopy of lurid smoke; the dreary, sloppy, broken pavement; the horrible stench of the stagnant cesspools; the utter want of form, colour, life, in the whole place, crushed me down” (14). Here is Locke’s moment of recognition: pursuing the hobby of natural history is fruitless amidst this squalor. “Horror” – filth – originates in England, in his own backyard. Locke transposes the canopy of the rainforest into thick smoke, revealing the perversion in the East End. The only “wonders” in this tiny backyard are monstrous insects – “great larvae” breeding in the water – and the filth suffocates Locke’s ambition to be a naturalist, while prompting him to share these discoveries with a blind populace. We can see how Kingsley’s references to “exotic” locales gain increased significance by reading this scene in light of the recent cholera epidemic. A disease that originated in India, “Asiatic cholera took shape in the Victorian imagination as an Oriental raider, a barbaric force whose progress westward exposed the weak spots of an expanding industrial culture” (O’Connor 22). Soon, the popular press began imagining cholera as the lord of the English slum. Social critics, including Kingsley, “agreed that England was mass-producing a distinctly exotic squalor out of its own ill-disposed waste” (O’Connor 30).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Southwood Smith equated the lethal atmosphere of the slum dwelling to the disease-ridden tropical marsh, a recognizable symbol of miasma: “The room of a fever patient, in a small and heated apartment of London, with no perflation of fresh air, is perfectly analogous to a stagnant pool in Ethiopia full of the bodies of dead locusts. The poison generated in both cases is the same” (qtd. in Wohl *Endangered Lives* 286). Erin O’Connor explains that

Locke transfers his naturalist energies to his method of literary representation. He continually demonstrates clear causal relationships to awaken similarly keen perception in the reader. There are numerous passages describing the unsanitary, dangerous, and claustrophobic conditions of London's workshops, homes, and streets, such as the tailor's workshop, which Kingsley likens to a hospital. Each floor nourishes a type of illness: dampness breeds rheumatism; exposure to cesspools leads to typhoid and dysentery; close, thick air clouded with sweat and fabric particles causes asthma and consumption (25). None of these illnesses are "natural." The workshop, a microcosm of the larger city, shows the man-made origin of these illnesses, which are propagated through careless relations with the environment.

Describing a "foggy" night in Bermondsey, Kingsley exposes environmental contaminants. He illustrates the way the city distorts the natural:

From the butchers' and greengrocers' shops the gas-lights flared and flickered, wild and ghastly, over haggard groups of slip-shod dirty women, bargaining for scraps of stale meat and frostbitten vegetables, wrangling about short weight and bad quality. Fish-stalls and fruit-stalls lined the edge of the greasy pavement, sending up odours as foul as the language of sellers and buyers. Blood and sewer-water crawled from under doors and out of spouts, and reeked down the gutters among offal, animal and vegetable, in every stage of putrefaction. Foul vapours rose from cowsheds and slaughter-houses, and the doorways of undrained alleys, where the inhabitants carried the filth out on their shoes from the back-yard into the court, and from the court up into the main street; while above, hanging like cliffs over the streets – those narrow, brawling torrents of filth, and poverty,

"[t]he notion that industrial England was manufacturing an environment uncannily akin to" the tropics "was a common one during the Victorian era. Exoticism provided a compelling metaphor for the effects of industrialism on the English environment, enabling commentators not only to emphasize how alien the urban landscape was, but also to align that apparent foreignness with filth and disease" (29-30).

and sin – the houses with their teeming load of life were piled up into the dingy choking night. (87)

Gas, rotting meat and vegetables, overflowing cesspools, manure, and human sweat create the toxic fog engulfing the neighborhood; this sensory miasmatic language demonstrates filth's contagious properties. "Teeming" like so many insects, the inhabitants cannot afford the luxury of cleanliness. Perpetually carrying filth on their shoes and in their groceries, they ignore the causal relationships Kingsley is eager to render. Cholera was most often contracted through swallowing infected water, but food such as Kingsley describes was also a carrier of the bacteria, which could last for days in meat, dairy products, and produce.

The urban market reveals another invisible reality of London, the chaotic presence of 'rural' activities. Horse and dog droppings as well as waste from London's numerous slaughterhouses litter the street,. Thousands of tons of manure were stored in London. Anthony Wohl shows that, "Although the Victorians often lamented the loss of rusticity, the Victorian town would strike us as an incongruous mixture of urbanity and barnyard setting, with town-houses interspersed with stables, pigsties, and slaughter-houses, and where sheep and cows jostled with horse-traffic, and pigs and chickens dwelt in close proximity to human inhabitants" (*Endangered Lives* 82).⁹⁹ Many of the daily realities of country and city life are not so fundamentally separate, but Kingsley's rhetoric echoes his assessment of Locke's London yard: the city ruins what should be beautiful. Like the human inhabitants, the animals are kept in close confinement, improperly fed, and cruelly used. Here, violations of the land – the build-up of

⁹⁹ He continues with startling numbers: "For much of the century London streets resembled those of a country town on market days. In 1876 some 349,435 cows and bulls, 1,659,324 sheep, and 14,394 pigs were brought into London to the central Metropolitan cattle market and the foreign cattle market at Deptford. Even though many were brought in by train and not on the hoof, they were, nevertheless, led to the streets from the central train termini to the cattle markets and private slaughterhouses. As late as 1892 well over 13,000 cows, calves, sheep, lambs and pigs were slaughtered *each week*" in London (82, emphasis in the original).

trash, mud, and manure – pollute the environment as a whole. Cesspools spill over onto the ground, polluting the land from within by seeping through the soil into groundwater. The barnyard conditions engender filth, but the city’s unsanitariness also harms the animals’ health. They cannot thrive any better than the people, imbibing ash-coated food and fetid water. Grown at a great distance, produce spoils before it reaches the table. This market is far from ‘agrarian,’ a term that, when opposed to ‘industrial,’ suggests direct engagement with land. As Christopher Hamlin posits in his ecocritical analysis of Kingsley’s writings, Kingsley denied the consciousness of a “nature separate from human involvement,” forcing the “confrontation” between the human and nonhuman realms (258). Kingsley still uses the word ‘nature’, but his rejection of the concept removes the term from the antithetical nature/culture, or nonhuman/human, context.¹⁰⁰ Kingsley’s scene shows the need for products grown in the countryside. Londoners suffer from imported or poor quality crops and poorly-tended livestock. The claustrophobic city is an inappropriate place for a productive herder or farmer. In blunt terms, Londoners poison themselves by failing to separate their ordure from their food.

Kingsley roots his moral melodrama in everyday, if ghastly, realities. P.J. Keating finds the plain description of the market so successful because Kingsley withholds commentary and lets the details, which are horrifying enough, speak for themselves. He argues, “Kingsley’s sole intention is [...] to re-create the feeling of repulsion experienced by himself [...]. [It] is notable that Kingsley has deliberately chosen what would normally be a fairly gay scene – a street

¹⁰⁰ Hamlin performs an ecocritical reading of Kingsley’s opus, including his novels and sermons. He shows that Kingsley perceived humans as “biotic beings,” essentially part of nature, and preached the combination of “consciousness and conscience,” fostered in the organic parish – a Christian, biotic community living according to natural law (God’s law). The founder of Christian Socialism, Kingsley advocated common land, putting the means of production into the hands of the worker (271). Hamlin notes that Kingsley’s use of Bacon’s command to “conquer” the land “may jar,” but Kingsley nowhere admits any tension between endorsement of industry and revulsion to the industrial city” (271). He believed in science, in accordance with religion, and its power to improve the world. As Alan Rauch posits, sanitary science became powerful proof for Kingsley of its restorative properties. Hamlin and Rauch assume Kingsley’s critique of the city rests in overcrowding and poor hygiene, not a condemnation of technology and manufacturing.

market at its busiest moment, Saturday evening – and that he makes no attempt whatsoever to present it from a working-class viewpoint” (19). Kingsley chooses the market as “typical working-class London as a whole: it is not simply an isolated plague spot” (20). These descriptions, in Keating’s words, that “grip the reader and stir his conscience” characterize the Victorian use of miasmatic language and the veracity essential to the novel’s confrontation with the actual environment (20). Kingsley aims to induce the physical sensation of repulsion. Patrick Brantlinger, establishing a set of characteristics of sensation fiction, resists relegating the genre into a separate category from realism; however, he argues that while the sensation novel may feature themes of reform, they “tend merely to exploit public interest in these issues” (“What is ‘Sensational’” 6). Due to their didactic earnestness, writers such as Dickens and Kingsley were never truly considered sensational novelists. In his grotesque market scene, Kingsley represents actual, horrifying facts, implying that the ‘real’ will be sufficiently ‘sensational’ as long as such evils exist.

In Victorian London, the workers lack opportunities of engagement with healthy environments. One laborer in a “sweaters den” raves,¹⁰¹ “when will I get out to the fresh air? For five months I haven’t seen the blessed light of the sun” (201). Maddened by his imprisonment in the carceral city, Jemmy Downes attempts to jump off Waterloo Bridge. After being prevented by Locke, Downes, intoxicated with gin and toxic water, leads Locke to a rat-infested, putrid den above a sewer. In far and away the most lurid scene, Downes confesses to killing his family by allowing them to live in claustrophobic quarters. His family succumbs to

¹⁰¹ A private workroom, where men are conscripted to work without break to repay debts to the owner. In shops, or in “premises,” the price of goods is negotiated directly between tailor and customer. However, work was often sent out to save expenses. The middle-man, or “sweater,” employs cheap labour to fulfill his contract, maximizing his cut of the profits. This system reduced the number of jobs available in workshops, and men became desperate enough to submit to this form of slavery. Located in homes, these dens were beyond the reach of legislation and inspection.

the “fever devils” – the noxious vapor rising from the sewer below – and the sensory description of the “hot breaths” of miasma uncovers visible and invisible threats – the dirt covering the floor and the infectious germs emanating from unsanitary conditions – so the reader may “see” and feel the pollution.

Locke first experiences the smell: “The stench was frightful – the very air heavy with pestilence. The first breath I drew made my heart sink, and my stomach turn” (332). Air, land, and water pollution converge in this house of horror, where the environment revenges itself upon human beings for their abuse. The contamination of the water with excrement and industrial fluids contaminates the air, and pollution of the land *is* pollution of the water, as litter clogs rivers and cesspools. Locke forgets his discomfort at the smell upon *seeing* the three corpses on the floor: Downes’s wife and her two children, half-devoured by rodents. Downes wails, “‘I watched ‘em dying! Day after day I saw the devils come up through the cracks, like little maggots and beetles, all manner of ugly things, creeping down their throats; and I asked ‘em, and they said they were the fever devils.’ It was too true; the poisonous exhalations had killed them. The wretched man’s delirium tremens had given that horrible substantiality to the poisonous fever gases” (332). Downes imagines contagion as embodied insects: since “fever” and “gas” (or the germs and viruses at their core) are largely invisible, Downes uses metaphor to articulate the cause of his family’s misfortunes. Both literal insects and hallucinations of insects representing toxins invade the body, “creeping” into their lungs, a nightmarish vision of the body toxic. Locke implies Downes suffers from typhus, known to cause delirium. “All manner of ugly things” creates the miasma, a myriad of pestilential particles including sewer gases, industrial fumes, and the insects that feed on human flesh and reside in their clothes and hair (332). Kingsley’s use of adjectives like “heavy” and verbs like “crawling” attempt to give a

tangible form to miasma. Novelists faced a problem when trying to render evanescent miasma 'real' to audiences; Kingsley's intense descriptions give "horrible substantiality" to invisible or microscopic toxins, encouraging an eco-consciousness in the reader that will allow them to recognize these dangers in the actual world.

Locke suggests Downes drink water instead of gin, only to learn that the sewer water is the only option. Gin becomes a necessity, a desperate effort to mask the taste of the "hell-broth" and combat nausea. Running to fetch water to illustrate his point, Downes falls into the foul sewer, suffocating in the stench as much as drowning. The water, "as opaque as stone," engulfs and hides his body (333). There is no euphemism here as Downes drowns in shit. Kingsley employs sensationalism in the cause of environmental justice. At the novel's end, Locke's highborn cousin will die of typhus fever, contracted from the coat he commissioned – the same coat Downes was working on, and used to cover the corpses of his family.¹⁰² Alan Rauch observes, "It is, after all, fabric itself that is the vector for disease between the ill-used tailors and the upper classes for whom they must work"; his analysis points to the metaphorical contamination of the cloth, which patterns this exploitation (200).¹⁰³ Cloth, itself a kind of web, becomes another way to represent contagion and ecological connections. Environmental injustices cannot be quarantined in the poorer districts, a common lesson of social problem novels. The fleas and lice birthed out of the great unwashed know no hierarchies, indiscriminately biting and infecting the rich with the blood of the poor. Kingsley recasts the

¹⁰² Typhus was most often spread by lice; often confused with typhoid fever, the two illnesses were not distinguished until 1869.

¹⁰³ Rauch considers how Kingsley adopts Carlyle's trope in *Sartor Resartus* and "weaves a more literal story out of it. As a social reformer Kingsley creates the tailor Alton Locke to demonstrate the terrible truth of Teufelsdröckh's axiom: 'society is founded upon cloth.' In the unequal worlds of Alton Locke and his employers, however, the cloth is contaminated" (200). Rauch does not mean contaminated in the literal sense, but figuratively contaminated, suggesting exploitation. The truth that the novel lays bare is the "naked self that exists under the clothes of all men and ultimately makes them equal" (200). This "entire scene [...] is an ironic gloss on the harsh reality behind the science of clothes" (201).

scene in *Past and Present* (1843) where Carlyle makes this point through an anecdote about the Irish widow who infects her unsympathetic neighbors with typhus. Disease functions as the ironic “proof that she *was* flesh of your flesh” (129), “bone of your bone” (128). Epidemic pollution reveals ecological truths. Their strategic miasmatic language suggests that Victorians were so eco-conscious as to be aware of interchanges induced by pollution, even without accurate knowledge of germ theory. Writing these interconnections into the novel awakened perception of inescapable linkages between classes, exposing the reality that pollution, often understood as a working-class problem, affected every person in England, including the figurehead.

These revelations are further supported by Kingsley’s use of the pastoral to heighten the monstrosity of the city. As Locke walks to Cambridge to see his cousin, once he escapes “the pall of smoke which hung over the city” (115), he passes through “the as yet unknown world of green fields and woods” (114). Locke, revived by the fresh air, realizes his cough has disappeared (116). That all it takes is removing to the country to suspend his ailment proves Locke’s illness is environmental rather than genetic. As he walks along, he observes “the great roots of London, running far out into the country, up which poured past me an endless stream of food, and merchandise, and human beings – the sap of the huge metropolitan life-tree!” (115). The cloudless countryside appears idyllic in comparison with the smoky shroud of London. Locke’s trained eye observes his own dependency on the material environment as he watches the importation of daily necessities into the city.¹⁰⁴ Building on the observations of the urban

¹⁰⁴ Lancelot’s observations pointedly contrast realist and Romantic nature: he sees how the land provides subsistence and the work involved. Hamlin observes that, for Kingsley, the “‘nature’ one looked at or invented was less important than that which one does, and in doing, is. By contrast of the physical work that obscured any border between a human and his or her surroundings, romantic apprehension of nature was touristic – passive, visual. A corollary was ambivalence to place, unusual in a mature writer. Places register mainly as sites of doing or being” (258-9). During his country walk, Locke notices activity rather than the scenery.

market, these roots reveal the city's reliance on the country; the crowded city, with no place to grow enough food for its inhabitants, cannot sustain itself. Without idealizing the rural, Kingsley takes the opportunity to map healthy alternatives to urban life. Kingsley did not have faith that cities, which he calls "foul sties" reared by civilization (387), could be recuperated.

Watching the current of exchange between country and city reminds Locke of the ecological truism that people are all the same. He rejects the opportunity offered him to study natural history, recognizing the hypocrisy in the outlook of his benefactor, the Dean, who claims naturalists are the "only true democrats" "for nothing is too great or too small for them to take note of. No tiniest gnat, or speck of dust" (181). The Dean fails to include human beings in his purview. Locke writes his autobiography to "perhaps awaken some rich man to look down and take pity on" those "struggling in poverty and misguidance" (387). As I show in Chapter 5, his story presents a moral imperative to recognize kinship between the classes, who are interconnected as are humans and the environment.

At the novel's end, Locke collapses into a feverish dream state after inhaling the poisonous gases of the cellar.¹⁰⁵ In an allegorical saga to reclaim Eden, ghosts of an ecological past haunt Locke: he dreams he has devolved into a madreporae, and then evolves over time back into a human.¹⁰⁶ Locke's evolution is triggered through altruism; it is when he protects his cousin from a falling tree, sacrificing his own life, that he evolves into an ape, the first stage of development towards humanity. During this stage, "Each man coveted the universe for his own

¹⁰⁵ He may also have contracted typhus.

¹⁰⁶ A madreporae is a kind of stony coral; given Kingsley's mania for natural history, he would be well-schooled in scientific nomenclature. However, Darwin's first monograph, *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*, based on his investigations aboard the *Beagle* from 1832-1836, expounds his theory of the formation of coral reefs. Published in 1842, the monograph cemented Darwin's celebrity in scientific circles and earned him, in 1853, the Royal Society's Royal Medal. Given the Victorian mania for natural history, it is possible that the genus madreporae would be recognizable to Kingsley's contemporary readers.

lusts, and not that he might fulfill in it God's command to people and subdue it" (349).¹⁰⁷

Subdue in this context means cultivate, referring back to an earlier allusion in the novel to Bacon's golden rule, "Nature is conquered by obeying her" (370). The "universe" must not be divided into resources for individual use: everyone must cooperatively share the land. Locke can only wake when he teaches his companions the proper relationship to the earth: stewardship.¹⁰⁸ He brings back to the present a past model of England and the "commons," free use of public land. His imagined evolution – an allegory of progress – resuscitates part of England's heritage. Locke, however, sets sail for America, where he hopes he may start a new life, and dies shortly upon reaching its shore. While Locke's autobiography lives on to inculcate the need for brotherhood, it offers an ambivalent conclusion: it is up to the reader to act.

In *Sartor Resartus* (1836), Carlyle asks, "What too are all Poets and Moral Teachers, but a Species of Metaphorical Tailors?" (219). Kingsley stitches a panoramic view of England: urban sweatshops and rural hovels tenanted by the lower classes, and the luxurious country estates and opulent drawing rooms of the elite. Miasma, inescapable, reveals currents of exchange; the workers are exploited by masters, who become infected by the hazardous conditions they create. Tina Choi argues that these intimate relationships between the biological and social create the connective tissue of the city, citing an 1843 *Quarterly Review* article: "we reflect that the air the labouring classes breathe [...] is the fluid in which rich and poor are equally immersed—that it is a commonwealth in which all are born, live, and die equal" (569). The feared miasma communicates these lessons, wafting the message from the core of London, from the gases sublimated by human activity, across the nation. Kingsley's miasmatic language

¹⁰⁷ See also Alan Rauch, who writes, "The process of development is only complete, Kingsley wants the reader to understand, once humans recognize that they are part of a complex social order, and, more importantly, of a far more complex universal system" (202). Rauch investigates the ways Kingsley bridges religion and science.

¹⁰⁸ I discuss stewardship in Chapter 4.

serves its purpose – the shock value in *Alton Locke* forcefully awakens perception, playing on cultural anxiety to disseminate unforgettable truths. Kingsley wrote for England’s youth, who, inspired by his zeal and radical ideas, caught what Henry James dubbed “Kingsley fever” (“Henry Kingsley” 1112).¹⁰⁹ This radicalism earned Kingsley a subversive reputation; barred from the pulpit by the Bishop of London, Kingsley continued to preach eco-conscious discourse to a wide audience through literature.

Alton Locke ambitiously represents the textile and agricultural industries and high society life, traveling between the slums and the respectable drawing room. Similarly, in *North and South* (1853), Elizabeth Gaskell crafts a series of comparisons between business owners and their laborers to depict the struggle for survival. She, too, moves between places – the southern country and urban north – to enrich her portrayal of at risk environments. While Bessy Higgins’s fatal lung disease is the most prominent example of illness in the novel, the bodies of the entire Hale family are rendered toxic once they move from South to North, from country to city. When Mr. Hale’s conscience urges him to leave his Anglican parish in “the out-of-the-way” Helstone, the family relocates to the Northern manufacturing district, Milton (modeled on Manchester) (18). Asa Briggs labels Manchester as the “shock city” of Victorian England; the burgeoning town gained a reputation for its turbulent economic progress, tense labor relations, and filthy living conditions. Gaskell, a resident of Manchester, depicts her home town, while adding to the many sordid depictions of the area, including Friedrich Engels’s *Conditions of the*

¹⁰⁹ Endeavoring to instill his views in an even younger age group, Kingsley revisits these issues in his didactic children’s story, *The Water-Babies* (1863). A young chimney sweep, Tom, becomes so fascinated with clean water that he drowns in the attempt to wash off the soot covering his body. This incident not only alludes to the lack of “water up the court where he lived” (1), but the city’s smoky air. Kingsley’s toxic discourse insists that Tom cannot survive in a contaminated environment, and so is transformed into a “water-baby.”

Working Class in England, published nine years before, immortalizing Manchester's notorious filthiness and austerity.¹¹⁰

Milton certainly shocks the Hales. Margaret's perspective as an outsider reveals the environmental degradation causing ill health:

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. It was all the darker from the contrast with the pale gray-blue of the wintry sky [...]. Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more of a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell [...]. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain. (59)

Margaret, a country girl, cannot read the meteorological signs in the sky above Milton, because, rather than subscribing to ecological laws, its weather is dictated by the artificial sway of the factory. Gaskell describes a perversion of the natural order, similar both to Kingsley's descriptions of animate slums and the rhetoric Dickens uses in *Hard Times*. The factory, like a mother hen, propagates the town with its "unparliamentary" smoke, an adjective referring to disregarded legislation. While the government attempted to control the output of smoke, as John Thornton explains later, most owners preferred to pay the minimal fines than lay out the money to refurbish their chimneys. Gaskell's miasmatic language focusing on the "deep lead-coloured" factory-produced, rather than residential, smoke, participates in the public conversation expressing anxiety over rapid industrialization. While domestic fires were a familiar annoyance,

¹¹⁰ Originally written in German, the book was not translated into English until 1885. Nevertheless, the England that so horrifies Engels during his stay in Manchester from 1842-44 is contemporaneous with Kingsley's and Gaskell's depictions of London and Manchester.

industrial pollution was not yet understood in the wake of unprecedented growth. Through Margaret's eyes, Gaskell defamiliarizes the accepted view of the city, where smoke was a tolerable part of life, and awakens readers to the harm of unregulated pollution. Elizabeth Starr suggests that Margaret herself models fiction's capacity for enabling communication between the classes (387). By moving between mill owner and employee, she shapes social relationships through narrative; the plot is shaped through telling stories and describing "bewildering" urban settings and conflicts (387). One might say Margaret learns to read Milton. In *North and South*, literature creates a social discourse, and in the same way, these urban novels create a public eco-conscious discourse.¹¹¹

Milton's smoke bewilders Margaret most of all. Certainly the salubrious smell of grass is missing from Milton, a town of brick and mortar, but the smoke asserts itself in its own right, as the Hales' health deteriorates. Margaret adapts slowly to town life, pining for what "could not be had": sunshine and purity. Using the language of miasma, she observes, "The thick yellow November fogs had come on [...]. [O]utside a thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven in to every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist" (65). "Yellow" fog signifies chemical vapors that here invade and violate the home. When authors emphasize the discoloration of smoke – yellow, brown, leaden – presumably they intend to jar the reader's complacency; not only is smoke artificial, but toxic, and should not be an atmospheric fixture. Margaret fears the smog's invasion of the domestic space. Even in the privacy of their own home, the Hale family cannot escape the effects of industrialization. Importantly, we see a middle-class family suffer from toxicity. Their name denotes the relationship between one's

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Starr argues, "Gaskell's fiction draws attention to the construction of narrative as a social act. Encouraging readers to see connections between the mundane, buried narratives that circulate on the streets and in the homes of her novels with her own authorship, Gaskell demonstrates her investment in the messy, contentious, and public process of storytelling" (387).

body and the environment: inhaling and exhaling polluted air compromises their health. Margaret's youth likely spares her from the worst effects of pollution, but her parents both succumb to illness, dying within a year or so of their move. Mrs. Hale's maid, Dixon, who also develops a severe cough, accurately predicts the smoke "will be [her mistress's] death," in only a few months (66). Before the move, Mrs. Hale notoriously complains about her tedious life in Helstone, lamenting the distance from other families and lack of entertainment. However, she quickly discovers her health is "seriously affected" in Milton: "The life in Milton was so different from what Mrs. Hale had been accustomed to live in Helstone, in and out perpetually into the fresh and open air; the air itself was so different, deprived of all revivifying principle as it seemed to be here" (88). Mrs. Hale comes to appreciate the slow-moving agrarian rural life of revivifying Helstone through the force of contrast with the bustling industrial life of filthy Milton. The sort of vague illness Mrs. Hale suffers from was common in the period, considering the likelihood of chronic food poisoning and toxic household goods. Mercury, phosphorous, lead, and anthrax all found their way into common items. Arsenic, for example, could be found in products ranging from decorations and toys, to stationary, to wallpapers, to curtains and carpet, and even to soaps. As with smoke, as Margaret realizes, chemicals travelled numerous avenues into the home. In an industrial context, widespread fevers, 'nervous' diseases, and fragility take on a new meaning that is not psychological or gendered, but part of the consequence of rampant contamination through the processes and products of mass-manufacture. Mr. Hale does not regret relinquishing his collar, but he does regret relocating to an "unhealthy, smoky, sunless place" (204). He, too, perishes from the "Milton air" (348). Although Margaret will go on to fund Thornton's new (ostensibly cleaner) factory, the narrative serves as a cautionary tale against unmitigated industrial pollution.

When the Hales arrive in Milton, Mr. Thornton engages Margaret's father as a tutor. The men strike up a friendship, as Mr. Hale, the outsider, questions Mr. Thornton about his business practices. Although Thornton acknowledges that the North is not so clean as the South, he bristles under Parliament's bidding to alter chimneys to consume their smoke. Thornton opted to do so to reduce fuel costs, noting that otherwise he would have waited to be fined. However, he doubts "if there has been a chimney in Milton informed against for five years past, although some are constantly sending out one-third of their coal in what is called here unparliamentary smoke" (82). The Smoke Nuisance Abatement Act of 1853 covered London, affecting most industries, but included the vague stipulation that smoke must be reduced within "reasonable limits." Similarly, Manchester's Borough Police Act of 1844 "contained a clause to the effect that manufacturers were obliged to install smoke-consuming furnaces only 'where the same shall be practicable,' and this element of practicability was, of course, open to generous interpretation and made prosecution very difficult" (Wohl *Endangered Lives* 222). Between 1847 and 1850, a smoke inspector mandated that nearly 90 firms improve their furnaces, but most factory owners ignored existing legislation, preferring to pay the fines, and the public ignored the smoke nuisance.

Thornton's attitude demonstrates a prevailing contradiction in the discourse surrounding smoke. Smoke-consuming devices were in fact cheap to install and actually led to substantial savings. Profit, not health, motivates Thornton to increase the efficiency of his chimneys. However, most business owners resented the cost, however small, and did not consider the ways reducing waste would increase their profit. Business owners' actions suggest that they even though they realized the harm posed by smoke, they circumvented emissions restrictions to cheapen operating costs. This reasoning puzzles Mrs. Hale, who notes the ruin of the family's

clothes in the smoky air, and the impossibility of keeping “the muslin blind clean here above a week together [...]. And as for hands – Margaret, how many times did you say you had washed your hands this morning before twelve o’clock? Three times, was it not?” (82). Mrs. Hale’s concerns about cleanliness speak to domestic considerations. The smoke blackens Thornton’s splendid home as well, where his mother covers the furniture to protect it from grime. The Northern middle-class, however, accepts smoke as a by-product of success, rendering laws ineffective. A constantly smoking chimney represented income: productivity and plentiful business.¹¹² Gaskell attention to toxicity aims to educate the public about environmental hazards. Effectually the critique of smoke was the critique of capitalism in which economic considerations trump environmental considerations. By contrasting revenue with cleanliness, Gaskell redefines wealth in bodily instead of monetary terms, redefining the significance of smoke.

Despite (or perhaps due to) the Thornton’s indifference, smoke lethally invades their home. Thornton’s sister, an invalid, presumably suffers from her proximity to the factory. Gaskell insists on this conclusion when she narrates the same circumstances among the working class. Just after Margaret comments on the stifling atmosphere of her new home, she meets Nicholas Higgins and his daughter, Bessy, who suffers a fatal lung disease from working in the mills. *North and South* demonstrates environmental determinism by juxtaposing Margaret and Bessy, who are both 19. Margaret, comfortably middle-class and reared in the South, escapes exposure to the worst environmental injustices, while Bessy, put to work as a child in a filthy mill, has little chance of survival. The plot primarily focuses on the mutual dependence of masters and men, condemning masters’ exploitation of their laborers. However, this relationship

¹¹² Wohl observes, “The theme, ‘it [smoke] is all good for trade’, runs like a constant refrain through the debates on smoke pollution” (*Endangered Lives* 216).

relates to humanity's dependence on the environment, on clean conditions that are compromised by the same system of exploitation. If profit continues to undermine other needs, the city's horrific filth will negate progress.

Erin O'Connor cites Bessy as an example of how "industrial capitalism reconfigures the body" (9). Her lungs are compromised from the dust particles in the factory, industrial miasma created both from the textiles and the coal. She explains that in the carding-room "the fluff got into my lungs, and poisoned me [...]. Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (102). "Poisoned" signifies hazard, and although not chemically toxic, the carded cotton creates a lethal miasma. Like the yellow fog and unclean smoke, fluff floats through the air, demonstrating the exchange between bodies and their environments with every breath. Bessy's cough lessens when the wind changes, indicating that Milton's smog exacerbates her condition. Human bodies take in what our machines produce; what we put into the world, we put into ourselves.

While the novel insists on the confrontation between anthropogenic pollution and our bodies, factory managers view ventilation as an unnecessary expense. Far from an individual case, Bessy could stand in for the ubiquity of occupational diseases. Respiratory illnesses affected large portions of the population, and the working classes in particular suffered in workshops by breathing not simply smoke and sweat, but fabric, glass, clay, and metal particles. Bruce Haley explains, "Testimony from medical investigators and workers alike included gruesome stories of 'black-spittle' among miners, of grinder's rot and potter's asthma. Those looking into conditions among milliners and dressmakers found much higher than average rates

of anemia, deteriorating vision, and various lung diseases caused by breathing dust and fine particles of fiber” (12). Drawing from this type of ongoing inquiry, Gaskell animates these present conditions in her fiction to bring this understanding of occupational disease to a wider audience.

Despite consciousness-raising realist fiction, factories and families continued to churn out filth. By 1885, Richard Jefferies was so disturbed by Victorian pollution that he turned to another genre – science fiction – to dramatize the horrific scenario of filth overtaking London in *After London, or Wild England* (1885). Though by this time sanitation efforts and smoke abatement projects were organized, industry had irrevocably transformed the country and showed no signs of slowing. “Cognitive estrangement” defines the science fiction genre: an alien (and frequently dystopic) future brought about through human agency (rather than supernatural forces). As these stories transport readers to alien locations, the settings represent a reaction to the author’s contemporary reality, creating the genre’s characteristic strangeness through the resulting comparisons. In Jefferies’s dystopia, the protagonist Felix Aquila travels through time, to actual London’s potential fate, rather than to a new place. This imagined future, the logical result of unmitigated industry, participates in the science fiction tradition of asking readers to consider how they might modify their behavior to prevent avoidable futures, in this case toxic apocalypse.

Not to belabor an obvious point, Jefferies’s title, *After London*, inscribes a cause and effect relationship between England’s wildness and the collapse of the industrial metropolis. Divided into two parts, his novel begins with “The Relapse into Barbarism,” where a historian records the fall of civilization and describes in sympathetic detail the environment’s reclamation of England. This natural history of “Wild England” maps a geography of conservation as the

land once free from human manipulation rejuvenates itself. Domesticated animals return to their wild roots and native plants reclaim the fields. The naturalist describes the landscape's abundant fertility: an uninterrupted natural cycle as the wind plants seeds, which germinate untouched, and are finally "reaped" by animals or winter storms (2). Within one season after London's collapse, "all the country looked alike" (1). Within thirty years, the land completely returns to a primitive state. The distinction between country and city becomes meaningless as towns disappear. Jefferies's pastoral emphasizes the end goal of literary representations of toxicity, which is eradicated once chemical contaminants are no longer released into the atmosphere. The Lake on which Felix sails is "clear as crystal, exquisite to drink, abounding with fishes of every kind" (56). A green earth provides daily necessities. In fact, Jefferies writes 'nontoxic' discourse in these scenes, where there is no fear of pollution.

Nevertheless, the state of the crops is "of the highest importance; peace or war, famine or plenty, might depend upon the weather of the next few months" (79). Human beings are beholden to the land, but it does not guarantee abundance. England's enclosed residences clearly demarcate the domesticated and the wild, the inhabitable and the dangerous, revealing an antagonism between human and nonhuman. Felix's room contains several hunting tools, including darts, spears, nets and a shield (65), which represent the dangers in authentically wild spaces. The need to arm oneself against renewed populations of wild animals and dense forces indicates humanity's vulnerability. Although Wild England is agrarian rather than industrial, Felix's father, Baron Aquila, compromises his status by farming his estate himself. That he is called Sir Constans, though rightly a lord, signifies "the low estimation" in which he is held (96). Jefferies's naturalist historian praises the revived land, but here we start to understand why England has not flourished. The Baron's estate "flow[s] with milk and honey," however, he does

not profit financially. The Prince robs the Baron of his fertile crops, dividing the “spoil” amongst his retainers (96). Rather than live in harmony with the land, human beings continue to regard it as a resource. Recreating a contemporary social problem, the higher class reaps the fruits of those below, so that the actual tiller of the soil is left in need. The class system has not changed. Profit remains paramount and ‘true’ nobility equates to idleness. While Jefferies’s contemporary, William Morris, preached feudalism as an advantageous alternative to modern industrialism, Jefferies’s attitude is clearly ambivalent, as England’s return to a wild state is accompanied by degraded culture. The ruralness of future England significantly differs from typical pastoral because it is far from idyllic: the land is pure, but the people are barbaric.

These base instincts indicate the drive to dominate the land enduring from an industrial past. Jefferies departs from the science fiction tradition by identifying technology as responsible for hardship, rather than the cure for it. While dominating the land would arguably improve social conditions, human mastery is also what polluted the environment beyond habitation, as Felix’s journey to abandoned, toxic London makes clear. He is almost suffocated by the toxic fumes of the city – a magnified miasma – which has been so defiled by manufacturing chemicals and processes that it is uninhabitable by man or beast: “There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it. The black water bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud of the bottom. When the wind collects the miasma, and, as it were, presses it together, it becomes visible as a low cloud which hangs over the place. [...] It is dead” (49-50). Any attempt to reclaim or till the land causes instant fever. The environment reasserts its mastery when dis-used, man-made structures are completely subsumed into the land: the once “marvellous city [...] was after all only of brick” (48). The sewer system collapses, clogging the Thames and flooding the city. The narrator’s remark

indicates that “brick,” representing man-made structures, cannot compete with the strength of environmental forces. These scenes of decay chasten human hubris.

Felix first notices the “ceaseless stream” of birds and fish moving westward, then the “brown and withered” banks: “The farther he sailed the more desolate [they] seemed, and trees ceased altogether” (254). This would, in fact, be a recognizable phenomenon to Victorian readers, familiar with industrial gases’ effect on plant-life. London’s characteristic yellow fog persists, unaffected by rough wind, enveloping Felix and obscuring his vision. The water becomes completely black, staining his canoe and his skin. The “rusty brown” water emits an “offensive odour” that Felix does not recognize, “not in the least like the vapour of marshes” (257). Jefferies uses miasmatic language (“vapor”, “mist”) to contrast ‘organic’ miasma with industrial miasma; these fumes are not “marshy,” but chemical. The “gaseous emanations from the soil” daze and tire Felix, who becomes confused, suffering from optical illusions and restricted breathing; the abundant and unknown chemicals actually drug him, as he likens the sensation to the influence of narcotics. Toxic exposure permanently turns Felix’s skin, hair, and clothes black. He visually evokes the body toxic as the contaminants inhaled, compromising his internal health, alter his exterior. Jefferies expresses a sophisticated understanding of environmental hazards, pointing directly to chemical modification by human agency. This man-made toxicity results not simply from excessive smoke, but also from mining, drilling, run-off, untested substances, and the myriad other environmental abuses rampant in his era: “There were said to be places where the earth was on fire and belched forth sulphurous fumes, supposed to emanate from the combustion of the enormous stores of strange and unknown chemicals collected by the wonderful people of those times. Upon the surface of the water there was a greenish-yellow oil, to touch which was death to any creature; it was the very essence of

corruption” (266). Jefferies could easily be describing petroleum, which varies in color, but is often tinged with green. He presciently blames oil for corrupting society, literally and figuratively. Felix’s summation of London’s legacy as “so many crimes” against nature expresses moral and literal corruption. Jefferies’s moral melodrama, still rooted in verifiable fact, condemns industrialism as Victorian civilization molds away and un-manipulated nature thrives.

The three urban novels discussed here represent a continuum of Victorian miasmic representations of toxicity. *Alton Locke* damns the city as a toxic, unnatural environment. As Londoners struggle to provide for themselves, they show their inability to have a relationship with land that is overdeveloped and polluted notwithstanding their reliance on a healthy environment. Kingsley, despite his devotion to science, longs for England to return to a pre-industrial past when land was available for public use. Kingsley stresses ecological connections between the human and nonhuman, and among all human beings. Gaskell continues Kingsley’s project of environmental justice as she condemns present environmental conditions that disproportionately impact a weakened laboring class. *North and South* brings to life the statistics widely circulated in Blue books, sanitary reports, and periodicals. The story of diseased Miltoners shows how the filth humans produce through their machines creates toxic bodies. Jefferies imagines a potential toxic earth of the future to illustrate that human beings limit their own survival when they destroy their environment. His science fiction locates purity in wild spaces, quarantining toxicity in the old metropolis. In Jefferies’s England, the country can only remain pure through the destruction of industry. To a degree, these authors suggest that the country preserves the health of the environment and the health of its people. However, the next

group of novels in this chapter attacks the myth of an impervious countryside, showing how urban pollution invades rural spaces, and pollution germinates from within the country itself.

ii. Rural England: “the constant foci of fevers...”

The parish of Colerne, which, upon a cursory view, any person (unacquainted with its peculiarities) would pronounce to be the most healthy village in England, is in fact the most unhealthy. From its commanding position (being situated upon a high hill) it has an appearance of health and cheerfulness which delight the eye of the traveller [...] but this impression is immediately removed on entering at any point of the town. The filth, the dilapidated buildings, the squalid appearance of the majority of the lower orders, have a sickening effect upon the stranger who first visits the place. During three years' attendance on the poor of this district, I have never known the small-pox, scarlatina, or the typhus fever to be absent.

Aaron Little, reporting to Edwin Chadwick, in his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842)

Richard Jefferies's solution to urban risk was to destroy the city, imagining a wholly rural England. Though Victorians paid sustained attention to the filth of their cities, Edwin Chadwick's report powerfully reminds readers that the countryside was not immune to contagion and uncleanness. William Rayner, reporting from the Heaton Norris district, describes the overcrowded, unventilated buildings, lacking yards, with the privies adjacent to the outer walls; the “putrefying matter” of indiscriminately thrown refuse contaminates the air, and pools of stagnant water breed disease. He observes, “It is not to be wondered at that such places should be the constant foci of fevers” (92). Aaron Little testifies that the rural district he attends has “never known” the absence of disease (86). These are merely two contributors to the report; collectively, these findings falsify the prevailing belief that the country remained healthy or was somehow immune to disease. With travelling for ‘fresh air’ a popular cure in the Victorian period, Chadwick's report is so startling because it questions the ability to find it in any but wealthy, sparsely travelled locations.

Rural novels expose the severity of pollution outside the city, in areas that were often overlooked because they *seemed* pure or because of the enduring myth of a salubrious

countryside. An early social problem novel, Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, a Factory Boy* (1840), takes place in the so-called "Black Country," the popular designation for England's Midlands due to its heavy industry, particularly textile mills and coalfields. In her preface Trollope explains "her intention to first drag into the light of day, and place before the eyes of Englishmen, the hideous mass of injustice and suffering to which thousands of infant labourers are subjected, who toil in our monster spinning-mills" (iii). Trollope's language employs the familiar naturalist strategy of training public vision to recognize environmental "injustice." Focusing on a kind-hearted factory boy, Trollope takes advantage of the interest in women and children as objects of sympathy. While the privileged classes speak of the factory workers as a degenerate race, inherently prone to corruption, Trollope identifies the social causes of filth, poverty, indecency, and ill-health.

Trollope sets her novel in the country, and immediately controverts readers' expectations by focusing on the industrial filth and smoke associated with the city. Factories were far from being only urban enterprises. Set in Ashleigh, one of the "busiest" towns in Lancashire, whose "hills and valleys were deformed by tall chimneys and dirty smoke," Trollope's novel describes the inescapable presence of manufacturing (84). Sir Matthew Dowling, the proprietor of several cotton mills, lives on a vast estate that he considers his respite from business. He insists that "no one speaks of the factory in the house of the manufacturer" (93), but "despite the carefully chosen position of the mansion, many towering grim-looking chimney cones were seen to rise amidst their own lurid smoke in the distance" (76). This lurking presence figures the metaphorically and literally polluted source of Sir Matthew's wealth; his factories transmute "human life into gold" (82).

Despite deliberately keeping his workforce at arm's length, Sir Matthew is pressured to adopt a living 'specimen,' the young Michael Armstrong, at the behest of his neighbor, Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, who wishes to reward the boy for rescuing her from an allegedly menacing cow.¹¹³ Lady Clarissa's "charity" inaugurates a common trope in the social problem novel: an individual case arrests her attention, but she cannot widen her sympathy far enough even to include the needful recipient beside Michael, his crippled brother Edward, who is repeatedly described as "rickety," suggestive of rickets – Vitamin D deficiency. The "cotton fluff mixed with [their] hair" announces the boys' occupation (28); they have worked in Sir Matthew's factory since "babyhood." Working from such a tender age in dark, close quarters deforms Edward's bones. Lady Clarissa, however, does not notice this. Her blind spot suggests the lack of interest in the greater condition of poverty. Michael's adoption is merely a performance of charity.¹¹⁴ Behind closed doors, Sir Matthew treats the affair as a jest, parading the boy around like a curiosity of "natural history." The telling reference to the popular Victorian pastime shows that Sir Matthew cannot conceive of Michael as a fellow-creature; the boy is an 'exotic,' a distinct genus. The wealthy class regards factory workers with abhorrence as another race, no better than monkeys (116).

Looking forward to methods of sensation fiction, Michael, the foreign, threatening Other, invades the home. His presence at Dowling Lodge discomfits the family and servants, who are shocked to see that once his clothes are changed, he looks honorable. They assume that a factory boy must be vile and his transformed appearance shakes their belief in his inherent corruption.

¹¹³ Lady Clarissa's terror at the harmless cow also reveals the separation her class maintains between their comfortable life and sordid realities of labor. Although she lives in the country, Lady Clarissa avoids direct environmental engagement.

¹¹⁴ Similarly, Sir Matthew appoints Dr. Croxley as his private medical practitioner to satisfy public concern about factory conditions. He is paid to "just [say] around the neighbourhood how remarkably well everything goes on at Brookford Factory" (123), a common practice as this time. Trollope's novel intends to expose these deceitful practices.

As in *North and South* where the outsider notices problematic social conditions, here, Michael as outsider brings the uncomfortable, hidden realities of the factory to the hearth (as the novel itself does in the actual world). Trollope sarcastically refers to Sir Matthew as the “knight,” both deflating his heroism and characterizing the romanticism of his home life that is as much of a sham as his pretensions to benevolence. Dowling Lodge, full of imported goods and gaudy possessions, impresses visitors with its opulence and luxury, presaging the Veneerings’ superficial abode in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*. One can feel as hot as the tropics in the conservatories (where they grow grapes and exotic plants), or as cool as they please in the ice-houses. Sir Matthew can manipulate his environment at will. He frequently indulges in cold beverages to recover from visits to his factory, and his quick return to comfort increases the impact of the descriptions of suffering workers. Michael’s presence in the home induces a conversation about toxicity, as Martha Dowling quizzes him on life in the mill, beginning to question whether it is truly the ideal enterprise her father makes it out to be. While Martha’s loyalty to her father inhibits true understanding, her neighbor Mary Brotherton becomes obsessed with understanding the factory system. She ponders, “there must be something deeply radically wrong in such a system that leads to such results” (98). She quickly becomes the tale’s real heroine, as her name suggests the “brotherhood” ethic she embodies.

An independently wealthy woman, the recipient of a fortune built on rural industry, Mary becomes attentive to the toxicity she has largely ignored. Trollope offers a similar experience to the reader, whom she assumes is equally ignorant, through descriptions of the factories and adjoining slums. In one scene, Sir Matthew parades Michael in his fancy dress around his cotton-mill. Along with the constant whirr of machinery, “the scents that reek around, from oil, tainted water, and human filth, with that last worst nausea, arising from the hot

refuse of atmospheric air, left by some hundred pairs of labouring lungs, render the act of breathing a process of difficulty, disgust, and pain” (80). The pollution horrifies Trollope, but she pays closer attention to the “hundreds of helpless children, divested of every trace of health” (80). The chemical contaminants and miasma of cotton particles create a “poisoned” environment. The narrator composes an interesting analogy whereby the “various impurities” of the factory filter through the “poison[ed]” lungs of the poor, to produce capital (80). In other words, the poor ingest pollution to spare the rich. Dr. Croxley notes the air could not be “breathed with impunity,” and refuses to go into the “working” portions of the factory (82). He uses the workers as a buffer against toxicity, revealing not an ignorance of pollution but a dangerous apathy.

Far from wishing to stop the mills, Trollope asks, is it possible “to manufacture worsted and cotton wool into articles useful to man, without rendering those employed upon it unfit?” (114-5). Mary becomes an impartial investigator, desiring to “see things as they really are” (127). She muses that factory children have “a very different way of life” than the farmers who work family land (95). This sense of “attachment” ostensibly allows field-labourers to be virtuous, while factory workers behave vilely. Mary distinguishes between her father’s industry and modern industry, musing that the toil of a land-labourer, while hard, is “healthful,” compared to the wretchedness of factories (98). Trollope certainly idealizes farming; however, she intends by the comparison to demonstrate the unnaturalness of factory work. The field-worker remains rooted to one spot; they ‘dwell’ on the land, rather than the factory worker who spends 12-18 hours a day behind the closed doors of the workroom, returning home only for mouthfuls of food and sleep. The connection to the land, as well as the obvious exposure to fresh air and apparently wholesome exercise allows the agrarian worker to tolerate the burden of toil.

Trollope simplifies the differences between these occupations, reducing the actual hardships of farm work in her didactic purpose to uncover the toxicity of large-scale industry. At one point, Sir Matthew dreams of factories taking over the landscape, engines glowing with fire “illuminating the land from one extremity of the island to the other!” (119). He hopes the repeal of the Corn Laws will result in the primacy of the factory, putting farmers out of business so mill-owners can buy up their land. He longs for a purely industrial economy. Reading his unsound philosophy in light of Mary’s considerations, the reader sees how ludicrous it is to assume that material goods by themselves can support the nation. What makes farm-labor so healthful is its essential function in meeting humanity’s need to breathe fresh air, to exercise, and, of course, for proper nourishment.¹¹⁵ Trollope’s invocation of the pastoral resembles the country/city trope; however, since country work includes both the farm and the factory, Trollope suggests that social ills do not emerge in a strictly urban context, but an industrial context. In other words, industry, which can occur anywhere, renders places toxic.

Mary’s quest for knowledge prompts a trip to Hoxley-lane, the working-class district. Mary immediately notices the filth and its power of infection. Trollope uses filth, a keyword in miasmatic language, repeatedly throughout the novel, and at least five times during Mary’s first visit. Hoxley Lane is the worst area in the parish:

Exactly at the bottom of the hill, just at the point where every summer storm and winter torrent deposited their gatherings, there to be absorbed as they might, began a long, closely-packed double row of miserable dwellings, crowded to excess by the population

¹¹⁵ Trollope idealizes the rural laborer by emphasizing these salubrious aspects of field-work. She glosses over the hardships connected with rural occupations and the class dynamic between estate owners and their tenants, choosing to focus on the benefits of dwelling in one place and the estate owner’s ostensible care for his workers as part of his home; in other words, managing their health is a necessary part of managing the estate. Trollope may not be naïve; she deliberately shapes a simplistic comparison between the field and factory worker to make a didactic point. Similarly, she continually argues that the English factory worker is worse off than the negro slave, insisting abolishing factory slavery in England is of more vital concern to the nation. Catherine Gallagher discusses this rhetoric of freedom and slavery in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (Part 1).

drawn together from the neighbouring factories. There was a squalid, untrimmed look about them all, that spoke fully as much about want of care, as of want of cash in the unthrifty tribe who dwelt there. It was like the moral delinquencies of a corporate body of which no man is ashamed, because no man can be pointed out as the guilty ONE. It was not the business of No. 1 to look after the filth accumulated in front of No. 2. [...] [A]n odour, which seemed compounded of a multitude of villainous smells, all reeking together into one, floated over them, driving the pure untainted air of heaven aloft far beyond the reach of any human lungs abiding in Hoxley-lane. (35)

These “miserable dwellings” are situated in an inhospitable location, indicating that the poor are relegated to land with little commercial value. The “filth” in front of the homes, which are “begrimed with soot and dirt,” is specifically identified as dung-hills (127). Trollope calls our attention to the tainted air, a product of excrement, organic refuse, and animal ordure. Most importantly, the blame for the “squalid” neighborhood cannot be assigned to any one person. None of the residents can afford to keep up appearances. Their wages are already spread too thin among rent, food, and clothing. Sir Matthew, who vehemently opposes Mary’s visits, assumes the residents are sinful and iniquitous, citing the filth of the garret as a reflection of their inner nature. Rather than criticizing the social order, he blames the poor for their ills. Trollope, however, condemns the hazardous conditions as the source of indecency and intemperance. This important reversal – filth engendering moral corruption, rather than moral corruption engendering filth – defines the social problem novel. There is no one to “look after” the condition of the environment, which implies a need for legislation and health officers to enforce it. Trollope bathes the reader in filth to shock her/him into this realization. Mary, also, is forever changed from the shock of exposure. In the abode of the Drakes, a family of mill-workers, the

mother lies dying in the “noxious” air (135). Dr. Croxley, called in to attend her, diagnoses the atmosphere as “mephitic,” a synonym for malodorous and pestilential (135). Physically unaffected, Mary becomes mentally plagued with guilt at her complicity in the factory system.

Sir Matthew, fearing Mary’s curiosity, banishes Michael, who is indentured to Elgood Sharpton and effectively enslaved in Deep Valley Mill, deep in Derbyshire away from prying eyes. The insanitary conditions horrify Michael, despite his being inured to filth. Trollope presents a picture of miserable, malnourished, emaciated children clad in scanty, unwashed rags, whose bones buckle under the hard work of the unceasing workday. The machinery “never stop[s]” as children are continually “dragged from [...] reeking beds” to work their shift (212).

In the unventilated factory,

the heat, particularly in the rooms immediately beneath the roof, [was] frightfully intense; cleanliness as to the beds, the floors, and the walls, utterly neglected; and even the person of the children permitted to be filthy to excess, from having no soap allowed to assist their ablutions – though from the greasy nature of their employment it was required.

(212)

Although the cruelty of the employers cannot be underestimated, Trollope identifies disease with “want of pure air and sufficient food” (187). “Reeking,” miasmatic language, points to infectious bedding. The “imperfect” ventilation traps germs, sweat, cloth particles, and grease in the air, creating a miasma. Without proper food and rest, the children cannot long survive in this noxious atmosphere. “Bad air” is the problem Trollope most frequently points out, noting “it is difficult to find any factory properly ventilated – free admission of air being injurious to many of the processes carried on within” (237). As always, the owners value their products and profit over their workers. Mr. Woodcomb, the manager, avows, “I’d be hanged, drawn, and quartered,

before I'd trouble myself about what sort of air a 'prentice had to breathe" (279). Mr. Thornton, though far less savagely, echoes this sentiment in *North and South* when he suggests economy, and that only, compels him to modify his chimneys.

However, Mr. Sharpton and Mr. Woodcomb are soon forced to "trouble" themselves over the air when an epidemic fever attacks the factory. The narrator explains that "[n]otwithstanding all the hardships of Brookford factory, no infectious disease ever appeared there" since the workers lived far off premises (212). The exposure to "fresh air" morning and night staves off infection. In Deep Valley Mill, however, where the workers never venture outside, the warmth and stuffiness nourish germs. Trollope identifies filth, not fog, as the cause of miasma: "the wretched hovels" of the apprenticed workers "reeked [...] with the congregated effluvia of fifty uncleaned sleepers in one chamber!" (212). This room crowds toxic bodies together, making contagion inescapable. Not simply organic matter, this "effluvia" combines several environmental contaminants brought in from the mill and infectious bodily fluids. Miasma exists from within the factory, and while modern readers understand miasma as something specific, this passage illustrates the Victorians' broad use of the term and its resonances of general filth and uncleanliness. Despite the daily deaths, the mill continues as normal until the disease "conquers" Mrs. Poulet, the overseer's wife (214). Her death shocks the mill workers and millocrats alike, suggesting the susceptibility of those in power to the conditions they create. Mr. Poulet begins to understand the "air a 'prentice had to breathe" is the same air he and his colleagues breathe, though his master, Mr. Sharpton, deems sanitation and better food cost-prohibitive.

Trollope singles out industrial miasma, evident in her contrast between the oppressive, but not toxic, atmosphere of Brookford Factory and the "pestilential" Deep Valley Mill, and she

contrasts both workplaces with the benefits of fresh air that rural labor provides. Her neighbors warn Mary against pursuing Michael, claiming that if she sets foot in a factory, she'll be "poisoned" by the "dirt" (196). "Poison" is an interesting choice of words alerting us to dirt that is not organic, but toxic, chemical, and fatal. Mary does, however, adopt Edward Armstrong, whose health is restored and limbs are straightened by his "new mode of living" (294). That the change in environmental conditions cures his infirmities implicitly condemns contaminated air as well as drudgery. Similarly, Michael's fortunes improve when he escapes the factory at 14, finally becoming a shepherd "upon the beautiful free hills of Westmorland" (315). The outdoor occupation transforms him into a robust, hardy young man (315).

Mary is only able to "rescue" two children in a novel agonizing over the plight of an entire population. She befriends a clergyman, Mr. Bell, who has made it his mission to investigate the atrocities in factories. Their conversations articulate the distinction between a social problem and a problem in a society, pointing to the national scale of environmental injustice. Mr. Bell tells Mary that her guilt is useless, and even if she gave up her entire fortune, she could not by herself improve the condition of the poor. He contends that it is "idle to hope" that "any of the ordinary modes of being useful on a larger scale, such as organising schools, founding benefit societies, or the like, could be of any use to beings so crushed, so toil-worn, and so degraded" (209). The problem is too vast for one individual; a social problem requires a social solution, that is, "an effective legislative remedy" (211). He cites the example of Wood and Walker who operate their factory "with comfort and advantage to every individual concerned," shortening the workday to a maximum of 10 hours (210). However, they cannot match their cutthroat competitors and lose thousands of pounds a year. Mr. Bell concludes, "Few alas! will think of following the example! All they can do therefore is in fact but to carry

on a system of private charity on an enormous scale – but till they are supported by law, even their vast efforts, and most noble sacrifices can do nothing towards the general redemption of our poor northern people from the state of slavery” (211). The resolution of Trollope’s novel is tenuous at best. Mary Brotherton provides an example of human (“brother”ly) compassion, and just as confronting local filth opens her eyes to injustice, the novel intends to foster eco-consciousness in the reader. Unless the readers act on their knowledge, however, nothing will change. Trollope anticipates objections to her discursive activism:

Let none dare say this picture is exaggerated, till he has taken the trouble to ascertain by his own personal investigation, that it is so. [...] If they be true, let each in his own little circle, raise his voice against the horrors detailed by them, AND THESE HORRORS WILL BE REMEDIED. But woe to those who supinely sit in contented ignorance of the facts, soothing their spirits and their easy consciences with the cuckoo note, ‘*exaggeration*’. (186)

Trollope answers the charge that her fiction is sensational by pointing out these “horrors” are actual fact. She describes a ripple effect: if an individual seeks truth, and passes it onto his/her circle, the message can be spread further and further, until protest becomes “public” and thus effective. Change requires a cooperative effort. Only so can national legislation and a public health movement be achieved.

Michael Armstrong attests to novelists’ concern with rural toxicity, though manufacturing miasma remains their primary target. Charles Kingsley also brings economic causes of pollution into a rural setting, separate from the factory system, and we can look to his first novel for graphic portrayals of filth. *Yeast: A Problem* (1848) appeared in volume form in 1851 after the success of *Alton Locke*. Kingsley, featuring rural laborers, de-idealizes the countryside,

discrediting the image of a pastoral, peaceful country in contrast to a corrupt, chaotic city, revealing the universality of unequal working conditions. Far from enlisting the pastoral as foil to identify toxicity in urban environments, Kingsley emphasizes similar working conditions and environmental hazards in the country. *Yeast*, written during the second cholera epidemic in England and just as the government crushed the Chartist movement, announces itself as a social problem novel through its sub-title. Sheila M. Smith shows that Kingsley was directly inspired by the 1843 Blue Book, a “Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture.” As with the other novelists discussed here, Kingsley disseminates representations of miasma in fiction to widen concern about environmental abuses and instigate reform. His novel provides the literary counterpart to the sanitary journalism of Edwin Chadwick and Henry Mayhew. Concurrent with the nascent public health movement, it was in the late 1830s and 1840s that authors realized how valuable the novel could be to propagate ideas, and as Smith argues, social problems shifted the concern of literary form “to the individual *in society*”(28).¹¹⁶ Just as Mary Brotherton learns to act familiarly to the working classes, *Yeast*’s Lancelot Smith learns important lessons of brotherhood.

