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Emotional Investments:
British Childhood and the Liberal Ideal, 1800-1870

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Emily Caroline McArthur

June 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Joseph Childers, Chairperson

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Dr. George Haggerty

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The Dissertation of Emily Caroline McArthur is approved:

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For my family

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Emotional Investments:
British Childhood and the Liberal Ideal, 1800-1870

by

Emily Caroline McArthur

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Joseph Childers, Chairperson

As a focal point of public spectacle and communal enjoyment, the Victorian sentimentalized child has earned considerable scholarly attention, and scholars typically read the good will and fellow feeling of sentimentality in opposition to capitalism's individualism and rationalism. The sentimentalized child is, according to this line of thinking, a reaction against modernity or a symbol of anti-rational, anti-utilitarian ideals. But to what degree is this child also a product of the individualist, capitalist, and imperialist drives of the mid-nineteenth century? My dissertation examines representations of Victorian children at the intersection of sentimental and economic discourse in order to show their complicity.

Through readings of Dickens novels, Victorian boys' magazines, radical poetry, and a range of other period texts, I contend that the sentimentalized child relies on

bourgeois class assumptions and can only exist because of market forces. At the same time, a capitalist approach to childhood must hide itself in the trappings of sentiment in order to be palatable to the reading public. The sentimental narrative's excessive suffering and tears can disguise a hidden economic agenda, as the tropes of pathos usually (but not always) come together to enforce a middle-class interpretation of appropriate family and public values. When taken together, these supposedly competing visions of childhood teach the core values of liberalism to the reading subject, who must learn to be hard working and individualistic yet, because of his strong emotional ties to others, able to self-regulate so that he does not become an egotistical menace to the wider community. Taken in a wider context, my project demonstrates that humans' emotional lives do not exclusively inhabit some private, interior realm; instead, they can bow to economic forces and social pressures, and they frequently conspire towards socio-political ends.

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1. Introduction: Two Discourses of Childhood

What is the true cost of raising children? In mid-November 2012, the *New York Times* blog pages lit up with this question when Nadia Taha of the *Bucks Blog* wrote a piece estimating the lifetime cost of raising a child in New York City to be nearly two million dollars. Her post itemizes the costs, both the obvious and the unexpected: a larger apartment, childcare, braces, college tuition, and lost maternal income, among others. The article quickly garnered over seven hundred comments. (By contrast, the *Bucks* post immediately preceding Ms. Taha's had just five.) Readers responded in a variety of ways, but a common refrain soon emerged: outrage at the notion of quantifying the value of a child. In a fairly typical response, Maura C from Connecticut writes, "Yes, kids can cost us money, worry, and heartache. But how do you measure joy?" Parents—not only on the *Bucks Blog* but also on the *Times* parenting blog *Motherlode* and social science blog *Economix*, which soon posted their own responses to Taha—fiercely combatted the notion that child-bearing could be an economic decision, or child-rearing an economic process.

Yet economic forces undeniably shape the "joy" Maura C. associates with children. The United States Department of Agriculture, which produces an annual study of the costs of parenting, reported in 2011 that American two-parent families with annual incomes above \$102,870 spent on average around \$200,000 more raising a child from birth to age seventeen than those with annual incomes below \$59,410. Wealthy parents spend an average of \$16,000 more on food for their children and \$60,000 more on education. Poorer parents spend \$7,000 less on medical care per child. Economic factors

clearly do influence what children eat and what they learn, how their bodies grow and their minds develop. And then there is the larger societal accounting surrounding child-rearing. Nancy Folbre, responding to the controversy on the *Times* Economix blog, points out, “Our standard economic accounting system ignores the value of goods and services that lack a market price,” including parenting. Yet the under-valued labor of child-rearing creates huge returns for our national economy, which enjoys the benefits of our collective attachment to narratives of childrearing as a labor of love and children as tokens of achievement, both present and future. In Folbre’s words, “Capitalism, that masterful force, would have to pay much more for workers if families weren’t willing to pony up most of the time, money and effort necessary to raise them, train them and educate them.”

1. Two Discourses of Childhood

Rather than Folbre’s lukewarm “willing,” I would actually substitute something stronger: perhaps “thrilled” or “delighted.” For the *Times* debate is not an isolated case. With declining fertility rates and the rising costs of childrearing in many Western nations, similar discussions play out in periodicals and on blogs and social media on a daily basis. When we widen the scope of inquiry to this enormous national conversation on childhood and childrearing, one trend becomes obvious: we have invested huge emotional capital in the concept of childhood. In a culture that has produced terms like “attachment parenting” and “helicopter parenting” along with the now infamous “tiger mother”-ing, one can pick one’s metaphor for the assumption that the parent’s chief purpose is meeting the (often culturally-constructed) needs of the child. Moreover, we must never describe

the meeting of these needs as anything other than a joy, even when that joy involves a slow progression from 2:00 A.M. feedings to screaming tantrums to bills for private schools and soccer camps. All of these expectations emerge from an assumption about childhood itself: that it is a time of special potential, qualitatively different from the rest of life. Parents are encouraged “not to miss a moment” and chastened, when tempted to complain, with the warning that “it all goes by too fast.”

Our affective investment in the significance of childhood presents quite tangible returns, though. The middle-class child—for this approach to parenting is and always has been strongly associated with bourgeois values—believes from his earliest years in the importance of achievement and improvement. Meanwhile, our social insistence on each child’s uniqueness instills a robust consumerist drive, as the child learns to demonstrate his individuality through the exclusivity of his possessions. Play dates teach socialization; team sports teach competitiveness; music lessons teach persistent, daily hard work. In short, our whole roster of parenting practices serves to inscribe upon each child the dominant values of capitalism.

As my metaphor of investment and return should demonstrate, two separate strands of thought emerge in our culture’s approach to childhood. The first, the sentimental, associates children with emotion—hopes, joys, and human connections. Childhood is invested with a special significance as a time of simplicity, innocence, and potential. The second discourse is economic, linking childhood (and parenting) to pragmatic personal decisions or national campaigns. The child, in this view, is a line item on a spreadsheet, an asset or a liability in the larger accounting of progress. Symbolically

speaking, the child stands at the junction of the affective and the economic, a monument to our fondest hopes for our families and our nations.

These dual narratives of childhood, however current, are not new. The nineteenth century, like our own, held contradictory views towards the economics of childhood and childrearing, seeking to shelter children from market pressures on the one hand while acknowledging the child's vital economic and social role on the other. My dissertation examines representations of children at the intersection of the sentimental and the economic during the nineteenth century in order to show the complicity of these two discourses. These discourses appear at times to be in competition, for sentiment is a communal quality (resting on the assumption that people fundamentally respond to emotional stimuli in the same way), while the values of capitalism are fundamentally individualistic. In fact, though, they rely heavily on each other, with the economic narrative of childhood often propped up by the sentimental and vice versa. Along these lines, I contend that the sentimentalized child relies on bourgeois class assumptions and can only exist because of market forces. At the same time, a capitalist approach to childhood must hide itself in the trappings of sentiment in order to be palatable to the reading public. If sentimental discourse relies on class assumptions in order to communicate its pathos, then economic discourse relies on sentiment in order to convey its message to a broader audience than the one that could be addressed through the discipline of political economy alone. The sentimental narrative's excessive suffering and tears can disguise a hidden economic agenda, as the tropes of pathos usually (but not

always) come together to enforce a middle-class interpretation of appropriate family and public values.

The complicity between the sentimentalized and economic visions of childhood points to the triumph of one overarching ideology: liberalism, which was formed from the theories of political scientists and utilitarian philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which still structures much of the West's economic and social policy today. In the following chapters I show that an outlook blending "appropriate" feeling with capitalist notions of progress produces the ideal subject for the liberal state, a person committed to both individual achievement and social cooperation. In this way, the exceptional individual of capitalism works alongside, rather than in opposition to, the moral hero of the sentimental tradition. Yet of the two traditions, sentiment seems the weaker. Perhaps because of the requirements of narrative form, texts that begin by emphasizing community through shared feeling inevitably end with one individual looming large above those around him. Bourgeois texts present their heroes with the bourgeois rewards of marriage and advancement, as affective social relations give way to the larger goals of personal and national improvement.

