UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# The Reform Aesthetic:

# Political Futurity and the Novel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Michael Raymond Vignola II

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Reform Aesthetic:

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Professor Jonathan H. Grossman, Chair

"The Reform Aesthetic: Political Futurity and the Novel" reads a group of narratives that appeared during and helped shape Britain's long moment of democratic reform. What I call the reform aesthetic adumbrates realist projections of transformed futures—figured as utopian fantasies, speculative futures, alternate histories—that the narrative ultimately refuses to see through, returning to an ostensibly unchanged reality. In a familiar move, the novels I read thus constitute themselves as realist by first playing out and then disavowing moments when it seems like they might become something else, when a generic shift seems in the offing. But if they depict the failure of political and social transformation, they do so in order to translate what would otherwise be an unbounded democratic impulse into the formal preconditions for reform. Far from merely affirming the status quo, these novels' forays into the transformed future

discernably alter the baseline ‘reality’ to which they return. In refusing their own refusals, they re-form the prevailing mode of liberal governance for a democratic age.

The dissertation of Michael Raymond Vignola II is approved.

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***

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# Introduction

The subtitle of Thomas Carlyle's 1867 anti-reform pamphlet *Shooting Niagara* put the question everyone was asking: *And After?* Britain had just taken a massive step toward democracy with passage of the Second Reform Bill, which doubled the number of eligible voters virtually overnight and seemed to place a preponderance of those votes in the hands of the working classes. The "Great" Reform Bill of 1832, henceforth to be known as the First Reform Bill, had indeed added new voters to the rolls to the tune of about half again as many as there were current voters. But in shifting the balance of the electorate to recognize the new manufacturing centers, the 1832 legislation had acknowledged an existing fact of social relations, extending the logic whereby Parliament represented interests, not persons. By enfranchising the urban working classes—every male householder in the boroughs—the Second Reform Bill instituted the logic of democracy. Unlike its predecessor, the Second Reform Bill was understood from the first not to have settled anything: there would eventually be a Third (1884), a Fourth (1918), a Fifth Reform Bill (1928).

*And After?* Carlyle was not asking what would happen as an immediate result of the Second Reform Bill but was instead trying to imagine the shape of the future that he understood would be its ultimate consequence. Democratic reform—visible on the horizon throughout the 1860s—gave rise to prediction, speculation, prophecy: attempts to imagine how changing the machinery of representation would in turn change how women related to men, how the colonies related to the metropole, and how the collective related to the individual. No democrat, to put it mildly, Carlyle seems at times in *Shooting Niagara* to be reprising his performance in *The French Revolution*, figuring democratic reform as a kind of muted apocalypse from which, with any luck, Britain might emerge purified. Once democracy had shot Niagara to the bottom,

Carlyle's true aristocrats could begin to achieve their "beautiful ideal," a future that, because Carlyle sketches it in broad, vague terms, could be carried to "an indefinite length."[1] But, seemingly against his inclination, Carlyle departs from his diagnostic-apocalyptic mode in *Shooting Niagara* to suggest some immediate, practical reforms that could forestall mass politics: military drafts, for instance, and improved schools. These come into view for Carlyle, moreover, only where his "beautiful ideal" fails, where he confesses "practically little faith in it."[2] As important as his question *And After*? is the caveat Carlyle adds as he rescues vestiges of his fleeting ideal: "And yet…."[3]

For all his criticism of democracy, Carlyle adopts a narrative form in *Shooting Niagara* that I will be arguing characterizes imaginings of democratic reform across the latter half of the nineteenth century. Each of the chapters that follow will look at specific moments in the expansion of democracy and the groups who were imagined to be the beneficiaries of that expansion. While these chapters thus attend to unique anticipations of the democratic future, a distinctive pattern—which I have called the reform aesthetic—nonetheless emerges across John Stuart Mill's prose as well as in novels by George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and George Gissing. Like Carlyle, these writers imagine an "ideally best" society (Mill) or a "Utopia" (Eliot), before ultimately falling back to more pedestrian, probabilistic versions of the near future.

"The Reform Aesthetic" tracks a form of temporality that united the kind of gradual suffrage reform which prompted Carlyle to write *Shooting Niagara* with the wholesale social transformation to which he gestured with *And After*. Reform is perhaps most often conceptualized as a moderate alternative to revolution: where the latter seeks to transform society immediately, so this thinking goes, the former operates within existing institutions, changing without completely remaking them.[4] And, indeed, insofar as it names a violent rupture

in the ways things are, revolution admittedly parts ways with reform. A skeptical line of criticism has even claimed that Victorian liberals, the driving force behind reform, were more interested in delaying universal suffrage than they were in achieving it, aiming thereby "to slow the country's progress toward democracy."[5] But as I have begun to suggest with the case of Carlyle's *Shooting Niagara,* in the period of Britain's democratization, reform was understood by many of its champions to pursue an end remarkably like what is usually signaled by 'revolution': a transformed future rendered as ideal, perfect, even utopian.

A generation earlier, Percy Shelley had made a case for this connection in his "Philosophical View of Reform." In that unfinished work, written in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre but unpublished for a century thereafter, Shelley argues for eventual universal suffrage on the grounds that it would facilitate "ulterior improvements of a more important character," namely the abolition of the monarchy and "equality in possessions."[6] Shelley, like Carlyle, looks beyond institutional reform to the "absolutely perfect" society that will be its consequence.[7] And like Carlyle, he does not dwell in that perfection long before he concedes its impossibility. The end toward which Shelley's radical program moves, equality as absolute perfection, quickly becomes for him a "moral rather than a political truth," a goal capable of inspiring "generous enthusiasm" even if it remains a "delusion," incapable of being consummated.[8]

Shelley's apprehension of reform's ultimate radicalism in fact leads him to a surprising endorsement of moderate suffrage expansion in the near term. Incremental extension of the voter rolls would indeed be a compromise when compared to universal suffrage, he reasons, but the latter was itself already a compromise when considered as a step toward an egalitarian republic. To argue for universal suffrage immediately, "at any price," as some of his contemporaries were,

was therefore to fix an arbitrary point along that trajectory as its end and implicitly to deradicalize reform by separating it from the perfect future it projected.[9] When Shelley tried to think through how his ideal republic might be achieved, he ran into the kinds of practical problems one encounters only when they begin by considering the world as it is: redistribution of property and abolition of the monarchy would require a civil war, which in turn would require an army, and the habits of obedience induced by military life were those "with which liberty is incompatible."[10] For the sake of the republic to come, it was best, Shelley concluded, to expand the vote incrementally. For Shelley, as for the later writers I will consider in this dissertation, "reform" united incremental suffrage expansion with universal suffrage and universal suffrage with a potentially thoroughgoing social transformation that would be its ultimate result. To think one point along this trajectory, it was necessary to think them all. Or, as Mill put in in his *Considerations on Representative Government*, it was impossible to understand the phenomenon of suffrage reform "without taking into account not only the next step, but all the steps which society has yet to make; both those which can be foreseen, and the far wider indefinite range which is at present out of sight."[11]

But then why the delay? Couldn't Carlyle's "beautiful ideal" or Shelley's "absolutely perfect" republic be achieved immediately, by revolutionary rupture, without the intervening series of reforms? Both writers, as we have seen, disavow the realization of idealized or perfected futures the moment they are constrained to describe them in any detail. They do so, I want to suggest, because the future that lay at the end of reform's trajectory represented for them transformation as such: to describe it would be to assimilate it to the world as it presently exists, to predict and therefore to fix in advance the consequences of universal suffrage. The flip side of suffrage reform's connection to social transformation was that the more fully one tried to

elaborate the content of the future, the more it looked like the present.[12] Even Karl Marx—like Carlyle, though for different reasons, no champion of reform—admitted that communism would inevitably come into being "still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges," an inheritance under which his own attempts to describe the post-revolutionary future likewise suffered.[13] If reform was inexorably tied to imaging the future in terms of beautiful ideals and perfect societies, it also could not wholly escape domesticating those ideals and perfections. The reform aesthetic responds to this dual imperative—imagine a transformed future but do not describe it—by depicting the future in utopian terms: at once ideally good, even a perfect place, and constitutively unimaginable, a no-place.

We can begin to appreciate the problem to which this mode of imaging the democratic future responded by previewing a quarrel that will come into sharper focus in chapter one. Although they both considered themselves liberals, John Stuart Mill and James Fitzjames Stephen agreed on little else. (As we will see, they disagreed especially vehemently on the meaning of democratic equality.) They did, however, imagine the expansion of democracy in almost exactly the same way. For Stephen, writing in 1862, as democratic reform was gaining institutional momentum, "liberal" and "liberalism" were terms "not greatly remote in meaning from the words 'democracy' and 'democratic.'"[14] Stephen's claim would seem to suggest that liberalism and democracy were synonymous around mid-century—but there was a catch. Stephen hoped that the newly enfranchised voters would form "a high and generous conception of national experience," and that they would, therefore, defer to their social betters until they were trained to their new responsibilities.[15] This was the kind of democratic future that could be anticipated and described in detail: society looked almost exactly like it did in the present, just with more voters. But there was also a different kind of democracy afoot, one that exhorted

laborers to "[t]urn over a new leaf and open a new chapter in the history of England" by destroying its institutions. Once their "just indignation" had vented itself, Stephen sneered, the common folk could "live at ease amidst [their] mills and corn-fields, and let the England of the future look back on the England of the past as a bad dream which had passed away."[16] There were then two versions of democracy for Stephen: one that could be described in detail because it has been preemptively assimilated to existing institutions and one that could be gestured to only negatively because it had the power to overturn those institutions and to remake society.

Mill was certainly friendlier to democracy than Stephen: he thought that everyone should have a vote, even if he sometimes suggested that some people should have more than one.[17] But he too holds that "[t]wo very different ideas are usually confounded under the name democracy." When people thought of democracy, they usually meant "the government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people, exclusively represented," the kind of "tyranny of the majority" which Mill memorably took on in *On Liberty*. By contrast, "the pure idea of democracy" was rather "the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented."[18] This form of democracy had "equality at its very root and foundation."[19] Mill differs from Stephen in a crucial respect: Where his antagonist disavowed the transformative kind of democracy—even through Stephen's sarcasm we catch utopian notes in his easy fields and dreamy future—Mill, as I shall argue in chapter one, embraced democracy under the banner of "equality." Nonetheless, for all their important differences, Mill and Stephen both exemplify a pervasive tendency to imagine the democratic future under a dual aspect: assimilationist, on the one hand, and transformative, on the other.[20]

Anticipating the democratic future inevitably involved imagining it as at once limited and unlimited: literary representations of reform took shape where these two versions of the future

met, where the utopian began to take recognizable shape and where the recognizable shaded off into the transformed. The tension between these two imperatives, present in virtually every piece of writing about suffrage reform during the period, makes for a distinctive kind of ambivalence in reform fiction. What I have called the reform aesthetic always depicts idealized futures slipping back into mundane reality. In this way, the reform aesthetic represents the institutionalization of democracy and its assimilation to the world as it existed—the kind of democratic reform to which Stephen gave his blessing. But although this fall back toward the present was inevitable—for the more one describes the ideal-utopian, the more familiar it begins to look—the authors I discuss in this dissertation tend to follow Carlyle and Shelley in emphasizing democratic reform's transformative potential. To assimilate democracy to the present, contemporaries first had to acknowledge that the future would be democratic and that it might unfold in ways both unpredictable and potentially sweeping.

While the term "aesthetic" may conjure for some readers the Frankfurt School of criticism—especially as I have used it in conjunction with "utopian"—I deploy it here in a more generic sense to refer to the set of literary practices through which reform was at once enacted and reflected. The aesthetic dimension of the reform aesthetic takes shape around a basic tension between the generic form of the novel, which requires closure, and the impetus of a capaciously imagined reform to push past any determinate ending. The sub-genre of realist fiction that I have identified under the rubric of the reform aesthetic handles this tension in two distinctive ways. First, the utopian or transformative moment that stands in for the unspecifiable *telos* of reform always precedes the end of the novel as such, both as story and as discourse. The novels therefore reorder the process of reform from its linear-institutional trajectory to its conceptual trajectory, wherein the 'ends' of reform precede its instantiation. Second, as we shall see in what

follows, reform aesthetic fiction always projects a sense of openness beyond its own end, often in the form of the imagined continuation of characters' lives beyond the fiction. In this way, novels not only prepare for and reflect institutional reform but also encourage the internalization of the reform aesthetic.

As the debate between Mill and Stephen has perhaps suggested, the reform aesthetic is particularly concerned with the evolution of political liberalism. All the authors considered at length in what follows—Mill, Eliot, Trollope, and Gissing—can be plausibly classified as one species or another of Victorian liberal. (Carlyle, in his inimitable way, has shown us a quintessentially liberal concern in its negative form.) The tension between assimilationist and utopian democracy was particularly acute for liberals, I will suggest, because it manifested conflicting tendencies internal to the liberal worldview. Victorian liberalism—really, liberalism of any kind—has proven an especially difficult term to define with any sense of exactitude or parsimony.[21] Indeed, as I hope the following chapters will demonstrate, "The Reform Aesthetic" owes a debt to recent work by Duncan Bell and Edmund Fawcett, both of whom have challenged the idea that individualism or "negative liberty" represents liberalism's irreducible core. At once a party, a politics, and a predisposition, invested in disinterest, procedure, and progressivism, along with much else, and reconciling thinkers as diverse as Mill and Stephen, John Bright and Robert Lowe, George Gissing and George Eliot, nineteenth-century liberalism is a complex and at times a contradictory phenomenon. Still, it seems impossible to describe this era of liberalism without recourse to what Isaiah Berlin called the "frontier" separating private life from public governance.[22] The individualism usually associated with Victorian liberalism seems to me to arise from this foundational commitment to privacy; taken together, these two core aspects of liberalism—or as close to a "core" as we will get—generate an insoluble tension around

democratic reform.[23] The idea, dear to Victorian liberals of all stripes, that each individual ought to have a voice in their own governance seemed naturally to call forth democracy. Yet the idea, equally (if not more) dear to mid-century liberals, that one ought to be able to walk as they like in the path "which merely concerns himself" was implicitly threatened by majoritarian rule.[24] Democracy could thus be seen as arising out of and completing liberalism's historic mission at the same time as it could be figured as an existential threat to liberalism's core commitments.

The tension between a nascent collectivist strand within liberalism and its traditionally individualist frame of reference—a tension we have encountered already in Shelley's opposition of "liberty" to the immediate realization of "equality in possessions"—will become especially apparent in the last two chapters of this tripartite dissertation. In chapter two, I show how George Gissing's *The Nether World* formally balances the conflicting imperatives of collectivism and individualism on the level of character by massifying individuals and individualizing masses. In chapter three, I argue that the prospect of women's suffrage represented democracy at its most transformative because it had the potential to realign—or to obliterate altogether—Berlin's frontier between private and political life. In the moment of the Second Reform Bill of 1867—the very legislation that prompted Carlyle to wonder *And After?*—Anthony Trollope quietly anticipates the radical effects of women's suffrage in his novel *Phineas Finn*. Before turning to these texts and the contemporary discourses within which they were embedded, however, I discuss in chapter one the concept of equality as the social content of democratic reform. As a general but unspecifiable end toward which democracy moved, equality took forms not unlike those imagined futures with which we began: Carlyle's "beautiful ideal" and Shelley's "absolutely perfect" society.

If we will find those utopian futures fleeting in the pages that follow, it is not quite because the authors I will discuss exchange transformative potentiality for the world as it "really" exists. A sense of disenchantment has indeed seemed native to realism and liberalism alike, as Amanda Anderson has recently suggested.[25] Because the ends of reform are potentially so transformative, one cannot move inductively from what is to what may be: even as reform moves one way along the trajectory, from present to future, it must be conceptualized in the opposite direction, so that its ultimate ends, hazy as these might seem, precede its more immediate realizations. The beautiful ideals to which democratic reform gives rise will thus always seem to fail. But it would be a mistake, albeit one common enough among critics of literary realism, to equate their disappearance with disillusionment. For as Carlyle has already taught us, practical reform begins to take shape only where the beautiful ideal recedes. So, although we will find ourselves repeatedly falling back from a utopian future into what seems a more familiar narrative 'present' across the next three chapters, we will also find that 'present' changed, subtly marked out as the near future and realizing parts of the utopia that the novels have appeared to forsake. For every *And After?* drawing us for a fleeting moment into an unbounded but unsustainable vision of the future, we shall find ourselves impelled into genuine futurity by that seeming addendum: And yet…

## *Chapter One*

# Reform Equalities: John Stuart Mill and George Eliot

In his book-length critique of John Stuart Mill's late-career political philosophy, the jurist and orthodox utilitarian James Fitzjames Stephen summed up Mill's creed as the nineteenth-century successor to the French Revolutionary motto: *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873). Stephen took acerbic exception to all three abstractions, which, he complained on the treatise's opening page, "rather hinted at than expressed" their underlying doctrines.[1] While Stephen's most immediate target was the content of the first term, to which Mill had famously given voice in *On Liberty* (1859), he reserved special opprobrium for the second as "at once the most emphatic and least distinct of the three doctrines."[2] Not least of Stephen's qualms with the concept of equality was what he apprehended as its indefinability:

> It may mean that all men should be equally subject to the laws which relate to all. It may mean that law should be impartially administered. It may mean that all the advantages of society, all that men have conquered from nature, should be thrown into one common stock, and equally divided amongst them. It may be, and I think is in a vast number of cases, nothing more than a vague expression of envy on the part of those who have not against those who have, and a vague aspiration towards a state of society in which there should be fewer contrasts than there are at present between one man's lot and another's. All this is so vague and unsatisfactory that it is difficult to reduce it to a form definite enough for discussion.[3]

Given the opposition he voices to the "doctrine of equality," Stephen's attempt at a definition and the exasperated handwashing to which it gives rise is surely in bad faith. And yet Stephen's procedure, offering partial and provisional definitions of equality, some of which conflict and some of which overlap, captures the conceptual expansivity of the term. A sense of juridical equality, with which Stephen begins, and political equality, pointedly omitted from Stephen's catalog, necessarily beget claims for various forms of material and social equality. At its most general, Stephen is correct that equality was "a vague expression" that signaled "a vague aspiration," or, as he put it a few pages on, "a word so wide and vague as to be by itself almost unmeaning."[4]

While Stephen was prescient to diagnose the concept of equality as practically indefinable, he characteristically misunderstands the deliberate use to which those he criticized put the term's vagueness. For Stephen, the definitional problem made equality all but meaningless. But for Mill, along with contemporaries like Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, and Matthew Arnold, equality's conceptual expansiveness guarded against the reductionism and violence associated with the ideal of equality as the social content of democracy while also figuring its indefinite elaboration as the trajectory of the political future.[5] As we shall see, these authors, especially Mill, were responding to the influential critique which Edmund Burke had levelled against French Revolutionary equality in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the long shadow of which is apparent in Stephen's recourse to the Revolutionary motto as a point of reference. Burke, however, decried not definitional vagueness but merciless numerical reductionism: French Revolutionary equality meant for him abstract numerical equivalence. Conceding to Burke that, once raised as desirable social end, equality tended to become self-perpetuating, and that in its purely numerical form this process would necessarily be

de-humanizing, Mill reformulated equality as an asymptotic end, while Eliot figured it as an internalized value that must animate authentic reform. As part of this reconceptualization, equality could be gestured to as an ideal or adumbrated negatively, often avowed most strongly in its disavowal or failure, but never reduced to the definite form that would have propitiated Stephen.

Recent theoretical reformulations of equality resonate, perhaps surprisingly, with the nineteenth-century conceptualizations formulated by liberals like Mill and Eliot. The "equality of style" that Jacques Rancière has located in Flaubert, for example, which "aims at revealing an immanent equality, a passive equality of all things," bears striking similarity to Eliot's elucidation of "true moral equality" in *Felix Holt, the Radical*, the subject of the second half of this chapter.[6] Likewise, Étienne Balibar's suggestion that the radicalism of equality, instituted in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, lies in its propensity for expansion to new claims by hitherto excluded groups recalls Mill's sense of perpetual expansion.[7] Nonetheless, even as equality has achieved perhaps unmatched rhetorical legitimacy, its institutionalizations—and in particular its parliamentary-representative form—have come in for critique. Critics of Victorian fiction influenced by Rancière and Balibar have argued that nascent political democracy was based in an inherently dehumanizing "abstract logic of statistics" and proceeded according to "the flattening process of inductive abstraction."[8] If we are to catch a glimpse of equality in Victorian fiction, they suggest, we must look outside of representative institutions to those supernumeraries who evade the official numerical machinery.[9]

Underlying these critiques, though not always articulated as such, are two assumptions: that the denial of representation to various groups is "structurally necessary for the functioning of the system" and that numerical equality was the ultimate horizon of the kinds of reform endorsed

by Mill and depicted by Trollope and Eliot, among others.[10] Attending to the common forms which these authors employed to evoke the concept of equality, however, confirms that political equality was just one, and not the most important, form of equality to circulate in mid-Victorian Britain. Writers like Mill and Eliot, as we shall see, understood political equality to be an inextricable part of what Amartya Sen has described as a conception of equality that takes into account "the fundamental diversity of human beings."[11] I will suggest that authors like Mill and Eliot, each in different ways, provide resources for thinking beyond, without leaving behind, numerical equality—whether conceived in terms of representation or distribution—to what Elizabeth Anderson has recently called an egalitarianism that "fundamentally, is about dismantling or taming social hierarchy."[12] If they are themselves aware that the "attempt to bring everyone within the fold" of equality "can only ever fail," as Nathan Hensley finds, it is not because an "exclusionary logic" dictates that the count can never add up to the total, but because the operation of counting fails to exhaust the possibilities of equality.[13] For someone like Mill, democracy only really got underway once the counting stopped.

As I will show in the first half of this chapter, John Stuart Mill and Anthony Trollope suggest that non-numerical forms of equality would proliferate as a result of institutional reform geared toward political equality. In figuring equality as unrealizable in itself but still asymptotically approachable in practice, Mill drew on the experience of his mental breakdown, described in his *Autobiography* (1873), and the resources of Romantic poetry that had given him succor thereafter. Taking up a sense of irony implicit in Mill's discussions of equality, Trollope stages the conceptual elaboration of equality as apophasis, affirming it by way of an elaborate denial that does not allow its definition to rest with any one character or idea. In the second half of this chapter, I will argue that George Eliot in *Felix Holt, the Radical* [1866] and Matthew

Arnold in and around *Culture and Anarchy* [1869] return to what Burke had dubbed "true moral equality" as a basis for conceptual expansion. While for Burke true moral equality and political equality were mutually exclusive, Eliot and Arnold figure the former as the precondition for the latter. Where a capacious sense of equality arises as a consequence of political equality for Mill and Trollope, for Eliot and Arnold political equality becomes the outward sign of a previously diffused moral equality. As Eliot amply demonstrates in *Felix Holt*, this fugitive sense of equality requires institutional failure both to become visible and as a mode of perpetuation. Reading *Culture and Anarchy* alongside of *Felix Holt*, we can see that equality serves for both authors as a utopian impulse within the world of imperfect "machinery." For all four authors, then, the indefinability of equality in its capacious sense constitutes its local and provisional meanings.

**"The Uncertain and Slippery Intermediate Region": Equality after Burke**

Conceptualizations of equality at mid-century, both critical and celebratory, were heavily influenced by Edmund Burke's admonishment of French Revolutionary equality in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.[14] Burke's critique begins with what he identifies as an impetus to achieve "abstract perfection," or what he elsewhere calls a "speculative" character, that is internal to the concept of equality. Once admitted as an absolute principle, Burke argues, the concept of equality becomes self-perpetuating, "inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walks of life."[15] The principle works just as well for corporate or composite entities at it does for individuals: hence, Burke predicts that the stated equality of French departments under the constitution will lead to rebellion, pitting the municipalities against Paris and one another, until only official violence can hold the state

together. At the same time, however, the impetus to expansion will always be frustrated because equality obeys different and conflicting prerogatives across domains. For example, an insoluble tension arises in the basis of representation between geometrical equality as applied to territory and arithmetical equality as applied to population. The equal squares into which France had been subdivided contain unequal numbers of putatively equal individuals, making "equality in geometry the most unequal of all measures in the distribution of men."[16] Nonetheless, for all its expansiveness across domains, within them the principle always reduces complex, historically sedimented relations to simplified numerical equivalence: square for square and citizen for citizen. And this operation too obeys an inherently violent logic, "reduc[ing] men to loose counters merely for the sake of telling."[17] Burke figures the kind of equality pursued by the French Revolutionaries as impossible to attain, famously proclaiming that "those who attempt to level, never equalize," and thus productive of violence both by virtue of the contradictions that arise from its expansiveness and the reductionism inherent in mathematical equivalence as applied to social relations.[18]

Nineteenth-century proponents of political equality responded to Burke's critique by prizing apart his claims of expansiveness and reductionism. For these thinkers, equality became *conceptually expansive*, moving beyond the political to the social and ethical realms where it would realize a meaning less easily quantifiable. Crucially mediating the French tradition for the English-speaking world, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835) began to reformulate the concept of equality within a post-Revolutionary context.[19] Tocqueville is perhaps best known for his ambivalence toward democracy, and those of his English readers who opposed democratic reform were certainly apt to quote his skepticism. But as perceptive interlocutors like Mill could note, Tocqueville predicted the inevitable triumph of democracy and

of equality as its social form; the only question for Tocqueville was whether a pernicious or a virtuous form of equality would prevail.