Lancelot, an independently wealthy gentleman, witnesses economic disparity between estate workers and owners, and matures from an idealistic, passionate view of life, to an awareness of social problems and environmental dependency. His name suggests his dual character: a mixture of the romantic and prosaic. The novel primarily plots Lancelot’s experience in the South of England as he visits Squire Lavington’s estate and subsequently falls in love with his daughter Argemone. Growing tired of Romantic authors, Lancelot who was variously “chivalry-mad; and Germany-mad; was now trying to become a great man, without any

¹¹⁶ Smith suggests that this does not necessarily produce realism in the sense of accurate reproduction, as “factual reality is not the same as artistic reality”; “the facts, however true, must be shaped into a convincing artistic whole” (38).

very clear notion of what a great man ought to be” (3). Argemone suffers a similar identity crisis: ascetically religious, this beautiful snob believes in liberal theories without actually practicing charity. Kingsley pokes fun at his characters by means of authorial interjections that interrupt pictures of frivolous upper-class life, with its superficial melancholy, to present social reality: “The finest of us are animals after all, and live by eating and sleeping: and, taken as animals, not so badly off either – unless we happen to be Dorsetshire laborers – or Spitalfield weavers – or colliery children – or marching soldiers – or, I am afraid, one half of English souls this day” (25).¹¹⁷ The novel quickly moves from romance to realism, chronicling Lancelot’s “conversion” to social reformer by the gamekeeper Tregarva, who exposes him to the squalid homes and habits of the working class. Kingsley claims, “Whatsoever may seem extravagant or startling is most likely to be historic fact, else I should not have dared to write it down, finding God’s actual dealings here much too wonderful to dare to invent many fresh ones for myself” (15). Combatting accusations of sensationalism, Kingsley renews his commitment to natural history, a faithful record of places and the creatures (including people) who inhabit them.

Tregarva confronts Lancelot with reality, correcting Lancelot’s impressions of beauty, citing “[f]ever, and ague, and rheumatism” (26) spread by the “white fog” (36), which unlike the bearable river-damps, are of “man’s sending” and unendurable (36). Tregarva specifies human agency as the culprit; this is important as regards miasmatic theory, since “miasmata” originally designated organic – natural – hazards emanating from swampy or damp conditions. Tregarva carefully distinguishes between river-damp and toxic effluvia. He observes, “A man’s eyes can only see what they’ve learnt to see” (38). Lancelot, sheltered by his elite education, had expected “pastoral sentiment,” “innocent, simple enjoyment,” and is startled by the reality of

¹¹⁷ Roger Lowman explains that, “Dorset was indeed the *locus classicus* of the rural problem, and during the century had become a by-word for rural deprivation and squalor” (42).

“vacuity,” of drinking to forget drudgery (190). He cannot understand the “guttural”, “half-articulate” speech of the laboring classes. Not only do the upper classes exploit the poor, they hinder their intellectual development. Kingsley implies successive generations of inadequate food and shelter have poisoned “blood,” betraying an anxiety about de-evolution. A polluted environment pollutes the body and turns the blood.

Social problem novels commonly uncover the inadequacy of Victorian philanthropy.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Kingsley, via Tregarva, observes the failing of “charitable” people:

When they see poor folk sick or hungry before their eyes, they pull out their purses fast enough, God bless them. [...] But the oppression that goes on all the year round, and the want that goes on all the year round, and the filth [...] and the profligacy, that go on all the year round, and the sickening weight of debt, and the miserable grinding anxiety from rent-day to rent-day [...] that crushes a man’s soul down, and drives every thought out of his head but how he is to fill his stomach and warm his back, and keep a house over his head, till he daren’t for his life take his thoughts one moment off the meat that perisheth – oh, sir, they never felt this; and, therefore, they never dream that there are thousands who pass them in their daily walks who feel this, and feel nothing else! (39)

Visible problems receive immediate relief, but these “charitable people” are unable to make the connection between the poor that they see, and the thousands more who remain invisible.

Tregarva highlights the difference between one or two unfortunate cases, and a prevailing social problem. The injustices outside their control crush these victims. Individual acts of charity, while appreciated, are no match for a massively harmful social system. These laborers are not out of work because of a flaw that they can correct; they are born into a class prohibited from

¹¹⁸ For instance, in *North and South*, Margaret patronizes the working class with visits, only offering money when it dawns on her that her few shillings will do more for the Bouchers’ stress than any amount of sympathy. Her unexpected inheritance ultimately makes her charitable plans and Thornton’s factory reforms possible.

reaping the benefits of work. Tregarva successfully convinces Lancelot of these distinctions, and it is Lancelot's subsequent decision to write about these revelations that potentially circulates them widely, the same reason that Alton Locke writes his autobiography. Kingsley invites his readers' participation: his book itself is "from beginning to end, as in name, so in nature, Yeast – an honest sample of the questions, which, good or bad, are fermenting in the minds of the young of this day, and are rapidly leavening the minds of the rising generation" (135). Kingsley deploys a metaphor of fermenting yeast to suggest how polemical ideas may multiply through word of mouth, similar to the function of miasmatic language in spreading a public conversation about environmental contamination. The young dictate the nation's destiny, and Kingsley looks outward to his audience for cures for pollution.¹¹⁹

Lancelot's conversion at this juncture entails dropping "all faith in anything but Nature" (126). Kingsley, an Anglican priest, nevertheless criticizes the Church for ignoring material needs to minister to the soul, a critique fleshed out fully in the epistolary subplot, the series of letters between Lancelot and his cousin, Luke. Argemone's spiritual mentor woos Luke to the Catholic Church, while Lancelot warns him against seclusion and ascetic devotion. The contrast between Argemone and her sister Honoria illustrates the church's failure: Honoria personally nurses the poor in "lean-to garret[s]" overcrowded and fever-stricken (130), while Argemone, staying home, believes her prayers are sufficient (19). What is a visit worth if these ladies leave behind tracts, rather than alms? Kingsley insists effective charity ministers to physical needs. Honoria, though initially setting a better example than her sister, ultimately demonstrates the failure of charity. John Kijinski, in his analysis of the importance of enlarging sympathy in the

¹¹⁹ "Yeast" is an interesting choice for a title, however. Any quickly multiplying organism would suggest the same thing, although yeasts are particularly common and widely used in domestic tasks such as leavening breads and fermenting wine and beer. These processes rely on "waste." Yeast consumes sugar then excretes carbon dioxide and ethanol, which allows bread to rise and produces alcohol. Literal yeast can provide a lens through which to read the novel, reminding readers of their ecological kinship to all creatures.

novel, argues, “she may be the benefactress of the poor, but she is not their sister” (104). Honoria only responds to individual cases of need, without addressing larger social problems. She does not see the connection between her aristocratic class and the condition of the poor, and quickly abandons Tregarva as soon as he speaks against her father, the Squire. The theme of religious hypocrisy in common between the two plots speaks a powerful message about environmental justice. It is unacceptable that “in a country calling itself civilised and Christian, pestilence should be the peculiar heritage of the poor!” (220). Tregarva recognizes that contagious diseases are “confined to the poor,” “while the rich, by the mere fact of money, are exempt from such curses, except when they come in contact with those whom they call on Sunday ‘their brethren,’ and on week days the ‘masses’” (220). The novel calls for an overarching social solution, but Tregarva and his peers are concerned with individual agency in the sense that they want to be given the means to provide for themselves, rather than accept charity at all.¹²⁰

The Squire fires Tregarva for writing an inflammatory poem voicing the plight of his comrades. In the first stanza, he accuses the gentry of making poaching necessary, by denying work and adequate money, and then subsequently punishing poachers. He describes the overcrowded, dilapidated cottages that provide little shelter from the elements, resulting in disease, which, by preventing the ill from working, increases their poverty until the master sends them to the workhouse (148). The Squire, instead of feeling shame or remorse, or even pausing for a moment to consider the truth of the verses, rages over Tregarva’s audacity and disloyalty. He subsequently dies of apoplexy, unenlightened. His daughter, Argemone, later dies of typhus contracted while ministering to the estate’s impoverished tenants. Her susceptibility to

¹²⁰ Josephine M. Guy observes that individual agency is valued over communal programs. While these novels are often regarded as failures by modern critics for not proposing definite solutions, novelists concentrate on changing individual behavior.

contagion teaches the ecological lesson that disease defies class barriers, and the treatment of the laboring classes *will* affect the nation as a whole.

Lancelot leaves with Tregarva to “the country of Prester John,” the fabled Christian nation in the Orient. This mysticism is partly why *Yeast* has not enjoyed the mainstream attention of other Victorian novels. Kingsley, leaving the novel open-ended, refuses to “draw the horoscope of the Whitford poor, or any others. Really that depends principally on yourselves” (269). He “advocates the ideals of cooperation and brotherhood as the solution to the pressing issues of his age,” which as Kijinski points out typifies an ideological stance shared by Victorian writers on social issues, “the belief that the increasing hostility between rich and poor could be ameliorated [...] if only members of all classes could increase their imaginative sympathy and communicate with each other in a more humane manner” (98). He continues, “the condition of England will improve only once individual citizens of England understand that all human beings must be viewed as members of the family that is ruled by a common Father, and that each person must willingly take responsibility for the well-being of the members of this family” (98-99). Kijinski describes Kingsley’s Christian Socialist beliefs, which also serve as a vehicle for an ecological imperative. All classes belong to the same human family, to the same species, and threats to one group become threats to all, such as contagious disease and environmental contamination. Miasmatic language, with its emphasis on currents of exchange, demonstrates this eco-consciousness.

The concept of brotherhood bears on an ecological reading of Kingsley. Thinking of humankind as a species levels class distinctions. However, Kijinski ultimately argues that Lancelot and Tregarva will accomplish their goals as individuals, rather than through “mass movements” (108); this is a paradoxical idea of brotherhood because while Kingsley insists that

individuals must consider themselves part of a family with all other human beings, the agent of reform is still the individual through his or her sympathy rather than a collective body of reform, or, in other words, participation in community or centralized action, a point Josephine M. Guy emphasizes in her analysis of the social problem novel. This interpretation ignores Kingsley's sense of ecology: if we view ourselves as biotic beings, we see ourselves as part of the ecosystem and become conscious of our connections with other creatures, obviously including other human beings.

Kingsley clearly sought out a mass response to his ideas. If solutions depend principally on his reader, we may assume he did not simply mean individual action, but individuals as part of a collective acting cooperatively. As a proponent of sanitation reform, we may also assume Kingsley approved of government-helmed and centralized responses to public health issues. Though he soundly condemns the Poor Law, via Tregarva, he suggests that better national education and equal economic opportunities are necessary to improve the social condition, both of which require collaborative action.

In *Yeast*, illness reveals the inescapable connection between classes and miasmatic language expresses the fog of filth afflicting the English "all the year round," a theme that emerges in Charlotte Brontë's exposé of Lowood school in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Autobiographical elements of *Jane Eyre* have been widely examined, and looking at her upbringing in the polluted village of Haworth helps us understand Brontë's awareness of the connection between health and habitat. In his "series of sketches" of famous nineteenth-century women, James Parton observes, "They [the three sisters] were reared amid surroundings the most gloomy and unhealthful," concluding, "Their very genius seemed a product of disease" (28). Parton refers to the wildness of the moors and the loneliness of the parsonage, indicating their genius might result from some

sort of peculiar mental disease; however, the adjective “unhealthful” becomes quite literal when we take into account their proximity to the parish graveyard and the lack of sufficient and clean water.

Benjamin Herschel Babbage, in his report to the General Board of Health in 1850, based on his visit in April 1849, exposes the grave sanitary situation in Haworth:

There are no sewers [...]; a few covered drains have been made in some of the streets to carry away the surface water [...] but generally the drainage runs along in open channels and gutters. As a necessary consequence of the want of sewerage there is contiguous to each privy a receptacle for the night soil [...]; into these midden-steads are thrown the household refuse and the offal from the slaughter-houses, where, mixed with the night soil, and occasionally with the drainage from pigsties, the whole lies exposed for months together, decomposition goes on and offensive smells and putrid gases are given out.

These midden-steads are uncovered, and the majority of them were nearly full when I examined them. Bad as they are, their situation, in close proximity to dwelling-houses, makes them much more injurious.

Babbage’s report exemplifies eco-conscious discourse in his attempt to expose the sources of toxicity and the dangerous combination of factors at work. Miasmatic language identifies the “offensive smells” and airborne matter that infects Haworth’s residents; however, this document demonstrates the rhetorical and conceptual postures of that language as Babbage explains how human beings create miasma by “mixing” together household waste and excrement, keeping these receptacles “uncovered” and overflowing.¹²¹ It would seem obvious that this ignored and untended waste would create injurious conditions. The sheer lack of basic preventative waste

¹²¹ In the small population of approximately 4,000 in Haworth, the average age of death was 25, and the mortality rate of children under six was 41 percent. Babbage notes that one privy served every 4.5 houses.

management demonstrates the lethal apathy of the district. This is the state of Haworth when Brontë composed *Jane Eyre*. Babbage's description strikingly resembles Gaskell's portrayal of the Davenports' hovel in Manchester in *Mary Barton*, published the same year: open gutters, pigsty refuse, and filth festering for months.¹²² He refers to the noxious miasma contaminating Haworth's atmosphere, also observing that the hamlet's "common earthen pot-pipes" leaked large quantities of water while absorbing environmental contaminants, allowing fecal matter and effluvia from decomposing bodies in the overcrowded hill-top cemetery to seep into the soil. Babbage reports 1,344 burials in the churchyard in the ten years between 1840 and 1850. Thus, one can accurately say that the Brontës drank water contaminated with corpses. Clearly the siblings were no strangers to filth. These considerations arise in the Lowood portion of the novel, which recalls the unsanitary conditions of Cowan Bridge, a Clergy Daughters School in Lancashire. As Gaskell chronicles in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), Charlotte's elder sisters, Elizabeth and Maria, died of tuberculosis in 1825 due to the school's unhealthiness.¹²³ The biography of the Brontë family exhibits the Victorian body toxic as powerfully as their fiction; constantly plagued with filth and fever, their story resembles both Queen Victoria's private battle with pollution and the nation's public battle with miasma.

Jane Eyre employs miasmatic language to expose the causes of the typhoid epidemic at Lowood school in rural Lancashire, particularly the blind eye to environmental contamination.

¹²² In her accounts of Haworth, Gaskell more than once refers to the unhealthy atmosphere, in one letter noting the "pestiferous churchyard" just outside the parsonage windows (*Letters* 242). Patrick Brontë, who aided Babbage in compiling his report, recognized that this filth was not something that should be tolerated and attempted to teach the health risks resulting from unhygienic environments. Ellen Nussey discusses his zeal for sanitary reform, narrating one particular mission: convincing the women of his parish to cease washing their clothes and hanging them up to dry in the cemetery. She reprints a humorous poem Patrick wrote for the occasion where he disgustingly describes the moaning corpses swimming in suds; although he intends to remonstrate against the violation of their slumber, the accompanying image of the women standing on damp, fetid ground is visceral and disturbing, showing harm to both the living and the dead.

¹²³ Helen Burns, Jane's friend, closely resembled Maria who was reportedly persecuted at the school. Her last name may suggest her internalization of the criticism of Brocklehurst and her teachers, who predict she will burn in hell-fire for her slovenly, lazy ways. However, her name intimates the burning of her fever and her painful suffering from consumption.

When the novel opens at Gateshead, Jane is relieved that inclement weather prevents “the possibility of taking a walk that day” (13).¹²⁴ While Jane dislikes winter walks in the novel’s opening, she begins to appreciate the fresh air of spring when banished to Lowood. After describing the “prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies” (88), she asks, “Have I not described a pleasant site for a dwelling, when I speak of it as bosomed in hill and wood, and rising from the verge of a stream? Assuredly, pleasant enough: but whether healthy or not is another question” (89). Jane “question[s]” the pastoral assumption that beauty equates purity in terms of health. She intends to shock the reader by revealing that Lowood lay in a “cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence; which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded school-room and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into a hospital” (89).¹²⁵ The fictional name, “Lowood,” reinforces its location as low in the valley, near the river, believed to create such conditions. While scholars typically read this section as a critique of hypocritical charity, miasmatic language alerts us to certain tropes, such as the “fog-bred” pestilence and poorly drained soil near the river. Though her invocation of miasmatic theory suggests she may misunderstand how germs were spread, she accurately traces the cause of disease to toxic effluvia.

¹²⁴ Charles Burkhart notes that ‘nature’ is a ‘key word’ of *Jane Eyre*, appearing “frequently and climactically,” designating “right” action or “feeling.” The word serves “as a guide” to the conflict between reason and feeling (178), and Burkhart argues that the novel is most rich and graceful when describing physical nature. He concludes that her “simple” belief in nature places Charlotte, spiritually, with the Romantics (178). However, as he shows, Brontë is conscious of natural law and the consequences of violating our inner natures and ignoring physical nature. Enid L. Duthie points to a system of “objective correlatives” created through a figurative scheme of natural elements: air, water, earth, and fire. Each of the novel’s five settings align with important stages in Jane’s life. Her work shows “the organic link between her experience and the landscapes” (134), but I am concerned with the *literal* consequences of these settings.

¹²⁵ That Brontë calls the disease “typhus” signals her ignorance; she seems to mean typhoid, carried in contaminated food and water. Typhus, a parasitic bacteria, could only be transmitted through living organisms, like lice and fleas.

Jane notes the epidemic takes hold in May. Spring, in fact, is a sinister season, awakening not only healthful plant life but also bacteria and virulent organisms. Despite its beauty and sweet smells, Lowood is a hot-bed of disease. Rural areas were often slowest to reform, especially because of their idyllic appearance. Brontë warns against such complacency as Jane shatters illusion, demonstrating the main idea of germ theory: appearances are deceiving; one cannot see or smell germs. The fog's movement suggests that the infection originated from the town and has blown over to this rural area. Lowood sits on an "unhealthy" site, and arguably 'swampy' surroundings could generate this fog. However, in her autobiography of Brontë, Gaskell strongly questions that the school was built on bad ground, though she calls the area "damp" (55), instead explaining that illness spreads easily when people live "in close proximity" and sanitary principles are not understood (53). Given her account, we may interpret Brontë's explanation of the epidemic in *Jane Eyre* not as an affirmation of miasmatic theory, but as an amateur's comprehension of germ theory. However, the importance lies in Brontë's concern about diseases transmitted by pollution. The narrative makes clear that the fog travels into Lowood and does not arise from there, illustrating permeable borders. Though Cowan Bridge ("Lotown") itself was very rural, the numerous factories in Lancashire country severely polluted the landscape.¹²⁶ Fog may then indicate smog or miasma from sewage flushed downstream, towards rural outskirts. The dampness of "poorly drained soil" is not particularly dangerous until we understand the river's relationship to the larger towns. Lowton's river is likely the Lune. Though touted for its beauty and purity, the river was just as polluted as any other, with untreated sewage dumped into the river as late as 1900. Jane notes the "fetid water" used by the

¹²⁶ By the 1830s, 85% of the world's cotton was manufactured there (Gibb 13), a fact contemporary readers would recognize.

school, drawn from this contaminated river. These circumstances emphasize the environmental factors of disease and the possibility of faraway residents polluting rural places.¹²⁷

Brontë differentiates between the evil one can see – stagnant pools, smog – and the evil that remains hidden – germs, chemical contaminants, an eco-conscious narrative strategy that renders visible how humans’ mistreating the environment ignores the essential need for its sustenance. The weakened constitutions of the children make them increasingly susceptible to environmental contaminants. Lowood is indisputably both polluted and neglected, a deadly combination. The virulence of the disease brings unwanted attention on the school, resulting in a thorough investigation: “by degrees various facts came out which excited public indignation in a high degree. The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils’ wretched clothing and accommodations: all these things were discovered” (97). Though the school is moved to a “better situation” (97), Brontë implies that had administrators been better informed (or more humane), the situation could have been prevented. She shifts the blame in creating toxicity from organically damp ground to human agency. Historical distance serves to provide a narrative solution to the real world problem of environmental detachment in the present. The epidemic generates awareness just as the novel, by reporting the event for readers twenty years later, intends to encourage eco-consciousness. Instead of couching this social problem in a contemporary industrial context, Brontë critiques the persistent prevailing mentality that separates humans from their environment.

¹²⁷ In the intervening two decades between Brontë’s childhood and the publication of her novel, not much had changed in England as a whole. Brontë’s toxic discourse applies to current conditions, where industrial miasma becomes increasingly probable.

Questions of where and how to live inform the novel as a whole, influencing even the hidden “madwoman in the attic” so central to the novel. Rochester houses Bertha at Thornfield Manor because he deems his other residence, his hunting lodge Ferndean Hall, unfit due to bad air and damp walls. As with Lowood, Ferndean’s name also describes its atmosphere: a muggy, secluded wood. Although English ferns grow in a variety of habitats, the most common species thrive in moist, shady forests, the kind of humid conditions believed to engender miasma. Rochester, with mixed motives of compassion and concealment, prefers to keep his wife under his own care, rather than entrust her to the madhouse or with a servant at Ferndean, where he cannot ensure her good health. He tells Jane, “I could have lodged her safely enough [in Ferndean Manor], had not a scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood, made my conscience recoil from the arrangement. Probably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge” (300). Rochester subscribes to the prevailing misconception that organic vapor compromises health, and this common fear makes it impossible to rent the “ineligible and insalubrious site” (430). When he is forced to relocate to Ferndean after the destruction of his primary residence, Rochester must learn how to live there. While Rochester assumes Ferndean’s uncomfortable dampness signifies toxicity, the environment is cleaner than Lowood, whose beauty masks toxicity.

The gloom impresses Jane when she first visits Ferndean; she, too, wonders how life can exist in this dense and dark wood. The lodge, almost indistinguishable from the trees, stands in the woods with “no grounds,” “no flowers, no garden-beds,” “only a broad gravel-walk” (430). Unlike the property of a traditional English estate, the area is almost authentically wild: it has not been “improved” or cultivated. Once Jane reconciles with Rochester, she awakes to a “bright, sunny morning” (439). This does not reflect Jane’s better mood so much as a new way of

looking at the place due to her desire to make a home there. Until Rochester's sight is restored, she becomes his eyes: "I was then his vision [...]. He saw nature [...] through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam – the landscape before us; of the weather round us" (451). When she must interpret the scene for her husband, Jane adopts a naturalist gaze. She sees not only the beauty of the scene, but the "effect of" the weather "round" them, an articulation of the environment's material influence. She also discerns the town, recognizing a human presence within the landscape. By looking carefully at her surroundings, its details lose their foreboding aspect. Beyond the "wild wood" are "cheerful fields," "brilliantly green" with "refreshed" flowers, under a "sparklingly blue sky" (439). Jane's language now suggests the healthiness of the place and its ability to reinvigorate Rochester. As they settle into the area, spending most of their time in "the open air" (439), nature becomes a part of their daily existence, bringing health and clarity. The place has not changed; rather, the way they perceive the place has changed. The mist clears away from their sight, dispelling the fallacy that the muggy site breeds disease, and they see the land as it is. Brontë implies the wildness of the wood is off-putting, but, through keen vision that sees the actual environment, the pair flourishes.

The way Jane and Rochester interact with the space fundamentally differs from its earlier use as a hunting-lodge. Jane notices the "game covers," which tell of the property's original history (430). Visiting Ferndean to hunt, Rochester once dominated the environment; he kills for sport the creatures that call the place home. However, once Rochester marries Jane, together they coexist with nature, raising a family and properly dwelling there. Communion with the environment renders it healthy. Rochester might initially assume that living at Ferndean will lead to death, but living there teaches him to see actual environmental conditions rather than

cultural assumptions. The couple cultivates a good, clean household. Ferndean's dampness is not the same unhygienic dampness polluting Lowood. These portions of the novel contrast organic rankness and the industrial, man-made miasma that leads to the death of so many girls. Lowood's miasma emerges from fetid, sewage-filled water and industrial fumes. "Fog" or "vapor" only becomes fatal "miasma" when human beings introduce toxicity into the atmosphere. The human body infects itself with the pollution it creates. Lowood casts a death sentence, not because the site is inherently toxic, but because neglect and recklessness make it so. Jane breathes fresh air ("Eyre") into Ferndean when she arrives to nurse Rochester, clearing away cultural assumptions about the wild wood. When they successfully make a home there, Brontë implies that the place is not uninhabitable or even toxic at all. Eco-consciousness is this ability to see hidden realities, and in learning how to live benignly in a particular place we find the cure for toxicity. As eco-consciousness compels readers to recognize and address toxicity, Jane breaks free of faulty vision. By learning to see the landscape properly, Jane becomes a part of it.

The importance of salubrious environments reflects back on the misplaced values of industrialism. Brocklehurst spoils Lowood to maximize profit; Thornton, Sir Matthew Dowling, and Squire Lavington all place profit over workers' health. Furthermore, in the hands of individuals, charity fails: Margaret Hale's scant resources cannot go far enough to transform Milton; Alton Locke's genius attracts benefactors who snub the rest of his class; Honoria only helps the poverty-stricken immediately in front of her nose, and Mary Brotherton's charitable impulses are discouraged by her peers, who have no intention of visiting Hoxley-Lane themselves. Single acts of charity *do not* change the world. Sensory, indeed sensational,

portrayals of toxicity encourage collective action. As Kingsley insistently urges, if England wants to be a Christian nation, charity must be a national prerogative and not an individual virtue. Novelists target flawed institutions, like the workhouse, while rallying for large-scale reform. Rather than simply encourage individual sympathy, these novels, by presenting a realistic depiction of the ecosystem, argue for centralized intervention. Literary practice becomes a mechanism for social reform, highlighting environmental determinism. This emphasis brings with it eco-consciousness, the recognition of the impact of humanity's behavior on the environment, which affects the nation as a whole. Statistics continued to obfuscate connections between pollution and mortality that common sense proved without a shadow of a doubt. Uninterested in debate and more powerful than statistics, the eco-conscious discourse in these novels, here expressed primarily through miasmatic language, promotes immediate reform.

The social problem novel and its relatives, through shocking and horrifying plots, break the barrier between sensation and realism. Through what are arguably lurid portrayals of the environment, we see disease being transmitted across class boundaries and across spatial boundaries like the East and West Ends and the city center and the suburbs. What is often coded as melodramatic is really this insistence on class connections, and so this awareness happens through genre, through the transformation of Gothic horror into sensational domestic fiction. Poverty merely fostered ideal conditions for disease that was equally contagious and found its way into the typical home. Catherine Gallagher also asks whether realism must be unsparingly realistic about even the harshest realities, or represent moral subject matter realistically? Anxiety about the object of representation "led to new demands for an alliance between politics and literature that ultimately helped transform the procedures of English realism" (220). Realist novelists often attempt to raise awareness about socially created problems, placing the blame

onto institutions. They forge clear cause-and-effect relationships between bodily and mental health and the environment, arguing that eradicating pollution will cure disease. Although many of these authors do not propose specific platforms of activism, they each participate in eco-conscious discourse that would engender environmentalism by the end of Queen Victoria's reign.

Chapter III: Malaise: Victorian Mental and Environmental Dis-Ease

Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air, were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and, in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure [...]. Unnatural humanity! When we shall gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles; when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the by-ways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat churchyards that they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity, and find it growing from such seed.

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (1848)

In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens foregrounds the city's "vitiating air," a lethal cloud pervading the city, pernicious for being invisible. Urban pollution harms "the health of Man," becoming one of the "unnatural sins" committed by humanity. Dickens refers to smoke (the "black cloud") and "offal" commingling into a miasma that outrages "Nature." Laws, here, are ecological laws: the necessity for fresh air and clean water, and dwelling with nature on an appropriate scale, essentially the one popularized by Malthus, despite Dickens's disapproval of political economy.¹²⁸ Malthus considers the "great cities" to be checks to the population as the cramped, overcrowded living conditions contribute to disease and famine. He describes

¹²⁸ Malthus promotes agrarianism, arguing that industry does not materially benefit the well-being of humans because it creates goods rather than food. Malthus contends that land set aside for cultivation is the only meaningful way to provide for a growing population: subsistence living, in the sense of comfortably meeting material needs, as opposed to a market economy. Neo-Malthusians and environmentalist Malthusians champion his idea of preventative checks to the population. Geoffrey Gilbert contends, "it is important to recognize that the term 'excess population' has a broader meaning for us today than it did for the earliest readers of Malthus. We now realize that excess population growth can cause not only adverse economic and political consequences but also severe, even irreversible, damage to the *environment*. Pressures on wildlife habitat, extinction of species, degradation of unspoiled wilderness areas – these are some of the additional concerns we have beyond those rehearsed in the 1798 *Essay*" (xxiv). However, fifty years after Malthus, Dickens and his peers express concern over the ecological impact of human numbers.

limitations of ecological law: with an exponentially increasing population, exacerbated by the migration from country to city, and an arithmetically increasing food supply, life in the city simply cannot be sustained. In concert with Malthus's critique of a market economy that produces surplus goods rather than sufficient food, Dickens questions the Victorian expectation that industry will provide for humanity.

Represented by the black cloud casting its shadow over London, industry necessitates a "wealth" economy – amassing large shares of commodities – as opposed to a "welfare" economy – meeting basic needs to ensure health and happiness.¹²⁹ However, in Victorian England, subsistence living becomes a sign of inferior social standing rather than a positive gauge of the nation's welfare. Industry produces useless goods that are antithetical to welfare and subsistence, encouraging a way of living that disconnects people from the history of products, particularly food sources and the land.¹³⁰ Thorstein Veblen contends that the ultimate purpose of industry is "the utilisation of non-human things":

[A]ll effort directed to enhance human life by taking advantage of the non-human environment is classed together as industrial activity. [...] [M]an's 'power over nature' is currently postulated as the characteristic fact of industrial productivity. This industrial power over nature is taken to include man's power over the life of beasts and over all the elemental forces. (12-13)

Industry requires the exploitation of the nonhuman for human satisfaction. Following Veblen, I refer to "industry" to mean large-scale production requiring mastery over the environment.

"Industrialism" denotes a wealth or market economy, what Veblen calls "pecuniary culture," a way of living that assesses monetary value and relentlessly amasses goods. "Industrialization,"

¹²⁹ See also Regenia Gagnier's *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (2000), particularly Chapter 1.

¹³⁰ Industry thus commodifies food and essential resources (land, water, air).

connoted with cancerous economic growth, exploits the earth to fuel an infinitely growing appetite for consumption. This chapter addresses the ‘problem of scale,’ an ecocritical concern over anthropocentric, unsustainable ways of living and the intensifying malaise they produce.¹³¹ The novels considered here explore the toxic environmental detachment linked to industrial growth but not limited to urban spaces. In her study of nineteenth-century literary realism, Katherine Kearns suggests that the novel records the anxiety produced by “technologization” (12), which extends throughout England to ensure locales become, in Anthony Giddens’s words, “thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them” (18), thus threatening the sense of place vital to realism. Historically, the novel expresses concern over the pervasive influence of modernity and industrialization in particular. Although Dickens’s concern concentrates on improving the quality of life of human beings, he nevertheless calls for the protection of the earth against the destructive forces of industry and the reckless pollution accompanying rapid growth and overpopulation.

The “noxious” air in *Dombey and Son* signifies London’s factories. Industrialization and its consequences pollute the city, just as Dombey’s greed and commitment to capitalism corrupts his life. Literal waste and the wastefulness of conspicuous consumption “outrage” Nature. Here, the “health of Man” signifies total well-being – mental and physical health. The sense of industry haunting the city, corrupting its citizens and blackening the environment, indicates Dickens’s fear that outraging Nature will destroy peace of mind; in other words, a harmonious relationship with the environment is essential to well-being. Dickens’s use of the term “unnatural humanity” suggests an industrialized economy that creates artificial needs that blight

¹³¹Malthus asserts in the first chapter of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, “the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man” (13). Mary Poovey argues that Malthus’s *Essay* “gave Victorian political economy its distinctive cast” in its emphasis on “scarcity instead of plenty” (156). Nineteenth-century political economists identified the “large scale” of industry as responsible for scarcity, following Malthus who claimed industry overtaxed the environment.

the earth. Industrial ways of living privilege the human over the nonhuman environment. As Dickens explores the implications of this divide, he attempts to place humanity back into the ecosystem, insisting that true happiness requires engagement with the environment. Human beings have become blind to their environmental dependency. Dickens's works aim to make miasma, its causes and consequences, "palpable to the sight."

Michelle Allen notes that Dickens uses "miasmatic theory to its full metaphoric potential, imagining fetid matter and foul air not only as sources of disease but also as sources of the moral and social disorder of the city. In fact, Dickens suggests that 'moral pestilence' is 'inseparable' from physical corruption and that filth may, after all, be just another name for 'depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder'" (8). Allen employs 'filth' as a metaphor for moral decay; to cleanse the city is to wash away unsavory elements like the disreputable poor and slovenly slums as much as to clear away literal pollution. *Dombey and Son* roots "pestilence" in the poorer districts, which earns them a reputation for immoral conduct. However, as Dickens reveals through his detailed and sustained descriptions of pollution, actual filth fosters moral filth: the poor are not innately more susceptible to depraved behavior, but become susceptible by their situation. Inadequate housing coupled with no drainage and high concentrations of smoke pollution created a toxic atmosphere. The laboring classes frequently occupied overcrowded tenements in close proximity to the factories, while wealthier Londoners lived in "posh" districts like Pentonville in the 1830s (home of *Oliver Twist*'s Mr. Brownlow) or Belgrave Square (where Lady Bracknell urges Jack "Earnest" Worthing to move to the "fashionable" side). Yet, miasma transgresses boundaries, travelling from poor areas – "haunts" – to infect the superior parts of town. The previous chapter explores representations of the indiscriminate reach of pollution and its impact on the human body. Disease "blights" the body, and its moral reach carries grave

implications for “humanity.” The title of Dickens’s novel points to Dombey’s consuming desire for an heir to continue his capitalist legacy. Dickens worries about future generations “growing from such seed.” “Moral pestilence” may include depression, apathy, greed, and other toxic states of mind. This chapter moves from miasma to malaise, linking physical and mental disease caused by toxic environments. In this discussion of mental health, the word “toxic,” much like filth, carries both literal and metaphorical resonances, denoting environmental contaminants and the harm of environmental detachment. Protecting morality clearly concerned Dickens and his literary peers. However, this moral pestilence is not simply disorderly, degrading behavior; ‘moral’ indicates maladies of the mind and soul: anxiety, depression, and dissatisfaction caused by industrialism and the resultant anthropogenic pollution. This chapter uncovers a distinctly Victorian strategy of eco-consciousness that acknowledges the reality of toxic ills while creatively representing them in literature to render visible their impact on mental and physical health.

I. Mens Sana in Corpore Sano

Had [humankind] faithfully followed Nature and her Laws, Nature, ever true to her Laws, would have yielded fruit and increase and felicity to him: but he has followed other than Nature’s Laws; and now Nature, her patience with him being ended, leaves him desolate; answers with very emphatic significance to him: No. Not by this road, my son; by another road shall thou attain well-being: this, thou perceivest is the road to ill-being; quit this!

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843)

Many Victorian novels highlight the consequences of prolonged alienation from the environment, what in “The House Beautiful” Oscar Wilde regards as the perversion of the soul caused by environmental abuse, and what in *Past and Present* Thomas Carlyle terms “ill-being” (26). Bruce Haley suggests that “[n]o topic more occupied the Victorian mind than Health – not

religion, or politics, or Improvement, or Darwinism” (3).¹³² He tells us, “Total health or wholeness - *mens sana in corpore sano* - was a dominant concept to the Victorians, as important in shaping thought about human growth and conduct as nature was to the Romantics” (4). As the Latin motto indicates, mental and physical health were believed to be dependent on one another. In the mid-Victorian period, this belief culminated in “Muscular Christianity,” the movement that linked moral virtue to physical health. Associated with the writings of Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, Muscular Christianity encouraged robust physical activity as the means to spiritual development. Well-being requires piety and athleticism, a healthy mind in a healthy body. Environmental engagement - outdoor exercise and agrarian labor – provided one avenue to cultivate masculinity. For Carlyle, as the epigraph reveals, “ill-being” is a state of uneasiness, a malady caused by violating natural law, in particular interfering with natural processes. The environment will “yield fruit and increase and felicity” to human beings if they allow it to function properly; “fruit” denotes essential physical needs while “felicity” denotes the happiness that accompanies eco-consciousness. Tampering with the environment destroys the means of our livelihood. This passage from *Past and Present*, despite the personification of Nature, acknowledges humanity’s dependence on the material environment and exchanges between the human and nonhuman; our interactions with place are potentially harmful unless we consider the consequences of certain behaviors on land.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1848) reveals humanity’s disconnection from the environment. Jane avoids going outside until disease

¹³² He continues, “In the name of Health, Victorians flocked to the seaside, tramped about in the Alps or Cotswolds, dieted, took pills, sweated themselves in Turkish baths, adopted this ‘system’ of medicine or that. Partly for the sake of Health they invented, revived, or imported from abroad a multitude of athletic recreations, and England became, in Sir Charles Tennyson’s words, the ‘world’s games-master.’ Literary critics thought of Health when they read any book of poems; social theorists thought of Health when they envisioned an ideal society” (3). Many of the Victorians discussed here – Ruskin, Eliot, Darwin – were plagued by ill health and constantly sought the next best remedy.

convinces her of the benefits of fresh air. An avid reader, young Jane prefers to experience “Nature,” a constructed version of the environment, in books such as Bewick’s *History of British Birds*. Not until the typhus epidemic at Lowood forces Jane from “Nature” into “nature” does she begin to appreciate the outdoors. She discovers “that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in a prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies” (89). Significantly Jane finds pleasure and well-being outside the “garden,” a space bound by “spike-guarded walls” and molded for human use. The “noble summits” represent un-manipulated nature, a place seemingly beyond the reach of human artifice. However, as Jane reveals the invisible pollution of these areas, we learn that despite their impressive appearance, the woods and riverbank have been compromised by human intervention. This “rich” hollow cradles “pestilence;” the “sparkling eddies” belie the contamination of the water that sickens the students (89). Jane becomes aware of realist nature, the environment we inhabit and depend on, rather than the Nature we delight to look upon.

Throughout his career, John Ruskin attempted to confront the public eye with realist, rather than Romantic, Nature. Though Ruskin describes humankind as stewards, the greatest of all creatures, we achieve this superiority only by respecting and nurturing, rather than dominating or isolating ourselves, from the environment.¹³³ He identifies human beings’ perceived “isolation” from the environment, or more properly the ecosystem, in *Modern Painters V*:

¹³³ Ruskin’s stewardship is grounded in Biblical thought. See Chapter 4, which addresses the stewardship parables and their influence on fiction.

Let [man] stand in his due relation to other creatures, and to inanimate things – know them all and love them, as made for him, and he for them; - and he becomes himself the greatest and holiest of them. But let him cast off this relation, despise and forget the less creation round him, and instead of being the light of the world, he is a sun in space – a fiery ball, spotted with storm. All the diseases of the mind leading to the fatalist ruin consist primarily in this isolation. (259)

To be holy, or healthy, a person must understand his/her interconnection with other creatures, human and nonhuman. Ruskin describes “isolation” from the environment as a mental firestorm, a metaphor suggestive of agitation and self-destruction. If man acknowledges and lives as part of the “creation round him,” he is “the light of the world,” a benign influence, and at peace with himself. But if man “despises” or neglects the environment, he will be both destructive, “a fiery ball,” and tormented, “spotted with storm.” These storm spots suggest blind spots in one’s vision, the failure to properly see the environment, as well as mental unrest. Mental illness stems from “casting off” relations to surrounding organisms, a debilitating ecological distance. For instance, in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Jane’s reluctance to walk outdoors in favor of reading natural history indicates this distance; her experiences at Lowood help Jane appreciate the actual environment at Ferndean, assumed to be unhealthy, where she successfully cultivates home and happiness with Rochester once she looks past the “gloom” of the wood to see its refreshing atmosphere.

Ruskin worries about the distance produced by industry, what William Morris calls “the sickness of world” caused by reckless decadence and exploitation of the earth as a resource to produce cheap, excess goods (“The Art of the People” 23). In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen considers the consequences of purchasing these goods, identifying “conspicuous

consumption” as unproductive consumption and “not a consumption directed to [...] comfort and fulness [sic] of life” (50), “conspicuous” because the leisured classes must show off their purchasing power to maintain their status. Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris all target this unproductive, wasteful behavior. The laboring classes can only afford to purchase staple goods necessary for their subsistence, while the leisured classes can purchase scarce and rare luxuries that reflect the extent of their wealth. They can afford to “waste” their money and “the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit” (Veblen 53). Recall the Veneerings’ home in *Our Mutual Friend* brimming with “bran-new” purchases as testimony and ostentatious showcase of purchasing power. To preserve the veneer of their wealth, they must continually acquire new products that their guests vicariously enjoy. Significant to the larger discussion of pollution, “reputability lies in the element of waste” (Veblen 60). The incessant replacement of the old with the new necessitates waste, actual rubbish in the form of cast-off goods. “Waste,” synonymous with conspicuous consumption, may be read as both litter and a moral contaminant.

In “Of Kings’ Treasuries” (1865), Ruskin contends that the pursuit of temporary, valueless diversions become a “feverous disease of parched throat and wandering eyes” (282), calling to mind tuberculosis, popularly called consumption. The term indicates a connection between lifestyle and disease. Consuming a constant supply of new and improved goods can never lead to satisfaction, and, in fact, may compromise health. Consumption affected all segments of the population, particularly the impoverished and malnourished, but as Katherine Byrne shows, the Victorian public became fascinated by the images of the consumptive romantic genius and the effete upper classes whose sumptuous appetites consumed them from within. Susan Sontag contends that during the nineteenth century “[s]adness and tuberculosis became

synonymous” (32), signifying the link between epidemic disease and mental health.¹³⁴

Furthermore, she forges a connection between capitalism and tuberculosis, which was “described in images that sum up the negative behavior of nineteenth-century *homo economicus*:

consumption; wasting; squandering of vitality” (63).¹³⁵ Consumption, like cancer, is the constant tension between satisfaction and dissatisfaction; thus, the Victorians conceived the disease as a combination of physical illness and mental unrest produced by a decadent lifestyle, or “conspicuous consumption.”¹³⁶ Most recently, Erin O’Connor has argued that the nineteenth-century laboring body became nearly synonymous with consumption, which was “[a]bsolutely symptomatic of industrial existence” (2). She continues, “Bringing up complementary images of poorly paid labor and hard, labored breathing; of airless rooms and ill-ventilated chests; consumption spoke of a decomposition that was taking place on both social and cellular levels, a decomposition that drew the diseased body into such close contact with social disorder that it became difficult to tell them apart” (2-3). Victorian “literature consistently forwards the notion that what the factory system really mass-produces is pathology itself” (7). The material desires of the upper classes consume them from within, while the laborer who produces these commodities becomes consumed by pathogenic work; consumption elides mental unrest with physical disease.

Ruskin sneers at any positive interpretation of conspicuous consumption, which he regards as a disease in its own right, acidly condemning a life wasted in the fruitless pursuit of worthless goods and the chase after an endless series of diversions. He yokes physical and

¹³⁴ She suggests that cancer has come to embody many of the anxieties surrounding consumption: “cancer is a disease of middle-class life, a disease associated with affluence, with excess” (15).

¹³⁵ Sontag identifies tuberculosis with ‘early capitalism’ based more in regulated spending and discipline and cancer with ‘advanced capitalism’ based more in indulgence. Nevertheless, Victorian conceptions of tuberculosis—consumption—carry the connotation of continually pursuing changing needs.

¹³⁶ While cancer, as Sontag indicates, is never regarded positively, Veblen argues that in the nineteenth century “infirmities induced by overindulgence” signify honorific status (50). Consumption, then, denotes both one’s bodily condition and moral character, interestingly conferring “nobility” as evidence of decadent taste (Veblen 50).

mental health, elucidating “How literally that word *Dis-Ease*, the Negation and impossibility of Ease, expressed the entire moral state of our English Industry and its Amusements!” (“Of Kings’ Treasuries” 282, emphasis in original).¹³⁷ Despite obeying the demands of the market that promise satisfaction, these habits make comfort impossible. Building on the definition of health posited in *Modern Painters*, “dis-ease” refers to the uneasiness produced by the ignorance of true needs and a dangerous environmental detachment.¹³⁸ Ruskin’s term refers both to individual anxiety and a pervasive cultural malaise indicative of modern lifestyles. As Haley suggests of the Victorians, one is only conscious of “health” when it is threatened; in other words, we actively experience disease and we do not think about being well unless we are *unwell*. It was the “constant threat of illness in the Victorian home [that] made people conscious of their bodies” (6). Malaise, the feeling of “vague, non-specific physical discomfort [and] absence of the sense of physical well-being” (OED), is essentially symptomatic of dis-ease. “Dis-ease” and “malaise” carry similar meanings; however, Ruskin’s concept specifically identifies a cause for anxiety, while malaise is not an identifiable illness, but an overall sense of being ill at ease, as the original French denotes. In informal terms, malaise is to know something is wrong, but not exactly what it is. Malaise, related to malady – “mental, spiritual, or moral ill health” (OED) – also suggests depression. For our purposes, we may regard malaise – unidentifiable anxiety – as an indication of dis-ease – the mental counterpart to disease that is synonymous with

¹³⁷ In *Unto this Last* (1860-2), Ruskin coins the term “illth” to mean the reverse of wealth (true value in the sense of well-being) (“Ad Valorem” 211). A variation of dis-ease, “illth means “ill-being” brought on by conspicuous consumption.

¹³⁸ Edward Carpenter would adopt this ideology to promote socialism, particularly in *Civilisation, its Causes and Cure* (1889). Like Carpenter, Ruskin, Carlyle, Dickens, Wilde, and Morris, his Victorian progenitors, Wendell Berry has theorized as a sense of uneasiness and alienation when we exist separately from our natural environments. Dis-ease, as opposed to health, “makes us conscious not only of the state of our health but of the division of our bodies and our world into parts” (“Health as Membership” 144). Berry further notes that human beings have become disconnected from their bodies by treating them as machines that may be modified through surgery and drugs.

conspicuous consumption and idleness or meaningless work, which alienate one from the environment. The authors in this chapter attempt to expose the cause of malaise as dis-ease.

Ruskin pinpoints both amusement and industry as causes of dis-ease. Industrialism operates by asserting human interests as superior to nonhuman interests, often leading to the treatment of the environment as a resource to be exploited. Health, then, implies sustainable living, cultivating the land, and the satisfaction of a job well done. Health predicates true wealth (as opposed to wealth in the fiscal sense); in William Morris's words, wealth is "what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth" ("Useful Work *versus* Useless Toil" 131). Morris stipulates the "reasonable use" of resources, which human beings require. What man "can make out" of the land implies a smaller scale than the manufacture of cheap goods, as Morris differentiates between "useless toil" (monotonous, worthless factory work) and "useful work" (subsistence living or craftsmanship). Considering the Victorian understanding of health, the country/city trope may be recast into the antithesis between agrarian and industrial ways of living instead of a contrast between place. Malthus, Veblen, and Marx, in common with many urban novelists such as Dickens, Thackeray, and Oliphant, associate the "great cities" with industry, adding an important dimension to condemnations of the chaotic, corrupt city. For novelists, the smoky city represents the threat of industrialism: a wasteful way of living, in more ways than one. The distinction between city and country becomes the distinction between waste and use.

In addition to articulating the tension between industrialism, "a way of thought based on monetary capital and technology (Berry "The Whole Horse" 236)," and agrarianism, "a way of

thought based on land” (239), dis-ease indicates concern about toxic environments.¹³⁹

Victorians associated miasma with bad smells. David Trotter, in his investigation of smell and its role in sanitary reform, describes the anxiety that odors produce, especially as they elude concrete descriptions; smells and tastes can only be recalled by experiencing the scent/taste again, making them difficult to describe later except with vague adjectives, like “bad,” “horrific,” or “foul.” Thus the way smell is experienced helps us understand the Victorians’ anxiety produced by pollution apart from actually contracting bodily disease. As much as we respond physically to odors – nausea, illness – people also respond mentally. The sight of grime, dirt, or insects is similarly unsettling. Trotter explains, “Feelings are directed at specific entities, at people or things; a mood is directed at (or in a sense directed from) the world,” recalling Heidegger’s distinction between fear, a feeling, and *Angst* (anxiety, dread), a mood: “Both are responses to threat, but whereas fear is a response to something specific *in* the world (a gun, an animal, a gesture), anxiety has no object, and is all the more oppressive for that” (40). Anxiety is like an ethereal daze; one feels not terror in a slum but anxiety and nausea caused by the oppressive atmosphere. Trotter focuses on smells, but smog, general grime, and the oppressiveness of a uniform or artificial environment functions the same way.

¹³⁹ Following in Victorian footsteps, Berry defines health as the sense of belonging to an ecological community: a sense of place. His theorization of health and dis-ease builds on Morris’s agrarianism, prescribing meaningful work and authentically dwelling with the land in cooperative communities as the cure for dis-ease. During the Victorian period, agriculture became increasingly industrialized, as Thomas Hardy shows in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*: farms and dairies updated their manufacturing methods with new technology, particularly to increase their output to meet the demands of urban markets. B.A. Holderness discusses the role of artificial fertilizers and specialized feeds, mass-manufactured materials, and new equipment in moving from a local to a national network of distribution. E.J.T. Collins explains that by late 1870s at least two thirds of all England’s corn was cut and threshed by machine; in southern Britain the portable steam thresher was standard procedure (as rented by the farmer in Flintcomb-Ash in *Tess*), although in the north fixed installations were more common. This shows that almost all farmers used machinery, although, depending on the size of the farm, owning machinery could be cost-prohibitive. Collins remarks, “To the Victorian mind steam was the symbol of technological progress, and was reckoned to be the means whereby fortunes could be made out of land in the same way as in a factory or mine” (208). Thus, the line between industrial and agrarian was blurred. While acknowledging this, I use “agrarianism” specifically to indicate a pre-industrial, welfare economy and engagement with the land, not necessarily limited to farming.

Consider the stark buildings of Dickens's Coketown in *Hard Times* (1854), oppressive in their uniformity: a "town of red brick" (280), the "jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail" (29). All the structures are indistinguishable and all resemble a jail imprisoning the residents in austerity and monotony.¹⁴⁰ While sources of pollution may be indirect, the "lack" of nature is harder to pinpoint. Miasmatic discourse, which transmits knowledge of environmental contaminants, "relentlessly converts fear into anxiety" (Trotter 42). Referring to the literature of sanitary reform, Trotter argues that while bad smells were perceived as the cause of contagion, sanitary inspectors "rarely identify the bad smells that so afflicted them *in medical terms*, as contagious matter. Those smells are there, not for diagnostic purposes, but for the anxiety they have already provoked in the inspector (in 'one') and for the anxiety they may yet provoke in the reader" (42, emphasis in original). In other words, the inspectors emphasized the unsettling impact of odors, producing dis-ease, rather than their potential to transmit physical disease. Novelists exploit this anxiety in sensational descriptions designed to produce eco-consciousness; similar to these hard to locate smells, the risk factors of lifestyle are not identifiable objects. This inescapable problem becomes doubly terrifying, because so close to home and hard to identify. The novel attempts to reveal causal relationships between dis-ease and pollution and alienation, showing that the presence of pollution (which indicates antagonism to the environment) is not simply a physical risk, but produces discomfort and anxiety.

Since Victorian consumers often did not recognize the waste that had become a cultural habit, the novel as a genre aimed to reveal the implications of human behavior on the environment through natural realism, wherein the environment determines the conditions of characters' lives. While a character may not know how to identify the cause of malaise – such as

¹⁴⁰ In fact, the infirmary is the jail and the jail is the infirmary: both are buildings holding people with environmental dis-ease.

Jane Eyre who does not find pleasure until enjoying fresh air, or the never satisfied, “nervous” Clara Hewett living in *The Nether World* – since the character inhabits a deterministic environment, the reader can perceive the link between setting and depression. A narrative consciousness that portrays characters who cannot see the reason for their own dis-ease creates two layers of anxiety: that concerning the separation from the natural world creating dis-ease which the writer reveals to his/her audience, and the writer’s anxiety expressed through characters’ ignorance that people cannot see the cause of dis-ease when they are in the midst of it. Looking at the environment from the outside as onlooker rather than participant allows the reader to objectively recognize the sources of dis-ease.¹⁴¹ Returning to Dickens, the narrator of *Dombey and Son* calls for a “good spirit” to “take the house-tops off [...] and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes [...]! For only one night’s view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect; and, from the thick and sullen air where Vice and Fever propagate together, raining the tremendous social retributions which are ever pouring down, and ever coming thicker!” (460). The narrator emphasizes keen vision – the ability to see the dangers hidden in plain sight – indicative of natural realism. The distance provided by narrative helps the reader to better understand and diagnose dis-ease. This emerging eco-consciousness allows the reader to understand the risks of industrialism. Thus, Carlyle urges his readers to quit “the road to ill-being,” a command taken up by the novelists in this chapter who investigate the unhealthy mind.

¹⁴¹ Consider George Eliot’s metaphor of the candle as ego in *Middlemarch*: “Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a center of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent [...]” Here, Eliot is explaining how one’s biases shape events happening around us. In general terms, however, one’s subjectivity obscures a clear understanding of events. When looking at the surface objectively, one sees events (the “scratches”) clearly; when participating in the events, it is easy to miss what is actually occurring.

II. Quit the Road to “Ill-Being”

i. The capitalist city

We call ourselves a utilitarian age and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that Water can cleanse, and Fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all.

Oscar Wilde, “De Profundis” (1897)

It would be easy to simply associate dis-ease with the working classes, depressed by economic injustice and limited opportunities for development and experiencing natural landscapes. However, Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), wherein the characters are aristocratic or comfortably middle-class, presents a clear division between “health” and “dis-ease” as the novel shows the damaging idleness that characterizes the upper classes, particularly gentlemen allowed to recklessly pursue an appetite for pleasure, what Veblen calls “conspicuous leisure.” Brontë’s primary story takes place during the 1820s, on the cusp of the industrial revolution. She does not address political ‘Condition-of-England’ questions, yet her novel reflects on the contemporary moment in its focus on social problems, particularly related to gender, such as male immaturity and female oppression, and related issues of intemperance and idleness. Brontë writes with didactic purpose. She explains in the Preface to the Second Edition, “I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it” (3). Her claim to realism acknowledges the purpose of narrative consciousness to open audience’s eyes to the need for reform. The novel defends the decision of Helen Huntington, née Lawrence, to leave her abusive, adulterous husband, Arthur. She escapes to her childhood home in Yorkshire, where she falls in love with Gilbert Markham, who narrates their story in a series of letters to his brother-in-law Halford. Helen travels between various places, and the environmental representations serve as a shaping background to other themes.

Brontë continues the Victorian tradition of deflating Romantic expectations with reality, as we compare Gilbert, the hardy gentleman farmer, with the charming, idle Arthur.¹⁴² Brontë brings Gilbert's flaws (his vanity, misogyny, and thoughtlessness) to the surface as he narrates the first chapters. Given Gilbert's defects, the reader wonders how he wins Helen's heart until, by reading her diary, we experience her ill-fated marriage in the present tense. Gilbert benefits by the comparison to Arthur, which reveals the figurative toxicity of idleness. Arthur stands in for the stereotypical wealthy gentleman, succumbing to vices and venturing outdoors only to hunt, ultimately perishing from dis-ease produced by his lack of useful employment.¹⁴³ Stevie Davies, in her introduction to the novel, observes that "moral disease has become a norm" (vii); here, disease suggests profligacy. Distressed by her brother Branwell's alcoholism and drug use, Brontë intends to warn her readers away from licentious and dissolute conduct; however, this does not exclude an alternative outlook on the moral dis-ease at the novel's center, emphasizing the root causes of intemperate behavior. Soon after their marriage, Helen begins to awaken to Arthur's flaws, but stays optimistic that the "freshening influence" of the country will purify him (223).¹⁴⁴ However, Arthur tires of "the idle, quiet life he leads" and, as Helen observes, "no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement [...]. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well" by hunting or riding (208). Arthur has no occupation; his estate is a pleasure ground and he is incapable of diverting himself indoors. He prefers the

¹⁴² In her essay, "How To Be A Gentleman Without Really Trying: Gilbert Markham *In The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall*," Sarah Hallenbeck observes "Gilbert's tendency to repeat and 'correct' scenes in which Arthur behaves poorly" (par. 14). Gilbert's robust masculinity and physical strength serve as the antithesis to Arthur's decadence.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Ruth* follows a similar story line. Her Henry and Brontë's Arthur suffer the same fate.

¹⁴⁴ Throughout the novel, Brontë pointedly avoids objective correlative; for instance, after Helen breaks his heart, Gilbert observes "the moon, shining so calmly and carelessly on, as little influenced by my misery as I was by its peaceful radiance" (107).

“dissipations of the town to the quiet of country life” (248), although such bouts shatter his nerves.¹⁴⁵

The town’s pollution serves as Arthur’s excuse for leaving Helen at home (he feigns concern for her and their child’s health). He returns home “altered! – flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity quite departed” (224). Helen’s Romantic impression that the country will heal proves incorrect as fresh air only temporarily restores his vigour. Brontë complicates the source of dis-ease, as in truth, Arthur behaves just as degenerately at Grassdale, importing town indulgences to his home with his friends. Her distinction between town and country is the distinction between industrialism, a way of life based on capital and consumerism, and agrarianism, a way of thought based on direct engagement with the land, represented in Helen’s attempts to manage the estate and encourage Arthur to participate in meaningful work. Thus, the matter does not simply rest on breathing country or city air, as toxic behavior emerges as a threat. Arthur’s debauchery is not contingent on pollution. Rather than pointing solely at the physical strain of sin and smoke, Brontë levels her more profound criticism at the type of amusements deemed socially acceptable. The notion that the town corrupts is a familiar literary trope, yet Brontë’s portrayal of Arthur’s psychological health entails a more complex understanding of urban hazards.