The defining feature of sentimental literature, however, lies not in the fabric of the text itself but in the reader's reaction to it; its purpose is to elicit emotion, and that necessitates a reading subject with the power to give or withhold feeling. Sentimentalized narratives of childhood follow well-trod paths: the suffering, angelic child; a saintly death or last-minute rescue; the belated remorse of the other characters and likely of the reader as well. But I will show that this reading subject can respond to sentimental conventions

in unexpected ways, whether it is Oscar Wilde's famous jab that he cannot read of the death of Little Nell without laughing, or Chartist authors bending the traditions of sentiment to new political purposes, or young readers writing back to their all-too-conventional boys' magazines with wit and good sense. In short, when sentiment becomes a market good, then sometimes it is bought and sometimes it is passed over.

2. Extraeconomics

Scholars like Anne Higonet and Philippe Ariès identify the emergence of the modern category of childhood sometime in the late eighteenth century, with the rise of Romanticism and the growing importance of the middle class. The nineteenth century, as scholars like James Kincaid and Catherine Robson have noted, fixated on sentimentalized child-figures, whose perceived innocence made a convenient repository for a host of adult desires. But the Victorians also redefined the child's relation to the public sphere. The years 1800 to 1870 saw the gradual removal of children from the productive economy through a series of Factory Acts beginning in 1802 and stretching throughout the century. Increasingly—and especially after the 1870 Education Act providing for universal primary schooling—children were repositioned into domestic or educational spaces, partitioning the worlds of childhood and work and enforcing a kind of economic innocence.

Yet we should not consider this a one-way move, with children pushed further and further outside the realm of the economic as the century progressed. Instead, the nineteenth century produced an explosion of materials—didactic texts, journalism, and

political economy as well as traditional “literary” writing—that figure the child in the terms of the market. These texts concern themselves with the child’s ability to produce or drive to consume, his or her place within the social body, and the sorts of preparations necessary for his or her future role in the nation. Even as children gradually disappear from the nation’s productive economy over the course of the nineteenth century, through these texts they are assigned an ever more central role in public debate. Childhood functions as a contested site not just over the proper role of the child, but also over the larger relationship between human feeling and economic systems.

This relationship is fraught with conflict, at least according to classical political economy. Early economic thinkers developed the idea of *homo economicus* as a model human, driven by his needs and interests (rather than feelings or ethics) to participate in the economic sphere. With the rise of classical political economy, this vision of humanity soon came to dominate social discourse, and human relationships were increasingly defined in terms of production and exchange. In Adam Smith’s famous formulation, human nature by definition includes “the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. . . It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love” (14-15). Early in the next century, David Ricardo worked to distance the fledgling science of political economy from the moral philosophy of earlier practitioners like Smith, according to Claudia Klaver. She calls Ricardo’s iteration of political economy an “aggressively amoral”

(XXIV) scientific discipline that defines “a distinct domain of ‘the economic’ and then [considers] human agents solely in terms of their relationship to that domain” (27).

In this vision, the economic man makes decisions based on perceived self-interest, and the nineteenth century saw this principle, along with the methodologies of the new discipline, begin to shape almost all realms of human endeavor. In politics, the 1834 Poor Law used economic incentives to deal with the problem of poverty: those who wanted charity would likely have to enter a work-house—in many cases little more than a prison—to get it. Men like Kay-Shuttlesworth and Mayhew adopted a sociological approach to their studies of city life, studying, classifying, and quantifying the urban poor. Evangelical religion preached doctrines of worldly striving and God-ordained success, and the rise of mass culture (from popular periodicals to the new department stores) quickly provided an avenue for massive profits. The Utilitarian movement turned self-interest into a greater good by defining human life as the sum of its pleasures and pains, while novelists, according to Ilana Blumberg, used their art to craft a new ethical schema that moved forward from the Christian notions of extreme duty and self-sacrifice towards a pursuit of “collective benefit” that reflected the value structure of capitalism (12). Even the family, as Eric Hobsbawm points out, became the “basic unit of property and business enterprise” in bourgeois society, “linked with other such units through a system of exchanges of women-plus-property” (236). On the other hand, John Stuart Mill argued for the emancipation of women on economic grounds, as all people should be free to pursue their self-interest and “compete for certain things” (490), including wealth and distinction. At the same time economic popularizers like Harriet Martineau and William

Ellis re-worked the theories of political economists into forms appropriate for workers, women, children, and other marginalized groups. As the ideals of laissez-faire spread to all walks of life, these notions were “re-moralized,” to use Klaver’s terminology (XXIV), pervading the domestic space and promoting a system of morality and ethics based on political economy’s tenets of self-interest and competition.

Clearly economic assumptions about human behavior and relationships flourished in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. But forces beyond the economic, even sometimes in opposition to the economic, continued to intrude upon that orderly realm. It is difficult to apply one overarching label to these forces, as they emerge from a range of sources: mass culture, domesticity, art, religion, cultural criticism, social reform, and of course sentiment. As I have noted, economic elements are not totally absent from these movements; instead, they represent areas in which forces of capital, labor, or production coexist with other factors to form an uneasy hybrid. I will refer to these hybrids as the *extraeconomic*—an interestingly ambiguous term, implying both a concentration of economic forces and a “beyond” them.

An example of this would be the nineteenth-century bourgeois family, Hobsbawm’s “basic unit of property.” The family clearly has an economic function and remains highly vulnerable to economic considerations, as evidenced by my opening examples from the *Times* blogs and the USDA study. But the nineteenth-century bourgeois family, presided over by domestic woman, also stands in opposition to economic forces, a source of authority in competition with capitalism, liberalism, and utilitarianism. As Nancy Armstrong points out, domestic woman gains power in the

nineteenth-century because of her authority over the realm of feeling: “Domestic fiction . . . invested common forms of social behavior with the emotional values of women. . . . In this way, domestic fiction could represent an alternative form of political power without appearing to contest the distribution of power that it represented as historically given” (29). This “alternative form of political power” is precisely the extraeconomic that I am positing. In the case of domesticity, this force exists under the larger rubric of political (and economic) power, but also subverts it. The domestic woman critiques capitalism through her emphasis on frugality and her avoidance of ostentation and excess; she unsettles liberalism through her authority over her children and destabilizes utilitarianism through her emotional, non-rational bonds with her family.

My dissertation is concerned with a related example of the extraeconomic: childhood. Because of the marriage of sentiment and economics that I have mentioned, childhood perfectly exemplifies the tension inherent in my term—a concentration of economic forces and an implication of something beyond them. Imagine the child of a Dickens novel—Tiny Tim, Sissy Jupe, or Jo the crossing-sweep in *Bleak House*—all extremely susceptible to the vicissitudes of their environments, and yet always somehow above the economic fray, possessors of a sincerity and an insight that can cut through questions of self-interest and consumption. These children suffer because they are unable to understand or manipulate economic realities; simultaneously, through the authors’ manipulation of their characters, these children form a critique of social and economic forces. The sufferings of Dickensian children seem to propose that the child must be protected from the economic realm at all costs, but they also suggest the

impossibility of such a task. They children call forth a flood of emotion on the part of the reader but also convey some opinion on economic systems.

Despite these conflicting messages, most recent studies of nineteenth-century literary childhood have avoided considering it as a significant economic (or extraeconomic) category. Instead they have focused on the child's innocence, or lack thereof. One significant example of this type of scholarship, James Kincaid's *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* argues that the child is really a discursive category, a construct into which humans can infuse all our various desires. According to Kincaid, the child's presumed a-sexuality—protected by the fixed boundary of puberty—distances the child from the power dynamics inherent to sexual relations, thus freeing it to act as repository (if only a temporary one) for any number of different meanings. Extending Kincaid's project into an examination of three centuries of visual culture, Anne Higonet's *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* explains the emergence of what she calls the "Romantic" child in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Before this time, according to Higonet, artists represent children as miniature adults, small bodies infected by original sin and in need of appropriate discipline. The sentimentalized Romantic child emerges in the wake of Rousseau's *Emile* and finds its home in the visual arts as "a set of visual signals" of innocence (9), including children in loose, a-sexual clothing, tender mother/child images, children holding small, fluffy animals, "natural" children portrayed out-of-doors, and the saccharine childhood images of the new nineteenth-century greeting card industry. More recently, Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian*

Gentleman investigates idealized young girls as part of “a pervasive fantasy of male development in which men become masculine only after an initial feminine stage” (3), suggesting that a fascination with young girls in Victorian male authors really reflects a narcissistic fascination with Self.