Tocqueville's conception of equality begins with the formal juridical and political equivalence of democracy but continues to expand in multiple directions after these have been achieved. Tocqueville can thus lament equality as the diffusion of a "universal uniformity" in virtually the same breath in which he announces that its triumph is inevitable and that nascently egalitarian polities will decide "whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness."[20] Tocqueville points out that even as an initial expansion of the franchise begets such momentum that "no stop can be made short of universal suffrage," democratic institutions, once realized, "awaken and foster a passion for equality which they can never entirely satisfy."[21] For Tocqueville, this passion inflects equality toward the kind of ideality that Burke had associated with chivalry as distinct from democracy: The "passion for equality" that democracy produces tends toward an "ideal but always fugitive perfection," or else an ideal that "perpetually retires" from before its pursuers "and in retiring draws them on."[22] This understanding of the relationship between democracy and equality became widespread as Britain began to countenance a first installment of democratic reform around mid-century, characterizing radicals and conservatives alike, in part because of Tocqueville's influence. Matthew Arnold, for example, citing Tocqueville in 1861, foresees the advent of formal democracy as "natural and inevitable" even as its result, "equality…the field of conquests of democracy," remains potentially limitless and therefore unpredictable.[23] The real import of democracy thus was not the abstract equality of citizens as potential voters, but the impetus to spread equality throughout the whole of society, an operation whose forms and effects could not be foreseen in advance.

The expansiveness of equality as an approach to "ideal perfection" orients democratic society to the future. But for Tocqueville, democracy also produces a countervailing tendency that acts as a check on the potential for limitless expansion. At times in *Democracy in America* he bemoans, for example, the failure to form "a clear perception of the future" that leaves democracies captive to "present privations."[24] The relation of an open future and a blinkered present inherent in modern democratic temporality tellingly emerges in Tocqueville's discussion of literature, where he considers the kinds of stories democracies tell themselves about their own advance. The "ideas of progression and of the indefinite perfectibility of the human race" which animate democratic equality, according to Tocqueville, give rise to a literature "haunted by visions of what will be."[25] In place of the idealized heroic past of aristocracy, equality inspires a forward-dawning self-conception in democracies. At the same time, however, equality redistributes literary attention to the daily lives of hitherto obscure individuals, grounding it in the 'real' present. Though Tocqueville leaves the upshot largely unexamined, taken together these two conflicting impulses diagnose a temporality aimed at the middle distance of futurity, tending toward the indefinite expansion of equality, but, given the open-endedness of the term, never able to articulate its own future clearly and therefore apt always to be drawn back toward the present. The conceptual expansion of equality as the content of democracy thus produces the signature literary temporality of the reform aesthetic.

The triangulation between a 'real' present and an ideal future, geared toward a perpetual expansion of equality, finds its most sustained philosophical elaboration in John Stuart Mill. Mill's famous account of his "mental crisis" in his *Autobiography,* I will suggest, crosses a personal narrative of Romantic self-development with a political and social narrative of progressive reform. Having set out "to be a reformer of the world," for which he had been

mercilessly drilled by his father and Jeremy Bentham, a still-young Mill suddenly found the ends of utilitarian reform not only unfulfilling but terrifying. "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized," he reports having asked himself, "that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?"[26] The resounding "No" with which he answered threw him into a protracted fit of depression. The standard account of Mill's travails emphasizes his psychological response: His sense of doubt had awoken him to a disjunction between the political and social ends of his philosophy and what it meant to live a fulfilled life as a human being.[27] He repaired the damage wrought to his psyche by turning to Romantic poetry, especially Wordsworth, developing a fondness for Coleridge and a friendship with Carlyle.

The effect of the episode on Mill's political philosophy, however, is less well understood. Traditional accounts of Mill's career have treated his mental crisis as a biographical episode that has little to teach scholars about his subsequent intellectual development.[28] A recent exception, David Russell has argued that Mill's breakdown led him to cultivate "an aesthetic liberalism distinct from a liberalism of method" and that the former, which valorizes obliquity, vagueness, and deferral of meaning, has been largely overlooked in Mill's political writings. Still, for Russell aesthetic liberalism only predominates in Mill's early political writings and, aside from *On Liberty*, mostly disappears from his later work.[29] But, as we will see, the realization that precipitated his crisis ("the end had ceased to charm") and his therapeutic response to it, which indeed drew on the values Russell descries, continue to inform Mill's political philosophy throughout his career. Mill in fact signals the larger implications of the episode in his *Autobiography,* which takes the form a rejection of finitude or end states that we have seen was characteristic of post-Burkean thinking about equality and was a hallmark of Benthamite

utilitarianism: “the destiny of mankind in general was ever in my thoughts, and could not be separated from my own. I felt that the flaw in my life, must be a flaw in life itself.”[30] The mature Mill retains his early commitment to political and social reform, but he eschews any comprehensive definition of their ends. Drawing from the Romantics, Mill begins to invoke the “ideal” as the ultimate outcome of reform while refusing to define it in any comprehensive way. This turn manifests most palpably in Mill’s limning of equality, the principle at the center of his philosophy.

Though the breakdown led Mill to distance himself from the programmatic utilitarianism of his father and Bentham, opening up a gap that would grow wider over the ensuing decades, in one important way its central insight continued to distinguish his mature thought. Bentham had removed the basis for radical politics from a ‘rights of man’ discourse implicitly located in the past, when the first men had been endowed by their creator, to the future, where reforms like democratic suffrage could be judged by their probable results. As Bentham put it in his *Fragment on Government*, his method of studying legislation moved from the historical questions of Blackstone, for example, to “what the legislator *ought* to do in the *future*.”[31] For Mill, consequentialism characterized all moral philosophy, with the only question being that of which end or value animates a particular theory. “That the morality of actions depends on the consequences which they tend to produce,” he said in his seminal reappraisal of Bentham, “is the doctrine of rational persons of all schools.”[32] Mill thus, as Jürgen Habermas points out, abandons the idea of a “natural basis” for the political public sphere and along with it the appeals to experience favored by Burke.[33] Rather than positing a resolution to public questions, the kind of end that Karl Marx saw in the inevitability of class conflict, Mill’s philosophy remains theoretically open to the perpetual redefinition of equality.

While Mill never wholly abandoned the utilitarian tradition, he did crucially modify its underlying epistemology. As Mill was suffering the lingering effects of his breakdown, his father's *Essay on Government* bore the brunt of Thomas Macaulay's Whig counter-offensive in the *Edinburgh Review*. Even in his restless intellectual state, Mill held that the radical side had the best of the argument, but not without granting significant concessions to Macaulay's critique. Macaulay's "copious induction," an echo of Burke's valorized "experience," failed to account for the causes of political phenomena; but neither were his father's quasi-French "geometrical" deductions sufficient. Instead, Mill admitted that an inductive "summing up of effects," though it was no substitute for, had to precede, deductive reasoning.[34] The robust case Mill made for women's rights several decades later in *The Subjection of Women* shows this methodology put to practical effect for the purposes of delineating equality. The observable phenomenon of expanding gender equality over several decades, he argues, "affords some presumption" that the trend toward equality will continue.[35] At the same time, however, Mill argues at length that experience fails to offer adequate grounds for determining gender roles because the experience itself has been determined by a presumption of inequality. For an opponent like Stephen, equality was a bad descriptor of a reality premised on fundamental inequalities; but for Mill the negative presumption of equality changed the nature of the very reality under observation. So, while experience might provide a basis from which to extrapolate, it cannot itself serve as a viable ground for principles of justice, which must be formed theoretically.

This mode of reasoning animates Mill's political philosophy throughout his career. In practice, this method would mean using an ideal or principle to shape what is practical given the history of a polity. He thus goes on in his *Autobiography* to make a distinction, which echoes elsewhere in his work, between "the region of ultimate aims" or "the highest realizable ideal of

human life" and "the immediately useful and practically attainable."[36] His own thought, he says, occupies "the uncertain and slippery intermediate region" between the ideal and the practical, the places where the present meets "anticipations for a remote futurity."[37] The mature Mill has the future in mind as much as the present whenever he offers a proposal or pronouncement. And while he admits that it resists comprehensive definition, his vision of the long future nonetheless guides and gives shapes to his near-term prescriptions. Mill's commitment to an ever-expanding equality thus lands him in the same temporal region as Tocqueville, that of the reform aesthetic.

Mill offers what at first seems like a counterpoint to his aversion to end-of-history theses in "The Stationary State" and "The Probable Future of the Labouring Classes," chapters from his earlier *Principles of Political Economy* which he revised later in life but never expunged. To be sure, Mill does maintain that what he calls the stationary state, that is, a state of society in which productivity and population have ceased to increase, is inevitable. Mill had inherited this thesis from Thomas Malthus (though Mill claims it has an even older lineage), for whom it had notoriously acted as a check on all human progress, but here he turned Malthus's pessimism on its head. Where Malthus brought forward "an argument against the indefinite improvability of human affairs," Mill hoped to show that a limit on population would lead to full employment and high wages for the whole of the population.[38] Mill in fact argues that economically advanced countries such as Britain might begin consciously moving toward a stationary state, in part by encouraging smaller families. (It is worth recalling in this context that a young Mill had been arrested while advocating for birth control.)

Given its Malthusian lineage—not to mention the foreboding name—some critics have argued that the stationary state represents the inability of a liberalism like Mill's to think a thoroughly transformed future: Mill's temporizing, melioristic politics achieve apparently bland

consummation in the stationary state. Elaine Hadley, for example, claims that Mill's prediction of the stationary state in *Principles* stands in pessimistic contrast to his more exuberant celebration of "the boundlessly transformative role minority opinion could exert on a society and government prone to stasis" in *On Liberty*.[39] To make a claim like this is to ignore Mill's repeated strictures against confusing the means of political economy for the ends of the social good, a vulgarization he found endlessly exasperating in popularizes of economic theory like Harriet Martineau. To the contrary, the end of purely economic progress and the growth of human population was for Mill merely the beginning of the progressive transformation of society. As Mill himself put it in *Principles*, with a perhaps misplaced gesture of confidence in his future interpreters: "It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement."[40]

Hadley's misconstruing of the stationary state opens onto the larger misconception of nineteenth-century liberalism's orientation to the future common to those who insist on too sharp a distinction between liberalism and democracy. As Hadley puts it, "Victorian liberalism has trouble imagining an end, or at least did not often like to imagine an end, that culminated in universal suffrage and mass culture" and is thus "more about delay and repetition than progress and reform."[41] On the contrary, the reform aesthetic finds nineteenth-century liberals repeatedly, even compulsively, imagining an end of one sort or another as a result of the expansion of the suffrage—only their imaginings do not end at the ending. While Mill discusses the stationary state without reference to political reform, he nonetheless follows this larger pattern for imagining the future. With the end of economic expansion, economic distribution will begin to proceed on a more equal basis, such that in the "stationary" future "while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer."[42] Equality thus continues to unfold within the stationary state as the

progressive improvements to material life hitherto confined to the middle class become "the common property of the species."[43]

Mill's stationary state rehearses in an impersonal sense the narrative of his mental crisis that he would later offer in his *Autobiography.* The series of questions with which he opens the discussion recapitulates almost verbatim the line of questioning that led to his breakdown: "Towards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress? When that progress ceases, in what condition are we to expect that it will leave mankind?"[44] During the long period of recuperation that followed the initial crisis, he found "medicine for my state of mind" in William Wordsworth's two-volume collected poems of 1815, which stimulated his own "love of rural objects and natural scenery."[45] Mill's ode to the stationary state in *Principles* lingers on the Wordsworthian keynotes of solitude and spontaneity:

> It is not good for man to be kept perforce at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which solitude is extirpated is a very poor ideal. Solitude, in the sense of being often alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without. Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.[46]

In the splendor of the wild shrub and the glory of the flower, Mill signals a practical utopianism that resists all forms of quantification and rationalization. Importantly, this vision is not, as it was for the older Wordsworth, rooted in pastoral conservatism. Rather, Mill's stationary state echoes what he says of Wordsworth's poetry in his *Autobiography*, where the latter's poetry—especially "Intimations of Immortality" (despite its "bad philosophy")—provides "a source of inward joy" that is itself unconnected to political and social struggles but which "would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind."[47] In this way, the stationary state remains open to spontaneous future development.

If Mill's stationary state borrows from Wordsworth, the future that he envisions in the subsequent chapter, "On the Probable Future of the Labouring Classes," draws heavily from Tocqueville. Here Mill predicts the gradual withering away of master-worker relations, first by a form of partnership between the two, then, ultimately, by a form of worker association that does away with capitalists altogether. In this state, workers would own their capital collectively, elect their managers, and generally come together "on terms of equality."[48] As was the case with Tocqueville, Mill goes on to complicate any easy definition of or practical program for achieving the latter term. For one, Mill says, socialist strictures against competition have "moral conceptions in many respects far ahead of the existing arrangements of society" and it is impossible as yet to foresee a time when competition will not be integral to progress.[49] Even so, this imagined future is useful in a different way. As he says elsewhere in the chapter, ideals exercise an unaccountable influence, even on those who are unconscious of being guided by them. And while all ideals are incapable of being realized as such, they nonetheless call forth a

"capacity of exertion and self-denial in the masses of mankind, which is never known but on the rare occasions on which it is appealed to in the name of some great idea or elevated sentiment."[50]

Mill's general mode of using the ideal to leverage reform in fact works in two different though overlapping ways. In the narrower sense, Mill as MP and public intellectual plays off an "extreme" measure against the status quo in order to open up a middle way for progress. In his *Autobiography* he says of his time in Parliament:

> I well knew that to propose something which would be called extreme was the true way not to impede but to facilitate a more moderate experiment… It is the character of the British people, or at least of the higher and middle classes who pass muster for the British people, that to induce them to approve of any change it is necessary that they should look upon it as a middle course: they think every proposal extreme and violent unless they hear of some other proposal going still farther, upon which their antipathy to extreme views may discharge itself.[51]

The important point for Mill was that his "moderate experiment" chart a path toward what the public had deemed "extreme." In the next chapter, I will argue that Mill follows this course when he proposes women's suffrage during the 1867 Reform debates, knowing well that it will fail but also setting it up as integral to the reform movement as much as working class votes. In this mode, Mill claimed that the real import of his work in the House was "to preach larger ideas than can at present be realised."[52] Mill also employs a more capacious version of this process, one that owes a debt to the visionary, Romantic mode he discovered during his depression. Here his "ideal" is comparatively unbounded and under-defined, a kind of energy or impulse with which to invest specific reforms but which looks past the discernable institutional future. These ideals

are not wholly out of future history for Mill, but they do operate at such a remove so as not to take on definite attributes. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, for example, Mill argues that advancing societies have to look "not only to the next step, but all the steps which society has to make" including "the far wider and indefinite range which is at present out of sight."[53] The particular, imaginable future—Parliamentary reform and universal suffrage, for example—thus prepares for and begets in turn a more inchoate and indefinable future, the continuing elaboration of progress even after the supposed ends of reform have been achieved.

While the precise disposition of this future remains for Mill consciously underdefined, it is characterized by the indefinite expansion of equality. For Hensley, as we have seen, Millian equality, a stand-in for liberalism as such, stops once it "transforms difference into sameness" and produces an understanding of citizens "as the chits of a political-economic system now operating according to a metaphysics of counting."[54] Hensley's argument might be persuasive for the first part of Mill's career, when in the shadow of his father he espoused a relatively unqualified version of Bentham's famous dictum: "everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one."[55] It fails, however, to track with the famously perpetual evolution of Mill's political thought in the wake of his nervous breakdown and after the death of his father. The "metaphysics of counting" can apply only in a highly qualified sense to Mill's embrace of plural votes, especially for the educated, in *Considerations on Representative Government*. Mill's immediate commitment to democratic equality is instead, as Habermas has pointed out, far more equivocal, an attempt to reconcile the bourgeois-liberal norms of rational debate with rising claims for equal political rights based on the unmasking of the former's pretensions to disinterest.[56] And while Mill's late-career political philosophy was directed toward the expansion of the vote, this was never the stopping point of his speculations on the future, which instead aimed toward an

expansive sense of equality not reducible to Carlyle's "count of heads."[57] In *Utilitarianism*, for example, he identifies the principle of equal treatment, which is different from the presumption of numerical equality, as "the highest standard of social and distributive justice" towards which, in a process implicitly without end, institutions "should be made in the utmost possible degree to converge."[58] As Mill put it elsewhere, an "inequality of rights" is "discordant with the future."[59]

Mill never offers a positive definition of equality, beyond repeating the Benthamite formula that the happiness of each ought to be accounted as equal, and even in those cases Mill is careful to qualify his claim with various expediencies that limit it in practice. And while happiness might be quantified, Mill also points out that there are many conflicting and, on principle, equally valid ways of doing so. Some Communists, he points out, hold that goods ought to be distributed on the principle of exact equality, while "others think it just that those should receive most whose needs are greatest," and still others argue for distribution based on some kind of merit.[60] More broadly, to the extent that equality is the essence of justice, a position which Mill suggests, though does not state explicitly, in *Utilitarianism*, its principles tend to grow in a "loose and irregular manner" such that more than one might be valid at any given time, even in the mind of a single individual.[61] Instead of a positive definition, then, Mill bases his case for equality on a negative presumption: equality is that which would exist once all existing inequalities have been uprooted. As a practical matter, Mill is thus less interested in establishing abstract equivalencies, as Hensley suggests, than he is in identifying and rooting out prevailing inequalities, which he suggests will go on existing for the foreseeable future. In this way, the move toward equality becomes for Mill a renewable project, as new perspectives bring previously undetected inequalities into view and as changing expediencies determine which inequalities ought to be targeted and how.

Mill makes the case for a version of equality that reaches beyond numerical equivalence most passionately in *The Subjection of Women*. Again, Mill begins with what can plausible be considered a numerical accounting, arguing as he does for "perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" between the sexes, a one-to-one equivalency.[62] But this equivalence works its way into felt reality, into the most intimate of human relations, in ways that cannot be comprehended by the kind of counting that transforms human beings into mere chits. While Mill often speaks in terms of the quantifiable, in *Subjection* as elsewhere, this kind of equality is only the approximation of and precondition for a deeper, more humane equality that shines through Mill's famously rationalistic prose. Mill thus points out that "society between equals," by which he means in this context companionate marriage, is not only an end in itself but "the only school of genuine moral sentiment," having effects that, true to form, he predicts "may not be felt or generally acknowledged for generations to come."[63] Belying claims of formulaic equivalence and violent abstraction, Mill goes on to claim that the good to be derived from "sympathetic association" or "cultivated sympathy between equals" exceeds all explanation or illustration. The terms which Mill employs underline the unrepresentability of this kind of equality, which begets "an unspeakable gain in private happiness" for women just as the restriction they endure "leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the human being."[64] This deeply penetrating, pervasive equality would, certainly, be impossible without the kind of numerical equality symbolized by an equal share of political rights; but instead of flattening diverse individuals and their relationships, Mill's sympathetic association projects a multi-dimensional equality that reaches beyond its formal preconditions.

In one of his last writings, Mill begins to contemplate socialism as the form towards which the progressive expansion of equality tends. To be sure, as a realizable, short-term political settlement, Mill finds socialist programs unlikely to fulfill their highest aspirations. But as an animating spirit toward which capitalist democracy seems to tend, socialism becomes for Mill a version of Romantic poetry that might partially, but never fully, realize itself in the future. Mill claims in his *Autobiography* not to believe in the "the beneficial operation of [socialists'] social machinery," but that the "ideal of human society" which socialism proclaimed might "give a beneficial direction to the efforts of others to bring society, as at present constituted, nearer to some ideal standard."[65] In his unfinished, posthumously published *Chapters on Socialism*, Mill repeatedly concurs with the prescience of socialist critique while at most partially endorsing specific remedies. The socialist case against adulteration and fraud in capitalist economies, for example, stimulates a response that otherwise would not be forthcoming and results in a remedy which "though suggested by and partly grounded on socialistic principles, is consistent with the existing constitution of property."[66] *Chapters* positions socialism as an extension of the democratic reforms of the late-sixties and early-seventies. These reforms had disappointed the "vast expectations" of both their boosters and detractors, but that, Mill argued, was because they failed to reason to their "remoter consequences."[67] These might take root slowly, as the ideal of socialism turned democracy into a middle term and as what was at present impractical or ideal, in Mill's second sense, in socialism became increasingly tangible. Mill's socialism thus takes shape somewhere between his two versions of ideality: less fleshed out than the "extreme" proposal which would clear the way for "a more moderate experiment," but certainly more tangible than the "dim starlit faith" that John Morley suggested animated Mill's thought.[68]

Although Mill himself can hardly be characterized as an ironic writer, the conception of equality that he formulates throughout his career nonetheless suggests an ironic disjunction between equality as a concept or value and its various instantiations, especially as they manifest in political institutions. As Anthony Trollope charts the democratic reform of Britain across his Palliser novels and in his stand-alone *Ralph, the Heir*, he stages the definition of equality in a mode of irony that never disavows its object: Analogous to Mill's repeated descent from the dim starlit realms of ideal equality, Trollopean equality succeeds most fully where it seems to fail. Throughout the Palliser novels, characters give voice to their most sweeping, extensive visions of the political future outside of Parliament, only to trim them when the context moves from abstract to practical. In an example from *Phineas Finn* which I will discuss at length in a subsequent chapter, Lady Laura Standish makes the radical claim that the "gist" of Liberal politics is "making men and women all equal," before admitting that she has in mind a general "tendency" to reduce inequalities rather than realization of the ideal.[69] "Equality" repeatedly appears in Trollope's political novels as the end toward which liberal politics strives, and yet it is always, as in the case above, ironized. The term always comes from the mouths of Trollope's characters, never his famously intrusive narrator, and those characters are always rebuked, if not by other characters, or by themselves, as in Lady Laura's case, then implicitly by the novel's plot. At the same time, however, Trollope's ironizing of equality is never complete, never fully drains it of meaning, but on the contrary serves to retain for it an expansive, open definition. As novels like *Phineas Finn, The Prime Minister,* and *Ralph, the Heir* suggest, Trollope understands that any positive definition risks hypostasizing 'equality' as a narrow, diminished end.

When 'equality' appears in a Trollope novel, it almost always spoken by means of apophasis, raised only to be denied and yet affirmed in the denial. In *Phineas Finn*, equality's

equivocal place as the unpronounced end of liberal politics is redoubled on its speaker, Lady Glencora Palliser, who claims that one is not "a Liberal at heart" unless they are "an advocate for general equality" (105). An outsider, given that she is a woman and cannot serve officially, but also an insider, given her social position and influence on her husband, Lady Glencora's endorsement of "equality" is fittingly quasi-official. Neither her husband nor the radical MP Monk, whom she conscripts to her position, endorses it, but neither openly opposes it. For her part, Lady Laura acknowledges that were she an official member of the government, she would be constrained by "reticences" and "official discretion" (104). Monk himself, as a member of the government, claims that "[e]quality is an ugly word and shouldn't be used" before criticizing Glencora for failing to supply "a clearly defined meaning" of equality (106). But despite disavowing the term, Monk offers a definition of Liberal politics that evokes 'equality' in all but name, holding that "every honest man should wish to assist in lifting up those below him, till they reach something nearer his own level" (106).

Monk's equivocation on 'equality' in fact doubles the irony at play in its definition and serves to deepen its meaning beyond the relatively bland generalities on offer in the exchange. Glencora's immediate qualification of equality as a "tendency" confirms Monk's claim that she has no "clearly defined meaning" of the term in mind. And yet the definition he offers only manages to recapitulate her claim that "general equality" consists of making "the lower orders…as comfortable and good" as the present company and the present company "as good and comfortable as anybody else" (105). 'Equality' thus emerges as processual, even asymptotic ("nearer," "tendency'), not only as a political principle, but in the very terms of its definition, which Trollope never allows to rest in one place. No one at the Laughlinter conclave, save for Lady Glencora, explicitly endorses equality, and even she quickly qualifies her vision of equality

in negative terms as a movement "to reduce…inequalities" (105). Trollope's management of dialogue allows the term to circulate between Glenocra, Monk, Phineas, and the skeptics Bonteen and Kennedy, without settling it as the ideological property of any single character. The series of underwhelming definitions thus takes on depth, as each is rejected or modified in turn and Trollope refuses to land on any final meaning. Far from draining the term of meaning, this definitional strategy underscores the extent to which 'equality' is constantly evolving, only ever provisionally defined as a matter of debate.