One of the “leisure class,” Arthur is exempt from professional employment, which, according to Veblen, “is the economic expression of their superior rank” (7). The upper classes must prove their time is spent in “wasted effort,” or unproductive occupations such as hunting, sports, and gambling to testify to their wealth. Arthur carefully avoids work of any kind, yet in order to keep satisfied, he constantly pursues new diversions. Brontë depicts the adage ‘idle

¹⁴⁵ Alongside her moral invective against alcoholism and gambling, Brontë frequently contrasts the “dust and smoke of London” with the “fresh breezes of the country” (224, 218). As we saw in Chapter 2, miasmatic language exposes the physical liabilities of succumbing to urban temptations.

hands as the devil's playthings,' arguing that conspicuous leisure inhibits Arthur's moral development. Immorality is ill mental health, which Brontë links to Arthur's relationship to the environment. Helen continually laments, "I wish [Arthur] had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment – anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about. If he would play the country gentleman, and attend to the farm – but that he knows nothing about, and won't give his mind to consider" (225). Useful work, or even a hobby, carries moral implications: if Arthur thought beyond his own pleasure, he could move past egoism to eco-consciousness, awareness of his relationships to other people and the environment. Helen refers in passing to Arthur's "poor tenants and labourers," whom she attends to as part of her household duties (246). Arthur obviously neglects his tenants and is not expected to be an active landlord, and even in Helen's case, their welfare seems an optional concern that merely helps her stay busy.

Supervising the estate becomes another 'amusement,' though the laborers perform necessary and indispensable work, providing the estate's food and income. Arthur's interest in where his meal comes from extends only to complaints about the cook. The workers' invisibility makes them easy targets for unconscious exploitation. Urban novels reveal the deliberate exploitation of the workforce and a willful ignorance of living and working conditions. In a rural context, the same apathy exists. Arthur simply does not care. Dis-ease, the "persistent want of satisfaction," is, according to Wendell Berry, directly and complexly related to the dissociation of ourselves and all our goods from our and their histories" ("The Whole Horse" 236). In other words, most people have no idea where their food, the fabric that makes their clothing, or their household goods come from. Despite the rural setting, Brontë's allusion to the invisible workers describes a wealth economy that is industrial in spirit. The market and the consumer mask the

process of production and the role of the worker, which as Marx explains in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* is how a good becomes a commodity: "From the taste of wheat it is not possible to tell who produced it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an English capitalist" (20). Capital – consumer goods, or the wealth created from the circulation of these goods – places a wedge between ourselves and the things we use from the earth. In most cases, the consumer cannot know the conditions of labor that produced a given article, but Arthur demonstrates a willful failure to see.¹⁴⁶ His class position, maintained through conspicuous leisure, separates him from authentic environmental engagement. Arthur's apathy precludes any thoughts about labor at all. He takes for granted a plentiful table, symptomatic of cultural disease. A trivial education, boredom, and encouraged selfishness pollute Arthur's character, creating a metaphorical toxicity distancing him and his peers from an awareness of dependency on the land.¹⁴⁷ Like Dickens in *Dombey and Son*, Brontë exposes people's failure to see how consumerism alienates them from goods produced by the land.

Arthur's final illness, a kind of brain fever, is largely psychosomatic; alcoholism and gluttony compromise his body, but Arthur has burnt himself out. His unidentified illness resembles the metaphorical applications of consumption, a word often used by writers to indicate wasting illness if not literally tuberculosis. The colloquial name for tuberculosis, consumption, connotes consumerism, an eating away of the body brought on by over-consumption, or over-indulgence. Katherine Byrne cites an early twentieth-century description of consumption as "a direct product of civilisation" (48), pointing to Dickens, who delineates "capitalism and trade as the disease of modern society, as its corrupter and destroyer [...]. [D]isease becomes a metaphor

¹⁴⁶ Opposing Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the market place, Marx wished to expose the failure to see the labor behind an object.

¹⁴⁷ Consider the picturesque descriptions of the estates, like Staningley. The impressive avenues and rolling lawns expose the presence of laborers, who are kept out of sight.

for all that is wrong about the ‘unnatural’, capitalist world” (55). Paul, the delicate “son” in *Dombey and Son*, slowly fades away from consumption. Society’s “desire to produce and consume despite the physical cost to the masses, and the moral and psychological cost to the upper classes [...] results in society’s own consumption by disease” (Byrne 60). Arthur, like Paul Dombey, suffers from this sort of metaphorical consumption, as Brontë identifies risk factors of an aristocratic life. Although Arthur is not a capitalist in the way of the businessman Dombey, his conspicuous consumption – his habits of reckless spending, promiscuity, overeating, and overdrinking in his effort to stave off malaise – worsens his dis-ease and cuts his life short.

Brontë, however, does not villainize Arthur, whose behavior is no better or worse than the privileges enjoyed by his cohorts. He is an overgrown child, spoiled by a patriarchal class system. The gentlemen hunt recklessly, neglect or abuse their animals, drink heavily, and brag about adultery. These behaviors and their overindulgence of luxury goods “strictly reserved for the superior classes,” such as wine and imported food, become a sign of their virility (Veblen 50). Veblen asserts, “the reputability that attaches to certain expensive vices long retains so much of its force as to appreciably lessen the disapprobation visited upon the men of the wealthy or noble class for any excessive indulgence” (51). For instance, while Helen’s conservative aunt disapproves of her marriage to Arthur, society sanctions his reckless behavior as a sign of his wealth. In diagnosing Arthur, Brontë diagnoses Victorian culture with dis-ease.

Gentlemanliness becomes synonymous with decadence that society expects women to be complicit in while remaining pure. This problematic basis of what it means to be a ‘gentleman’ provides the novel’s basis. The reader constantly keeps Gilbert, as the frame narrator, in mind as Arthur’s foil. When we first see Gilbert returning home to Linden-Car, the family farm, his

mother openly shows her preference for her son by saving the best bits of the meal and stroking his vanity. Of a lower class than Arthur, Gilbert is nonetheless a spoiled gentleman, arguably escaping dis-ease because of his farming responsibilities: what Veblen calls “productive work” and Morris calls “useful work” rescues Gilbert from the effects of an overindulgent mother and social practices of conspicuous consumption. Eliza Millward facetiously says to Gilbert, "Well, there's nothing like active employment, I suppose, to console the afflicted" (369). Regardless of Eliza’s jealous sarcasm, her comment indicates Brontë’s own thoughts on “active employment” as a cure for dis-ease.

Gilbert is primarily a farmer, rooted to the earth by his inheritance of his father’s land, by settled custom. He “continue[s] in the good old way” (11): agrarianism. In the 1820s, when the novel is set, farming remained the backbone of England’s economy; by the end of the 1840s, industry already dominated the economy. With his last breath, Mr. Markham exhorts Gilbert to “follow his steps, and those of his father before him, and let [his] highest ambition be, to walk honestly through the world [...] and to transmit the paternal acres to [his] children in, at least, as flourishing a condition ” as was left to him (11). The Markham family authentically dwells at Linden-Car; Gilbert inherits acres and agrarianism, participation in a welfare economy. An active steward, Gilbert physically labors alongside his employees. Gilbert as owner maintains his status as gentleman while avoiding the charge of ‘playing’ at farming. He continually refers to such tasks as getting in the hay, stacking corn, breaking in horses, and properly draining the land, and this continual attention to seasonal duties exhibits Gilbert’s eco-consciousness.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ In contrast to Kingsley’s and Hardy’s novels, Brontë’s scope stays middle to upper class: dependent laborers remain invisible, and the sense we have of Gilbert’s occupation comes in his remarks to others, rather than descriptions of him actually in the fields. This again distinguishes Brontë from the social problem novelists. She does not seem concerned with economic injustice, exploring eco-consciousness in relation to the higher orders.

Helen's attraction to Gilbert lies in his outdoorsy masculinity: his community activity, genuine kindness to children and pets, avoidance of serious vices, and his respectable occupation.¹⁴⁹ He contends, "[A]n honest and industrious farmer is one of the most useful members of society; and if I devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm, and the improvement of agriculture in general, I shall thereby benefit, not only my immediate connections and dependants [sic], but in some degree, mankind at large" (11). The designation "useful" contrasts with Arthur's idleness and with the conspicuous consumption fed by industry. Gilbert's work satisfies real needs as opposed to sham wants. Although the Markham's farm certainly generates profit, Gilbert's father charges him with maintaining a relationship with the land, which in turn fosters community and provides for neighbors and "dependants" (his family and workers). To be an "honest" farmer carries moral implications – recognizing higher concerns than profit. Gilbert makes visible the agrarian welfare economy in Yorkshire, while Arthur's urbane habits mask the ongoing work on his estate, representing instead the industrial consumer economy he participates in. Just as Brontë contrasts the economies associated with city and country, she contrasts town-bred dissipation and a moderate country community. Gilbert socializes and attends parties, drinks and flirts, but exercises restraint. With a farm to keep him busy, Gilbert balances work and play, while Arthur's insatiability causes dis-ease.

The importance of usefulness that emerges in the comparison between the farmer and aristocrat relates to the working farm's contrast with "landed opulence" (Davies xxviii), or the farm contrasted with the park. In a similar fashion to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Anne's novel creates a division between the scenic estate – Grassdale Manor, Wildfell Hall, and Staningley (the home of Helen's aunt and uncle, where she actually grows up) – and the productive system of Linden-Car and Ryecote Farm, indicative of Yorkshire's agrarianism. The

¹⁴⁹ Gilbert exemplifies Kingsley's "muscular Christianity," proving his masculinity as a competent, robust farmer.

land surrounding Wildfell Hall is “picturesque,” “but, doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit” (23). Here, “gloomy” means inhospitable; while beautiful, the land is not arable. The name of the ruined estate, coupling “wild” and “fell,” suggests both the attempt to fell the wild landscape, and the fact that the opposite proves to be true: the harsh land drives out human beings.¹⁵⁰ Davies, noting the topographical meaning of “fells,” affirms, “‘Wild’ and on the ‘fells’, just off the edge of the community, where culture meets nature, ‘the superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era’ has already made progress in resolving issues of patrimony by crumbling uninhabitably back into the heath. Human beings have abandoned the place as too wuthering” (x). Davies contends that an outworn patrician class cannot sustain themselves from such inhospitable land, and such “pretensions are mocked by the recrudescence of mansion into moor” (x). Despite sharing its initials with Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Wildfell Hall more accurately resembles Thrushcross Grange, a sumptuous estate that hides its reliance on the land. As Gilbert describes the walk from Linden-Car to Wildfell Hall, he notes the changes in landscape:

I left the more frequented regions, the wooded valleys, the cornfields, and the meadow lands, and proceeded to mount the steep acclivity of Wildfell, the wildest and the loftiest eminence of our neighborhood, where, as you ascend, the hedges, as well as the trees, become scanty and stunted, the former, at length, giving place to rough stone fences, partly greened over with ivy and moss, the latter to larches and Scotch fir-trees, or isolated blackthorns. The fields, being rough and stony and wholly unfit for the plough, were mostly devoted to the pasturing of sheep and cattle; the soil was thin and poor; bits of grey rock here and there peeped out from the grassy hillocks; bilberry plants and

¹⁵⁰ Brontë evokes the secondary meaning of “fell”: to cut, knock or strike down (OED).

heather – relics of more savage wildness – grew under the walls; and in many of the enclosures, ragweeds and rushes usurped supremacy over the scanty herbage. (22)

Fields give way to “poor,” rocky soil. The adjective “unfit” signals that the Lawrence family chose a poor site for a home. The family constantly wars with the uncultivable and unsustainable land. As the ivy and moss cover the fences, and the fields resist the plough, we see a losing battle to tame the area. The weeds that “usurp” the deliberately planted greenery signify the reclamation of the land by native elements. The Hall’s overgrown box gardens, molded by “the gardener’s torturing shears” to “assume the shapes he chose to give them,” have grown out of control (23). Created for beauty rather than use, these shapes – a swan, lion, knight, and castellated towers – transform from emblems of aristocracy into reminders of the futility of battling hostile environments because they cannot retain their form. “Torturing shears” temporarily subdue the environment, which resumes its original course if left alone. Gilbert’s comments on the gloomy atmosphere, caused by exposure to harsh weather rather than evil forces, indicate that the family built the Hall without understanding the wuthering landscape, which undoes the gardener’s work. Coming to this realization, the Lawrences deserted the Hall “for a more modern and commodious mansion in the neighboring parish” (21). These useless gardens represent the family’s dis-ease: their ignorance about the landscape, and the anxiety produced by nature’s power that drives them away.

However, Helen, the new tenant, recognizes the limitations of the place while appreciating its beauty. One of her first practical improvements is to replace the old gardens with vegetable gardens. She is able to make a home here because she accepts the place as it is, and she is drawn to Gilbert precisely because as a farmer he dwells in his local environment. Helen and Gilbert find the ‘wild’ neither scary nor unwelcoming, diffusing the “gloom” of

Wildfell Hall and negating the Romantic notion that landscape symbolizes or reflects an emotional state. *Wuthering Heights* with its unhappy remembrances feels more ‘haunted’ than its literary relative. As Davies puts it, “Anne Brontë’s ancient hall demystifies Gothic. Her ruined hall is not haunted. It is simply dilapidated, damp and unwelcoming” (xi). This demystification allies Brontë with Dickens, Kingsley, and Gaskell, whose realism relocates the cause of horror from foreign or exotic places to domestic landscape. The Gothic novel is unconcerned with actual place, using settings that are imaginary constructs to convey a kind of atmosphere. Here, the attention to particular native plants and the region’s distinctive topography create an environment recognizable as Yorkshire. Brontë’s presentation of a real place, however lonely, repositions Gothic conventions. In certain realist novels, discussed in Chapter 2, the shock of exposure to pollution and exploitation produces horror, and here, Brontë diffuses the horror at ‘wild’ spaces, at most creating an unsettling humility when faced with inhospitable landscapes, a humility akin to wonder. We might call this ‘eco-Gothic’ in the sense that the seemingly foreign atmosphere is created by rebellious nature, but since Brontë insists that the dominant attitude towards the landscape is problematic, not the land itself, this is not entirely correct. The real horror comes in Helen’s inability to escape an abusive marriage, as she constantly fears detection and the loss of her son. Despite the relative isolation of Wildfell Hall, it is hardly a “hermitage.” To Helen’s initial dismay, the town takes a lively interest in their new resident, actively trying to pull her into the community.¹⁵¹

Helen chooses agrarianism, the path to ‘well’-being and a happy ending. Arthur never changes, but his friend Ralph Hattersley, as bad a reprobate as Arthur, reveals the potential for

¹⁵¹ Contrasting Anne’s novel with the work of her sisters, Christine Colón also argues the resolution of Helen’s story takes place within the context of a community: “In Anne’s novel, individuals are repeatedly threatened by the evil that surrounds them, and many succumb to its temptations. Anne proposes that these dangerous patterns will only begin to change when people learn to value community and begin to care for their neighbors” (21).

reform through country living: “Avoiding the temptations of town, he continued to pass his life in the country immersed in the usual pursuits of a hearty, active country gentleman; his occupations being those of farming, and breeding horses and cattle, diversified with a little hunting and shooting, and enlivened by the occasional companionship of his friends” (458).¹⁵² Cultivating an attachment to land re-trains his priorities. Hattersley avoids “temptations” and more importantly directly tills his estate. Thus, this particular novel suggests a way to successfully cure dis-ease; the social system must change to value productive work and community ethics. The novel closes with Gilbert encouraging Halford to visit: “you must leave your dusty, smoky, noisy, toiling, striving city for a season of invigorating relaxation and social retirement with us” (489), re-drawing the contrast between an antithetical country and city. The country/city trope, which opposes the “smoky,” “toiling” city with the “invigorating” country, suggests a healthy way of living. Brontë insists that agrarianism is the road to physical, moral, and mental well-being. In common with other contemporary writers, such as Frances Trollope and Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë’s understanding of agrarianism is somewhat shortsighted: she promotes an old-fashioned, hands-on approach to farming and does not question the benefits of rural labor.

Whereas in Brontë’s novel wealthy characters may choose to relocate to the country, the workers in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) have no such luxury. They suffer both physical disease and mental dis-ease from the lack of open space, fresh air, clean conditions, and adequate nutrition. This chapter focuses on malaise, though *Mary Barton* equally considers urban toxicity, as Gaskell frequently notes the smoke and filth of Manchester. The scene in the Davenports’ filthy cellar is famous within Victorian literature (Chapter 6). When Mary visits Liverpool,

¹⁵² Of course, the stakes are much lower for these men. Hattersley inherits the riches of his father (a banker) and can afford to try his hand at farming without risk of poverty.

Charley remarks Manchester is a “nasty, smoky hole,” and asks how she can stand to live there. He declares, “I don’t think I could abide a home in the middle of the smoke” (290). However, the steamships in Liverpool’s harbor and the clouds of smoke they emit shock Mary. In an unfamiliar environment, Mary immediately notices the pollution she is inured to at home. The tall smokestacks, which befoul both the air and the human body, represent humanity’s harmful intervention into the environment. *Mary Barton* represents the dehumanizing and alienating effects of industry as it chronicles the increasing poverty of two working-class families, the Bartons and the Wilsons. But the root cause of this malaise is not just commodity culture or a mechanized lifestyle – it is the dislocation from healthy environments.

Gaskell originally envisioned John Barton as the novel’s protagonist, focusing on his inability to find work after he loses his factory job. The novel centers on his discontent and increasing malaise, suggesting that Barton is alienated both from work and from other people, and that he, his family and coworkers are alienated from the natural world, which would provide some relief. John Barton struggles to feel human in the oppressive factory environment.¹⁵³ Like Anne Brontë, Gaskell anticipates the back to the land ways of living recommended by John Ruskin and William Morris in the 1860s and 1880s,¹⁵⁴ emphasizing meaningful work as the source of health and the cure to debilitating industrialism. Barton’s idleness increases his alienation; the Victorian wealth economy denies him the ability to provide for himself if he cannot earn wages.

¹⁵³ Harriet Guest describes Barton himself as a commodity: “In the terms suggested by Walter Benjamin, the individual in the crowd is also a commodity insofar as they are identified with their labour power, and participate in the romantic and complex exchanges of desire and projection that commodities stimulate and focus” (83). However, Guest argues that the reader’s alienation from the workers in Manchester is different from Barton’s lack of empathy or the alienation produced by the modern city. Barton is distanced from the “allure of the shops” because of the commodity economy, while the reader is excluded from the romance of the shops as outside “the network of local attachments and sympathies peculiar to ‘Living in Manchester’” (83).

¹⁵⁴ Morris’s cottage industry producing wallpapers and meaningful work rejected modern technological innovations. John Ruskin envisioned his Guild of St. George as an agrarian commune.

The condition of England's cities – poverty, dirt, waste, and crowding – concerns Gaskell. In the preface she explains her choice to avoid a rural setting, and given her concerns, there is little 'nature' in the novel. Nevertheless, the novel opens with a country scene that sets the tone for events to come, describing the townspeople seeking the country for repose:

Here in their seasons may be seen the country business of haymaking, ploughing, &c., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch; and here, the artisan, deafened with the noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life: the lowing of cattle, the milkmaid's call, the clatter and cackle of poultry in the old farmyards. (5)¹⁵⁵

Matters of subsistence are "mysteries" to the townspeople, surrounded by stone and smoke. The country provides the welcome respite Octavia Hill describes thirty years later in "Our Common Land" (1877): "have you ever paused to think what Londoners would do without this [Bank] holiday, or what it would be without these open spaces? Cooped up for many weeks in close rooms, in narrow streets [...] suddenly they expand into free uncrowded space under spreading trees, or on to the wide Common from which blue distance is visible; the eye, long unrefreshed with sight of growing grass, or star-like flowers, is rejoiced by them again" (4).¹⁵⁶ A pioneer of

¹⁵⁵ In his assessment of the novel's historical accuracy, D.S. Bland focuses on the novel's opening in Green Heys Field, considering the likelihood of rural space being available to workers in Manchester in the late 1830s. Gaskell's contemporaries refuted her suggestion that the laboring classes sought the countryside. Bland asks, has Gaskell, "overcome by an understandable nostalgia for the country-side" exaggerated "her memories of Manchester"? (59). Bland concludes that the opening scene does in fact give "an accurate picture of one of the more innocent recreations of the Manchester operative of the 1830's" (60). His research is interesting, not simply because it validates the accuracy of *Mary Barton*, but because this possibility was a point of contention upon the novel's release: we can see how threatened rural areas actually were, so much so that Victorian readers were skeptical that a field would remain at all within walking distance of the city.

¹⁵⁶ In 1844, Wordsworth wrote a poem violently protesting the Kendal and Windermere Railway. He famously asks, "Is no nook of English ground/ secure from rash assault?" (lines 1-2). Wordsworth worries about the damage to the land the trains would cause, as well as the increased tourist traffic that would compromise the purity of the Lake District. Furthermore, he insists, the "pausing traveller" cannot fully appreciate the scene. Neither Gaskell in *Mary Barton* nor Dickens in *Hard Times*, which also depicts rural excursions by railway, comment on the risks of increased traffic into the countryside. Their main concern, like Hill, is democratic access to open space. Scott Hess suggests that Wordsworth constructs nature "as a sphere of high culture, which would be violated by the infusion of

urban ecology, Hill argued for the psychological and physical value of open spaces, working to preserve land in the cities and suburbs and to design ecologically conscious social housing. Natural spaces “refresh” the mind. Decades before Hill’s vigorous conservation campaign, Gaskell similarly emphasizes the need for natural retreats and the introduction of natural elements *into* the city itself.

The workers enjoy the respite Green Heys Fields provides from their city environment, while reducing the essential business of living, growing food, into an “&c.” The townspeople likely import much of their crops, milk, cheese, and meat from these fields on the southernmost edge of the city. Though indicating that Manchester’s denizens feel discontented in the chaotic city, the scene illustrates how disconnected they are to the land and the significance of these tasks. The malaise pervading the novel seems tied to this first scene, which shows on one hand that people continue to seek nature, but on the other how alienated they are from it.¹⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, who claims *Mary Barton* “is the most moving response in literature to the industrial suffering of the 1840s,” argues these early chapters “embody the characteristic response of a generation to the new and crushing experience of industrialism” (88). Once again, we see that the country/city trope invokes the agrarianism/industrialism antithesis, and Gaskell’s characters must learn to recognize realist nature in an urban environment. Brontë condemns both the polluted city and city values, but Gaskell carefully directs her critique towards industry rather than urbanity. Townspeople may be “invigorated” within the city itself.

‘low’ or popular culture” (116), while Gaskell particularly wishes to open up nature to all classes. Wordsworth’s protest of the railway, which “was not ecological, but instead aesthetic, social, and cultural” (Hess 117), amounted to a campaign against modern and industrial values encroaching on the aesthetic sphere. Hess notes that the working classes did not actually infiltrate the Lake District “*en masse*,” thus, Wordsworth’s fears on that point were largely groundless.

¹⁵⁷ Amy M. King has argued, “The fact that the novel opens outside the city, in a space characterized by natural history collecting – the source of Alice’s herbal medicine – and situates its working-class denizens amid narrative energies that verge on the taxonomic, suggests the importance of natural history to this industrial novel” (“Taxonomical Cures” 257).

The dissociation between consumers and supplies that causes dis-ease indicates ignorance about the sources of meals and clothes, true of city life in Gaskell's novel. The consumer world of the novel privileges man-made, manufactured goods.¹⁵⁸ Jill L. Matus investigates the "pathological psychic states" of the novel, which are "coded as a working-class problem," caused by "excessive feeling and lack of control" (32). This generalized dynamic of stultified inwardness actually works within a specific Victorian idiom of dis-ease – from Ruskin to Dickens and Brontë – that highlights, in a negative fashion, the physical and moral effects of toxicity which underlies the alienation from realist nature. In a pecuniary culture, Barton is nothing but his labor, and so when he loses his job, he sits by idly for the duration of the novel. His enforced idleness and his imprisonment in the city produce dis-ease. In a capitalist economy, the workers rely on wages to support themselves, having no means to satisfy their physical needs in any other way. This is a fairly obvious point, but gains significance in considering Gaskell's attention to material goods and natural spaces. Gaskell implies Barton could provide for himself if he had access to cultivatable land. Ironically, his surname, Barton, means a farmyard.¹⁵⁹ A cotton-mill worker, he will finally pawn most of his possessions to clothe and feed himself. Gaskell's novel centers on the irony of many industrial novels: the factory workers do not benefit from what they produce.

The laborers resent the purchasing power of their masters who are doubly alienated by their self-absorption. In his introduction to the novel, Macdonald Daly explains: "The willful ignorance of the propertied and their lack of enquiry into the conditions of the poor is starkly symbolized by Mrs. Hunter, the manufacturer's wife, who passes Barton 'loaded with purchases

¹⁵⁸ For further reading, see Christoph Lindner's "Outside Looking In: Material Culture in Gaskell's Industrial Novels." *Orbis Litterarum* 55 (2000): 379-396.

¹⁵⁹ The OED cites an 1816 usage from Southey's *Poet's Pilgrimage*: Spacious bartons clean, well-wall'd around, Where all the wealth of rural life was found.

for a party' on the day that his son dies of starvation" (xvi). The social problem novels aim to force this consciousness onto the upper classes, and this scene further illustrates the lack of enquiry into where these purchases come from. Mrs. Hunter comes away with "edibles" (25); the shop sells venison, cheese, jelly, and other groceries, luxuries and likely basic staples perhaps grown in Green Heys Fields. Neither masters nor men are self-sufficient in that they can make or raise their own food, which comes from a shop. These items are commodities stripped from their history, just like the products manufactured in the factories. The Bartons purchase all their food, though from lower-end stores, as they frequently run out to buy eggs, milk, ham, and other daily necessities. In the first chapter, the Bartons' home is "crammed with furniture (sure sign of good times among the mills)" (15), an indication not so much of close quarters but the desire for material comforts. The Bartons' prized green-japanned tea tray and blue-check curtains further demonstrate their love of material goods. In her study of Victorian things, Elaine Freedgood points out how Gaskell repeatedly draws our attention to those curtains that become an ominous sign of the factory system. Placed there as the decorative touch of a homemaker, they belie their commodification.¹⁶⁰ John Barton and his friend George Wilson slave to manufacture the cotton that produces those curtains, and their presence indicates the workers' own displacement of their work from what they purchase.

Mary's desire for commodities becomes increasingly dangerous. Known for her vanity, she chooses to go into service as a dressmaker, assuming certain privileges accompany the work: she will "be always dressed with a certain regard to appearances; must never soil her hands, and need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour" (26). Harriet Guest investigates Gaskell's

¹⁶⁰ Calico becomes a recognizably English cloth; its history "unravels the ideological work of domesticity as Gaskell tries to deploy it. The blue and white curtains that promise protection at key narrative moments have been purchased at the expense of the laborers who make them in England, and the laborers who no longer make them in South Asia" (Freedgood 57).

anxiety that factory life threatens domesticity by giving women disposable income that allows them to participate in the commodity economy while keeping them outside the home. Fearing for Mary, John Barton refuses to allow her to work in a factory, but her chosen service exposes Mary to the conspicuous consumption of the upper classes she longs to emulate. She idolizes her aunt Esther, whom she believes to have risen into the upper ranks of society through this avenue. In truth, Esther is tempted into an illicit relationship once her factory job whets her desire for commodities. Lured by the promise of finery, she elopes with a soldier, and then opens a shop to support her standard of living. She squanders her money on material goods and is reduced to selling herself, the only commodity left to her. Her lavish taste earns her the nickname “Butterfly.” The immorality associated with conspicuous consumption directly manifests in her prostitution. In death, she collapses into a “heap” of clothing (392), fittingly succumbing to physical consumption. Esther’s indulgences literally consume her as they do Arthur Huntingdon. Her gauzy, impractical finery represents her desire for material possessions, even at the expense of food. Similarly, the well-groomed Harry Carson lures Mary into this economy; she is attracted by his purchasing power. Harriet Guest suggests, “The imagined pleasures of consumption – or perhaps more accurately, of money-spending, and the power that implies – are [...] important to the progress of Mary’s seduction” (95). Mary’s class envy and frustration compromise her well-being as she wrongheadedly pursues a wealthy suitor to relieve her malaise. Esther feels compelled to warn Mary against repeating her history.

Clearly, the Bartons are conspicuous consumers, though at a different level: so it is Mrs. Hunter’s callousness that fuels Barton’s vengeance. Mrs. Hunter’s excess, “a pampering of artificial wants” (26), offends Barton as his child lies ill of scarlet fever. As he goes out to find him proper nourishment, he compares his serious needs with her personal luxuries:

At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill, to buy an estate in the country, while all the time the weaver, who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth, is struggling on for bread for his children, through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, &c. (23-4)

Again we return to the question of scale, for the employers can afford to purchase ever larger houses on large plots of land while the workers cram into inadequate lodgings with claustrophobic courts that serve as yards. This seizure of land clearly exacerbates the shortage of open space in the city. The successful businessman relocates to the country, leaving behind the city he has polluted in the pursuit of wealth. Although Gaskell ultimately tries to appease both parties by pointing out that mill owners also suffer from the poor economy, in the above passage she sympathizes with Barton's sense of injustice. Even with diminishing profits, the owners have enough income to maintain their style of living. To run the mill seems to require little merit, as the weavers, "the real makers of this wealth," possess the actual skill. Mr. Hunter and Mr. Carson's business acumen ensures success, but accepted practice continually cut workers' wages to maximize profits in an unstable market. In a capitalist economy, these "vicissitudes" primarily affect the dispossessed worker who has no recourse to other employment.

These circumstances heighten the importance of Green Heys Fields, within walking distance of the city, and the site of Alice Wilson's herb-gathering and Job Legh's search for specimens to add to his natural history collection. In contrast to this industrial economy, Alice and Job represent an alternative agrarian ethos because they blend environmental engagement with a community ethos. Each character supports his/her neighbors, serving as a sage who can

cure and calm. Alice represents a type of local economy that keeps nature and work together, using her knowledge of plants and herbs to nurse her community by making medicines. She has an intimate and useful knowledge of her environment; by knowing what to look for, she can spot homeopathic herbs throughout the city as well as in the fields to create cures that are more effective than the products bought from apothecaries.¹⁶¹ Counseling Mary and others, she remains particularly attuned to the emotions around her. Alice's ability to heal makes her an asset to the community and gives her purpose. She is able to stay healthy and optimistic throughout the novel, escaping malaise despite the loss of her eyesight. An urban Tiresias, she can nevertheless "see" what others cannot.

Alice benefits from her eco-consciousness and healthy way of living. Amy M. King argues that natural history cures "the ills of perception" ("Taxonomical Cures" 256).¹⁶² Job, the naturalist, seeks knowledge of his surroundings, collecting from the environment specimens that comfort him through hardship. His hobby trains him to be a careful observer. As Manchester suffers increasing unrest, Job becomes a mainstay for Mary and her father.¹⁶³ Job brings together Barton and Mr. Carson, negotiating forgiveness, and he provides Mary with legal advice as she tries to clear her lover, Jem, from the charge of murder. Danielle Coriale calls Job a "translator," both for helping his friends communicate with the business classes and for replacing

¹⁶¹ Bruce Haley lists some of the hack cures sold in apothecary shops which sold "hundreds of 'specifics,' drugs intended to attack particular varieties or symptoms of disease. Among the remedies for 'hooping-cough' [...] were opium, belladonna, digitalis, bark, cup moss, arsenical solution, nitrate of silver, oil of Amber, meadow narcissus, and acetate of lead" (13). Barton purchases an expensive and ineffective tonic for his son, while Alice is continually called upon for her beneficial services.

¹⁶² She writes, "Gaskell uses the taxonomical logic of natural history to propose a more human way of seeing the working class, not as another species or as types of a larger order but as individual specimens whose ills can be ameliorated. Gaskell's most sustained and coherent political call in *Mary Barton* is for the two classes to see each other and classify themselves like species," indeed, as members of the same species (258).

¹⁶³ Many articles focus on Job Legh as an example of the artisan naturalist, which Anne Secord identifies as a Manchester particular in her article, "Elizabeth Gaskell And The Artisan Naturalists Of Manchester." The city was known for its large collective of working-class naturalists who met in pubs to learn taxonomy, pooling their funds to buy books and combining their specimens together into impressive collections. See also Amy M. King's "Taxonomical Cures: The Politics of Natural History and Herbalist Medicine in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*" and Danielle Coriale's "Gaskell's Naturalist."

“the voice of the Chartist [in the novel], reinterpreting his [Barton’s] actions” (374). Barton, diseased and desperate, irrationally murders Henry Carson to revenge himself upon the wealthy classes. Gaskell describes Barton as Frankenstein’s monster (170), a monster she cannot help but sympathize with, but a monster nonetheless, warped by radical views. As King and Coriale suggest, Job’s naturalist intellect allows him to carefully evaluate the economic crisis and mediate between masters and men, who, by regarding themselves as two distinct species, lack the sympathy necessary to reach compromise. It is by reminding Carson and Barton that they both lost a son, that they are not fundamentally different, that Job effects a truce: quoting the Bible, he urges, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us” (367). Job understands Barton’s reasoning in believing Carson’s exploitation cost him his son, and Job’s influence prompts Mr. Carson to open his Bible and identify with his enemy.¹⁶⁴ Coriale adds, “Job explains for the sake of readers who were unwilling or unable to imagine themselves in Barton’s shoes or achieve any kind of sympathy for him” (374). Not only does Job create sympathy within the novel, he teaches the reader to “see” artificial class distinctions. Job commands respect, serving as a bridge between the working classes and their masters and middle-class readers.

Alice and Job survive in the city because they have a natural touchstone. Gaskell represents these knowledge bases as progressive, perhaps rural in origin but urban in practice (King 257). Alice’s knowledge originating from her rural childhood benefits Manchester, providing a model for reform that renovates the city instead of rejecting urban life. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams explains how English novels traditionally depict the city as the “dark mirror” of the country, a symbol of capitalist production, labor, and

¹⁶⁴ Guy calls this solution offered by Gaskell “moral re-education,” necessary for reactionary masters like Henry Carson “to learn to live amicably with figures like John Barton” (162).

exploitation. The country represented Eden while the city became the hub of modernity, a quintessential place of loneliness and the loss of romantic faith. For Williams, “the contrast of the country and city is one of the major forms in which we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crises of our society” (289). The novelists in this chapter use the country/city trope to underscore the danger in separating humanity from their environment. Gaskell laments the loss of natural space within the city, using the language of natural history both to study the class system and deny the attitude that the worker is a separate species. She aims to enlarge the reader’s vision, resulting in an eco-consciousness that could potentially alleviate dis-ease. She does not, however, condemn the city as inherently bad, and in fact legitimates urban environments. Gaskell’s insistence on importing the natural into urban spaces looks forward to the environmental justice movement, which prefers an all-inclusive definition of ‘nature’ that does not privilege rural spaces. *Mary Barton* ultimately deconstructs the country/city dichotomy. While she moves Mary and Jem out of Manchester, Jem continues to work as an engineer. Their cottage in Canada offers the alternative version of her model: in a spacious glen cleared of “primeval yews,” and surrounded by a garden, the couple live sustainably, industriously using resources without marring the “gorgeous beauty” of the area (392). Neither wild nor completely tamed, their “dwelling” indicates they have learned from the monstrosity of Manchester to temper the industrial spirit with agrarianism. The novelist’s earliest readers questioned the shift in focus from John to his daughter, and the matter of the novel’s resolution continues to preoccupy critics. Some, like Pamela Corpron Parker and Chris Vanden Bossche, argue that Gaskell transfers agency to the reader and never intended to fully solve the problems that her novel engages with. In Mary and Jem’s emigration to Canada, Gaskell removes her characters from the crowded city, as they choose a life of small-scale

farming over the commodity culture of industrialization. She perhaps raises more questions, particularly about colonial expansion and the threat that settling new places poses to the wilderness, while undermining her faith that the city may be recuperated. Nevertheless, the novel's conclusion gestures towards a broader solution – a cultural transformation rather than Mary's personal resolution – achieved through eco-consciousness.

ii. The Carceral City

It is curious to observe from the earlier hour of a Sunday morning, in fine weather, what groups are pouring into the country. There are mechanics who, in their shops and factories, - while they have been caged up by their imperious necessities during the week, and have only obtained thence sights of the clear blue sky above, of the green fields laughing far away, or have only caught the wafting of a refreshing gale on their fevered cheek as they hurried homeward to a hasty meal, or back again to the incarceration of Mammon, - have had their souls inflamed with desires for breaking away into the free country.

William Howitt, *The Rural Life of England* (1858)

In *The Rural Life of England*, William Howitt describes the droves of workers who congregate in the country on Sundays, their one day off; he warns, “There is not a horse or gig to be had for love or money at any of the livery-stables on a Sunday” (562). The country offers freedom for the city's “fevered” workers, “incarcerated” by Mammon, the god of greed, embodying capitalism and its wealth economy. Howitt depicts the city as a prison making its residents ill. The “refreshing” wind and “clear blue sky” provide the cure for dis-ease. Dickens, too, describes a carceral city, suggesting Victorians have imprisoned themselves within their pollution. Robert L. Patten asserts, “For Dickens, human engagement with Nature is likely to be problematic. From *Dombey and Son* (1846-8) on, Nature tends to be so defiled that it can scarcely serve as a tutelary deity. As Monroe Engel observes: ‘The world [...] is a hell in which Nature has been corrupted, and un-Nature has become the rule’” (154). Coketown is precisely such a hell. The engagement in question is anthropogenic pollution; however, as this chapter

demonstrates, the dichotomy between Nature and Culture is problematic, indicative of dis-engagement. Imagining ourselves as outside of Nature displaces the reality of pollution's material impact. Gaskell focuses primarily on dis-ease as a working-class problem, while Dickens showcases urban dis-ease across class lines in *Hard Times* (1854).

As is frequently argued in literary criticism, Louisa and Tom have been warped by their father's austere beliefs, their humanity squeezed out by a suffocating utilitarianism. Their name, "Gradgrind," points to the novel's emphasis on machinery and monotony. This, of course, relates to the industrial town they inhabit. Here we see that a superior attitude towards the environment causes ill-being or dis-ease as much as literal pollution causes physical sickness. This mechanical lifestyle affects the Gradgrinds, Bounderby, and the working class represented by Stephen and Rachael. The novel's full title, *Hard Times, for These Times*, indicates Dickens's concern with the present moment, and the dedication to Thomas Carlyle evokes the "Signs of the Times" (1829), where Carlyle indicates that the mechanization of society harms culture and England's moral character: "Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word" (6). Machines in every industry replace every living hand in order to increase efficiency and convenience. Everything is performed by machinery, including religion and education, so that even thoughts and feelings are manufactured. Carlyle laments, "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand" (8). Machinery ostensibly transforms the earth so human beings can better achieve their ends, but, in truth, rapaciously consumes the earth as a resource: "We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines,

come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils” (6). Carlyle’s sarcasm transfuses *Hard Times* as both authors question this victory.

Dickens sets his novel in the fictitious Coketown, a generic Northern English mill-town, partially based upon nineteenth-century Preston and similar to Manchester. “Coke,” the byproduct of burning coal, identifies the town by its pollution. As Dickens calls attention to choking smoke, dye discoloring rivers, and the hazardous abandoned mining pits, which provide the nearest open space to the town, he brings together the major ecological problems of the period. The narrator contends, “All closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up” (227). He parallels the exploitation of the earth to the malaise of the industrial workers. Coketown residents are doubly imprisoned by a utilitarian regime and the architectural uniformity and closeness of the town – an impenetrable haze of soot and smoke. Lack of nourishment, fresh air, and clean water oppress the workers beyond their threshold to bear it, while industry similarly perverts the earth, transforming its nourishing qualities into destructive forces, such as smoke and toxic water. In “De Profundis,” Wilde laments utilitarianism that exploits the earth without recognizing the ways in which it fulfills the true needs of humanity. In the same spirit, Dickens documents how pollution perverts the environment, including the human and nonhuman.

The fifth chapter of Book I strikes “The Key-Note” of the novel. Dickens identifies the work’s main theme, the key on which it is based, with a description of Coketown, a polluted, mechanized environment:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the

painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which intermingable [sic] serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (28)

Place creates “hard times.” This particular story of melancholy madness can only happen in a polluted factory town.¹⁶⁵ Dickens sounds the primary notes of his story; if Coketown is the keynote, animal imagery and savagery accompany the tune of eco-conscious discourse. The city reads as a degraded version of a natural space – a corroded wilderness. “Smoke-serpents” trailing over the town, “mad elephants” monotonously taking “their heavy exercise,” the “forest of looms” in the factories: this rhetoric combines the mechanical and the organic to expose the corrupting power of machinery. Here again we see the influence of Carlyle. P.J. Keating argues, “For both Carlyle and Dickens the city is organic, a total world of contrasting yet interdependent parts. This much their interpretations share, but differ entirely in mood and tone. Carlyle’s city is symptomatic of a social malaise, a ‘wasp-nest or bee-hive’, in which all is confusion and turmoil, with human activity producing revolting compounds of ‘wax-laying and honey-making, and poison-brewing and choking by sulfur’” (15). Unlike Keating, I see Dickens’s tone as equally negative in *Hard Times*. Stephen’s “muddle” indicates the confusion and anxiety of the working class, who cannot make a home in the unnatural, polluted city. In this key-note, Dickens illustrates the connection between carceral/carcinogenic city and social malaise (dis-ease). The

¹⁶⁵ Tamara Ketabgian investigates positive responses to machinery in the Victorian period in *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture*. However, she describes the melancholy mad elephants as images of “deranged rage,” representing the potential for routine animal and mechanical actions to become out of control.

toxic urban center becomes a new kind of wilderness,¹⁶⁶ where the hazards are not wild beasts, but man-made machines. Dickens uses distorted natural metaphors to describe Coketown, primarily in the beginning of each chapter, and such grotesqueries serve to orient the reader.

Dickens frequently uses the phrase “melancholy mad” to express dissatisfaction – a mixture of sadness and madness, or malaise. Machinery produces regression rather than progress. This type of description recurs in *Bleak House* (1852-3), where the elements of the city produce a sense of backwardness, recalling a pre-historic time when humanity lived as beasts. In *Hard Times* Dickens describes the workers as “like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs” (68). Dickens relies on his readers’ knowledge of natural history to imagine shoreline specimens. Likened to curiosities, the workers are dehumanized by their environment. Dickens describes a “labyrinth of narrow courts” closing in “an unnatural family,” practically “trampling” each other as they rush about their business” (68). “Trampling” implicitly aligns the workers with the melancholy mad elephants stomping in the factories. Keating argues that Dickens is so concerned with conveying the “sense of oppression, helplessness, suffering or unhappiness” of the working classes, that these considerations override the realism of his novels (18). Also skeptical of its realism, Josephine M. Guy regards *Hard Times* as a fable due to its simple moral oppositions rather than historical or cultural specificity (119). However, as the subtitle indicates, Dickens consciously roots his story in a specific Victorian moment. Though framing his tale with the city/country and culture/nature antitheses, Dickens seeks to accurately recreate the “muddle” of the worker for the reader. Dickens never misses an opportunity “to address the reader on the state of the poor; no effete aristocrat or pompous merchant is presented

¹⁶⁶ As we say today, “a concrete jungle.”

without a lower-class comparison being implied” (Keating 18).¹⁶⁷ As Keating argues, conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption require the exploitation of the workers, causing their malaise. The narrative, with typical sarcasm, observes the constant threat of ruin to Coketown, primarily from inspectors who required schooling for all laboring children and “considered it doubtful whether they [the factory owners] were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery,” and “it was hinted perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke” (115). The factory owners resent interference that threatens their profits.

In addition to monotonous industrial work, the city’s claustrophobia worsens dis-ease: “Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in” (68). Fresh air cannot penetrate Coketown and closely built houses pave over all open space. Although the stark, tight architecture occupies the foreground, pollution frequently confronts the reader, particularly the “sickly air” (273) and the river, “black and thick with dye,” emanating “vile smells” (116). James Harthouse, on his first day in Coketown, exclaims, is it “*always* as black as this?” (124). Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby boast of the smoke, as it betokens profit. Bounderby proudly points out this achievement, calling smoke his “meat and drink [...]. It’s the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. If you are one of those who want us to consume it, I differ from you. We are not going to wear the bottoms of our boilers out any faster than we wear ‘em out now” (130). By “consume,” Bounderby refers to the Parliamentary legislation requiring factories to reduce their smoke output, obviously allying himself with John Thornton’s support for “unparliamentary smoke” in *North and South* (1854-5). Dickens intends to caricature Bounderby’s bombastic attitude, highlighting his mercenary motives: “meat and drink” may imply the literal connection between his factories’ output and his profit, as well as

¹⁶⁷ Thus, Bounderby’s blackest crime is pretending to come from humble beginnings, hypocritically profiting off a romanticized version of the lives of workers that he exploits.

Bounderby's impression that smoke sustains him physically. This ignorance about industrial pollution is not merely a mistaken impression on Bounderby's part, as I discuss in Chapter II. Many Victorians considered smoke healthy, particularly in regard to burning air-borne miasma, and did not generally fear the ubiquitous soot of cities. But despite casting off Harthouse's objections, Bounderby puts a railway journey between himself and the city when he moves to the country.

Bounderby's bombastic capitalism and Gradgrind's coolly rational utilitarianism are two sides to the same coin: these motives behind industrialism converge to render Coketown inhospitable. Dickens "strike[s] the key-note again, before pursuing the tune," in his chapter, "Never Wonder" (54). If the key-note is mechanization, the absence of wonder becomes synonymous with Coketown. This motto is voiced by Gradgrind, who uses "wonder" in place of imagination, prohibiting not just creativity but critical thinking and the imaginative sympathy required to ameliorate social ills; 'wonder' is a version of the 'taxonomic cure' proposed in *Mary Barton*. If by "wonder" naturalists designate close vision, a comprehensive awareness, to "never wonder" is to think solely in a prescribed, mathematical fashion. Following Carlyle, Dickens demonstrates the systemization of education: the Gradgrind children are tutored in formulaic thinking. This results in dis-ease as the inability to wonder prevents eco-consciousness (see Chapter 1).

Dickens contrasts the circus people with the manufactured Coketown people. Sissy Jupe, 'rescued' from the circus, struggles with this new regime. Mr. M'Choakumchild reprimands her for imaginative sympathy. He forbids her to wonder about other possibilities that bear on an equation of political economy. The circus folk possess "natural attitudes" (45), and never wondering is an unnatural attitude, in the sense of mechanized. Dickens describes a "sick",

“nervous”, “mad”, “listless” populace, finding escape in drink and drugs (29-30). The populace never laughs.¹⁶⁸ Called “hands,” the workers are not considered whole people, but rather pieces of equipment, cogs in the factory machine. The novel’s critical language devalues industrial influence as degrading. Reason alone makes a person only half functional. In his analysis of *Hard Times*, Patrick Brantlinger argues that Dickens wishes to “refute the hide-bound ‘laws’ of political economy and to reverse the dehumanizing patterns of modern commerce, industrialism, and urban conditions” (*The Spirit of Reform* 220). He reads the novel as Dickens’s “epistemological defense of the romantic imagination against the encroachments of science and industrial materialism” (217). The circus represents “an idealized or romanticized vision of human possibility” (217) and, Brantlinger argues, Dickens’s indictment of industrialism amounts to the belief that workers are entitled to less work and “more play” (217). Brantlinger’s description of the Sleary’s operation as “idealized” and “romanticized” doubts its adequacy as a response to laissez-faire capitalism. However, for Dickens, “industrialism” combines the single-minded pursuit of profit with a dry utilitarianism. Readers must not reduce “wonder,” or imagination, into the desire for amusement. My reading recasts Dickens’s denunciation of industrialism – the single-minded pursuit of profit combined with a dry utilitarianism – into environmental terms. Just as workers are exploited for their use-value, so is the environment. Wonder counteracts these dispassionate formulas.

Raymond Williams also considers the novel’s central antitheses (industrialism vs. human nature, for one), concluding that *Hard Times* “is more a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it” (*Culture & Society* 96-97). The malaise, or muddle, at the novel’s center finds its representative in Stephen Blackpool, the luckless factory worker. Dickens introduces Blackpool after discussing Coketown’s austere atmosphere. Living in “the

¹⁶⁸ Keating discusses this point in detail. The fact that there is absolutely no laughter or joy heightens the tragedy (9).

hardest working part of Coketown,” he resembles the “stunted and crooked” dwellings, prematurely aged by hard work and an unhealthy environment (68). Blackpool, whose name resonates with toxicity foreshadowing his fatal fall into polluted water, becomes the face for the dis-eased residents of Coketown. Blackpool’s personal key-note is “muddle,” his word for a confused, beaten down state of mind, synonymous with malaise. He tells Bounderby,

we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town – so rich as ‘tis – and see the numbers o’ people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an to card, and to piece out a livin’ [...]. Look how we live, an wheer we live, and in what numbers, an by what chances, an wi’ what samness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis’ant object – ceptin awlus, Death. (153)

Blackpool’s muddle resembles Barton’s frustration when he moves to smaller and smaller lodgings while the masters relocate to larger and larger mansions. Blackpool questions how Coketown can be so rich without improving the material comfort of the laborers, who work continuously until death without improving their lot. Dickens does not give us the concrete detail we find in Gaskell’s *North and South*, where she points out that factory owners resisted the expense of installing ventilation in workrooms, ignoring that weaving and carding were lethal activities.¹⁶⁹

Despite their seeming insulation from the effects of industrialization, the upper classes are not immune to dis-ease. As Oscar Wilde puts it, Gradgrind’s daughter Louisa “exists,” but does not “live.”¹⁷⁰ In effect, she is as much of an automaton as the factory hands. As she stares into the fire in the schoolroom with Tom, her malaise reminds us of the workers similarly “lounging listlessly.” Her utilitarian education buries her natural sympathies. Her

¹⁶⁹ The three major tasks in the cotton mill were weaving, carding, and spinning, all of which created the type of textile miasma Bessy Higgins suffers from in *North and South*.

¹⁷⁰ “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.”

emotionlessness horrifies her, causing her to be jealous of Sissy. Her character has already been formed and she does not know how to change.¹⁷¹ Her selfless love for her brother Tom suggests a finer temperament, but unfortunately, he is an undeserving recipient, more severely warped by a repressive education that fosters ambition without morals. To improve his prospects, Louisa sacrifices herself to a loveless marriage, believing that Tom, the man, has a greater chance to escape their dreary situation. Harthouse, who Dickens pointedly calls a “devil,” tempts her into a forbidden passion. He is as undeserving of her affection as Tom, yet Harthouse’s crime is not awakening Louisa’s emotions, but rather his encouraging her to break her marriage vows. Exposing Louisa to life outside the Gradgrind regime would be an invaluable service if Louisa were free to act on impulse. As it is, she falls down the staircase imagined by Mrs. Sparsit, blaming her father for her fall into immorality:

How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here! (216)

This passage likens Louisa’s mental state to the environment in a manner similar to the way Blackpool takes on the appearance of Coketown tenements. Coketown’s pollution creates a “wilderness” with toxins personified as deadly creatures and Louisa cannot bloom in this environment. The “inappreciable things” Louisa misses are beauty, wonder, and compassion; the cleansing fire of Louisa’s schoolroom is usurped by blackening factory fire, and she charges her father with forgetting “that Water can cleanse, and Fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all” (Wilde “De Profundis” 1057), in other words for ignoring the gifts of nature apart from its

¹⁷¹ Haley explains the Victorian distinction between temperament, one’s natural personality, and character, the aspect of our being molded by environment and society.

use-value. She avoids ruin, but the experience exposes the failings of Gradgrind's system and exacerbates her dis-ease, incurable in Coketown.

Coketown casts its bleak shadow on its immediate surrounding areas, heaping "ashes not only on its own head but on the neighbourhood's too" (265). The outlands within walking distance provide a contrast to the semi-idyllic site of Bounderby's country seat, in the "country" proper, which is inaccessible to the workers. Even in the country Dickens reminds us of the proximity of the railway, the "machine in the garden" that eliminates any truly pristine space.¹⁷² However, the setting depicts the actual, complex environment. Mrs. Sparsit's memorable experience in the garden eavesdropping on Louisa and James de-idealizes the country, emphasizing her discomfort in the poor weather and the bugs and sap that adhere to her clothes. Clearly, the country is a preferable environment to Coketown, but Dickens does not whitewash its nuisances. Walking through the fields away from Coketown, Blackpool thinks, "So strange to turn from the chimneys to the birds. So strange to have the road-dust on his feet instead of coal-grit" (167). This relatively green landscape, despite being compromised by the cotton industry and old mining works, marks quite a change from Coketown and feels foreign to Blackpool. Just as the Wilsons and Bartons seek out green space, Coketown's residents periodically escape the city: "it was customary for those who now and then thirsted for a draught of pure air [...] to get a few miles away by the railroad, and then begin their walk, or their lounge in the fields" (265). Not only is the railway journey prohibitively expensive, but as already noted, the working classes hardly have the time to seek it. Yet to adequately escape Coketown's pollution, one must travel well into the country by railways that in turn transform the landscape. Blackpool passes

¹⁷² The phrase "the machine in the garden" comes from Leo Marx's book of that name. Marx identifies the tension between the pastoral ideal and the rapid transformations wrought by machine technology that emerges as a major theme in nineteenth-century American literature. This tension is expressed "everywhere" in literature by the recurring image of the machine in the garden--that is, the sudden and shocking intrusion of technology into a pastoral scene.

“by the railway [...] where the besmoked evergreens were sprinkled with a dirty powder, like untidy snuff-takers; by coal-dust paths and many varieties of ugliness” (167). The soot from passing trains blankets the landscape that “was blotted here and there with heaps of coal” (266). The land continues to recover from the devastation caused by coal mining, the remnants of which litter the fields: silent, abandoned engines; faint tracks of cart-horses; rotten fences. A victim of consumption, this space is “used-up” space; the miners have departed for greener pastures, literally, moving to as yet more bountiful locations. The deserted works remain extremely hazardous. Overgrowth obscures the openings to the abandoned pits, and Blackpool gets swallowed up in the muddle, falling into the “Old Hell Shaft.”

Despite his refusal to participate in the strike, Blackpool becomes a scapegoat for union activity. Employers, perceiving Blackpool as incendiary, refuse to give him work and he must relocate. His reputation is further blackened when, in his absence, he is blamed for Tom’s crime of robbing Bounderby’s bank. It is on Blackpool’s return to Coketown that he falls into the pit, effectively proving Dickens’s dictum in Chapter 11 that there is “no way out.” His demise creates an intersection between the novel’s two main concerns: the exploitation and callous treatment of the workers, which causes Blackpool to leave his home, and environments pitted by reckless industry. The specter of the mining industries recalls the hundreds of lives lost to satisfy lust for profit, and the desperate plea to lawmakers to increase wages and improve the safety standards in pits, where fire-damp is “crueller than battle” (272). More specifically, Blackpool calls attention to the coal that fuels Victorian industry as a whole. This is “Coke”-town, and coal is the resource that makes large-scale machinery possible. Industrial capitalists treat fields and workers similarly, happily using them up for the “greater good.” In business terms, the land’s only value is its coal-yield, just as the workers only value is as “hands.” the workers’ only value

is as “hands.” In Coketown, industrialists do not consider their impact on the environment, which is merely a resource to be used, displaying the same superior attitude implied by the pock-marked fields. The quality of air, a basic need, does not factor into utilitarian equations because it does not have a direct use. In other words, air does not fuel machinery. This attitude reveals a disconnection between industry, which defines wealth by ‘money’ not ‘health,’ and lived experience where residents choke on man-made pollution. So while Dickens does not directly comment on Blackpool’s situation, he evokes a long-standing tradition of mastery over the environment and inhumane working conditions. The novel’s denouement connects Coketown with larger social problems. The plot combines the failure of crushing utilitarianism and Mammon worship with environmental abuse, linking moral with material ills.

Gradgrind’s realizations come too late to restore a happy family life, and Blackpool’s death will not change the Coketown regime. Reviewers perceived the novel as unsuccessful because Dickens fails to offer concrete cures for the ills he portrays.¹⁷³ However, the novel’s structure prescribes relief through eco-consciousness. The division into three books, “Sowing,” “Reaping,” and “Garnering,” indicates the perseverance of natural laws. Time, “The Great Manufacturer,” “went on in Coketown like its own machinery [...]. But less inexorable than iron, steel, and brass, it brought its varying seasons even into that wilderness of smoke and brick, and made the only stand that ever was made in the place against its direful uniformity” (93-94). Expressing a muted hopefulness, this passage goes farther than the cliché, ‘time heals all wounds.’ Environmental processes make a stand against toxicity, and if only human beings were to tap into this sensibility, or ally themselves with an ecological viewpoint, the environment could be recuperated. Dis-ease, the consciousness of the division between our bodies and the

¹⁷³ In 1857, *Our Miscellany* “refinished” the end of *Hard Times* from Blackpool’s rescue according to the principles of “poetical justice.” Stephen survives to marry Rachel, Sissy marries a reformed Tom, and Bounderby is chased by a mob into his factory and violently killed by his machinery.

environment, can only be cured by placing humanity back into the entangled bank of ecology, the road to well-being. Dickens condemns interfering with natural processes while advocating environmental engagement and sustainable living. Though Dickens cannot arrive at a fully-realized solution to the ills he identifies, attesting to the complexity of real life, the novel calls attention to the nature of the problem itself.

Echoing Blackpool's "muddle," the refrain of George Gissing's novel, *The Nether World* (1889), "things were wrong somehow" (54), points to the cultural malaise chronicled in the earlier fiction of Dickens and Gaskell. Keating identifies the main element of Gissing's working-class fiction as the depiction of the slum as an inescapable trap; for Keating, this indicates the inability of the working-class to rise above their station. This metaphor also relates to the atmosphere of imprisonment created by the city's architecture, a sensibility inherited from Dickens. Within the carceral city, Gissing precisely plots characters' claustrophobic movements – the novel takes place in the few miles of Clerkenwell Green – which as Stephen Gill observes, "emphasizes the fact that they are bounded by bricks and cobble-stones" (xiii). Gissing's characters are imprisoned by the cityscape. Lawrence Buell identifies the Marshalsea as the defining institution of Dickens's London: "houses, neighborhoods, factories, and landscapes of diverse sorts become scenes of confinement" (132). In *The Nether World*, Middlesex House of Detention casts a similarly long shadow. London's intolerable weather imprisons its denizens in its choking "yellow" fog which causes asthmatic breathing (240), "sooty moisture" and "squalor" emerging from "chimneys innumerable" (59, 65, 280). Sunshine rarely penetrates the gloom and rain only dirties the city further: "with it descended the smut and grime that darkened above the houses; the pavement was speedily over-smear'd with sticky mud, and passing

vehicles flung splashes in every direction. Odours of oil and shoddy,¹⁷⁴ and all such things as characterised the town, grew more pungent under the heavy shower” (203). These details inform us of the typical smoke and ash as well as other chemical agents like oil, which mix with dung, excrement and litter. The chemical cocktail causes “social disease,” Gissing’s term for “natures frustrated by circumstances” (94).