These works display only a limited concern with the economic forces that influence childhood. Kincaid does include a detailed depiction of the conditions of certain child-workers, for instance, and Higgonet interests herself with the elision of the working classes—including servants and nannies—from visual representations of bourgeois family life. But to all of these authors, representations of childhood primarily reveal something about the cultural politics of sentiment and sexuality. They read significant power into the seemingly powerless child figure—power to produce or direct desire. As Stalleybrass and White note, society often places marginalized figures at the symbolic centers of culture, and so the kind of sexuality projected onto the “blank” of childhood can certainly reveal the power dynamics of heteronormative ideology. But it can also reveal its slips and gaps, like the gender confusion discussed by Robson or Kincaid’s consideration of the pedophile as a transgressive figure produced by cultural norms.

My dissertation contends that childhood can reveal the same kinds of gaps in capitalist ideology. Lee Edelman unites these two separate strands in his consideration of childhood in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, making his work, perhaps counter-intuitively, the closest match to my own interests. Edelman’s child holds symbolic value both sexually and politically, as it “embodies the citizen as an idea,

entitled to claim full rights to its future share in that nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights 'real' citizens are allowed" (11). He calls this unquestioned faith in the child's symbolic worth "reproductive futurism," which unites both sexual and economic ideology through an insistence that future considerations must always win out over mere present pleasures. For Edelman, the queer figure stands in opposition to this reproductive futurism, and he coins the term "sinthomosexual" to describe a figure that finds perverse pleasure in denying future concerns. Edelman explicates this idea in a discussion of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miser who rejects reproduction in both its sexual and economic forms.

Sentiment, too, contains all the ambiguities of the extraeconomic, as Kathleen Stewart contends. Her notion of "ordinary affects" defines our daily moments of intense feeling not as centers of symbolic meaning but as ambiguous intimations of bonds and connections, making them "more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings" (3). Affect, in this sense, heralds both "promise and threat" (129). Stewart sees affect as opposing our middle-class "self-making projects" (59) because it is uncontrolled, defying our sense of individual agency and effort. But that does not stop structures of domination from trying to use our affective capacities to persuade us. One example of this is our sense of "home," which Stewart says is tinged by "prevailing public winds—privatization, sensible accumulation, family values, or some kind of identity or lifestyle or something" (52). Stewart also points to childhood as a moment where our affective forces are particularly concentrated. She tells a story of walking with her baby and passing through

a group of teenage boys, who act tough until one notices her child and exclaims, almost involuntarily, “Did you see that *cute* baby?” (47). Stewart claims a performative approach to her topic, describing moments of intense feeling along with her reflections on them, and while I cannot replicate her methodology here, I fully embrace her overall contention: the “tight circuit” of public ideology and private experience creates our sense of the ordinary, as “publicly circulating styles, sensibilities, and affects simultaneously snap into place in hearts all over the country” (105).

Like Stewart, Sara Ahmed sees emotion as circulatory rather than wholly internal and individuated (10). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* she contends that our emotions travel, often somewhat unpredictably, among individuals and groups, and by examining this social dimension of feeling we can better understand the function of emotions in the political realm. Ahmed is especially interested in the ways that emotions join or divide us. For instance, she describes the broadcasting of individual pain into a media event as part of a broader “commodification of suffering” (32) that allows the “ordinary or normative subject [to be] reproduced as the injured party” (43). As an individual’s story of pain circulates, we feel that we can share it, and even that moment of empathy gives Ahmed’s “normative subject” a false feeling of kinship. Yet rather than this collective commodification Ahmed argues for an understanding of pain as something the individual only experiences alone, which calls for “a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one” (39). These two visions—Stewart’s and Ahmed’s—of emotion in the public sphere construct a

theoretical platform for my own work, which points to the dual nature of sentiment as a force that both unites us and divides us, that can perpetuate social conditions as it aims to reform them. As these authors show, and as my own analyses will demonstrate, feeling can never be fully separated from the material realm, since material conditions generate and direct the course of our feelings.

3. Chapter Summaries

I have divided the remainder of this dissertation into four chapters and a brief conclusion, each of which presents a group of (generally fictional) Victorian children as a case study in the overlap between economics and sentiment. My first two chapters analyze novels and poetry written in the 1840s, yet I have chosen 1800 as the beginning of my project's chronological scope because it lies neatly between the publication of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798 and the passage of the first of the British Factory Acts in 1802. These two documents represent early attempts to delineate the child's role in the public sphere, a task that will also be taken up, later in the century, by the authors of the sentimental texts I will examine. By design, there is no homogeneity in the kind of texts or authors that I have included here, as I wish to show how sentiment's political and economic force touched a range of nineteenth-century audiences.

In my first chapter, I read the sentimentalized dying children at the heart of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son*. Little Nell and Paul Dombey, two of the most familiar examples of Victorian sentimentalized childhood in their day, do indeed serve to

draw readers together into communities of feeling, as many scholars have shown. But the death of an otherworldly, nonproductive, nonprocreative child also makes space for narratives of national progress through exceptional individualism and the nuclear family. Nell and Paul represent older, more communal conceptions of labor and exchange, and I argue that they actually represent a Dickensian vision of the “prebourgeois,” or a life stage before the capitalist impulses of adulthood take over in what Marx terms “*Vereinzelung*.” Because these children do not make the appropriate move from the prebourgeois to the bourgeois, they must die and be replaced by other young people willing and able to make this transition. I read the novels’ deathbed scenes and subsequent resolutions in order to show the biopolitical, bioeconomic pressures that push back against the sentimentalized child and her construction of an affective community. These novels conclude with a focus on the creation of new families, bent on progress and production yet always sympathetically benevolent, haunted by the friendly ghosts of sentimentalized children past.

In my second chapter, I investigate the implications of a middle-class sentimental tradition adopted and effectively radicalized by working-class authors. Chartist poets often turn to emotional depictions of extreme child suffering and death, a move that some scholars see as a weakness in Chartist verse. I argue that their deployment of sentiment is in fact a strength, as the poets adopt the conventions of both elegy and sentiment to emphasize the personal and political significance of these sorrows. Chartist poets turn these conventions to two concrete tasks: convincing the working-class reader of the importance of political action and giving him the language to effectively describe his

condition. Through my readings of poems by Ernest Jones, Robert Lowery, Ebenezer Elliott, and others, I show that Chartist use of sentiment builds more than just a community of feeling; its radical goal is to join its readers together not just in pity but in outrage that ultimately results in action.

In my third chapter, I examine a form of sentimentalized childhood meant for consumption by the children themselves: Victorian boys' magazines, particularly Samuel Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine* and Edward J. Brett's *Boys of England*. Through this investigation I show how the central heroes of their serials blend the ideals of sentiment and bourgeois achievement to form the ideal liberal subject. This figure is perfectly self-regulating, embodying both individual industry and, because of his moral sentiments, properly communal. Scholars regularly argue that these texts present only the most traditional values to their middle-class and lower-middle-class readerships, yet the features beyond the serials, and especially those that encourage an interactive relationship with readers, regularly undercut this ethic, subverting the notion that readers accepted any of these values uncritically. Thus the boys' magazine emerges not only as a voice of convention but also as a site for struggle over the availability of freedom, the location of moral values, and the definition of masculinity.

In my fourth chapter, I examine children who are not sweetly warmhearted and parent-child relations without the tender maternity that inflects many other Victorian texts. Here, primarily using readings of *Jane Eyre* and *A Christmas Carol*, I discuss the threatening, wholly unsentimentalized portrayal of poor, proliferating children, the Malthusian masses that threaten the wider social body. Not only children are implicated

in this threat, however. “Poor” parenting—whether through over-procreation, neglect, or another form of failed childrearing—manufactures monstrous children who viciously compete with each other and brashly defy the established social order. This chapter argues for the reliance of sentiment on bourgeois assumptions about class: an abundance of poor children is threatening to the middle classes, and that threat cannot always be neutralized through sentiment.