The paradigmatic pronouncement of equality in Trollope comes in the penultimate Palliser novel, *The Prime Minister*, as Plantagenet and Phineas survey the Matching estate's sweeping grounds and contemplate the probable fall of their coalition ministry. Trollope likewise invokes equality in this scene by way of apophasis. As the term circulates, taking on multiple synonyms, its meaning deepens without ever being specified; as in *Phineas Finn*, it emerges as the Liberal creed despite the fact that none of the Liberals in the novel endorses it as such. While Conservatives can be characterized by their desire to uphold social distances, Palliser says,

> "The Liberal, if he have any fixed idea at all, must, I think, have conceived the idea of lessening distances,—of bringing the coachman and the duke nearer together,—nearer and nearer, till a millennium shall be reached by—"
>
> "By equality?" asked Phineas, eagerly interrupting the Prime Minister, and showing his dissent by the tone of his voice.[70]

The exchange rhetorically performs the Trollopean idea of equality. Palliser, note, offers his idea of Liberalism in the subjunctive ("if," "I think") as a way of mitigating against the finality of "any fixed idea," the kind of stopping point or final definition that, as we have seen in *Phineas*

*Finn*, is antithetical to the constant adjustments needed to retain equality as a living idea. (He will go on to decry the harm done by treating equality "as a fact accomplished" rather than a perpetual "march to some nearer approach" (516).) The terms of the definition likewise double back on themselves—Palliser in effect offers an "idea" of an "idea"—immediately qualifying the imperative, "must," with personal reservation, "I think." Perhaps most characteristically, the brief concrete example at the center of the definition is linked to the synthetic definition by the repetition of "nearer," underscoring the asymptotic approach to that which Palliser refuses to name. Although Palliser has offered a definition of equality, Phineas is the one to pronounce the term, filling the gap of unnameability, and he does so only skeptically, in the mode of "dissent."

Palliser's response to Phineas notably deemphasizes 'equality' without disavowing its negatively defined content. While he does pronounce the word in what follows, he does so only to underscore its constitutive indefinability: "the thing itself," to take one example, "is so great, so glorious, so godlike…its perfection is unattainable" (516). Palliser's reticence to name 'equality,' and, once named, to supply a positive definition, results in a series of lexical substitutions: it becomes, by turns, "heaven," "perfection," "a dream," and "a millennium," all of which speak to its infinite expandability and unrepresentability in itself. The logic of substitution underscores the extent to which 'equality' never hardens into an end in itself but remains instead a constantly evolving principle by which to guide practical action. When Phineas and Palliser return to Parliament and active politics, "millennium" replaces "equality" as the tag for their discussion. Notably, Phineas abandons his earlier skepticism to propose to the Duke that the county franchise Bill their government has introduced is a step "toward that millennium of which we were talking at Matching" (543). Palliser brushes off Phineas' "moral speculations" in this scene, in effect disavowing the conversation, only later to invoke the "step toward the

millennium" himself (554). Phineas thus never speaks the word 'equality' except to register his dissent, while Palliser only pronounces it by way of disavowing its false definition, that "mock equality" which has made "the very idea of equality stink in men's nostrils" (516). In this way, Trollope manages to convey both characters' endorsement of equality without offering a rigorous definition of its content and without either character having to proclaim it openly.

The same substitutions for 'equality' that prevailed in *The Prime Minister* characterize Moggs, the son of a bootmaker and radical candidate for Parliament in Trollope's *Ralph, the Heir*. Unlike the Palliser novels, the term 'equality' is never openly pronounced in *Ralph, the Heir*, but Moggs's platform, which embraces strikes, co-operative associations, and "the rights of labour" more generally, leaves little doubt as to the animating force of his politics. More than this, Trollope follows the same logic of substitution to describe Moggs's politics that he will later employ for 'equality' in *The Prime Minister*. Moggs, whom the narrator repeatedly describes as "full of poetry," refers to the future he conjures as, alternatively, "an Elysium," "an Eden," "a heaven," and "a millennium." The semantic spillover allows us to read Moggs's political platform as being dedicated to equality, even where the word itself is absent. As in the Palliser novels, the chain of synonyms serves simultaneously to ironize Moggs's politics and to keep any one of them from ossifying into an end in themselves.

On the level of plot, Trollope's narration of Moggs's political career follows the pattern of his lexical substitutions for 'equality.' Standing for the fictional Percycross, Moggs at first seems poised to win a seat in Parliament as a radical, leading in the nomination-day show of hands by a margin of five-to-one over his nearest rival, thanks to the energetic support of the town's laborers. Moggs's nomination speech, or "sermon," functions as an extended moment of wish-fulfillment, allowing him "to believe,—just for that hour,—that he was about to become the

hero of a new doctrine throughout England."[71] Trollope punctuates the speech, however, with a riot that presents the underside of his implicit claim to equality should his program move from fantasy to reality. Moggs's supporters thus tear down the "stout rail" that was meant to protect the "weaker" candidates' supporters "from the violence of the stronger" and "drive their enemies from the field" (2.6, 2.8). Likewise, the prospect of success embodied in the nomination gives rise to Moggs's election-eve fantasy that he might not only win a seat in Parliament but that "he might move the very world" with his cry of "Purity and the Rights of Labour" (2.10). As in *Phineas Finn* and *The Prime Minister*, Moggs's revelry exceeds any prospective instantiation, taking the shape instead of "a great love for the borough," the seizing of "destiny," and a belief that he has "wings strong enough for soaring" (2.10). But once again, Trollope allows the fantasy to dilate only to undercut it abruptly, with what he pointedly calls "the *real* day" of the election arriving in a dreary rain and Moggs proceeding to finish last at the poll.

Although Moggs loses the election, Trollope signals that he and his idea betoken the future. Not only is Moggs's rallying cry of "Purity" vindicated by the disfranchisement of the corrupt borough. Trollope also ties Moggs's romantic life to his political aspirations, as his courtship of the prosperous breeches-maker's daughter, Polly Neefit, only begins to succeed when he stands for Parliament. Just before the extended election scene, on the eve of the nomination, Moggs writes to Polly, who does not reply until "the contest was over, and that great day had done its best and its worst for him" (2.319). Trollope nonetheless leaps ahead to the future, giving readers Polly's letter at once, one of only two prolepses in the novel. (The other also concerns Moggs, as Trollope anticipates "the facts of our tale" by presenting Polly's dismissal of Moggs's rival ahead of its time (2.305).) Moggs's marriage to Polly and Trollope's mode of presenting it thus reinforces the extent to which his political failure in the present stems

from being ahead of his time. Moggs fails to inaugurate a "millennium of political virtue" and "[p]aradise of the labourer," but these scarcely definable ideals, even in their necessary failure, force the Liberals at Percycross to embrace the ballot and set the trajectory of democratic expansion from household to manhood suffrage (1.310, 1.253). Even as Moggs's radical liberalism shades off into the vagueness of ideality, it thus stands for the expansive sense of democracy that Tocqueville had tagged "equality."

**"Something Else Before All That": George Eliot's Utopia**

Moggs's recourse to terms like "millennium," "Eden," and "heaven" evidences a submerged connection between nineteenth-century political discourse around equality and the term's earlier, pre-modern associations. Once again, Burke serves as the touchstone for the survival of this kind of thinking into the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps less well known than his admonishment of theoretical equality, Burke endorses in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* what he calls "true moral equality" or "noble equality" based in "antient chivalry."[72] It can be difficult to pin down exactly what Burke means by these terms. Indeed, their resistance to denotative definition is the point. An equality that proceeds "without confounding ranks" seems a contradiction in terms, as is apparent when, in the course of his famous description of a young Marie Antoinette, Burke defines "noble equality" as "that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified loyalty, that subordination of heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of exalted freedom."[73] An equality that paradoxically proceeds on the basis of social and political inequality, however, has a long pedigree in the medieval Christianity to which Burke often looked for inspiration. "True moral equality" is Burke's name for what Erich Auerbach, reading Antoine de la Sale, refers to as "the 'creatural' aspect of Christian

anthropology—life's subjection to suffering and transitoriness."[74] According to Auerbach, the creatural understanding of humanity comprises "a radical theory of the equality of all men" in its devaluation of temporal ends, which it understands to be vain, even as it retains "the highest respect for man's class insignia."[75] Burke's apparently contradictory doublets ("proud submission," "dignified loyalty," "servitude…freedom") thus come into focus as a performance of the simultaneous coexistence of political and social inequality with a basic form of human equality before God. In place of the violence that Burke sees as inherent in abstract equality, a recognition of creatural equality meliorates power, having "obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem," by an appeal to the emotions, "manly sentiment" or "sensibility of principle."[76]

For Burke, true moral equality and political equality are mutually exclusive: Any attempt to actualize abstract numerical equality will destroy the basis of equality before God that, according to Burke, holds society together. But as we saw was the case with Burke's critique of equality more generally, those who followed in his wake in the nineteenth century reconceptualized moral equality in the service of the eventual expansion of political equality. Where Burke had held that moral and political equality were antithetical, writers like George Eliot and Matthew Arnold figured the former as the precondition for the latter.[77] Although they do not name it as such, Eliot and Arnold depict moral equality as an affective state of receptivity to the claims of institutional reform in the service of political equality. For both authors, moral equality names that disposition which makes otherwise purely "mechanical" reforms meaningful. This disposition becomes especially apparent in Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical*, a novel set in the wake of the First Reform Act which she composed on the eve of the Second. In it, Eliot depicts the failure of electoral reform undertaken on the principle of abstract equality without a

previously diffused moral equality as its basis. The very failure of the first, abstract form of equality, however, serves to advance it in the second, moral sense. *Felix Holt* thus echoes Trollope's political fiction, underscoring the constitutive indefinability of equality by depicting it only negatively. But Eliot's approach to equality differs from the authors I discussed in the previous section in that it locates a fugitive, unrepresentable equality prior to its imperfect political instantiations, not as the ideal result which they approach asymptotically. As Trollope looks toward the millenarian aspirations beyond the horizon of any particular reform, Eliot's moral equality exists as the promise of perfect or utopian equality submerged within a world of inequalities.

*Felix Holt* follows its titular protagonist's attempt to further the project of reform amid the upheaval of the first post-Reform election. While evangelizing for his idiosyncratic brand of radicalism, Felix meets Esther Lyon, who learns, just as she begins to fall for the spartan Felix, that she is not the daughter of a humble minister, as she had thought, but the potential heiress to a noble estate. When her claim on the estate unexpectedly becomes valid as a result of the same election riot that lands Felix in jail, Esther faces a choice: claim the estate and marry its former owner or abjure the estate and marry Felix. Esther's choice of the latter, coupled with the various failures of radical politics depicted in the novel, has led to the prevailing consensus that *Felix Holt* offers a lesson in renunciation or "sad resignation."[78] Eliot appears to stage Esther's renunciation in a scene that doubles as metanarrative commentary on *Felix Holt*'s generic form, constituting the novel's realism, in a familiar move, by first interpolating and then disavowing a competing mode of narrative deemed 'unrealistic.'[79] Having learned of her prospective inheritance, Esther reflects that her fantasies have been irrevocably altered by becoming real:

> The story and the prospect revealed to Esther…had made an impression on her very different from what she had been used to figure to herself in her many day-dreams as to the effect of a sudden elevation in rank and fortune. In her day-dreams she had not traced out the means by which such a change could be brought about; in fact, the change had seemed impossible to her, except in her little private Utopia, which, like all other Utopias, was filled with delightful results, independent of processes.[80]

Through Esther, Eliot thus defines utopia as being "independent of processes," the implicit antithesis of a realism devoted to tracking personal and social histories. As Esther decides to marry Felix instead of Harold, she repeatedly refers to the estate as a would-be utopia which, having become reality, can only ever fail to live up to her fantasy.

By rejecting Harold Transome and the estate, Esther seems to write her own story as *Felix Holt*'s rejection of utopian fantasy. But if, as the narrator says, Esther's "life was a book that she seemed to be constructing for herself," both it and *Felix Holt* hinge less on the renunciation of utopia than it might seem. Many commentators have pointed out that realist fiction necessarily retains something of the genre against which it constitutes itself, having first had to enact it in order to abjure it. But I want to suggest that Eliot does more than simply subordinate utopian fantasy to realism. Esther indeed rejects the false utopia of the Transome estate, but she does so only to embrace an authentic utopia in the person of Felix Holt. Her "story"—and Eliot's—is ultimately utopian. In his relative independence from causal processes and in the gap between his actions and his character, Felix fulfills the formal conditions of utopia as articulated by Esther. Their marriage thus symbolizes the possibility of society's utopian transformation. For all that Eliot mostly denudes his politics of content, to the extent that Felix signals a political program, both in *Felix Holt* and Eliot's later, supplemental "Felix Holt's

Address to the Working Men," it is predicated on the expansion of equality. Felix, I will suggest, represents Eliot's reworking of what Burke had called moral equality. As we shall see, Felix's moral equality relies on the very institutions it putatively rejects in order to constitute itself. As with the relation of Eliot's realism to utopian fantasy, what may seem at first pass a subordination of the one to the other in fact bespeaks their parity. As a utopian figure, Felix's equality always exists beyond the 'real' world of the text, always remains irreducible to any concrete instantiation, while at the same time emerging within that world and influencing the institutions which cannot capture it.

Critics have long complained that Felix is, as Catherine Gallagher puts it, "absolutely unconditioned by mere social facts," an omission all the more glaring for Eliot's patient tracing of the effects of social conditions on the novel's other characters.[81] Esther's definition of utopia as "delightful results, independent of processes," however, helps us understand this seeming omission as a deliberate utopian figuration. Felix twice attempts to convey the narrative of his political evolution, but on both occasions he abandons causal explanation in favor of delineating that which he rejects. Felix's first appearance in the novel comprises his initial interview with Rufus Lyon, during which the latter tries to understand why Felix abandoned his father's patent medicines and a middle-class existence for a working-class life. The core of Felix's story passes in a paragraph detailing that which he rejected after a mere "six weeks' debauchery" in a Glasgow garret, where "the smell of raw haggis" and "the old women breathing gin" were apparently enough to turn him against a life of "easy pleasure" (55-56). Felix similarly defines himself by negation, omitting any truly causal narrative, when he later tries to explain his development to Esther in terms of two axiomatic principles. (In the same scene, he describes himself as entertaining utopian "visions and dreams" and implores Esther to have her own

"vision of the future" (224).) In the first place, Felix posits the simpering, dishonest bourgeoisie as "the picture of that which I should hate to be" (222). The construction would seem to promise that Felix's second axiom will supply positive content in the form of that which by contrast he aspires to be. Instead, he only supplies another negation, this time of "the spawning life of vice and hunger" that he takes to be characteristic of the working classes (222). To the extent that Eliot presents Felix as conditioned by social facts, then, he is only ever conditioned negatively and thus only minimally imbricated in the kinds of processes constitutive of Eliot's realism.

The same utopian freedom from processes adheres to Felix even more radically when, despite himself, he becomes involved in a determinate political action. Although he initially vows to sit out the election-day excitement, Felix is drawn into a volatile crowd when he senses the threat of a riot. Attempting to forestall the murder of the hated mining boss Spratt, Felix puts on the guise of a rioter, leading the mob away from town and safely depositing Spratt on a fingerpost. When the riot nevertheless manages to overwhelm his attempt to influence it, and Felix is taken prisoner ostensibly in the act of looting the Debarry mansion, he looks to all of those who have witnessed his behavior no different from any other mob leader. And, as many readers have pointed out, from an external point of view he really is no different. At trial, the prosecution need only present "the facts already known to us," which for the most part Felix does not gainsay. Instead, he claims that he will not plead to manslaughter because such a term "may carry a meaning which would not fairly apply to my act" (370). Guilt, Eliot is clear, adheres to him in none but the narrow, juridical sense, touching his acts but not his essence. As a utopian figure, something of Felix will always elude his action in the world, removing him from the realm of causality even when he participates in it; as no institution can exhaust the content of egalitarian reform for Eliot, so Felix's actions fail to exhaust the content of his politics. What

Esther thinks of Felix's relationship to her in another context thus remains true for his relationship to the world of practical politics in general: "an influence above her life, rather than a part of it" (302).

Felix's independence of processes seems to leave him vacuous, an empty center around which Eliot constructs a novel that is putatively political but that in fact counsels the rejection of politics as such.[82] Felix's politics, it is true, tend to the abstract and under-defined, such as his claim "to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise" (226). Claims like these underline Gallagher's influential argument that Felix's vagueness recapitulates a politics of culture predicated on abstraction from material concerns. Felix's very quotable claims, however, have obscured the fact that he does endorse both a political program and a means for achieving it, though he does so in a typically negative fashion and though a good deal of vagueness, strategic on Eliot's part, nonetheless still adheres to his claims. In his nomination day speech, Felix notably proposes that the end of working-class politics is "giving every man a man's share in life," equality, in other words, and that the means of achieving this end is not universal suffrage but an appeal to "public opinion." Neither of these propositions means quite what they might seem at first pass; indeed, in the case of "public opinion" Eliot develops a definition over and against what Felix seems to articulate.

To begin with the first, substantive claim, Felix's endorsement of "a man's share in life" proceeds according to the general form of discourse about equality that I have been tracing, taking shape obliquely so as to emphasize its expansive possibilities. Felix does not himself make the initial claim, but rather endorses the previous speaker's assertion that "the greatest question in the world is, how to give every man a man's share in what goes on in life" (246). Even after Felix repeats the call for "a man's share" in his own speech, what he might mean by

the phrase only comes into view negatively through his rejection of that which he does not endorse. His own speech thus begins as a reaction to the previous speaker's development of equality as a political form comprising "universal suffrage, and annual Parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts" (248). Felix does not, as many readers presume, object to these forms as such, but rather suspects that, emptied of any content, they would merely lock in place the present material and moral conditions that would flesh out the concept of equality and therefore enjoy a prior claim as "something else before all that" (248). At the same time, for all that we know does not exhaust "a man's share" for Felix, what might comprise it in its totality remains inarticulable. As an under-defined program that only comes into view by means of negation, Felix's definition of equality mimics the story of his political conversion and his relation to his own actions, suggesting an expansiveness that outstrips any instantiation and yet relies on those instantiations for its definition.

Eliot's reprisal of the nomination day speech in her post-Second Reform Act essay "Felix Holt's Address to the Working Men" confirms the centrality of equality to Felix's political program. The "Address" proceeds on an unobtrusive but unmistakable assumption of equality as the end of reform, what Felix articulates as a "common interest" in everyone receiving their "right share," that, as in *Felix Holt*, is most clearly articulated in the negative. So, for example, when Felix warns against "hasty measures for the sake of having things more fairly shared," the admonition against immediate action tends to overshadow the implicit assertion that expanding equality marks the long-term horizon of reform.[83] The "Address" does, however, develop a strand of Eliot's thinking about equality that only comes into full view with the passage of the Second Reform Act. As Eliot ventriloquizes Felix, equality begins as working-class solidarity, a condition exemplified by trades-unions when they make "some protest on behalf of our body"

out of the intuition "that it is our interest to stand by each other."[84] This equality of interest among individuals then extends to classes as corporate or aggregate entities. Like individuals, aggregated classes tend to act out of self-interest; any class that achieves a preponderance of influence is likely to press that preponderance for "more than their right share."[85] In *Felix Holt*, set in the wake of the First Reform Act and composed before the suffrage expansion of the Second Reform Act, Felix warns that precipitate enfranchisement will merely allow the likes of Jermyn and Johnson, bourgeois schemers and self-dealers, to manipulate working-class voters against their own best interests. With her eyes to the newly enfranchised voters in the "Address," the working classes have become capable of the same mismanagement that has distinguished aristocratic and bourgeois governments. Eliot's sense of moral equality, on which any actor is just as likely as another to leverage their own self-interest, thus leads her to see in the over-hasty expansion of political equality the means of perpetuating social and material inequalities.

Eliot's emphasis in the "Address" on the universal propensity to channel power to one's own good, whether conceived in terms of individuality or in terms of class, to the detriment of the common good clarifies a distinction between her understanding of equality and the version adumbrated by Mill and Trollope. Eliot's equality is essentially pessimistic, premised on a belief in human imperfection that transcends class distinctions, a central tenant of Eliot's fictional project which she had embraced in *Adam Bede* on the implicitly egalitarian grounds that "fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are."[86] This pessimism stands behind what we have seen to be Eliot's skepticism of formal democracy. But her skepticism reaches only so far as the claim that formal democracy can stand in for what she felt were more substantive social and moral reforms. In the "Address," Eliot claims through Felix that the social good will not be "unconditionally hastened" by the franchise, not that it will be unconditionally vitiated by it.[87]

Eliot had made a similar claim in her oft-quoted letter to Sibree from 1848. There she makes a distinction between "the slow progress of *political* reform," which she says is "all we [English] are fit for at present" and a more robust "social reform which may prepare us for great changes" and occurs "both in Parliament and out of it."[88] While she clearly favors the latter, more robust but less easily definable reform, Eliot's formulation nonetheless suggests that the two might run together in the same direction; if political reform and social reform are not necessarily connected, neither are they mutually exclusive. When this attitude carries over into *Felix Holt* and the "Address," what emerges is not the anti-democratic position many have descried. Instead, Eliot remains agnostic (so to speak) toward democracy, embracing equality as its precondition rather than its outcome.

At times in the "Address," Felix echoes nearly verbatim another text from the period not usually considered in terms of what it has to say about equality: Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. *Felix Holt* and *Culture and Anarchy* have, of course, long been read in each other's light, most famously and most persuasively by Gallagher in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*.[89] In the course of establishing that both Eliot and Arnold equate culture and politics, so that they "end by representing one another" to the exclusion of all else, Gallagher claims that Arnold develops the anti-democratic implications of Mill's ideas, signaling a liberal break with descriptive representation and hence with universal suffrage.[90] While she is certainly correct to highlight Arnold's skepticism that mere descriptive representation could generate value, Gallagher nonetheless overstates Arnold's antipathy to democracy. Arnold's reaction to the Hyde Park "Riots" notwithstanding, *Culture and Anarchy* can best be characterized as his response to the inevitable triumph of democracy. Arnold ends the collection's first essay, for example, with a sustained discussion of "the new and more democratic force which is now

superseding our middle-class liberalism."[91] The problem, as Arnold sketches it here, is not democracy as such, but the prospect that the ascendant classes will either be co-opted by the middle class "to be Philistines to take the place of the Philistines whom they are superseding," or else be seduced by "abstract systems of renovation applied wholesale," which he tags, revealingly, as "Jacobinism."[92] For Arnold, the "machinery" of suffrage is but the means to an end of which both Philistines and the Jacobin faction of the Populace have only a partial view: this is why the first essay culminates in his claim that "the men of culture are the true apostles of equality."[93] *Culture and Anarchy*, I am suggesting, should be understood alongside *Felix Holt* as a text that attempts to give meaning to the idea of equality represented externally by democratic expansion.

The centrality of equality to *Culture and Anarchy*, as well as its place in the evolution of Arnold's thought, becomes clearer if we look to the texts that frame it in Arnold's oeuvre. In a text from the beginning of the decade, his introduction to *The Popular Education of France*, Arnold hews closely to Tocqueville and Mill in figuring equality as the consequence of an expanding democracy: "Social freedom—equality—that is rather the field of the conquests of democracy."[94] Arnold's relatively high rating of democracy throughout his introduction to *Popular Education* is for the most part a reflex of its perceived relation to the expansion of equality. The prediction of democracy's inevitable advance that Arnold makes in that text in fact never abates. What does change for Arnold is the relationship between the expanding suffrage and the realization of equality. In two texts that appear in the decade following *Culture and Anarchy*, "The Future of Liberalism" and "Equality," equality is no longer the consequence of democracy but rather proceeds alongside it. Suffrage expansion is necessary so that the working classes can, in a practical sense, protect their interests against the aristocracy and the

bourgeoisie—it being very much the nature of each class to look to itself—but the substantial work of reform would come via an expanding equality, which he figures as both the next frontier of liberalism and a force that can endow it with meaning.