By moving beyond the factory system, this fin de siècle novel shows how completely industrialism transformed society. Gissing writes about the larger body of urban workers (as opposed to industrial workers), calling Londoners “silent victims of industrialism” (54). He features “[w]orkers in metal, workers in glass and in enamel, workers in woods, workers in every substance on earth, or from the waters under the earth, that can be made commercially valuable” (11). This description strikingly identifies every worker by a type of environmental resource; Gissing enumerates the Victorian exploitative attitude towards the earth. He continues,

The inscriptions on the house-fronts would make you believe that you were in a region of gold and silver and precious stones. In the recesses of dim byways, where sunshine and free air are forgotten things, where families herd together in dear-rented garrets and cellars, craftsmen are for ever handling jewellery, shaping bright ornaments for the necks and arms of such as are born to the joy of life. (11)

Environmental exploitation is tied to exploitation of laborers. The novel’s ‘hero’ Sidney Kirkwood works as a jeweller, a profession he does not particularly care for, but it provides him with the means to live in relative comfort and aid other families, such as the Hewetts, semi-skilled workers: John, the father, performs odd carpentry before turning to anything that pays, like window cleaning; his son, Bob, casts molds; Clara works at stamping. Other notable

¹⁷⁴ A type of inferior cloth from repurposed wool, so Gissing may have meant shredded fabric filling the air like the cotton fibers in factories or, more likely, the smell from unwashed clothing.

characters, Clem Peckover and Jane Snowdon, make artificial flowers. We see a diverse array of occupations amidst uniform poverty.

Kirkwood, like a naturalist, experiences a “sad clearness of vision” (58), sad because he cannot accept social problems. We see the city through his eyes. Gissing pays great attention to the effect of places on people, describing a “struggle for existence” that causes the malaise symptomatic of dis-ease (374). Continuing the trope of the prison-like city, Gissing describes John Hewett’s face as “like that of some prisoner, whom the long torture of a foul dungeon has brought to the point of madness” (190). Again he points to imprisonment as the cause of ill-being. He continually refers to Hewett’s weariness and anxiety: “He was the embodiment of worry” (21). Gissing differentiates between physical ill-health, doubtless “the result of semi-starvation” (56), and “social disease” (94). All the characters’ health is compromised, but even those comparatively strong face mental burdens. In this way malaise becomes a social problem because one cause of depression in these novels is living in an unhealthy environment produced by an industrial way of life. Gissing does not depict malaise as an individual problem relating to loss of work or drinking or family discord; rather, his novel and its method of bringing together diverse lives in its pages reveals malaise as a wide and pervasive problem, a “social disease.” In accord with the other authors in this chapter Gissing attributes dis-ease to lack of meaningful occupation. Urbanites suffer from hard work, useless work, and no work. Like his literary brother John Barton, John Hewett’s “enforced idleness” threatens to drive him out of his wits (367).

Kirkwood’s eco-consciousness preserves his sanity. As a child, he aspired to be an artist, inspired by natural scenes, paintings of which adorn his walls. Seeking gainful employment he becomes a jeweller, what he calls “meaningless work” (57), the cause of “mental misery” (329).

Voicing the same reasons Hardy's Clym Yeobright, a successful diamond merchant, gives in *The Return of the Native* (1878) when leaving the business, Kirkwood feels jewelry-making panders to the artificial wants of the elite. He recognizes that he produces commodities for the leisured classes, and although this makes him uncomfortable, he persists in the occupation. As a bachelor, he can afford a home in a comparatively healthy district in a planned housing development. The "cleaner" end of Tysoe Street

leads into Wilmington Square, which consists of decently depressing houses, occupied in the main [...] by watchmakers, working jewellers, and craftsmen of allied pursuits. The open space, grateful in this neighborhood, is laid out as a garden, with trees, beds, and walks. Near the iron gate, which, for certain hours in the day, gives admission, is a painted notice informing the public that, by the grace of the Marquis of Northhampton, they may here take their ease on condition of good behavior; to children is addressed a distinct warning that 'This is not a playing ground.' (50)

Northhampton, a substantial landowner in Clerkenwell, owned 600 or so working-class houses. His position as gatekeeper to the park reminds one of the *Punch* illustration of 'St. James's' policing his territory from 'St. Giles's' the slum dweller (see Fig. 3).¹⁷⁵ The "grateful" open

¹⁷⁵ In *Punch*, John Leech depicts "St. James Turning St. Giles Out of His Parks," a representation of the limited open space in London, owned by the wealthy and available only to tourists and privileged classes. St. James and St. Giles were two regions of London; the former, a fashionable neighborhood, and the latter, a slum. William Hogarth set several of his famous drawings in St. Giles, including "Four Times of Day," "Gin Lane," and "The first stage of cruelty." An upset St. Giles, here a young street urchin covered in grime, looks up at St. James, who, with upturned nose, refuses to make eye contact. The boy holds a hoop that indicates his innocent intention. His rags contrast sharply with the guard's sumptuous dress. The tree branches rising over the fence symbolize the promise of fresh air beyond the wall. Dedicating the image to the Commissioner of Works and Parks, the artist condemns the selfish and inhumane denial of admittance.

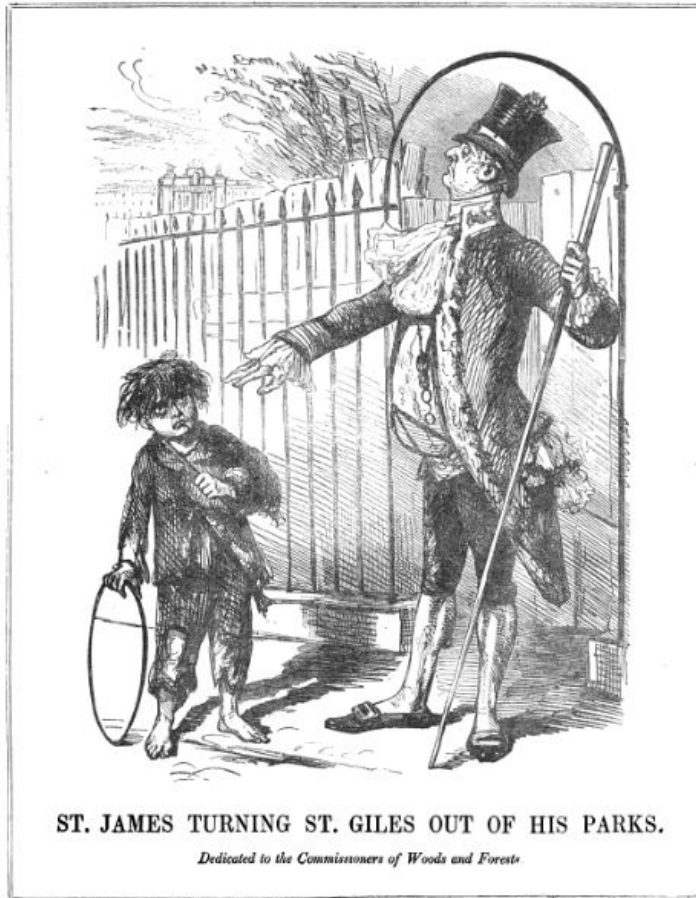


Figure 3 *Punch* volume xix, 1850, p. 167.

space is only conditionally available to the renters, contingent on good behavior. This language implies that the residents are out on parole, being granted temporary reprieve from their carceral houses. The privilege to moderately exercise and observe the garden's beauty comes with the proviso, "This is not a playing ground," barring amusement from the area, and so children must continue to play in the streets and gutters. The adjective "depressing" links the passage to Gissing's more direct critiques of planned housing. Kirwood's situation is unquestionably preferable to "Shooter's Gardens," the other development given sustained attention. However, Gissing seems to object to the uniformity and 'gentrification,' to use an anachronistic term, of

the area. As we will see, he refuses to give the city redeeming qualities and urban housing, cut off from open space, is “depressing” by definition.

Gissing understands “natures frustrated by circumstances” as “social disease” (94). These circumstances most certainly include poverty, but also environmental factors like filth, and limited open space, causing incredible overcrowding and a shortage of air. Urban life often results in the rootlessness of the workers. Gissing identifies the problems with renting: urbanites pay a disproportionate amount of their income for their shelter and do not authentically “dwell” in their residence without the satisfaction and security of ownership. The Candy family rents a room in Shooter’s Gardens,

a picturesque locality which demolition and rebuilding have of late transformed. It was a winding alley, with paving raised a foot above the level of the street whence was its main approach. To enter from the obscurer end, you descended a flight of steps under a low archway, in a court itself not easily discovered. From without, only a glimpse of the Gardens was obtainable; the houses curved out of sight after the first few yards [...]. A stranger bold enough to explore would have discovered that the Gardens had a blind offshoot, known simply as ‘The Court.’ Needless to burden description with further detail; the slum was like any other slum; filth, rottenness, evil odours, possessed these dens of superfluous mankind and made them gruesome to the peering imagination. (74)

The misnomer “Gardens” points to the tragic farce of city living; the yard does not even remotely resemble a garden, just as the artificial flowers made by Clem and Jane inadequately imitate the real thing. The description evokes the same claustrophobia as Coketown; the residents are imprisoned by stone. The Gardens are so smoky that “at present the blind man would have fared as well in that retreat as he who had eyes, and the marvel was how those who lived there escaped

suffocation. In the Gardens themselves volumes of dense smoke every now and then came driven along by the cold gusts; the air had a stifling smell and a bitter taste” (344).

Gissing explicitly connects the unhealthy body to the unhealthy mind when Sidney visits Clara’s apartment: “there was no breath of air stirring, and from the open windows radiated stuffy odours. A quarter of an hour sufficed to exasperate [Kirkwood] with anxiety and physical malaise” (92). Here, Gissing uses “anxiety” to indicate the psychological precursor to what I term “dis-ease” – psychosomatic illness. “Anxiety” comes first; these dark, carceral environments depress the human spirit. The fear of contagion and suffocation result in dis-ease even when the body resists injury. Clara is often described as “nervous” or as suffering from “nervous disease.” Athena Vrettos investigates the “competing cultural ‘meanings’ of nervous sensitivity” (12). She explains that nervousness “was used to describe emotional exhaustion as well as unexplained physical pain and to define evolutionary progress as well as the debilitating effects of modern civilization” (12).¹⁷⁶ In *The Nether World*, Gissing evokes the latter meaning, and even the sense of social struggle accompanying evolution.

These “debilitating effects” are seen in the difficulty in finding adequate urban housing and earning enough wages. The house where Mrs. Candy lives contains “in all seven rooms, and each room was the home of a family; under the roof slept twenty-five persons, men, women, and children; the lowest rent paid by one of these domestic groups was four-and-sixpence” (249). This is quite expensive in proportion to workers’ incomes; in the overcrowded city, high demand

¹⁷⁶ As Vrettos also points out, “nervousness” was typically associated with hysteria and thus with women. William Greenslade, writing about the “disease of civilization” in Gissing’s *The Whirlpool* (1897), contends that the Victorians believed that “nervousness” is nature’s means of punishing women for shirking their duties. As women’s primary ‘natural’ function is to reproduce, to be the progenitors of the race, any added mental strain – the pursuit of intellectual pursuits or independence – simply overtaxes their body, resulting in neurasthenia or hysteria. Similarly, women who do not reproduce at all or are ‘bad’ mothers suffer penalties for rejecting their evolutionary function. Thus, according to Greenslade’s arguments, Clara’s nervousness penalizes her for seeking a career. Even when she finally gives birth, Sidney is the child’s primary caretaker while Clara continues to suffer from headaches and depression.

kept rents high. These workers often rented rooms on a weekly or even daily basis. This continual moving obviously makes it impossible to create a “home.” The Hewetts continue to move into smaller and smaller lodgings, before occupying a single room in a cellar. Their “nomadic” existence results from “the restlessness of domestic ill-being [which] subsequently drove them from place to place” (130, 131). “Domestic ill being” (dis-ease) relates to the discomfort of overcrowded, slovenly homes, but also to the causes Gissing has been exploring in the novel as a whole: high rent, little space, and pollution. He laments, “The inconvenience of having no foothold on the earth’s surface is so manifest” (341). His diagnosis recalls the concept of “dwelling,” creating a home through a reciprocal relationship to the environment. Unlike Gaskell, who sees the city as redeemable, Gissing questions whether *any* urban housing can be healthy and expresses anxiety over its cancerous growth:

Look at a map of greater London, a map on which the town proper shows as a dark, irregularly rounded patch against the whiteness of suburban districts, and just on the northern limit of the vast network of streets you will distinguish the name of Crouch End. Another decade, and the dark patch will have spread greatly further; for the present, Crouch End is still able to remind one that it was in the country a very short time ago. (364)

The shades of light and dark signify the toxicity he sees in the town, which is alleviated the further one goes from the center. While even now one may discern the presence of the country in suburban neighborhoods, in a short time the town will consume these areas.

Providing a contrast to these hostile places, the Snowdons reside in the upper story of a house and can afford touches like good furniture and fresh flowers that perfume the peaceful

atmosphere (101). Visiting their lodgings soothes Sidney's mind. He later accompanies them on a holiday to rural Essex,

merely one of those quiet corners of flat, homely England, where man and beast seem on good terms with each other, where all green things grow in abundance, where from of old tilth and pasture-land are humbly observant of seasons and alternations, where the brown roads are familiar only with the tread of the labourer, with the light wheel of the farmer's gig, or the rumbling of the solid wain [...]. [A]t times there is a pleasant glimpse of farm-yard, with stacks and barns and stables. All things are simple as could be, but beautiful on this summer afternoon, and priceless when one has come forth from the streets of Clerkenwell. (165)

As William Howitt and Octavia Hill confirm, the country provides much needed relief to urbanites. Gissing enlists pastoral support to help the reader understand the problems of the city. That man and beast are on good terms with each other is a significant observation; in contrast to the city, where people are in fact isolated from other people, despite living practically on top of each other, this description of Essex shows the relationships with the environment that are able to be cultivated in the country where access to land is available. The well-worn paths on the road suggest constant work, as well as the pastureland and farm buildings that indicate direct activity with the land. Natural law takes precedent as seasonal cycles assert themselves, indicating the necessity for the farmer to be aware of ecological processes. Gissing cannot put a price on this kind of serenity. Here, "green abundance" represents wealth. Nevertheless, as we see in Kingsley's fiction, this "retreat" is not immune to labor problems, as the Farmer inveighs against landlords and land-laws: "Here, as elsewhere, the evil of the times was pressing upon men and disheartening them from labour" (165). This "evil" is rent, paying exorbitantly for the privilege

of shelter, coded as an urban problem since Gissing condemns the plight of the worker who must apply all his wages for the “permission” of shelter (182). The city/country antithesis functions to contrast wealth and welfare, and Gissing worries that urban values will ultimately incarcerate the only remaining places with the requisites of health that can alleviate social disease.

iii. The Cancerous City

A pure atmosphere and a pastoral environment are a very appreciable portion of the sustenance which tends to produce *the sound mind and body*, and thus much sustenance is, at least, the labourer's birthright. Thomas Hardy, “The Dorsetshire Labourer” (1883) (my emphasis)

Gissing moves between the city and the country to show that social problems are not isolated to urban environments; the carceral city threatens to become the cancerous city, extending the reach of consumer culture ever outward. For instance, the population of London doubled between 1801 and 1841, and nearly tripled by 1861. “Cancer,” indicating unchecked growth, became the favorite word to describe cities in the late nineteenth century (Briggs 81). Buell observes, “the sense of country life as no less grimly determined than city life becomes more pervasive and insistent as the combination of Darwinian thinking, urban migration, and the shrinkage of domestic agriculture as a component of national economies takes hold in the later nineteenth century” (147). Like Gissing, Thomas Hardy consciously translates Darwin’s “struggle for existence” (this ‘grim determinism’) into his novels. In “The Dorsetshire Labourer” (1883), published in *Longman’s Magazine*, Hardy insists that human beings require a “pure atmosphere” for health (54), articulating the Victorian philosophy of health as a sound mind relies on a body made sound by “a pastoral environment” (54). W.J. Keith notes that “Hardy has often been criticized [...] for his unskillful juxtapositions of documentary reporting and artificial melodrama,” but scholars are beginning to realize these “awkward shifts of tone [...] both reflect and reproduce the jagged patterns of modern experience” (145). In all of

Hardy's varied landscapes, the reader "encounter[s] a distinct sense of unease" (Keith 145). A "pastoral environment" promises health, but the threat to these areas described in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" produces a version of dis-ease. That changes in agriculture and rural society alienate humanity from "a sense of an objective reality of nature" is their "tragedy," and as Louisa James argues, the source of Hardy's pessimism (163). While the above novels depict dis-ease through disconnection with the land, Hardy explores the issue in a wholly rural context, revealing ambivalence about modernity and its ramifications for the environment.

Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) does not provide an optimistic narrative of human progress, showing how the extinction of landed nobility paves the way for capitalist businessmen to make factories out of farms. The Durbeyfields, workers for hire, till the land their ancestors owned, succumbing to an increasingly nomadic existence. Certainly not all modern innovation is negative: feudal England was never idyllic, and Hardy candidly critiques "nobility" and the accompanying system of labor. Even so, he exhibits nostalgia for an agrarian past, evaluating the price of modernity. Hardy continually emphasizes Tess's link to the land, here more properly Nature, which makes her vulnerable to exploitation. "Nature" variously resonates with the ideal of a nurturing earth, Mother Earth, fertility, wilderness, and capriciousness, all qualities associated with women. Annette Kolodny, discussing American history and literature, contends that historically conceptions of landscape are feminine: the earth may be seen as a nurturing mother offering her bounty or as a virgin to be conquered and mastered, *made* to be bountiful. Hardy's English novel corresponds to Kolodny's paradigm. Dividing the novel into phases of Tess's maturation, Hardy points to Tess's relationship to natural cycles: it is her association with Nature, her rosy beauty and sexual desirability, that marks her as prey to rapacious desires. Tess's affinity with nature shapes her character in

positive ways, cultivating sympathy, awareness, and nurturing, but like ‘virgin land’ she is ripe to be conquered; male exploitation of Tess is justified by the same attitude of mastery exhibited by factory owners, millers, shopkeepers, and industrial farmers who view the earth as a supplier of resources.¹⁷⁷ Penny Boumelha places Tess, as an agricultural worker, “at the point of conjuncture of economic and sexual exploitation” (39). She is raped by Alec as Wessex is raped by industrialists.¹⁷⁸ Tess falls victim to consumer culture, both as Alec claims her virginity and as rural Wessex becomes increasingly modern.¹⁷⁹ The toxicity of the city compromises and invades the country. Through natural realism, Hardy links the degradation of the land by an increasingly technological (and masculine) market economy with the constricting gender roles of Victorian England.

Hardy equates woman with the land. Tess is “part of the landscape; a field-woman pure and simple” (280). Described as a “natural woman,” her “luxuriance of aspect,” “fullness of growth,” and “holmberry lips” immediately attract men. Her berry lips, rosy cheeks and voluptuous breasts bespeak both virginity and fertility. These natural charms are Tess’s undoing when she is “marked and coveted by the wrong man” (43). Alec regards Tess as another object to consume, treating her like a flower, a pretty thing to be plucked. Tess, with “her large eyes staring at him like those of a wild animal,” remains ignorant of Alec’s motives until it is too late

¹⁷⁷ As George Eliot does in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Thomas Hardy problematizes the concept of Nature as opposed to nature: society’s association of the land with the feminine results in Tess’s vulnerability. See Chapter 5.

¹⁷⁸ In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant argues “Both the woman’s movement and the ecology movement are sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and dominations arising from the market economy’s *modus operandi* in nature and society” (xvi). Ecofeminism investigates the connections between the treatment of women and the treatment of the nonhuman environment, particularly the logic of domination that justifies exploitation of both. Western culture’s oppression of the environment can be traced back to the construction of the dominant human male as a rational self, and the construction of the antithesis between “reason” and “nature” and all that is associated with nature, including women, the body and emotions. Feminists have argued that women’s oppression in Western culture is characterized by their association with emotion, the body, and reproduction. Ecofeminists link this logic of domination to the ecological devastation of the earth. The dominant metaphor of land as woman affects the actual behavior of its inhabitants.

¹⁷⁹ Wessex interconnects most of Hardy’s fiction as the place held in common. Simon Gatrell explains that since Hardy “unearthed” the word, ‘Wessex’ has come to mean the whole culture found in Hardy’s fiction: traditional, unmodernized, rural, and pre-industrial (19).

(55). Highlighting her affinity to virgin land, Alec rapes Tess in a moonlit bower, taking her on a bed of leaves. Unlike Romantic nature, realist nature remains indifferent to human activity. Hardy makes a distinction between the world as “psychological phenomenon” (Nature), and realist nature. He further suggests this horrific act is nothing out of the ordinary; man’s exploitation of woman is as old as the primæval yews and oaks nearly extinct from men’s rapaciousness.

In the novel, Alec drugs Tess, but in the alternative version, published as a short story in the *Graphic* in 1891, ‘Tess’ succumbs to her “masterful” employer in a scene left unwritten, allowing the reader to assume she was partly complicit in their intercourse. To enjoy sex is a natural instinct which becomes socially criminal if it occurs outside marriage. Hardy admires the freedom of the country women, if not their jealousy and violence. Tess resists Alec because of her sense of virtue and because she “does not love him,” fundamentally different from “he is not my husband.” Tess’s mother assumes she will sleep with Alec, unabashed by carnal desire, as long as Alec fulfills his social obligation to marry Tess. Her daughter’s fall disappoints her, but she accepts the situation more easily than Tess, who cannot shake her sense of shame. Perhaps, too, Tess can sense Alec’s treatment of her as just another body to be consumed. Alec strips emotion from the act, and in a sense, even sex becomes a commodity when reduced to the routine satisfaction of an urge. Though sexual desire is “natural,” Alec approaches the act mechanically, while Tess experiences intercourse differently because she requires feeling. The rape detaches Tess from her own body and instigates her growing malaise.¹⁸⁰ Tess becomes depressed even though her ability to work and participate in rural society remains unaffected by her pre-marital affair, even when she gives birth. Her shame is “based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in

¹⁸⁰ The name Tess chooses for her child bespeaks her mental state: Sorrow.

Nature” (279). Morality is relative: every village has its own code, and the country women are proud of their sexuality, forming an organism with “surrounding nature” of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously come together with each other (65). In other words, their sexual freedom ties them to the environment. As Tess does not experience sex in this organic way, she suffers from feelings of alienation.

Angel also objectifies Tess, calling her “a genuine daughter of Nature,” “the visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly” (130). These nicknames are only “half teasing” because he appraises her “naturalness” in terms of her value; her rustic knowledge makes her the ideal candidate for a farmer’s wife. Tess believes Angel loves her “untraditional newness” (128), but he really loves her heathenness reminiscent of an earlier time: “Her unsophisticated open-air existence required no varnish of conventionality to make it palatable to him” (165). He values Tess’s *lack* of newness, of artificiality, but he assumes Tess is uncultured, virgin land he can cultivate. When he finds out she has been already sown by another, this perceived impurity shatters his illusions of her character and he leaves her. Angel has fallen in love with a concept, with Nature, not the real Tess.

Through the sacrificial figure of Tess who succumbs to dis-ease, Hardy relates injustices placed upon women with the migratory field workers. Tess – the pagan, the fallen woman – cannot fit the feminine ideal, at the same time as she is allied with a vanishing Nature. The “ache of modernism” is another version of dis-ease (124).¹⁸¹ Nature vanishes in the face of industrialism. Linda M. Shires aligns Hardy with Carlyle and Ruskin, who, years before Marx

¹⁸¹ Hardy’s novel points forward to the concerns of “High Modernism.” While the Victorians expressed optimism about change, eager for progress, the Modernists felt anxiety over change beyond their control. Both Linda M. Shires and David de Laura hone in on this phrase in the novel. Hardy, without consciously following Marx, describes the effects of capital and consumer culture on social relations.

“produced his theories about the ill-effects of capital,” both “perceived that they were part of a new historical situation which was altering the relations of society. Mechanization, especially, was changing the relationship of the laborer to her work, and was producing an effect of alienation, a divorce of experience and value” (160). The “divorce” Shires describes is a kind of commodification, a distance from lived experience with the earth, and thus similar to dis-ease. In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* we see the growing divide between agricultural peoples and the land they work. Native workers are displaced in favor of cheaper seasonal labor, rendered disposable as they become mere extensions of agricultural technology (such as the threshing machine). Hardy conveys this alienation, as Gaskell does in *Mary Barton*, through the relationship between country and city, but here in the reverse direction, particularly when Tess is working at a dairy which provides milk to urban areas.

The novel’s central conflict resides in the difference between Durbeyfield and D’Urberville, the Durbeyfs of the field, and the D’Urbervilles of the town. The mutation of the name reveals the family’s change in circumstances from landowners to land-tillers, and it is this attempt at reclaiming a defunct identity that triggers the Durbeyfields’ problems. The D’Urberville name is actually extinct, that of a feudal family which has long died out, and appropriated by the Stoke-D’Urbervilles, “new” wealth hoping to wash clean their laboring history. These names suggest three statuses: the aristocrat, merchant, and menial laborer, and Tess’s experiences on Alec’s estate further highlight the difference between recreational outdoor pursuits and living off the land.

We meet the Durbeyfields as the revelation of their ancestry causes their patriarch to assume the idleness of the aristocrat, leading to a failed trip by Tess into the city to deliver honey, and the death of their horse, a fatal blow to the family business. The Durbeyfields must

deliver their beehives to retailers in Casterbridge while there is still a market for them and they cannot afford to wait until the next year. Marlott, “an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape painter” (12), supplies the larger town with goods. Particularly avoiding a kind of painterly gaze that focuses on beauty, Hardy describes fertile terrain sown with corn and other crops. As yet “unenclosed,” here the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale (12), implying a comparison to the city and rural areas becoming increasingly industrialized. Hardy’s novel eulogizes this mixture of untouched and cultivated land, wary of a magnified scale (cancerous growth) threatening health and tradition. Marlott’s residents retain native knowledges of folktales, superstitions, and holistic medicine, indicating the region has yet to be subsumed into modern culture. However, the ‘ache’ in the novel’s heart emerges from threat of industrialization overtaking rural areas. Dis-ease appears as what Angel Clare calls “the ache of modernism,” an anxiety over the threat of technological and social progress to folk knowledge and traditions, and an ambivalence about new values that seem more conservative than the pagan values they replace. Tess fears “Life in general,” as opposed to “outdoor things,” rooting her malaise in social constructs rather than basic needs and natural processes (123). The environment poses no harm: social mandates on how to live do.

The Durbeyfields depend on their bees and their horse for their livelihood, while we see a different relationship to “outdoor things,” and the environment in general, in Trantridge where Tess travels to appeal to her “relatives” for help. The Slopes “was not a manorial home in the ordinary sense, with fields and pastures, and a grumbling farmer, out of which a living had to be dragged by the owner and his family by hook or by crook. It was [...] a country house, built for enjoyment pure and simple, with not an acre of troublesome land attached to it beyond what was

required for residential purposes” (38). The idiom “by hook or by crook,” signifying the toiling farmer’s perseverance, etymologically refers to farming (the billhook) and shepherding (the crook), occupations now obsolete on the estate. The house, with bricks blazing red with newness, seems out of place against the primeval forest adjoining the property. It has been purchased by business earnings, and the “fancy farm” and pretty vistas are merely for show. Like Bounderby, Simon Stoke makes his fortune as a merchant, then establishes a permanent home in the country, with no intention of earning a living off the land, or relying on the land for subsistence. Hardy observes, “Everything looked like money – like the last coin issued from the Mint” (38). This ‘bran-new’ home puts luxury on display, bespeaking the conspicuous consumption of the *nouveaux riches*. Despite their transplantation, wealth remains coded as urban. Essentially, money can buy the country: the Stoke-D’Urbervilles take over this plot of land as a status symbol. They transform the area into a pleasure garden, evidence of conspicuous leisure, diminishing the environment to another type of use-value calculated according to aesthetic or recreational value.

These newcomers usurp the land from those who can bring it to better account. Tess is hired to “look after a little poultry-farm which is [Mrs. D’Urberville’s] hobby” (45), housed in an old thatched cottage: “The rooms where dozens of infants had wailed at their nursing now resounded with the tapping of nascent chicks. Distracted hens in coops occupied spots where formerly stood chairs supporting sedate agriculturalists” (58). Mrs. D’Urberville’s hobby displaces the workers, and the animals on the property are pets. Tess, somewhat ridiculously, must handle and whistle for Mrs. D’Urberville’s pet birds that are clearly treated better than the hired help. Business classes displace agriculturists, signaling a shift in the relationship to the land, which lies at the core of dis-ease.

Angel observes, “it is surprising how many of the present tillers of the soil were once owners of it” (189). The class injustices characterizing the city transform the country as well, as the wealthy minority buys up the majority of the land. By the 1890s, the situation illustrated by the country Chartists in Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1851) worsens: landlords, who have no knowledge of how to till the land, compromise the landscape by neglecting some tracts of lands to concentrate on smaller areas using the newest technology, laying off a large portion of the workforce, turning out the unemployed and renting the cottages at exorbitant rates to farmers, who are not allowed to use the land for their basic needs. This results in an itinerant workforce, and makes farming similar to the factory: the worker creates cheap goods for a ‘master,’ serving a large market, in place of the agrarian model of subsistence farming. In “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy directly comments on urban versus rural life: “Drudgery in the slums and alleys of a city, too long pursued, and accompanied as it is too often by indifferent health, may induce a mood of despondency which is well-nigh permanent; but the same degree of drudgery in the fields results at worst in a mood of painless passivity” (54). Hardy calls attention to the architecture of city – urban housing and narrow streets – to argue that the drudgery of the city is fundamentally different from the drudgery of the fields, which at least allows the worker to experience fresh air. This ameliorates the worker’s ills and directly links dis-ease to urban, industrial environments. In *Tess*, Hardy fears the mechanization of farming will increase the degree of drudgery to the point that it will produce a permanent state of ill-being. He fears the increasing uniformity of the laborer: “Now [...] there is no mark of specialty” amongst distinct trades (59), so they resemble the interchangeable “hands” of Coketown.

In his essay, Hardy declares, “The landlord does not know by sight, if even by name, half the men who preserve his acres from the curse of Eden,” sentiments which reappear in *Tess*.

Sustenance indicates literal nutrition and mental nourishment. Dis-ease plagues the rural worker as much as his/her urban counterpart because s/he is denied access to the “pure atmosphere,” a basic need, that ought to be a given. The bucolic environment counteracts malaise. Rather than properly dwelling in the countryside, inheriting its benefits, the workforce becomes “disassociated” from the land they work as they “come and go yearly” like migratory birds (65). Hardy explains the customary practice of renting cottages to the migrant worker, who then has no guarantee of shelter: “he is only a tenant of a tenant, the latter possibly a new comer, who takes strictly commercial views of his man [...]. Thus, while their pecuniary condition in the prime of life is bettered, and their freedom enlarged, *they have lost touch with their environment*, and that sense of long local participancy which is one of the pleasures of age” (66, emphasis added). These “[un]fixed” laborers lose the wellness associated with environmental engagement and thus the sense of camaraderie fostered in a local environment.

Mr. Durbeyfield’s death deprives the family of the stability of his life-hold and must give up their home to new workers hired by the landlord. In *Tess*, Hardy illustrates the annual removal to find other work on Old-Lady Day, where workers pack up to fulfill “agreements for outdoors service” entered into earlier in the year: “These annual migrations from farm to farm were on the increase here. When Tess’s mother was a child the majority of the field-folk about Marlott had remained all their lives on one farm, which had been the home also of their fathers and grandfathers, but latterly the desire for yearly removal had risen to a high pitch” (351). In contrast to Anne Brontë’s Gilbert Markham’s inheritance of “paternal acres,” generational cultivation of a single place begins to ebb away, particularly for the laboring classes anxious to find desirable work. Migrant workers lack an environmental heritage; constant yearly removals

prevent them from dwelling on the land and from building a community. To lose touch with the environment compromises individual well-being and inhibits healthy social relations.

In “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy concludes, “This process, which is designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns,' is really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced” (73). An almost identical passage recurs in *Tess* following the Durbeyfields’ removal from Marlott, to which he adds “when forced by *machinery*” (352). With this addition Hardy points to the increasing use of machinery on farms, which either replaces jobs or modifies the workers’ role to that of a ‘hand.’ Workers relocate to the city from necessity only, as the country becomes mechanized. Zena Meadowstrong argues that both the steam thresher and the end of the life-hold are “symptom[s] of modernization in Wessex – a stage in the gradual detachment of rural laborers from the land they farm” (239-40). The novel depicts the move towards mechanized farming, happening first in Marlott, contradicting its first appearance as a relatively pristine landscape. After the birth of her child, Tess finds employment harvesting crops shorn by a mechanical reaper. She and her co-workers are the helpmates of the machines – “hands” – but the work remains unmistakably hard in its grueling monotony.¹⁸²

The mechanical reaper, typically horse-drawn, signifies the first move towards mechanization in farming. After her disastrous marriage to Angel Clare, Tess relocates to Flintcomb-Ash farm to take part in the wheat threshing, where the farm has borrowed a self-propelled steam-powered threshing-machine, a significant innovation. “Machines in the garden,” both these tools represent the encroachment of industrial methods into rural areas. The

¹⁸² The machine becomes a literal ‘grim reaper’ as it drives the wildlife into the fast shrinking areas of coverage, until finally when the “last few yards of upright wheat fell,” the harvesters put every creature to death with sticks and stones (87). The machine makes the harvest more efficient, effortlessly circuiting the field and reducing the time of the operation, but it also decimates the larger environment: the animals cannot outrace the machine, as they might do human labor.

thresher's "sooty and grimy" engineman becomes the embodiment of the machine: "What he looked he felt. He was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke; these denizens of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost, and sun" (325). Hardy's language draws on the usual city/country trope – the engineman belongs to the city, the site of industrial smoke. His presence here represents an intrusion, a penetration of the country by machinery. A threshing machine separates grain from stalks and husks, intended to ease the process. As Hardy represents it, the machine does *not* lighten workloads, but forces the worker to keep up with its "despotic demands," hustling under time constraints as the machine is engaged to another farm (325). The machine not only ravages this landscape, but threatens to doom the workers to more severe drudgery than traditional farm work.¹⁸³ Meadowstrong comments on Alec's presence in the field, as he waits in the wings to court Tess after her workday. "Although the nominal villain, here [Flintcomb-Ash] and elsewhere, is Alec d'Urberville, his tyranny closely aligned with the machine's. Like Alec, the threshing machine is new to rural Wessex and comes originally from the industrial North [...] and the mythic representation of the tyrannical machine – its diabolical appearance and its serpent's hiss – matches the Satanic posture of Tess's pitchfork-wielding personal tyrant" (236). The threshing machine's objectification of Tess is the same as Alec's behavior towards Tess. Meadowstrong argues that Alec's minimal characterization is actually a reflection of his function as a machine; he too is a diabolical agent of modernization.

The figurative rape of the land recalls Tess's rape, and again she battles malaise induced by mechanical action. Her job is to untie corn sheaves and hand them to the feeder; hence, "there was no respite; for, as the drum never stopped, the man who fed it could not stop, and she,

¹⁸³ Meadowstrong similarly notes how machine labor brutalizes the workers and how this passage demonizes the engine-man and his machine. She, too, allies Tess with agrarian living: "Here the machine – the steam pressure – nearly destroys Tess, as it will inevitably destroy the way of life she stands for" (232).

who had to supply the man with untied sheaves, could not stop either” (327). It is difficult for the hand to keep pace with the tireless machine. Furthermore, the drumming and vibrating of the machine wears Tess out, a dynamic reminiscent of the story in “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” of a woman becoming so dizzy from the work that she cannot find her way home. Tess, too, becomes barely conscious; her “stupefied reverie,” both physical and mental, becomes an extreme symptom of dis-ease (333). The machine, an alien invader, prevents the worker from directly connecting with the land (as capital does in an urban setting): s/he becomes dispossessed, dislocated, and dis-eased. The men on the straw-rick remember “the past days,” when they threshed by hand, concluding that the process “though slow, produced better results” (326). They prefer the longer process that provides direct contact with the environment. Threshing remains hard work, yet this sense of nostalgia results from the recollection of the interaction between human and nature. Hardy’s regretful portrayal of the past underscores the dis-ease of the present, reflected in farming methods that rape, rather than cooperate with, the land.

Before Tess returns to farm labor, she works at Talbothays Dairy in “the valley of the Great Dairies,” “intrinsically different” from her previous experience of Blackmoor Vale, or “the Vale of Little Dairies” (102). Hardy showcases how other rural trades are affected by industrialization, and Froom Valley, in its large scale, is more akin to the great manufacturing districts: “The world was drawn to a larger pattern here. The enclosures numbered fifty acres instead of ten, the farmsteads were more extended, the groups of cattle formed tribes here about [...]. These myriads of cows stretching under her eyes from the far east to the far west outnumbered any she had ever seen at one glance before” (102). The scale of the dairy industry – “a larger pattern” – overwhelms Tess. In contrast to a family farm that provides for the

family's immediate needs and sells surplus crops, Talbothays runs primarily for profit, servicing urban areas in addition to its own neighborhood. As a result of advanced transportation methods in the 1870s, including the railway and steamship, British farmers faced enormous competition from imported goods. Milk production was one of the few lucrative agricultural trades in the late nineteenth century, as perishable milk, cheese, fruits and vegetables could not be shipped long distances or across national boundaries, as wheat could. Cheap grain from America and Russia threatened British farming, while dairies benefited from the increase in milk consumption from mid-century onwards, as living standards improved.¹⁸⁴ The scope of the dairy farms that overwhelms Tess reveals the success of the trade's expansion by adopting an increasingly industrial business model.

Hardy exposes the invisible channels of exchange between country and city, routing the path of produce into London. In his short story, "The Son's Veto" (1894), a woman watches vegetables arrive from her native North Wessex, traveling through the London suburbs into urban markets. Such a procession "was indeed made early every morning about one o'clock when the country vehicles passed up with loads of vegetables for Covent Garden market. She often saw them creeping along at this silent and dusky hour – waggon after waggon, bearing green bastions of cabbages [...], walls of baskets enclosing masses of beans and peas, pyramids of snow-white turnips, swaying howdahs of mixed produce" (40). The sights soothe her "depression and nervousness," but are hidden from most sleeping residents (41). Similarly, Tess remarks that the Londoners who drink the milk hailing from Talbothays Dairy "don't know anything of us, and where it comes from; or think how we drove two miles across the moor to-night in the rain that it might reach 'em in time?" (187). The histories of these products are kept

¹⁸⁴ See F.M.L. Thompson's "Free Trade and the Land" in *The Victorian Countryside*, Vol. 1.

out of sight, as produce is delivered while most Londoners are asleep. Tess muses, “Noble men and noble women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen, and babies who have never seen a cow” remain completely unconscious of how milk, a universal staple, gets to their table (187). She describes the commodification of food as the Londoners take for granted the delivery of these necessities. The dairy earns its income by exporting their products (mostly milk, cheese, and butter) to London. Angel and Tess travel to the railway station to drop off milk, an “intermittent [moment] of contact between their secluded world and modern life. Modern life stretched out its steam feeler to this point three or four times a day, touched the native existences, and quickly withdrew its feeler again, as if what it touched had been uncongenial” (186). This “steam feeler,” the railway, becomes yet another cancerous invader into the country. Although it is “quickly with[drawn],” the train, as with the reaper and thresher, nevertheless represents the machinery that will replace the traditional methods of Wessex. Like oil and water, the realms do not mix well: “modern life” finds tradition and pastoral “uncongenial.” Nevertheless, these daily trips reveal the city’s need for agrarianism; this secluded world, as yet fully industrialized, remains the primary source of staple goods. The light of the railway station becomes like the North Star for Talbothays Dairy, as it signals the growing urban demand for dairy products from rural districts. Wessex farms nourish the dis-eased cities, which take available food for granted. The quality of life of the worker remains outside their peripheral vision as “modern” consumers happily exploit “old-fashioned,” yet life-sustaining, areas.

Angel attempts to reconnect with “old-fashioned” farming methods when he socially lowers himself to learn a useful trade. Lawrence Buell locates the Durbeyfields’ ills in their attempt to claim Norman ancestry (*Writing for an Endangered World* 148). He contends that

Hardy's point seems to be "that Tess must come to ruin when she tries to move beyond her provincial sphere, just as her Angel stumbles when he tries to step into it" (149). This does not seem to be the point at all. Buell locates the problem in Tess's attempt to better her situation, and Angel's plan to 'play' the gentleman farmer. Angel 'interns' at the dairy to learn practical skills, as he plans to become a gentleman farmer. He wants to know the business first hand: "He is the dairyman's pupil – learning farming in all its branches. He has learnt sheep-farming at another place, and he's now mastering dairy-work" (133). Initially he keeps aloof from the other workers until outdoor life initiates Angel into the mysteries of the actual environment:

"Unexpectedly he began to like outdoor life for its own sake, and for what it brought, apart from its bearing on his own proposed career. Considering his position he became wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (118). This chronic melancholy is dis-ease, and Angel's outdoor work improves his total health. Like Gissing, Hardy identifies dis-ease as a "chronic" social malaise affecting the "civilized" races, another permutation of the nature/culture antithesis producing a toxic distance between the nonhuman environment and human beings. Hardy worries that the "civilized races," or modern Victorians, suffer from industrial and urban forces. Here, Hardy references Angel's atheism: the son of an Evangelical minister, Angel rejects the church for a secular trade. His relationship to nature preserves his well-being, saving him from the despair caused by loss of faith. Angel "made close acquaintance with phenomena which he had before known but darkly – the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon in their temperaments, winds in their several dispositions, trees, waters, and clouds, shades and silences, *ignes-fatui*, constellations, and the voices of inanimate things" (118). Angel finds "clarity" – his cultured vision clears to focus on natural "phenomena." His connection with the environment

moves beyond a superficial appreciation of its beauty; he becomes attuned to ecological processes and recognizes the dignity of all creatures, human and nonhuman.

Christianity, a “systemized religion,” is an artificial code at odds with “Pagan fantasy” fostered by “the forms and forces of outdoor Nature” (104). Hardy insists of the latter, “One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky” (86). Angel *does* better himself when he experiences eco-consciousness; when tested, however, he fails to practice his liberal ideas. He is “yet the slave to custom and conventionality,” and cannot accept Tess’s unintentional violation of religious law notwithstanding her worthy qualities (265). Hypocritically, he cannot forgive Tess for the same crime he wishes to be excused in himself. David de Laura labels Angel’s failure “imperfect modernism” (382).¹⁸⁵ He identifies Hardy’s positive ideal as “the simple endorsement [of] freer relations between men and women unhampered by the stifling and unnatural standards of the dying civilization” (395); in other words, Hardy criticizes repressive Victorian morality, arguing that to be truly modern is to be heathen. Hardy does not attack the desire to move between spheres; he attacks conservative attitudes that prevail in spite of modernity. Angel wisely desires to learn the methods of his chosen trade; when he cannot shed his own stigmas against the rural class and his socially constructed notions of purity, he betrays his progressivism. The country/city trope often reduces to nature/culture, and here Hardy applies this antithesis to Angel’s failure to shed artificial custom for an authentic life grounded in natural law.

Tess similarly internalizes a sense of shame about her actions, despite feeling innocent; had Angel been able to accept her, she seems well equipped to be a gentleman’s wife. Hardy

¹⁸⁵ Angel’s confusion is part of what Linda M. Shires identifies as the novel’s “muddle, suggesting randomness, [which] challenges the unitary and anthropocentric aspirations of so many of our cultural systems” (157). Her use of the word “muddle” reminds me of Stephen Blackpool’s inability to sort out the complexities of the Victorian market economy.

discriminates between two value systems: “natural” and “cultural,” closely related to the contrast between mechanical and manual labor. Hardy argues “the happiest of all positions in the social scale, being above the line at which neediness ends, and below the line at which the *covenances* begin to cramp natural feeling, and the stress of threadbare modishness makes too little of enough” (128). To be rich or to be impoverished are equally undesirable; one need only to ensure their welfare for health and happiness. The class “line” indicates that civilized, elite status “cramps” natural feeling. Tess chafes under social *covenances*. Her love for her child causes her to question “sin” when the church damns her innocent baby. This seems unnatural to Tess, so she turns pagan as she baptizes Sorrow herself, rationalizing, “The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone” (99). Nevertheless, the passive Tess devalues herself due to her social “sin.” Instead of allowing herself to be conquered like land, she needs to validate her instincts, and silence the internalized voice of social norms. Hardy insists society is “out of harmony with the actual world,” not Tess: “But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break a necessary social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (85-86). Tess’s inability to recognize her connectedness creates her malaise. Hardy deconstructs the antagonism between Nature and Culture, by putting human beings back into the entangled bank. To go forward, we must go backward and return to pagan values.

Tess “fulfills” her destiny when she, reunited with Angel, is pursued by the police for Alec’s murder. They find her in Stonehenge, the “heathen temple,” sleeping upon the stones like a sacrifice on an altar. Tess tells Angel, “now I am at home” (393). She has given in to Alec’s persuasion, believing him when he tells her Angel will never return. Tess allows herself to be

defined and exploited by men. Feeling pressure from her family and aware she cannot shake social stigma, she has little choice. Unable to imagine any other way to escape Alec, she stabs him for his role in her ruin and as the representative of male tyranny in general. Tess can never reconcile her heathenness with modernity; she effectually perishes from dis-ease, the inability to resolve her inner nature with the outer world.

As characters become increasingly alienated in the novels discussed in this chapter, they fulfill Carlyle's warnings in *Past and Present* about transgressing the laws of nature: "now Nature, her patience with [mankind] being ended, leaves him desolate." He urges his Victorian readers to find another path, the road to "well-being." As Oscar Wilde suggests in "The House Beautiful," industry travels the road of "ill-being." Carlyle emphatically discards the notion that mental misery is always an individual problem. Instead, he points to humanity's attitude of mastery towards the environment, the willful disregard of natural laws. We may interpret natural law as carrying capacity, the amount of contaminants the atmosphere can sustain, or small-scale industry. The laws of sham propagate artificial wants. The novels in this dissertation expose environmental horrors in various ways. Some authors concern themselves with physical disease caused by environmental pollution, and others explore the mental taxation the separation from open space, fresh air, and quite simply beauty causes on human beings. These related issues of disease and dis-ease shape an eco-conscious discourse that would result in unified and effective environmentalism by the end of the nineteenth century, the type of activism we traditionally think of today: pushing for legislation reform, protesting reckless industry, and publicizing information on how to safeguard our health from pollution. While Brontë, Gaskell, Dickens, Gissing, and Hardy do not necessarily offer neat or adequate resolutions, their fiction attests to

the complexities of negotiating relationships with the environment and the need for action outside the novel.

Chapter IV: Watchfulness: The Victorian Parable of the Wise Steward

“I have been making a sketch of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine Driving the Conquered Kings in his Chariot. [...] I take Tamburlaine in his chariot for the tremendous course of the world’s physical history lashing on the harnessed dynasties. In my opinion, that is a good mythical interpretation.” [...]

“The sketch must be very grand, if it conveys so much,” said Dorothea. [...] “Do you intend Tamburlaine to represent earthquakes and volcanoes?”

“O yes,” said Will, laughing, “and migrations of races and clearings of forests – and America and the steam-engine. Everything you can imagine!”

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Chapter XXII

During their honeymoon, Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon visit the art studio where, under Naumann’s tutelage, Will Ladislaw studies painting. He describes his vision for a “grand” sketch, recasting Marlowe’s drama into a secular allegory of the human drive to conquer the earth. Marlowe depicts his anti-hero as savage, ruthless, and megalomaniacal, ostensibly more barbaric than the peoples he captures.¹⁸⁶ For Will, Tamburlaine represents civilization – “the world’s physical history,” or manipulation of the environment – “lashing on the harnessed dynasties” – dynasties interpreted as resources converted into human achievement. Will’s version is less fatalistic than Marlowe’s: human agency transforms the world. Marlowe based his play on Pedro Mexía’s *Silva de varia lección* (*The Foreste; or, Collection of Histories, 1540*), a journalistic account of histories, anecdotes, observations, and miracles: in short, an early example of natural history. Will carries on this project of “collecting history,” embodying human progress in the lash-whipping tyrant who harnesses the earth’s resources and thus equating civilization with the dominance of the natural world particularly through technological innovation. Casting civilization as a villain (Tamburlaine), Will’s tableau illustrates man’s

¹⁸⁶ The 14th century Mongolian conqueror, Tamburlaine, led his nomadic hordes from their capital at Samarqand in central Asia to overrun vast areas of Persia, Turkey, Russia, and India.

attitude of mastery over his world and implicitly advocates a turning away from violent technology and back towards nature. Dorothea asks if Tamburlaine “represent[s] earthquakes and volcanoes,” and while Will immediately assents to this interpretation of King as geological phenomena, he corrects her with examples of specifically *human*-rendered changes: the clearing of forest by man, the removal of native races and the deliberate migrations to new territory such as the colonial conquest of America and its shifting frontier, ending with the quintessential emblem of Victorian technology, steam-power, which transformed industry, agriculture, and transportation. As Will rattles off epochs in human history, he does not quite mean to include “everything” that Dorothea can imagine, but all the ways which human beings modify the environment. The tyrannical characterization of Tamburlaine reveals Will’s skeptical stance on human “achievement.” The projected painting queries human beings’ proper relations to the environment: Conqueror? Protector? Subject? Will’s enthusiasm emanates not from admiration of civilization’s domineering legacy but from his desire to “put something of his own” into his work” (213), to produce a meaningful piece of art.¹⁸⁷

This chapter explores Victorian alternatives to what ecocritics call “logics of domination,” investigating the question Will implies: What is, and what should be, humanity’s place in the ecosystem? In *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe the guiding principle of our culture’s earliest myths, that “the world becomes subject to man” (8), indicative of the inescapable compulsion to social domination of nature. They argue that, “What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to

¹⁸⁷ Will’s concept fascinates Dorothea who, however, dismisses art in general as “not a great object in life” (219); when she firsts meets Ladislav sketching on Lowick’s grounds, she depreciates the appeal of art, arguing, “I never see the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. [...] I suppose there is some relation between pictures and nature which I am too ignorant to feel” (79). Underneath Dorothea’s false humility lies her conviction that “those pictures,” such as Will’s sketch of an old yew-tree, do not accurately reflect the environment. She appraises his “large coloured sketch of stony ground and trees, with a pool” as a typical Romantic portrayal (79).

dominate it and other men” (4). Max Oelschlager, in his foundational text *The Idea of Wilderness*, documents this process throughout history, emphasizing how the Industrial Revolution reinforced the ideological conversion of wilderness into material nature – into resources to fuel economic progress: “Modernism [...] underlies the emergence of a profound homocentrism, still dominant in the world, which may be characterized as *the ideology of man infinite* [...] [M]odern human beings think of themselves as existing without natural limits” (69). Ecocritics, notably Carolyn Merchant, argue that this process emerges from Enlightenment thinking (as do Adorno and Horkheimer), though Oelschlager understands “modernism” as “a historical movement that begins with the Renaissance and extends to the present;” “through science, technology and liberal democracy modern people hoped to transform a base and worthless wilderness into industrialized, democratic civilization” (68). Regarding the Victorians specifically, Herbert Sussman has argued that they initiated our modern age by securing technological dominion over the environment. Yet, even as this period set an enduring logic of domination, Will’s beliefs voice the powerful counter-discourse surfacing simultaneously. Will particularly objects to Tamburlaine’s lashing whip: the King dominates and destroys the physical environment. He fulfills Oscar Wilde’s later call in “The House Beautiful” for the artist to come forward “as a priest and prophet of nature to protest and even to work against the prostitution or perversion” of the physical world (926). Wilde’s lecture protests the dominant ideology of mastery over the environment and technology’s role in dividing man from nature, as does Will’s art.

The eco-conscious discourse characterizing literature of the period emphasizes horizontal, rather than vertical, relationships between human and nonhuman, offering an “aesthetics of community” in contrast to the “aesthetics of relinquishment” typical of Romantic

and Transcendental texts.¹⁸⁸ Critics have persistently located a communal ethos in the Victorian novel, and here that notion of community extends beyond the human to unite a range of subjects in a common network, moving away from anthropocentrism.¹⁸⁹ This aspect of eco-conscious discourse instructs human beings how to live with the environment without encroaching upon it or destroying it.

In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I have discussed related eco-conscious discourses, moving from natural realism, a mode of realism emphasizing ecological connections between people and the environments they inhabit, to discussions of physical and mental health in popular discourse. In this fourth chapter and the chapter to follow, I identify two closely related models of eco-conscious discourse that engage with land and nonhuman neighbors particularly. The subject of this chapter, proper stewardship, occurs when human beings act as responsible caretakers of the environment, safeguarding the present ecosystem for future generations.¹⁹⁰ This ideal remains anthropocentric, though it explicitly challenges the drive to wholly dominate the nonhuman. The next chapter continues this discussion, identifying the “Creed of Kinship,” an ecocentric viewpoint that collapses the hierarchy of stewardship by breaking down the barrier between human and nonhuman altogether. Both philosophies emerge from a Christian framework coupled with scientific discourse to convey how human life is

¹⁸⁸ In *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell argues that Thoreau establishes an enduring “aesthetics of relinquishment” formative to environmental literature. In order to appreciate nature, one must relinquish ties to society, learning to live by one’s own labor.

¹⁸⁹ What Jane Bennett calls “vital materialism.” Suzanne Graver’s *George Eliot and Community* includes a summary of how Victorians understood the concept. More recently, Brigid Lowe demonstrates the role of sympathy in social responsibility and community formation. I emphasize how sympathy as a practice was a powerful ethical force in relation to the nonhuman, even non-sentient, members of the world as a whole.

¹⁹⁰ In ecocriticism today, stewardship forms part of a dialectic concerning humanity’s place in the ecosystem. Self-consciously anthropocentric, stewardship refers to the wise management of the earth’s resources, in contrast to wilderness-based or preservationist outlooks that insist on maintaining a nearly pristine condition of land, protected from (rather than for) human beings. However, historically proponents of stewardship combat arguments for dominion over nature, partly based on Genesis when God gives the earth to Adam and Eve. Stewardship transforms human beings from rulers into managers. As Carolyn Merchant explains, “The idea of man as nature’s guardian and caretaker was a managerial interpretation of the doctrine of dominion” (249).

entangled with the ecosystem as a whole: plants, animals, and the land. These entanglements imply not just the agency of human “stewards,” but also the agency of nonhuman objects.

I. The “King of Acres”: Stewardship

How many wood-pigeons are there in the South Wood alone, besides the copses and the fir-plantations? How many turtle-doves in spring in the hedges and outlying thickets, in summer among the shocks of corn? And all of these are his – the Squire’s – not in the sense of possession, for no true wild creature was ever anyone’s yet; it would die first; but still, within his ring-fence, and their destinies affected by his will, since he can cut down their favourite ash and hawthorn, or thin them with shot. Neither of which he does.

Richard Jefferies, “The King of Acres” (1884)

“Forest History” (1901), one of George Meredith’s last poems, articulates a clear ecocritical platform, which shows the process by which human beings define themselves against nature (the Other) as something to be feared and thus subdued. The poem chronicles a fictional history of an English forest, beginning with man’s primeval strife with the wilderness, embodied in the legend of a mysterious dragon, and ending with a forest tamed and ravaged by man’s ax. In the same manner as Will’s projected painting, Meredith’s poem advocates stewardship, protesting the “insensib[e] devouring” of the forest by human beings (stanza XXVI). The history in the poem advocates humanity’s responsibility to the environment. It associates the barbarian races with the dangers of the forest in contrast to the civilized, cultured races housed in the monasteries and nunneries fortified against the environment. Representing cultivation, the clergy provide food and shelter. Yet, once townships begin to “climb” the violence against the forest becomes gratuitous, as man commands wilderness “with fierce mien” (stanza XIII). Pristine nature is not only subdued, it is erased. This represents a significant shift in man’s relation to nature. To “overstep” environmental limits – to clear too much, to pollute, to disrespect – is truly a move backwards. Meredith eulogizes “the poet’s awe in rapture” to advocate responsibility to the environment: stewardship provides the nexus between due

“reverence” and human advancement. As we have seen, this “awe,” or wonder, reminds human beings that they are not above the other elements of the ecosystem; stewardship is an aspect of this eco-conscious discourse, disseminating a moral imperative to preserve the environment. Meredith propounds, as does Wilde, a sort of “literary stewardship,” in that art, by communicating eco-consciousness to the reader, helps to protect the earth. Through their art, prophets – the poet, painter, novelist – raise eco-consciousness intended to incite action.

The concept of stewardship comes from the Creation story. After God creates humankind on the fifth day, “God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The verse gives human beings complete “dominion” over the natural world, and Christians have continually debated precisely what this means. Today, many ecocritics and environmentalists use the principle in service of protecting the environment. Max Oelschlager insists that the Bible “explicitly mandates that humankind is to care for creation” (*Caring for Creation* 128), and stewardship is fundamental to pioneering environmentalists such as Wendell Berry and Aldo Leopold. René Dubos argues that “the Judeo-Christian peoples were probably the first to develop on a large scale a pervasive concern for land management and an ethic of nature” (161). He identifies two Christian models of sustainable living, Franciscan conservation and Benedictine Stewardship. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment, “preached and practiced absolute identification with nature,” and this Franciscan worship of nature has influenced Western doctrines of conservation, which, however, are “based on human value systems:” the “cult of wilderness” fulfills our emotional need to preserve the environment (167).¹⁹¹ Dubos

¹⁹¹ St. Francis “treated all living things and inanimate objects as if they were his brothers or sisters” (Dubos 161-2), a belief that informs the Creed of Kinship discussed in Chapter 5.

offers up Benedict of Nursia “as a patron saint of those who believe that true conservation means not only protecting nature against human misbehavior but also developing human activities which favor a creative, harmonious relationship between man and nature” (168). St. Benedict is an appropriate emblem of stewardship – an aristocrat who “knew the dangers of physical idleness,” he insisted that all monks work with their hands in the fields, importantly breaking down the “old artificial barrier” between the manual and the liberal arts (169). In this way, Benedictine stewardship is both hierarchic and democratic. Inspired by the second chapter of Genesis, where God appoints Adam and Eve stewards of the Garden of Eden, this mode of life places human beings in charge of the environment in order to ensure harmony.