I conclude with a brief coda examining England’s 1870 Elementary Education Act. The intensity of the contemporary conversations about this legislation, especially regarding the issue of religion versus secularism in the nation’s schools, points to education as the primary modern method of both determining and increasing the value of the nation’s children. In this case, England makes a concrete financial investment in the future of its children, but that could not happen without a corresponding emotional investment. This historical moment provides an excellent opportunity to examine the child as a fulcrum in national politics, as England weighs its economic necessities against its fundamental conceptions about itself.

2. Value in Death: *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son*

“The little group would often gather round him of a night and beg him to tell again that story of good Miss Nell who died. This, Kit would do; and when they cried to hear it, wishing it longer too, he would teach them how she had gone to heaven, as all good people did; and how, if they were good like her, they might hope to be there too one day, and to see and know her as he had done when he was quite a boy.”

(Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* 556)

This chapter focuses on the two most famous dying children in Dickens, Paul Dombey and Nell Trent. Paul and Nell seem at first to be fully sentimentalized, spiritualized, and even disembodied figures. But I argue here that these dying children act as a bridge between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of mammon, making them prime examples of the extraeconomic, which I defined in my introduction as a concentration of economic forces and an implication of something beyond them. In the case of Paul and Nell, the moral values they represent frequently come into conflict with the concrete needs of family, economy, and nation. Thus, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son* express considerable ambiguity about the real source of a child’s worth, and this ambiguity concentrates itself in the tension between the pathos of the child deaths and the novels’ otherwise happy resolutions. Although the death of a child removes a potential laborer and consumer from the economy, this death also provides a unique opportunity for the reaffirmation of shared values, both affective and economic. As many scholars have noted, sentiment can work on an ethical plane to build a community of shared feeling; however, the dying child also serves as a public reminder of the importance of energy and industry, directing the reading community towards an ethic of worldly success, as these novels’ resolutions show. In this way, child deaths are

as necessary to larger narratives of national progress as they are to tales of sentiment. The idealized child must first remind the reader of the importance of true feeling and shared emotional experience. But the child then must die and make way for the children of the future, the children who will strive for Britain's dominance on the world stage. The power of these child deaths, then, lies not only in their ability to elicit an affective response from the reader, but also in the dead or dying child's physical presence as an embodied memorial to the sorts of sacrifices that are necessary for the nation's success.

Scholarship on sentiment in Dickens no longer contents itself with dismissive jibes about the author's tendency toward sappiness. Instead, scholars frequently aim to "rehabilitate" Dickensian sentiment by considering its positive potentialities alongside its emotional excesses. Recent criticism in this vein has emphasized its ethical potential not just for Victorians, but also for the readers of today. In a 2007 issue of *19*:

Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century called *Rethinking Victorian Sentimentality*, several articles considered issues of feeling in Dickens. In particular, pieces by Nicola Brown and Emma Mason work to move criticism of sentiment beyond new historicist attempts to compartmentalize feeling as a construction of certain material or historical conditions.¹ "Sentimentality is not simply a textual figure for a something else that can be discovered by archival research or diligent searching in the literary undergrowth," Brown writes (3). Mason, too, denies the notion that sentiment can be entirely reduced to market forces, gender constructions, or class expectations. Instead,

¹ Another example of this comes in an essay by Maria K. Bachman: "Who Cares?: Novel Reading, Narrative Attachment Disorder, and the Case of *The Old Curiosity Shop*," in which the author argues, from a cognitive science standpoint, that a novel's form actually shapes the ways that we do or do not feel sympathy with its characters.

she argues that reading with careful attention to one's feelings will result in greater ethical engagement on the part of the reader.

Mason's and Brown's warning not to try to find one "key" to the interpretation of feeling in a text is a crucial one, but that should not hinder efforts to consider sentiment as a historical construct. While I agree that sentiment cannot be blithely explained away with references to the material conditions that created it, defining sentiment as simply the feelings-cum-ethical promptings attending the process of reading ignores the potential for cross-contamination between feeling and historical situation, or indeed for the reader's sense of empathy and pathos to misguide him or her in construing moral lessons. We cannot assume that twenty-first century readers (or even—especially—twenty-first century literary critics) experience the same catalogue of emotions at the deaths of Paul Dombey or Little Nell as the average Victorian reader did at the time Dickens published those novels. Sentiment does not stand alone as an independent force, an affective "first cause" connecting people through space and time in some mystical union. The crucial work of the scholar, then, is to consider the potential causes and effects of sentimental reading as situated within a particular historical context. In fact, a 2012 issue of *19*, this time titled *Dickens and Feeling*, works to expand just this kind of historical understanding. Bethan Carney's introduction, for instance, traces Victorian reviewers' gravitation from appreciation to denigration of Dickensian sentimentality between the 1830s and the 1850s, in part as a reaction against the expansion of novel-reading among the working classes (8). If such a short span of time could see such a wide divergence in

opinion on sentiment, then clearly material conditions must have some influence on the ways in which we interpret and express our feelings.

Indeed, there is a longstanding tradition of scholarship at the intersection of sentiment and a range of material and historical conditions, especially socio-economics. Scholars within this tradition frequently read sentiment as a reaction to harsh economic realities, a pathway toward deeper community through shared emotion. Fred Kaplan's *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* perhaps best exemplifies this effort, though other scholars engage in similar attempts.² Kaplan argues that Victorian writing about feeling carries on the 18th century conception of moral sentiments, as described by David Hume and Adam Smith. According to this tradition, true feeling produces virtuous action, as the "sacred tears" mentioned in Kaplan's title create space for communities of shared feeling in opposition to the advancing forces of philosophical realism and scientific empiricism. Kaplan also speaks directly to sentimentality in Dickens, for whom feeling is a necessary force for community-building in the face of "the alienating and dehumanizing pressures and structures of modern culture" (41).

Other scholars see even the form of sentimental literature as a means of resisting the modern economy. Sue Zemka, for instance, considers sentiment as having an aesthetic of excess or disproportion, thus setting it fundamentally apart from bourgeois capitalism with its "dictum of proportionate earnings" (308). Nell's death, Zemka points out, draws on the upper-class nostalgia for the Gothic as well as the working-class

² For examples, see Leeann Hunter's "Communities Built from Ruins: Social Economics in Victorian Novels of Bankruptcy" and John Kucich's "Death Worship among the Victorians: The Old Curiosity Shop."

excesses of the Punch show and makes the entire novel an outgrowth of its own gambling motif: “Nell is Dickens's gamble with his readers' emotions” (308). Sentiment, like gambling, remains an outlier in the capitalist economy, but both provide opportunities for the sly practitioner to “game the system” or “get rich quick.” Although she never cites Adorno, Zemka’s assumption that Dickens’s economy of sentiment could undercut the prevailing capitalist economy clearly follows in a similar vein. In a 1931 lecture, Adorno reads *The Old Curiosity Shop* as a site of struggle between what he calls the “prebourgeois” and the “bourgeois” world. Nell, he argues, must be sentimentalized because she is the core of the “prebourgeois form” of the novel (172). In other words, it is not a realistic psychology that is important with Nell—that would indicate the typical bourgeois obsession with individuality—but instead her symbolic position as a kind of sacrificial lamb upon the altar of bourgeois values. Her angelic sweetness, her filial devotion, and her drawn-out death all function as signs of her symbolic or allegorical role and contribute to the reader’s sense of outrage at the destructive forces of bourgeois culture.

To clarify what these scholars might be leaving out of the conversation on sentiment in Dickens, I find it useful to turn to the terminology of Catherine Gallagher, whose recent work distinguishes between two separate strands of thought linking economies and bodies. The first, bioeconomics, considers the relationship between political economy and the resources of life (and, conversely, death), while somaconomics deals with the ways in which economics comes to be about feeling, the pleasures and pains associated with labor and acquisition. Scholars typically interpret the

unending Victorian fascination with literary child deaths using the terms of somaeconomics, which Gallagher explains as a “plot” in political economy underlying all human choice, as “even the most cerebral economic operation was assumed to be *sensational*, tinged with actual or anticipated suffering or enjoyment” (50). Political economists defined these “economic operations” as production (associated with pain) and consumption (associated with pleasure) and assumed that their goal was simple: “wealth would be converted into enjoyment and enjoyment into wealth” (51). We can also translate this economic language to reading, which entails both the consumption of a text and the production of certain thoughts and feelings in response. Reading about sentimentalized child deaths generates both pain and pleasure and, as the scholars mentioned above note, can therefore help focus the reader’s attention on the unsettling changes of bourgeois capitalism. By focusing on the emotions and subsequent moral lessons created by sentimental texts, however, this scholarship has often ignored the way that sentiment plays upon the physical requirements of a strong family and a strong nation—or, as Gallagher calls it, the plot of bioeconomics. This narrative “[traces] the interconnections among human life, its sustenance, and modes of production and exchange” (35). Frail, sentimentalized children are by necessity left out of both production and exchange, and a child’s death, fraught as it is with sentiment, also makes space for other, more productive members of society to rise and achieve prominence. By focusing on the bioeconomic transactions surrounding death, this reading expands the power of the child beyond the realm of sentiment and restores to it a corporeal force within the public sphere.