But in what does Arnold's equality consist if not in democratic "machinery"? In *Culture and Anarchy* he associates it with "the social idea," a term which Arnold, true to form, does not deign to define directly. In the later texts, the kind of equality to which Arnold looks forward is, to be sure, at least in part material, a corrective to the "immense inequality of conditions and property" which have prevailed under middle-class governance.[95] But just as his contemporaries viewed democracy as a step toward greater material and social equality, so Arnold began to view material equality as a spur to a more expansive kind of moral equality. Living in a "society of equals," Arnold argues, "tends in general to make men's spirits expand," by imparting, among other things, "a self-respect, an enlargement of spirit, a consciousness of counting for something in [one's] country's action."[96] Arnold thus distinguishes the approach to material equality from the attempt of each class to appropriate to itself as much as it can, a potentiality that we have seen Eliot deprecate through Felix in the "Address." Arnold's belief in the inevitable advance of democracy remains constant from *Popular Education* through "Equality." By the late 1870s, however, Arnold weakens the connection between formal political equality and the kind of social equality that characterizes "a humane kind of life."[97] Equality thus moves out of the properly political realm to the realm of "social life and manners," where, as the "spirit of society," it becomes almost ineffable.[98]

Reading these later elaborations of equality back into *Culture and Anarchy,* we can begin to see Arnold's vaunted culture as a utopian term, one that echoes in Eliot's description of Felix as bearing "the peculiar stamp of culture" (248). Unlike Eliot, Arnold does not invoke utopia by

name; but his definition of culture is nonetheless bound up in a term from which utopia is inextricable: perfection. As "the study of perfection," culture is a harmonious, holistic, and totalizing concept, impossible "while the individual remains isolated."[99] This rooting of culture in "motives eminently called social" strengthens the connection between it and equality, especially in light of Arnold's grounding of equality in similar motives, "social freedom," in *Popular Education*.[100] At the same time, however, Arnold locates "the character of perfection as culture conceives it" in a perpetual "growing and becoming" and "a perpetual advance in beauty and wisdom."[101] Just as the perfectionist aspect of culture evokes one aspect of the utopia pun—"good place"—and seems to locate it within the realm of achievable reality, it simultaneous draws on the other—"no place"—to abstract its adherents to an "inward working."[102] Arnold's culture thus parallels Esther's renunciation in *Felix Holt*, only coming about through what he calls significant "renouncement" that paradoxically activates the very thing renounced.[103] In both cases, the failure of spurious perfection in the world of external machinery is the precondition for locating a true inward perfection which is itself figured as a process of perpetual becoming. Rather than rejecting institutional machinery, however, Felix's utopianism and Arnold's perfection only begin to take shape in reference to it as "the end for which machinery is valuable."[104]

This complex relationship between institutions and the ends they both construct and fail to account for becomes apparent in Eliot's development of "public opinion" as the means by which equality is to be achieved. What is usually indicated by the normative sense of the phrase, a disinterested accounting of the public good, fails repeatedly in *Felix Holt*. The public debate between Rufus Lyon and the young establishment clergyman Theodore Sherlock, for example, ends before it can even get underway. Elsewhere the gentleman farmer Timothy Rose, whose

independence Eliot goes out of her way to signal, and who would thus seem to offer an example of autonomy and disinterest, splits his vote between Debarry and Transome on the basis of a spurious equality, arguing that "when you can vote for two, you can make things even" (256). The most glaring instance of the failure of public reason, however, is undoubtedly Felix's nomination day speech itself. Felix's oratory is so tantalizing as potential evidence of Eliot's political stance, and has been discussed so often as such, that it is easy to miss the way that the form of the chapter undercuts the viability of public opinion in the very process of articulating it. Eliot's narration of the speech ends when Felix, in the process of arguing against undue influences on voters, takes a quasi-private jab at Johnson, who is looking on from the crowd. The personal interest of this identification immediately overwhelms the public content of the speech, as onlookers recognize Johnson. One of them, Christian, has been made aware by Tommy Trounsem that a lawyer named Johnson has information material to inheritance of the Transome estate. Felix's aside thus finally brings these two characters together as Eliot breaks off from narrating his speech to narrate their exchange, which reveals Esther's claim to the estate. Eliot never returns to Felix's unfinished address. Even as she gives voice to the degraded state of public opinion through Felix, Eliot's narration of the scene models the propensity of disinterested public opinion to dissolve into private interest.

But where disinterested reason fails, another kind of public opinion succeeds in a way that has generally gone unnoticed. Felix's courtroom defense initially amounts to little more than a recapitulation of the incidents that led to his arrest, a procedure that Esther intuits will result in sure conviction. Esther's testimony by contrast succeeds on this score not because it provides a compelling rational argument for Felix's innocence, but because through it she is able to communicate her "sympathetic ardour" to Loamford society, thereby "shatter[ing] the stiffening

crust of cautious experience" (379, 375). As this scene makes apparent, Eliot's version of public opinion works not by reasoned detachment but by the sympathetic investment that constitutes moral equality. As Arnold, once more echoing Eliot, put it, the sympathy generated by the study of perfection is that "which binds humanity together" such that "individual perfection is impossible so long as the rest of mankind are not perfected along with us."[105] Indeed, the effect of Esther's sympathetic communication is to bring together the previously warring political and social factions of Loamford to petition for Felix's pardon. Sympathy, as Eliot understands, requires not only a community but a perception of likeness, the affinity of things which mutually affect one another or "an agreement in qualities" that easily slides into equality.[106] At the same time, as the ordeal of Esther's testimony amply suggests, sympathy requires a perception of suffering. What is remarkable about Esther's testimony from the perspective of an expanding sense of moral equality is its institutional failure. Her plea fails in the courtroom after the judge succeeds in "cooling down sympathy into deliberation" (375). The institutional context of the courtroom is necessary in order for Esther to make her claim, allowing her a forum to address the assembled Loamford society, but the terms of that claim necessarily overflow the institutional context in which she gives them. Esther's testimony thus paradoxically succeeds in its failure, drawing the community into a condition of moral equality in the process.

Eliot, as we have seen, predicates the successful diffusion of a commitment to equality through public opinion on the sympathy generated by its prior institutional failure. This process thus textualizes the novel's generic form, wherein the seeming rejection of utopian fantasy, or at the very least its constitutive subordination to a realist aesthetic, in fact betokens its triumph. In and around the pivotal trial scene, Eliot recurs to the markers of the putatively rejected form, suggesting that the sympathy Esther generates belongs to its sphere of values. Esther's "inward

vision," later reprised as an "inward revolution," thus comes out of what Harold correctly diagnoses as "a moral enthusiasm, a romantic fervour" (375, 389, 379). At the end of the novel, the narrator briefly states that Esther and Felix live with their son in an unnamed English town where they continue their reformist work. The narrator thus folds the transcendence that has accrued to their characters back into the world while also allowing for its distribution across the classes about to be enfranchised in 1866. From the perspective of Eliot's contemporary readers, Esther, Felix, and young Felix could be any members of the 'respectable' working classes. At the same time, the refusal to name a determinate place maintains their separation from the actual world: For all intents and purposes, they reside in the no-place of utopia.

*Chapter Two*

## From Working Classes to Working Class

In the final scene of George Gissing's *The Nether World,* Jane Snowdon and Sidney Kirkwood meet in Abney Park Cemetery over the grave of Jane's grandfather, Michael. Looking at Michael's grave, the ordinary passerby would have no inkling of the outstanding fortune that Michael left at his death, nor would they know the vagaries of circumstance that brought him to that fortune, nor the sheer ill luck that saw him die in the days between destroying one will and composing another. All that remains in the churchyard is a "plain headstone," the inscription comprising "simply a name, with dates of birth and death."[1] To those not acquainted with his unique story, the headstone inscribed "Michael Snowdon" is presumably but one of many instances of a type; "plain" in the sense of being undistinguished and undistinguishable.

Similarly, though the reader has come to know the particularities and peculiarities of their stories, Jane and Sidney, too, are beset by indistinction at the novel's close. The promise that they would grow into distinguished citizens has sadly not come to pass; thus Sidney is "neither an artist, nor a leader of men in the battle for justice" and Jane is "no savior of society by the force of a superb example; no daughter of the people, holding their wealth in trust for the people's needs" (391-2). Both are, pointedly, "unmarked" in the same fashion that Michael's grave is "plain." And yet, just when they seem to collapse into the undifferentiated mass of the nether world, Gissing intimates that Jane and Sidney are, to some degree, unique: "Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own" (392). In the rhetorical move from negations to comparatives, Gissing distinguishes Jane and Sidney from the mass of

London poor, albeit ever so slightly. Gissing finally leaves Jane and Sidney with the assurance that "[s]orrow certainly awaited" them, as it awaits all the nether world, although for hearts as strong as theirs he allows that defeat in "the humble aims that they had set themselves" is not assured, only lurking "perchance" (392).

Michael's plan to raise Jane up as a leader of her class without differentiating her from that class both serves as the novel's main plot and, in the mode of characterization it licenses, supplies the novel's most pressing formal question: how to balance the demands of class representativeness or typicality with the individuality demanded of a protagonist? Jane and Sidney's divergence from the type of their class, and the circumscribed possibilities this divergence leaves open to them, is slight enough that generations of readers have passed it over. Jane and Sidney are often seen as types who exist in a profoundly deterministic space, but the novel's mode of characterization, I want to suggest, is more complicated than it has seemed.[2] Rather than oppose individuals to crowds, as John Plotz's *The Crowd* shows was common across texts from an earlier period in the history of reform, or protagonists to minor characters, as Alex Woloch does in *The One vs. the Many,* Gissing telescopes masses and individuals, minor and major characters, in *The Nether World* such that key properties from each accrue to the other.[3] Jane and Sidney, as they represent the mass of the nether world, are bound by its average because to diverge too far—to actually become the "leader" or "savior" which had at one time seemed possible, or simply to make it out of the working class and into the bourgeoisie—would mean that the characters cease to be representative. And yet they do diverge, retaining their individual personhood in the mode of "more or less." Crucially, the personhood that Jane and Sidney retain applies in turn to the class they represent. As they are bound by their class in their inflection toward the average, the class itself becomes more unified than ever before in its

individualized embodiment. This commutative relation between class and individual allows the former to be invested with public sympathy and seen as capable of self-regulation on the pattern of the individual. At the same time, the modicum of possibility that remains for Jane and Sidney, marked here by the operation of chance ("perchance"), also adheres to their class. The nether world may be a predominantly deterministic space, as readers of the novel have long agreed, yet though it diminishes possibilities for social change, it does not erase them entirely.

Raymond Williams famously reads the scene I sketch above as espousing a quintessentially "Victorian solution" to a social problem: "a dedication to charity, sunk to an almost hidden scale, within an essential resignation."[4] Subsequent critics, most notably Fredric Jameson and Lauren Goodlad, have tended to follow Williams's lead.[5] As Jameson intimates, the lack of any narrated "upper world" in the novel seems to keep the characters in their place and to blunt any politically revolutionary energies the text may generate by denying "the nether world" a class antagonist. Similarly, though she gives Gissing more credit for his "radical insights" than Williams and Jameson, Goodlad ultimately follows both writers in lamenting that Gissing denies his characters "viable political agency" because he is ultimately unable to square his materialist critique with his commitment to liberal individualism.[6] I will argue, however, that what Jameson reads as *The Nether World*'s attempt to avoid proletarian politics in its recourse to "the notion of 'the people,' as a kind of general grouping of the poor and 'underprivileged' of all kinds" is in fact the precondition of the form of working-class politics that emerges virtually simultaneously with the novel's publication.[7] The novel's aggregative mode of characterization, in other words, is fraught with ambivalent possibilities that outstrip Gissing's professed pessimism. On the one hand, *The Nether World* represents a reconstitution of liberal individualism on the level of the aggregate. On the other hand, it is precisely the breaking of barriers within what came to be

viewed and to view itself as the singular "working class" that served as the basis for the emergence of class-based political parties and the creation of the industrial welfare state in Britain.[8] Rather than Williams's "essential resignation," the novel's final scene represents the diminished key of liberal reform in which the working class learns to posit its demands and the public to embrace them.

*The Nether World* appeared at precisely the moment when, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, "the plural 'working classes' were fused into the singular 'working class'" through the Labour movement, which itself eschewed "riot and insurrection" for organized demonstrations, meetings, and election campaigns.[9] Almost simultaneous with the novel's publication in the summer of 1889, the massive London dock strike began to change the discourse around labor organization in Britain. H. Lewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash's definitive account of the strike, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike, as Told by Two East Londoners*, which appeared that winter, soon after the strike was settled in favor of the dockers, draws on the same characterological resources as *The Nether World*, first to unite different strata of workers and then to garner broad, cross-class sympathy for their demands. As Gissing does with Jane and Sidney, Smith and Nash focalize the dockers in the person of strike leader and working-class politician John Burns, to whom Gissing, having partially depicted him in his 1886 novel *Demos,* was no stranger. This earlier novel and a previously unnoticed contemporaneous allusion to the strike in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* provide context for a nascent discourse that found stability in the alignment of individuals and aggregates.

What manifests as pessimism in Gissing's novel is turned to reformist account in the dock strike, shorn, to be sure, of revolutionary possibility, but nonetheless laying the foundation for social change. Gissing's mode of characterization in *The Nether World* overlaps with the

form of class politics taking shape in representations of the dock strike, a resonance lost on otherwise perceptive Marxian critics like Jameson, who dismiss liberal-reformist politics as an effective means of political change. But for contemporary observers like Smith and Nash, as well as Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the dock strike represented, respectively, "an experiment [in] constitutional government" and a catalyst for "constitutional" socialism.[10] These associations suggest that the transformation of liberalism in the ensuing decades was predicated on a strategy of containment as well as concession, in that autonomous working-class politics becomes a reality precisely because of this reconfiguration. This chapter thus contributes to debates about the ascension of collectivism and displacement of individualism in the latter third of the nineteenth century.[11] This political recalibration, I argue, drew on the resources of novelistic characterization to reconstitute liberal individualism at the level of the collective.

**The Crowd in the Man**

The London dock strike of 1889 crystalized around a class of labor that had frightened middle-class journalists and politicians throughout the 1880s: the "residuum." Coined by John Bright during the 1867 debate over what became the Second Reform Act, the term connoted poverty and dependence, and thus unfitness to vote. By tagging the lowest class as a "residue" Bright intended to diminish the threat to an expansion of the franchise. For others, like Matthew Arnold, the residuum was a "vast, miserable, unmanageable" mass, a savage horde "sunken" in the very heart of civilization.[12] Both Bright and Arnold, however, intended to posit a hard line of distinction between those members of the working class who could be trusted to keep order, and thus could be trusted with the franchise, and those who could not. "A man who has a house, who has a wife, who has children, who has furniture, whose life is marked by steady industry," Bright

argued in the "residuum" speech, was entitled to vote precisely because he "need[ed] so little governance as the people of this country need."[13] In 1867, the debate about enfranchisement turned on whether the working class was capable of self-government on the model of middle-class individualism.

The New Unionism that emerged from the dock strike in 1889 challenged what had been the accepted radical view in 1867, breaking down distinctions between the residuum and the 'respectable' working class in favor of broad-based solidarity. The Old Unions, organized on a guild basis, emphasized self-help and eschewed electoral politics. The New Unionism, by contrast, was predicated on vertical organization of all classes of worker within a given industry. During the dock strike, this meant that the better-paid, regularly employed workers went on strike to obtain concessions aimed predominantly at improving the lot of 'casual' hourly laborers. The strike thus began to break down previously obtaining distinctions between the (plural) working classes and helped forge a sense of solidarity among the nascent (singular) working class. What is more, the New Unionism sought to organize workers from all trades and classes politically, advocating for Members of Parliament drawn from the working class themselves and for legislation such as unemployment insurance. In redeeming the residuum, the dock strike thus made an implicit case for the politicization of the poor and began to undo political discourses framed in terms of respectability. Key to this process was the way in which accounts of the strike individualized the masses and massified the individual.

H. Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash published *The Story of the Dockers' Strike, Told by Two East Londoners*, still the most comprehensive account of the strike, in December 1889, roughly three months after it had ended. Smith and Nash were firsthand observers of the strike, but their suggestion of amateurism in the book's subtitle is misleading. Smith had recently

contributed to the first volume of Charles Booth's monumental *Labour and Life of the People*, where the docks, as employer of last resort, received prominent treatment, both in Booth's introduction and the entry on them prepared by Beatrice Potter (later Webb).[14] To some extent, Smith and Nash put Booth's methodology to practical work in their account of the strike and its relation to London's poorest classes. One of the most significant achievements of Booth's intervention, which Smith and Nash take up in their narrative of the strike, was to shrink what had grown to Matthew Arnold's "ungovernable masses" in the public imagination back to a truly residual portion of the population. As Booth put it, the "hordes of barbarians" supposed "one day to overwhelm civilization" simply did not exist.[15] Instead, there was a relatively small percentage of the very poorest with no hope of supporting themselves who existed by sponging on society and had the effect of pulling down those above them. The solution, he suggested, was first to enumerate and then to isolate the residuum.[16]

Smith and Nash's association with Booth has continued to influence scholarly accounts of the dock strike. The authors of *The Story of the Dockers' Strike* depart from their mentor, however, in dramatizing the breaking down of distinctions within the working classes to a far greater degree than they emphasize isolating the casual residuum. For Smith and Nash, the dockers as a whole are inextricable from the casual residuum; they are, for example, "the lowest layer of all…not a class, but the drift of all classes" (24). To be sure, the four-page conclusion to *The Story of the Dockers' Strike* gives a somewhat misleading impression with its explicit invocation of Booth and seeming endorsement of a policy of "squeez[ing] out the residuum," a conclusion belied by the body of the text (164). Gareth Steadman Jones thus makes an understandable mistake in his important account of the strike by drawing almost exclusively from Smith and Nash's conclusion to argue that the effect of the strike was "to establish a clear

distinction between the respectable working class and the residuum."[17] While Jones and I agree that the strike and the mode of trade unionism that grew from it served to incorporate the working class into the social system, the narrative portions of *The Story of the Dockers' Strike* along with other contemporaneous accounts achieve this end by fusing all layers of the nascent working class into a composite actor.

This fusion was possible in part because of formal contradictions already apparent in Booth's *Labour and Life*. For all his avowed aim to isolate the residuum, Booth's mode of classifying tended itself to proliferate distinctions to the point where they were in danger of breaking down completely. Within each subset of the working class, there were always yet more distinctions to be made. Booth's Class B, for example, which occupied the crucial conceptual space between the "undetectable" Class A, mostly criminals and vagabonds, and the desperate but redeemable Class C, could itself be subdivided between those "in want" and those even more perilously "in distress."[18] Despite Booth's tabulation of a staggering number of numbers, it was hard not to conclude that, in the words of one commentator, rather than hard distinctions between classes there was a continuum "by gradations imperceptibly darkening."[19] Booth himself repeatedly points out that the classes "melt into each other by insensible degrees" and that the divisions he imposes, despite the pretense to mathematical objectivity, "are divisions of sentiment rather than positive fact."[20] It might be expected, given that Booth had made his fortune in shipping, that the docks would serve as a prominent example in his general discussion of the classes. The striking fact about Booth's frequent recourse to the docks as an example, however, is that they almost always appear as a problem for or an exception to his abstract class system. The boundaries for casual laborers, who make up a large and prominent section of dock

laborers, are constantly in flux, which makes it especially hard, Booth concedes, to impose the kinds of distinctions his system relies on at the docks.

Smith and Nash's discussion of casual dock labor dramatizes the internal breakdown of Booth's system by simultaneously blurring and proliferating distinctions. The main division among the dockers was between the "permanent" men, who received set wages and had regular working hours, and the "casuals," who queued at the dock gates each morning in hopes of being engaged. Even when they were taken on, the casuals could not be sure of the hours they would receive, and they were paid significantly less than the permanent men. Smith and Nash, like most observers, were impressed by the extent to which the permanent men were willing to risk their own comparatively desirable position in order to improve the lot of the casuals by staying out on strike even when they had nothing to gain, thus cutting across the stratifications that had previously characterized labor unions. Not only did the permanent-casual distinction break down during the strike; the closer Smith and Nash looked the less stable the "casual" category seemed. Among casuals there was a further distinction to be made: "preferred" men did not receive a regular wage nor were they guaranteed regular hours, like the truly casual laborer, but they were the habitual first choice of the bosses who engaged the work gangs each morning, making their employment less contingent in practice. The Boothian strata thus break down in both directions: permanent and casual classes of docker blur in the nascent solidarity that the strike fostered, while the casual class itself was comprised of different kinds of labor that could provide the basis for an entirely different categorization.

Despite the authors' professed indebtedness to Booth, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike* largely depicts the breaking down of distinctions among the dockers and their fusion into an aggregate body. But the breakdown also presented Smith and Nash with a narrative problem.

Booth's classes were amenable to typification; if the classes were relatively stable, it was easy enough to pick out or construct a figure who embodied its characteristics.[21] During the dock strike, however, it was quickly becoming apparent that the various strata of the working classes were themselves diverse even as those strata had begun to fuse into a singular entity. There really was no representative docker, nor even a representative casual, and yet, paradoxically, such a figure was all the more necessary now that the dockers, and by extension the working class at large, had forged a corporate identity. It was, moreover, difficult to invest a diffuse entity like 'dockers' or 'the working class' with the kind of sympathy that would bolster their claims among the public.

The solution, for Smith and Nash especially, but also for the press at large, was to organize narratives around an individual who both stands for and stands apart from the mass. Smith and Nash implicitly align individuals and masses in a commutative relationship in order to depict the working class as singular and self-governing and to enable readers to invest the kinds of emotions in a corporate body that they would normally reserve for fictional individuals. The undisputed central figure of *The Story of the Dockers' Strike* was John Burns, a charismatic artisan from Battersea who had risen to prominence as the leader of large working-class demonstrations in the latter half of the 1880s. In Smith and Nash's account, Burns' personality comes, on one hand, to "pervade the field of battle, and make itself felt among the scattered millions who day after day follow the strike from afar," and, on the other, to express the will of the crowd as their representative (36). Accounts of the strike stress that Burns is exceptional but simultaneously figure his exceptionalism as never diverging too far from the aggregate type he represents.

Burns' career traced a path from the Trafalgar riots of 1886 and 1887 to the disciplined demonstrations of the dock strike in 1889, and from working-class union leader to council member, MP, and eventually Cabinet Minister. He is thus instructive for sketching the boundaries within which the mode of representation to which Gissing ascribes is amenable to reform impulses. Like Sidney Kirkwood, Burns identified primarily as an artisan throughout the eighties; even later in his career, when he had become a professional politician, he argued that trade union leadership should be restricted to those actively employed as workers. Burns first rose to prominence in 1886, when he led a demonstration in Trafalgar Square, scaling its iconic stone lions in order to deliver a speech and rallying the demonstrators to him by way of a conspicuous red flag. "The man with the red flag," as the press soon dubbed him, found himself held over on charges of inciting a riot after some of the demonstrators clashed with members of the conservative Carlton Club. His defense from the dock of the Old Bailey, in which he argued that he was trying to lead the demonstrators away from the square and out of trouble, soon bolstered his fame; the Social Democratic Federation had it printed and distributed it as a pamphlet. Several witnesses, however, claimed they had heard Burns inciting the crowd to violence, and he did himself no favors when he subsequently delivered a fiery speech in Hyde Park denouncing the English Constitution.[22]

Though he was acquitted, Burns became associated with mob violence and public disorder. He was arrested the following year for leading another Trafalgar demonstration, this time to protest the imprisonment of the Irish Home Rule MP William O'Brien. The event was a debacle. Police picketed the Thames bridges and barricaded Trafalgar, effectively blocking Burns and others from entering. Burns was once again arrested, and this time sentenced to a short stint in jail. The failed demonstration spurred a transformation in Burns. Organizing the

demonstration brought him into contact with Liberals and Radicals, who were outraged on grounds of free speech and the right of assembly. Whereas William Morris had stood his bail for the first trial, this time his co-defendant, the MP Cunninghame Graham, was defended by H.H. Asquith, the future Liberal Prime Minister in whose Cabinet Burns would later serve. Burns began to decry the lack of working-class organization and the self-defeating unruliness of the Trafalgar demonstrations. Early in 1889 he quit the SDF, and that spring, just prior to the dock strike, he leveraged his fame to win a seat on the newly formed London County Council.