Many Victorians distanced themselves from Enlightenment versions of stewardship, following the Benedictine model of living sustainably within nature. For instance John Ruskin, in *Modern Painters V*, describes man’s “due relation to other creatures, and to inanimate things”: to “know them all and love them, as made for him, and he for them” elevates man to “the greatest and holiest of them” (259). For Ruskin, stewardship is benevolent dominion over the nonhuman. Ruskin goes on to warn that the consequence of mistreating or disregarding “the less creation around him” will result in man’s own destruction. According to Dinah Birch, Ruskin, more than any other nineteenth-century thinker, instructed artists to see “the small still voice” of divinity in the quiet details of the natural world (529), and drew “attention to the spiritual humility necessary to discern the significance of that solitary wreath of leaves, the type of what cannot be wholly seen. Their function can be compared with that of a biblical verse” (530). As Birch describes the fusion of Ruskin’s Evangelical Christianity with his intellectual curiosity, she shows how the Bible taught him to look at nature and how this method influenced Ruskin’s

contemporaries. Although we cannot conflate Ruskin's views with the Victorian period in general, his work reveals a cultural tendency to link an ecological sensibility with Christianity.

Recently, Victorianists have demonstrated the “continual slippage between the sacred and the secular” in many social domains, including the “philosophical, scientific, medical, historical, [...] political,” and, of course, the literary (Knight and Mason 3). Elisabeth Jay calls the Bible the “chief intertext” for Victorian authors (465), and Northrop Frye, throughout his career, has studied the influence of the Bible on narrative. Borrowing a phrase from William Blake's poetry, Frye calls the Bible “the Great Code” of art, meaning that the Bible's language, its typology and metaphors, “has had a continuously fertilizing influence on English literature from Anglo-Saxon writers” to the present (xvi). The Creation story, the flood and Noah's ark, and Jesus's parables formed what Frye called a “collective unconscious,” so that these myths continually reappeared in Western culture. Frye asserts one purpose of the Bible is to establish the relations between man and nature, to teach its readers to “separate” from the world made hellish “by dominating and exploiting” one's fellow man and/or nature to regain the Edenic world wherein man and nature cooperate (76). In his study of England's readership in the nineteenth century, Richard Altick identifies the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* as the two books any reader would be familiar with. Victorian children frequently memorized verses from popular Bible books, including Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, who must recite the beatitudes each night at Lowood school.¹⁹² Jude V. Nixon asserts such “seminal Christian religious texts” constitute “the fabric, if not plot, of Victorian literature,” and the novel “underscores the centrality of religion to the dominant ideology” (8).

This must be brought to bear on any discussion of stewardship, as many Victorian writers employed or reinscribed “Christian ideas and doctrines to comment on contemporary issues”

¹⁹² See also Colón, Jay, and Nixon for fuller discussions of influential Biblical texts.

(Knight and Mason 8), including ecological problems. Susan Colón argues that the Bible, particularly the parables, influenced the form of the realist novel. Following her lead, I am interested in the parabolic potential of the Victorian novel,¹⁹³ and I argue that the Bible provided a way of thinking through and articulating eco-consciousness. In the novels that follow, characters express their sense of duty towards the nonhuman environment, a sentiment resulting, in part, from the cultural familiarity with the Bible. Colón shows how a number of Victorian novels “incorporate[d] into their formal and thematic fabric an intentional and sustained conversation with one or more parables of Jesus” (3). The Victorian realist novel, by asking readers to project the fictional story onto their own, arguably functions as parable. This chapter engages with the set of thematically related stewardship parables in Matthew and Luke and specifically how the Victorian interpretation of the parable of watchfulness in Luke mandates an ecological sensibility.

Jesus warns against covetousness in The Parable of the Rich Fool, telling the story of a rich man who builds bigger barns to store his abundant crop, rather than sharing it with the multitude, and is punished by God. The following parables build on these teachings, particularly the subsequent story of “Watchfulness,” or the wise and foolish stewards. Before departing on a long journey, a master puts his servants in charge of his possessions. When he returns unexpectedly, he finds the foolish steward reveling in drink and the food he has kept all for himself and, as in the previous story, the servant is punished for his covetousness. Like the foolish steward, the Christian who ignores God’s will shall be assigned “a place with the

¹⁹³ Similar to what Mark Turner calls “parabolic projection”: how readers use their everyday experience to reach an interpretation of a literary text and then go on to project that interpretation back onto their own lives. Michael Burke, following Turner, demonstrates “that parable is a fundamental, continuous, cognitive instrument of thought that we employ, largely unconsciously, both in real-world meaning construction and in literary interpretation procedures” (115) The primary purpose of the NT parables “was to challenge the ingrained perceptions of the hearers” (116). Not every religious story is a parable; a parable specifically requires the reader to “import new knowledge and incorporate it into their existing understanding,” to modify their existing world-views (116).

unbelievers” (Luke 12:46). Human beings are God’s stewards entrusted to “watch” and protect the earth: “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching [...]. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (Luke 12:37-8). While, Biblically, this is a temporal stewardship, doing one’s duty on earth to achieve permanent rewards in the kingdom of Heaven, the command to continue to keep watch into the second, third, and successive generations urges humans to safeguard their gifts for the earthly future. Victorian interpreters purposely make this move from “watch” to “generation.” For instance, in his nineteenth-century explanation of the parable, James Stirling insists that God places the environment into the trust of human beings, who must use their talents to ensure the progress of civilization.

In the parable, the watchful steward tends the land for God. Colón explains, “As understood by nineteenth-century commentators, the concept of stewardship had very wide application to secular life no less than religious life” (104). Specifically, the Victorians emphasized the dictates of stewardship towards the community:

it is evident from the text of the parable [in Luke] that the stewards are judged on the basis of how their conduct towards others reflects their fidelity to the absent master. [T]he parable of the wise and foolish stewards was evidently intended to illustrate the relation between the disciples and the rest of the people with respect to their mutual relation to God. In that light, the parable emphasizes the leaders’ responsibility to serve the people and not the other way around. The foolish steward [...] takes advantage of his position to demand service from others: while the wise steward [...] makes himself the servant of others. (104)

This is extremely important in understanding the intentions behind stewardship; the steward does not care for the environment for his profit only. Colón goes on to explain that Victorian commentators read the parable in Luke 12 as “underwriting capitalism: God expects his followers to increase their financial holdings by hard work, reasonable risk, and thrift. Yet the capitalism thus authorized is an altered one in which production does not equal ownership” (105). Thus, “the accumulation of money is bound to the ethical demands of stewardship indicated in the other parables – namely, the use of goods or power to serve and benefit others” (105). The primary moral of these parables is that one “cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). In literature, the steward tends to appear in the liminal space between the pull of the marketplace, what Victorians would call “Mammom worship,” and the ecological economies of the material world, as if to stage the tension between those competing systems of value in the period. Stewardship implies a degree of self-interest, or at least assumptions about how to use the land properly, but it requires careful management. We can see how this influences Will in his new, “good mythical interpretation” of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*. As he “drives the conquered Kings in his chariot,” *Tamburlaine* calls to mind the foolish steward beating the other servants and appropriating the resources to himself, folly that Will’s tableau aims to expose.¹⁹⁴ So while Victorians interpreted these parables within the context of capitalism, the extracted moral warns against the reckless use of resources, ignoring the needs of the community, and assuming “ownership” over the land.

Richard Jefferies’ “A King of Acres” (1884) constructs an ideal of the wise steward. It tells the history of James Thardover, “a true man of the land” (85), whose gaze takes in all the

¹⁹⁴ Chapter XXII of *Middlemarch*, where Will’s project is described, begins with a poem by Alfred de Musset, referring to the sort of spiritual riches valued in the parable. In context, the poem alludes to Will’s love for the selfless Dorothea; however, the dichotomy between literal money and figurative riches underscores the themes of the novel. The poem is “Une Bonne Fortune” (1834). Eliot quotes the line, “Des richesses du coeur elle me fit l’aumone” (“She gave me alms from the riches of her heart”).

activity on his family estate, be it the team hoeing the field, the keeper shooting rabbits, or the “hundreds of small birds” observing the work (82). Thardover owned his lands “by right of labour,” rather than merely in deed: “He had laid his hands, as it were, on every acre” (85). Jefferies celebrates Thardover for his struggle against the “adverse influences” threatening agriculture; this “King of Acres” uses old-fashioned methods in his discovery that the steam-plough “reduced the fields to a dead level,” ruining the soil, increasing weeds, and decreasing crop-yield (87). Jefferies employs the rhetoric of stewardship – man is the “King” of Acres – yet his language also gestures towards ecocentrism as he commends the qualities that make Thardover a proper steward. In the epigraph preceding this section, Jefferies wonders how many creatures live within the confines of the Squire’s ring-fence, all of them “his” property “affected by his will,” and yet the Squire does not exercise his right to interfere with the non-human inhabitants. Human beings can never truly “own” their environment, and yet our actions influence the ecosystem. A landowner possesses complete jurisdiction within his “ring-fence” – his property – and Thardover regards considering the needs of the creatures within his domain as a sacred trust. Because he “sink[s]” his money into maintaining the soil and refurbishing the cottages, his estate is not financially lucrative. However, “it had another value [...]. [T]he beauty of these woods, and grain-grown hills, of the very common, is worth preservation” by both hands and votes (103). This recognition of the intrinsic worth of fallow land tempers the anthropocentrism of stewardship. The steward protects the land, and by fostering a sense of place and preserving healthy areas serves the community.¹⁹⁵

A primary distinction between Franciscan conservation and Benedictine stewardship is that while conservation emphasizes reverence for nature, Benedictine monks “actively

¹⁹⁵ In ecocriticism, sense of place refers to the unique characteristics of local environments that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging.

intervened in nature – as farmers, builders, and scholars. They have brought about profound transformations of soil, water, fauna, and flora, but in such a wise manner that their management of nature has proved compatible in most cases with the maintenance of environmental quality” (Dubos 169). Thardover actively intervenes in the environment to maintain the integrity of his land and ensure a healthy, sustainable yield of crops. Human beings invariably change the environment, and, as Dubos affirms, they must decide whether those interactions will be destructive or constructive. Thus, as in the parable, Benedictine stewardship stresses “wisdom” – the ability to coordinate human activity – daily and seasonal work – with natural rhythms. Thardover makes many decisions that modify the environment; however, by following the guidelines of wise stewardship, he “preserv[es]” it as well.

Jefferies’s “King,” a Squire, humbles himself by working alongside his paid laborers, yet we can see an elitist element in stewardship in its link to land ownership. Both Victorian history and the novel reveal the ambivalence of the environmental steward, as a figure who worked to regulate the object world while preserving a human-oriented ontology. Stewardship is inherently anthropocentric by placing human beings at the center of the world and asserting their right to use the materials of the earth for their own purposes. Historically, stewardship sanctioned the Enclosure Acts, which increasingly moved common lands into the hands of private owners. It became the responsibility of the landed (ie: the wealthy) to preserve their resources.¹⁹⁶ Of Sir

¹⁹⁶ Following 18th century discussion, the Inclosure [sic] Act was passed (1801) to put all instances of enclosure and previous legislation under one umbrella, and affecting much larger areas. Enclosure reduces open fields or “common” land, granting land to an owner (the government or a private citizen, usually wealthy). In 1845, the General Inclosure Act appointed Inclosure Commissioners who could enclose land without submitting a request to Parliament, obviously making private ownership much easier. However, the history of enclosure (or “inclosure”) in England is a long one, gaining momentum in the 16th century. Enclosure, generally, restricts rights such as grazing on common land, walking through property, etc. Once enclosed, the uses of the land become restricted to the private owner. Land moved out the hands of the public, and the poor, to the wealthy; as suffrage was tied to land ownership, this also affected government representation. The vanishing of common land becomes an anxiety, both in the platforms of activists like Octavia Hill, and in literature; unenclosed areas were primarily rough pasturelands in mountainous areas, or small portions of the lowlands. Discussing the ramifications of both enclosure and

Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House* we are told: “His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He had a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without the Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great country families” (21). While Sir Leicester grudgingly acknowledges his duty to conserve the environment, a landowner could do as he/she liked with their property, indicative of an attitude of superiority to the environment, rather than equality with it. A wise steward should protect the land for everyone’s benefit, whereas a foolish steward abuses the environment to sustain a certain lifestyle or to fuel industry.

Wise stewardship became integral to late nineteenth-century environmentalism, particularly in “greening” the city. Octavia Hill, the tireless social reformer who campaigned to make more open space available to city residents and the poor in particular, recognized the necessity of privatizing land to ensure its preservation. Hill championed “space” and “beauty,” articulating an intersection of concerns: beauty *depends* on purity.¹⁹⁷ She believed in access to open space, clean water and healthy air. Barbara T. Gates identifies Hill as “the one who most carefully framed her efforts to further the cause of conservation in terms of dispossessed humanity” (*Kindred Nature* 134). Hill was profoundly influenced by John Ruskin’s commitment to conservation; Ruskin, in fact, financed many of Hill’s schemes for urban planning. However, Hill came under fire for putting open space under the proprietorship of the wealthy. “Our

disafforestation, N.D.G. James notes that woodlands belonging to private individuals were better managed from the 1700s onward, “largely due to the fact that they were unhampered by forest law, the rights of others or an outdated forest administration. An individual who used his initiative and business acumen was often able to make a worthwhile contribution to the nation’s timber supply and, at the same time, obtain a reasonable return for his efforts” (129). Nevertheless, many landowners became concerned over the increased felling of trees and woodlands, resulting in a number of publications warning against destroying this irreplaceable resource and tutoring readers about proper forest management.

¹⁹⁷ Not in a purely moral sense; Hill’s sense of purity recalls Charlotte Brontë’s problematizing of superficial beauty’s role in physical health in *Jane Eyre*.

Common Land” (to use the title of Hill’s 1877 collection of essays) – referring to common or public land – remained desirable, but was not often a feasible option. Hill campaigned to put land in custody of the crown or the landed gentry.¹⁹⁸ For instance, in 1895, Hill and Hardwicke Rawnsley co-founded the National Trust for Historic Sites and Natural Scenery, the still thriving charitable organization that conserves natural areas of “beauty” or “historic interest” in England, Ireland, and Wales. By establishing the Trust, Hill acknowledged the need for some establishment to be appointed “steward” to protect the secured land for public use (in this case, Parliament). Landowners, too, were instrumental in conserving open space; as long as land remained private property, it could not be touched by government or industry. Her motto, “for ever, for everyone,” testifies to her vision of a socially inclusive society albeit facilitated by the upper classes. Although such methods “possess” the land, this stewardship ethos condemns viewing land as a mere provider of resources.

These official efforts to preserve open space began in the 1880s, yet a similar drive existed much earlier on the part of conscientious landowners. The Victorian estate frequently became a family inheritance intrinsically worth protecting. This chapter looks closely at the estate and its inhabitants in the Victorian novel. The novelists featured here disseminate this eco-consciousness through stewardship discourse (thus metaphorically becoming stewards themselves), and with respect to land, emphasize the need to preserve forests for their intrinsic value. Models of the foolish steward – the reckless or mercenary aristocrat – and the wise steward – selflessly motivated to serve the community – sow the seed for action outside the

¹⁹⁸ Gates explains Hill’s strategies more fully: “Despite her championing of the poor, Hill envisioned a National Trust managed by the landed and well-to-do. [...] Like many successful crusaders, Hill was a talented rhetorician. When she wanted to save the cities for the people, she appealed to them as well as to the landed, but when she wanted to save outlying or rural lands, as was the case with the English Lake District and other areas of special interest to the trust, she appealed primarily to the upper classes who held specific parcels of land, working to persuade them that all land was in actuality held in trust” (“Greening Victorian Studies” 12).

pages of the novel. A parable functions to throw life events alongside its story, “to make visible aspects of those stories, or to intervene in them in some way” (Colón 98), just as the novel’s stewardship discourse throws real life alongside these fictional examples to instruct readers in sustainable living. Colón writes, a realist novel “can do something much like Jesus’s parables do: it can use particular sets of human relationships and responses to show gesturally or sometimes metaphorically what [in Paul Ricoeur’s words] “human reality in its wholeness” might look like in particular instances [...]. It can show one or more people responding to an ordinary situation in an extraordinary way, a way that is fully on the plane of human action but which challenges ordinary ideas about, for example, [...] whether people can change for the better” (37) or, as I argue, whether environmental attitudes can be reformed.

II. The Foolish Steward

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Luke 12:20-21

In his *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (1861), the archbishop and poet Richard Chenevix Trench pinpoints the decision of the farmer in the Parable of the Rich Fool to store up his grain in bigger barns as the moment when he turns towards error. When the farmer begins to consider the harvest as “*my* [his] goods, and *my* [his] fruits” (275, emphasis in the original), he is no longer simply a hard worker, but covetous: “for he did not count that he had these from God, else as a steward of God, he would otherwise have disposed of them” by sharing his harvest with the less fortunate (275). Christ’s lesson is two-fold: man must industriously perform God’s work, in this case, tilling the land, while recognizing the worth of his life is not assessed by the abundance of his possessions. The stewardship parables supply for the Victorians a conceptual

model for understanding true wealth as well-being, and the social obligation of the steward – the landowner or businessman – to share his resources. A steward never actually “owns” property, instead regarding him or herself as a temporary resident holding property in trust for his neighbors and successors. Thus, the foolish steward hoards or wastes his wealth, disregarding the claims of others in the present and future.

Although published later than most of the novels discussed here, I begin with *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871) to demonstrate the “foolish” steward ignoring the dictates to the community. Anthony Trollope’s well-received novel traces the fate of a diamond necklace worth ten thousand pounds to condemn the materialistic social milieu of the rapacious Lizzie Eustace. She schemes to keep the diamonds, which, while presented to her by her late husband, belong to the family trust and not to her exclusively. Her refusal to return the necklace is just one instance of her greed, though it ignites a heated struggle between her and the Eustace family lawyer, Mr. Camperdown. In addition to appropriating the diamonds for her own pleasure, Lizzie also neglects to maintain the property given in trust to her, running the Scottish estate of Portray into the ground. The Eustace family protests her ransacking of the land for saleable timber to pay her debts, while the workers on the estate suffer directly from her mismanagement, many losing their livelihood. Juliet McMaster argues that “Trollope tells us about his characters while he tells us about their estates” (71). Lizzie’s behavior underscores Trollope’s description of her as devoid of “tenderness” and “conscience” (46); Lizzie’s heart is bare – much like the land she strips.

From the very first Lizzie is associated with diamonds and improper stewardship.¹⁹⁹ After Sir Florian Eustace’s death, Lizzie obstinately refuses to return the diamond necklace to the

¹⁹⁹ While beyond the scope of this paper, diamonds symbolize a long history of raping the land. In his “The Diamond Necklace” (1833), Carlyle deconstructs the notion of “making” diamond jewelry, as diamonds are mined

bank, where it is kept for safekeeping. The necklace has belonged to the Eustaces since 1799, and the diamonds mean far more to the family than the appraised ten thousand pounds; they embody the family's history.²⁰⁰ Mr. Camperdown doggedly pursues the diamonds, firmly believing that no property belonging to the estate can ever be separated from it and linking the future of the diamonds with that of the land itself. However, his colleague, Mr. Dove, disagrees on the status of the necklace. Mr. Camperdown insists that the necklace is an heirloom (which means they can never leave the family estate), while Mr. Dove asks, "Would the Law do a service, do you think, if it lent its authority to the special preservation in special hands of trinkets only to be used for vanity and ornament? Is that a kind of property over which an owner should have a power of disposition more lasting, more autocratic, than is given him even in regard to land?" (295). Preservation, an important word here, is precisely the reason an object is made an heirloom or put in trust. A necklace does not merit the same consideration that land does. By this logic Lizzie tries to defend her right to the necklace: "If a thing is a man's own he can give it away; - not a house, or a farm, or a wood, or anything like that" (94).²⁰¹ She argues that the diamond necklace – a thing that can be carried about – is surely an individual's right to give

from the earth, not made. The essay discusses the jeweler Bohemer's plan for an extravagant necklace, with tiers of diamonds of all shapes and sizes that is so expensive, no one can buy it. Each diamond speaks of colonial oppression, the explosion of the earth, and violence motivated by greed. Carlyle suggests that not only is its price of between 80 and 90,000 pounds prohibitively expensive, so is the price exacted from the environment.

²⁰⁰ The diamonds originate from India, but the necklace, a beautiful commodity, masks their origins of imperial greed. Unlike Dorothea in *Middlemarch* who cannot separate the image of the mines, the rape of the earth, and the exploitation of the workers from her mother's jewels, Lizzie and others in Trollope's novel do not look too closely at them. Interestingly, Lord Fawn works for the India Office that is endeavoring to strip the Sawab of Mygawb of his property. See Suzanne Daly for discussions of the diamond's relationship to Empire.

²⁰¹ Lizzie steadfastly refuses to return the jewels, ordering a special iron box to house them. Jen Sattaur suggests this controversial and heavy box "marks Lizzie clearly as a victim, as a woman who strives only to protect what is, for the moment at least, her property, in the face of unhelpful and even malicious officials. By leaving the question of legal ownership open at the end of the novel, Trollope even implies that in some ways the necklace is Lizzie's by right of conquest" (47). Sattaur sympathizes with Lizzie, and surmises that Lizzie's dishonest behavior results from her attempts to live on her own terms. When Sattaur asserts the diamonds are Lizzie's by "right of conquest," she glosses over the fact that this is the same logic condoning British appropriation of Indian diamonds. Though Lizzie, perhaps admirably, tries to live on her own terms, her sense of entitlement to the diamonds represents her greed above all else.

away, and by the same token, she recognizes the permanence of land and its connection to a family, rather than a single individual. However, this fails to stay her hand when it comes to the house and wood she inherits from her late husband. Although critics such as Suzanne Daly and Christoph Lindner discuss the diamond as commodity in great detail, they do not emphasize the environmental ramifications of the gems, nor link Lizzie's possessiveness of the diamonds to her plunder of Portray.²⁰² Quoting Bill Brown, Daly investigates "the way commodity relations came to saturate everyday life" and how *The Eustace Diamonds* demonstrates that the human investment in the physical object world, and the mutual constitution of human subject and inanimate object, can hardly be reduced to those relations" (7). As Brown and Daly observe, Trollope registers the dangers of reducing the physical world to objects, but such scholarship fails to recognize Trollope's interest in the latent reality of human/nonhuman networks. In other words, "things" are not objects merely to be circulated, but agents in our lives.

Although Sir Florian provides Lizzie with a generous settlement upon his death,²⁰³ Lizzie, caring little for the property and more for keeping up appearances, curtails the funds available for its maintenance and thus ignores her responsibility as its steward. Along with receiving a large sum immediately, Lizzie inherits a life interest in the whole property in

²⁰² Daly does, however, connect the history of the Eustace diamonds to the subplot where Lord Fawn and Frank Greystock debate in parliament about the Sawab's claims to territory in India. She examines diamonds as "plunder," one way of symbolically appropriating colonial subjects and territory; commodifying diamonds parallels the usurpation of land. Lindner focuses mostly on Lizzie's commodification and how she is seen through her diamonds, not in and of herself. Lindner ignores the history of the diamonds, more concerned with their circulation in the text and with the tying of Lizzie's fate to the fate of the jewels as a tradeable/exchangeable object on the marriage market.

²⁰³ Her husband, Sir Florian, is described as "vicious, and . . . dying" (43). Trollope later qualifies what he means by "vicious:" "He was one who denied himself no pleasures, let the cost be what it might in health, pocket, or morals" (43). In other words, he ruthlessly pursues his desires, paying no heed to the consequences. Trollope uses "vicious" synonymously with "decadent" in its literal sense, as Sir Florian's pleasure shortens his life. His doctors predict his early death "if he did not change his manner of living." (43). While consumption is said to run in his family, Sir Florian's illness is not actually a heredity disease, but a hereditary disposition to conspicuous consumption. As the medical men determine that changing his manner of living would recover his health, we see that his vices cause his death. Sir Florian, then, is another casualty of dis-ease, resembling Arthur Huntington, the dissipated aristocrat of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Scotland, including Portray Castle in Ayrshire and around 150 acres of land, while her son stands to inherit the bulk of Eustace property once he comes of age. This includes the estates in Yorkshire, the “backbone of the Eustace wealth” (48), which, in the meantime, remain in the hands of John Eustace as manager and the heir’s guardian.²⁰⁴ Lizzie is undeniably well provided for as the recipient of the revenues from Portray, around £4000 a year (52). As she claims about the diamonds, Lizzie insists that the estate is hers in perpetuity, while the will grants the estate for her life only. This distinction establishes the rights Lizzie has to the property in regard to its sale and use; while she may live there, the property remains effectually Eustace property. The family lawyer and the Eustace family are aggrieved when she begins to ransack the land for saleable timber to pay her debts, violating the conditions of the will and her trust as a landowner.

The anxiety Trollope expresses over Lizzie’s behavior reveals the family’s larger stake in property. As Mr. Camperdown tries to explain again and again, after Lizzie’s death Portray Castle would “be rejoined, of necessity, to the rest of the Eustace property” (77). These legal documents detail the source of the Eustaces’ wealth, the agricultural produce (including timber) their estates yield. In addition to providing for the present needs of the family, Eustace land is kept in trust for subsequent generations. The will stipulates that Lizzie is only a life-holder so that the estate never truly leaves the family, and is thus preserved. The Eustaces regard Lizzie as an interloper, but John Eustace, the family’s spokesman, does not begrudge Lizzie the necklace.

²⁰⁴ Inheritance among English aristocrats was governed by primogeniture, the principle that the oldest son or, in the case of sonless families, the closest legitimate male relative in the male line would inherit the family title, estate, and the income it produced. This system was often enforced by deeds of entail intended to protect the family lands in the event that an irresponsible person inherited them: when land is entailed, the proprietor cannot sell any portion of the property or determine his heir, and is thus more accurately a life-holder than landowner. As Claudia Nelson explains, “Compulsive gamblers or spendthrifts, say, could raise money on the property by renting it to a stranger. They could mine it, cut down its trees and market them as timber, or dispose of art collections or other valuable household contents not mentioned in the entail. But they would not have the power to contract a mortgage, sell their houses, or reduce the size of their land holdings to pay their debts unless they broke the entail, a legal proceeding that required the acquiescence of their adult heirs” (73). Entail guards against foolish stewardship. On these same principles, Lizzie is prevented from selling Eustace property, although she can abuse her temporary privileges to profit from the land.

He is only truly angered when she begins to cut down the forest and so he wants to marry her off to a decent gentleman to curb her mismanagement.²⁰⁵ He vents to Lizzie's cousin, Frank

Greystock:

“I'm blessed if she hasn't begun to cut down a whole side of a forest at Portray.

She has no more right to touch the timber, except for repairs about the place, than you have.”

“And if she lived for fifty years,” asked Greystock, “is none to be cut?”

“Yes; - by consent. Of course the regular cutting for the year is done, year by year. That's as regular as the rents, and the produce is sold by the acre. But she is marking the old oaks. What the deuce can she want the money for?” (154).

Eustace speaks of the timber as if it, too, is an heirloom. It is a valuable that should not be touched except “by consent,” and the “old oaks” in particular should not be cut or sold. Eustace insists that Lizzie has no right to sell the wood, or take it out of the family's hands. Since her brother-in-law allows her to keep a necklace worth a fortune, clearly Eustace is more concerned with what the land represents than the revenue it generates. He observes to Mr. Camperdown that ten thousand pounds hardly matters between now and the little Sir Florian's adulthood if the rest of the property is squandered. Even when one “owns” property, to be a wise steward is to look at oneself as merely a temporary resident, safeguarding the property for posterity. In a Biblical context, man is the agent of God, but in a secular context, the steward is the agent for the next generations. Thus the incumbent at Portray does not have the right to do as he or she likes

²⁰⁵ The circumstances of the Fawns demonstrate the responsibilities of landed gentry. Paradoxically a poor rich man, Lord Fawn's expenditure nearly outstrips his income. They pay proportionately higher for their laborers and must keep the “large old brick house in order” (117). They employ only the necessary servants: butler, coachman, stable-boys, gardeners, and cowherd (117). The villain Sir Griffin Tewett is also a poor rich man; “He was nominally, not only the heir to, but actually the possessor of, a large property; – but he could not touch the principal, and of the income only so much as certain legal curmudgeons would allow him. As Greystock had said, everybody was at law with him – so successful had been his father in mismanaging, and miscontrolling, and misappropriating the property. Tewett Hall had gone to wrack and ruin for four years, and was now let almost for nothing” (371).

with the property because it is never truly “owned” by one person alone. John Eustace’s purity of interest comes through in the novel’s discourse, opposed to a mercenary aristocratic stewardship. Lizzie fails to feel a sense of duty, and abuses her ownership by converting resources into ready money.

Once Portray comes into her possession, she neglects its maintenance. We are told, “There was a grand kitchen garden, – or rather a garden which had been intended to be grand; – but since Lizzie’s reign had been commenced, the grandeur had been neglected. Grand kitchen gardens are expensive, and Lizzie had at once been firm in reducing the under-gardeners from five men to one and a boy. The head-gardener had of course left her at once,” and Lizzie hires a cheaper, but less qualified replacement (228). Here, “grand” likely means large and well-stocked rather than ornamental. Lizzie “ought to have been happy and comfortable” (229), but she continually makes poor decisions as to how to spend her money. She “firmly” but unwisely reduces the staff. Looking for convenient ways to limit expenditure, she ignorantly decides that the kitchen garden is not as important as procuring horses for her guests. Lizzie does not prioritize spending that is not conspicuous consumption: she delights in her wealth insofar as she can show it off and display her purchasing power. She spends the bare minimum on the estate, letting it fall into disorder and disregarding an important role of the landowner, to provide employment for the surrounding community.

A battle of wills erupts between the reckless landowner, Lizzie, and the conscientious steward, Gowran. Lizzie makes an enemy of him, “the steward and bailiff and manager and factotum about the place, who bought a cow or sold one if occasion required, and saw that nobody stole anything, and who knew the boundaries of the farms, and all about the tenants, and looked after the pipes when frost came” (238). An “honest, domineering, hard-working,

intelligent Scotchman,” Gowran honors the Eustace name and hates the irresponsible Lizzie “with all his heart” (238). His “fostering care” maintains the estate (319), and he hesitates to call Lizzie his mistress, as, “There’s a mony things at Portray as ha’ to be lookit after,” and, he implies, Lizzie does not look after them (575). Gowran will not quit his post, “having an idea in his mind that it was now the great duty of his life to save Portray from her ravages” (238). Gowran’s genuine love of Portray trumps his hatred of Lizzie; thus, he continues to trim the woods and repair the fences, roads, and buildings. He also assiduously takes care of the crops and animals. When he catches Lizzie and Frank embracing, Lizzie angrily dismisses him. He, however, refuses to be fired: “There’s timber and a warld o’ things about the place as wants protection on behalf o’ the heir. If your leddieship is minded to be quit of my services. I’ll find a maister in Mr. Camper-doon, as’ll nae allow me to be thrown out o’ employ” (276). He carries his point. Lizzie does not dare to get rid of Gowran because he is the only one with the “essential” knowledge to run the estate (239).

Lizzie delights in the power conferred upon her by things, and in turn the power she exercises over physical objects and people. Lizzie’s greed prompts her to lie when an attempt to steal the diamonds is made: the thieves take her conspicuous strongbox, and although the necklace remains safe in her desk, Lizzie stays silent to impede Mr. Camperdown’s efforts to return the necklace to the Eustace family. As a result, when the diamonds are actually stolen, in order to hide her perjury Lizzie cannot report them missing. Self-interest guides Lizzie in every action she takes; although the theft of her diamonds agitates her, her emotion stems from the loss of her “power of being arrogant to those around her” (51). She is relieved that Mr. Camperdown no longer pesters her about the necklace and she resists testifying in court once the criminals are apprehended. Frank insists it is her duty to the community to aid the investigation. She retorts,

“I don’t care for the community” (607). Regardless of the context, no truer words are spoken by Lizzie. She does not care for the Eustace heritage; she does not care for the un-“alluring” land in Ayrshire; she does not care for her child; she does not care for justice. The only thing she cares about is her own comfort. Once the diamonds are out of her hands, the whole matter becomes irrelevant to her. Lizzie only cares about Portray insofar as she can entertain guests and flaunt her position and income. That the property may go to ruin in the long run certainly does not matter to her. She regards her employees as necessary encumbrances, and does not spare a thought for those who also rely on the estate for an income. A woman so fundamentally selfish cannot fulfill the duties of stewardship. Trollope warns against this anti-community sentiment, urging his readers to despise her unheroic behavior. Lizzie lacks the quality of “watchfulness”: she lacks foresight and continually blunders because she fails to strategize or consider the far-reaching consequences of her actions.

The distinction between wise and foolish stewardship emerges throughout Trollope’s writing, including his first major success, *Framley Parsonage* (1860). The Barsetshire gentry control large tracts of land, and the novel chronicles their exchange, destruction, and preservation. *The Eustace Diamonds* considers Lizzie’s wanton disregard for the future generations of Eustaces, and her assessment of her property’s use-value. In *Framley Parsonage*, Trollope expresses the same concerns; however, he looks more closely at land’s irreplaceability and its value to the public, exploring the tension between private ownership and public service. Mr. Sowerby is perhaps as concerned about losing his family estate, Chalidicotes, because its woodland will be cut down, as he is over the shame of losing caste. The Duke of Omnium plans to “sweep up and garner” the park, while the Crown plans to “disforest” the ancient Chase,²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ The term “dis-forestation” refers specifically to the process whereby the Crown sold off land, thus removing the official designation of “forest.” The result of this, however, was usually the clearing of the land for industrial or

uprooting the ancient oaks to reclaim the land for its commercial value. As the gentry effectually holds land in trust for the entire community, Trollope shines new light on the anxiety about keeping land in the family. In other words, the novel does not merely convey a conservative concern about maintaining England's aristocracy, but worries that this divestiture may harm the fabric of England's land itself.

The unscrupulous, irresponsible Mr. Sowerby feels no qualms about bankrupting his creditors, or pulling others in debt alongside him (notably the novel's imprudent protagonist Mark Robarts), yet his conscience lives in the beloved woods of Chaldicotes. His name expresses his ambivalent attitude: "sower" suggests his position in the community as landowner, yet he "sours" his inheritance by gambling away his collateral. The manor and park belong to the Sowerby family, while the old forest attached to the property, the Chase of Chaldicotes, belongs to the Crown, which "now, in these utilitarian days, is to be disforested" (53).²⁰⁷ Sowerby, despite "all his pecuniary distresses," has, until now, "managed to save from the axe and the auction-mart that portion of his paternal heritage":

agricultural purposes. Thus, the word carries the dual meaning of divesting land of royal affiliation and cutting down the now vulnerable trees.

²⁰⁷ A chase is a forest that is monarch's property, but given over to one of his subjects to safeguard. While a chase is no longer governed by forest law, "its character and extent might remain virtually unchanged" (James 2). Up until the mid 19th century, oaks were needed for the Royal Navy. Although the first iron ship, the HMS *Warrior*, was built in 1860, "nearly three quarters of a million pounds were spent in buying timber for the Navy" in that year alone (James 160). The outbreak of the Civil War caused England to rethink the materials of their ships, due to the extreme shortage of timber and because their traditional wooden ships were no match for the stronger American ships. When, in 1862, the American *Merrimac* sank both the *Congress* and *Cumberland*, "it was immediately realized that, unless the Navy was provided with ironclads, the Country's role as a great sea power was at an end" (James 160). James continues, "It is difficult to appreciate the widespread effect that this turn of events had on machinery for providing the Royal Navy with timber. The future of those woodlands that had been planted with oak, specifically for the Navy, was called into question; the channels through which timber had been purchased were drastically curtailed; those who were concerned with the transport of timber to the dockyards soon realized that their services were no longer required, while many of the smaller shipbuilding yards found themselves in jeopardy" (160). These events help contextualize Trollope's novel, where he chronicles the Crown's "disforestation" of areas no longer needed as a ready supply of timber. Instead of making forests safer, they were now subjected to other commercial uses (as fuel) or cleared in favor of more profitable, arable land.

In former times [the Chase] was a great forest, stretching half across the country [...] but the larger remaining portion, consisting of aged hollow oaks, centuries old, and wide-spreading withered beeches, stands in the two parishes of Chaldicotes and Uffley. People still come from afar to see the oaks of Chaldicotes, and to hear their feet rustle among the thick autumn leaves. But they will soon come no longer. The giants of past ages are to give way to wheat and turnips; a ruthless Chancellor of the Exchequer, disregarding old associations and rural beauty, requires money returns from the lands; and the Chase of Chaldicotes is to vanish from the earth's surface. (53)

The passage contrasts this innocuous enjoyment of nature with economic values, as the “ruthless” Chancellor of the Exchequer orders the forest to be cleared to become arable land. “Money” overrides “beauty.” The narrator describes the intrinsic value of the trees: tourists continue to visit the woods to see for themselves a primeval forest and to experience undeveloped green space. For many generations, the Sowerbys have been rangers of the Chase, giving them “almost as wide an authority over the Crown forest as over their own” (54). Sowerby recognizes his responsibilities to the community as a steward. Despite his recklessness, up until this point he has determinedly preserved the centuries-old oaks, acknowledging the higher value of heritage and rural beauty over ready money. Unfortunately, Sowerby literally cannot see the forest for the trees when he must sell his land, converting trees into cash to pay off his creditors. Living outside his means, he realizes too late the consequences of Mammon worship as the ax threatens the irreplaceable forest.²⁰⁸

Such self-awareness rescues Sowerby from complete villainy. He squanders the chances in life afforded to him by his inheritance, and reflects upon “what a pass [he had] brought

²⁰⁸ This same possibility threatens Lord Lufton. To cover his debts he intends to sell part of his property, a farm, in Oxfordshire (62). Lady Lufton cannot “bring her mind to such a profanation for the Lufton acres” and so sends her son five thousand pounds to cancel his debts (113).

himself!” (332). This exclamation acknowledges his personal responsibility, and while he continually makes poor decisions, he agonizes over shirking his duty. His conspicuous consumption on horses and entertainment looks forward to Lizzie Eustace, but unlike Lizzie, who selfishly keeps up appearances by undermining the integrity of her estate, Sowerby does not directly ravish the land. He is the foolish steward who, instead of giving the other servants their food, “begins to eat and drink, and to be drunken” (Luke 12:45). In the parable of the stewards, resources are represented as food to be shared. Sowerby appropriates to himself all the resources and squanders his trust.

As the narrator laments in the earlier passage, Sowerby’s actions are injurious to the community. Victorian forestry prioritized community benefit as equal to the individual landowner’s advantage. In his influential text *The Forester* (1847, 1855), James Brown urges the landowner to preserve “a proper quantity of the natural forests for ultimate good,” for the succeeding generations (2).²⁰⁹ Should Chaldicotes Chase be sold off, the public will lose an invaluable natural resource. Furthermore, as an MP, Sowerby cannot be arrested, a privilege he exploits by living entirely on credit. Local business owners receive no compensation for their services and he defrauds his creditors. So while Sowerby’s standard of living never diminishes, he lets his estate fall into ruin. Chaldicotes looks “disordered”: the lawns are untrimmed; winter leaves have yet to be removed; weeds take over the walkways; the fences are “shattered” and bent (440). Here we see the immediate impact of Sowerby’s mismanagement, the sight of which causes him to reflect on the future ramifications: “he would sit and think of his old family: how they had roamed there time out of mind in those Chaldicotes woods, father and son and grandson in regular succession, each giving them over, without blemish or decrease, to his successor”

²⁰⁹ The text details a system of forestry that will increase the economic value of land to benefit “the community at large” (6).

(440). The wise steward dutifully preserves the trees “without blemish or decrease.” That the trees are most valuable in their original condition tacitly recognizes their intrinsic value to the community. Sowerby goes to the wood to seek communion with his ancestors. Though he imagines his family, including the descendants he has disinherited, the woods chasten him for failing in his duty to others, including the surrounding population. Sowerby knows that land is irreplaceable. His heritage cannot be regrown. Although land can be replanted, renewed, its original qualities are inevitably lost in the process.

The concern over “new” land emerges in a conversation between Sowerby, Frank Gresham, and the Duke. Gresham lives at Boxall Hill, where they “haven’t a tree” (120). Mr. Sowerby compliments their exotics, but Gresham would “sooner have one full-grown oak standing in its pride alone [...] than all the exotics in the world,” noting that new growth will not happen soon enough for him to see its fruition in his lifetime (121).²¹⁰ Thus, as Gresham exclaims, “rooting up” trees is “a murderous shame” (121). Sowerby realizes that the devastation he has wrought in his lifetime will take decades to repair. He experiences dis-ease resembling the feelings expressed by Gresham, and experienced by Mr. Gresham Senior when he too was losing his property in an earlier chronicle, *Doctor Thorne* (1858).²¹¹ He experiences the “dislocations of his property” as “operations on his very self which he was forced to witness [...] He, luckily [...] had lived to see all his bones and joints put together again” (*Framley Parsonage* 328), but Sowerby will not be granted such relief.

Trollope describes a literal connection between human and nonhuman: Gresham’s land is an appendage to his body and he cannot feel whole without it. A sense of place defines one’s self. Thus, Sowerby loses his identity along with the woods:

²¹⁰ In the 1860s, the timber shortage was a serious problem as the life of a mature tree was longer than that of a man; an oak, for instance, takes 120 years to mature.

²¹¹ See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of dis-ease in the Victorian period.

“There can be nothing more bitter to a man than such a surrender. What, compared to this, can be the loss of wealth to one who has himself made it, and brought it together, but has never actually seen it with his bodily eyes? Such wealth has come by one chance, and goes by another: the loss of it is part of the game which the man is playing [... but to] have swallowed up in one’s own maw all that should have graced one’s children, and one’s grandchildren!” (326).

The language of consumption recalls Ruskin’s distinction between wealth and illth.²¹² Sowerby has swallowed the land for personal gain, as the Duke intends to “swallow” the woods whole. This perception, actually seeing wealth in the form of trees, signifies eco-consciousness. As Sowerby distinguishes between wealth and illth, symbolic economies of the capitalist marketplace are pitted against the primary economies of objects and agents in the material world. Trollope describes a kind of wealth that is “real,” substantive, rather than an intangible bank balance. The wealth one has “made” or “brought together,” in this case the preservation of a long-standing legacy, is intrinsically more valuable. Susan Colòn argues that the stewardship parables supply for the Victorians “a conceptual model that enables the transformation of ‘illth’ into wealth” (102). Sowerby, the foolish steward, squanders his wealth, “causing various devastation and trouble around [him] in all directions” (Ruskin “Unto this Last” 211). Referencing Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, Colòn’s argument is applicable to *Framley Parsonage*: “Properties in the hands of stewards make wealth; they are the dust that is really gold, that conduces to life. Conversely, properties in the grip of owners or would-be owners tend to make illth [...] that conduces to death” (102). In practice, Sowerby is really an “owner” rather than “steward,” in that he converts his wealth of trees into illth to sustain his conspicuous

²¹² In “Unto this Last” (1860), Ruskin uses the term “illth” as the antonym to “wealth” defined as well-being. Illth suggests the ill-being resulting from ill-gotten money.

consumption. Trollope advises that if a man “will only restrain his greed,” he can enjoy all his property and the fruits of it (333). Stewardship is revealed to be closely linked to the prospect of ownership in Victorian culture, particularly the prescription to increase property, and Trollope shows that it is only a short step backward from stewardship to ownership in Sowerby’s inability to put aside his own self-interest. In other words, the novel registers for its readership the problem inherent in stewardship with its human-oriented ontology.

Trollope’s novel advocates an ideal in which he or she who will preserve the land and act as a wise steward shall inherit it. When the Duke of Omnium demands immediate payment on his mortgages, Sowerby loses his claim to the land: “Chaldicotes was to be swept up and garnered, and made part and parcel of the Gatherum property” (325). Aptly called “Gather” “um,” the Duke greedily buys up “fair property” in Barsetshire to add to his domain. It is unclear precisely what he means by sweeping and garnering, leaving whether or not he will preserve the land an unanswered question. As a result, Sowerby chooses to sell the land to Miss Dunstable who intends on “rescuing the Sowerby portion of the Chaldicotes property from the duke’s clutches” (443), and to buy the Chase, to keep the property intact. While her intentions reassure Sowerby as to the future fate of his paternal acres, he never truly recovers from losing ownership of the property. He “attempted that plan of living as a tenant in his old house at Chaldicotes and of making a living out of the land which he farmed; but he soon abandoned it. He had no aptitude for such industry, and could not endure his altered position in the county. He soon relinquished Chaldicotes of his own accord, and has vanished away” (552). Sowerby enjoys being a landed man, but he has no work ethic. He is still unable to fulfill the function of steward and remaining in Barsetshire reminds him of his failure. He eventually vanishes and Miss Dunstable and her new husband, Dr. Thorne, move into Chaldicotes, rejoining the chase to the

estate. She makes a higher offer than the Duke on the crown property, “to the manifest profit of the public at large” (549). The newly minted Mrs. Thorne has no plans to develop the property and the doctor will not hear of any trees being cut down (558), so the reader can be assured that the property will be preserved. Juliet McMaster shows that Trollope’s frequent use of country estates to stage his fiction indicates his “deep respect for the values that are rooted in the land” (70). In his conservative endings, the “worthy” heir must eventually inherit the estate. McMaster argues that the worthy heir is always the legitimate heir by blood, but this is not the case when Miss Dunstable assumes Chaldicotes, which suggests that proper stewardship defines worth.²¹³ McMaster describes bad stewardship, citing Lady Eustace among others, whose disastrous marriages punish them for marrying money. She claims that land “turns to ash” in the hands of women. Again, Miss Dunstable as both a woman and an outsider, contradicts these assertions. Unlike Lizzie Eustace, Miss Dunstable regards her property as a trust, to be shared with the community. She becomes the anti-type of Lizzie: Miss Dunstable values the independence her wealth gives to her and frequently uses that wealth in service of the community, refusing to submit her self-will to men or the marketplace. She finally marries a man who shares her values and allows her to manage her property, which, kept intact, flourishes under her hands. While McMaster overemphasizes the importance of legitimacy by blood, she astutely observes that the proprietors of country estates in Trollope’s fiction are “members of the ministry more fully demonstrated as sacred than all the bishops, deans, prebendaries, and curates in the diocese of Barchester” due to the transcendent value of land (125). This apt comparison accentuates the essentially religious duty of landowners to preserve England’s environment.

²¹³ This conception of worth recurs in *Wives and Daughters*, where “natural selection” is determined by merit, not circumstance.

III. The Wise Steward

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Luke 12:42-43

In 1873, James Stirling, a popular London minister, published a study on the Parables of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), looking closely at the stewardship commanded by the Bible. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells of a master who, upon leaving on a long journey, entrusts his property with three servants. The first and second servants invest their money and double the property's value, while the third servant buries his portion in the ground. The master praises the industrious servants for their faithful stewardship, and reprimands the third servant for wasting his "talent" and for not serving his master or the community. A "talent," literally a large unit of money, is usually interpreted as personal ability or skill, and so this parable endorsed the Protestant work ethic of capitalism, rewarding the risk taken to serve God. Stirling takes the interpretive leap from individual property to the earth as a whole, insisting that God, who no longer enters the human drama directly, has entrusted the earth to humanity's care. Stirling argues that stewardship is essential to human flourishing, and his interpretation of the Parables of the Talents reflects the Victorian understanding of stewardship as a social obligation. Similarly, the parable in Luke of the Rich Fool reprimands the servants who neglect the property in their care and emphasizes that wealth accumulated through industry and ingenuity must be shared. Like the third servant who hides his talent, the foolish steward squanders his wealth; the wise steward "watches" his property for God, distributing his resources among his dependents. William Arnot, in his earlier *Notes on the Parables* (1865), also looks at these thematically related parables, drawing similar conclusions about stewardship and social duty. Arnot, in fact, aligns "riches" with environmental resources, "treasures" from heaven including rain and grain.

He sermonizes, “Riches are truly enjoyed when they are wisely employed in doing good; but hoarded as the portion of their possessor, they burden him while they remain his, and rend him at the parting” (377). From these parables, we can construct a paradigm of the wise steward: through hard work and prudence, the steward increases the abundance of the land in his trust, serving his community and preserving the property for the future. The term “property” translates into the environment at large.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s fiction expresses her sustained interest “in the relationship between religion and social politics” (Knight and Mason 77). The Bible’s influence pervades her fiction, and in *Wives and Daughters* (1854-6), she depicts the wise steward whose careful management ensures the maintenance of the country estate for his family’s security and the social obligations of the landowner. Here, we move away from the sort of cautionary tale presented by Trollope’s novels to a model of stewardship as careful and charitable management that facilitates environmental engagement.²¹⁴ The boundary between stewardship and possession is permeable, and becomes a way for Gaskell to explore the line between care for the material world and a merely materialistic pursuit of capital. She suggests that wise stewardship may help realize lasting social reform. The importance of land preservation figures prominently in her work. In *Wives and Daughters*, she illustrates a clear cultural anxiety over deforestation while demonstrating the recuperative function of stewardship in the disruption of the father and son relationship at Hamley Hall.

Unlike Trollope’s foolish stewards, Gaskell’s wise stewards protect their estates and offer a positive model of agrarian living in the face of technological change. *Wives and Daughters*, at least in name, is about Molly Gibson, a doctor’s daughter, coping with her shallow and scheming

²¹⁴ Gaskell admired Trollope, wishing he “would go on writing *Framley Parsonage* for ever. I do not see,” she wrote, “any reason why it should ever come to an end, and everyone I know is always dreading the *last* number” (*Letters* 602). Perhaps Gaskell felt so strongly about the novel because its themes captured her literary imagination.

step-mother and her strong-willed, coquettish step-sister. At the heart of the story is Molly's long-suffering love for Roger Hamley, son of a wealthy Squire. Much of the action surrounds Molly's visits to the ailing Mrs. Hamley and the tight-knit relationships that bloom between the devoted girl and the family, regardless of social barriers. I will focus, however, on the two estates in the novel – Hamley Hall and the Towers – and Gaskell's construction of a stewardship discourse that cultivates a sense of place.

To be a successful benefactor *requires* careful management of land; it is impossible to look out for any one's interests, including one's own, otherwise. The primary landowner, Lord Cumnor, resides at Cumnor Towers, where he is an active landlord in the 1820s in the small town of Hollingford (modeled on Gaskell's native Knutford). The narrator explains that he “put[s] his steward a little on one side sometimes, and tak[es] the reins into his own hands [...], much to the annoyance of the agent,” who resents Lord Cumnor's “fancy to go ‘pottering,’” meaning that “occasionally the Earl asked his own questions of his own tenants, and used his own eyes and ears in the management of the smaller details of his property. But his tenants liked my lord all the better for this habit of his” (7). Not content to trust his agent alone, Lord Cumnor prefers to act as his own steward, relying on his own visual evidence that his estate is running properly, not simply to guarantee profit, but to safeguard the welfare of his tenants. His “pottering,” or superintending, comprises even the “smaller details” of the property.

Gaskell depicts work out in the open at the Towers as Mr. Gibson rides past “men in their shirtsleeves [...] in the fields getting in the early harvest of oats; [...] he could see them over the tall hedgerows, and even hear the soothing measured sound of the fall of the long swathes, as they were mown” (109-10). Analogous to the opening scene in *Mary Barton* (1848) where Gaskell shows urban laborers seeking out the “delicious sounds of rural life” in Green Heys

Field (5), this necessary labor comforts Gibson as he glimpses the growing pile of oats, though the men who sweat with exertion likely do not find the work “soothing.” This bountiful harvest provides a sense of security more valuable than monetary wealth. Gibson’s imaginative sympathy and Cumnor’s stewardship reflect the aesthetics of community integral to Gaskell’s novel. Like her other work, *Wives and Daughters* suggests that sympathy is essential for social progression, using an evolutionary framework that aligns fitness with cooperation and compassion. This essential harvest work, overseen by Cumnor himself, dignifies the work of the laborer and stresses the interconnections between landowner, dependents, and other community members. The land exercises a volitional power as it brings together the human actors in this scene. Cumnor exemplifies how to create a community by rooting it in the concept of entanglements, the networks between people, plants, animals and natural forces that enable human existence.

The Cumnors’ example of careful stewardship influences the town to act in kind. Whenever the “great folks” return to Hollingford, their agent Mr. Sheepshanks “might be seen trotting up and down on his stout old cob, speaking to attentive masons, plasterers, and glaziers about putting everything – on the outside at least – about the cottages belonging to ‘my lord,’ in perfect repair” (274). Sheepshanks concerns himself with superficial repairs, but his solicitude in satisfying his lord’s standards for adequate accommodations shows that the town benefits from watchful stewardship. As Lord Cumnor owns the majority of the town, these improvements exert a substantial impact on the residents and prompt, “by the dread of contrast,” “those who lived under other landlords, or in houses of their own [...] to do up their dwellings” (274). The Cumnors sit at the center of Hollingford’s web, their influence radiating outward. While the Cumnors own and profit from their property, the family diligently fulfills their duty as

town-benefactors, using their wealth to serve others. The “master” in the watchfulness parable refers to God, though in a secular context, the family inherits capital from their forefathers and are in a sense mastered by the duty to pass on the estate intact, in the process fulfilling their ethical obligation to the community. This is precisely what Lizzie and Sowerby fail to do. The Cumnors wisely manage their inheritance, using their goods and powers to benefit the town; thus aristocratic stewardship, while mercenary in its emphasis on capital, remains ethically motivated.

The novel opens with an example of stewardship, when the family hosts an annual “gala” day for the ladies of Hollingford to thank them for their service to the school. It is on this solemn day that we are introduced to Molly Gibson, who is honored with the dubious pleasure of attending for the first time. The ladies of the house guide the guests through their greenhouses and hothouses, where Lady Agnes, possessing “scientific taste,” “expatiated on the rarity of this, and the mode of cultivation required by that plant” (15). Gaskell clearly uses the term “scientific” pejoratively, as she starkly juxtaposes the artificial, unhealthy hothouses with the refreshing greenery of a parkland that is indistinguishable from woodland. The exotic blooms do not pique Molly’s interest “half so much” as the “flowers in the open air.” She soon grows faint in the oppressive heat and escapes back out to the “[g]reen velvet lawns,” stretching “away on every side into the finely wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft sunny sweeps of grass, and the dark gloom of the forest-trees beyond, Molly did not see them; and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her” (15). There is no perceptible division between the cultivated portion of the estate and the pristine woods. Although Gaskell applies the word “gloom” to the forest, the “sunny” grass that merges so seamlessly with the trees casts its rays onto the forest, diffusing their darkness. The attentive eye dismisses such distinctions, even superstitions, regarding “wildness.” The park remains

“finely wooded” and the aboriginal forest remains intact so that the scene impresses Molly with its abundance.

Molly’s reaction to the hothouses and the surrounding wilderness suggests that a well-managed estate preserves the wild while carefully maintaining the land for a bountiful yield and to facilitate engagement *with* nature, rather than simply taming it. Molly prefers the native flowers to Lady Agnes’s collection of curiosities, and the narrator clearly shares her sympathies, evident by her pains to differentiate between unmodified areas and the “glittering” hothouses, as here, and elsewhere the boxed-in “ornamental” gardens. The other man-made structures at the Towers blend into the natural environment: the walls and fences “were covered with climbing roses, and rare honeysuckles and other creepers just bursting into bloom” (15). Walls and fences represent the impulse to “wall out” the wild, or “fence in” the property one owns, and the camouflaging of such boundaries helps cover over the divisions between human beings and their environment. In short, Gaskell devalues the “picturesque” in favor of the working estate.²¹⁵ Here we see the ecological ramifications of stewardship. Although much of the land is modified, human needs do not overwhelm the landscape or transform it completely.

After chronicling this memorable event, the novel moves forward, presenting us with a seventeen-year old Molly in the first blushes of maidenhood who bonds with Squire Hamley precisely because of her appreciation of her native place; she understands the features and workings of his estate that so delight him. Like Lord Cumnor, the Squire regards his stewardship as a sacred trust, feeling a commitment to his ancestral legacy and driven by happy childhood

²¹⁵ To create picturesque landscapes, its elements were literally arranged as if in a picture. Ann Bermingham explains that when applied to landscape, the term “referred to its fitness to make a picture; applied to pictures, the term referred to the fidelity with which they copied the picturesque landscape. If the highest praise for nature was to say that it looked like a painting, the highest praise for a painting was to say that it resembled a painterly nature” (57). This, then, links nature to art, and creates an anesthetized ideology of nature. Labor, pollution, disharmonious proportions, etc. were not “fit” for a painting.

associations with these familial acres. The Squire's intimate knowledge of his estate and proper land management earn him admiration. Of the Hamleys of Hamley, one of the oldest families in the region, the narrator explains,

They never traded, or speculated, or tried agricultural improvements of any kind. They had no capital in any bank [...]. 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. There was a dignity in this quiet conservatism that gained him an immense amount of respect both from high and low; and he might have visited every house in the county had he chosen.

(41)

Squire Hamley's avoidance of speculation contrasts with Sowerby, who risks and loses his property. The Squire persists in employing old-fashioned farming methods and resists the conspicuous consumption practiced by his neighbors, voluntarily choosing simplicity over sumptuous living. Many critics read the Squire's reactionary habits unfavorably, especially in terms of the novel's awareness of evolution. Phoebe Poon and Mary Debrabant argue that the Hamley family is on the verge of extinction from the Squire's inability to adapt to an industrial economy. Shu-chuan Yan highlights the Squire's "outmoded" and "traditional" thinking, oblivious to the "evolutionary pace in his time," and "therefore he fails to notice the trend towards more professional estate management" (265). These critics pass over Gaskell's obvious approval of this character, and Yan particularly overstates the case; although the Squire deliberately resists certain innovations, he is certainly "professional" in his estate management, particularly when he takes on a government loan to drain and reclaim Upton Common at the

edge of his property, doubling the value of the estate (191). Undoubtedly, the Squire modifies his environment to serve human interests, and the advantage in removing common land is questionable.²¹⁶ Once again, Gaskell stages the tension between the competing systems of value in the period: between capitalism and the desire to increase one's holdings, and the value placed on the intrinsic worth of the environment. Nevertheless, the Squire's traditional methods and resistance to steam-power – the “improvements” mentioned in the above passage – minimize his footprint on the land. As Will Ladislaw intends to demonstrate in his tableau in the scene from *Middlemarch* beginning this chapter, innovations such as the steam-engine potentially do more harm than good. Gaskell shares this skepticism and clearly values Squire Hamley's traditional way of life, standing as a bastion against questionable change. More than this, the Hamleys' financial woes stem from Osborne's excessive expenditures. The Squire is an effective manager and the estate suffers only when he must pay Osborne's debts. Thus, city living and conspicuous consumption, albeit indirectly, injure Hamley Hall.