I develop this argument in two sections, roughly corresponding with the child's worth in life and in death. First I will consider the life and labor of Paul Dombey and Little Nell as a way of determining their value, both in bioeconomic and somaeconomic terms. Then I will move on to their deaths and the subsequent resolutions of their respective novels in order to think about how that might undercut traditional interpretations of sentiment as a reactionary or resistant force in these texts. Additionally, these two novels—which celebrate emotion's capability to improve, in the most practical terms, both family and nation—bridge the seeming chasm between Dickens's renowned allegiance to sentimentality and his disdain for utilitarianism.

1. Labor, *Vereinzelung*, and the Prebourgeois Child

The highly aestheticized lives and deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey may seem at first to trade only in the currency of sentimentality, but in fact their emotional appeal derives from the contrast between the idealized youths and the heartless society surrounding them. Here I maintain, with many of the scholars mentioned above, that Nell and Paul do indeed represent Dickens's resistance to modernity, but I would contend that his critique relies not only on the reader's affective response to suffering but also on the material conditions of the children's lives. These children stand out because they hearken back to older, "prebourgeois" conceptions of community, labor, and exchange.

Nell and Paul are in many ways two iterations of the same Dickensian vision. For both children, their chief characteristic is their otherworldly innocence, but nonetheless both are forced to act as miniature adults from a very early age, Paul to fulfill his father's

outsized expectations and Nell to care for her gambling-besotted grandfather. Despite their need to take up adult roles in bourgeois spaces—the school and the workplace, respectively—both children maintain their sense of otherworldliness.³ Paul is frequently described by those around him as “old-fashioned,” while Nell emerges into the modern world from an “old curiosity shop” as a kind of antique curiosity herself. In describing *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Theodor Adorno explains this old-new dichotomy as a vital part of the “prebourgeois form” of the Dickensian novel (172), as idealized characters like Nell (and Paul, I would add) take on allegorical meaning as sufferers at the hands of modernity.

Yet in these cases Adorno overlooks a key element constituting the prebourgeois: the fact that these sufferers are children. This is not significant merely because it increases their pathos. Instead I would argue that childhood creates space for a distinct pre-capitalist phase in these texts and that the brief lives of Nell and Paul show the potential pleasures of the prebourgeois existence just as their deaths show the dangers of modernity. Surviving as “old-fashioned” individuals in the modern world actually requires the innocence of childhood, according to Dickens, and when that childhood is outgrown then the precapitalist child must die, either physically or symbolically. As adults Paul and Nell would not be able to escape the bourgeois realities of labor, accumulation, and exchange, and it is only their premature deaths that save them from the necessity of fully entering into that world. In this way, Dickens actually posits these

³ This otherworldliness helps the reader categorize the two together despite the glaring difference of their sex. Nell’s femininity places her in additional danger over the course of her novel, but while some characters (most notably her brother Frederick) hope to trade on her sexual value, she is—like Paul—most celebrated for her quiet virtue.

aforementioned bourgeois necessities as a stage of life, something that can be grown into—indeed, must be grown into if a child is to become a functional middle-class adult. Children like Nell and Paul cannot make this transition and so must die.⁴ Equally problematically, some children (like Bitzer from *Hard Times*) are born into the bourgeois state and thus miss out on the lessons of the sentimentalized prebourgeois childhood. For Dickens, this phase is just as essential as the bourgeois adulthood, as it lays the groundwork for an adult life that values sympathy and simplicity alongside accumulation and exchange. Throughout Dickens's works, the most stable adults transform caterpillar-like from prebourgeois youth into adulthood perfectly capable of meeting the demands of the world of work. Like Walter Gay, who at first playfully interprets his relationship with Florence as something out of a fairy tale but eventually grows to sober modern manhood, these adults will be able to successfully integrate compassionate social relations with a drive for worldly success. In other words, those who easily navigate the transition from prebourgeois childhood to bourgeois adulthood become the ideal subjects for a liberal state.

⁴ We might think also of *Bleak House*'s debt-ridden Harold Skimpole, whom the novel frequently describes as a child. John Jarndyce explains his tendency towards bad decision-making as follows: " 'I don't mean [that he is] literally a child . . . not a child in years. He is grown up—he is at least as old as I am—but in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly affairs, he is a perfect child' " (79). Of course, Skimpole's open secret is that he is not childish at all; rather, he has learned how to skillfully manipulate his friends into covering for his financial missteps. Nonetheless we see here a trace, if a more cynical one, of the Dickensian prebourgeois child who is not yet versed in the requirements of the modern world. Skimpole in fact claims this status, declaring himself be a version of Paul or Nell all grown up and still incapable of navigating "worldly affairs."

If sentimentalized childhood demonstrates the possibility for an existence outside the strictures of capitalism, then this potential is chiefly exemplified through the child's labor. To return to Gallagher's terminology, Dickens gestures towards the plot of somaeconomics in order to make his idealized children deliver lessons not only in sentiment, but also in a vision of labor not bound by the typical laws of political economy. Labor is the foundation of value for the early political economists, but in their view it emerges from necessity and is only valuable for its productivity. As Gallagher shows, this labor causes pain—it allows for the accumulation of wealth only through a process of self-denial and postponement of pleasure (52). Adam Smith lays out this principle of labor as necessity early on in *The Wealth of Nations*. He compares the expectation of living by the benevolence of others (as opposed to earning sustenance through work) to a dog that “endeavours by a thousand attractions to engage the attention of its master who is at dinner, when it wants to be fed by him” (15). Humans, though, cannot always rely on this benevolence: “man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour. . . . Nobody but a beggar chuses to depend chiefly on the benevolence of his fellow-citizens” (15). Instead, humans turn to labor as a convenient system of barter with which to engage the world. This assumption works well in the realm of political economy, but Dickens writes his idealized children to do exactly what Smith says humans *cannot* do. Paul Dombey and Little Nell do indeed rely on the benevolence of others, and because of their childish sweetness that charity is given unstintingly. When they do work, their labor does not

function as an object of exchange; instead, it merely confirms their pre-existing worth to those around them and to the reader. In the prebourgeois world of the idealized child, labor is an extension and expression of the self rather than a means to some economic end. Paul and Nell intuitively understand this distinction, and in refusing to determine their self-worth in terms of their productive output, they call attention to the inhumanity of capitalist labor practices.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx distinguishes between the capitalist and precapitalist visions of labor in a way that further describes the prebourgeois nature of Paul's and Nell's work. He characterizes the development of capitalism as a transition from "living labour powers" into a "labour market," in which the labor force exists independent of land or personal property and therefore "dependent on the sale of its labour capacity" to earn a living (271). Bourgeois society, he argues, is constructed out of the "ruins" of "vanished social formations" (241), when the human existed as a "clan being" or "herd animal" rather than an isolated individual (262). The process of the accumulation of capital, in his view, relies on the dissolution of bonds—communal, geographic, material—that joined individuals together to form communities (263). Marx calls this process of individuation "*Vereinzelung*," and it leaves only the economic ties of exchange as possible bonds between otherwise disconnected humans. *Vereinzelung* undergirds the worker's alienation in many senses, most fundamentally his alienation from the community of the human race. The notion of the human as a "clan being" is destroyed as man seeks to turn to his own advantage the needs and desires of his fellow man. Or, as Marx puts it in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "Estranged labour

estranges the *species* from man. It turns for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. . . . Life itself appears only as a *means to life*” (75-76). Through the process of *Vereinzelung*, man is alienated from his work, his time, his body, and ultimately the entire species.