Burns was at a turning point in the summer of 1889. He had not yet succumbed to what Beatrice Webb would call a "fatty complacency with the world as it is" that saw him resist crucial reforms as President of the Board of Trade, nor had he yet engaged in the jealous partisanship that would alienate him from Keir Hardie and the Independent Labour Party.[23] As Burns ascended in Parliament, he came less and less to identify himself with the class he presumed to lead, but in 1889, though the egotism may have been discernable already, he was only a year out of jail and still identified strongly in both the public imagination and his own self-image as a working-class radical. Burns, as he appears in Smith and Nash's account as well as in various newspaper reports, embodies and thus governs the demonstrators without ever being fully distinguishable from them. Although Burns stands apart from the masses as the acknowledged leader of the strike, his leadership is predicated on his likeness to the men who follow him. So, while commentators invariably refer to Burns' pervasive personality and "magical" influence over the strikers (73), they also repeatedly marvel at his "mysterious ability to epitomise the whole struggle in his own person."[24] This invertible relationship ties his limited exceptionalism to the otherwise anonymous mass he leads.

Burns rehabilitated his image as "the man with the red flag" during the dock strike, emerging in contemporaneous accounts as the man in the bright yellow straw hat. The hat made Burns instantly recognizable and figures prominently in most press accounts of the strike: Smith and Nash go so far as to call it, with only slight irony, "the pivot around which the strike turned" (117). Burns' hat became the tangible symbol of the strike's orderliness as compared with the earlier Trafalgar demonstrations. According to Smith and Nash, the police suggested at the outset that Burns should wear something conspicuous, so that they might know where to find "the champion of law and order" and came up with the straw hat. In his Fabian Society biography of Burns, G.D.H. Cole gives a slightly different version of the story, on which the police give Burns the hat so that he can more easily command the attention of the crowd. In either case, the yellow hat picked Burns out of the crowd as the guarantor of orderliness. But rather than suggesting that the police coopted Burns, the hat was their implicit admission that Burns "could keep order where they were powerless without his aid."[25] The hat distinguished Burns from the rest of the crowd, but only so that he could more thoroughly identify the crowd with himself and vice versa. Observers noted what one of his subsequent biographers was to call his ability "to identify his audience with him by identifying himself with it."[26] The relative distinction that Burns' conspicuous yellow hat symbolized never removed him entirely from his milieu; he remained a type of the working class, albeit a type inflected toward the above-average, through which the press could focalize the otherwise diffuse crowds.

This tension between representativeness and distinction plays out formally in Smith and Nash's set-piece narratives of the strike, which usually begin with a survey of the assembled dockers before zeroing in on Burns. On the important first Sunday of the strike, for example, they describe the initial assemblage as consisting of "seedy dockers and sturdy stevedores,

sailors and firemen, in the fresh enthusiasm of their new trade union, weather-stained lightermen, and coalies cleaned up for Sunday" with "not a few engineers and other skilled artisans" on the outskirts of the crowd (60). Booth's statistical classificatory system implicitly organizes this description, wherein "seedy dockers and sturdy stevedores" occupy the center of the normal curve and smaller numbers of engineers and skilled artisans exist on the periphery. Rather than stratifying the crowd, however, the description of variance prepares for the fusion of the heterogeneous dockers into a single entity, usually represented by Burns. When Burns exits a meeting with the dock managers, he is immediately "borne by the crowd down the stairs and through the entrance hall" (70). This imbrication of Burns and the crowd allows any capacity for governance ascribed to him to pass in turn to the crowd, which can then be seen to discipline itself on the model of the individual. As Burns addresses the crowd not to give marching orders but "to ascertain the dimensions and the feelings of the crowd," so the crowd figures as an individual: "The assemblage was large," a *Times* reporter notes, "but of one mind."[27] It is this relationship between Burns and the dockers that Smith and Nash have in mind when they note that the crowd "had its moods—was merry on some days, taciturn on others, laughed at the Dock House sometimes, howled at it at others, but it never lost command over itself or caused serious anxiety to its leaders or to the citizens of London" (86). The crowds thus signified as an individual, capable of expressing a unified will, which is one reason why the dock owners' attempts to turn the various strata against one another failed.[28]

The extent to which the crowd could be figured as an individual was tied to the perception of self-discipline. Burns offered a vector through which what would otherwise have been "a disorganised and over-numerous mass" could be corporately individualized, disciplined, and thus, finally, invested with sympathy where it had earlier evoked fear.[29] The same *Times*

reporter who had noted that the dockers were of one mind thus goes on to dwell on the ways in which the "pitiable" dockers had evoked "a very widespread expression of sympathy," a sentiment that Smith and Nash similarly tie to the strike "welding a heterogenous mass of unskilled labourers into compact working organisation" (169).[30] Because Burns "epitomize[d]" the dockers, to know him was thus to know them—not because he controlled the crowd, but because the crowd and Burns were super-imposed on one another. The corollary of individualizing the mass of the working class on the model of a figure like Burns, indeed through and as Burns, is that it comes to be seen as self-regulating. The collective self-command the dockers displayed left onlookers convinced that they "possessed enough brains and intelligence to rule themselves" and that, therefore, "they would be no longer governed by men who were not of themselves."[31] The agency of the masses is thus in a crucial sense diminished, as in exchange for public sympathy they relinquish the claims to revolutionary change that characterized the Trafalgar riots. To the extent that individuals identify as working class, their fate is bounded by the aggregate. In return, groups like the dockers receive reforms on the model of "more or less" that characterizes the ending of *The Nether World*.

**Taming the Crowd**

Before turning to *The Nether World,* I want to examine briefly two novels that will throw light on its mode of characterization and its importance in the evolving conceptions of the working class that came to be centered on the dock strike. Gissing's 1886 novel *Demos* is deeply connected to the protagonists of the 1889 dock strike and the conceptual framework that underlies Smith and Nash's account. It is the only novel that Booth singles out as offering an accurate account of the typical East Ender in *Labour and Life*.[32] Given Booth's own admission

that he had little firsthand experience of poverty, Gissing's novel almost certainly influenced the narrative descriptions that accompany his presentation of statistical data. The novel's climactic riot scene, moreover, has subsequently been taken as a synecdoche of Gissing's view of the potential for working class unrest. When Jones refers in the course of his account of Booth and the dock strike to "the barbarians of Gissing's novels who would sack the West End and overturn civilization," he surely has this earlier novel, and not the circumscribed working class of *The Nether World*, in mind.[33]

The relationship between *Demos*'s protagonist, Richard Mutimer, and John Burns is similarly direct, though somewhat more complicated. As John Goode has argued, Gissing had Burns' role in the Trafalgar riots in mind when he composed the novel's culminating riot scene.[34] Gissing had not been a spectator of the Trafalgar riot, but, as he wrote to his sister Margaret when he learned of the event the following day, he was keenly aware that it could draw attention to *Demos*, the final volume of which he had recently begun.[35] Several similarities identify the riot in the novel with the one at Trafalgar: both include competing factions of the working class, both involve public meetings that break into riot as they move from their initial meeting place to the city at large, and both involve a leader who is subsumed by the very forces he has deigned to lead. Gissing also may have known Burns personally at this point, perhaps from one of the Socialist League meetings he had attended at William Morris's house.[36] Still, Gissing began *Demos* well before Burns rose to prominence as a leader of working-class demonstrations and there is scant overlap between his biography and Mutimer's. As a working-class leader whose credentials rest on his likeness to those whom he leads, and whose rise to prominence thus creates a problem in that it potentially distinguishes him from those he represents, Burns and

Mutimer are generically similar. Gissing only consciously aligns the two, however, in the riot that ends Mutimer's life.

*Demos* centers on Mutimer, a working-class Londoner who inherits a suburban factory as next of kin to an estranged relative who has seemingly died intestate. Mutimer's endeavor to develop the countryside of Wanley on what he calls a socialist basis deteriorates as he distinguishes himself more and more from his class, for example by turning his back on his working-class fiancé and marrying a daughter of the local gentry. A copy of the missing will, which all had thought destroyed, turns up, leaving the property to a son who has no desire to develop it and returning Mutimer firmly to the class from which he has alienated himself. Ousted from the factory at New Wanley, Mutimer capitalizes on his fame by developing a new scheme for "Democratic Capitalism," acting as a bank for union members and lending the money at interest.[37] Arguing that the working class requires "personal influence" and a "personal interest" in their leader, not "a *movement*" but "a *man*," Mutimer's scheme explicitly distinguishes him from the class he is to lead (412, 403). But before he can become the "First President of the English Republic" Mutimer foolishly invests in what turns out to be a fictitious Irish Dairy Company (429). His subsequent loss of the workers' money gives his opponents among the revolutionary wing of the socialists an opening to attack the man and his movement, and results in a mass meeting that descends into riot. Mutimer loses his life to the mob.

Critics who cite Gissing's professed antipathy to crowds often have scenes like *Demos*'s climactic riot in mind. It represents a strand of Gissing's thinking that is indeed antipathetic to working-class crowds and aggregates of all kinds, but one that I am arguing is partly amended in *The Nether World*. Not long before the riot, Mutimer muses on the kind of demonstration that would prove so effective in 1889: "Why don't they march in a body to the West End?" he asks,

"why don't they make a huge procession and go about the streets in an orderly way…I could lead them, I feel sure I could" (429). The problem in *Demos* is that Mutimer has distinguished himself too far from the body of the working class to act as its head. The initial meeting, which had been called so that Mutimer could explain the Irish Dairy fiasco, goes well at the start, and only definitively turns against him when someone brings to light the story of his earlier abandonment of his working-class lover. Thereafter, Mutimer is "carried yards away in an irresistible rush," swept along against his will by "the main current of the crowd," perilously and tenuously keeping his distance from it (453, 454). Gissing thus figures the riot as a synecdoche of the novel, which has been the story of Mutimer's attempt both to differentiate himself from his class and to lead it without being subsumed by it. As in the novel at large, for a while it works. Mutimer finds refuge in the apartment of Emma Vine, the woman he had earlier abandoned, and seems for a moment to be safely separated from "the multitude which made but one ravening monster" (456). But when Mutimer leers from the window, certain that the crowd is "so tight packed they haven't a hand among them to aim anything" he exposes himself to a missile fired from one of those anonymous and supposedly useless hands (456). Killed by the aggregate multitude he has attempted to organize, the riot undoes Mutimer's nascent individuality.

The culminating riot in *Demos* plays out with naturalistic savagery a scene familiar across mid-Victorian industrial and social problem novels, wherein the middle-class reformer is undone by the multitudes whom he or she has attempted to cultivate. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, to take just one example, the reformist heroine Margaret Hale finds herself in the middle of a threatening strike when she visits her love-interest Thornton's factory. Like Mutimer, Margaret and the Thorntons barricade themselves in a room with a vantage of the

assembled workers, a disposition that heightens the contrast between former's individuality and the latter's anonymous animality. The strikers are inhuman and undifferentiated, an ominous threat, until Margaret catches sight of Boucher, a worker whom she knows and who serves for her as the locus of stability. Seeing the individual, she sees "human beings," able, finally, to "read" the crowd.[38] Although the sense of safety that the individual represents is short-lived in this scene, the novel's reformist resolution turns on the individual as the locus of stability that this crucial scene has introduced. *Demos* can be distinguished from fiction like *North and South* primarily by Gissing's pessimistic refusal to differentiate the individual from the mass, at least when it comes to the working class, and the resulting failure of any kind of reform. The opposition of individual to mass, the threat represented by the latter and the sympathy that can be evoked by the former, remains, however, substantially the same across both novels. But by the advent of the dock strike and the publication of *The Nether World* what Jameson calls "the primal nineteenth-century middle-class terror of the mob" has been transformed into the reassuring predictability of the aggregate.[39]

With characteristic lucidity, Sherlock Holmes will bring together this nexus of working-class agitation, statistical discourse, and novelistic characterization. When Arthur Conan Doyle sat down to his famous dinner with Oscar Wilde and the editor of *Lippincott's* magazine on August 30, 1889, the dock strike was at its height. The assembly that morning had been the largest yet, according to that day's *Times*.[40] The Sherlock Holmes story Doyle was commissioned to write, *The Sign of the Four*, would appear in *Lippincott's* early the next year; the composition of the text thus spans the period of the strike and its aftermath. Resonances of the dock strike pervade the novel if only we take our magnifying glasses close enough. The waterfront setting; the manner of solidarity proclaimed by the Four—"we should each always act

for all, so that none might take advantage"—and symbolically expressed in their sign of four horizontally connected crosses; the launch owner's son's demand for "a shillin,'" the same concession demanded by the dockers: all of these evince a preoccupation with the strike. The most important of the occluded references to the strike occurs just before the climactic chase scene, as Holmes and Watson stand on the deck of a police launch moored just opposite the Tower of London. Holmes calls Watson's attention to "the swarm over yonder in the gaslight" coming from work at the docks:

> "[W]hile the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician."[41]

Given the history of the strike, and the fact that the Tower was the site of the dockers' daily mass meetings, the passage reads as a commentary on the newly realized predictability of the laboring masses. The individual had been the locus of stability for the kind of liberalism that took hold in Britain in the nineteenth century and the masses a source of anxiety; but now the situation has reversed, with the law of large numbers offering the salve of predictability.

Yet there is something odd in Holmes's pronouncement. As if the punchline to an elaborate joke only the master reasoner himself can appreciate, just after Holmes delivers his monologue on the statistical regularity of the masses, what are undoubtedly two of the most singular individuals in all of London, the Andaman Islander Tonga and the peg-legged Jonathan Small, shoot out of Jacobson's Yard and into Holmes's ken, just as he had predicted. It always goes this way for Holmes: the individuals he tracks always (or almost always) conform to

probabilities. This, then, is the punchline to Holmes's joke: you can never tell what any one man will do; but know the aggregate and you have a pretty good chance of knowing your man, especially if he is a member of the lower class, and even more so if he happens to be fictional.

Recent criticism by Catherine Gallagher, Jesse Rosenthal, and Audrey Jaffe has brought attention to the dawning perception of a disjunction between aggregates and individuals that resulted from the evolution of statistical discourse over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century.[42] Building on the insights of historians of science, Victorianists have become attuned to the newly invigorated theorization of chance that took hold near the end of the century.[43] *The Nether World* appears at a moment of transition, when probability theory was on the cusp of a revolution, a shift away from the theory of determinism that had predominated earlier in the century and toward a reconceptualization of individual indeterminacy. In this moment, the individual can still be seen as the guarantor of order, on the model of disciplinary individualism that Mary Poovey, following Michel Foucault, has identified as predominant earlier in the century, even as masses come to be seen as more and more orderly and individuals as less and less predictable, a lesson Holmes has driven home for us.[44] Conceptualizations of the individual and the mass thus tend to pass back and forth between one another, often in an attempt to express the statistical regularity of aggregates in human form. As I argued at length above in the case of Burns, the one comes to incorporate the many and the many concomitantly can be depicted as one, though in a way that does not necessarily reduce them to their average.

Statisticians, like novelists, devised characters in order to unite aggregates and individuals. One famous example, Adolphe Quetelet's *l'homme moyen*, "average man," largely coincided with the debate in the second third of the nineteenth century about what Hacking has called "statistical fatalism," which held that "if a statistical law applies to a group of people, then

the freedom of individuals was constrained."[45] To be a member of a group, in other words, was to be constrained by its average. Quetelet posited average man as the physical and moral representation of a nation, the average of its people's attributes, and thus held that for average man, "all things will occur in conformity with the mean results obtained for a society."[46] Importantly, Quetelet did not posit average man as a statistical abstraction, as later statisticians would figure their results. Instead, he came increasingly to think of average man as having ontological primacy: akin to philosophical idealism, average man was real, and individuals existing in the world were mere deviations from the divine average. For Quetelet, then, the individual is a fraction of the species, part of a whole that exceeds him. And for Quetelet this is a one-way relationship: Unlike what we saw in the dock strike, the mass is not internal to the individual. Quetelet thus encourages thinking of the individual as a deviation from a more ontologically primary average that exists over and above them. One cannot see the average in the individual so much as one can array the individual in a distribution that clusters around the average.

Francis Galton's composite portraiture is in many ways the late-nineteenth century heir to Quetelet's average man. Galton differs from Quetelet, however, in two ways that are crucial for understanding the relationship between aggregate and individual in the moment of the dock strike and *The Nether World*. Whereas Quetelet concerned himself with society-wide aggregations, Galton trained his lens on narrower criminal and ethnic types. In doing so, Galton recalibrated his focus from the average to the exception. Galton found that exceptional cases—exceptional in all the wrong ways—evinced their own form of regularity. Quetelet's average man had little to say about individual cases; they deviated by necessity, which was the whole reason for positing an average man in the first place. But when Galton put his various subgroups in front

of the camera and proceeded to superimpose their partially exposed portraits on top of one another, he found that society's outliers substantially overlapped. The resultant portrait was a "generalised picture" or "imaginary figure," but it retained nonetheless what he called "a curious air of individuality" even as it "exactly resemble[d] none of its components."[47] Thus for Galton what appears at first to be the site of anarchy and social unrest is in fact possessed of a measure of regularity all its own. Not only, as Galton put it a text that appeared alongside *The Nether World* in 1889, was it true that "the huger the mob, the greater the apparent anarchy, the more perfect [the law of frequency of error's] sway."[48] The mob could also be given a human face.

Where Quetelet placed the individual in the mass, Galton's composites emphasize the mass in the individual. The "ghost of individual peculiarities," or the way in which the individual diverges from the mass, exists side by side with the common qualities that in many ways overwhelm them. The mass and the individual can thus come in and out of focus, without the need to posit an abstract entity over and above the individual; this entity instead comes out of the individual. What was ideal, or at least exceeded all instantiations, could now be seen as immanent in individuals, who carried the aggregate with them as much as they made up a piece of a picture that exceeded them. Galton's composite photographs speak to the impetus to unite the individual and the mass across an epistemological gap that was just beginning to separate them. To typify the individual was to make them as predictable as an aggregate; to individualize the mass was to give a human face to what Victorians had often figured as an unruly mob.

**Reforming *The Nether World***

The argument I am making is essentially a formal one: Gissing can disavow any possibility of change, as he seems to do at times in *The Nether World*, and yet his mode of

characterization serves as the precondition for the reforms that were to establish the welfare state over the course of the ensuing several decades. Like *The Story of the Dockers' Strike*, *The Nether World* focalizes the masses who are its subject through individuals who are broadly representative of their social class, but not assimilable to its mean. At the same time, it downplays the threat of the residuum; while Gissing devotes more space to the poorest of the poor than Smith and Nash, he nonetheless suggests that they are bounded by the regularity of the exception and thus need not be the subject of intrusive policing from the upper world. Jane and Sidney at the end of the novel evoke the same kind of pathos that John Burns was to mobilize during the dock strike. Above the average, below the truly exceptional: Jane and Sidney are representative in a way that skews the class toward themselves and thus allows for the disposition of society to be thought of as non-static without, however, overturning the class system as such.

In arguing for this qualified sense in which the novel ends on a note open to reform my argument runs against a long tradition of emphasizing the rigid determinism of *The Nether World*.[49] The novel signals openness to social reform in part by its structural reliance on chance events for plotting, a facet of the novel that has been generally overlooked. While it is true that the chance occurrences around which Gissing plots *The Nether World* tend to even out over the course of the novel, leaving things substantially, although not quite exactly, as they were, their prominent role in the novel nonetheless signifies the contingency of the social world they depict. The novel opens on a series of near misses between Jane and her estranged grandfather Michael among the warren-like streets of Clerkenwell. Michael has returned from Australia with a fortune that he has inherited from his younger son, also named Michael, who made it "chiefly out of horse-dealing and what they call 'land-grabbing'—buying sheep-runs over the heads of

squatters, to be bought out again at a high profit" before drowning in a freak accident (176). Once Michael returns to London, the fortune functions as the engine of a number of plots: among them Michael's plan to turn Jane into a secular saint of and for the poor; Sidney's refusal to marry Jane and decision to marry his earlier love-interest Clara instead; and Joseph Snowdon's and the Peckovers' schemes to inherit the money. Michael initially names Jane as his sole heir, but in a moment of doubt about his plan for her, he destroys his will; he dies the day before he is to dictate a new one. Not Joseph's machinations, but the arbitrary operation of chance determines his inheritance: as he says, "[a]ll the thought and the trouble that I've gone through this last year, when I might have taken it easy and waited for chance to make me rich!" (328). Fittingly for a fortune derived from speculation in land, Joseph loses it by "commercial speculation on a great scale" on the American stock market, thus cancelling out the initial disposition of chance and returning the nether world to equilibrium (389).

The mode of characterization that Gissing employs in *The Nether World* is part of his solution to a dilemma that beset him just as he was beginning the novel. Two entries in his diary clarify the case. On the one hand, as Gissing was to remind himself just before finishing the novel, his purpose was "to suggest that the idealistic social reformer is of far less use than the humble discharger of human duty."[50] Comments like this one, and comments disparaging of the working class more generally, abound in Gissing's published writings. On the other hand, after visiting his estranged wife Marianne Helen ("Nell") Gissing's squalid lodgings on her death, he committed the following oft-quoted lines to his diary: "Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind."[51] Whereas the former comment disparages social reform, the latter suggests that Gissing's testimony might be meaningful for social change. Gissing recorded this thought just a few weeks before he began

writing *The Nether World*, when he was thinking over the broad contours of the new novel, and the experience of his estranged wife's death obviously influenced what he wrote. But while Nell's death may to some extent account for Gissing's change in tone from his early comments, the comment cuts against his skepticism of reform and general disparagement of the working class. Gissing distrusts the poor in the aggregate and at the same time feels the need to protest their condition in a way that goes beyond the individual, exceptional case. Aggregation can lay the extent of the problem bare, highlighting the sense in which individuals are not responsible for their circumstances, but in abstracting it is also dehumanizing, like the "idealistic social reformer" Gissing distrusts.

These imperatives pull Gissing's characterization in two opposing directions. In order to be broadly representative of the nether world, and thus "to bear testimony against the accursed social order," Jane and Sidney must be typical of their milieu. But a character who approaches too closely to the type will be bound by the average for society. Sidney makes this point almost explicit in the novel, in what now should read like a metafictional comment on Gissing's mode of characterization: "'We are the lower orders; we are the working classes,' he said bitterly to his friend, and that seemed the final answer to all his aspirations" (58). But though Sidney's class may supply his destiny in the final analysis, Gissing's narrative reliance on chance, which I outlined above, provides a number of opportunities for thinking that it could be otherwise. To the extent that they are individualized, the novel entertains the possibility of an open future for Jane and Sidney that diverges from the average of their class; though if they diverge too far, they cease to be representative and thus to bear Gissing's testimony. Jane and Sidney therefore diverge just enough from the type to conjure the possibility of an open future, a possible

transcendence of the nether world, and in doing so they telescope the collected masses who bear the average into individuals.

As with Sidney's self-nominalization as "the working classes," Gissing makes this mode of characterization the defining feature of Jane's story. Having found Jane at the outset of the novel as a "thrall of thralls" in domestic servitude to the Peckovers, Michael raises her for several years in better, though still humble, circumstances. Ultimately, he hopes to raise her to administer his inherited fortune to the poor without distinguishing herself from them, presumably continuing to live a straitened life in Clerkenwell despite her vast resources. Michael's plan to raise her up as a kind of secular saint to the poor who is herself of the poor threatens to raise the same problems of distinction that beset Richard Mutimer in *Demos*:

> [S]uppose when I die I could have the certainty that all this money was going to be used for the good of the poor by a woman who herself belonged to the poor? You understand me? It would have been easy enough to leave it among charities in the ordinary way; but my idea went beyond that. I might have had Jane schooled and fashioned into a lady, and still have hoped she would use the money well; but my idea went beyond *that*. There's plenty of ladies nowadays taking an interest in the miserable, and spending their means unselfishly. What I hoped was to raise up for the poor and untaught a friend out of their own midst, some one who had gone through all that *they* suffer, who was accustomed to earn her own living by the work of her hands as *they* do, who had never thought herself their better, who saw the world as they see it and knew all their wants. A lady may do good, we know that; but she can't be the friend of the poor as I understand it; there's too great a distance between her world and theirs. (178)

The plan introduces the same paradox that saw Mutimer belonging neither to one class nor the other. “There’s plenty of ladies taking an interest nowadays in the miserable,” but Jane and Sidney, were he to join her, would be *sui generis*, unassimilable to the middle-class philanthropists who usually engage in charity work. Culturally, economically, geographically: Jane is to remain in the nether world. Yet to “raise up” is implicitly to differentiate Jane from those around her and to introduce a measure of the “distance” between the reformer and the poor that Michael deplores at the end of the paragraph. If Jane were indeed special, different in kind from those around her, the plan would fail because she would cease to represent them; at the same time, as Sidney thinks, the plan is destined to fail not because of any fault in Jane, but simply because her “character contains no miraculous possibilities” (236). *The Nether World* as a piece of social fiction confronts this same problem: how to depict a representative individual without differentiating them from the class they represent? Gissing answers the question by pulling Jane and Sidney back from this kind of absolute distinction to a position of qualified individuality that takes into itself the class it represents.