Osborne's cavalier attitude towards the Hamley property offends the Squire, who views the land as an aspect of their heritage. The farm does not run for profit (“capital”), but to provide for the family, and we are told that despite their straitened circumstances, the Hall table remains “luxurious” as all the principal supplies for the household come from the estate (257). However, the expense of financing his two sons through college forces him to abandon his drainage project and he agonizes over the necessity of mortgaging some of his land. This “cut him to the heart,” because to lose any of his land is like losing a limb. It is likely the buyer would either completely refurbish the land for agricultural use, or sell the trees for industry or to the Royal

²¹⁶ This conversion of common land into private property may be beneficial to the Squire, who thus increases the amount of land usable for agriculture, although the losers in this situation are the general public if Upton Commons was available for recreation.

Navy.²¹⁷ The latter issue touches “the root” of the Squire’s resentment against his elder son, Osborne, who uses these assets as leverage to borrow money. The Squire is unable to conceive of the trees as “so many pounds sterling,” valuing them instead in terms of the joy they give, the history they represent, and their intrinsic worth.

Mr. Preston (the Cumnors’ land agent) criticizes what he sees as the Squire’s foolish stewardship. He observes Osborne’s unfitness for managing the estate, acidly, yet accurately, summarizing the state of affairs at Hamley Hall:

The poor old Squire – not the wisest of men – has woefully mismanaged his estate. And Osborne Hamley is too fine a gentleman to understand the means by which to improve the value of the land – even if he had the capital. A man who had practical knowledge of agriculture, and some thousands of ready money, might bring the rental up to eight thousand or so. Of course, Osborne will try and marry someone with money [...]. The family is going down fast; and it’s pity when these old Saxon houses vanish off the land.

(228)

Clearly, Mr. Preston regards the Squire as a bad capitalist whose failure to increase the economic value of his estate dooms his family to extinction. However, Gaskell disregards the matter of rental-value, instead focusing on Osborne’s lack of the “practical knowledge” required to manage the estate. Osborne muses to himself that the active and “useful” Roger is “fit for all the employments from which Osborne was shut out by his fastidiousness, and his (pseudo) genius;

²¹⁷ By the 1860s, the government was unable to secure the 100,000 acres of oaks perpetually needed to service the Navy, paradoxically revealing to Victorians the necessity of protecting and maintaining forests over time and leading to the birth of modern forestry. In 1769, William Marshall explained: “A seventy-four gun ship [...] swallows up three thousand loads of oak timber. A load of timber is fifty cubical feet; a ton, forty feet; consequently, a seventy-four gun ship takes 2000 large well grown timber trees: namely, trees of two tons each” (qtd. in James 147). In the year 1778, N.D.G. James explained that the Royal Navy required 413,667 tons of timber, or approximately 206, 834 trees (149). Nearly 100 years later in *The Forester*, Brown emphatically states, “no less than the matured crop of forty-four acres of woodland, or two thousand two hundred full-grown trees, are required” for one man-of-war ship (3).

so it was well he was an eldest son, for he would never have done to struggle through the world; and as for his settling down to a profession, it would be like cutting blocks with a razor!” (258)

As the first son, he has been raised as a gentleman and, since he is expected to inherit the estate, is not trained for any occupation. Plagued by a delicate constitution, he accustoms himself to a life of extravagance and diversion. He must hide his marriage to a French, Roman Catholic governess as his father expects him to marry a woman equal in rank who can bring much needed money to Hamley Hall. Mr. Preston recommends some “man who had practical knowledge of agriculture,” and such a man exists in the younger son, Roger, a naturalist always on the lookout for wild plants and creatures. Roger’s keen eyesight is continually mentioned. His father tells Molly, “Roger knows a deal of natural history, and finds out queer things sometimes. He would have been better off a dozen times during this walk of ours, if he’d been here; his eyes are always wandering about, and see twenty things where I only see one” (73). Roger resembles his father in his love of the outdoors and robust frame, though the Squire initially undervalues Roger’s talents. At this time, one could not gain honors at Cambridge with a degree in naturalism, the type of recognition his father can understand. Yet, as an amateur scientist, Roger’s forward-thinking and grasp of botany and developmental theory fit him perfectly for the role of steward and increase his standing in the community. Roger’s occupation underlines Gaskell’s concern with proper relations between human beings and the environment. The newly developing sciences that he represents train him to sympathize with human and nonhuman alike. As the source of Roger’s wisdom, naturalism intersects with stewardship discourse.

Molly discovers Roger’s virtues when he comforts her during her first major trial, her father’s second marriage. Noticing a rare, wild plant, he spots – “with those great keen eyes of his” – Molly seated under the ash-tree (114). She “almost thought that no one knew of the

hidden seat under the ash-tree but herself; for there were not more gardeners employed upon the grounds than were necessary to keep the kitchen-gardens and such of the ornamental part was frequented by the family, or in sight of the house, in good order” (113). Packed into this reflection we learn more about the workings of the estate and evidence of the Squire’s wise stewardship. As the Squire performs much of the labor himself, he employs only the “necessary” retainers. Significantly, the gardeners fall into this category, and the “kitchen-garden[ers]” enjoy pride of place. We can also infer that the “ornamental” part of the park is fairly small and kept up for the benefits of visitors (comprising the area “in sight of the house”).²¹⁸ The goal of stewardship is not to maintain a merely picturesque landscape, but a productive one that protects the health of the land.

The Squire obviously does not restrict his superintendence to the ornamental area, and neither does Roger, who is returning from a collecting expedition, dredging-nut slung over his shoulder. Roger’s powers of observation arouse his natural sympathy. When he sees Molly in distress, he awkwardly gives her advice, judging by instinct what will give her courage to face her difficulty. Anne Dewitt contends that “Gaskell’s novel participates in a representation of natural history as a moral endeavor, a representation widespread in contemporary periodical articles” (2). DeWitt points to the larger eco-conscious discourse that Gaskell contributes to by linking “scientific ways of thinking” to morality (3), placing this moral imperative in the context of land management. Molly takes to heart Roger’s words to consider others before herself; they become her guidepost throughout the novel and demonstrate the commitment to social welfare fostered by eco-consciousness. Of course, selflessness is not limited to eco-consciousness.

Victorian Evangelicalism mandated that the believer demonstrate his/her spirituality by working

²¹⁸ Mrs. Hamley’s sitting-room looks out upon this part of the grounds: “brilliant-coloured, geometrically-shaped beds, converging to a sun-dial in the midst,” “the prettiest bit of flower-garden in the grounds – or what was considered as such” (66). The added disclaimer contradicts the prevailing judgment.

for others, resulting in the zeal for missionary and charity work. The doctrine of progress that flourished in the nineteenth century, despite its hallmark of individualism, was also predicated on social duty. Herbert Spencer, for instance, defined progress as the evolution of humans from selfishness to selflessness (63). In the case of stewardship, the Victorian dictate to think of others first necessitates that one put land before one's own self-interest, making way for more horizontal relationships with the nonhuman. As Jim Endersby explains, "Sympathy was a scientific skill, partly innate and partly acquired, that Victorian naturalists regarded as necessary to fully understand the living world; considered as a skill it relates to an older sense of sympathy that referred to grasping the 'affinities' between living things" (300). Thus, Roger walks with "light and well-planted footsteps in search of the treasure. He was so great a lover of nature that, without any thought, but habitually, he always avoided treading unnecessarily on any plant; who knew what long-sought growth or insect might develop itself in what now appeared but insignificant?" (114). Importantly, Roger avoids doing harm to *any* living creature, including non-sentient plants, intuitively recognizing their rights as well as his own.²¹⁹

Osborne's indifference to his environment magnifies Roger's stewardship.²²⁰ As George Eliot's Mr. Tulliver does in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Squire Hamley continually tries to groom Osborne for a profession against his natural inclinations. It is Roger's presence that mollifies the Squire enough for him to forgive Osborne his academic disappointment, if not his

²¹⁹ Roger's sensibility demonstrates the land ethic I discuss in Chapter 5.

²²⁰ These differences between the brothers demonstrate how, according to Julia Wright, Gaskell divides her characters into two groups. The first, "nervous bodies" (including Cynthia and Osborne), are egotistical, with superficial and flawed sentiments nurtured by a taste for Romantic literature. Osborne's poetry imitates Felicia Hemans, a popular Romantic poet in the early nineteenth century. The second, the "healthy bodies" possess "deep but private sentiments and "a willingness to sacrifice their personal comfort for the good of others" (164). Characters such as Molly and Roger read "serious" literature, "a category that, in Gaskell's novel, includes science, philosophy, agriculture, and specifically pre-Romantic literature" (164). Wright links health to evolution: in order for culture to evolve, the Victorians discard a "Romantic past" "as an ineffective cultural mutation" (164). As my first chapter showed, Romanticism was associated with egotism, "self-feeling," and heightened emotion, while the organicist discourse of the Victorian era was associated with the common good, duty, and sense of place.

refusal to agree to a judicious match. At an agricultural meeting, the Squire intends to introduce Osborne to “Grantley, and Fox, and Lord Forrest – men from the other side of the county, whom you ought to know” (168). At the risk of stretching a point, I argue that the men embody the Squire’s hopes for his son: he literally wants to introduce Osborne to the ways of gamekeeping and forestry required to maintain the family grant, or land. Osborne, however, leaves early: “Bullocks, I find, are not in my line. I only disappointed my father in not being able to appreciate their merits, and, I’m afraid, I didn’t care to learn. And the smell was insufferable” (167). The workings of the estate do not interest Osborne, who claims the bucolic, burdensome atmosphere harms his health. He could, intelligent as he is, acquire the necessary knowledge to run the estate, but he does not “*care* to learn.” This apathy checks most of Osborne’s efforts to find gainful employment. He devotes himself to compiling a volume of poetry, more “in his line,” with negligible possibility of lucrative returns. Preoccupied with Romantic Nature, Osborne refuses to engage with the material environment.

It is not the Squire who represents an outmoded or weak way of life, but Osborne, who does little to actually support his family except indulge his whim to write poems. The narrator conjectures that if Osborne pursued out-of-doors amusements, his health might have strengthened. However, Osborne is too “short-sighted” to trace the cause of his dis-ease (250). Sadly, Osborne dies before the breach from his father can be repaired. In a Darwinian sense, Osborne is, literally, too weak for this world.²²¹ A congenital heart condition hastens his death.

²²¹ Morris, Poon, Yan, and Debrabant all consider Gaskell’s engagement with evolutionary theory, both before and after publication of Darwin. Phoebe Poon cautions that, “Critical studies of *Wives and Daughters* tend to focus narrowly on Gaskell’s exploration of Darwinian themes in *The Origin of Species*, neglecting Gaskell’s contribution to the further development of those themes in literature before they receive similar treatment in scientific analysis” (197). Mary Debrabant reveals how Gaskell’s evolutionary awareness influences the form of her novels: “The power of time, its gradual effect on forms is a constant consideration” in all her fiction. “Long developments tracing the unhurried, linear progress of characters and events, emphasis on the deterministic interrelations between characters and their environments, historical, local or social, are characteristic features of Gaskell’s compositions. Stories (and biography) unfold, strewn with small details provided to substantiate cause and

We may read this as a version of consumption: his idleness and inability to act burn him out. Unwilling to expose his secret or take on a useful trade, Osborne remains purposeless and sheltered. Roger, the fittest to run the estate, becomes the beneficiary. Roger shares his father's commitment to the estate and the two often discuss management strategy, such as "the relative values of meadow, arable and pasture land" (632). Roger, a wise steward, weighs decisions carefully, considering his family's needs and the health of the environment.

His scientific publications earn him respect and the patronage of Lord Hollingford, who recommends him for a scientific voyage to Africa to bring "back specimens of the fauna of distant lands, and so forming the nucleus of a museum" funded by "the rich eccentric Mr. Chrichton," who, "fired by the example of Lord Bridgewater" sets up a trust upon his death for this purpose (360).²²² For this reason, Pam Morris calls the novel "Darwinian pastoral," where science and discovery temper the old-fashioned and impetuous emotions of the past with "reason and educational refinements" (xxix). Roger's earnings allow his father to resume the superintendence of the works on his estate, allowing him to rehire several laborers to drain the marshy land on Upton Common, which benefits his dependents and provides income to the region. As I noted earlier, environmentalists now protest activities such as drainage that modify the natural climate, and we can see that this reclamation is not necessarily the best use of land, as it puts the Common to exclusively human use. Nevertheless, Victorian landowners and agents regarded drainage as part of their duty as good stewards, following Benedictine principles. The

consequence relationships" (15). Other scholars, such as Leon Litvick, have noted that Osborne is a victim of natural selection. Poon observes that Roger's "physical and intellectual vigour" suit him to compete more readily for survival "than his languid, elder brother Osborne" (200). Anne DeWitt adds, "The opposition between the two brothers recalls that between the naturalist and non-naturalist described by [G.H.] Lewes, who claims that the former's activities allow him to rise above the worldly and superficial interests of the latter" (7).

²²² Yan examines the ramifications of Roger's African tour. She discusses how British imperialism merges cultural exploration with natural science – "scientific imperialism." Furthermore, "Roger's quest implies the study of animal and plant distribution over the globe must be seen as a colonialist activity. The interplay between imperial space and intellectual authority is reinforced to the natural scientists exploratory travels overseas" (272).

coming generation represents a modern progressive society wherein intellect and individual merit are valued above class.

Roger is modeled on Charles Darwin, a close, personal friend of Gaskell. Shu-chuan Yan observes that “the resemblance between Roger and Charles Darwin reflects the wider influence of Darwinian evolutionary theory on the plot development in *Wives and Daughters*” (267). My reading, too, considers the consequences of evolutionary thinking on the novel. It remains uncertain whether Gaskell read *On the Origin of Species* (1859); however, she was well versed in popular evolutionary discourse. The Darwinism invoked in her novel emphasizes humanity’s shared origins with animals. Attention to this kinship tempers human self-interest by recognizing nonhuman agency, and rather than supporting the placement of human beings in a special category, replaces them into the “entangled bank,” or ecosystem. In the oft-quoted ending of *Origin*, Darwin contemplates the forms of life “so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner” (360), describing horizontal relationships between human and nonhuman. The environment must be preserved, both for human society and for all creatures. Stewardship preserves the distinction between human, the “watcher,” and the nonhuman, while working against homocentrism in its recognition of entanglements. Thus, while Gaskell realizes the shortcomings of stewardship, Darwin’s influence provides a way to overcome its limitations. As Roger carefully avoids treading on other life forms, he puts in practice the respect for all life Darwin exhibits. Gaskell stresses the role of altruism in social progress. In this respect, Gaskell looks forward to the arguments that Darwin fully expounds in his second major work, *The Descent of Man* (1871). Here, Darwin argues, “Important as the struggle for existence has been and still is, yet as far as the highest part of man’s nature is concerned there are other agencies more important” (688), ie: sympathy, which “forms an

essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation-stone” (122). The notion of sympathy finds new expression in the period, as it is not exclusively directed towards other people.

As Poon argues, “Whereas Darwin privileges the concept of individual struggle in his early arguments about natural selection, his later arguments in *Descent* qualify the materialistic emphasis of *Origin* by considering social instincts and morality (highly evolved social instinct) as inheritable qualities that facilitate individual survival more readily than anti-social self-interest” (196). It is this Darwin, the so-called “patron saint” of ecology (Levine *Darwin Loves You* 21) who considered sympathy a tool for survival (rather than the Darwin appropriated by Social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer), that influences eco-consciousness. Poon continues, “As a post-Darwinian writer in relation to *Origin* but a pre-Darwinian writer in relation to *Descent*, Gaskell is uniquely positioned to promote self-sacrifice as an alternative form of behaviour to self-interest” (196). Gaskell’s stewardship discourse emphasizes the importance of caring for the environment in our own survival.²²³ Adding to Poon’s intelligent commentary on the novel, we can see that stewardship turns away from materialistic considerations towards wider, social concerns. In *Wives and Daughters*, Roger exhibits altruism by ensuring that his brother’s son is legally recognized in order to eventually claim his inheritance, and by financially supporting his family: “the interests of a community connected by blood ties may often overrule the interests of its individual members” (Poon 199). In what Poon identifies as “the family context,” Roger puts

²²³ Mary Debrabant, along similar lines, asserts that Gaskell’s *North and South* “centres on the themes of struggle, competition, and the aptitude for survival, which includes co-operation and altruism as necessary strategies in adapting to a changing environment” (15).

others before himself, demonstrating in the microcosm the key role altruism plays in natural selection.²²⁴

Sadly, Gaskell would never complete the novel – we can only surmise that Hamley Hall flourishes under Roger’s management, and his inevitable marriage to Molly provides him with the ideal partner. Though he moves to London to teach “at some great scientific institution,” the estate remains in the capable hands of his father, now financially secure (649). Roger represents the new, scientific generation, yet *stewardship* ensures the survival of agrarian life ways. The lessons of science need to be lived out in the local community. The proper management and use of resources, which does not necessarily require technological innovation, enables a progressive society to prosper.²²⁵ Though the Hamleys and Cumnors are aristocratic, their stewardship is nonetheless democratic in the sense that eco-consciousness mitigates arbitrary class barriers, allowing Roger to rise socially, and even Lord Cumnor to mingle with his laborers. Through natural selection, Roger is chosen as the proper steward by proving his superior skill.

Like Gaskell, George Eliot moved in intellectual circles disseminating the scientific ideas of the time, and *Middlemarch* (1871-2) circulates the same evolutionary ideas privileging altruism and the reality of human entanglement with the environment. As we saw in Hollingford, aristocratic stewardship, in practice, was not altogether selfless. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea endeavors to practice a democratic stewardship, finally giving up Causabon’s fortune to do so. For instance, Mr. Brooke agrees to improve the cottages on his estate since healthy workers will increase his revenues. His motives are not truly in the spirit of Dorothea’s “pet

²²⁴ Julia Wright regards local community as the microcosm, and the nation the macrocosm, writing, “That Roger restores the vigor of two symbols of the nation - the Hamley estate and the maturing Molly - is not only evidence of the power of practical science and slow, steady progress, but also of the importance of self-sacrifice to the nation’s well-being. Self-sacrifice [...] increasingly marked social and nationalist discourse in the nineteenth century” (180).

²²⁵ It is important to note that naturalism and stewardship do *not* necessarily go hand in hand. Curiosity collectors ravaged and decimated sea shores and forest floors in their relentless pursuit of specimens. Roger’s sympathy, his inherent kinship with all creatures, prevents him from subordinating the land and its inhabitants to his interests.

project.” She designs model cottages to materially improve the lives of tenant farmers because of the debt the family owes them for continued subsistence; she does not consider how she will profit from the scheme, but sincerely desires to create a healthy environment. I began this chapter by examining Will’s tableau in *Middlemarch* and Dorothea’s critique of the picturesque. Dorothea’s remarks concerning art reveal her disapproval of depictions of landscape that elide the reality of laborers working the land.²²⁶ “I used to come from the village with all that dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in the drawing-room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false, while we don’t mind how hard the truth is for the neighbours outside our walls” (389). Rather than to simply dismiss the beautiful, Dorothea’s indictment of art serves to substantiate the Victorian call to realism and combat a perspective on life that whitewashes hardship and material realities. For Dorothea, commonplace drawing-room pictures obscure relations between people – not just social relations, but biological kinship – and the human role in the environment. Dorothea’s dislike of “romantic”²²⁷ tradition derives from its perceived fantasy and inaccuracy as much from her communal ethos. *Middlemarch* brings classes together in their common dependence on the land and Dorothea keeps duty to her community uppermost in her thoughts.

Dorothea and Sir James actively work to construct a healthy community in Tipton Grange. Mr. Brooke, a notoriously bad landlord, resolves to “see if something cannot be done in setting a good pattern of farming among my tenants” (17), a cause his niece eagerly takes up.²²⁸

²²⁶ For a fuller discussion of this, see Ann Bermingham’s *Landscape and Ideology*.

²²⁷ Casaubon’s adjective for the “celebrated frescoes” in Rome that bore Dorothea (197). According to Lawrence Buell, Romantic and Transcendental literature offers an “aesthetics of relinquishment”: relinquishing the support of the community for self-realization. The individual adopts a voluntary simplicity, choosing, like Thoreau at Walden Pond, to provide for one’s self by his/her labor alone, giving up luxuries to live closer to the land. In contrast, I argue that Victorian literature offers a valuable “aesthetics of community.”

²²⁸ In *Middlemarch*, a reporter for the *Trumpet* assesses Mr. Brooke as a landlord, accusing him of hypocrisy for running as a “reformer.” They call him “retrogressive” (382), “a man who [...] keeps his farms as rack-rent [...] and does not mind if every field on his farms has a rotten gate: a man very open-hearted to Leeds and Manchester”

When we first meet her, Dorothea is “bent on finishing a plan for some buildings (a kind of work which she delighted in)” (11). Throughout the novel she shifts her focus from good works in the religious sense to practical work such as providing clean, salubrious housing for her “fellow-creatures.” She believes that “we [the wealthy landholders] deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords – all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us” (31). Implied by her choice of words is that the tenants are treated like pigs, condemned to live in filthy “sties,” while their social superiors live in “beautiful houses” maintained through the tenants’ labor.²²⁹ Given the prevailing tendency to regard the lower classes as a separate species,²³⁰ Dorothea aims to break down arbitrary class barriers by valorizing the laborer’s role in providing for the community through agriculture. Though farming, of course, modifies the land for human interests, it contributes to the stewardship discourse illustrated through woodland preservation because the steward considers the needs of the entire community, including all classes and species. In Dorothea’s view, all creatures modify their environment: beavers build dams, cows eat grass, laborers till the fields and so forth. Dorothea’s eco-consciousness appears in her refusal to place human interests above nonhuman interests, which would overwhelm the ecosystem by exploiting the resources.

Dorothea particularly values land improvement schemes, acknowledging the correlation between health and environment. Model cottage building became a popular project for nineteenth-century landlords. The cottage itself served as an emblem of the charms for rustic

(383). Interestingly, Brooke’s association with manufacturing districts comprises half the insult. He stands accused of treating his laborers as factory workers; Brooke exploits them for capital, uninterested in the workers’ living conditions.

²²⁹ Dorothea’s language recalls the title of this dissertation, “The House Beautiful.” To create a truly “beautiful” home requires eco-consciousness. As Wilde warns that exploitation of the earth creates ugliness and dis-ease, Dorothea argues exploitation of the workforce mars the environment.

²³⁰ In *Animals’ Rights* (1894), Henry S. Salt somewhat excuses the lower classes for mistreating animals, since as they are treated as inferiors by the class above themselves, they naturally take out this injustice on animals. Salt believes that extending equal rights to the lower classes will pave the way for extending rights to the lower animals.

living, yet the real things were frequently run-down and insanitary. Gillian Darley describes how model cottages were intended to mix the desire for picturesque with common sense, recommending drainage, refuse removal, and services such as proper medical care and adequate education and recreation.²³¹ Responding to objections of cost, Dorothea argues that “[s]urely it is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land which supports them all” (17). Here, “mak[ing] the most of the land” does not mean making it an instrument for human gain, as a project like the Squire’s drainage tended to do. Dorothea means regarding it as an actual site for sympathy and fellow-feeling in its own right. In financial terms, improving conditions for tenants is not wasted expenditure as their labor supports the whole community. Dorothea is incapable of believing herself to be separate from the dependents who she depends on for maintaining Tipton Grange.

With her usual perspicacity, she dispels the misconception of charming, picturesque cottage-life, arguing “life in cottages” can only be happy “if they were real houses fit for human beings from whom we expect duties and affections” (31). The narrative unveils this truth when Dorothea accompanies Mr. Brooke on a visit to his tenant Dagley’s cottage, ironically named “Freeman’s End.” The narrator speaks to the reader:

It is true that an observer, under that softening influence of the fine arts which makes other people’s hardships picturesque, might have been delighted with this homestead called Freeman’s End: the old house had dormer windows in the dark-red roof, two of the chimneys were choked with ivy, the large porch was blocked up with bundles of sticks, and half the windows were closed with grey worm-eaten shutters about which the jasmine-boughs grew in wild luxuriance; the mouldering garden wall with hollyhocks

²³¹ Darley also identifies Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, as a possible model for the character of Dorothea (49), and highlights case studies of cottage improvements to reform village health and sanitation (Chapter 6).

peeping over it was a perfect study of highly-mingled subdued colour, and there was an aged goat [...] lying against the open back-kitchen door. The mossy thatch of the cowshed, the broken grey barn-doors, the pauper labourers in ragged breeches who had nearly finished unloading a waggon of corn into the barn ready for early threshing; the scanty dairy of cows being tethered for milking and leaving one half of the shed in brown emptiness; the very pigs and white ducks seeming to wander about the uneven neglected yard as if in low spirits from feeding on a too meagre quality of rinsings [...]. (394)

I quote at length to show how Eliot's interesting mixture of language converts signs of rustic beauty into signs of neglect. She highlights all the customary picturesque elements of the scene – the ivy and moss, the “wild luxuriance,” the vibrant hollyhocks contrasting with the cottage's subdued tones – mingled with jarring adjectives such as “worm-eaten,” “mouldering,” “broken,” “ragged,” and “neglected.” The chimneys are “choked” with ivy. No longer coded as harmonious growth, the ivy poses an unhealthy obstacle, while the shutters and jasmine-boughs close up the window, blocking the entrance of necessary light. The narrator begins this detailed scene with the acerbic comment that art simply serves to make entertainment out of “other people's hardships,” the lower classes specifically, repeating Dorothea's earlier critique. The passage continues, “all these objects under the quiet light of a sky marbled with high clouds would have made a sort of picture which we have all paused over as a ‘charming bit’,” but Eliot recasts these objects in the context of “other sensibilities” moved by the agricultural depression of the time. The sticks represent precious firewood; the overgrowth and worm-eaten shutters reveal lack of maintenance; the animals are aged and ill-fed. These “troublesome” realities “spoiled the scene” for Mr. Brooke, who, in light of the obvious poverty and neglect, has shamefully come to reprimand the family for poaching, a morally, if not legally, small offense

given the evidence of starvation. Dagley is *not* a “free man” entitled to use the land for his own benefit and resents Brooke’s interference. He refuses to punish his son and berates his negligent landlord. Sufficiently chastened, Brooke decides to rehire the well-qualified Caleb Garth as land agent, who immediately orders repairs.

Not only does Eliot ask her readers to sympathize with the laborers’ hardships; she points outwards to the larger ramifications of this scene. Dorothea sees the cottages as the lifeblood of the estate and in imagining a healthy community, she includes the land itself. More than the other stewards in this chapter, Dorothea confers agency on the land. To return to her phrase “making the most of the land,” we see how she views it as a source of subsistence rather than profit and how the land acts upon us. For instance, the details Dorothea observes in the cottages – the lack of fresh air, the uncleanliness – show how much we depend on the environment. Through Dorothea, Eliot provides a model for thinking beyond the “steward” as such – as watcher, caretaker –, instead thinking of humans as members of the ecosystem.

Two key moments demonstrate Dorothea’s awakening eco-consciousness. In the first, she gazes out the window onto Featherstone’s funeral, looking upon “[s]cenes which make vital changes in our neighbor’s lot [that] are but the background of our own, yet, like a particular aspect of the fields and trees, they become associated for us with the epochs of our own history, and make a part of that unity which lies in the selection of our keenest consciousness” (326). In other words, there is no real distance between Dorothea and her neighbors; their lives may seem like “the background of our own,” yet if our vision is keen, we will realize our history depends on the wider community. The “fields and trees” are essential parts of the web that determines our histories. In Richard Jefferies’s words, “there is but a thin, transparent sheet of brittle glass between the artificial man and the air, the light, the trees, and grass” (“Nature and Eternity” 304).

Eliot renders this glass literally to challenge the separation it endorses. Dorothea longs for unity with her environment, seeking communion with the poor, and to participate in an agrarian community. Eliot uses simile to compare the workers themselves to the fields and trees. They become part of the land, part of the overall environment that Dorothea serves.

Her position at the window as observer, looking down on her neighbors, figures her subject position as wealthy heiress and the implied condescension in any of her philanthropic endeavors, and it is precisely this aloofness that she hopes to diminish. The narrator explains, “The country gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air: dotted apart on their stations up the mountain they looked down with imperfect discrimination on the belts of the thicker life below. And Dorothea was not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height” (326). Dorothea’s anxiety at her separation from “life below,” applicable to both human and nonhuman, is symptomatic of the dis-ease described by Ruskin throughout his works, the mental illness that results from “casting off” our relations with the nonhuman environment. The gentry regard the community with “imperfect discrimination;” that is, they fail to recognize their unity with the laboring classes and the work they perform. The landowner as steward oversees the estate, but Dorothea feels uncomfortable imagining herself above the tenants. Eliot further describes the “life below” as “thicker,” perhaps suggesting that it is richer and more vital than gentrified life. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz theorizes “thick description” as detailed, specific description that contextualizes and interprets behavior in terms of its surrounding culture. The use of the word “thicker” in *Middlemarch* reinforces the connection of the people to the land and its history.

Dorothea desires to get to know her neighbors, and not simply those who work for her, implying that learning about the lives they lead would produce the imaginative sympathy

necessary for reform. Her continued observation helps her achieve a new perspective: “‘I am fond of knowing something about the people I live among,’ said Dorothea, who had been watching everything with the interest of a monk on his holiday tour. ‘It seems to me we know nothing of our neighbors, unless they are cottagers. One is constantly wondering what sort of lives other people lead, and how they take things’” (326). Her hope to positively influence the community instigates her marriage to Causabon. Despite her better instincts she feels disappointed to see how well ordered and healthy the cottages are on her husband’s estate, realizing her help is not needed, which deprives her life of useful purpose. She redirects her energy to her husband, hoping his key to all mythologies can be her next pet project, yet, unfortunately, his fruitless idea also fails to provide Dorothea with work that can actively benefit the community. It is only after his death that she can once again pursue useful work, sponsoring Lydgate’s fever hospital. As long as she has money at her disposal, she longs to use it for the community, and thus Dorothea’s eco-consciousness is not strictly limited to land. Her reflections encompass the environment as a whole – land, animals, and people. The narrator tells us how Dorothea recalls the reflections from her window-gazing for years afterward, providing a clue to her eventual choice to give up her fortune and reside in London with Will, quietly ministering to local needs.

Before this, however, Dorothea experiences a second moment of realization, this time at her bedroom window on a sleepless night after she catches Will with Rosamond and returns home depressed. Looking out onto the “bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond,” she strengthens her resolve to serve others:

On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving – perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in

the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (788)

These interactions with the land comfort Dorothea. “Life” becomes synonymous with the agrarian labor that sustains it, “palpitating” like a heartbeat, and “involuntary” because necessary. Her “luxurious shelter” does not separate her from labor and this awakening consciousness pushes aside her hurt feelings at Will’s ostensible betrayal. These scenes at the window should not simply be read as warnings against the effacement of the realities of human labor or the necessity of reforming the class system. Dorothea yearns for more horizontal relationships with the environment, and feels part of the social and environmental organism. Read within the context of stewardship, Dorothea’s moments of epiphany, sparked by her naturalist gaze, recast earlier symptomatic approaches of the text in light of a materialist reading of human and nonhuman networks of interaction.²³²

²³² Many influential readings of the “great window scene” at the funeral acknowledge the novel’s ethos of organic interdependence; however, readings of the text should see social reform in relation to the material environment. Sally Shuttleworth discusses the individual in relation to the social organism. The strands that link individuals together are the exchange of opinion, beliefs, knowledge, prejudices, and a shared language. In other words, this organic interdependence is social, and uniquely human. What Shuttleworth calls the novel’s “pastoral organicism” – the characters’ relations to each other and the “life-processes” of the town (143) – comprises “physiological life, language, social relations, or historical development” (146). She reads the scene at the window during Featherstone’s funeral in terms of Dorothea’s psychology. It is a personal moment of awakening to her “dynamic relationship” with the social order (157). Similarly, Suzanne Graver looks at this “great moment of awakening” for Dorothea as where she finds “wholeness” in her life (224). “Testifying not to organic wholeness, but to the incompleteness of women’s lives,” Dorothea’s “visionary yearning for community” gives her purpose (224). At the window, the transformation by her consciousness of the family into “an image of ‘the largeness of the world’” inspires Dorothea to visit her rival, Rosamond, and is a “self-subduing act of fellowship” (224). Graver focuses on Dorothea’s personal self-development, her desire to achieve the life she has marked out for herself (215). Kerry McSweeney describes Eliot’s fiction as reflecting her belief in “the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of men” (21). The scene at Dorothea’s bedroom window is one of a series of moments calling attention to her “ardent feelings” and “the amazing grace of intense fellow-feeling” (22, 24). Importantly, such feelings allow for the movement away from egotism, an element of democratic stewardship, but, like Shuttleworth, McSweeney discusses the scene only insofar as it draws Dorothea to other people. These three readings, typical of the scene, emphasize Dorothea’s “feelings,” her “psychology,” and the “social organism,” rather than how this scene also connects her to agrarianism and to the land.

While her family disapproves of her choice of Will, Dorothea is happiest quietly achieving local good free of class barriers exacerbated by fortune and social tradition. Will shares Dorothea's idealism and the pair move to London to live humbly. In the famous closing, the narrator counters reader disapproval, disclosing that "the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world" (838). Dorothea's "diffusive" impact on the world cannot be calculated.²³³ Michael Tondre explains that mid-century writers "saw diffusion in optimistic terms," and in *Middlemarch*, Eliot "represents diffusion as a form of eternal fulfillment—as a theory of the persistence and proliferation of fellow-feeling over the *long durée*" (205). Despite the inability to measure or accurately observe such "constructive tissues of influence" (206), they accrue over time, indicating "the limitless potential for improvement" (205). In this way, Dorothea's "wasted energy," or individual failure, leads to enduring and positive outcomes. Tondre cites Eliot's remarks in an undated notebook: "'futil[e]' feelings – sentiments that do not signify at the threshold of social utility – can influence society in spite of their shortcomings. [...] Even as 'excess' energy accumulates, it imparts an ever-increasing potential for further growth" (209). Dorothy's energetic sympathy, while "incalculabl[e]" (Eliot 838), "continues to circulate in society" even after her death (Tondre 210).

Ecology, the "particular web" (132), harnesses the interconnections between people and provides the conditions for a community including the nonhuman. Dorothea recognizes the laboring classes as part of the environment, not only as contributing members of the community, but as the foundation of the community. Although Dorothea continues her charity, the ending does, to an extent, signal the breakdown of the stewardship ideal. In order to be charitable,

²³³ The power of sympathy to radiate outward for good encapsulates Eliot's religious humanism. T.R. Wright comments that "Dorothea's task is to fill the blank vacated by God, to reconstruct her world-view and to retain some kind of religion" (144). She converts her imprudent religious ardor into practical charity motivated by a desire to materially improve the comfort of her fellow creatures.

Dorothea gives up her wealth and aristocratic status, and in the city, she presumably loses some contact with the nonhuman, engaging predominantly with human beings. *Middlemarch* both communicates stewardship discourse and exposes its limitations. Dorothea's keen eye observes the nonhuman environment, and although her reflections focus more on human interests, she recognizes that those interests are interconnected with the environment. This consciousness of ecological networks dignifies the laborer in a way that recasts the ideal relationship towards the community from an elitist stewardship to an equal partnership with nature and one's neighbors.

IV. Interpreting the Times

He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

Luke 12:54-56

While texts such as *Middlemarch* and *Wives and Daughters* feature characters who are wise stewards, the writers themselves act as literary stewards in their efforts to instruct their readers. Their discourse travels from the page into public conversation, sowing eco-consciousness that will ideally ripen into action. Like Dorothea, whose diffusive influence benefits her community, the novelist hopes to inspire his or her audience to practice wise stewardship. In his study of European realism, Georg Lukás contends that the great realists took as their starting-point "the most important, burning problems of the community": "their pathos as writers is always stimulated by those sufferings of the people which are the most acute at the time" (12). The "true great realists" of the nineteenth century not only revealed how the individual "is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, i.e., with politics; whether the humans themselves are conscious of this" or not (9), the realists demanded the "politicization of literature" (10). The model of stewardship connects to the formal and

generic specificity of the novel as agent of social change. Articulating a phenomenological approach to the “reading process,” Wolfgang Iser describes the two poles of literary work, the artistic and the esthetic: “the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader [...]. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader” (274). Iser contends that the reader fulfills the author’s vision by enacting his/her ideas, and it is this combination that creates literature. In addition to creating characters that are models of stewardship, the authors themselves create a literary tradition born out of realism that is implicitly connected to preservation via the awakening of eco-consciousness in the reader. From the pastoral to the social problem novel, the author plays a vital role in environmentalism, bringing attention to pollution and to alienation from nature.

The parable in Luke that organizes this chapter ends with Jesus’ remonstrance to his listeners, “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this [present] time? (Luke 12:56). In what Colón calls the parabolic effect of literature, self-knowledge results from, as Riah puts it in *Our Mutual Friend*, “seeing the whole thing visible presented as upon a theatre” (708). These novels ask readers to interpret the signs of the times. These lines reappear in the Gospel of Matthew 16: 2-3: “When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:2-3). In the Gospel, human beings can read obvious phenomena but fail to adequately interpret them. In the nineteenth century, most Victorians continued to repeat this mistake. They saw the smoke hanging in the air, but not necessarily their complicity in pollution. Similarly, regarding trees as “so many pounds sterling”

indicates blindness to humanity's dependence on the land. In this case, the signs of the sky, or the environment, literally are the signs of a time ruthlessly harnessing the earth's resources.

Thomas Carlyle takes these lines from Biblical parable as the title of his essay, "The Signs of the Times" (1829). He begins with the lamentation that "nations or individuals" do not concern themselves with the future. Calling the present a "Mechanical" age, Carlyle argues that God has been supplanted by "Mechanism": "Our true Deity is Mechanism. It has subdued external Nature for us, and we think it will do other things. We are Giants in physical power: in a deeper than metaphorical sense, we are Titans, that strive, by heaping mountain on mountain, to conquer Heaven also" (111). Carlyle's description of human beings strikingly resembles Will Ladislaw's symbolic Tamburlaine harnessing the environment. Machines literally turn people into Tamburlaines, into tyrants, instead of stewards. The essay's indictment of culture encompasses the various consequences of the Age of Machinery on industry, agriculture, religion, and the worldview in general, and is thus not limited to an indictment of capitalism or the factory-system. Machines alter our "whole manner of existence" (103): "For all earthly and unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils" (101). Foolish stewardship destroys the environment. While Carlyle regards man's relationship to Nature as a metaphysical question, describing the "spiritual maladies" resulting "from our own unwise mode of viewing Nature" (116), his attention to these relationships begins a larger discourse continued in the novels discussed here, where the material environment is of vast importance. Carlyle asserts that "[a]t no former era has literature, the printed communication of Thought, been of such importance" (113-14), even possessing an

influence more powerful than the Church to comment on current events. As what I call literary stewards, Trollope, Gaskell, and Eliot teach their readers to view “Nature” differently, indeed to open their eyes to the material environment (“nature”) and their dependency on the nonhuman, which is the only way to ensure the future.

Chapter V: The Victorian Golden Rule: Kinship Discourse

I. The Creed of Kinship

Sitting indoors, with every modern luxury around [...], it is easy to say, ‘What have *I* to do with all this [nature]? I am neither an animal nor plant, and the sun is nothing to me. This is *my* life which I have created; I am apart from the other inhabitants of the earth.’ But go to the window. See – there is but a thin, transparent sheet of brittle glass between the artificial man and the air, the light, the trees, and grass. So between him and the other innumerable organisms which live and breathe there is but a thin feeble crust of prejudice and social custom. Between him and those irresistible laws which keep the sun upon its course there is absolutely no bar whatever. Without air he cannot live. Nature cannot be escaped. Then face the facts, and having done so, there will speedily arise a calm pleasure beckoning onwards. (304)

Richard Jefferies, “Nature and Eternity” (1895)

And when the Civilisation-period has passed away, the old Nature-religion – perhaps greatly grown – will come back. [...] Man will once more *feel* his unity with his fellows, he will feel his unity with the animals, with the mountains and the streams, with the earth itself, and the slow lapse of the constellations, not as an abstract dogma of Science or Theology, but as a living and ever-present fact.

Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation, its Cause and Cure* (1889)

Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of common origin of all species is ethical; that it logically involved a re-adjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a *necessity of rightness* the application of what has been called ‘The Golden Rule’ beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. While man was deemed to be a creation apart from all other creations, a secondary or tertiary morality was considered good enough towards the ‘inferior’ races; but no person who reasons nowadays can escape the trying conclusion that this is not maintainable.

Thomas Hardy, to the Secretary of the of the Humanitarian League (1910)²³⁴

For environmentally aware Victorians like Richard Jefferies, nature was not an idealized concept, but a force that materially determined their lives. *The Hills and the Vale* (1909) compiles pieces of Jefferies’s journalism from the mid to late nineteenth century. In these essays Jefferies’s descriptions of flora and fauna are minute. Exemplary of the Victorian method of natural history, he observes his surroundings carefully, illuminating both the ordinary

²³⁴ Hardy wrote in 1910 to congratulate the Humanitarian League for 20 years of work, particularly in the Animals Defence Department.

happenings and local marvels of his environment. He puts humanity squarely into the ecosystem, while acknowledging the symbiotic entanglements among species: many animals depend on us, and we depend on the earth for subsistence. In “Nature and Eternity” (1895), Jefferies describes a community comprising human beings and “the other innumerable organisms which live and breathe” on earth (304), disavowing arbitrary, culturally constructed distinctions between human and nonhuman. In the above passage, the window presents a culturally constructed separation from the environment, even the attempt to wall “Nature” out or reduce its value to the picturesque. Jefferies, however, reminds his readers that all creatures live by the same “irresistible laws” (304). His terminology clearly allies itself with what I have been calling realist nature, particularly in the line, “Nature cannot be escaped.” To put this another way, there is no such thing as “Nature” apart from human life, and to recognize this is to recognize kinship with nonhuman species. As represented by the “thin, transparent sheet of brittle glass,” humans construct the idea of Nature as something outside their world, which blinds us to these relations. As I have shown earlier, Victorian natural realism exposes the problematic separation of Nature as Other from human culture. “Without air [w]e cannot live,” Jefferies insists. To deny our kinship with the environment undermines our fundamental needs. Humans are “[p]art and parcel [...] of the great community of living beings, indissolubly connected with them from the lowest to the highest by a thousand ties” (Jefferies 299), and Jefferies’s prose frequently describes the various entanglements drawing all species together. “Community” in this context suggests complex, essential networks between all creation.²³⁵

These egalitarian entanglements are the subject of this chapter, which discusses the “Creed of Kinship” emerging in the Victorian period. Building upon stewardship discourse, it contends “[t]hat the basis of any real morality must be the sense of Kinship between all living

²³⁵ Include Disraeli’s definition of community as a web rather than concentric circles?

things” (Salt vii). This creed, first of all, establishes the brotherhood between all human beings, regardless of wealth, sex, or race, and secondly, extends this brotherhood to include all sentient life. “Kinship” literally denotes relationship by descent, and thus invokes an evolutionary framework authorizing the shared origins between human and nonhuman, or the “entanglements” characteristic of natural realism. The ideology of this Creed, conceived by Henry S. Salt, reoccurs in the writings of several Victorian prose writers including William Morris and Edward Carpenter, and anticipates what the pioneering environmentalist and ecologist Aldo Leopold defines as a “land ethic” to endorse wilderness conservation. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold explains that “a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. A land ethic “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (204). He does not use the word “rights” as does Salt, but “citizen” (one entitled to rights) implies the recognition of nonhuman agency by suggesting that the nonhuman participates in social and political life. In Jefferies, a land ethic crumbles the “thin feeble crust of prejudice and social custom” between human beings “and the other innumerable organisms which live and breathe” (“Nature and Eternity” 304). Thus, a “land ethic” describes all-inclusive networks of matter, and I consider this ethic part of Victorian kinship discourse. While Salt emphasizes kinship with sentient or animal life, the novels in this chapter describe exchanges between the human and the material world and the reciprocal agency exercised by each. Thus, kinship discourse emphasizes what Jane Bennett calls “vital materialism,” the affinities between all matter – vegetable, mineral, animal – and how the “thing” and human being overlap: “we are also nonhuman and [...] things, too, are vital players in the world” (4).

Salt calls the Creed of Kinship “a charter of human and sub-human relationship” (viii), although, as I noted, it includes non-sentient beings. Salt’s use of the prefix “sub” obscures his insistence that animals are more truly another race of beings, rather than something apart or below the human. Here, Salt calls his “Creed” a charter, a contract between all species, and his use of a religious term further reinforces the sense that a Creed of Kinship establishes basic tenets of belief and behavior that shape an eco-conscious discourse of kinship emphasizing the rights of the nonhuman. He asserts that “the religion of the future will be a belief in a Creed of Kinship” (viii). This concept significantly modifies the traditional stewardship ideal by establishing horizontal relationships within the ecosystem. In other words, while humans look after their own interests, they recognize and make room for the interests of other species as well. Stewardship and the Creed of Kinship share an emphasis on preservation. In the previous chapter, we saw how Ruskin, in articulating the Victorian stewardship ideal, elevates humankind, “the greatest and holiest of” creatures, above “less creation,” and while God decreed that human beings must protect the earth, this phraseology enforces a strict, hierarchical structure of all matter and life. The Creed of Kinship levels this hierarchy and further collapses the binary between humans and animals. Edward Carpenter allies this new Creed with “the old Nature-religion”: “Man will once more *feel* his unity with his fellows,” a term that includes sentient and non-sentient members of the ecosystem. The Creed requires “sensibility,” literally awareness of other persons, not merely physically (Salt 98). The ramifications of this sensibility, or eco-consciousness, is that morality requires human beings to respect the environment.

Writing to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League, Thomas Hardy declares “the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of common origin of all species is ethical” (377). By “*necessity of rightness*” we must apply “‘The Golden Rule’ beyond the area of mere mankind

to that of the whole animal kingdom” (377). Evolutionary science, in Hardy’s view, mandates human participation in the ecosystem on terms of equality with other species. However, this gospel of reciprocity derives from the Bible.²³⁶ Eco-conscious Victorians continued to use a Christian framework to articulate their ideas, yet ecology joins, or even replaces, religion in providing meaning for existence.²³⁷ The novels in this chapter move from an anthropocentric stewardship ideal (the earth as a gift to humankind from God) to a creed of kinship granting rights to all species that in turn contends that the environment must be protected for its own sake. Hardy’s enlarged Golden Rule exemplifies ecocentrism, a nature-centered as opposed to human-centered system of values. Rather than privileging human needs and viewing the environment as a supplier of resources, ecocentrism denies that there are any divisions between human and nonhuman sufficient to claim that humans are superior. This worldview grants intrinsic value to the environment. Hardy extends the project of sympathy beyond contractual obligations to other human beings. Sympathy could, and should, be located in nonhuman and even non-sentient agents. Given the ambivalence over stewardship and the class issues it raises, a kinship discourse provides a progressive model for engaging with the environment in an egalitarian way.

II. By Sunshine and Labor: Plain Members and Citizens

Elizabeth Gaskell’s short novella, *Cousin Phillis* (1864), explicitly voices a land ethic when her hero the minister Mr. Holman prays for the “for the cattle and the live creatures” (174). In *Cousin Phillis*, Gaskell locates her story in a small community, Heathbridge, where the residents live intimately connected with land and animals. Though the village appears fairly

²³⁶ Variations of the Golden Rule appear in Leviticus, Matthew, Luke, and Galatians.

²³⁷ See George Levine’s *Darwin Loves You* in which he posits Darwin “re-enchants” the world. “Darwin, whatever else, and with all his pains, illnesses, losses, loved the earth and the natural world he gave his life to describing; he found value and meaning in it; he argued that the human sense of value, which he regarded as the world’s highest achievement, grew out of the earth earthy, and this genealogy, he believed, did not degrade but ennobled” (xvii).

isolated, “culture” continually finds its way into Heathbridge in the form of books and visiting urbanites. As its name implies, the village mixes wildness with cultivation, “bridging” the rural with the urban. In this coming of age story, the narrator, Paul Manning, builds a relationship with his mother’s relatives, the Holmans, when his new job with the railway brings him near their home, Hope Farm. Paul quickly comes to admire the Independent minister for his “power,” signifying physical and mental strength, and falls in love with the minister’s pretty young cousin, a “child of the land” (219).

Mr. Holman’s power comes from “attending to the means,” his expression for maintaining the livestock and farm that nourish his family. Prejudging the minister, Paul expects to find a conservative, learned man; however, he is only half right. Mr. Holman’s blend of ruggedness and intellect takes Paul by surprise: he “still looked like a very powerful labourer, and had none of the precise demureness of appearance which I had always imagined was the characteristic of a minister” (167). Holman keeps Hope Farm “in good order” (161). As his daughter, Phillis, explains, “He gives up five days a week to his own work, and two to the Lord’s; and it is difficult to say which he works hardest at” (161). His “own” work is farming. In the three hours before breakfast, Mr. Holman takes in hand many of the daily chores: he calls the men to milking, feeds the horses and hogs, sees to the equipment, and orders the necessary food and fuel for the farm. After the day’s work, the minister sings a psalm: “He lifted his spade in his hand, and he began to beat time with it” (167).²³⁸ His spade symbolizes his physical labor, and it provides the beat for his prayer. The spade is the pulse of his life; the land is his church.

Hope Farm operates according to a land ethic, evident in Holman’s solicitude for all creatures and his inclusion of animals in his prayers. The family regards livestock as their kith and kin, worthy of respect beyond their economic function. After another prayer, Holman asks

²³⁸ René Dubos explains that a dominant aspect of Benedictine stewardship “is that to labor is to pray” (168-9).

after an ailing cow: “the poor beast needs [her medicine] and here I was asking a blessing and neglecting the means, which is a mockery” (175). Despite his belief in God’s power, Holman understands blessings come from the environment. Thus, farming becomes both a means of subsistence and also a means of respecting nonhuman animals by valuing their role on the farm. Heathbridge demonstrates a fellowship between human and nonhuman, and Holman serves as God’s steward in his attendance to other creatures. This acknowledgement of mutual dependency undercuts the traditionally superior attitude of human beings. Gaskell’s novella mediates social assumptions about humanity’s role in the ecosystem, providing a forum for ideas that had not yet entered mainstream discourse. Holman is not just a wise steward; his watchfulness allows him to see his own dependency on other creatures. As we saw in Chapter 4, Gaskell anticipates Darwin’s later works, particularly *The Descent of Man*, and here she expresses attitudes over twenty years later circulated by Jefferies, Carpenter, and Hardy, among others, that advocate terms of equality for nonhuman agents.

Holman’s health derives from a sound mind in a sound body, literally rendering him a whole man as his name suggests. Holman spends as much energy cultivating his mind as he does the land, and this union of the physical and intellectual yield well-being. Paul wonders at the minister’s strength, remarking that he had never seen a more powerful man (167).²³⁹ After all of Holman’s morning chores, he reads with Phillis if there is time before breakfast, otherwise they study after dinner. He studies the classics, art, and music as well as the science of engineering. Though Heathbridge remains agrarian, Holman is open to innovation and enjoys talking with Paul’s father, an engineer, and Paul’s employer, Mr. Holdsworth, the railway’s representative. Holman raises Phillis to “work with her hands as well as her head” (186). She

²³⁹ Holman exemplifies what Charles Kingsley called “muscular Christianity,” a dual commitment to piety and physical exercise. See also Chapter 3.

assumes Paul “would not like animals as [he] did not like books” (176), indicating how closely allied the natural world and the pursuit of culture are in her mind. Because Paul is not interested in scholarship, Phillis cannot return his affections. Instead, she fancies his educated employer, Mr. Holdsworth, who can translate Greek and Latin.

Gaskell falls back on the trope of the country’s recuperative powers in “contrast to the close, hot town lodgings” shared by Paul and Holdsworth (199). When Holdsworth falls ill, Holman suggests, “Bring him out here [...]. Our air here is good to a proverb; the June days are fine; he may loiter his time in the hay-field, and the sweet smells will be a balm in themselves – better than physic” (189). Holman frequently praises country air, though here, his reasoning points to the “hay-field.” Though the term “loiter” does not refer to labor, the prescription seems to be that engaging with the land can restore vigor, and Holdsworth does indeed recover quickly. After his stay at Hope Farm, it is said that he never looked stronger (196). Thus, when Gaskell contrasts the suffocating city with the balmy country, she does not reduce these areas into a strict dichotomy of polluted/clean or grimy/beautiful. The value Holdsworth finds in Heathbridge is actual engagement with the environment; however, the urban values he brings with him, his intellectual curiosity and admirable education, augment his experience.

While the romance between Phillis and Holdsworth is ill-fated, the novel mixes deep connections to the environment with respect for technological advancement and the endowments of civilization.²⁴⁰ the city may be natural just as the country may be industrial. We see that although Gaskell employs the country/city trope, she does so to ultimately deconstruct the prevailing cultural assumption that the city is ecologically unsound. Holdsworth’s urbane manner immediately attracts Phillis. Though he all but proposes to her, he forsakes her when he

²⁴⁰ Similar to the union of the cultivated Cathy and rustic Hareton in *Wuthering Heights* and the way *Mary Barton*’s Alice and Job preserve local herbal knowledge in Manchester.

travels to Canada on railway business, meeting and marrying another woman. Pining for him, Phillis falls dangerously ill. Paul sadly tells the reader, “Every person (I had almost said every creature, for all the dumb beasts seemed to know and love Phillis) about the place went grieving and sad” (238). It would appear farm life has returned to its normal routine aside from Phillis’s illness; she has such a presence that every creature mourns her absence. Nevertheless, the railway line connecting Eltham to Hornby is complete, presaging the encroaching influence of technology. Neither Paul nor the other characters express anxiety over the railway,²⁴¹ and Holman considers adopting some of Paul’s father’s plans for efficient machinery on Hope Farm. While Holdsworth harms Phillis, the railway that he represents does not seem to harm the town. What safeguards Heathbridge? Ostensibly, the area will remain healthy as long as its residents maintain kinship with the environment. Gaskell creates what Dale Porter calls an “*interface* between society and the environment” (20). Rather than a retreat into pristine nature, these are ways of authentically incorporating human beings into the environment. These endeavors recognize a union of nature and culture, rather than a dominance of humanity over nature, a superiority of the country over the city, or an escape into a nonexistent wilderness. Gaskell encourages readers to consider how to unite nature and culture in positive ways, using her story to provide a forum for new ideas.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, George Eliot’s fiction circulates many of the same ideological concerns as Elizabeth Gaskell’s. Negotiations between technology and landscape comprise the dominant theme of Eliot’s novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Eliot bases her narrative on the evolutionary principle that humanity is indistinct from animal life, the basic

²⁴¹ Contrast this with the ending of *Middlemarch*, which closes with the railway as an immediate threat. Speculators plan to run a line through the town, and the intrusion closes the curtain on the type of traditional, agrarian life-ways the novel portrays. *Cousin Phillis* betrays no such an anxiety, instead considering how the country may be industrialized whilst preserving the qualities that make it healthy. Alan Shelston points out that Gaskell was a frequent traveler on the railway.

tenet of natural history, and demonstrating the natural realism I define in Chapter 1.²⁴² Maggie and Tom are spoken of as animals, especially when they are young, and the tropes of progress and survival resonate throughout the novel.²⁴³ Far from suggesting that nature is “red in tooth and claw,” Eliot also emphasizes Darwin’s later insistence that community is essential to survival, thus offering an ecological perspective on community.²⁴⁴ Despite Eliot’s sharp eye for human failings, the novel crafts a land ethic urging us to have sympathy for our fellow creatures and to remember that love and kindness are innate, indispensable characteristics. Maggie Tulliver considers all animals to be her kith and kin, from the floury spiders in the mill and the exotic elephants and kangaroos in her books to her playmate Yap, the terrier. Evolutionary and kinship discourse open up a related set of concerns about the ethics of land, and here my analysis will focus on the nonhuman actors in the novel and the battle over water rights at its center. Furthermore we see two competing value systems embodied in Maggie, who expresses a ecocentric belief in the creed of kinship, and the men in her family, whose anthropocentric logic of domination impedes sympathy.

The Mill on the Floss’s plot hinges on water rights and the environment’s indifferent influence on its inhabitants. Mr. Tulliver feels an unquestioned right to the river, which he appraises for its use value. When this right is questioned, he initiates a lawsuit which proves to be the downfall of his family. His behavior as a foolish steward illustrates the anthropocentric logic of domination. The novel questions his notion of “ownership” over the water: can anyone actually *own* water? In a legal context, certainly the answer is “yes”. Numerous disputes over

²⁴² The influence of evolutionary theory on the novel has been widely examined; though she wrote *The Mill on the Floss* before the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, Eliot was nevertheless well versed in scientific conversations of the day. She wrote the novel as her partner, George Henry Lewes, was studying marine biology. Together they explored England’s shores to compile his *Seaside Studies* (1858). Also, see Gordon S. Haight’s introduction to the novel for a discussion of Eliot’s Evangelical beliefs and their relation to her depiction of human relationships with animals.

²⁴³ The rhetoric of “breeding” in the novel is widely remarked on, notably by Mary Jean Corbett.

²⁴⁴ In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin identifies sympathy as essential to survival.

water in the nineteenth century wrestled over this question and attempted to lay down stable judicial codes governing water rights. However, Eliot does not ask these questions in a strictly legal context, but also in a metaphysical one. To what degree do the laws of nature dictate water usage? In other words, she suggests that human beings are beholden to what Thomas Carlyle terms the “Laws of the Universe” or “Laws of Nature” rather than the official laws of the Victorian period which typically had nothing to do with an ecological sensibility. Since Tulliver is literally in conflict with riparian law even as his lawsuit engages with larger questions of environmental engagement and the rights nonhuman agents are entitled to, this chapter will look at “law” from both perspectives. England’s bodies of waters had no legal representation, which is perhaps one reason Eliot begins her tale by giving an actual voice to the Floss.