Paul and Nell, as idealized child figures, have not yet undergone Marx’s *Vereinzelung*, and therefore their approach to labor provides a useful window into a view of work not reducible to mere exchange. The efforts of Paul and Nell remain outside the market system of labor that produces; instead they emphasize the relational and communal aspects of work—work that draws the human species together rather than isolating its individual members. A striking example of this is Paul’s scholastic labors at Dr. Blimber’s academy in *Dombey and Son*. Like the vast majority of Dr. Blimber’s students, young Paul never achieves success in his studies. Sally Shuttleworth points out that the rigorous studies at Blimber’s school push students beyond their breaking points, which, according to common Victorian belief, actually would cause the student to regress intellectually, becoming increasingly child-like in mind. Paul, with his “strange, and old, and thoughtful” character (189), is especially susceptible to damage from this rigorous labor. Dr. Blimber’s school embodies the modern conception of labor as pain, or as Paul sees it, a “burden . . . piled upon his back” (189). He finds the entire experience of bourgeois boarding school alienating, as he is forced to leave his family and apply himself to learning that holds no value for him.

Yet Dickens does not allow Paul’s value in the novel to be determined by his ability to trade on his labor, and the boarding school eventually gains something of a

prebourgeois spirit through his influence. Even as Paul finds himself increasingly unable to perform adequately at school, he attracts more and more sympathy from those around him. His strangely wise conversation yields him “an odd kind of attraction” (123) to his first teacher, the “Ogress” Mrs. Pipchin, who soon comes to enjoy his company. Later, at the end of his stay at Dr. Blimber’s school, the greatly weakened Paul becomes the recipient of “universal kindness” (227) from his peers and even from Dr. Blimber himself. His teacher Cornelia Blimber tells him that he has “always been [her] favourite pupil” (228) despite the fact that Paul has been too sickly to flourish in his studies. In the eyes of his friends and tutors, Paul’s value stems from the sentiment his feebleness calls forth within them, not from his scholastic abilities or attainments. Paul’s labor, in other words, is without value, but others still offer him their friendship and assistance. In the prebourgeois economy built around little Paul, labor is not the exclusive determinant of value. The individual holds intrinsic worth, and the suffering child, who strengthens the affective bonds of all around him, possesses singular significance. The feelings called up by this ailing boy draw together the entire community of Dr. Blimber’s academy in a fellowship of sentiment that rejects political economy’s emphasis on mutually beneficial exchange.

Indeed, the case of Paul Dombey demonstrates that in the idealized world of the prebourgeois child, labor serves not to destroy the bonds between individuals but to strengthen them. As Paul progressively weakens, only one thing gives him the strength to continue in his studies: his sister Florence would “sit down with Paul on Saturday night, and patiently assist him through so much as they could anticipate together, of his next

week's work," and so Paul works on with "the cheering thought that he was laboring on where Florence had just toiled before him" (189). The only thing preserving Paul's fragile health, in other words, is the relational aspect of his school-work. He enjoys working at Florence's side, and when alone, the memory of their joint efforts carries him through. Rather than the alienation of a lone worker under capitalism, this is a prebourgeois conception of labor, one for which the compensation comes not in the payment at the end of the day but in the social relations that are built in the process. For Florence, too, her work to understand Paul's studies in Latin and Greek are paid off not in material terms, but in her brother's fervent declaration: "'Oh Floy! . . . How I love you! How I love you, Floy!'" (187). These human bonds—between the two siblings and between Paul and his school-fellows—point towards a reconstruction of a true species-level connection, one in which the weaker individual (in this case, a sentimentalized dying child) is protected rather than exploited by the strong.

The child's relational labor stands in stark contrast to the work of the House of Dombey, for which Paul is ostensibly being prepared. In perhaps the most famous lines from the novel, the House's purpose is linked explicitly with exchange: "The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre" (12). Here all of nature is complicit in the firm's schemes for trade, as no part of the human ecosystem exists outside the bourgeois drive for profit. Dombey's own glory in his work comes in

what it brings to his reputation, not in the relationships it can help him build. The toxicity of this vision becomes immediately apparent in the novel's opening pages, as the "labor" required to bring little Paul into the world literally kills his mother. Even in the birth of his son Dombey sees only the arrival of "a new partner" for his business (12). The relational aspect is totally stripped from work and from life. The narrator comments, "Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts. They left that fancy ware to boys and girls, and boarding-schools and books" (12). In the eyes of the successful bourgeois individual, the prebourgeois world of social relations is fit for no one but children and exists nowhere but in storybooks.

In direct contrast to the alienating business practices of his father, Paul's sense of the world is based on the social—not economic—bonds uniting individuals. Paul famously stumps his father with the question, "Papa! what's money?" (110). Mr. Dombey wishes to reply using the terms of political economy—"circulating-medium, currency, depreciation of currency, paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth" (110)—but he realizes that this answer would mean nothing to his son, who has no sense of exchange value, or indeed any value beyond the personal. When Dombey tells Paul that money "can do anything" (111), his son immediately cuts to the core of the matter: why then could money not save his mother's life? In other instances, too, Paul shows that his valuation of money lies only in the social bonds it can create. On one occasion, he chooses to give money to Walter to help his uncle (a gift which the senior Dombey immediately interprets as a loan). On another, he has an especially revealing conversation with Mrs. Pipchin. Musing on the question of

what to do when—and if—he grows up, Paul says, “I mean . . . to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!” (214). In thinking about his future, Paul rejects the world of labor and accumulation that so captivates his father in favor of a quiet country life with his sister. In so doing, Paul once more reminds his reader that he does not belong in the modern world. His prized possessions are the fruits of nature, not of money, and he values community over the firm. Marx’s *Vereinzelung* has not yet become reality for the prebourgeois child, who rejects isolated individualism in favor of the social ties that bind.

Unlike Paul Dombey, Nell must work in order to support herself and her grandfather in their travels, and so exchange at some level is required for her survival. But this exchange trades not on her productive efforts but on her personal qualities—sweetness, refinement, loyalty—that preexist her acts of labor. At Mrs. Jarley’s Waxworks Nell works as a tour guide in exchange for room and board for herself and her grandfather. But the primary value she adds to the establishment is her genteel, innocent demeanor that helps move the otherwise rather low-brow exhibit towards its “calm and classical” aspirations (208). Dickens writes, “The beauty of the child, coupled with her gentle and timid bearing, produced quite a sensation in the little country place” (221), drawing large crowds to the exhibit. Nell labors out of necessity, but she does not experience the pain or discomfort traditionally associated with work because she primarily trades on the value her own subjectivity. She is not a productive laborer by the standards of classical political economy because she adds nothing and creates nothing.

She herself is the value, and her worth is determined by personal, not economic qualities. Rather than being alienated from her labor because it requires only her body, Nell *embodies* value, and to share it she must simply be herself.

Perhaps because her gender and class status leave her more vulnerable than Paul, Nell is more forcefully recruited to enter the world of *Vereinzelnung* and capitalist labor. At one point, Mrs. Jarley asks Nell to deliver a message to Miss Monflathers, a waspish schoolmistress in the area who immediately turns on Nell because of her “naughty and unfeminine” efforts at the waxworks. One might expect her disapproval to stem from the very public nature of Nell’s work, but instead Miss Monflathers criticizes Nell’s position as a non-productive laborer on the outskirts of capitalism:

‘Don’t you feel how naughty it is of you . . . to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-ninepence to three shillings per week? Don’t you know that the harder you are at work, the happier you are?’ (240)

What is truly “naughty and unfeminine,” Miss Monflathers contends, is not working outside of the home (for Miss Monflathers herself does this) but working outside the productive economy, on a barter system without in any way enriching the nation. By suggesting that Nell find employment in England’s manufactories, what Miss Monflathers is actually suggesting is that she “grow up” and move from the preindustrial economy of barter and personal loyalties into the modern capitalist economy of wages and machines. Because she works on the premodern fringes of society, Nell does not contribute to England’s growth or strength (symbolized by the steam engines of the

manufactories), and her very existence refutes Miss Monflathers's philosophy that the worker's only purpose in life is to labor.