On that score, Michael’s plan is not a total failure. The money, certainly, disappears with his son Joseph and then on the American stock market, and the machinations that surrounded it have meanwhile separated Jane and Sidney. Nonetheless, the plan succeeds in mobilizing Jane’s individuality without removing her from her class. This part of the plan works even before Michael has revealed his fortune and persists after he loses it. It works narratively by following Jane through the gradations of class in the nether world where at each point she accrues a residue that remains with her throughout the novel. The chapter “Sunlight in Dreary Places,” for example, follows Jane from her job making artificial flowers through a visit with Pennyloaf, and finally home to her lodging with the Byasses. As the narrative follows Jane, it slides along the

scale of working-class life, highlighting Jane's likeness to each. When Jane's co-worker Annie bares her blistered fingers in a bid for sympathy, Jane urges her to go on working, explaining that she had similar blisters when she began the job (128). With the Byasses, Jane takes on the role of domestic mediator, which she continues to do throughout the novel. It is with Pennyloaf, however, that Jane performs her most sustained and successful intervention, one that Gissing figures as broadly symbolic of working-class solidarity.

Pennyloaf grows up in Shooter's Garden, the poorest of the Clerkenwell tenements, the daughter of an alcoholic mother and a violent father. She marries Bob Hewett, who promptly begins neglecting her emotionally and financially. In describing Pennyloaf as "one whom society pronounced utterly superfluous" Gissing invokes the concept of the residuum in all but name (356). Jane's influence helps to redeem Pennyloaf from superfluity; only at first "in obedience to Jane" does Pennyloaf keep "herself and the babies and the room tolerably clean" (211). The significance of Jane's relationship to Pennyloaf is not, however, simply that she helps a character who is lower on the social scale; for that would be little different from the organized middle-class philanthropy and social reform of which Gissing is so skeptical. Rather, Jane has been, and to some degree still is, Pennyloaf. Jane rises above her initial degraded status to the cusp of transcending her class situation; when Gissing snaps her back to her class, she does not return to where she had begun but remains slightly distinct from the likes of Pennyloaf. The distinction that the inheritance plot has both bestowed upon and discovered in her remains in her character, evinced for example in the nobility she shows in the novel's final chapter. But so too has "the inheritance from miserable childhood" remained with her: "something of that degradation" from the time of "her suffering as a little thrall" seems "still to cling to her" even in her most exultant moment as Michael's heir (224).

The end of the novel sees the throngs of characters who have occupied *The Nether World*'s early chapters focalized in Jane and Sidney, whose names provide the titles of the novel's final two chapters. As Jane ministers to Pennyloaf, Sidney marries the disfigured Clara Hewett and takes over responsibility for her father and siblings, albeit at the expense of a considerable diminution of his earlier prospects. Where Jane has emerged from the lowest order of the poor to a station somewhat above the average, Sidney has declined from exceptional to a similar position. If the "downward tendency in all about him" pulls Sidney toward indistinguishability, he nonetheless resists certain of the worst habits prevalent among the working class, and his kindness and self-sacrifice with regard to Clara's family signify that he has retained something of his exemplarity, even as it has diminished significantly (373). As with Jane, Gissing highlights the sense in which Sidney is distinct from those around him, while at the same time he remains like enough to represent them. Jane and Sidney carry with them traces of their past lives which, taken together, account for nearly the entirety of the nether world. Diverging from the average and yet tied to it, having slid in opposite directions along the scale of working-class life, Jane and Sidney end the novel in a position not unlike that which Burns occupied in the 1889 dock strike.

Gissing repeatedly figures old Michael Snowdon's plan for Jane as a way of fixing the future. Jane at times seems promised a "wondrous future," a "future [which] might reveal marvels," not least of which is her "forecast of the future" that includes her life with Sidney (222, 227). Michael's lost will, like all wills in Victorian fiction an implicit if not an explicit claim on the future of society, diminishes Jane's prospects. At the conclusion of *The Nether World*, Jane is not "the savior of society" that Michael had projected, nor is Sidney the "leader of men" it had seemed possible he might become, and their union, which would have symbolized

social regeneration, has also failed. In pulling back from these possibilities, however, Gissing leaves behind a changed mode of conceptualizing the working class that itself becomes the precondition for future reform. The reformist failures that the novel depicts conceptualize future reform as a diminishment from transformational impulse to meliorist possibility. In refusing to depict that possibility as such, leaving readers instead with a qualified sense of "perchance" and a pathetic picture of resilience, the novel also lays the affective groundwork for sympathy with an aggregated working class. "If there were hope," Sidney says near the end of the novel, "I might fret under the misery" (376). There is a little, at least, at the novel's end, and so it seems that contemporaries did.

*Chapter Three*

## Anthony Trollope's Leap in the Dark

On November 13, 1866 tyro publisher James Virtue solicited Anthony Trollope to edit a new magazine. Four days later, Trollope began the novel that would be the centerpiece of the magazine's early issues. More political than any of Trollope's previous novels, *Phineas Finn* tracks closely with England's national mood and the personal designs of its author at the time of its composition. Five months earlier Lord John Russell and William Gladstone's Liberals had spectacularly failed to pass their long-awaited Reform Bill, which would have substantially expanded the electorate, prompting demonstrations like the Hyde Park "riot" that scared Matthew Arnold into *Culture and Anarchy.* Although the Conservatives had come to power as a minority government under Lord Derby and Trollope's *bête noire* Benjamin Disraeli in the wake of the June failure, the massive Liberal-Whig majority in the House, some seventy seats, along with the prevailing national clamor for long-overdue franchise reform, portended a speedy return to power for Russell and Gladstone, a repetition of the Conservative interregna of 1852 and 1858-9. *Phineas Finn* begins with a Conservative government falling after a brief tenure and proceeds to narrate the Liberals' ultimate triumph in reforming Parliament. Trollope not only expected things to play out in more or less this fashion; he expected to take part, if not in passing the Bill, at least in the fruits of its passage. In September 1867, just as *Phineas Finn* was beginning its serial run, Trollope resigned from the Post Office to pursue what he thought "should be the highest object of ambition to every educated Englishman."[1] He would stand for Parliament at the next election, and he would use *St. Paul's* magazine—he had at one time countenanced naming it *The Monthly Liberal*—as his "horgan," in the words of *Phineas Finn*'s seedy newspaperman, Quintus Slide, to promote his views once elected.

As it happened, Disraeli and the Conservatives slowly embraced the idea of reform. By February Disraeli had introduced a Bill for the limited expansion of the franchise; the next month, after a chilly reception for his earlier endeavor, he introduced what would become the Reform Act of 1867, passed that August after a round of radical amendments throughout the spring had stripped its most restrictive measures and left a Bill that nearly doubled the number of eligible voters, a far greater increase than even the radicals had though possible at the beginning of the process. When Trollope began writing *Phineas Finn*, a relatively restrictive Liberal Bill seemed more than probable; when he finished, in May 1867, an expansive Conservative Bill was all but assured. In August of that year, after Trollope had finished writing and lightly revising the novel, but before he had published it, the Conservative government passed the Second Reform Act, despite the fact that Derby called it, with what we shall see was a partly ironic nod to its indeterminacy, "a leap in the dark." What had begun as a bold prediction and statement of Trollope's political creed thus took on the quality of alternate history: *Phineas Finn* is recognizable as a history of the Second Reform Act, but only if we squint, so that Liberals blur into Conservatives and the imperfect likenesses seated in the novel's Parliament resolve into their real-world counterparts. By the time the novel had finished its run, in May 1869, more of Trollope's political expectations had been upset. In *An Autobiography*, Trollope records his bitter experience on the hustings at Beverley, a notoriously rotten borough where he finished last at the poll. He would not sit in Parliament.

In *Phineas Finn* Anthony Trollope not only fictionalizes a historical event that was unfolding as he composed the novel; he finished writing the novel, which he only lightly revised, several months before the Reform debates came to an end.[2] As such, Trollope finds himself frequently ahead of events, having to predict or anticipate their results and having to adjust the

plot of *Phineas Finn* to a number of surprises and reversals. We can see how his anticipatory method works in a scene that occurs just as Trollope's *ad hoc* novel begins to take definitive shape around the question of parliamentary reform. As Phineas and his friend Lord Chiltern "ride to hounds" on a hunting expedition through the unfamiliar fields and copses of Leicestershire, Phineas, mounted on the ominously named Bonebreaker, foresees "the probability of an accident."[3] Phineas' prediction proves spectacular. He and Chiltern get a beat on the fox, which abruptly changes course, leading them over high fences and toward a particularly wide tributary of the river Eye, invisible until the riders are almost on top of it. Two horses leap—Phineas, slightly ahead, has just a moment to look over his shoulder after having cleared the gap to see Chiltern's horse "in the very act of his spring" attempt "the leap," and disappear into the stream, having crashed chest-first into the bank (181).

A veritable leap in the dark for both riders—one of whom emerges with a shattered shoulder and a mortally wounded horse. A leap in the dark for Trollope, too, it would seem, given that he composed the scene early in 1867, after the phrase's initial burst of popularity in spring 1866 but well before it became ubiquitous as a byword for democratic reform that summer. Yet there is considerable evidence that this apparent evocation of "a leap in the dark" was no mere coincidence, especially given Trollope's attention to reform as an aspiring politician. He would go on to quote the phrase elsewhere in the novel, and *Phineas Finn*'s first chapters appeared in *St. Paul's* framed by an article titled "The Leap in the Dark." The scene in the chapter titled "The Willingford Bull," however, is tantalizing, much more so than Trollope's verbatim deployment of "a leap in the dark," in that it seems to demand recognition as a reference to the reform debates and yet relies on future contingencies to resolve the reference into legibility. Trollope's depiction of the leap, I want to suggest, serves as a figure both for the

anticipatory mode of writing he was forced to adopt in his attempt to depict the political present as it unfolded and for the temporal indeterminacy that characterized democratic reform at its outset in 1867. Proponents and detractors alike acknowledged the potentially sweeping consequences of the Second Reform Act, but they also agreed that its consequence would be delayed, as the effects of democratic reform worked their way into the kind of everyday lived reality that was Trollope's métier, and that they could not be fully predicted ahead of time. The meaning, as opposed to the mechanics, of Parliamentary reform, would only resolve itself in an indeterminate future, which would take up certain threads of the present while leaving others loose.

If we follow the "leap" and its various resonances through *Phineas Finn*, as I will later in this chapter, certain potentialities that were obscured by the subsequent historical record (but might not have been) begin to become legible. The anticipatory mode of *Phineas Finn* thus shares some crucial similarities with counterfactual historical fiction, especially a self-conscious sense that what is "latent or submerged" may be "surfaced into prominence."[4] As in many later instances of counterfactual fiction, Trollope portrays the intersection of the romantic plots in the novel's foreground with an event of world-historical importance in its ostensible background. As references to "a leap in the dark" pass from one of these to the other, however, they point up the destabilization of the economy of public and private on which the novel is built. What would be purely domestic begins to become politicized, while the political itself is prospectively domesticated. This, I will argue, is because the trajectory of "a leap in the dark" as Trollope and many of his contemporaries understood it, passed through women's suffrage and, beyond that, to transformed gender relations. Women's suffrage represented the point, akin to what critics of

alternate history call the "nexus," where the procedural changes effected by democratic reform would be felt in deep changes to lived reality.[5]

As he does with the contingent figure of the leap, Trollope seeds *Phineas Finn* with anticipations of the effects of women's suffrage that await future contingencies to be made legible. Such a prognostication may seem quixotic, Trollope's considerable hedging notwithstanding, in retrospect, when we know that the advent of women's suffrage lay over fifty years away in 1918. But the years from 1867 to 1870, including John Stuart Mill's attempt to introduce a women's suffrage amendment to the Second Reform Act just days after Trollope finished writing *Phineas Finn*, represent a moment of acute possibility. Yet even as Trollope recognizes in women's suffrage what Catherine Gallagher has called "the fact of a potential," he cannot quite bring himself to see it through, much less wholly endorse it.[6] In part, this represents Trollope's commitment to probabilistic realism, an intuition that even as women's suffrage was becoming more likely, and therefore the kind of thing he needed to anticipate, it remained more improbable than not. More than this, though, Trollope's ambivalence represents a deep uncertainty about how far democratic reform would reach into domestic life, thus realigning the boundaries of what was public and what was private. The uncertainty occasioned by these potential consequences registers where the anticipation of women's suffrage is most acute, in the character of Lady Laura Standish, who begins the novel as a kind of proto-feminist only to end in a state of desperation, dependence, and exile. Lady Laura represents both a real sense of the possibilities opening for women around 1867 and, in her sustained abjection across the latter part of *Phineas Finn* and its sequel *Phineas Redux*, the visceral cruelty of their foreclosure.

**"A Leap in the Dark"**

On August 6, 1867 Lord Derby addressed the House of Lords, where the Second Reform Bill would soon become law. After lauding the Peers for their "very temperate, fair, and candid manner" in discussing the Bill, Derby punctuated his short address by glancing at what he hoped would be its probable near-term consequences. Acknowledging the conservative impulse to settle the question for good, thus precluding future expansions of the suffrage, Derby shared his hope that "in the adoption of this Bill we may find the means of putting a stop to the continued agitation of a question which, as long as it remained unsettled, only stood in the way of all useful legislation." He ended with a paean to his "fellow countrymen" and the belief that the Bill put the country's institutions on a surer, safer basis; but not before conceding the uncertainty that had become the focal point of the debates: "No doubt we are making a great experiment and 'taking a leap in the dark.'"[7]

As the scare quotes with which Derby's utterance was reproduced in *Hansard* attest, "a leap in the dark" had come to signify a particular kind of ironic indeterminism in its emergence as a catchphrase for the Second Reform Act. Three days previous, *Punch* had run one of its more indelible political cartoons: Britannia, astride a horse with the visage of Benjamin Disraeli, shields her eyes as she leaps across the page toward a thicket labelled REFORM. Derby, along with Gladstone and the radical tribune John Bright, among others, looks on from the background in the figure's upper-right-hand corner as Disraeli glides toward the margin of the page and an uncertain future that had obsessed the Victorian press over the past year. Yet the immediate source of anxiety for much of that time, the newly enfranchised members of the working classes, are curiously absent from the cartoon. As Trollope had done in his ambiguous portrayal of the leap, the illustration looks beyond the "necessary aftermath" of democratic reform, now broadly understood to include manhood suffrage, to what I will argue was a more deep-seated and less

predictable source of uncertainty: the effects of reform in the domestic sphere.[8] Instead of depicting Britain as, say, John Bull, the *Punch* cartoonist embodies the nation as a woman, although they do so with an ambiguity consonant with *Phineas Finn*'s leap. If, as we shall see, the unfolding debates about women's suffrage make the choice of Britannia seem obviously motivated, she is nonetheless stylized as androgenous, her feminine waist, for example, offset by her muscular forearms. The cartoon thus remains open to the indeterminacy that the poem accompanying it explicitly acknowledges: "And—who knows what will come of this LEAP IN THE DARK."[9]

Anthony Trollope composed his first of several allusions to "a leap in the dark" in *Phineas Finn*, the hunting scene I sketched earlier, around January 1867, several months prior to the *Punch* cartoon and Derby's speech. Trollope was a famously meticulous writer, as he details in *An Autobiography*, and he kept a writing diary to ensure that he stuck to his regimen. The surviving manuscript of *Phineas Finn* shows few traces of editing.[10] It is thus possible to date passages of the novel with some accuracy. Another author, John Sutherland contends, might have revised the novel to make its divergences from history less jarring, or else paper them over altogether; but not Trollope, whose clock-like writing and publication schedule made him reluctant to recall a commodity bound for the market, with Virtue already committed as a buyer.[11] Yet for all the undeniable commodity-form of Trollope's fiction, I posit a less venal reason for his reluctance to revise *Phineas Finn*. After all, the novel, with its jarring sense of near recognition, in fact tracks quite well with the historical experience of 1866-7, a moment full of unexpected reversals, "meandering, purposeless, fortuitous" and "doubtful until the very end," the upshot of which, moreover, brought "a complete uncertainty about the future."[12] As "a leap

in the dark" circulates during this period, it takes on a host of connotations from its various usages, ultimately emerging as a figure for the temporal irony that characterized reform.

Derby's utterance and the *Punch* cartoon have had a long afterlife in scholarship on the Second Reform Act.[13] The salience of these moments, however, has obscured the fact that the phrase debuted much earlier in the debates, and that it enjoyed two periods of prominence in 1866-7. Both instances follow a similar pattern: a speech in Parliament that employs the phrase as a narrowly procedural reference, followed by newspaper accounts that extend its meaning to the nation at large. When Disraeli introduced the phrase in Parliament on March 23, 1866, the "leap" to which he objected was Gladstone's promise to bring in separate bills that would address redistribution of seats and adjustment of constituency boundaries after securing approval for an expanded franchise. Disraeli argued that this would commit Parliament to an open-ended debate on reform even before the first step, a lowering of property qualifications for prospective voters, could proceed. *The Times* editorialist that evening inflected the procedural register of Disraeli's initial use of the phrase with the concern that the nation was moving blindly toward democracy, warning that it was now on "the eve of a *coup d'état*" before urging "the highly respectable objection which every man of independence and common sense must have to a leap in the dark upon any matter whatever."[14] The frame of reference for "a leap in the dark" thus aligned Parliamentary procedure with the life of the nation in a way that could be internalized by ordinary subjects.

The phrase circulated widely in the spring and summer of 1866 as the debates were at their height, making seven more appearances in *The Times*, but subsided when the session adjourned. Lord Cranborne then reintroduced it to the Reform debates in a speech on March 18, 1867, a moment of perilous uncertainty for the government, now led by the Conservatives. Like

Disraeli, Cranborne used it in a narrowly procedural sense, claiming that the government's request for support of the Bill's second reading in advance of the amendment process would require "a leap in the dark."[15] As it did a year previous, the press almost immediately applied the phrase to the nation at large, deepening the connection between Parliamentary-procedural uncertainty and an uncertain national future. But Cranborne also added a new dimension to the phrase's phenomenology. His speech was eagerly followed in part because he had just sixteen days earlier defected from Disraeli's government in protest over what he claimed was a reckless plan to expand the suffrage.[16] Cranborne was quoting his old leader back to himself in an attempt to bring down the government, thus adding an element of irony to the phrase that it would continue to carry throughout its career.

The irony that attaches to "a leap in the dark" was crucial for contemporary conceptualization of reform. Not only did the phrase allow speakers to at once indicate and disavow radical change; given the phrase's initial register, the irony becomes increasingly temporal, signaling that the meaning of the democratic reforms then in the process of being enacted would determinately resolve only in an unknowable future. The Second Reform Act's sweeping consequences must be qualified by an understanding that not even democratic reform's harshest critics expected the change to be immediate, nor did they claim to know exactly what its effects would be. Reform's most eloquent enemy, Robert Lowe, for example, referred to the legislation's "double aspect," wherein "what it will immediately effect," a relatively modest increase in the franchise, was played off against its "potentiality," the massive political and social changes "to which it may lead."[17] Several years later, Walter Bagehot still thought it was too soon to tell how extensive (or not) the Act's consequences would prove.[18] Similarly, when the phrase appeared as the title of the unsigned leading article in the first issue of the Trollope-

edited *St. Paul's* on October 1, 1867 alongside the first installment of *Phineas Finn*, a subtle shift in the piece's title suggests the move to circumscribe the transformative potentiality of reform: it has become "*THE* Leap in the Dark" and no longer "*A* Leap in the Dark."[19] The definite article represents an attempt to project beyond the indeterminate future of reform to a moment where its consequences could be determined, and kept in check, by retrospection—the place where the irony of "a leap in the dark" would be worked out.

The prominent pairing of *Phineas Finn* and "a leap in the dark" in *St. Paul's* suggests the conceptual structure that Trollope calls upon when he alludes to the phrase in his novel. As the phrase repeatedly tracks across a procedural uncertainty internal to Parliament and the consequences of those deliberations for the life of the nation, it emphasizes the perceived expansion of Parliament's power to intervene in everyday life under a democratic constitution. At the same time, the shape and extent of that intervention remains dependent on future contingencies. As the *St. Paul's* author notes, there is a disjunction between what the public knows the Bill to have accomplished theoretically, "nothing less than a revolution," and its immediate, practical result, "a slight modification of our representative system."[20] The public, the article continues, "do not realize the fact that their prosperity, their comfort, their liberty of action, their means of livelihood, *ay, even their family relations* are in the hands of that body which, by our constitution, wields supreme power in every department of life."[21] At its most radical outward horizon, the piece understands, democratic reform has the potential to reshape the distinction between public and private life at the very basis of British society. The future in which reform resolves into something radical, in other words, will register in the domestic sphere and thus preeminently on women. Britannia may remain a generic symbol for the nation's "slight

modification" of the franchise, or else she might resolve fully into a symbol of femininity, presaging "nothing less than a revolution" in the domestic sphere, *ay, even in romantic relations*.

**The Probability of an Accident**

Trollope's leap of January 1867 cannot have been a straightforward reference to the Second Reform Act, the passage of which lay in a future that was farther from Trollope's lived present than retrospective chronology would suggest.[22] The fact that *Phineas Finn* began appearing serially in October 1867 and was published in 1868 has misled some readers; it would suggest that Trollope had the opportunity to edit the text in line with what had occurred in the interim, perhaps to insert a topical reference like a more or less literal "leap in the dark."[23] But as Sutherland has shown, and as the extant manuscript attests, Trollope in fact made only minor changes to the material he had written straight through from November 1866 to May 1867. Occurrence of "a leap in the dark" in the press had greatly subsided after a burst of popularity in the spring and summer of 1866 on the heels of Disraeli's speech in the Commons. Only after Cranbourne's speech in March 1867, and then in earnest after the *Punch* cartoon and Derby's speech in early August, did the phrase gain anything like the ubiquity it has since enjoyed with respect to the Second Reform Act.

Yet, as I have detailed above, "a leap in the dark" had made a prominent appearance in the press well before Trollope had begun writing *Phineas Finn*. With the scene in "The Willingford Bull," Trollope anticipates a future in which the phrase will once again be raised to prominence, in which Phineas' leap will therefore be legible as a reference to reform, without, however, determinately resolving it into one. An (at the moment) unforeseeable future will ultimately decide the scene's referentiality. In a later novel, *The Way We Live Now*, Trollope

refers to this kind of writing as being "*in utrumque paratus*," prepared for either eventuality.[24] In what reads like a winking reference to *Phineas Finn*, the newspaper editor and future candidate for Parliament Alf produces an editorial so full of undetermined irony, his "strongest weapon," that he "would at any future time be able to refer to his article with equal pride" whether his target, the financier Melmotte, proves a self-dealer or the real deal.[25] Coming as it does at a moment when Melmotte's antecedents and intentions remain opaque—one wonders if Trollope himself has decided at this point—Alf's temporalized irony allows him to anticipate both possible outcomes while committing to neither. While *The Way We Live Now* appeared several years, and several Palliser novels, after *Phineas Finn*, and while it lacks the genuine referential uncertainty that makes the earlier novel's predictions genuine contingencies, we can nonetheless take the mode of anticipation that Trollope ascribes to Alf as a kind of key for *Phineas Finn*. Fittingly, it seems, however much Phineas' leap may have been born of fortuitous circumstances, Trollope subsequently turned it into a method fit for conscious reflection.

The leap scene in *Phineas Finn* does not predict the *Punch* cartoon and Derby' speech as much as it accounts for the possibility that something like them could occur. When it does, Trollope develops the potentialities inherent in the earlier scene, a process he foregrounds by having Phineas foresee "the probability of an accident" (178). When we recall that passage of the Second Reform Act was itself viewed as something of an accident, albeit one that arose out of decades of agitation both in and out of Parliament, textual levels align even further: Trollope uses a hunting accident to figure the 'accidental' passage of the Second Reform Act but does so in a way that builds the contingency of the event into the figure. Instead of revising the early scene into an outright allegory of reform in light of later events, he strengthens its underdetermined connections later in the novel by casting meaning back on it. And because

Trollope composed *Phineas Finn* in sequence without revision, we can tell a lot about the potentialities Trollope has in mind for Phineas' leap by looking at the context he creates for it in the chapter that immediately follows.