As the novel opens, the narrator tells us, the Floss “seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice” (7).²⁴⁵ The novel’s opening establishes the presence of the river as literal agent. Set in the 1820s in a predominantly agrarian area, *The Mill on the Floss* recounts the misfortunes of the Tulliver family, while the novel’s title situates the forces at play in the text: the family mill and the river that shapes the town.²⁴⁶ The opening scene describes in detail the river and its banks that are so crucial to the action: “A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace” (7). The Floss connects the village of St. Ogg’s to the world at large. These initiatory lines demonstrate the language of repression recurring throughout the tale: the tide “checks” the river’s passage just as Maggie must learn to “check” her passions, as Dix and Pivart attempt to “check” and harness the river’s

²⁴⁵ See Josephine McDonagh for a discussion of Eliot’s “retrospective narrative voice” and its significance in commenting on contemporary issues by contrasting past and present (42).

²⁴⁶ Since the Mill normally sits on the Ripple, a tributary of the Floss, the novel’s title actually invokes the flood, when the Floss’s waters rise to reach the Mill.

power, and as Tulliver tries to “check” the infringement on his share of the river and the natural inclinations of his children. Tulliver does not completely understand his neighbors’ proposed innovations, such as irrigation, and once his family’s tenure has ended, the new owners modernize the mill with steam-power. These preliminary activities on the Floss foreshadow the success of Mr. Deane, an employee of Guest & Co., the “great mill-owning, ship-owning business” (63). Taken together, these interconnected forces set the stage for the novel, depicting a sense of cooperation with the environment despite the ships carrying plunder.²⁴⁷ The roofs of the wharves that tinge the river with a “soft purple hue” (7) reveal the mutual influence between humans and the environment. The narrator carefully resists idealizing this pastoral scene: even though the February landscape is “damp”, leafless, “threatening, and “chill[y],” it is still “pleasant to look at” (7). Importantly, the river is “deaf,” meaning unresponsive, but “loving” (7), in the sense that the Floss literally nurtures humankind, although it is not flowing for that purpose.

These carefully described landscapes create a sense of place, and the narrator asserts that the love of one’s homeland “distinguishes the British man from the foreign brute” (152). Glossing over the xenophobia, this pronouncement indicates the importance of dwelling in one’s native place, a concern Thomas Hardy takes up at century’s end as laborers become increasingly migrant. Reflecting on his/her childhood, the narrator explains “our affections had [...] a trick of twining round” the local flora and fauna, so that the “elderberry bush overhanging the confused leafage of a hedgerow bank” charms more than the hothouse flower or exotic plant (152). These

²⁴⁷ Not only does the river link St. Ogg’s to other towns, it bears with it environmental resources such as “fresh-scented fir planks,” “rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed,” and “dark glitter[ing] coal” (7). This speaks to the increasing influence of industry, another central concern of the novel.

companions of youth “wove itself into [his/her] joys when joys were vivid” (152).²⁴⁸ Just as Mr. Tulliver weaves a tangled web of his family affairs, the narrator uses the language of entanglement to describe our kinship with place; the environment around us interweaves itself so deeply into our being that we can never love a place so much as the one we dwell in.²⁴⁹

The claim to water rights at the center of the novel serves to question both humanity’s arbitrary separation from “Nature” and the sense of mastery over the nonhuman environment. Mr. Tulliver’s ire is first roused when Dix proposes to build a dam that would potentially divert water from the mill; they settle this dispute through arbitration. Because Tulliver feels he “owns” part of the water, he next goes to law against Pivart, “who, having lands higher up the Ripple, was taking measures for their irrigation, which either were, would be, or were bound to be, (on the principle that water was water), an infringement on Mr. Tulliver’s legitimate share of water-power” (154). Defending himself to his wife, Tulliver muses: “water’s a very particular thing – you can’t pick it up with a pitchfork. That’s why it’s been nuts to Old Harry and the lawyers. It’s plain enough what’s the rights and the wrongs of water, if you look at it straightforrard; for a river’s a river, and if you’ve got a mill, you must have water to turn it; and it’s no use telling me, Pivart’s erigation and nonsense won’t stop my wheel: I know what belongs to water better than that” (156). Tulliver’s over-confidence leads to a disastrous lawsuit, however, as I will show, he does have grounds to pursue action against Pivart, whether or not the irrigation would actually stop his wheel.²⁵⁰ A discussion of riparian law is necessary to

²⁴⁸In her monograph on *The Mill on the Floss*, Rosemary Ashton discusses Wordsworth’s influence on Eliot (chapter #), evident in these passages.

²⁴⁹ Later, when Mr. Tulliver loses ownership of the mill, he laments, “I should go off my head in a new place. I should be like as if I’d lost my way” (264). His reminiscences of this spot, where the Tullivers “had lived for generations,” include the home and objects in the landscape (263). The narrator intercedes to explain that Tulliver’s feeling is instinctual; it is only our “instructed vagrancy” fed by travelogues that instigates people to wish to move from their native spot (263).

²⁵⁰ Jules Law, in his discussion of water rights in the novel, points out that the problem is not so much that Tulliver is given to “lawin’,” but that times are changing and these issues have never presented themselves before: “the new

understand both the “tangled business” of water (15), and the logic of domination that influenced such laws.

William C. Walton begins his comprehensive study of water with the assertion that it “is to man the most important single substance, with the exception of the air he breathes” (13). Water is, quite literally, “tangled” into our lives as we cannot survive without it. As such, the right to use it has been vigorously contested. Many of areas of the world lack water surplus and “have long struggled to develop workable doctrines to accommodate the conflicting interests and to provide a sound legal base for economic progress” (Walton 33). England, while far from arid, faced this difficulty when it came to negotiating between competing interests vying for access to water power after the Industrial Revolution. Joshua Getzler explains that “England’s scarcities of flowing water provoked acute competition to capture the available resources, a rivalry that commonly spilled into the courts” (40). In 1816, the engineer John Sutcliffe estimated the annual expense of water cases and arbitrations at 10,000 pounds (Getzler 40), and at least 200 cases concerning water rights were reported between 1770 and 1870 (Getzler 41). While now all water development projects are designed to serve multiple purposes, before the twentieth century all waterworks were built for a single purpose, such as to power a mill, irrigate fields, provide water for a town, or to dispose of waste (Walton 35). The two most common conflicts were upstream interference with water flow to lower mills and downstream damming-back of water causing flooding of the upstream mill, both of which are represented in *The Mill on the Floss*. Pivart’s irrigation plan represents a competing interest to Tulliver’s mill, even if the impact on the water’s flow is negligible. To fully understand the lawsuit so central to the novel, it is necessary to briefly look at the muddied waters of riparian rights in the early nineteenth century

issues of water rights posed by technological advances in irrigation opened up an entirely new area of litigation – one in which the outcome of Tulliver’s suit cannot have been foreseen with any clarity” (608). As I will show, law could actually be relied on in Tulliver’s time to adhere to the rule of appropriation.

and the precedent for Tulliver's grievance. He may be litigious, but his case against Pivart resembles many actual cases brought before the King's Bench.

Drawing from Roman law and concurrent American cases, two theories of water rights prevailed in the nineteenth century: the prior appropriation rule, dominant until around 1850, and the rule of natural flow, which came to be known as riparianism. At this time, William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (published in four volumes between 1765 and 1769) was regarded as "the settled law of England" (Getzler 212). An "easily accessible, readable, and manageable primer for lawyers (as well as laymen) on the laws of England as a whole," it "became the lawyers' bible" (Taggart 109). Jonathan Taggart, writing on the lengthy court case of *Bradford Water Supply v. Pickles*, investigates the impact of water disputes on current laws protecting private property. Blackstone's definition of property as "the sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any individual in the universe" (vol. ii, 2) set a lasting precedent, and also legitimates man's absolute dominion over the environment. Blackstone regarded the elements of light, air, and water, and wild animals as property in "common" (vol. ii, 14), but they become private property the moment that they are "in actual use and occupation" by a person who then becomes their undisputed possessor until he ceases to use them (vol. ii, 395). These natural amenities then "become again common, and every man has an equal right to appropriate them to his own use" (vol. ii, 395). These resources are common, or un-owned, in terms of being available to the public, but they always have the potential to be possessed.²⁵¹ Taggart explains, "Blackstone – like Bracton, Fleta, Britton, Callis, and Selden before him – drew upon Roman law in his description of the elements of light, air, and water as everyone's by the law of nature"

²⁵¹ John Locke, too, argued in *Second Treatise on Civil Government* that although light, air, and water are common, they become private the moment a man, by his own labor, claims them.

(112); from an ecocritical standpoint, we can see how they were considered as resources, and all legal disputes centered on the question of what person has more right to them, according to the usage criteria of “pleasure” and “profit,” and not *whether* humans have an unmitigated right to them. The “preservation” or “protection” of the environment itself does not enter these deliberations.

Blackstone acknowledges water to be a “moveable, wandering thing;” thus, one “can only have a temporary, transient, usufructuary” ownership of water so long as it flows on one’s land (vol. ii, 18). When Tulliver repeatedly calls water a “particular” thing, he notes the intangibility and mutability of the constantly moving body of water. Nevertheless, by the rule of appropriation, the first landowner to appropriate flowing surface water “had the use of it to the detriment of all other subsequent users upstream or downstream. There were no restrictions as to how much water could be taken, or for what purpose” (Taggart 114). In other words, once a person puts the water on his/her property to use, he/she immediately become entitled to its water power to the exclusion of all others, regardless of whether or not the water flows through someone else’s property. For our purposes in this chapter, three main points of the rule of appropriation need to be considered: first, the prior claimant always retains the right to the water if the use of the water from “time immemorial,” which, legally, meant twenty years, can be proved and, secondly, the right of appropriation protects future usage. Even if the person is not currently using the water, the claim only lapses after twenty years of abandonment; or, if an owner requires a lesser portion of the flow (for instance, if a mill is outfitted with more efficient technology), the owner retains the right to the previously used, larger amount of water-power. Lastly, the third point important in terms of Tulliver’s grievance, is that a landowner may file a claim of *injuria sine damno* (“injury without damage”): any diversion of flow by another user

constitutes an infringement on the owner's water rights (injury), even if no actual damage has occurred. Again, this distinction shows how future or potential usage is protected and defends the rights of the first person to claim use of the water flow.

This Blackstonian doctrine remained dominant until the increasing demands on water usage by industry forced a reevaluation of the law. Taggart explains that between the publication of Blackstone's commentaries and 1840 English courts struggled to develop a workable system of water rights due to the many court cases brought under review. In order to protect economic development by allowing enlarged access to necessary waterpower, natural flow, also called riparianism, began to supplant appropriation theory. The 1851 case of *Embrey v. Owen* (a case I will discuss in detail below) established riparianism as the primary rule of law. I will reduce the complex arguments into a few main points. John Locke's concept of "natural rights" provides the juristic basis of riparianism. Natural flow argues that natural amenities such as light, air and water are common, inalienable rights (*res communes*). Everyone has the same right to use a river, regardless of prior possession. A riparian proprietor "does not 'possess' water flow, in the sense of appropriating or controlling or occupying a stream to the exclusion of all other persons" (Getzler 43). Blackstone argued that no one can own "flowing" water, but if a person owns the land, he/she owns the right to use the water above or below it. Natural flow discards the concept of absolute ownership and additionally insists that no person can legally interfere with the natural flow of water.²⁵² What this means is that if one user (D) constructs a dam that creates an artificial flow to another user (P), D's dam legally infringes on P's water rights; however, if D's water usage does not interfere with the natural flow, P has no case. Furthermore, a plaintiff must

²⁵² Riparianism may be more democratic, but it is no less anthropocentric. For instance, the court in *Wood v. Waud* in 1849 observed, "It is said that the true rule...is [...] that streams are meant for the use of men, and that it would be unreasonable, and contrary to the universal consent of mankind, to debar each riparian proprietor from [water use]...provided the use...work[s] no material injury to his neighbour" (qtd. in Geltzer, 283).

prove that *actual* damage has occurred, in addition to injury. While appropriation theory would find in favor of the prior user, whether or not damage had actually occurred, the burden of proof is now on the plaintiff to show his/her interests are harmed by the defendant. It was often not possible to show how much water ran to a mill and therefore difficult to provide evidence of diminished flow. One could not litigate based on feared damage. The move from the rule of appropriation to natural flow encouraged economic development, because by relaxing the formal requirements for declaring riparian rights, newcomers could access the flow to power mills or irrigate fields that potentially benefit the community by expanding industry. Thus, not only one person's business would be protected. Lastly, natural flow rests on the maxim, "*sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas*": so use your own property as not to harm your neighbour's, a variation of the traditional Golden Rule.²⁵³ Although another person's water usage might consequentially injure another user, that is not necessarily grounds for legal action. The law asserted that one could not harm someone else's interests "maliciously," and intent was hard to prove and highly subjective.

What this brief summary shows is the variability of water laws in the early nineteenth century; each case was decided on an individual basis, considering questions such as: what constitutes damage, as opposed to injury? how does one distinguish between natural and artificial flow? to what purpose is the flow being put? With such subjective concepts as "reasonable use" and "malicious intent" it is easy to see why Tulliver felt "lawin'" to be so puzzling, despite declaring the "rights and the wrongs of water are plain enough" (156). In particular,

²⁵³ Blackstone, discussing nuisance doctrine, actually asserts, "So closely does the law of England enforce that excellent rule of gospel morality, of 'doing to others, as we would they shall do unto themselves'" (vol. iii, 218). While claiming a secure right for riparian owners, he qualifies these rights by making injurious use an actionable offense: ie: poisoning a water-course or erecting a lime-pit too near someone's residence.

“reasonable” use depended much on the judge’s discretion.²⁵⁴ Who can definitely say whether Tulliver’s industrial use of water is more reasonable than Pivart’s agricultural use?

Let us return to the facts of the case. Although Eliot was writing in the late 1850s, the lawsuit in the novel takes place in the 1820s when the rule of appropriation generally decided cases. This is what we know: Tulliver claims that Pivart’s irrigation will divert water and reduce the flow to his mill downstream, while Pivart’s engineers insist that the proposed irrigation will not diminish the natural flow of the Ripple, the tributary of the Floss on which the mill stands. At that time, as the prior appropriator from “time immemorial” (the Tulliver family has operated the mill upwards of a hundred years, well over the twenty year benchmark), Tulliver essentially has an undisputed right to use as much water power as he sees fit, and so his lawsuit, despite his family’s protestations, has merit. “[N]obody ever heard of a Pivart meddling with the river” (Eliot 155), and so Tulliver’s uninterrupted usage guarantees his water power. When the mill was built in the 1700s, the law described riparian rights as “guaranteed access to the usual flow,” regarding “water for a mill, like woods attached to the land,” “as an integral part of seisin or possession of land” (Getzler 122). For centuries, the first user’s entitlement to water power had been protected, which makes Tulliver’s logic fairly defensible from a legal standpoint. Of course, in the novel, he loses the suit. Why does Eliot “rule” against Tulliver?

The answer might lie in the rulings contemporary to the time of Eliot’s writing the novel. The fictional case closely resembles the groundbreaking case of *Embrey v. Owen*. A corn-miller, P, sued his upstream neighbor, D, for wrongfully diverting the stream to irrigate his property. As a result, the reduced flow to P’s mill diminished the profits he might otherwise have accrued.

²⁵⁴ For instance, in the eighteenth century, Lord Kames always prioritized the use of water for an individual’s “well-being” over and above any industrial purpose. Use becomes more reasonable the more it benefits the community: for instance, a mill that “saves labour and cheapens bread” has priority over water flow over a bleachfield (33-4). Baron Parke, a judge of King’s Bench from 1828-1834, “was wary of allowing riparians to use water for other than the ordinary and natural purposes of human sustenance and watering animals” (Taggart 131).

Tulliver files a damage-centered action on the same principle of anticipated damage to his mill's output because of Pivart's diversion of water for irrigation. However, in *Embrey v. Owen*, the jury found that D's diversion did not appreciably lessen the natural flow of the water and that no rights had been violated, unreservedly adopting the American reasonable use doctrine. The court ruled that common sense dictated that slight diminutions of water could not constitute violations to riparian proprietors, otherwise any use of the water by a neighbor, such as to take a drink or water a garden, would be punishable by law: "It is entirely a question of degree, and it is very difficult, indeed impossible, to define precisely the limits which separate the reasonable and permitted use of the stream from its wrongful application" (Parke B qtd. in Geltzer, 289). As Getzler indicates, "*Embrey v. Owen* proved to be the authority finally settling common-law riparian doctrine regarding natural surface streams" (290). From this point on, riparianism became the guiding principle of all water disputes, insisting on communal right to water and the necessity of maintaining natural flow.

Thus, a jury after 1851 would likely rule in Pivart's favor. According to riparianism, Pivart has an equal right to use the river, especially if he is using superfluous flow, and if Tulliver cannot prove actual damage. Suspected, or the possibility of, future injury would not be enough to win the suit. However, as the action in *The Mill on the Floss* takes place decades earlier when appropriation theory remained dominant, the decision would likely favor Tulliver on the basis that Pivart's irrigation injures Tulliver's interests, whether or not actual damage had occurred. Yet, if Tulliver *could* prove damage, Pivart might lose in any case. Despite being so pivotal to the plot, the novel offers few facts. We know Tulliver feels a sense of injury and indignation, but we also know that even after Pivart proceeds with his irrigation, the mill remains operational, and there is no indication that its profits are reduced by the circumstances. It is hard

to judge between Tulliver and Pivart without more information. Moreover, that may be beside the point.

Eliot seems to be questioning the very principles behind water laws. Tulliver's claims raise the metaphysical question of who can own water and the environment in general. Tulliver asserts "the rights and wrongs of water" are plain enough, asserting his stake in water as a natural resource to turn his mill. Here, too, we see an implicit critique of stewardship, explored in Chapter 4, as Tulliver clearly regards himself as in charge of the resources on his land, regardless of whether or not he puts them to good use. The reader not only questions Tulliver's legal action, but his very sense of entitlement. By allowing Pivart to win, Eliot may be condemning the legal precedent of appropriation theory at the time, or she is not interested in how the case would actually be decided. Without knowing her familiarity with riparian rights, we cannot say for sure how deliberate was her decision to uphold natural flow in a legal context. However, Eliot clearly chastens Tulliver's assumptions of appropriation and dominion. He may be legally correct, but is he morally correct to monopolize water flow? Eliot condemns the logic of domination and accompanying efforts to codify relationships between people and the environment. In context of the complacency with which the natural world is regarded by the townspeople, the legal scuffle over water reveals the town's attitude towards the environment as a resource, an anthropogenic viewpoint Eliot attempts to combat. The downfall of the Tulliver family directly results from their patriarch's domineering attitude: "there was a general family sense that a judgment had fallen on Mr. Tulliver" (200).

Tulliver tries to control the river as he tries to control his family life: he has married the "stupidest" of the Dodson sisters hoping for a docile wife,²⁵⁵ he insists on educating Tom as a

²⁵⁵ Mr. Tulliver explains his reasoning for marrying Elizabeth Dodson; "I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er'cute – bein' a good-looking woman to, an', the rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o'

“gentleman,” to push him into an unsuitable occupation; he favors Maggie, but laments that her “over ‘cuteness’” will harm her marriage prospects. Tulliver’s failure as a patriarch reveals his imperfect understanding of “breeding.” Alan W. Bellringer correctly identifies “sexism” as one primary cause of Tulliver’s misfortunes (48), citing his patronizing treatment of Mrs. Tulliver and her daughter. Bellringer pinpoints the root of Tulliver’s arrogance. Gordon S. Haight also addresses Tulliver’s sense of entitlement, asserting that Tulliver’s “unreasoning and futile hostility towards the calculating new world represented by the lawyer Wakem is his undoing. [...] Mr. Tulliver wants mastery over his family, just as he wants to dominate the river – both calamitously hubristic errors, for which he is amply punished” (xx). I would qualify his statement here, however, by pointing out that Tulliver’s hubris is not limited to his stubborn adherence to old world methods, but rooted precisely in his erroneous belief that he can dominate the river. Similarly, Jules Law posits that “the catastrophe of the novel in the largest sense – the destruction of the Tulliver family” is precipitated by the lawsuit, rather than the literal flood, and this “is where the material reality of the river as a source of labor (and the struggle for legal and technological control over its energies) intersects with, and is refracted throughout, the novel’s social and sexual structures” (607). Haight and Law describe the logic of domination propelling the plot, an attitude identified with the men in the novel.

Tulliver obdurately insists on his entitlement to private property.²⁵⁶ His son acts according to the same principles of “justice,” refusing to compromise if he believes he is right.

While Tom always acts according to the letter of the law, as Maggie observes, he “would be the

purpose, ‘cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn’t agoin’ to be told the rights o’ things by my own fireside” (19). He chooses a weak woman in order to assert his dominance. He also assumes that his daughter will resemble her mother, and his son will resemble himself.

²⁵⁶ In addition to the water suits, he goes to law to prevent the the “right of way” across his land, open to the public. Remaining indignant at losing the suit, he also blames this on Wakem: “it was unquestionably Wakem who had caused Tulliver to lose the suit about the right of road and the bridge that made a thoroughfare of his land for every vagabond who preferred an opportunity of damaging private property to walking like an honest man along the highroad” (158). Ostensibly, Wakem’s “rascality” is his tendency to defend common interests.

better” if he could feel pity or offer forgiveness for faults in others (147). The novel contrasts Maggie’s feminine empathy with Tom’s tyrannical masculinity and indifference to the suffering of those around him. Maggie feels kinship with the nonhuman, while Tom upholds the traditional absolute dominion over nonhuman. As noted above, Eliot scholars including Haight, Law, Ashton, and Bellringer have examined this patriarchal pattern of the masculine dominating the feminine, and such logics of domination need to be connected to environmental issues. Ecocriticism as a critical apparatus examines dualistic thinking and its relation to the logics of domination – the connection between social order and land cultivation, between controlling passion (a “natural” value) and promoting reason (a “cultural” value). Growing out of ecocriticism, ecofeminism specifically emphasizes the connections between woman and nature, allying nature with passion, irrationality, and the female – qualities patriarchal dominant culture aims to suppress.²⁵⁷ When connected, these parallel drives expose the roots of problematic thinking towards the environment that Eliot’s novel endeavors to correct. Masculine logics of domination attempt to exploit environmental resources, while feminine models of kinship encourage egalitarian relations with the environment.

Even as a child, Tom looks forward to becoming a man, when “he should be master of everything, and do just as he liked” (133). In the meantime, he rules over both his friend Bob

²⁵⁷ Ecofeminists assert that Western culture’s oppression of nature can be traced back to the construction of the dominant human male as a rational self, and the construction of reason as opposed to nature and all that is associated with nature, including women, the body and emotions. Feminists have argued that women’s oppression in Western culture is characterized by our association with emotion, the body, and reproduction. For further reading, see Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature*, and two important collections, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein) and *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (ed. Karen J. Warren). In *Reweaving the World*, Charlene Spretnak’s “Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering” discusses the origins of the movement, particularly the resistance to patriarchal culture and a commitment to nature-based religion. Riane Eisler’s “The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto” details how the philosophy of earth as goddess (Gaia) may help to reverse attitudes of “man’s nature:” the self-centered, greedy exploitation of the earth. Two essays in the collection *Ecofeminism*, Val Plumwood’s “Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics” and Petra Kelly’s “Woman and Power” further discuss the shortcomings of anthropocentrism (human-centeredness), effectually synonymous with androcentrism (man-centeredness), and the alternatives posed in distinctly feminine thinking: women exercise power *with* others, not over others (Kelly 114).

and his sister, assuming Maggie will grow up to be his housekeeper. Tom's behavior towards animals reflects his imperiousness. He "was often observed peeping through the bars of the gate and making minatory gestures with his small fore-finger while he scolded the sheep with an inarticulate burr, intended to strike terror into their astonished minds; indicating thus early the desire for mastery over the inferior animals, wild and domestic, including cockchafers, neighbours' dog, and small sisters, which in all ages has been an attribute of so much promise for the fortunes of our race" (92). An example of the narrator's sarcasm, the last statement wryly condemns this socially condoned "desire for mastery." Here as elsewhere, Tom is callous and cruel. He scolds the sheep in much the same way as he ruthlessly scolds Maggie when she displeases him. While Maggie becomes preoccupied with guilt and sadness on such occasions, Tom very easily puts his sister out of his mind, feeling no remorse for hurting her feelings. After the lost lawsuit, "The natural strength and firmness of [Tom's] nature [began] to assert itself" (204). He must "behave like a man," and Tom believes this to mean to assert his firmness over his mother and sister (204). He "show[s] himself dominant" (234), on the one hand seeking out employment to support his family, and on the other forbidding Maggie to speak to Philip Wakem.

It is no coincidence that the novel is as much about keeping Maggie, who is constantly trying to keep her passion in check, under control as it is about keeping the Floss under control. As Law underscores, the novel's emphasis on "flow, check, reversal" connects the river, water rights, and Maggie's growth; the psychological and social concerns of the novel are linked to the ecological concerns. The narrator pointedly compares Maggie's "fate" to that of an "unmapped river" (402). Both are destined to be ruthlessly dominated. Challenging the patriarchal domination of Mr. Tulliver, over both his land and his family, Eliot establishes a land ethic in

tune with female modes of thought: cooperation and sympathy. This overcomes male prerogatives, both in regard to unequal gender roles and as regards stewardship. We are told that “the need of being loved [was] the strongest need in poor Maggie’s nature” (37). Maggie feels most checked by Tom, desperately trying to please him by doing things from offering up her jam tart to rowing to his rescue during the flood. The narrator explains of love, “It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love – this hunger of the heart – as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world” (39). The narrator frequently refers to this instinctual, “simple, primitive love which knits us to the beings who have been nearest to us, in their times of helplessness or of anguish” (200). The language of kinship points to human entanglement with the environment, “knit” together by sympathy.

Although Maggie’s loving nature is contrasted to Tom’s pride and her father’s hubris, she struggles to conform herself to the model of femininity embodied in her cousin Lucy: meek, demure, dainty, charming but unintellectual. As she grows up, she discovers St. Thomas Aquinas²⁵⁸ whose “voice from the past” appeases her sense of injustice. The rough edges of the overgrown puppy are smoothed out:

Hanging diligently over her sewing, Maggie was a sight anyone might have been pleased to look at. That new inward life of hers, notwithstanding some volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions, yet shone out her face with a tender soft light that mingled itself as added loveliness with the gradually enriched colour and outline of her blossoming youth. Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be “growing up so good;” it was amazing that this once “contrairy” child was becoming so submissive, so backward to assert her own will (294).

²⁵⁸ Patron saint of animals.

The mature, tractable Maggie pleases her mother by adopting a proper, ladylike occupation – sewing – and silencing her own will in deference to her family. However, her “imprisoned passions” struggle to come to the surface. The geological metaphor suggests an inevitable eruption, once again allying Maggie with the environment. Reflecting the difficulty in legally controlling the river, Maggie’s “natural flow” cannot be interfered with.

The Red Deeps, an enclosure of trees formed “by the working of an exhausted stone-quarry – so long exhausted that both mounds and hollows were now clothed with brambles and trees” becomes Maggie’s landscape of resistance (299), where she goes to meet Philip and becomes reintroduced to books. The Red Deeps allude to a history of environmental domination: miners “exhaust,” or use up, the land and alter its topography, then move on to new ground. Yet, wildness (in the form of brambles, trees, and grass) reclaims the space, just as Maggie, experiencing “kinship” with the well-loved trees, ceases to suppress her inner nature (299). Maggie, “enjoying the free air,” looks up “at the old fir-trees, and thought that those broken ends of branches were the records of past storms, which only made the red stems soar higher” (299). Reading arboreal signs of stormy weather, Maggie is moved by the ability of the trees to overcome injury. The stems reveal rebirth, both from natural (storms) and man-made (the quarry) occurrences, and foreshadow the rebuilding of St. Ogg’s after the flood. The “free” air encourages Maggie to indulge her passions. Torn between her duty towards her brother and her natural sympathy towards Philip, Maggie ultimately cannot adhere to her narrow asceticism (much like Dorothea Brooke).²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ In her analysis of the Red Deeps, Ellen Moers cites Freud’s observation that “[t]he complicated topography of the female genital parts makes one understand how it is that they are often represented as *landscapes*...” (qtd. in Moers, 254). The Red Deeps are a metaphor for Maggie’s entrance into adulthood, her sexual awakening (Moers 254), evident in the line, “there may come moments when Nature makes a mere banks a means towards a fateful result” (Eliot 298). Maggie plays out her sexual drama on this landscape, choosing “between brother and lover” (Moers 254); however, her sense of “kinship with the grand Scotch firs” (299) indicates a very real ecological sensibility.

The novel's ecocentric viewpoint comes to the fore as human concerns or institutions are overridden by nature.²⁶⁰ The "free air" restores Maggie's true, passionate, self, just as later in the novel, she gives in to her desires as she passively allows the river to transport her and Stephen Guest to Mudport. The direction of the current coincides with Maggie's sexual desires though she recognizes that she has violated her social and moral duties to those she loves. Once again submitting her own will to others', she returns alone, naïvely assuming she can repair the breach. Maggie violates social custom, though not sexual propriety. Stephen is right when he says the tide carries them away from "all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us" (465), though not necessarily in the way he means. Eliot sets up the nature/culture opposition by continually pointing to the artifice of culture. The narrator remarks, "We perhaps never detect now much of our social demeanor is made up of artificial airs, until we see a person who is at once beautiful and simple" (429). So the novel ends with an upsurge, a flood that tears away "the artificial vesture of our life" to reveal "primitive mortal needs" (518).

Maggie's story ends tragically because her extreme attempts at self-control prove unhealthy; ultimately, she cannot survive in a close-minded society. The flood occurs just after her emotional meeting with Lucy, metaphorically breaking the dam: "The tumult of emotion [Maggie] had been enduring for the last twelve hours seemed to have left a great calm in her" (516). The flood functions in a variety of ways: as an objective correlative of Maggie's emotions – when she releases her emotions, the waters flow freely – and as a symbolic cleansing of the town: "what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal

²⁶⁰ The most sarcastic portions of the novel target the punctilious Dodson sisters and the gossipy, hypocritical residents of St. Ogg's. Eliot sets up the nature/culture opposition by continually pointing to the artifice of culture. The Dodson sisters are notorious for their strict notions of tradition and propriety – they have deliberate ways of storing linen, making preserves, and lending money. They set a rule for every trivial occasion. Eliot's narrative commentary humbles human beings by pointing out such absurdities.

needs?” (518). Yet, Eliot is careful not to depict the flood as merely metaphor. It serves as a literal reminder of natural disaster and destroys the perceived separation between humanity and nature. The conflict over land/water rights points ironically to the limitations of legal/human institutions: the river, finally, cannot be controlled. Eliot inclines towards the rule of natural flow; however, she goes further by giving the water agency. The flood makes things happen; it transforms the landscape, it destroys the mill, and it claims the lives of Maggie and Tom. Eliot’s novel builds on Gaskell’s land ethic, going beyond a consciousness of kinship to demonstrate the inescapable influence of nonhuman actors.

Tulliver’s attitude towards the river is indicative of a larger worldview described in the novel. We are told that St. Ogg’s was “one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature, as much as the nests of the bower-birds or the winding galleries of white ants” (115). However, because of its long history, its inhabitants have grown complacent about this kinship, the way they are literally knit together with their environment. Natural disasters seem a thing of the past and “the present time was like the level plain where men lose their belief in volcanoes and disasters, thinking to-morrow will be as yesterday, and the giant forces that used to shake the earth are for ever laid to sleep” (118). In other words, the residents fail to acknowledge the environment’s agency. Hence the flood, though quite natural and anticipated in geological time, seems sudden and catastrophic.²⁶¹ The environment strikes back. The flood is a chastening gesture that reminds the townspeople that they are vulnerable to the forces of nature. *Those* forces cannot be kept in check.

While the flood might be catastrophic to humans, it reflects the cycle of natural history: “Nature repairs her ravages – repairs them with her sunshine and with human labor” (521). I

²⁶¹ Jonathan Smith explains the catastrophic and uniformitarian models of history, respectively. He writes, “The narrator’s verdict is that floods, however destructive to individual human lives, are part of a uniformitarian model of history that includes social as well as geographical phenomena” (447).

want to emphasize this important coupling of “sunshine” and “human labor.” Both become agents that modify the environment, reflecting the sense of kinship embodied by Maggie. Since both human beings and natural forces aid the recovery, Eliot writes the ecosystem as a community including human and nonhuman. The narrator continues, “The desolation wrought by that flood had left little visible trace on the face of the earth five years after” (521). Although Eliot’s novels encourage human fellowship, this ending is more ecocentric than anthropocentric. The Floss takes control at the end of the novel, which reasserts nature’s mastery, and condemns the value system embodied by Tom and his father, of aggression, avarice, and self-interest. It is important to note that Maggie and Tom are literally killed by machinery (from the mill in fact), only drowning when they hit man-made, industrial refuse. Although Eliot is optimistic about human progress, evident in Maggie and Tom’s better education and rise above their parents in the social scale, evolution may require individual tragedy. As Rosemary Ashton argues, the particular case does not necessarily end happily, though the entire species benefits in the long run: “Individual tragedies occur. It is hard to be optimistic about human stories of waste, even if one can accept destruction in the animal world with equanimity” (107).²⁶² Ashton points to the mentality Eliot wishes to correct, the apathy to the animal world. Humans *are* animals, subject to the same forces. Five years later, the area has almost returned to normal. Maggie and Tom are mourned, but the world goes on. However, Nature has not repaired “all” her ravages; the hills are “left scarred” (521), marks of “past rending,” perhaps as reminders of the flood’s lesson. Though she personifies Nature in her conclusion, Eliot does not idealize Nature. She gives nature agency by describing “her” actions, but departing from the Romantic tradition, Eliot insists on the flood’s brutality. The scars on the landscape reinforce her ecocentric viewpoint as

²⁶² The central characters, Maggie and Tom, perish, but many of the secondary characters flourish, such as the Deane and Pullet branches of the family whose wealth is derived not from inherited land but trade and partnerships (Ashton 40). Here again we see ambivalence about technology as industry, in both senses of the word, triumphs.

reminders of environmental agency. Though tranquility is eventually restored, rebuilding requires a mutual effort of human and nonhuman. Eliot's novels are invested in people, yet this ecocentric ending reduces human beings to plain member and citizen of the ecosystem.

III. The Victorian Golden Rule

All of Thomas Hardy's novels share Eliot's ambivalence towards progress, and like Gaskell, he clearly articulates a creed of kinship. However, more than the earlier authors, Hardy's aesthetics of community concentrates equally on the nonhuman members, particularly animals. *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy's fourth novel, is the first to employ the name Wessex, as Hardy explains in the preface: "The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene. Finding that the area of a single county did not afford a canvas large enough for this purpose, and that there were objections to an invented name, I disinterred the old one," Wessex (3). These novels require a single geographical area to demonstrate the relationship between human beings and land so crucial to his sensibility." He says, "attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation and generation" is necessary for a local community to thrive (5).

Some Wessex stories such as "The Distracted Preacher" and *Under the Greenwood tree* capture and eulogize an agrarian past; others directly present the threat of modernity to rooted communities, such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. A novel of the former sort, *Far From the Madding Crowd* takes place in Weatherbury, "a spot open to the unrestricted vicissitudes of natural, social, and emotional 'weather'" (Shires xxi). In her introduction, Linda M. Shires points to the novel's land ethic: "Seeming to praise undiluted country life and rural

values, the novel holds forth ideals of harmonious integration between man and nature, man and man, and woman and man” (xiii). Her use of the word “seeming” qualifies this assessment since, as she later explains, this simpler, ideal past only exists in memory, pushing aside the “difficult realities” of labor in its nostalgia (xxi). Nevertheless, Hardy *does* unreservedly praise rural values, perhaps sentimentalizing old-fashioned labor to heighten the contrast with modern, industrial farming. Even so, Weatherbury is not immune to difficult realities, nor does Hardy romanticize nature. Its residents must contend with the vicissitudes of weather and the indifference of the environment to human life.²⁶³ The novel presents a clear example of kinship between human beings, animals, and the land itself.

Within the novel, human life does not dominate the landscape and Hardy continually acknowledges the presence and emotions of other creatures. The story follows Gabriel Oak, as stout and robust as the tree he is named for. His faulty watch defines his character. Older than his grandfather, the watch “had the peculiarity of going either too fast or not at all” (10), so although Oak carries around this family token, he relies on “the sun and stars” to tell time. Thus Oak lives his life according to seasonal time. His most faithful companion is his “clever and trustworthy” sheepdog (39), George, tellingly a human name.²⁶⁴ The narrator frequently refers to George’s emotions: his interest in a dead lamb, his indifference to the cat, his neutral adherence

²⁶³ Shires explains the title of the novel, a reference to Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” in the antithetical terms of country and city: “To be far from the madding crowd, then, is to be geographically isolated from the bustle of civilization, but it is also to be placed apart morally, in a more incorruptible, if not innocent, set of social relations. Hardy’s choice of this title from Gray seems to imply the supreme value of pastoral over the urban scene in a binary opposition. It apparently means that if one gets away to a rural scene, one will be influenced for the better” (xx). She goes on to argue that the novel is more complicated than this would suggest, especially considering that Bathsheba’s vanity breaks the heart of three men throughout the novel, and that her first marriage ruins another woman. We can hardly say social relations are “innocent.”

²⁶⁴ As opposed to Buddy, Yap, Daisy, etc. In *Man and the Natural World*, Keith Thomas explains that domestic animals were usually given nonhuman names to reinforce their inferior subject position. A human name was actually a sign of increased kinship, rather than a bid to anthropomorphize the animal.

to duty. Though “he understood English but imperfectly” (109), George is in tune with his master’s emotions and desires, and thus can understand Gabriel perfectly.

Rather than anthropomorphizing animals, Hardy employs analogies between the human and nonhuman to identify the similarities between them.²⁶⁵ For instance, George “waited for his meals in a way so like that in which Oak waited for the girl’s [Bathsheba] presence that the farmer was quite struck with the resemblance, felt it lowering, and would not look at the dog” (29). Gabriel is rather ashamed to realize that his instinctual love for Bathsheba resembles his dog’s primitive, single-minded concern for food. Later, Gabriel compares Fanny Robin’s pulse to overdriven lambs’, recognizing the “the same quick hard beat in the femoral arteries” (54). He can read the animal signs of Fanny’s body to discover her desperation and misfortune. Her animal instinct, legible to Gabriel, undoes the human/nonhuman binary. His analogy is apt because it connects the fear of the harassed lambs to Fanny’s plight as she is driven away by the fickle Sergeant Troy. She exits the novel until after Troy’s marriage to Bathsheba.

Fanny harnesses her energy to reunite with the father of her unborn child. Her struggles on her journey road reflect a land ethic because of the interdependent relationship that she forms with a large dog on the way. Nine months or so after Troy’s rejection, Fanny struggles to reach Casterbridge to meet him and collapses on the side of the road. She awakens to a dog softly touching her hand and licking her cheek: “He was a huge heavy and quiet creature [...]. Whether Newfoundland, mastiff, bloodhound, or what not, it was impossible to say” (262). The narrator explains that “In her reclining position [Fanny] looked up to him just as in earlier times

²⁶⁵ Hardy, in fact, employs isomorphisms, shared characteristics between two beings, not exclusively limited to the exclusive interpretation of the nonhuman in human terms. Jane Bennett argues that such strategies actually help human beings realize ecocentrism. Instead of being oversensitive to anthropomorphism, in an “effort to experience an authentic ecological sensibility,” we should realize that in order to think of the nonhuman in terms of human characteristics requires us to “recognize the Other as related” (99).

she had, when standing, looked up to a man” (262). Rather than suggesting how low Fanny has sunk in the world, so low that she now looks up to an animal, Fanny’s gaze reminds us of the dog’s similarities to a human. Despite the dog’s intimidating size, she recognizes a friendly face, seeing a gentle giant who recognizes Fanny’s physical exhaustion, one who comprehends her emotions and body language. It is clear he has reason to fear humans: “The animal, who was as homeless as she, respectfully withdrew a step or two when the woman moved, and seeing that she did not repulse him he licked her hand again” (262). The dog has learned to expect “repulse” from human beings and yet Fanny meets with more respect from this dog than she had from Troy, or, indeed, from men in general.²⁶⁶ The dog wishes to accompany her to Casterbridge and once he realizes she is too weak to move on her own, he allows Fanny to put her weight onto his back: “Her friend moved forward slowly, and she with small mincing steps moved forward beside him [...]. Sometimes she sank [... and the] dog, who now thoroughly understood her desire and her incapacity, was frantic in his distress on these occasions: he would tug at her dress and run forward. She always called him back” (262). Here, Hardy emphasizes the dog’s comprehension. The designation “friend” and the expression of the dog’s emotions reinforce kinship. He empathizes with Fanny and even tries to encourage her to proceed.

The dog receives the expected repulse almost the moment the pair arrive in Casterbridge. Linda M. Shires comments on Hardy’s “heavy” irony: “What might so easily be aggressive, a homeless dog on the road, turns out to be the kindest being of all. [...] Unlike the sheepdog [...] in the opening of the book, this dog makes no mistakes in his caring, unless it is that he remains near human beings too long” (xxx). With the dog’s assistance, Fanny reaches Casterbridge, fainting outside the workhouse on the edge of town. When she revives, she immediately asks

²⁶⁶ As Shires notes in her introduction, the dog is smart enough to avoid people, familiar with cruelty, but risks going into town for Fanny’s sake.

about the dog who had helped her only to learn that a man had “stoned him away” (263). The scene evokes anger at the callous treatment of Fanny’s friend. The workhouse employee embodies the feeling of superiority over animals which leads to cruelty. Hardy’s novel works hard to correct this view. Fanny’s alliance with the dog is not simply a product of her weakened condition.

Gabriel Oak, the figure of strength and skill in the novel, similarly communicates with animals, and it is precisely this trait that allows him to recover from hardship. At one point in the novel, he must “tragically” shoot George’s son, a young puppy, whose overzealousness leads to Oak’s bankruptcy when the sheep break through the fence, and the dog “corrals” them straight over a cliff (42). We can assume that killing the dog gives great pain to Gabriel, who recognizes that the dog only intended to please him. He apparently decides to shoot the dog to prevent further harm to livestock. His first emotion at the scene is “pity for the untimely fate of these gentle ewes and their unborn lambs” (41): “Oak was an intensely humane man [...]. A shadow in his life had always been that his flock ended in mutton – that a day came and found every shepherd an arrant traitor to his defenceless sheep” (41). Butchery is the necessary end to raising livestock, and while Oak understands his role as provider of meat, he nevertheless feels uncomfortable killing the animals with whom he has built a relationship. Only after these humane reflections does Oak realize the dead sheep represent the loss of his savings. He sells his farm to become a shepherd for hire.

When Gabriel moves to Weatherbury to take over management of Bathsheba’s farm, which she has inherited from her uncle, his efforts as steward to protect the farm in the face of a violent storm turn out to illustrate the impossibility of such superiority. Human interests are insignificant in the face of natural phenomena. Though inexperienced, Bathsheba is

conscientious and confident in fulfilling her role as steward of the farm; she participates in the labor, oversees each task, and checks that all is in order before going to bed. After her marriage to Sergeant Troy, in silent homage to Bathsheba, Gabriel exercises an even more active role in managing the farm as he doubts Troy's abilities. Gabriel can read the signs of the land, demonstrating his connectedness with the ecosystem in which he exists.²⁶⁷ One night after the crops have been newly harvested, the toads and slugs that appear indoors seeking refuge from the rain alert Gabriel to "prepare for foul weather" (239). It is the sheep that confirm Gabriel's prediction of a severe storm; as they huddle in a circle in terror, Gabriel knows that thunder will be coming. Nature exercises its own agency, indifferent to the plight of the farmers who risk losing "[s]even hundred and fifty pounds" value of grain on the eight ricks (240). Gabriel calculates the value of the grain on the eight ricks in pounds, but mentally converts this currency into its "divinest form," "that of necessary food for man and beast" (240). The storm cannot be stopped, so the farmers need to fear and prepare for these "complications of weather" (239). Gabriel urges Troy to prepare for this "war" with the environment, but Troy dismisses Gabriel's concern and gets the men so drunk that no one is capable of aiding Gabriel, who resolves to cover the ricks single-handedly. Bathsheba, however, remains a solicitous steward and the weather draws her out into the field in concern. She joins Gabriel in protecting the harvest: "love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe" (246). Hardy certainly does not "sentimentalize" the hard work involved in covering the ricks as the pair narrowly escape being struck by lightning. The weather which dominates this scene humbles "human" concerns: though Gabriel is still in love with Bathsheba,

²⁶⁷ His fluency in reading environmental signs allows him to regain his class status, as he eventually oversees Bathsheba's property and her neighbor's, Boldwood. Throughout the novel, Gabriel displays great skill in husbandry. For instance, as the only one who knows how to safely pierce their sides, Gabriel saves the bloated sheep.

the urgent need to protect their food and to keep safe excludes thoughts of romance, jealousy, and even anger at Troy. Even more striking than his portrayal of an indifferent environment is Hardy's portrayal of Gabriel's kinship with the environment that equips him to protect the crop; Troy and Boldwood ignore the signs, too wrapped up in their own human concerns.

The larger context represented by the storm shrinks the importance of the characters. Though the universe is metaphorically "infuriated" during the violent storm, it is not enacted as a judgment on mankind. Natural phenomena simply occur regardless of surrounding life. Troy, in an uncharacteristic moment of wisdom, says: "To speak like a book I once read, wet weather is the narrative, and fine days are the episodes, of our country's history" (254). More often than not, human beings must contend with the elements. No amount of technology and ingenuity can actually control the environment, as we saw in the limitations of riparian law. Thus, unlike Gabriel's statement, Hardy does not represent the farmers at "war" with Nature, a belligerent or always hostile environment, but rather depicts the horizontal relations between human and nonhuman. As he describes the men's futile attempts to dominate their environment, Hardy's language resembles Eliot's earlier critique of patriarchal norms and values in *The Mill on the Floss*. If the two had not struggled all night to cover the crops, most of their necessary food and income for that year would have been destroyed.²⁶⁸

In a similar night scene, Bathsheba sleeps outdoors after running away from a cruel, grieving Troy after Fanny's death, but her experience in nature only serves to show that the nonhuman environment exists oblivious to individual plight. She awakes to the sounds of sparrows, finches, and squirrels, all indifferent to her presence there: "Day was just dawning, and beside its cool air and colours, her heated actions and resolves of the night before stood out

²⁶⁸ In fact, this happens to the heartbroken Boldwood. Too preoccupied by Bathsheba's rejection, he neglects his farm.

in lurid contrast. She perceived that in her lap, and clinging to her hair, were red and yellow leaves which had come down from the tree and settled silently upon her during her partial sleep” (296). Here, the marshy bower safely houses Bathsheba: the overnight exposure does not harm her, even as the land remains indifferent to her presence. Shires remarks that the leaves covering her body draw her into the scene, but the wind moves them around regardless of her company, so “[w]hat at first seemed like a ‘thicket’ and then a womb-like place of peacefulness is undercut [...] by the fact that life goes on all around Bathsheba without attending to her. She is hidden but she is also inconsequential” (xxv). As Shires notes, Bathsheba’s escape into the thicket is “a highly dramatized call for attention,” and her subsequent avowal that being a runaway wife is shameful allows her to ignore “a far more serious insight: that her being is both unnecessary and irrelevant to her husband, her farm, and the universe” (xxvi). Bathsheba’s vanity obscures the reality that Troy ignores her absence, and that the nonhuman community continues regardless of her personal tragedy.

Troy learns a similar lesson when he goes to place flowers on Fanny’s grave, suggesting that human beings are one of many equal members of the environment. In a chapter entitled “Troy’s Romanticism,” the guilt-stricken lover meticulously plants flowers over Fanny’s grave. However, during the night, heavy rain collects onto the roof of Weatherbury Church, pouring out the mouth of a stone gargoyle and uprooting all the flowers. Thus, once again the weather in Weatherbury thwarts human intention. The chapter title indicates the futility of Troy’s actions in the face of an indifferent environment; nature does not simply reflect his individual strife but rather acts as it will in spite of it, revealing his position within the ecosystem. A realist author, Hardy differentiates between an idealized view of nature that would conform to Troy’s emotions, and the way the environment actually operates. The universe does not recognize his grief, and

the washing away of the tokens on Fanny's grave implicitly robs his effort, and arguably her death, of special significance. This is not "Romantic Nature" because it neither allows Troy emotional catharsis nor serves as passive backdrop. Environmental agency actually removes his handiwork. However, despite its harshness, the environment does sustain life and draw human beings into its community. *Far From the Madding Crowd's* land ethic shows how humans communicate with and adjust to the environment. As in all the Wessex novels, human beings must coexist with the landscape.

In his last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Hardy examines human relationships with animals more closely, not only disavowing humanity's right to dominance, but questioning the rights all creatures are entitled to. Humans manipulate the landscape and slaughter animals for food, and Jude continually questions how much of this behavior is necessary for survival or how much of our behavior can be modified to meet our needs without brutality. He finds himself ultimately unable to reconcile "Nature's logic," "[t]hat mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another," with humanitarian impulse (18). Man pampers the dog to hunt the fox, or, as in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the pheasant; he dislocates birds and vermin to preserve his crops; and, in the chief example of cruelty in *Jude*, he guts and gores the pig for food. Jude, whose self-development is limited by his class, feels affinity towards animals and is sickened by the way rights and resources are distributed unequally, suggesting a link between the disenfranchisement of animals and that of the lower classes. Just as in *The Mill on the Floss* where Tom's militant masculinity positions him at odds with the larger world, Jude's unorthodox manhood leaves him more receptive to the powers of nonhuman agents. Jude does not indicate the norm, and his resistance to the dominant value system harms his social aspirations, even as Hardy holds him up as a model disciple of the Creed of Kinship.

Jude's sympathy towards animals demonstrates Hardy's notion of a land ethic as the key to social progress. Untethered by his yearning to earn his degree in Christminster, yet barred by the restrictive class system, he wanders in search of a harmonious community. In other words, Jude suffers from the "modern vice of unrest" (85). His humanitarian impulses unfit him for farm-work and butchery. He becomes a stone-cutter, a small rebellion against modernism, as he preserves the past by restoring and repairing buildings. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on how the treatment of animals becomes a barometer for character. Honoring the golden rule of kinship cultivates the sympathy necessary for a community's progress.

Early on, Jude identifies himself with maltreated animals, placing himself on the same ground as they and revealing that his notion of community extends beyond the human. Jude's first job in Marygreen is to chase away the birds from Farmer Troutham's crops. His respected schoolmaster Mr. Phillotson's parting words are to be kind to animals, and Jude takes this to heart, sympathizing "with the birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away? They took upon them more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners - the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him" (15). Jude does not anthropomorphize the birds, but acknowledges similar desires. These "friends", "like himself," are not wanted in the *human* world. Jude, however, does not put the birds' interests below the farmer:

"You *shall* have some dinner – you shall. There is enough for us all. Farmer Troutham can afford to let you have some. [...]."

They stayed and ate [...] and Jude enjoyed their appetite. A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those lives were, they much resembled his own.

His clacker he had by this time thrown away from him, as being a mean and sordid instrument, offensive both to the birds and to himself as their friend” (15).

Once again, the narrator reinforces the connection between his life and the birds’ lives, though he calls them “puny and sorry.” It may seem as if these adjectives devalue the birds’ existence in spite of Jude’s humanitarian intention. However, this probably refers to the maltreatment of the birds by human hands, and given Hardy’s pessimism, most lives are implied to be “sorry,” including Jude’s. Truthman, who overhears Jude’s decision, certainly does not share Jude’s opinion that there is enough to go around, of course values his crop more than the birds’ satisfaction. He beats Jude off his property, and the boy suffers more for the birds’ sake than from the pain of the blows. Walking homeward with a heavy conscience, he attempts to repair the violent imbalance by carefully tiptoeing around the scores of earthworms covering the ground “without killing a single one” (17).²⁶⁹ Importantly, Jude’s empathy even extends to non-sentient nature, for, in addition to animals, “He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them” (17). Jude sees himself as part of an ecosystem in which even the non-sentient can experience pain.

Jude’s sensibility hearkens back to Gabriel Oak, who communicates with animals and the land. Elaine Scarry’s eloquently written essay on the body in Hardy’s novels primarily shows the ways in which a worker’s tools become grafted onto his body, and how Hardy, by identifying

²⁶⁹ In his last book, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms with Observations on Their Habits* (1881), Darwin dignifies these deaf, dumb, blind, and limbless creatures. Darwin details how the worm transforms the landscape and benefits human beings. In the conclusion, he writes: “Worms prepare the ground in an excellent manner for the growth of fibrous-rooted plants and for seedlings of all kinds. They periodically expose the mould to the air, and sift it so that no stones larger than particles which they can swallow are left in it. They mingle the whole intimately together, like a gardener who prepares fine soil for his choicest plants” (309-10). This humble creature unifies the ecosystem. Perhaps Hardy had these remarks in mind when he chose earthworms as the subject of this scene in *Jude*. Deborah Morse and Martin Danahay explain that one effect of Darwin’s theories was “both to make the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions” (2). Even the term “animal” escapes definition, as in popular parlance, it typically refers to vertebrates. For example, even today most pour salt on slugs or crush spiders with no hesitation, but protest the abuse of dogs and cats. Hence, Jude’s reluctance to squash the worms reveals his heightened sympathy. The letter that serves as epigraph to this chapter vocalizes Hardy’s deliberate intention to extend rights to all animals, here including invertebrates.

human beings as workers, in turn identifies their relations with the material world. Her insights into the exchanges between the human body and non-sentient objects in the environment enlarge Hardy's sense of kinship that he expresses in his Golden Rule beyond the animal. The perpetual mutual exchanges between sentient and non-sentient life leave traces on one another. Scarry provides numerous examples throughout Hardy's work, particularly in *The Woodlanders* (1887) where Giles Winterbourne carries traces of the orchard with him wherever he goes, his head covered by "translucent sap and seed" (92), and the smoky film on Grace's walls that attests to her studying late into the night, enduring long after the work has stopped (91). Scarry shows how "[t]he material record of the interaction between man and world often survives the interaction itself" (92); encounters, collisions, and exchanges with the material world leave evidence and alter both agents so that there "ceases to be a clear boundary separating them" (96). Carrying Scarry's astute observations farther than her discussion of work, we can conclude that not only do "man and world" act on and alter each other's surface, they fundamentally define each other. The "largesse" of these interactions that Scarry alludes to indicates "vital materialism." Jane Bennett theorizes that the overlaps between "thing" and "human" demonstrate the permeability of matter: I am part thing. The walking-stick that Jude cuts for Sue is an extension of her limbs; Jude's "marble" face and the coating of stone-dust on his books and rough hands tell of his physical work even when he is at rest. Scarry writes, "the human creature is immersed in his interaction with the world, far too immersed to extricate himself from it (he may die if he stops)" (92). While Scarry does not discuss Jude specifically, he, too perceives the nonhuman as his "comrades" (Scarry 97), later empathizing with the pig his wife slaughters and transforming his environment through his stone-cutting and being transformed by that work.

Jude's keen perception of nonhuman suffering becomes both the source of his heroism and a social liability. The narrator remarks that, socially, this is a "weakness of character" bound to bring more grief to his life (17), reminiscent of the famous aside in *Middlemarch*: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity" (194). Eliot describes the lack of connection to difference, including non-sentient living creation, and wonders if a too heightened sensitivity to all life would debilitate us. Most people walk about "well wadded with stupidity," or ignorant of our animality, and thus, for Hardy, Jude's adherence to the Creed of Kinship, his compassion, increases his humanity.²⁷⁰ As in *The Mill on the Floss*, featuring Maggie's feminine sympathy in conflict with Tom's masculine imperiousness, Hardy's characters pose a dialectic of environmental ethics. Jude, socially debased, presents a kinship ideal distinct from the prevailing cultural apathy. The reader identifies with Jude; his worldly failure models a more meaningful connection with the nonhuman world. Jude frequently acknowledges his kinship with animals, whom he respects without thinking of himself as a "steward," but "friend." As I show in Chapter 4, the steward guarantees the rights and well-being of the natural world as an ethical prerogative, and Hardy pushes this further to insist, not on benevolent condescension, but on the intrinsic value in the nonhuman.

²⁷⁰ Jude's wife Arabella is described as a "female animal." Robert Morrison argues that she degrades herself by acting like an animal. That Arabella attracts Jude's attention by throwing a pig's genitalia at his face is indicative of their entire short courtship. The retrieved offal is hung on rail of the bridge on which they talk, representing the awakening sexual urges in Jude. Jude is ruled by instinct, giving in to Arabella's sexual nature despite knowing her to be beneath him intellectually and morally. He is, after all, a male animal. Years later, when Jude meets Arabella again, he is incapable of being cruel to her, regarding her as a "fellow-creature" much in the same way he regards the lower animals: "an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature" (266). Despite her manipulations and weaknesses, he will not harm her. The comparison is not flattering to Arabella, yet, it reveals Jude's understanding that humans are animals with higher intelligence, as opposed to a separate type of being altogether. He recognizes his own "animal passions," as does Sue, who prides herself on her self-control. Nevertheless, Arabella's reemergence finally arouses Sue's jealousy. It is this basic sensation that leads Sue to finally consummate her relationship with Jude.

Jude's lawful wife, Arabella, represents the dominant value system. Governed by self-interest, Arabella disregards the feelings of nonhuman creatures, whereas Jude refuses to be cruel, even if that means modifying his needs. Their differing behavior towards animals demonstrates how mismatched are Jude and Arabella, as well as later signaling his affinity with Sue. It is slaughtering their pig that effectually breaks up Jude and Arabella's marriage. When the pair tie the victim down onto the stool to be butchered, the pig's note changes to a "cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless" (64). Arabella insists the animal must "be eight or ten minutes dying, at least," while Jude determines, "He shall not be half a minute if I can help it, however the meat may look" (64). He "mercifully" kills the beast with one stroke, calling on Arabella to "have a little pity on the creature!" (64). Jude perceives the despair in the pig's cry, while Arabella selfishly worries that the pig's squeals will attract the neighbors' attention and embarrasses her in their eyes for slaughtering the pig herself. She ignores the animal's tone of agony and reproachful glare, while Jude responds, "Upon my soul I would sooner have gone without the pig than have had to do this! [...] A creature I have fed with my own hands" (64). Arabella points out "Pigs must be killed" (65). This Jude concedes, but he objects to the cruel and slow manner of killing them in order to drain out their blood. He instinctually recoils from killing a creature he has raised and developed a relationship with. Feeling that he has betrayed the pig, Jude would rather forgo eating meat than inflict such suffering. Personally he abhors the need to take life, but he accepts that animal slaughter provides for basic social needs, and does not "see how the matter was to be mended" (66).²⁷¹ His empathy and Arabella's anthropocentrism represent their fundamental incompatibility.