Significantly, if Nell were to take this advice and "grow up" both figuratively and literally, she would lose the value she holds for Mrs. Jarley, for Dickens, and for the reader, which is precisely her childish innocence and sweetness. As I have mentioned, Nell does not actually have to "labor" for Mrs. Jarley to communicate that value; instead, she contains value no matter what she does. Because her mere existence calls forth the sympathy of those around her, her worth comes from within her being, not from what she does with her body. Miss Monflathers, on the other hand, wants to see Nell committed to the kind of labor that produces pain. In her famous re-imagining of Isaac Watts's "Against Idleness and Mischief" from *Divine Songs for Children*⁵ (which instructs children to pass their time "in books, or work, or healthful play"), she exclaims that "poor people's children" should interpret the poem thus:

'In work, work, work. In work always
Let my first years be past,
That I may give for ev'ry day
Some good account at last.' (241)

From this point of view, the children of the poor do not have the luxury of a precapitalist childhood. Their worth cannot be romanticized or sentimentalized; it can only be measured in terms of physical output, the capabilities of their bodies. From their "first years" onward, these children are born into the world of alienated labor, forced into work for which they see no benefit beyond their own merest survival. While Nell, a child herself, can imagine a world beyond these limited possibilities, Miss Monflathers cannot.

⁵ The song is better known by its first line, "How Doth the Little Busy Bee."

Nell, of course, eventually moves on from her visit with Miss Monflathers as well as from her employment with Mrs. Jarley. She and her grandfather finally reach the Welsh border and a small rural village centered on an old Gothic church—“a very aged, ghostly place” (354). This morbid setting forms an appropriate backdrop for the last moments of Nell’s life, as many scholars have noted. But it also sets the scene for the final occasion of Nell’s labor, as she leads groups of tourists enamored with the strange, old-fashioned child through the church and cemetery. No payment is recorded for these last acts of labor, but through her work at the church Nell becomes a central figure of several communities: the tourists, the village school-children, and eventually all the local country-folk. Not merely the “angel of the house” of Victorian renown, Little Nell actually becomes the angel of the whole village, the symbolic center of this preindustrial economy, where the people “would gather round her in the porch, before and after service; young children would cluster at her skirts; and aged men and women forsake their gossips, to give her kindly greeting. None of them, young or old, thought of passing the child without a friendly word” (414). If, as Marx contends, bourgeois economies are built from the “ruins” of “vanished social formations,” then this rundown Gothic church, with Nell upon its porch, stands as a resistant, if crumbling, defense of communal values against what Dickens sees as the invasive, destructive forces of modernity.

What are these forces, and what might they have to do with labor under capitalism? Dickens’s statement of his novel’s organizing principle, which comes towards its conclusion, gives us a clue: “Everything in our lives, whether of good or evil, affects us most by contrast” (401). In the case of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the novel’s

fundamental contrast consists of the duality of sentiment and isolation, and Dickens creates specific settings to emphasize that contrast. If Nell is the embodiment of sentimentalized childhood and the Gothic church the center of precapitalist life, then the primary contrast to this vision comes about half-way through the novel, in Dickens's depiction of an urban industrial wasteland. Nell and her grandfather arrive in the industrial city almost as time travellers from pre-capitalist age and greet this strange new place "as if they had lived a thousand years before" (331). Dickens's depictions here could be summed up by Marx's *Vereinzelung*; the capitalist economy is populated by individuals fundamentally alienated their fellow man, joined only by their need to trade with one another. Here is no unifying force of community. The descriptions emphasize instead each person's separate-ness: some people "frowned, some smiled, some muttered to themselves; some made light gestures. . . In busy places, where each man has an object of his own, and feels assured that every other man has his, his character and purpose are written broadly in his face" (331). Indeed, everyone is so focused on his or her individual pursuits that no one takes any notice of Nell and her grandfather in their state of extreme need. In contrast to the later scenes of Nell at the Gothic church, the industrial city leaves them out of the bustle of capitalist labor and detaches them from any source of community. The narrator says, "They were but an atom, here, in a mountain heap of misery, the very sight of which increased their hopelessness and suffering" (332). The only thing uniting the hordes of isolated individuals, according to this passage, is their suffering, but even then the effects of *Vereinzelung* so far separate them that they cannot acknowledge their shared pain.

In this urban wasteland they do finally encounter one helpful face, but it is one so transformed by the forces of reification and alienation that his assistance barely seems human. This is, of course, the fire-man, an employee in charge of stoking the fires at a great foundry in the region. This unnamed man looks upon the fire he tends as mother, father, nurse, tutor, and childhood playmate. It has transformed even his appearance, as he is constantly sooty and blackened from his work. Though this man is kindly to Nell and her grandfather, giving them a warm place to sleep near his furnace, his work represents exactly the sort of inhuman capitalist labor that Dickens hopes to condemn. The fire-man tells Nell of his entire life, from infancy on, spent before this fire:

‘They [the other workmen] leave me to myself,’ he replied. ‘They know my humour. They laugh at me, but don’t harm me in it. See yonder there—that’s *my* friend.’

‘The fire?’ said the child.

‘It has been alive as long as I have,’ the man made answer. ‘We talk and think together all night long.’

The child glanced quickly at him in her surprise, but he had turned his eyes in their former direction, and was musing as before.

‘It’s like a book to me,’ he said, ‘the only book I ever learned to read; and many an old story it tells me. It’s music, for I should know its voice among a thousand, and there are other voices in its roar. It has its pictures too. You don’t know how many strange faces and different scenes I trace in the red-hot coals. It’s my memory, that fire, and shows me all my life.’ (337)

Sentimentalized children embody value because their very existence facilitates the affective bonds necessary for community; thus, the labor of Paul and Nell holds significance only because it connects them to other people. In contrast, the fire-man’s work has destroyed every human connection. Indeed, one can hardly even call him alienated from his work; instead, he is *only* his work. He has become, like his fire, a part

of the apparatus of production. Nell's surprise at his manner of living only underscores the isolation created by industrial labor practices.

In a sense, then, generations of Dickens scholars are clearly right. The author's sentimentalized children do act as the mortar for building communities of feeling, and they often represent resistance to the individuating, isolating trends of modernity. Yet it is not only the tragedy of a suffering child that makes Nell and Paul especially apt vehicles for these critiques. The feeling we invest in children like Nell Trent and Paul Dombey cannot simply be reduced to the usual tropes of sentimentality: exceptional morality, overwrought suffering, premature death. Rather, the sentimentalized child is uniquely positioned to condemn the problems of modernity because he or she represents the possibilities of a prebourgeois existence. He or she operates in a stage prior to capitalist *Vereinzelung* and manages to labor without alienation or isolation. To phrase this in the terms of Gallagher's somaeconomics, these children work without pain or hope of accumulation, thus disrupting the elaborate system of trade-offs underlying a capitalist economy. Any analysis of sentimental childhood that does not take this into account cannot fully explain the resistant potential found in these figures, who remain outside of the modern economy even as they suffer because of it.

2. What Must Remain: Bioeconomics and the Dying Child

To consider these children only as personified denunciations of modernity, however, overlooks the extremely important role they play as public reminders of the physical requirements of the strong (modern) nation. As I have explained, Dickens's

sentimentalized children present such a profound criticism of the modern world because they have no place within it. Their precapitalist labor does not create exchange value, and their bodies cannot be conscripted for production or procreation. The sentimental narrative functions well as a critique of the lurking inhumanity that Dickens always foretells in modern life, but neither of these novels end with the demise of their young sentimental heroes. Instead, their resolutions turn to other children to carry on the business of building the proper society. With these children, Dickens weaves a bioeconomic narrative that promises not just shared feeling, but shared wealth. According to this plot line, the deaths of idealized children are necessary sacrifices, making space for the proto-liberal subjects who will build a stronger domestic family and bourgeois economy for future generations. In this way, Dickens makes a rather ambiguous evaluation of the child's worth, torn between his or her moral qualities and concrete contributions. This leaves the reader in on equally uncertain ground. Yes, we can read sentiment as a reaction against the changes of modernity, but the deaths of Nell and Paul also suggest the intruding pressure of biopower as a force competing against sentiment to preserve economic order and maintain the strength of both family and state.