Recall that Lord Chiltern's leap lands him, broken-shouldered, in a stream-bed; Phineas, on the other hand, comes down almost immediately in the next chapter to a rally outside of Parliament in honor of the Radical MP Turnbull and featuring prominently Phineas' landlord, the legal stationer and working-class radical Mr. Bunce. The proximity of this scene invests the leap with political resonance, while the leap likewise figures the "riot" scene that follows as one of the probable consequences of reform, the likely near-term trajectory of Parliament's "leap in the dark." The seamlessness with which Phineas moves from one scene to the other, and thus from the novel's romance plot to its reform plot, reflects their connection not only in Trollope's compositional process, but also in terms of the depiction of reform that Trollope has in mind for his novel going forward. "Mr. Turnbull's Carriage" in fact quickly picks up the motif of prognostication that the previous chapter had established, with the new chapter's first paragraph referencing Turnbull's own "prophecies": "Mr. Turnbull had predicted evil consequences…and was now doing the best in his power to bring about the verification of his own prophecies" (183). Trollope repeats "the people," with its echo of the Second Reform Act's proper name, The Representation of the People Act, four times in the chapter's opening paragraph, thus tying the scene to the demonstrations for enfranchisement even if their ostensible aim in the chapter is the secret ballot. If a sense of prognostication carries over from Phineas' leap to this, the only scene depicting the mass meetings and demonstrations that feature so prominently both in the history of reform and in political fiction during this period, it suggests that Trollope, unlike many of his

counterparts in the press and in Parliament, is relatively unconcerned by the uncertain future that will follow from working-class male enfranchisement.

The way in which meaning passes between these two chapters is indicative of Trollope's more general mode of anticipating the probable but uncertain future in which his novel will appear. "Mr. Turnbull's Carriage" implicitly politicizes the previous chapter in a deliberately unobtrusive way; taken alone, the chapter allows us to read Phineas' leap as an allusion to "a leap in the dark" without insisting that we do so. If the "leap" is deliberately indeterminate in order to remain open to uncertain (but probable) future developments, the "riot" scene is likewise strategically ambiguous in order to embrace various possible futures. Trollope refers to the gathering as "a mob of men gathered together without any semblance of form," and, drawing on the Hyde Park "riot" of July 23, 1866, "[t]he windows also of certain obnoxious members of Parliament were broken, when those obnoxious members lived within reach" (183, 187). Trollope's crowd both surrounds and makes itself felt within "the frail walls" of Parliament, and even Turnbull, their tribune, loses his nerve as he feels "the breath of the mob" (188, 189). Had Reform begotten the conflict conservatives predicted, or had one of the many working-class demonstrations that characterized the period gotten out of hand, the chapter would provide Trollope, as he continued to write throughout the spring, with the basis for a radically different novel than the one he eventually produced. Phineas' prediction of "the probability of an accident" would then strongly resonate with Bright's repeated warnings of an "accident" that would produce something on the scale of France's July Revolution if the government did not act.[26] In this case, Chiltern's unsuccessful leap would have figured the "swamping" of the traditionally powerful classes by the working classes and their radical and middle-class allies, damningly in the case of the former, as evidenced by Trollope's treatment of Turnbull, and

perhaps unwittingly in the case of upstarts like Phineas, whose successful leap lands him among the likes of Mr. Bunce.

On the other hand, Trollope stresses throughout the novel, and especially in this chapter, the "respectability" of Bunce. Trollope's treatment of the working class as figured in the Bunces may, as Elaine Hadley has contended, ultimately be condescending; but his attitude is less important than the fact that he anticipates manhood suffrage changing little in the basis of British politics. If the working classes might vote irrationally, they will vote no more irrationally than the current set of voters. Phineas is thus significantly unable to gainsay Mr. Bunce's argument that the "roughs" of London and its "respectable" working class are, for the purposes of reform, practically inextricable. "If every man with a wife and family was to show hisself in the streets to-night," Bunce argues, "we should have the ballot before Parliament breaks up, and if none of 'em don't do it, we shall never have the ballot"; to which Phineas, because he "intended to be honest, was not prepared to dispute the assertion" (186). In this way, Trollope figures the demonstrators as a peaceful, if unruly, force for registering the will of "the people" within the walls of Parliament and suggests that the rigidity of the forces of "order" pose a greater threat to the polity than those "reformers as ardent and as decent" as Bunce (189). The chapter ends with the police arresting Bunce not for unruly behavior or the commission of a crime, but because he has insisted on his civil rights in an attempt to advance close enough to shake Turnbull's hand. The final sentence in the chapter, spoken by Mrs. Bunce, equates Phineas and Mr. Bunce as equally susceptible to the "accident" of being taken for no reason, and in doing so creates a node of middle- and working-class solidarity: "You might have been took, all the same…for I'm sure Bunce didn't do nothing amiss" (191). What is more, in foregrounding the issue of proximity as the cause of Bunce's arrest, Trollope metaleptically encodes the scene's retrojection of meaning

onto the previous chapter in the same way that he has encoded prediction and accident in Phineas' leap.

In a similar fashion, two later chapters take up the language of "The Willingford Bull" and "Mr. Bunce's Carriage" in order to imbue them with determinate meaning in the subsequent light of the renewed public circulation of the phrase "a leap in the dark." In "The Willingford Bull" Chiltern predicts that he "shall get into some desperate scrape" about Violet Effingham (175). When his prediction comes true, and he threatens Phineas with violence over the latter's courtship of Violet, Trollope pointedly has both characters refer to the possibility as a "riot"; as he did with the "the people" in "Mr. Turnbull's Carriage," Trollope underscores the phrase by repeating it four times in close proximity (281). The connections serve to tie the personal and the political, grounding in metaphorical resonance what had been a metonymic relationship of proximity, as the "riot" that had followed "The Willingford Bull' now interpenetrates the otherwise purely romantic and private quarrel between Phineas and Chiltern. To further underscore the relationship, when Violet recalls having accepted Chiltern's proposal, she thinks to herself that "she had taken the jump" (382). The phrase takes on heightened political significance in this context not only for its relation to the earlier "leap," with all its proximal connection to politics via the "riot," but also because Trollope composed it after Cranbourne's resurrection of the phrase during the opening of the debate on Disraeli's Bill. Aware of this context, it becomes difficult not to read what follows as a reference to the reform debate, especially as the suddenness of the engagement after a long delay both brings the immediacy of the present into relief and foreshortens the distance between it and the future: "And *now*? It is all changed *now*" Chiltern asks Violet, before pledging a speedy marriage, "we'll have no delay,--will we? No shilly-shallying. What it's the use of waiting now that it's settled?" (381-2).

If Trollope's initial employment of a "leap" as an emblem for Reform is under-defined, self-consciously contingent on future political events, his verbatim employment of the phrase casts meaning backward upon it. Later in the novel, Trollope has the upstart widow Marie Goesler, who is being pursued by Trollope's symbol of aristocratic grandeur, the Duke of Omnium, urge the latter's suit by enjoining him to take "a leap in the dark," the phrase's only verbatim appearance in the novel (448). The passage plays on the prominence the phrase had by then achieved as shorthand for the Second Reform Act. The leap scene resolves more determinately into a reference to Parliamentary reform in light of this later passage, which, coming as it does in a chapter titled "Madame Goesler's Politics," implies that romance and politics ultimately figure one another. In this way, *Phineas Finn* unobtrusively looks forward to a possible future in which women are full participants in the public, political sphere, potentially undermining the doctrine of separate spheres along with any hard distinctions between social and political or private and public life.

**Votes for Women**

On May 20, 1867 John Stuart Mill proposed a simple amendment to what would shortly become the Second Reform Act: Strike the word "man," the philosopher-MP offered, and replace it with "person."[27] In advocating for women's suffrage within the all-male confines of the House of Commons, Mill acted as the mouthpiece for suffragist petitioners like Barbara Bodichon, Elizabeth Garrett, and his stepdaughter Helen Taylor, who could only look on from "behind the grille" in the ladies' gallery as the debate unfolded. Mill's speech is usually remembered as one of the opening salvos in the long fight for women's suffrage in Great Britain, as well as for its lucidity and soundness of its argument, a point even anti-suffragists conceded at

the time.[28] But the speech is also remarkable for what it reveals about the centrality of women's suffrage to the imagined trajectory of democratic reform at its outset in Britain.

Early in the speech, Mill recapitulates the Reform debate as a series of surprises and reversals that would carry on indefinitely into the future: "some things were strange enough to many of us three months ago which are not at all so now; and many are strange now, which will not be strange to the same persons a few years hence, or even, perhaps, a few months."[29] Mill's ally in the House, Henry Fawcett, recently married to the future suffragist heroine Millicent Garrett, likewise expressed his belief that Parliamentary consideration "had brought the question [of women's suffrage] out of the realm of ridicule" (this despite the laughter that greeted Mill's initial proposal) and his faith that if the amendment failed on the night of May 20, it "would be successful before ten years had passed away."[30] Mill himself was perhaps less sanguine about the timeline for reforming gender relations, but he too seems to have been making an appeal to the near future as much as he was making a timely appeal in the House: "when the time comes, as it certainly will come…I feel the firmest conviction that you will never repent of the concession."[31]

For both Mill and Fawcett, the rapidity of recent political and social change made women's suffrage thinkable as the next logical extension of democratic reform. Mill claimed he was merely insisting that Parliament recognize the "silent domestic revolution" sooner rather than later.[32] The fact that the first installment of women's suffrage was more than a half century away when Mill spoke belies its nearness in the political imaginary at that moment, its live potentialities during the time when Trollope was composing *Phineas Finn*. On the eve of Mill's speech, when Trollope finished *Phineas Finn*, the future in which women have the vote was arguably closer than at any time in the subsequent forty years. Just a few months after Mill's amendment failed, a woman named Lily Maxwell in fact managed to record a vote in the by-

election at Manchester, her name, it seems, having inadvertently been added to the rolls.[33] In the general election that followed, women nearly turned the accident to account. Citing Maxwell, as well as the legal precedent that "man" referred to both men and women in Parliamentary legislation, scores of women registered for 1868 general election; a few even cast votes successfully.[34] Women won the right to vote in local elections the following year. And, finally, in 1870 Jacob Bright, for whom Maxwell had voted at Manchester, introduced a women's suffrage Bill that received a second reading, one shy of becoming law, helped along by the fact that Disraeli, by now the Conservative leader, was a purported supporter. For this brief span from 1867 to 1870, forming what alternate history would call a 'nexus' for the early advent of women's suffrage, Fawcett's ten years could seem overly pessimistic.

As women's suffrage moved quickly from fringe issue to real possibility in these years it also came to represent even more than manhood suffrage the transformative prospect of democracy. Working-class men might, it was feared, try to set Disraeli up as a kind of English Napoleon III, or else they might pass labor laws that flew in the face of classical political economy, but the consequences of women's suffrage would be unknowable changes to the very way men and women related to each other—democracy on the most intimate level. Feminists made a virtue of the indeterminacy. In her pamphlets *Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women Considered* and *Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women*, both of which appeared in 1866, Bodichon returns repeatedly to the unpredictable consequences of women's suffrage. In *Objections,* for example, she argues that the historical exclusion of women from public life made it impossible to say that they "must and will do certain things in the future" and that what will be considered "womanly" was a question "only the future can prove."[35] She makes a similar claim for women's influence on party politics in *Reasons* where, tellingly for my purposes, she frames

her larger argument for women's suffrage by quoting Trollope on votes for members of the civil service.[36] Mill's *The Subjection of Women,* published in 1869 but drafted earlier, went farther. Echoing his speech to Parliament, he argues that the observable phenomenon of expanding gender equality over the past several decades "affords some presumption" that the trend will continue to "complete equality."[37] But, crucially, he goes on to argue at length that experience fails to offer adequate grounds on which to predict future gender roles because experience itself has been determined by a presumption of women's inequality. Once imposed inequalities, including the exclusion from political life, were removed, there was no telling how much characteristics hitherto deemed essential to women might change. Women's suffrage, more than any other democratic reform, was a leap in the dark.

* * *

*Phineas Finn*'s most forceful statements of reform come from women, and these moments blur distinctions between public and private worlds. For example, during a "semi-political, or perhaps rather…semi-official gathering" and just before Phineas makes his proposal to Lady Laura Standish, Lady Glencora Palliser punctuates the novel's introduction to the idea of reform with a formulation that puts women's suffrage at its heart (104). When prompted by the party leader Gresham, Glencora offers a pithy distillation of "the gist of our political theory": "Making men and women all equal" (104). This statement is notable for its ambiguity. It stakes a radical if unobtrusive claim on the centrality of women's suffrage to reform politics in implying that the most salient form of equality reaches across gender divides: making women men's equals. Yet the syntax of the phrase also keeps men and women apart, allowing for the construal that the coming equality will obtain only within, not across, gendered spheres: making all men equal to all men and all women equal to all women. Reinforcing the equivocation, Trollope has

Glencora qualify her endorsement of radical equality almost immediately and does so within the context of dissolving the "semi-political" character of the meeting to its purely domestic basis. When the mini-conclave breaks up, and Lady Palliser is escorted to dinner by her host, Kennedy, she whispers into his ear—the move from quasi-oratory to quasi-amatory is palpable here—that the actual gist of her politics is not "that people are equal, but that the tendency of all law-making and of all governing should be to reduce the inequalities" (105). The temporality of Lady Glencora's program thus shifts with the frame in which she articulates it, from the immediacy of a political program that merely needs to be enacted legislatively to an undefined "tendency" that evades the serialized markers of Parliamentary time as it plays out in private life.[38]

A later scene follows this pattern almost exactly. This time, Madame Max Goesler offers a sweeping endorsement of radical reforms, similarly over a "semi-political dinner," only, in a move that recalls the distinction drawn by the *St. Paul's* article, to equivocate when pressed on moving from "theory" to "life" (305). After lamenting that "[t]he one great drawback in the life of women is that they cannot act in politics," Madame Max claims that she would "vote for everything" if she could have a seat in Parliament: "ballot, manhood suffrage, womanhood suffrage, unlimited right of striking, tenant right, education of everybody, annual parliaments, and the abolition of at least the bench of bishops" (305). Her expansive list ranges "womanhood suffrage" with an array of reforms, some of which, ballot and tenant right, are explicitly discussed in *Finn*, while another, Church reform, becomes a topic in *Phineas Redux*. So, while her program might seem comically maximalist, it importantly includes woman's suffrage within a set of realistic reforms; indeed, she implicitly sets up a progression from manhood to "womanhood" suffrage. But Madame Max suggests almost immediately that she might not be so bold if she in fact had the vote she wanted, admitting, ironically, "a dastard security in the

conviction that I might advocate my views without any danger of seeing them carried out" (305). The pattern of both this and the previous scene—a strong claim for gender equality immediately qualified—metaleptically registers Trollope's own equivocation about the prospects for women's suffrage and its consequences. Despite what seems major backtracking, Madame Max never in fact abandons her claim for women's suffrage, just as Glencora's equivocation does not amount to disavowal. Which will predominate, the claim or the qualification, and whether the subtle blurring of romance and politics will be raised to salience, very much depends, as Alf's editorial in *The Way We Live Now* will, on the context to be developed in an indeterminate future.

Trollope was never an avowed proponent of women's suffrage, and even in *Phineas Finn* his most independent and politically invested female character, Lady Laura Standish, explicitly disavows it. Yet as several critics have pointed out, these explicit stances fail to account for the novel's staging of gender issues.[39] When Lady Laura Standish pronounces suffrage "abominable" it strikes a discordant note, if not an entirely false one, given the same character's earlier lament that "a woman's life is only half a life as she cannot have a seat in Parliament" (75, 51). Laura's reversal would thus seem to vindicate Jill Rappoport's suggestion that in the Palliser novels "questions of female suffrage…appear only long enough to be rejected in favor of vicarious political power."[40] I do not want to suggest that we should ignore the ultimate disavowal, nor that we should let Trollope off the hook for his anti-suffragism. But I do think that Trollope's "punishment" of Lady Laura—he has her marry an abusive, tyrannical bore, which leads to her exile from para-Parliamentary life—obscures the extent to which her character implicitly raised the possibility of reformed gender relations in ways that might have read differently had women's suffrage come to pass in the years just after the novel's appearance. In the terms that the MP Monk, Trollope's portrait of a responsible reformer, uses to

describe reform legislation more generally, reading Laura retrospectively from the moment of women's suffrage allows us to see her as representing the beginning of its movement from the "chimerical," where it can scarcely be thought, to the merely "dangerous," after which it will eventually enter the realm of "things probable" (556).[41] As with Lady Glencora's insinuation that gender equality is integral to the reform program that the novel endorses, it is possible to see in his treatment of female characters like Lady Laura the trajectory of a leap that remains for Trollope somewhat in the dark even as he contemplates it.

Laura is not only arguably the most politically engaged character in the novel, male or female; she is often described in masculine terms that the narrator plays off against Phineas' femininity. The erotics of their relationship at the outset of the novel hinge on the inversion of traditional gender-power dynamics, as Laura enjoys "perfect power of doing what she pleased," directing both her father's and Phineas' Parliamentary careers (31). In contrast to Laura's masculine physiognomy—Phineas jokes that she is six feet tall, and she is described as acting "after the fashion of men rather than of women"—Phineas "blush[es] like a girl" and is repeatedly figured as a masochist (32, 10). He will look back upon her refusal of his proposal, Laura suggests, "as one of the past pleasures of his life;—not as a pain" (341). (On the very next page, we are told that Phineas cannot abstain from the vicarious pleasure he receives by reading "abuse of himself" in the newspapers.) As her "political pupil" Phineas "must at any rate be obedient" to his mentor, something the "Irish boy" seems to relish as he sits at her feet (64-5). The 'danger' that Laura represents is thus more extensive than simply the claim for women's suffrage. The very fluidity of Laura and Phineas' gendered relations threatens to make a mockery of the doctrine of separate spheres based on sex at precisely the moment when women are

making an unprecedented push for the right to vote and suggesting that the changes begotten by women's suffrage will extend from the ballot box into romantic life.

It is crucial, then, that Trollope portrays Laura as a proto-feminist first, and only later assimilates her character to a more conventional marriage plot, albeit one that falls apart on Laura's desire to maintain her political influence. Laura's early, explicitly political and implicitly suffragist commitments thus cast the shadow of "what might have been" on her later disavowal of the vote and her subsequent abjection (560).[42] In this way, Laura represents a future implicit in "a leap in the dark" that briefly becomes visible before being deferred indefinitely. While Phineas, engaged directly in the process of reform, repeatedly marvels at how fast the time seems to go, despite the incongruent fact that he ages only two years over the course of a five- or six-year Parliamentary career, Laura takes an excess of time upon her person. She complains of "how slow the time has gone" for her because she, unlike Phineas, cannot sit in Parliament due to "the great curse of being born a woman" (241). Near the end of the novel, Phineas contrasts their first meeting, which had been taken up with a discussion of a possible Reform Bill, with Laura's changed appearance in the intervening years: When they first met, she "had not looked a day older" than her twenty three years; but after a few short years of stress, "she might have been taken to be nearly forty, so much had her troubles preyed upon her spirit, and eaten into the vitality of her youth" (559). The extra years that Laura accrues would place her in the temporal range where Fawcett thought women's suffrage certain, underscoring the extent to which she represents the seed of a possible future before its time. And if her "punishment" for intruding on the masculine political sphere is ejection from the present, she still encodes the possibility of a radically different trajectory for *Phineas Finn*. As Laura and Phineas part at the end of the novel,

she seeks not an avowal of love but rather "some half-suggestion as to what might have been their lives had things gone differently" (560).

* * *

Never loath to replay a hit, Trollope reprises "a leap in the dark" in *Phineas Redux* (drafted 1870-71; published 1873), underscoring the phrase's centrality to *Phineas Finn*. But in the sequel, where Lady Laura appears from the outset old before her time, the moment of possibility that had characterized the earlier novel has vanished, and with it the indeterminacy marked out by "a leap in the dark." If the phrase continues to mark the place where romance and politics meet in *Redux*, it no longer points toward their potential collapse into one another. It first reappears at the outset of *Redux*, when Phineas decides to forgo his government appointment in order to stand once more for Parliament, calling it "the one great step—or rather leap in the dark."[43] Later, Trollope recurs to the phrase as a metaphor for the predicament of a young woman on the verge of marriage: "she, knowing nothing, takes a monstrous leap in the dark, in which everything is to be changed, and in which everything is trusted to chance" (127). Rather than pointing to their interpenetration, as it did *Finn*, the phrase's echoing across politics and romance emphasizes the extent to which they have been disconnected with the passing of the nexus moment. Tellingly, as *Phineas Redux* proceeds the reform issue on which it began, Church disestablishment, slides from the narrative, seemingly half-forgotten by Trollope, in favor of romantic intrigue, remaining unresolved at the novel's end.

The newly rigid separation of politics and romance is nowhere more apparent than in *Redux*'s reprisal of the leap scene, which Trollope shears of the genuine anticipatory signification and fecund ambiguity it had carried in *Phineas Finn*. In *Redux*, Phineas, once again hunting alongside Lord Chiltern and mounted on an unpredictable horse, speeds toward a broad

ditch with a high embankment, invisible until it is (again) almost too late. This time Chiltern's horse easily takes the leap while Phineas' horse pulls up short, sending him "over the brute's neck head-foremost into the ditch" (117). But unlike Chiltern in the earlier novel, Phineas emerges merely "shaken and dirty" to attempt the leap again (and again and again) to no avail. Trollope thus projects this leap as a self-conscious diminishment of the volatility inherent in *Phineas Finn*'s figuration of "a leap in the dark," a diminishment that takes shape around the absence of political signification from the scene. Madame Max Goesler joins Phineas for his repeated fruitless attempts to leap the ditch, with her horse, initially ready to take the ditch, soon joining his in shying from it. *Phineas Redux* of course ends with Phineas marrying Madame Max, and the scene is not without anticipation of that eventual outcome. When she admonishes him that she's known him before "to be depressed by circumstances as distressing as these, and to be certain all hope was over" but to have recovered, the allusion both looks back to their near-romance in *Finn* and anticipates Phineas' seemingly hopeless murder trial and eventual acquittal later in *Redux* (119). But these anticipations are both wholly diegetic, lacking the extra-textual underdetermined referent that distinguishes Phineas' leap from Alf's article in *The Way We Live Now*, and wholly romantic, lacking the earlier scene's political resonance. With the diminishment of the radical possibilities for women's emancipation that could be anticipated in the moment of *Phineas Finn*'s composition and publication, romance and politics have been determinately prized apart.

Not surprisingly, these diminished expectations register especially poignantly on Lady Laura. She and Phineas repeatedly replay salient moments from *Phineas Finn*, but like the leap itself those moments too have been drained of anticipatory political possibility. Where Laura had begun the first novel from a position of power and remained defiant even through her mounting

humiliation, she is pathetic from the first in *Phineas Redux* and remains abject throughout, as if doing sustained penance for her earlier proto-feminism. Laura's "strong, unalterable, unquenchable love" for Phineas, her only defining character trait in the second novel, which Trollope unconvincingly has her claim she has always felt, is part of the way he converts the moment of possibility in the earlier novel into a symbol of the foreclosed nexus moment (85). From this retrospect, Laura's underdetermined early political aspirations resolve determinately into the fault of her life, a conclusion by no means foregone in *Phineas Finn*: "I tried to blaze into power by marriage, and I failed,—because I was a woman. A woman should marry only for love" (88). Thus during Laura's last appearance in the *Phineas* novels, when Phineas informs her of his decisions to refuse a Cabinet seat and to marry her rival Madame Max, the political and the romantic remain for him "perfectly distinct" in a way they were not in *Phineas Finn*, that novel's anticipatory orientation to an indeterminate future having determinately turned back on itself (555). As Phineas and Laura wander the fields of her Saulsby estate at dusk, resolved to part for good, she eschews talk of the future for "the incidents of their past life," placing responsibility for her blighted prospects not on those conventions which have made hers only half a life but on her "ignorance," for which she pays "with the penalty of my whole life" (561).

Laura's diminishment in *Phineas Redux* only emphasizes the uncertain possibilities she represents in the historical moment of the earlier novel. Trollope cannot have known the content of Mill's speech when he wrote *Phineas Finn*, nor the subsequent contingencies that would bring women's suffrage to the cusp of reality. Like the Reform Act itself, they lay in the novel's future—in this case of Mill's speech, just a few days after Trollope finished writing and editing the novel. Yet, as we have seen, the issues to which Mill was to give powerful voice on May 20, and which were to reverberate in Lily Maxwell's vote and Jacob Bright's unexpectedly

successful suffrage Bill, shape the novel from its outset.[44] Mill's argument that women's suffrage is bound up with the diminution of "a hard and fast line of separation between women's occupation's and men's," is, I have tried to suggest, key for understanding his depictions of women and their relationship to politics for what they are—anticipations of a potential future folded into a depiction of the present.[45] Trollope, like Mill, locates the "woman question" at the heart of the reform debate; not the working-class Mr. Bunce but the politically engaged Lady Laura Standish is, at times, at least, and seen under the right aspect, the avatar of democracy in *Phineas Finn*. This is so because the recognition of women's political agency blurs the line demarcating private and political spheres; in this way 'equality' ceases to be an abstract issue of representation. In fictionalizing the beginning in Britain of what Edmund Fawcett has recently called "the long grudging compromise that liberalism struck with democracy," Trollope adumbrates what continues to be the central question of democratic reform: where the personal ends and the political begins.[46] Lady Laura remains a symbol of democratic reform's promise to work unknowable changes on everyday life, and she can remind us that democracy has always meant more, in principle, than mere procedural adjustment.