²⁷¹ Morrison details the influence of the Victorian humane movement, of which Hardy was a staunch supporter, on the novel, particularly in regard to slaughterhouse reform. Hardy offered the periodical the *Animals' Friend* a version of the pig-killing scene titled "A Merciful Man" in hopes that it "might be useful in teaching mercy in the Slaughtering of Animals for the meat-market" (qtd. in Morrison 67).

The humanity of Jude's true love, Sue, is depicted in her freeing of her pet pigeons, which is somewhat analogous to Jude's merciful killing. After Jude loses his job in Aldbrickham, they must sell their house and a poulterer purchases her pigeons: "An emotion at the sight of them, assisted by the growing dusk of the evening, caused her to act on impulse;" "she pulled out the peg which fastened down the cover, and went on. The cover was lifted from within, and the pigeons flew away with a clatter" (308). She releases her pet pigeons rather than allow them to be slaughtered. She admits the deed was foolish, though this does not change her regret that "Nature's law" is "mutual butchery" (308). Sue feels kinship with the birds, not only because she metaphorically identifies with their need to be free, but out of natural compassion. In contrast, Arabella goes on to ensnare the quack doctor, Vilbert, using his own love-philter distilled from the juices of a hundred pigeons' hearts. This match between two callous, self-serving people seems fitting.

Though Arabella derides Jude for sentimentalism, Sue loves him precisely for his humanity. Moral without being Christian, a wife without signing a register, Sue rejects social institutions that would govern her instinct, preferring to act in accordance with free will rather than by compulsion. Sue, an autonomous scholar and atheist, regards herself as the "negation" of civilization (147). Sue codes "civilization" as artificial rules and attempts to return to a simpler, yet not savage state. Jude, mistaking the source of her modernity, accuses her of being an "urban miss" (139). She corrects him, indicating that she loves the country, and in fact her ideas are modern by being "natural." She would like to live "[o]utside all laws except gravitation and germination" (139). For her, the only true laws are natural ones. Essentially, to be progressive is to be retrogressive. Both she and Jude appreciate "culture" in the form of books, art, and

knowledge, but rather than follow the herd of human beings, they elevate themselves by authentically practicing their beliefs, including humanitarian impulses.

Sue identifies with a trapped rabbit that Jude sets free, and finally resolves to escape the trap of her marriage and her painful physical aversion to her husband. In the middle of the night, the distressed cry of a rabbit caught in a trap arouses Jude from sleep; he knows from experience the rabbit will suffer until the trapper collects it in the morning. Jude

who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a 'bad catch' by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-sprung instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the fields from the mortification of the limb. If it were a 'good catch,' namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken, and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape. (214)

Jude cannot sleep until he puts the animal out of its pain. Just as Tess in Hardy's earlier novel wrings the neck of suffering pheasants, Jude kills the rabbit quickly to spare it further misery. Sue, also unable to sleep from listening to the animal's torture, had intended to end its sufferings herself; her relief that Jude has done it leads to her admission that her marriage is an unhappy one, and to their first kiss on the following morning. Just as Jude releases the rabbit, Mr. Phillotson releases Sue, agreeing to let her leave him and live with Jude. Phillotson, too, is troubled by her inability to have sex with him or even sleep in his bed, and is unwilling to force himself on her. When she literally jumps out the bedroom window to avoid intercourse, he concludes, "it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer" (230). He braves public scorn and scrutiny to be merciful towards Sue. He later says, "Cruelty is the law pervading all nature

and society; and we can't get out of it if we would" (318). In other words, the biological need for food remains a moral dilemma, the very same question that vexes Jude as a child and husband. Nevertheless, this cultural sanction does not mean that Phillotson should betray his principles and be cruel towards Sue, a "fellow-creature." Although Phillotson says "we can't get out of [this dilemma] if we would," Hardy's novel presents, in the Creed of Kinship, a desirable alternative to these cruel, domineering relationships with the nonhuman, and also to the condescending stewardship ideal. This impasse bars the path to success for Jude. Hardy's wayward protagonist is, in fact, too progressive: the world is not ready to share his ecological sensibility or sanction his challenge to social norms. Jude cannot win against the world, and herein lies Hardy's pessimism. Similarly, Phillotson is socially ostracized for his mercy to Sue.

The novel suggests that if people could learn to be kind to animals, they would be kinder to each other. Jude, who feels disadvantaged due to his class, perceives "there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas" (327). He is perplexed both by the fact that cruelty corresponds to social law and that class, not merit, decides success. Like pigs and rabbits, the lower classes are treated disdainfully. The culmination of this feeling comes in Christminster, after Jude observes a common instance of animal cruelty. On graduation day, Jude's emotions rise to the surface, prompting a speech about being unable to follow "the bent of his nature" due to social barriers (326). He blames "the spirit of mental and social restlessness," dis-ease, for his troubles (327). Christminster should be the site of culture, of awakened social conscience, and yet the learned atmosphere fails to prevent wanton cruelty, which Jude observes when "there drove up [...] a cab whose horse failed to stop at the exact point required for setting down the hirer [...]. The driver, alighting, began to kick the animal in the belly" (327). Jude remarks, "If

that can be done [...] at college gates in the most religious and educational city in the world, what shall we say as to how far we've got?" (328). The nearby police officer silences Jude for stirring up trouble, regarding Jude's disorderly remarks as a greater offense than the savage kicks. In fact, Christminster houses two polarized worlds: that of the elite, wealthy scholars and the working class who serve them unnoticed. The stonemasons, shopkeepers, and other tradesmen fall into the same category as the work-horse. Jude feels kinship with the abused animal, and reacts to the violence transpiring in front of him. Although the lower-class cab-driver performs the cruel act, as Robert Morrison asserts, "Hardy also indicts the doctor, the college, and the urban police force, perhaps the entire city for ignoring [it]" (76). Hardy believes that the action represents the state of society, and if human beings have not progressed far enough to recognize kinship, they remain savage. In this scene, Hardy particularly attempts to dispel the prevailing notion that animal cruelty was a lower-class vice.²⁷²

Phillotson's parting words to Jude in Part I at Marygreen are to "forge a link between kindness to animals, social class, and education" (Morrison 71). By telling Jude to "be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can" (Hardy 10-11), Phillotson implies that education promotes altruism. However, Jude is quickly disillusioned when he encounters animal cruelty in the city of enlightenment, Christminster. Much like the various entrapped animals throughout the tale, Jude and Sue fall victim to outmoded, repressive social laws. While Phillotson lets Sue go, society never accepts her decision. Near the end of his life, Jude compares himself to his pig, lamenting that he did not die alongside the animal. After he is entrapped by Arabella for a second time, Jude recalls the helpless pig, metaphorically butchered by circumstance. As long as the "letter," social structures, governs relationships and restricts opportunities, Jude's class will remain animals.

²⁷² Although, as Morrison shows, he betrays class anxiety in his association of lower-class characters with butchery.

Hardy's novels express a clear land ethic by extending the idea of community to animals and advocating their rights. Human beings are no better than animals, and it is mercy, acknowledging our equality, that actually humanizes us. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy exposes this natural truth, but, like Jude, is ultimately defeated by social disapproval; it would be his last novel. Jude's ecocentrism is not heard, but his death serves as a cautionary gesture, much like the flood that ends *The Mill on the Floss*. Out of all Victorian novelists, ecocritics single out Hardy for his realistic portrayals of the environment.²⁷³ While I hope to broaden this view of Victorian fiction by including a range of equally eco-conscious authors, Hardy obviously does important work by exemplifying a land ethic, which requires Hardy's golden rule to function. This chapter broadens the sense of "community" crucial to the period by revealing how Hardy and other Victorian writers conceived of human and nonhuman networks of agents.

Visible in the flood that destroys St. Ogg's, the smoke-clogged air that sickens Londoners, the dis-ease produced by developing all available space, the Victorian novels in this dissertation participate in an eco-conscious discourse initiated early in the period, in such works as Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843). Carlyle warns against violating "Nature's Laws": "Nature's Laws, I must repeat, are eternal: her small still voice, speaking from the inmost heart of us, shall not, under terrible penalties, be disregarded" (143). He insists on the importance of obeying environmental laws, declaring that transgressing these limits leads to society's ills, eerily foreshadowing the current climate crisis.²⁷⁴ Although Carlyle never intended to idealize a

²⁷³ Thomas Hardy appears in nearly all important ecocritical collections such as *The Ecocriticism Reader*, where Scott Russell Sanders (in "Speaking a Word for Nature") insists that most mainstream British fiction from Defoe to Woolf does not include any meaningful acknowledgement of a nonhuman context, with the exception of Thomas Hardy. Perhaps the fullest discussion by an ecocritic of Thomas Hardy's work is Richard Kerridge's "Ecological Hardy," in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*.

²⁷⁴ Indeed, his apocalyptic rhetoric is similar to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989).

medieval, pre-industrial past, his work nevertheless inspired many novelists to interrogate the “Condition of England” and to illustrate the consequences of Mammon worship that Carlyle prophesies. Gaskell’s *Cousin Phillis* refreshingly reimagines community operating according to the Creed of Kinship, while Eliot and Hardy pessimistically map out the consequences of human hubris and greed. *The Mill on the Floss* does more than warn against human greed. Not only does Eliot punish Tulliver’s desire for profit and absolute dominion over the Ripple; her version of Noah’s flood washes away human attempts to disregard Nature’s Law and ignore environmental agency. Whether Tulliver’s understanding of riparian law is right or wrong ultimately does not matter in the face of Nature’s law. Hardy worries that if society persists in disenfranchising its nonhuman members, progress will never be achieved. Nature’s Laws continue to operate outside of an exclusively human context. The Victorian novels in this dissertation reconceive humankind’s relations with the environment, mobilizing eco-consciousness in hopes of creating the conditions for true kinship.

Conclusion: Protecting the “House Beautiful”: Morris’s Geography of Conservation

Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” (1891)

This dissertation investigates how certain authors in the Victorian period participated in the related discourses of natural realism, miasmatic language, dis-ease, stewardship, and the creed of kinship, hoping to inspire social and environmental reform. This eco-conscious discourse, employing a set of recognizable strategies for readers of popular prose, emerges at century’s end in eco-socialism, a comprehensive alternative to capitalism and its associated life choices. William Morris, the face of this movement, worked energetically throughout his career as a lecturer, writer, and artist to promote environmental awareness. He believed an agrarian economy rooted in art could cure the “sickness” of civilization and promote kinship with the environment (“The Art of the People” 23). Morris condemned a capitalist culture for its decadence, for exploiting the earth as a resource while producing cheap, excess goods. The culmination of eco-consciousness into “eco-socialism” was in part a product of the movement away from economies of production towards economies of conspicuous consumption, the “fever” sickening civilization (“The Society of the Future” 184). In 1890, Morris transferred his long-standing ideas about socialism, craftsmanship, and ecology into *News from Nowhere*. This science fiction tale illustrates Oscar Wilde’s maxim, “Progress is the realisation of Utopias.” Morris describes the kind of utopian, or “eco”-topian, future that would be possible if Victorians began to act with eco-consciousness. He does not describe England as it exists – polluted, dis-

eased, and anthropocentric – but as it could be. His *Arcadia*, at once “Nowhere” and everywhere, answers the cries of the earlier texts in my study by uniting the varied themes of eco-conscious discourse to imagine precisely how progress could be realized. Utopia refers both to *eu-topos* (good place) and *ou-topos* (no place), and despite using “Nowhere” in his title, Morris re-maps actual England into a “good place” by constructing meaningful relationships with local environments, predominantly through a return to handicraft, which repudiated ornamental art and championed preindustrial principles. By suggesting how to create a utopia, Morris maps a geography of conservation onto the future. His optimistic vision captured the public imagination and convinced critics of the practicality of his ideas. The book’s “singular charm” won over reviewers (Johnson 339), despite its relatively flat characters, and created a new genre, the ecotopia.²⁷⁵

The protagonist of *News from Nowhere*, William Guest, falls asleep after returning home from a meeting of the Socialist League and awakens in twentieth-first century England, where society now lives by the socialist principles he had been fighting for. Unable to recognize the sparkling clean Thames, Guest does not realize that he remains geographically in the same spot. The English have reorganized into self-sufficient, local economies, specializing in handcrafted goods, thus eliminating the conspicuous consumption and pollution Guest has come to expect as characteristic of his home. Various guides (presumably Guest’s descendants) journey with Guest through sustainable places along the Thames and navigate him through alien concepts such as “shopping” without money. Nowhere, completely decentralized, lacks government and formal education systems; institutional control of trade, marriage, and religion has been abolished.

Dick, the waterman, his lover Clara, and his great-grandfather, Old Hammond, lecture Guest on

²⁷⁵While Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 novel gave the name to the genre, Morris’s *News from Nowhere* is really the first ecotopia, defined by “the recurrent theme of living in harmony with nature, which [...] contributes to a pollution-free environment” (Delveaux 76).

these socialist principles and the proper relationship to the land, while he answers questions about his “planet,” where Victorian England’s concepts of wealth, the nation, and civilization appear as equally foreign to the Londoners of the future.²⁷⁶ Guest is schooled in the eco-consciousness, the keen vision and practical, naturalist knowledge valued in *Nowhere*, that revived the environment. As a “Guest,” he must eventually return to Victorian England, where he presumably will share this knowledge, much as his counterpart, Morris, shares through literature his vision of sustainability.

Morris called *News from Nowhere* a “utopian romance,” but it is arguably within the larger generic category of science fiction. While most science fiction depicts a dystopian world perverted by technology, Morris’s geography of conservation, a blueprint for a sustainable place, allies his work to that of the novelists practicing natural realism. Through practicing handicraft, the residents of *Nowhere* conserve the environment, suggesting how pollution may be reversed by replacing machines with old-fashioned tools.²⁷⁷ Throughout his career, Morris argued that the arts, in their real meaning, “are surely the expression of reverence for nature” (“Architecture in Civilization” 60), and that an object is beautiful “if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her; it cannot be indifferent” (“The Lesser Arts” 2). His belief in the power of arts and crafts to conserve the environment undergirds the metamorphosis of London into *Nowhere*. Guest hopes, “if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream” (228). *Nowhere*, or “no place,” conceptualizes a possible future by sowing eco-consciousness intended to bloom into a cleaner, healthier England. By using this alternate meaning of utopia in his title, Morris acknowledges

²⁷⁶ The lecture format is a distinctive feature of science fiction.

²⁷⁷ Though production, even by hand, may seem counterintuitive as an act of conservation rather than depletion, as Gillian Naylor has shown, handicraft opposed the costs of “mechanical ‘progress’” on human values and the environment (8), limiting production to a few, well-made items.

the tension between the ideal and the real, implying that agency is required to change the world, a responsibility that rests with the reader: otherwise, a beautiful future will remain a dream.

My study traces Victorian eco-consciousness throughout the nineteenth century, which culminates in the organized environmental activism emerging in the 1870s. Through the developing project of natural realism, the novelist emerges as a steward, one who protects the environment for posterity. The popular prestige and authority of the novelist initiated mainstream discussions about environmental ills, conservation, and sustainable living. Realist novels, for example, often investigated social problems, but usually left them unresolved, transferring agency to the reader who must then act. While such novels sparked conversation about ecological issues, they did not always inspire the intended action. The eco-conscious discourse of the novel converges with Morris's eco-socialism, generating various groups of people interested in effecting social change, such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Humanitarian League. Morris builds on earlier representations of the material environment, what I have been calling "realist nature." What is "beautiful" or aesthetically pleasing in his novel, written during the ascendancy of aestheticism, is equivalent to what is beautiful in the sustainable landscape of the future. A reader who truly appreciates Morris's writing takes the first step towards environmental change.

I. Natural Realism: Urban Ecology

Departing from popular science fiction such as Richard Jefferies's *After London, Wild England* (1885) and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), dystopias critiquing faith in progress and the monstrous city, Morris's ecotopia challenges the belief that the city is inherently corrupt. Like his contemporaries, Morris questions the ability of science to rescue civilization,

but rejects the Victorian stereotype of the city as an alienating abyss of filth. He creates a sustainable London through transformed ways of living: sustainability does not require relocating out of the city or abandoning the city altogether. For instance, in *After London, Wild England*, Jefferies indicates that industry has rendered London too toxic to ever be reclaimed. His science fiction becomes a cautionary tale instigating Victorians to change their habits in the present to preserve the future. Morris's *Nowhere*, however, offers a geography of conservation intended to will into existence a utopian design. The novel, an artifact of Morris's "craft," details the necessary steps to transform England into a sustainable place through handicraft.

Despite being dubbed a "utopian romance," Morris carefully describes a possible version of England based on the ideal of urban ecology. In *News from Nowhere*, the concepts of meaningful work and dependency on and observance of natural law cultivate a sense of place, in an "actual" place. In the spirit of learning "to love the narrow spot that surrounds our daily life" ("Art and the Beauty of the Earth" 91), Morris considers how to resuscitate and preserve the health of London, as opposed simply to retreat into a rural or imagined setting. Concepts in common with Victorian natural history, such as the attention to local wonders and dwelling within an entangled bank, permeate the narrative. The notion of the "short-sightedness" of humanity recurs throughout Morris's lectures and his ecotopia where he emphasizes aware vision, the 'naturalist gaze,' which reveals natural wonders while interrogating the utility of technology in our relationships to the environment. As we saw in Chapter 1, natural history influenced the form of the novel, and Morris's science fiction tale develops from this tradition of natural realism.

When William Guest finds himself in an alien place, after his first feeling of "delicious relief caused by the fresh air and pleasant breeze," he experiences "mere measureless wonder"

(45). In *Nowhere*, people continually wonder at the individuality of each season and the abundance of the land. The woods become a schoolroom, teaching people to see not Romantic Nature, an idealized or subjective landscape, but realist nature, an interface between the human and nonhuman. Guest adopts an “archeological natural-history” mode (55), a way of “seeing” the environment’s actual impact, which produces for him the alienating effect that characterizes science fiction. *Nowhere*, as potential England, is not an invented place with imagined conditions; the naturalist gaze reveals the ecosystem to Guest for the first time. He marvels at the healthy environment in *Nowhere*, so different from the familiar filth of Victorian England. For the first time, he sees human participation in the ecosystem, as opposed to human dominance over or ignorance about the ecosystem.

The residents of *Nowhere* make all their products by hand and only produce what they need. This pre-industrial way of living revives the environment, as industrial pollution and excess waste disappear. Conservation and craftsmanship intersect to create ecotopia. Morris problematizes science fiction’s traditional association with a technological future, arguing for Back to Nature strategies as a legitimate alternate reality. In the late nineteenth century, the phrase “Back to Nature” referred to an ideology desiring a return to a simpler life as refuge against the damage done to the social fabric and the natural environment by utilitarianism and industrialism. As a prerequisite to this return, Morris eliminates advanced technology from *Nowhere*, distinguishing between handicraft and science and dispelling the myth that increased technology can improve human welfare. Throughout his work, Morris differentiates between technology defined typically as advanced machinery, for instance, and *techne*: “an art, skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is achieved or created,” or “a product of this, a work of art” (OED). *Techne* points to the practical application of art, rather

than the aesthetic creed of art for art's sake. Lecturing on a utopian future, Morris urges, "Let us remember that even savages live, though they have poor tools, no machinery, and no co-operation, in their work: but as soon as man begins to use good tools and work with some kind of co-operation he becomes able to produce more than enough for his own bare necessities" ("Dawn of a New Epoch" 152). That man uses "good tools," rather than machinery, indicates scaled-down production. Morris also emphasizes the role of community over machinery in achieving subsistence.

Morris's "Society of the Future" is "a society conscious of a wish to keep life simple, to forego some of the power over nature won by past ages in order to be more human and less mechanical, and willing to sacrifice something to this end. It would be divided into small communities varying much within the limits allowed by due social ethics, but without rivalry between each other, looking with abhorrence at the idea of a holy race" (183). Thus, the terms "citizen" and "nation" do not exist in Nowhere. In this cosmopolitan view, the people conceive of their places seamlessly connecting to "the outlands" or other areas; they are aware of their place in the earth as a whole, not separated by the imagined borders of "England" per se.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ According to Benedict Anderson, the imagined community, such as a nation or religious sect, is socially constructed, reliant on imagined relationships between its members, rather than face-to-face contact. Morris creates a new type of imagined community, not founded on capitalism and consumerism, but on coexistence transcending national borders. Similar to what ecocritics call "spaceship ethics," the idea that human beings are "world citizens," discourages toxic behavior compromising the entire earth. Essentially, one nation cannot practice reckless industry that would impact others beyond its border. Envisioning the earth as a "spaceship" instead of separate nations reduces the potential of anthropocentric, indeed nationalist, decisions. In his famous 1965 speech to the U.N., Aldi Stevenson urged, "We travel together, passengers on a little space ship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft." As in Nowhere, resources must be shared equally worldwide, with each individual responsible for the safety and purity of the whole earth, or ecosystem. See Barbara Ward's *Spaceship Earth*, and Garrett Hardin's famous response, "Lifeboat Ethics." Anderson's view is based specifically on circulation of newspapers/texts; similarly, Morris intends to will into existence his ecotopia through circulating his own texts. Morris's vision evokes the notion of "act locally, think globally." In "Imagining the Future: Mercier's 'L'An 2440' and Morris' 'News from Nowhere,'" Gregory Ludlow notes, "Unlike much xenophobic utopian literature of the past, Morris' vision of his peaceful, restructured society of the twenty-second century is not restricted to the domestic scene but has international ramifications as well. In his world of the future the whole system of rival and contending nations has disappeared, along with the inequality between individuals in society" (30).

Dissected into what Martin Delveaux calls “mini-cities,” Nowhere combines “traditional agricultural practices and de-urbanisation/reforestation with modern, pollution-free use of science in transport, energy and telecommunication, revealing a hybridity between pre- and post-industrialism” (77). Nowhere does not regress into a feudal past, but improves on the model. While the city becomes a community center, it does not overwhelm the environment because of the new horizontal relationship between humans and the earth. Nowhere weighs the needs of the nonhuman in addition to human interests. There is no evidence of cancerous growth (what we call “urban sprawl”); the ideal city is a web that interconnects with other webs.

Guest learns about how England adopted eco-socialism from Old Hammond, Dick’s great-grandfather, who used to be the custodian of books at the Museum, a repurposed St. Paul’s church. During a lengthy conversation with Guest, Hammond summarizes England’s historical progress: moving from an imperfect feudalism to the even less desirable capitalism,

it is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, shed, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty. For, indeed, we should be too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on the large scale, to carry with it the appearance, even, of desolation and misery. (105)

Here, “garden” indicates rehabilitation and conservation, embodying *rus in urbe*, bringing the country to the city.²⁷⁹ Nowhere’s cities encompass rural elements – livestock, horse-drawn vehicles, farming, etc. – creating an *urban* pastoral, or an urban ecology, which reconciles man-

²⁷⁹ For further reading, see Michael Waters’s *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (Chapter 8), Carole G. Silver’s *The Romance of William Morris* (Chapter 6), and Alex Shishin’s essay, “Utopian Ecology: Technology and Social Organization in Relation to Nature and Freedom.” The term “garden” recurs throughout Morris’s work; for instance, in “Art and the Beauty of the Earth,” Morris insists, “We must turn this land from the grimy back-yard of a workshop into a garden. If that seems difficult, or rather impossible, to some of you, I cannot help it; I only know that it is necessary” (*WMAS* 93).

made, artificial elements with the natural landscape. Here manifests the type of science Morris desires, cultivating land in a sustainable way through *techne*, or manual tools, rather than machinery. A garden becomes emblematic of cultivating the land for livelihood, intervening into the landscape without subduing it. This is a far cry from the picturesque gardens of the eighteenth century, well-manicured properties meant to be admired from a respectable distance. “Trim,” a word Hammond uses above, comes to signify the Victorian garden philosophy. It suggests care, generally meaning orderly, but it could also be a pejorative term, resonant of restraint and bourgeois taste. Michael Waters explains, “in many contexts, ‘trim’ contrasts with ‘tumbledown’,” and since Morris frequently uses trim to describe interiors, it serves “as a paradigm of the relations between people and nature under ideal conditions” (17), the “happy union of house and (formal) garden” (18). A garden, then, is not a wild space, but a shared space, the *rus in urbe*. However, Morris also employs “trim” negatively to indicate unnecessary manipulation of the landscape. Guest notices that woods lose their “gameskeeperish trimness, and were as wild and beautiful as need be, though the trees were clearly well seen to” (183). Morris makes a distinction between dominating the land like a gamekeeper – sculpting the environment – and necessary intervention. A garden, essentially a small-scale farm attached to the home, is independent of the forests. This suggests a separation between land used for cultivation, and woods and similar spaces that should be conserved. Morris prefers wildness, though acknowledging necessary maintenance such as removing dead branches or cutting back overgrowth. He clearly resists idealizing the environment, and such recognitions of the reciprocal relationship with land ground his ecological sensibility.

For Morris, to till a garden is to make land a “home,” a version of Heideggerian “dwelling,” a term appropriated by ecocritics to mean living practically within the environment,

coexistence, and duty and responsibility to the earth.²⁸⁰ To dwell is to be, and to let be; it is symbiosis with the earth. Morris repeatedly uses the words “dwelling,” “dwelling-place,” and “dweller,” indicating his residents do not simply live in a particular location, but participate in its ecosystem, not as stewards, but as members. Hammond explains, “The spirit of the new days, of our days, was to delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells” (158). Dwelling, an element of eco-consciousness, expands our appreciation of the world and creates an ecology that humans are part of, rather than apart from.

Most significantly, Morris’s *novum* is London, England’s capital city, described as “a pleasant country place – pleasanter, indeed, than the deep country was as he had known it” (44). Though Guest travels up the Thames, his journey shows no significant differentiation between the city and country. He is continually struck by the healthiness he encounters everywhere, especially in the “country” people (63), a designation that Dick does not understand. Every place is rural. The Revolution triggered an “exodus of the people from the town to country” (199), mixing together their respective knowledges. Nowhere combines the best of both worlds: agrarian principles with culture (art, music, literature and science). Hammond details this transition: “the difference between town and country grew less and less; and it was indeed this world of the country vivified by the thought and briskness of town-bred folk which has produced that happy and leisurely but eager life of which you have had a first taste” (104). Morris, a native Londoner, would certainly appreciate valuable urban qualities separate from an industrial or decadent lifestyle. Though Hammond tells Guest that reading imaginative literature has become rare, and that there is little need for “works of art” in the Victorian sense of word as all

²⁸⁰ Heidegger’s use of “*bauen*,” to dwell, means to preserve and protect the earth, in addition to laying down roots (“Building Dwelling Thinking”).

forms of labor are now artistic, the people of Nowhere hold regular dances and concerts, expressing their creativity through workmanship and community events. Conserving the environment does not require abandoning the city. *News from Nowhere* suggests that human beings can dwell anywhere if their architecture grows out of the earth instead of reinforcing separation of human beings and the environment. When Ellen, Guest's love interest, arrives at the Old House near the hay-fields, she "laid her shapely sun browned hand and arm on the lichened wall as if to embrace it, and cried out, '[...] How I love the earth, and the seasons, and the weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it, - as this house has done!'" (220). The house blends into the landscape, becoming an emblem of dwelling. Ellen's attractiveness stems from her love of the earth, her sun-tanned limbs bespeaking physical labor, coupled with intelligence and inquisitiveness.

Like other science fiction writers, Morris depicts "a realistic irreality" (*MOSF* viii). The actual ecosystem clearly determines the way of life in Nowhere, and in important ways, Morris resists idealizing tendencies, despite creating an ideal place. Nathanael Gilbert discusses the landscape of the novel in relation to landscape in art, particularly painting, that creates a recognizably national, English countryside while subverting the social reality of labor and class division. Gilbert makes important observations about Morris's conception of the environment, what he terms a "landscape of resistance." Morris resists the tendency to simply repeat conventional descriptions of landscape, or to idealize nature:

Instead of creating a romanticized version of the rural landscape of the nineteenth century that conceals or misrepresents the conditions of the laborers within it, he projects this image of an agricultural landscape, albeit an English landscape, into the future where, in the wake of social revolution, nothing need be concealed. Things are what they seem to

be: women and men happily work together in a summer meadow for the sake of work itself (Gilbert 27).

His urban ecology forms the *ideal* relation to an *un-idealized* environment. Morris's geography of conservation portrays an environment made utopic through eco-consciousness. Chapter 1 has shown how Charles Dickens mapped the ecological connections between Londoners to reveal the consequences of pollution and how Thomas Hardy portrayed a pastoral past to emphasize what society loses due to industrialization. Geographies of conservation underscore the need to curtail anthropogenic threats. Here, Morris chooses to portray an ideal future instead of the endangered environments of the present.

II. "Non-Toxic" Discourse

When he awakens in Nowhere, the unrecognizably clean Thames astonishes Guest, who traverses the river to tour other parts of England. The Thames, full of salmon and clean enough to bathe in, presents a stark contrast to the river as usually depicted in the Victorian novel. For instance, Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* opens on the black and slimy river, observing two dredgermen fishing the waters for rubbish to sell. The barges crowding the river and the factories on the shore provide a continuous source of litter and waste. Encompassing polluted streets, skies, and waterways, Dickens's novel painstakingly narrates London's toxicity, particularly its "dust": ash, feces, and decomposing vegetables and bodies. The novel follows the fortune of Old Harmon, a miser who, as a rubbish collector, directly capitalizes on the city's rampant consumption. As we saw in Chapter 2, the popular realist novel traces the material environment's determining influence on character to reveal both visible and invisible, organic and industrial, anthropogenic contamination. Miasmatic language, which privileges sensory

evidence of pollution, permeates the Victorian novel to demonstrate how fully pollution informed the Victorian experience and offers a familiar vocabulary to discuss the threat of toxicity.

However, *News from Nowhere* offers only one moment of toxic discourse while Guest remains in nineteenth-century London. The novel opens on the railway, iconic of Victorian progress and technology, where Guest “stew[s] discontentedly” “in that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway” (43). “Vapour,” a term in the miasmatic lexicon, suggests both the smoke from the railway and smoggy conditions more generally, and as Morris uses it here, a sense of dis-ease: anxiety and depression caused by disharmony with the environment. Living in pollution pollutes the mind. Guest suffers from the actual smog *and* its cause: capitalist industry. As he exits the carriage, into the post-industrial future of Nowhere, he experiences “an indefinable kind of look of being at home and at ease” (171). Transported to 2003, Guest experiences true health for the first time on the shore of a renewed Thames: “The soap-works with their smoke-vomiting chimneys were gone; the engineer’s works gone; the lead-works gone, and no sound of riveting and hammering came down the west wind” (48). From this point forward, Morris does not employ toxic discourse, as the threats that produce toxicity have been eradicated. The subsequent portrayals of a clean, healthy London offer a non-toxic discourse and a possibility of how Londoners might live.

As Norman Talbot puts it, Guest is “baptized in the new Thames” (43), made possible by the purified water, suggesting both the water’s transformation and its transformative powers. Morris pointedly references *Our Mutual Friend* through his revision of Boffin, a recognizable figure of “the degrading effects of class-based wealth in nineteenth-century literature” (Donaldson 30). As Dick, the waterman who first befriends Guest, acknowledges: “I see you

take the allusion. Of course his real name is not Boffin [...]; we only call him Boffin as a joke, partly because he is a dustman, and partly because he will dress so showily, and get as much gold on him as a baron of the Middle Ages” (60). Boffin literally becomes a “Golden Dustman” (60), but rather than made rich by the copious waste of London, wealth is determined by sufficient livelihood. Guest frequently marvels at what he regards as fancy dress; self-adornment is the norm in Nowhere, as everyone has free access to quality materials. In Victorian England, such materials were far from cheap: Morris’s own wallpapers and furniture retailed at high prices despite his democratic aesthetic.²⁸¹ In an industrialized economy, these hand-made items become luxuries, much like organic food and hand-made furniture and clothing can be cost-prohibitive today. Morris imagines a future where materials are shared and not subject to price fixing. Furthermore, each laborer – be it dustman, historian, reaper – contributes equally to the landscape, eliminating professional hierarchy. Morris showcases the unglamorous profession of a dustman to emphasize this point, as well as to juxtapose dis-eased Victorian England with a healthy future, allowing the reader to see their entanglement with nature more clearly.²⁸² Laura Donaldson also explores the ennobling of Boffin, asking, “If the figure of Boffin in *News from Nowhere* embodies Morris’s goals for the transformation of nineteenth-century cultural and literary values, the question remains: transformed from what?” (29).²⁸³ Donaldson posits that Morris’s “artistry of reversal” – converting the sordid scavenging of the river in a filthy boat into

²⁸¹ *News from Nowhere* first appeared in serial form in *Commonweal* in 1890, and then was reissued in 1892 by Kelmscott Press, which Morris founded to produce beautiful books by old-fashioned, medieval methods. A copy printed on hand-made paper cost 2 guineas, while the ten vellum copies were priced at 10 guineas each (Peterson 317). Thus, this edition was not accessible to the consumer of modest means. Morris’s commitment to traditional – but expensive – methods complicated his socialist ideals, even while enacting his belief in pre-industrial production.

²⁸² Both Gregory Ludlow and Norman Talbot point to Dickens’s literary presence in Morris as a means of contrast and critique. Interestingly, Morris takes a page out of Edward Bellamy’s book, as in Bellamy’s utopia *Looking Backward* (1887), West opens a Dickens’s novel for comfort, only to be struck “by force of contrast” with “the strangeness of my own present environment” (Chapter XII, 87).

²⁸³ Donaldson argues that as Morris’s Boffin is the writer of “reactionary novels,” Morris’s intent is to *critique* Victorian realism. Since Dickens’s introduces Boffin in his pursuit of knowledge – hiring Wegg to read to him – Donaldson suggests Morris hopes to transform the Victorian novel, typically preoccupied with realist portrayals of social problems, which becomes obsolete once society is transformed.

Guest's wholesome journey to the harvest – “ultimately enlarges to include all dimensions of society” (37), introducing a clear polemic.

Boffin's function is primarily symbolic, since being a dustman at all is a contradiction.²⁸⁴

There is no waste (dust) in Nowhere, as Old Hammond explains,

The wares which we make are made because they are needed: men make for their neighbors' use as if they were making for themselves, not for a vague market of which they know nothing [...]. Nothing *can* be made except for genuine use; therefore no inferior goods are made. Moreover, as aforesaid, we have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want; and as we are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them (127).

Conspicuous consumption, what Morris calls a wasteful “fever” in his lecture “The Society of the Future” (185), is eliminated in this economy. The move from large-scale manufacturing to cooperative craftsmanship reduces waste and avoids exploiting environmental resources by only producing goods as needed for the community. *News from Nowhere* emphasizes the serious element to Morris's personal commitment to decorative arts. Though well known for his famous wallpaper designs, illuminated manuscripts, and textiles, it bears keeping in mind that these artifacts signified within a broader program of anti-capitalist subversion.²⁸⁵ The Arts and Crafts

²⁸⁴ Unless, of course, we view “dust” as the common Victorian euphemism for “dung,” which the future Londoners suggestively store in the old Parliament buildings, giving reality to what Charles Dickens conceived as “the National Dustheap,” the phrase he frequently used to refer to Parliament in his letters.

²⁸⁵ Talia Schaffer also explains that, “Handicraft, both as a lived practice and a literary trope, was driven by Victorians' need to retain an alternative to mainstream capitalism” (13). However, her book *Novel Craft* distinguished between the domestic handicraft popular at mid-century and the later Arts and Crafts Movement, largely inspired by the writings of Ruskin and Pugin. Handicraft “embraced the mass-produced commodity” (8), recreating expensive items using cheap, often recycled materials. Handicraft became a way to mimic industry, while the Arts and Crafts movement redefined “craft and machine work as inherently oppositional” (37), stressing the need for professional training in connoisseurship and craft production. Schaffer concludes, “Arts and Crafts reformers

movement, an international design movement led by Morris, “sought to provide an alternative code to the harshness of late nineteenth-century industrialism, to foster spiritual harmony through the work process and to change that very process and its products” (Cumming 9). Gillian Naylor notes that its participants situated “problems of design with a social context,” “stimulated by the British precept and example to work towards the creation of an environment that would both serve and express people’s needs” (7). One of the hallmarks of Morris’s socialism is the sustainable nature of direct, unmediated modes of physical labor. Nowhere’s “banded-workshops” eliminate economic competition and produce quality, enduring goods. Nowhere completely discredits the constant desire for “sham wants,” capitalism’s fabricated demand for new merchandise. Returning to Dickens’s text, we can see how Morris’s ecotopia reverses the conditions that create toxicity. Immediately following the opening spotlight on the river, the next chapter of *Our Mutual Friend* depicts a scene of conspicuous consumption in the home of the Veneerings: “Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, [...] their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, [and] they themselves were new” (6). The repeated use of the word “new” signifies how easily replaceable, thus disposable, these objects are. Their conspicuous consumption creates the waste polluting the Thames and London’s streets, and these manufactured items point to the continuously operating factories, working, in Hammond’s words, to produce “a vast quantity of useless things.” The factories, of course, contribute their own “dust”: smoke, ash, and chemical run-off. Nowhere’s methods of production eradicate toxicity by employing hand-operated tools instead of machinery running on coal or oil. This

therefore aimed to replace cheap mass-produced goods with objects produced by people who were not alienated from their labor” (56).

reversion away from technology reduces toxic emissions into the air as well as toxic chemical run-off into water sources.

Guest, living and working in industrial London, wonders that he sees “no smoke coming from the furnaces” in Nowhere (82). Production and pollution are inseparable in Guest’s experience. Dick answers, “why should you see smoke?” (82). The smarter manufacturing, or *techne*, in Nowhere eliminates this risk. Differentiating between *techne* and technology, Hammond denounces nineteenth century machinery as “devices for cheapening labour [that] simply resulted in increasing the burden of labour” (125), glutting the market with useless goods. Civilization, or “organized misery” (126), distances human beings from their environment. If to be savage is to reject mass-manufacture, Hammond happily accepts the label. Tools that facilitate our subsistence and our art are in a different class from the factory or steamboat that mass produce or operate on a large scale, and hence impact the ecosystem more significantly. In “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” Oscar Wilde insisted, “At present machinery competes against man. Under the proper conditions machinery will serve man” (1183). Morris creates Wilde’s conditions in Nowhere, condemning not only technology that usurps handicraft, but technology that destroys the integrity of the environment. Abolishing manufacturing is necessary for the health of the ecosystem: “whatever coal or mineral we need is brought to grass and sent whither it is needed with as little as possible of dirt, confusion, and the distressing of quiet people’s lives” (102). The people of Nowhere use technology sparingly and selectively: only when a job cannot be adequately or comfortably performed by hand.

Technology should eliminate pollution, rather than cause it: “Science duly applied would enable [people] to get rid of refuse, to minimize it, if not wholly to destroy, all the inconveniences which at present attend the use of elaborate machinery, such as smoke, stench,

and noise; nor would they endure that the buildings in which they worked or lived should be ugly blots on the fair face of the earth” (“Useful Work *versus* Useless Toil” 140). Science becomes problematic when it recklessly manipulates the environment, ignoring the symbiosis between human beings and their habitat. A certain amount of pollution is inevitable – all animals impact the earth,²⁸⁶ our duty, however, is to “minimize” our impact. Morris did not dismiss science altogether, but felt human energies needed to be redirected to invent cleaner, sustainable technologies, what we today would call “alternative energy.” In *Nowhere*, “[f]orce-barges” operate with an unspecified clean fuel (186), which Morris leaves to posterity to invent. Although science creates these new methods, craftsmanship satisfies needs as well or better than big industry. These eco-conscious ideas presage E.F. Schumacher’s economic ideal, “small is beautiful,” that characterized environmentalist discourse in the 1970s. Schumacher argues that small-scale operations “are always less likely to be harmful to the natural environment than large-scale ones, simply because their individual force is small in relation to the recuperative forces of nature” (37). Schumacher identifies the “economics of giantism” as a product of 19th century thinking (79), and could easily be quoting Morris when he recommends an agrarian economics oriented “towards the threefold ideal of health, beauty, and permanence” (121), “a direction that shall lead [the economy] back to the real needs of man” (169). Morris’s non-toxic discourse optimistically envisions progress achieved through restraint and eco-consciousness, responding to the toxic discourse at mid-century by suggesting how to reform the threats identified by such novels as Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* and Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*.

²⁸⁶ For instance, the excrement housed in the old Parliament buildings.

III. From Industrialism to Agrarianism: Treating Dis-Ease

In “Art Under Plutocracy,” a lecture concerned with the gap between rich and poor, Morris connects the health of the land with the health of the people, arguing “the happiness of life is sickening in the house of civilization” (119). Morris continues the eco-conscious discourse initiated by early realist novelists and taken up most vocally by John Ruskin, who theorizes “wealth” as “health” and the related opposite “illth,” ill-being resulting from ill-gotten wealth. The term “dis-ease” etymologically reminds us that disease stems from the absence of ease, or anxiety, due to insatiable and false capitalist desires that estrange human beings from the environment. Chapter 3 discusses the expressive economies of malaise and dis-ease that diagnosed the unhealthy environmental detachment in the Victorian period. Morris’s oeuvre condemns “the sickness of the world” caused by reckless decadence and exploitation of the earth as a resource while producing cheap, excess goods (“The Art of the People”). Like Ruskin, Morris identifies dis-ease with conspicuous consumption and logics of domination. Guest not only physically suffers from nineteenth-century London’s toxic vapor, he feels “discontented,” evidence of the mental suffering induced by environmental detachment. His first sensation in Nowhere is “relief”: he breathes easier, finally experiencing overall well-being.

Morris frequently argues that the division between the classes is that of “waste and want” (“The Art of the People” 33). Laborers work to pay tribute to the rich, denied the use of the goods they make; commerce functions to create goods for the wealthy to waste, producing a false demand. A clear disservice to laborers, this system also renders the rich helpless. Hammond laughs “at that silly nineteenth-century fashion, current amongst rich so-called cultivated people, of ignoring all the steps by which their daily dinner was reached, as matters too low for their lofty intelligence” (94). He scoffs at being “civilized” if that means neglecting physical work,

upending the definition of a gentleman as one who does not dirty his hands. *News from Nowhere* may be read as an optimistic counterpart to Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial Manchester. By adopting eco-socialism, future England becomes utopia. Agrarian living, an overall reliance on the land, promotes health. In *Mary Barton*, John Barton becomes increasingly dis-eased due to his anger at the unjust factory system and his inability to provide for himself. In a wealth economy, the worker requires wages to meet his/her basic needs, while in a welfare economy, working the land meets these needs directly. Industrial, urban London robs Barton of the means of subsistence.

Barton's dis-ease results from his alienation from the natural world as much as his unemployment. *Mary Barton's* opening scene in Green Heys Fields demonstrates Hammond's ridicule of the nineteenth-century, as the townspeople recreationally seek open space without understanding their own connection to the agrarian labor they watch. These tourists regard the "country business of haymaking, ploughing, &c." as "pleasant mysteries" (5). Lumping this necessary work into an "&c." indicates the ignorance of Manchester's denizens about their own dependency on land, even though they prefer this relatively serene landscape to the chaotic city. This moment in the fields roots the malaise of the novel in this desire for nature by the alienated urbanites.

Morris's future people also seek out nature. In fact, when Guest meets Dick, the waterman switches occupations with an agricultural worker during harvest month. Dick vacations through farming, a different kind of labor than he typically performs. He explains that this is a common practice in Nowhere and one of the reasons for each person's longevity and vigor. They seek out "country business" to participate, rather than spectate as the Manchester laborers do. Health requires environmental engagement, a distinction bound up with the

attributes of capitalism itself, the movement away from economies of production towards economies of consumption in the Victorian period. While Gaskell describes the “sallow complexions” of urban laborers, the people of Nowhere boast ruddy faces and strong limbs, a product of fresh air and exercise. In contrast to nineteenth-century London, labor equals health. “The reward of labour is *life*,” Hammond tells Guest (122). Accruing monetary wealth becomes irrelevant.

In Nowhere, all land is common land providing universal access to the means of subsistence. Eliminating notions of ownership, if everyone is granted access to the land, the primary cause of dis-ease is eradicated. Enclosure neither denies access to open space to the lower classes nor wholly converts wild spaces into arable land. Marx’s “freedom to fish” means the freedom to meet one’s needs through the land, which is impossible if land is privatized.²⁸⁷ Morris condemns a system where farm laborers are not allowed to work the land for themselves; following the whims and instructions of their employer, they were often thwarted in maximizing the potential of the land, weakening the harvest for all. Thus, urbanites and rural laborers alike could be denied the ability to meet their subsistence through the land. The Revolution, set in 1952, is successful because a universal strike makes the wealthy powerless: “thousands of middle-class families, who were utterly dependent for the next meal on the workers” (149), became frantic trying to support themselves with no practical knowledge. The public, recognizing their reliance on the worker, and the environment by extension, is forced to capitulate. Morris builds a community democratizing art, weaving a web of cooperation and dependence. Utopia, really ecotopia, requires an agrarian model – a radically altered perception of humanity’s place in the ecosystem – to produce ideal, universal conditions.

²⁸⁷Marx’s *German Ideology* (1845). See also Tony Fitzpatrick.

According to Morris, useless toil “makes the thousand and one things which nobody wants,” fulfilling sham desires to fuel commerce, wasting resources in the process, while pleasurable labor satisfies humanity’s fundamental needs (“The Art of the People” 21). Morris’s eco-socialism breaks down class barriers by dignifying handicraft, resting on the assumption that “it is the nature of man, when he is not diseased, to take pleasure in his work,” identifying “cultivating the earth” as “the most necessary and pleasantest of all work” (“Useful Work *versus* Useful Toil” 128, 138), a sensibility made clear in *News from Nowhere*, when farm work is sought out as a respite from stationary or indoor occupations. Agrarianism offers a lasting cure for dis-ease.

IV. Literary Stewardship: Morris’s Land Ethic

By eliminating private ownership and establishing the commons as the only way to interact with land, Morris modifies the Victorian stewardship ideal discussed in Chapter 4 by unbuilding the hierarchy between the classes it maintains. George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* exemplifies a democratic stewardship ideal through Dorothea Brooke’s “pet project,” model cottages that provide clean, adequate housing for the workers so fundamental to the health of the estate. Dorothea respects agrarian labor as the source of her community’s welfare, and comes down from the “chilliness” of the height of her aristocratic class to improve her environment. She safeguards the intertwined health of the land and the health of the people. Much of the good that Dorothea achieves comes from her private fortune, although she ultimately gives it up to marry the humanitarian Ladislaw. Anthony Trollope’s fiction frequently demonstrates the landowner as steward; money and position places the aristocratic in a superior position to conserve property. When in *Framley Parsonage* (1861) Miss Dunstable reunites the ancient

Chase to the rest of the Chaldicotes property her wealth acquires, she rescues its oaks from immediate destruction and preserves them for the community's enjoyment. In the macrocosm, human beings have the power to watch and protect the earth. These important works differentiate the wise from the foolish steward, arguing for the intrinsic worth of the environment even if in service of human interests. As the Victorians understood it, stewardship metaphorically eliminates the concept of ownership since the steward only ever holds land in trust for future generations. In *News from Nowhere*, Morris goes one step further to entirely eliminate any private ownership, in the process undermining hierarchical class distinctions. Furthermore, the residents of Nowhere live on terms of equality with the non-human. Thomas Hardy's characters, Jude and Gabriel Oak, empathize with animals, recognizing their kinship to the non-human and taking great care not to unnecessarily harm or injure any form of life. Jude, for instance, demonstrates his belief in the equality of non-human life as he gingerly maneuvers around earthworms to avoid trampling them to death. He discounts cultural assessments of "lesser" or "inferior" creature. However, in adulthood, Jude does not see his way around cruelty, and cannot avoid killing livestock for food as he had earlier spared the earthworms. Morris does not create an obviously vegetarian Nowhere, although the diet appears to consist mostly of what they harvest, the salmon in the Thames indicate another possible source of food; however, human beings coexist with animals and do not regard their abuse and exploitation as necessary to support their society. Morris's eco-socialism fundamentally alters society's mindset instead of advocating sympathy or reform within a capitalist context.

In every new experience in Nowhere, Guest learns the fundamental ecological lesson that Nature does not exist outside human culture. Clara, one of Guest's guides, asks of the Victorians,

Was not their mistake once more bred of the life of slavery that they had been living? – a life which was always looking upon everything, except mankind, animate and inanimate – ‘nature’, as people used to call it – as one thing, and mankind as another. It was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make ‘nature’ their slave, since they thought ‘nature’ was something outside them (200).

Morris moves beyond a problematic stewardship ideal that advocates hierarchical relationships among all creatures. *News from Nowhere* exemplifies the Victorian Creed of Kinship (Chapter 5), the belief that humans are animals, and as such, have no inherent superiority over other species. Morris, a Social Democrat, effaces class distinctions and, effectually, species distinctions, by recognizing the value in all creatures. Clara describes the “mistake” of looking upon “animate and inanimate” agents as outside or independent of human life. More than merging country and city, urban ecology wholly deconstructs binary thinking (self/Other; nature/culture). The symbiosis between human and nonhuman supports the transformation from Victorian England into Nowhere.

Clara’s comments highlight how Victorians attempted to harness nature to fuel their large-scale industries. This enslaves the environment as well as the laborer by destroying the possibility of health. Nowhere rejects an “idea” of Nature: environment is regarded as a habitat, so much part of the human experience it cannot be conceived or discussed separately from it. Morris’s choice of the name “Nowhere” may be linked to this impossibility of erecting boundaries between the human sphere and the environment. Although within the narrative the characters refer to their home as England, the title designates an unspecified locality to imply that this ecotopian way of living should be anywhere, and not limited to a specific time or place.

Proper cities build a community that comprises all creatures, adopting the land ethic of an enlarged community including the non-human. When Guest describes the architecture in *Nowhere*, it seems alive: “not only exquisitely beautiful in itself, [...] it bore upon it the expression of such generosity and abundance of life” (62). “Green” dwellings blend into the earth; architecture becomes an organism, not only beautiful, but useful: “Each house stood in a garden carefully cultivated, and running over with flowers. The blackbirds were singing their best amidst the garden trees, which [...] seemed to be all fruit-trees” (77). By building this harmonious architecture within his ecopolis, he reminds us that community includes the non-human. Later, when Ellen’s sun-tanned body embraces the lichened house wall, the exchange reveals the networks between all life. The sun alters her body and highlights her agrarian labor. Lichens are composite organisms consisting of a fungus and a photosynthetic partner that rely on one another for survival, and thus a symbol of environmental symbiosis. The lichen brings the dwelling into closer contact with the environment. Ellen says it “grows out of the earth, and the seasons, and the weather” (220). She describes these elements as actors in the ecosystem. Guest must come to understand humanity’s ecological role, and bring this knowledge back to nineteenth-century England to warn against exploitative, unsustainable industry. In “The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization,” Morris equates “blindness to the natural beauty of the earth” with carelessness, while the appreciation of beauty cultivated by art is the earth’s “only possible guardian” (“Architecture in Civilization” 60). In other words, literature promotes the necessary eco-consciousness to preserve the environment. Art, by raising eco-consciousness, guards the earth. Dorothea Brooke’s and Miss Dunstable’s respect for the environment benefited their communities. The novels, by praising wise stewardship, encourage similar behavior in the actual world. In this sense, Eliot and Trollope practice literary stewardship, much in the same

way as Morris argues that art protects the environment, and as Wilde calls on the artist to become the “prophet,” or protector, of nature, coming forward to generate widespread awareness. Morris hoped his utopia would be actualized. He proclaimed, “Nothing can make me believe that the present condition of your Black Country yonder is an unchangeable necessity of your life and position: such miseries as this were begun and carried on in pure thoughtlessness, and a hundredth part of the energy that was spent in creating them would get rid of them” (“The Beauty of Life” 42). His narrative challenges “thoughtlessness.” Eco-conscious is, essentially, awareness of humanity’s place in the ecosystem.

“News from” implies this “utopian romance” is a harbinger, presaging or forecasting the future. While the name “Nowhere” indicates this place does not exist, and may perhaps be impossible, it can also suggest this London does not exist *yet*, and will not come into being until humanity achieves eco-consciousness. Morris both resists fantasy, a completely unattainable or supernatural future, and dystopia by rejecting technology as society’s cure. Morris joins in the distrust of technology, but suggests it could be used selectively to create a better future, even if it resembles a pre-industrial past. Morris mixes generic romance (medieval fiction) and Romanticism (radical literature inspired by legend and folklore to protest industrialism and elitism), but ultimately creates an ecotopia by rooting past concepts in the future. Humanity does not need to colonize a new planet; the potential for ideal conditions exists on earth. Morris pinpoints capitalism, large-scale industry, and anthropogenic arrogance as the cause of dis-ease, and, at heart, *News from Nowhere* shifts the paradigm of science fiction to be what we could do to make things better instead of writing apocalyptic fiction about dystopian futures brought about from the anthropocentric commodification and destruction of the environment.

Morris synthesizes the five facets of eco-conscious discourse into a narrative. The rise of modern-day environmentalism is typically attributed to the late twentieth century, but as Peter C. Gould contends, “the most fecund and important period of green politics before 1980 lay between 1880 and 1900. During that period the philosophy of industrialism, the relationship between the individual and the social and physical environment, and the functions and successes of the city received an extraordinary degree of critical examination” (viii). These decades saw the organization of activism into such groups as the Kyrle Society (1876), the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the Selbourne League (1885), the Selbourne Society for the Preservation of Birds, Plants, and Pleasant Places (1886), the Humanitarian League (1891), the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising, and the Coal Smoke Abatement Society (1898). Other organizations had formed earlier in the period, like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (founded 1824; granted Royal status in 1840), the Commons Preservation Society (1865), and Royal Commissions such as the one appointing Edwin Chadwick in 1832 to investigate the Poor Laws. All these groups were concerned about social and environmental awareness, the need for people to be more conscious of the world around them. This dissertation reveals the process by which many of these philosophies took root in the mid-nineteenth century. I date the emergence of such a green politics with the rise of the realist novel. It is fair to say, however, that the eco-conscious strategies coalesced by the 1880s into eco-socialism and the related Back to Nature and Back to the Land movements. “Back to Nature” advocated refuge against the damage done to the social fabric and the natural environment by utilitarianism and industrialism, and was more of an ideology desiring a return to a simpler life than a political platform. “Back to the Land,” in contrast, originated in the social unrest of the 1840s, and explicitly supported the Chartist Land Plan, which collected money “for

the purchase of land for small rural communities of lottery-winners supplied with cottages and land,” which supplied financial independence (7). Gould calls this movement “conservative” as proponents disregarded the intrinsic merits of rural life, focusing more on taking control of their own employment. Back to the Land meant, in general, a redistribution of land to laborers, but did not, like many of the organizations listed above, threaten the existing social order or industrialism/capitalism.

Using Jonathan Porritt’s definition of “green,” a term coming into use in the 1980s, Gould demonstrates how the Victorians satisfied its criteria a century earlier. To be green means, firstly, “a reverence for the earth and all its creatures” (Gould 6). This emerges in both the ideal of the wise steward and the Creed of Kinship. Green means “a willingness to share the world’s wealth amongst all people” (6). In turn, green thinking posits “sustainable alternatives to the ‘rat race’ of economic growth” and “a rejection of materialism and the ‘destructive values of industrialism’” (6). Green further denotes “‘human-scale technology’; socially useful, personally rewarding work; personal growth and spiritual development, ‘open participatory democracy at every level of society’; [and] harmony between different peoples” (6). As conceived by Morris and his followers, the brotherhood of socialism includes all sentient life, and thus required action to defend the environment. The critique of capitalism so inseparable from environmental discourse in the Victorian period results in eco-socialism, which re-defines wealth as welfare, rejecting materialist and anthropocentric values. Victorians defined “dis-ease” as conspicuous consumption, insisting well-being depends on a way of life rooted in the earth. “Green” philosophies posit alternatives to the wealth economy, a commitment to peace, democracy, and the “Creed of Kinship,” which expanded rights to the non-human.

“Environmentalism” often conjures up images of green demonstrations in the 1970s, when the risk posed to the environment by climate change, overpopulation, and toxic industry captured the public imagination and became a recognizable political agenda. Environmentalism, as we think of it, certainly began in the late nineteenth century with Victorian “Back to Nature” movements. Yet, it did not gain rapid, international momentum until 1970, marked by the first Earth Day celebration in April of that year. By the mid-1970s, activists revived the related Back to Nature and Back to Land agendas of the previous century, joining environmental ethics with the peace movement and the protest of the Vietnam War. However, “environmentalist” became synonymous with “hippie” and “tree-hugger,” individuals living outside the codes of capitalist society. The 1980s saw an emphasis on wildlife conservation, the growing awareness of climate change, and the rise of environmental justice movements, an evident continuation of the work of social problem novelists. While much of the stigma against environmentalism has dissipated, the global climate crisis remains one of the most crucial and contested political issues of today.

What this brief history shows is a gap between the more mainstream eco-conscious discourse of the Victorian period and the politicized environmentalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Though “green living” has now become a buzz word in the western world, suggesting a gamut of life choices from using alternative energy and/or energy conscious appliances, organic cleaning products, and consuming locally grown food, to be “green” in the Victorian period meant a comprehensive way of understanding our relationship to the material environment, what Felix Guattari calls a “mental ecology.” A mental ecology requires a complete change in thought process: the development of materialist ethics, an “awareness of finitude,” or the “mortality of the species, the planet and the entire universe,” to emphasize our actions in the present (Pindar and Sutton 11). Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, in their introduction to

The Three Ecologies, note that an entire mental ecology is necessary in order not to give “our *unconscious* assent” to capitalism and the associated behaviors (5). This last point especially applies to the strategies of the Victorian realist novel, where authors employed eco-conscious discourse to confront their readers with new ideologies and unexamined behaviors and raise lasting awareness about humanity’s place in the entangled bank.

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