## NOTES

### Introduction

[1] Thomas Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara: And After?* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), 42.

[2] Carlyle, 43.

[3] Carlyle, 44.

[4] Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832-1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), 2-3.

[5] Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), 4. Focusing her attention on how subjects lived liberal commitments at mid-century, Hadley suggests that liberalism's "cognitive practices were generally considered capable of reforming the subject and the subject's world but not revolutionizing them" (12). Throughout *Living Liberalism*, Hadley opposes liberalism—and, implicitly, suffrage reform—to "a utopian form of direct democracy" (320). I discuss the conflicted relationship between liberalism and democracy below and return to the ways my interpretation of the period's reforms differs from Hadley's in chapter one.

[6] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1820), ed. T.W. Rolleston (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1920), 47, 44.

[7] Shelley, 48.

[8] Shelley, 44, 48.

[9] Shelley, 42.

[10] Shelley, 42.

[11] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XIX* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 397.

[12] Fredric Jameson, discussing the aporia faced by literary utopias, puts the basic contradiction thus: "the more surely a given Utopia asserts its radical difference from what currently is, to that very degree it becomes, not merely unrealizable but, what is worse, unimaginable" (*Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* [London: Verso, 2005]: xv). Quentin Skinner's influential claim that "[e]very revolutionary is…obliged to march backward into battle" to the extent that they must legitimate their behavior (and, by extension, their revolutionary ends) in terms of an existing discourse turns, it seems to me, on the same problem of imagining a transformed future in terms provided by the present ("Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Political Theory* 2.3 [1974]: 294-95).

[13] As Edmund Wilson, discussing Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*, drolly put it, "[t]he exalted vision of release which swims beyond the range of his early writings here gives way to a prolongation of something like the world we know" (*To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* [New York: New York Review Books, 2003]: 326).

[14] James Fitzjames Stephen, "Liberalism," *Cornhill Magazine* 5 (1862), 73.

[15] Stephen, 74.

[16] Stephen, 74.

[17] Mill's willingness to change his mind, and the relative frequency with which he did so throughout his life, has led to some basic confusion about his position on democracy. Isobel Armstrong, for example, has recently claimed that Mill was one of the century's "leading intellectuals" (along with Carlyle and Matthew Arnold) who "resisted the franchise" (*Novel Politics: Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016]: 6-7). Nathan Hensley, meanwhile, leaves the impression that Mill's "utilitarian democratic program" reduced complex individuals to exactly equivalent abstract units (*Forms of*

*Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016]: 94). It is hardly fair to characterize Mill as anything but a democrat; he argued both in prose and in Parliament that the right to vote should be expanded to all adults in Britain, and he was one of the few male writers to include women in that formulation. At the same time, however, he was fond of citing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's dictum that votes should be weighed as well as counted, and on those grounds he endorsed plural votes for the educated and intelligent—not, as Hensley claims, "a mathematically equal share of political right" for every voter, at least in the near term (98). I discuss this issue at greater length in chapter one.

[18] This and the previous quotations in this paragraph are from *Considerations* in *Collected Works XIX*, 448.

[19] *Considerations*, *Works XIX*, 449.

[20] The 1860s, it is worth noting, mark the beginning of the institutionalization of what had been "until then regarded as revolutionary by the educated classes" (Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860-86* [London: Allen Lane, 1976]: 11). For many, however, democracy was still synonymous with various forms of socialism. See for example Guido de Ruggiero, who notes that from "its first appearance in the stormy sky of the French Revolution," democracy "contained within itself both what is now strictly called democracy and what is now distinguished by the name of Socialism" (*The History of European Liberalism*, Trans. R.G. Collingwood [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1927]: 371). Mill likewise lumps together "the progress of democracy and the spread of Socialist opinions" (qtd. in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983]: 140-41). See also Eugenio Biagini's introduction to *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals, and*

*Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 9. John Darwin has argued that the sense of democratic radicalism only began to abate after 1884, when manhood suffrage had largely been achieved. See his *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009).

[21] Duncan Bell's "What Is Liberalism?" collected in his *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2016) offers the most comprehensive discussion of the definitional problem of which I am aware.

[22] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 124.

[23] For the tensions between liberalism and democracy see de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* ("a relation at once of continuity and contrast," 370); Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear" ("a marriage of convenience," 37) and *After Utopia* ("two inseparable but opposed terms," 228); and Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* ("the long, grudging compromise that liberalism struck with democracy," 140). As John Brenkman has noted, this tension has continued down to the present as "the permanent clash between the civic and the liberal dimensions of modern democracy" (*The Cultural Contradictions of Democracy: Political Thought since September 11* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007]: 16).

[24] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 224.

[25] As Anderson argues in *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016), liberal thinking has been shaped since the nineteenth century by a deeply engrained pessimistic streak that is often glossed over in theoretical accounts originating in literary and cultural studies, where a caricature of liberalism as overly optimistic still obtains. While Anderson's account of

liberalism's bleakness is a useful corrective to prevailing opinion, it should not tempt us (as Anderson herself makes clear) to lose sight of liberal optimism. Liberal reform, I have suggested, should be understood in terms of the tension between its animating utopian aspirations and its perception of those "negative social and historical forces" described by Anderson (12).

**Chapter One**

[1] James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (New York: Holt & Williams, 1873), 1.

[2] Stephen, 205.

[3] Stephen, 205.

[4] Stephen, 217.

[5] Social equality as the outcome of democracy dates at least to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (see below). In 1867, the year of Britain's decisive step toward democracy, Thomas Carlyle glossed democratic reform in *Shooting Niagara* as "'the equality of men,' any man equal to any other" (*Shooting Niagara: And After?* [London: Chapman and Hall, 1867]: 4).

[6] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 53.

[7] Balibar discusses of the conjunction of equality and liberty in French Revolutionary discourse, which he tags with the portmanteau "equaliberty," as "indefinitely open, indefinitely deferred" (Étienne Balibar. *Equaliberty: Political Essays* trans. James Ingram [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2014]: 48). In the analytic tradition, discussions of equality tend to appeal to what Isaiah Berlin calls its practically unattainable "ideal limit" (*Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996]: 106). See also Douglass Rae, *Equalities* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981).

[8] Emily Steinlight, "Dickens's 'Supernumeraries' and the Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction," *NOVEL* 43.2 (2010): 230; Nathan Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016): 88. See also Patrick Joyce, who argues that political democracy comprises "a gigantic political technology based on number" (*The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* [London: Verso, 2003]: 24).

[9] Steinlight, for example, reads *Bleak House* as holding out "the possibility of equality by subsuming the entire population within the null set of the quantitatively uncounted and the qualitatively discounted" (230).

[10] Balibar, 252.

[11] Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 219. Or as essayist Adam Phillips puts it, "That people are not identical, but that it is possible for them to be equal in certain ways, is one of our modern political hopes" (*Equals* [New York: Basic Books, 2009]: xiii).

[12] Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017), 8.

[13] Hensley, 109.

[14] See for example Judith Shklar, who notes that Burke influences the likes of Mill and Tocqueville to trim the optimistic ambitions of the liberal tradition they inherited, although "no liberal was ready to follow Burke all the way" (*After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957]: 228). Jürgen Habermas describes a similar ambivalence in Mill and Tocqueville that arises out of the pressures of democracy, though he does not link their response explicitly to Burke: see *The Structural Transformation of the Public*

*Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 129-40.

[15] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 37.

[16] Burke, 174.

[17] Burke, 186.

[18] Burke, 49.

[19] In his *Autobiography*, Mill acknowledges the influence on his thinking of *Democracy in America*, a text he twice reviewed when it was translated by *Edinburgh Review* editor Henry Reeve. See below.

[20] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. II* ed. Henry Reeve, revised Francis Bowen (Cambridge, Sever and Francis, 1863), 410, 412.

[21] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. I* ed. Henry Reeve, revised Francis Bowen (Cambridge, Sever and Francis, 1863), 71, 255.

[22] Tocqueville, *Democracy v. II*, 38, 166.

[23] Matthew Arnold, *The Popular Education of France; with Notices of that of Holland and Switzerland* in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, Volume II* ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962), 7-8.

[24] Tocqueville, *Democracy v. I*, 291-92. Mill echoed this view in his second review of *Democracy in America*, noting a "[w]ant of appreciation of distant objects and remote consequences" in a society ruled by "mere numbers" ("Tocqueville [II]" in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII* ed. John M. Robson [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977]: 202).

[25] Tocqueville, *Democracy v. II*, 89.

[26] *Autobiography* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume I* ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), 138.

[27] Gertrude Himmelfarb, for example, prominently suggests that Mill's crisis was "'mental' in both senses of the word, intellectual and emotional," leading to his "development of poetic and artistic sensibilities" over and against the exclusively rational Benthamite concern with externalities (*On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill* [New York: Knopf, 1974]: 4, 7).

[28] For Richard Rorty, "Mill" signifies the quintessential "public liberal" whose daylight rationalism cannot be reconciled with the kind of extreme or unique psychological experience more congenial to a "private self-creator" like Friedrich Nietzsche (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989]: 85). Hadley reads Mill's breakdown as a disruption of the *Autobiography*'s developmental progressivism and a rebuke to the kind of disinterest supposedly inculcated in the young John Stuart by his father's pedagogy (*Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010]: 100). Amanda Anderson argues that the story of the breakdown "dovetails with a range of responses in the nineteenth-century to the excesses of overweening rationalism" (*Bleak Liberalism* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016]: 45).

[29] David Russell, "Aesthetic Liberalism: John Stuart Mill as Essayist," *Victorian Studies* 56.1 (2013): 18.

[30] *Autobiography*, *Works I*, 149.

[31] Qtd. in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 95.

Philosophic radicals, as Mill defined them in "Fonblanque's England under Seven Administrations," "when they are discussing means, begin by considering the end" (*The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume VI* ed. John M. Robson [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982]: 353).

[32] "Bentham" in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume X* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1985), 111.

[33] Habermas, 130.

[34] *Autobiography, Works I*, 165-66.

[35] *The Subjection of Women* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXI* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 276.

[36] *Autobiography, Works I*, 197.

[37] *Autobiography, Works I*, 197.

[38] *Autobiography, Works I*, 107.

[39] Hadley, 49.

[40] *The Principles of Political Economy* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume III* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), 756.

[41] Hadley, 124.

[42] *Principles, Works III*, 754.

[43] *Principles, Works III*, 757.

[44] *Principles, Works III*, 752.

[45] *Autobiography, Works I*, 150.

[46] *Principles, Works III*, 756.

[47] *Autobiography, Works I*, 150.

[48] *Principles*, *Works III*, 775.

[49] *Principles*, *Works III*, 794.

[50] *Principles*, *Works III*, 775.

[51] *Autobiography*, *Works I*, 280.

[52] Qtd. in Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 162.

[53] *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XIX* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 397.

[54] Hensley, 97.

[55] Qtd. in *Utilitarianism*, *Works X*, 257.

[56] Habermas, 130.

[57] Carlyle, 4.

[58] *Utilitarianism*, *Works X*, 257.

[59] *The Subjection of Women* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXI* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 272.

[60] *Utilitarianism*, *Works X*, 244.

[61] *Utilitarianism*, *Works X*, 253.

[62] *Subjection*, *Works XXI*, 261.

[63] *Subjection*, *Works XXI*, 293.

[64] *Subjection*, *Works XXI*, 336, 340.

[65] *Autobiography*, *Works I*, 175.

[66] *Chapters on Socialism* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume V* ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967), 732-33.

[67] *Chapters*, *Works V*, 706, 707.

[68] John Morley, "The Life of George Eliot," *Macmillan's Magazine* 304 (Feb. 1885): 252.

[69] Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 105. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[70] Anthony Trollope, *The Prime Minister* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 516. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[71] Anthony Trollope, *Ralph, the Heir* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 2.7. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[72] Burke, 37, 76.

[73] Burke, 76.

[74] Burke, 249.

[75] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), 250, 249. But even as early as the fifteenth century, Auerbach points out, there are instances "where politico-economic conclusions are drawn from this doctrine of equality" (250).

[76] Burke, 76.

[77] Evan Horowitz notes a general affinity between Eliot and Burke. See "George Eliot: The Conservative," *Victorian Studies* 49.1 (2006): 7-32. Bernard Semmel has traced the influence of Burke on Eliot through the metaphor of inheritance: *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 45-46.

[78] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 176.

[79] For Eliot's use of this technique in *Felix Holt* see Daniel Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[80] George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 304. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[81] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 244. David Kurnick likewise points out that "[t]he details of Felix's past thus appear less psychologically realistic than narratively required" ("*Felix Holt*: Love in the Time of Politics," *A Companion to George Eliot* ed. Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw [Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013]: 146). See also Linda Bamber, "Self-Defeating Politics in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*," *Victorian Studies* 18.4 (1975): 419-35; Colene Bentley, "Democratic Citizenship in *Felix Holt*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24.3 (2002): 271–89. Jay Clayton argues that a similar narrative gap, contravening Eliot's law of consequences, opens in the last book of *Adam Bede* as that novel charts its protagonist's transcendence: see "Visionary Power and Narrative Form," *ELH* 46.4 (1979): 645-72.

[82] Kurnick and Horowitz have both pointed to the emptiness of Felix's political program, in Kurnick's words his counselling of "cautious abstention from political action" (147).

[83] "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings* ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 347.

[84] "Address," 342.

[85] "Address," 343.

[86] George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin, 2008), 329.

[87] "Address," 345.

[88] qtd. in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 103.

[89] See also Hilda Hollis, "Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot's Mouthpiece?" *ELH* 68.1 (2001):155-77; Michael Wolff, "The Uses of Context: Aspects of the 1860s," *Victorian Studies* 9 (1965): 47-63.

[90] Gallagher, 237, 233.

[91] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 48.

[92] *Anarchy,* 49.

[93] *Anarchy,* 53.

[94] *Education,* 8.

[95] Matthew Arnold, "The Future of Liberalism," *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, Volume IX* ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1973), 157.

[96] *Education,* 8-9.

[97] Matthew Arnold, "Equality" in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, Volume VIII* ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1972), 291.

[98] "Equality," 288.

[99] *Anarchy,* 9, 36.

[100] *Anarchy,* 34.

[101] *Anarchy,* 36, 67.

[102] *Anarchy,* 28.

[103] *Anarchy,* 32.

[104] *Anarchy,* 57.

[105] *Anarchy,* 141.

[106] *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for "sympathy." Cristina Richieri Griffin's recent reading of Eliotic sympathy through her engagement with Ludwig Feuerbach speaks to its fundamentally social nature ("George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, and Secularism," *ELH* 84.2 [2017]: 479-80).

**Chapter Two**

[1] George Gissing, *The Nether World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 391. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

[2] The Archdeacon Frederic Farrar, a contemporary reader, was the first to remark that the characters "represent whole classes to be found in the lower strata of society" ("The Nether World," *Contemporary Review*, 56 [1889]: 371). For arguments that emphasize the novel's determinism see John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), 107; Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing* (London: Anthem, 2003), 30; John Sloan, *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989), 79; C.J. Francis, "Gissing's Characterization: Heredity and Environment," *George Gissing: Critical Essays* ed. Jean-Pierre Michaux (London: Vision, 1981), 79-85.

[3] John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000); Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003).

[4] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Harper, 1966), 175.

[5] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca:

Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 185-205; Lauren Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 211-18.

[6] Goodlad, 212.

[7] Jameson, 189.

[8] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 112-41.

[9] Hobsbawm, 131, 135.

[10] Herbert Llewellyn Smith and Vaughan Nash, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike Told by Two East Londoners* (London: Cedric Chivers Ltd, 1889), 100. Cited hereafter parenthetically. Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (New York: Longmans, 1920), 412.

[11] See Gareth Steadman Jones, *Outcast London* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the History of England's Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

[12] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 141.

[13] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 186 (1867), col. 631.

[14] Both Smith and Nash would go on to work alongside Burns in the Liberal Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith governments.

[15] Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People* 2 vol. (London: Williams and Northgate, 1891), 1:39.

[16] Booth, 1:154. Booth relies on School Board visitors and extrapolates from their findings but resolves "to make us of no fact to which I cannot give a quantitative value" (1:6).

[17] Jones, 319.

[18] Booth, 1:131.

[19] Qtd. in Jones, 12.

[20] Booth, 1:41.

[21] Alain Desrosieres, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning* trans. Camille Naish (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 213-14.

[22] Kenneth D. Brown, *John Burns* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 20.

[23] Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership*, ed. Barbara Drake and Margaret I. Cole (New York: Longmans, 1948), 393.

[24] Brown, 49.

[25] G.D.H. Cole, *John Burns* (London: Fabian Society, 1943), 19.

[26] Cole, 17.

[27] *The Times*, August 30, 1889, 4.

[28] See letters to the editor in *The Times* on August 23, by Millwall Dock Manager G.R. Birt, and August 24, by "A Bonded Warehouse Keeper."

[29] Arthur Page Grubb, *From Candle Factory to British Cabinet: The Life Story of the Right Honorable John Burns, P.C. M.P.* (London: E. Dalton, 1908), 91.

[30] *The Times*, August 30, 1889, 4.

[31] *The Times*, August 26, 1889, 3. *The Times* subsequently quotes Burns avowing that the dockers will be "[their] own police" (August 28, 1889, 10).

[32] Booth, 1:157.

[33] Jones, 319.

[34] See John Goode, "Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism," *Victorian Studies* 12.2 (1968): 201-26.

[35] *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, 9 vol. (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1990-97), 3:6.

[36] Gissing mentions seeing Burns at a gathering in support of the match girls' strike of 1888 while working on *The Nether World* (*London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas [Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978], 35).

[37] George Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1972), 416. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

[38] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 175-76.

[39] Jameson, 188.

[40] *The Times*, August 30, 1889, 4.

[41] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories*, 2 vol. (New York: Bantam, 2003), 1:203.

[42] See Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," *Representations* 90.1 (2005): 61-74; Jesse Rosenthal, "The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling," *ELH* 77.3 (2010): 777-811; Audrey Jaffe, *The Affective Life of the Average Man: The Victorian Novel and the Stock-Market Graph* (Columbus: The Ohio State Univ. Press, 2010).

[43] See Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); and Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking: 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986).

[44] See Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995).

[45] Hacking, 121. See also Hacking, 115-32; Porter, 151-92.

[46] Porter, 52-53.

[47] Francis Galton, "Composite Portraits," *Nature* 18 (May 23, 1878): 97; "Composite Portraiture," *The Photographic Journal* 15 (June 24, 1881): 140.

[48] Francis Galton, *Natural Inheritance* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1889), 66.

[49] For a recent reading closer to my own, see Susan E. Cook, who argues that the novel "leaves space for the possibility of social mobility and the productive alteration of oppressive social conditions" ("Envisioning Reform in Gissing's The Nether World," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 52.4 [2009]: 461).

[50] *Diary*, 36.

[51] *Diary*, 23.

**Chapter Three**

[1] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1997), 186.

[2] While it has long been recognized that *Phineas Finn* unfolds against the backdrop of the Second Reform Act, a persistent critical tradition has deemphasized the novel's substantive engagements with politics. D.A. Miller, for example, memorably claims that Trollope portrays "a Parliament that, for all its politicking, has no politics" in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 116. See also Bradford Booth, *Anthony Trollope: Aspects of His Life and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press 1958); and A.O.J. Cockshut, *Anthony Trollope: A Critical Study* (New York: HarperCollins, 1968). Recent scholarship, however, has reexamined the salience of politics, and reform more generally, in the Pallisers: Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010); Nicholas Dames, "Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the

Management of Ambition," *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2003): 247–78; Lynette Felber, "Advanced Conservative Liberal: Victorian Liberalism and the Aesthetics of Anthony Trollope's Palliser Novels," *Modern Philology* 107, no. 3 (2010): 421-446; Michael Dango, "Representation between Utilitarianism and Liberalism: Focalization in *Phineas Finn*," *NOVEL* 50, no. 2 (2017): 236-254; David A. P Womble, "*Phineas Finn,* the Statistics of Character, and the Sensorium of Liberal Personhood," *NOVEL* 51, no. 1 (2018): 17-35.

[3] Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn* (Oxford: Univ. Press 2011), 178. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[4] Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018), 13.

[5] Gallagher, *Wasn't*, 52.

[6] Catherine Gallagher, "When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?," *Representations* 98 (2007), 58. See also Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004) for "the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous" as a "prognostic structure of historical time" (95).

[7] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. 189 (1867), 951-2.

[8] Gertrude Himmelfarb "The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867," *Journal of British Studies* 6 (1966), 9.

[9] "A Leap in the Dark," *Punch* 53, no. 2 (1867): 48.

[10] The manuscript is housed at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library: GEN MSS 310, 15.

[11] John Sutherland, "Trollope and *St. Paul's* 1866-1870," in *Anthony Trollope*, ed. Tony Bareham (London: Vision, 1980), 131.

[12] Himmelfarb "Politics of Democracy," 97, 102. Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1954), 292. For the extent to which the legislation was "shaped by chance" see J.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill* (Adelaide: Melbourne Univ. Press, 1966), 4. For the Second Reform Act as the beginning of "the institutions and practices of democratic government" in Britain see Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 1.

[13] See the title page of Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Race, Class, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); Homersham Cox, *A History of the Reform Bills of 1866 and 1867* (London: Longmans, 1868), 278-80; Briggs, 264; Himmelfarb, 97.

[14] "The Condition of the political world at this moment," *The Times*, March 23, 1866, 9.

[15] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. 186 (1867), 84.

[16] Maurice Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), 177; Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, 160-61.

[17] *Hansard* 186, 1311.

[18] Walter Bagehot, "The Reform Act of 1867; And the Function of the House of Peers," in *Essays on Parliamentary Reform* (London, 1883), 183-248.

[19] "The Leap in the Dark," *St. Paul's* 1 (1867), 8.

[20] "Leap," 13.

[21] "Leap," 14. My italics.

[22] Cowling, 166; Himmelfarb, 101.

[23] See for example Juliet McMaster, *Trollope's Palliser Novels: Theme and Pattern* (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1978), 225.

[24] Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 277.

[25] Trollope, *Now*, 277.

[26] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. 182 (1866), 222.

[27] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. 187 (1867), 829.

[28] Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, 204.

[29] *Hansard* 187, 819.

[30] *Hansard* 187, 837-8.

[31] *Hansard* 187, 829.

[32] *Hansard* 187, 821.

[33] Jane Rendall, "Who Was Lily Maxwell? Women's Suffrage and Manchester Politics, 1866-1867," in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 57-83.

[34] The 1850 legal precedent known as "Romilly's Law" held that the word 'man,' where it appeared in Acts of Parliament, applied equally to men *and* women.

[35] Barbara Bodichon, *Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women Considered* (London, 1866), 4-5.

[36] Barbara Bodichon, *Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women* (London, 1866), 2.

[37] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *Collected Works* XXI (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 276.

[38] Lest Glencora's equivocation seem disingenuous, Trollope himself later takes up her words in *An Autobiography*, where he characterizes his own politics as encompassing "a tendency towards equality" (255).

[39] See Jill Rappoport, "Greed, Generosity, and Other Problems with Unmarried Women's Property," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 4 (2016), 636-660; Romona Denton, "'That Cage' of Femininity: Trollope's Lady Laura," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (1980), 1-10; Jane Nardin, *He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1989); *The Politics of Gender in Anthony Trollope's Novels: New Readings for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marwick, Margaret, Deborah Denenholz Morse, and Regenia Gagnier (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[40] Rappoport, 654.

[41] Monk's immediate point of reference is Irish tenant rights. The issue was, like women's suffrage, being popularly discussed at the time Trollope wrote *Phineas Finn*. A more contained measure—already a diminishment of Home Rule—tenant rights would have seemed to Trollope closer to probable than chimerical. In *Phineas Redux* he describes Phineas' support of the issue as having been merely "twelve months in advance of his party" (10).

[42] For the "optative, lateral prodigality" inherent to realistic fiction, of which Lady Laura's lament is an instance, see Andrew Miller, "Lives Unled in Victorian Fiction," *Representations* 98 (2007), 122.

[43] Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Redux* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 15. All quotations will be from this edition and page numbers given in the body of the chapter.

[44] Mill signaled his intention to introduce a women's suffrage amendment on March 19, 1867, when Trollope was still composing *Phineas Finn*.

[45] *Hansard* 187, 821

[46] Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2018), 140.

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