The ambiguity surrounding the potential value of a child's death stems from a wider societal fascination with death and all its trappings. The massive cultural apparatus that grew up around death and dying during the Victorian period typically (and often with great fanfare) presented the promised rewards of the Christian tradition as a trade-off for the distresses surrounding death. Philippe Ariès famously posits the nineteenth century as the era of the "beautiful death," emphasizing "the lure of the infinite . . . [and] the idea of

mutual dissolution in the endless cycle of nature” (446), but Victorian death culture offered another kind of consolation as well, one that had little to do with either sentiment or faith. Paradoxically, death held out the promise of material, even financial benefits for the nation. As John Morley explains in *Death, Heaven, and the Victorians*, death meant big business, from the production and consumption of innumerable commemorative trinkets—“memorial cards, . . . ceramic memorials of disasters at sea and on land, . . . photographs set in jet, a beloved’s hair formed into a ring, a bracelet, a necklace, or a watch chain, the family dogs, immortalized by the taxidermist or the bronze founder” (14)—to the publication of numerous books and pamphlets on the idealized “good” death. The fact that class distinction persisted even in death, with pauper’s funerals viewed as “wicked” or “un-Christian” (Morley 28), meant that working-class citizens regularly deposited money with a burial society in the hopes of someday having a genteel Christian burial for themselves or their relatives. Death also meant big business for Dickens and other authors who used sentimental portrayals to win readership; famously, the impending death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* roused public interest in the novel to a fever pitch. Death, in short, played a significant part not only in Victorian family and religious life, but in economic life as well.

Likewise, the deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey play a vital role in both sentimental and economic narratives, as the sentimentalized child fails to transition into bourgeois adulthood and must therefore exit the scene. To examine this dichotomy, we must turn to the famous deathbed scenes and also to the novels’ resolutions—what remains after these deaths have taken place. In the case of *Dombey and Son*, Paul’s entire

existence from birth onward has been directed toward taking up his rightful place as heir to his father's firm, a role for which he is entirely unfitted. Physically weak, inclined towards daydreaming, and lacking the quick wit of Florence, "old-fashioned" Paul prefers the quiet affection of his sister to the bustle of his father's world. His death-bed scene emphasizes his role as observer rather than participant in the world of commerce:

He lay there, listening to the noises in the street, quite tranquilly; not caring much how the time went, but watching it and watching everything about him with observant eyes. . . . By little and little, he got tired of the bustle of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and re-passing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again . . . of that rushing river. 'Why, will it never stop, Floy?' he would sometimes ask her. 'It is bearing me away, I think!' (248-9)

The imagery of the river recalls Paul's fascination with the sea from his stay at Brighton with Mrs. Pipchin and gestures towards his impending death, as a river steadily carries its water out to sea. Yet it also conveys another symbolic meaning, one made clear by the juxtaposition of bedroom and city street in this passage. The river, roaring endlessly as if in flood, represents the modern world sweeping by at a frantic pace just below Paul's window. Paul watches its turbulence but finds it tiresome and prefers to remember the pastoral scenes of his days at school. Laurence Lerner notes that sentimentalized child deaths rarely include any depiction of pain or suffering (91). This is true of Paul in a physical sense, but his plaintive "will it never stop?" reveals considerable mental suffering. By explicitly connecting Paul's death with the frantic pace of the modern urban economy, this passage positions Paul (once again) in opposition to its values. Entwined in the arms of his sister and enthralled by a vision of his mother and Christ in heaven, Paul's

final passage on “that rushing river” leaves him as one of those “angels of young children” (253) who were too good for the ugly world.

It leaves the reader feeling rather unsettled when Paul, whom we meet as a newborn in the novel’s first sentence, bows out of the plot only a quarter of the way through in a sort of aborted bildungsroman. But the novel contains other good children who are, it seems, not *too* good for this world and so do not need to become angels in order to maintain their goodness as they grow up. What is the difference between Paul and his sister Florence, or Walter Gay, both of whom are allowed to live out full, productive lives? While Dickens clearly endows all three with moral qualities and means them all to earn the admiration of his readers, only the latter two can survive to the novel’s end because only they have laid the ground-work for a successful bourgeois adulthood. Florence has occupied a space of domestic motherhood from a young age, caring for her brother and the Dombey household after the death of her own mother. Walter, too, envisions himself working in the adult world and is imagined in a romantic relationship with Florence from the first moments we meet him. These characters do not reject Paul’s values of community and compassion, but neither do they deny the bourgeois ideals of ambition and sheltered domestic life. The success of these two, bought at the price of Paul’s death, suggests the author’s hedging his bets, so to speak, on the potential of modern urban capitalism. While it may often seem like a flooded river threatening to sweep away the pure of heart, these characters indicate Dickens’s opinion that it is possible to navigate such dangerous waters. In fact, some characters must be strong enough for this task in order to carry on the project of building a strong society.

The question of survival—both of individuals and of social forms—necessitates a consideration of Foucault’s notion of biopower, with its implication that bodies, individually and collectively, must be properly controlled and directed in order to produce the strongest possible population for the state (140). These issues surface throughout Dickens’s career, from the non-biological families formed in *Nicholas Nickleby* to persistent worries about inheritance and its effects in *Our Mutual Friend*. *Dombey and Son* is no exception; the title itself alludes to inheritance and family relations, especially between fathers and sons.⁶ The question of heredity arises from the novel’s opening chapter, as Florence’s mother, Fanny Dombey, dies soon after giving birth to Paul. The elder Dombey’s sister, Mrs. Chick, finds her death unfortunate but unsurprising—Fanny was “not born a Dombey herself,” so she cannot display that family’s typical toughness. Once Fanny has produced a male heir bearing the Dombey name, she is allowed to quietly exit the scene. Paul too proves unsuited for the responsibilities of the “Son” to his father’s “Dombey,” and so he, like his mother, makes an early exit. This leaves Florence as the sole living Dombey child and heir, and so, as the spinster Miss Tox exclaims, “Dombey and Son [is] a Daughter after all!” (253). Yet while the firm’s name implies a male heir, Florence exhibits certain worldly qualities her brother lacked. Although on the one hand Florence is clearly a domestic, maternal figure, Dickens also accords her some masculine qualities: she masters Latin and Greek and she enjoys considerable mobility throughout the novel, to the point of leaving the safety of

⁶ The novel’s full title, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation*, makes the connection between familial relations and capital even more clear.

her father's roof and even sailing to China. This combination of traits makes her ideal to carry on the Dombey line; she will pass on her strengths while still acting the role of nurturing mother.

One thing yet remains in order for the new generation to surpass the old, with happier families and a stronger nation: Florence needs a husband who embodies the proper relationship to labor and improvement. The novel's resolution provides just such a spouse in Walter Gay, who has the trustworthiness and compassion of little Paul without his weakness or disinclination toward labor. From his childhood Walter embarks upon a project of self-improvement, one that places him thoroughly in line with a Victorian vision of childhood that merges the capitalist and the Evangelical. In this view, the child—naturally sinful or naturally slothful, it makes little difference—must gradually learn to work or to pray (or better, do both) in order to improve himself and enter the adult world fully-formed.⁷

Here I turn back to a text that surfaced in my earlier discussion of *The Old Curiosity Shop*: Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs for Children*. There Miss Monflathers quotes Watts because she believes thoroughly in the purpose of childhood that I have mentioned: that children should pass their hours "in books, or work, or healthful play"—or, barring that, at least in work. This song, "Against Idleness and Mischief," lays out one of the central themes of Watts's text: the connection between industrious labor and spirituality.

⁷ This is the vision of childhood we see, for instance, in Dickens's later bildungsromane, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, as the child initially has a misguided conception of work and improvement but eventually achieves some level of success. It also permeates texts written explicitly for children by utilitarian-influenced authors like Harriet Martineau and William Ellis and of course forms the basis of many children's tales of religion and morality.

“Against Idleness and Mischief” links the two most explicitly and most famously, using the analogy of “the little busy bee” and all the tasks she undertakes in order to “improve each shining hour.” Her duties—gathering nectar, building the hive, making honey—improve life both for herself and for her community, but Watts also ties in a spiritual lesson:

In works of labour, or of skill,
I would be busy too;
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.

Sloth is an evil in both the spiritual and the economic realms, Watts implies, damaging the community as well as the individual. An addendum to the *Divine Songs* called “A Slight Specimen of Moral Songs” includes a number of poems on this same theme, including titles like “The Sluggard,” “The Thief,” and “Good Resolutions.” As an impetus for change, Watts holds out the threat of child death; one song, on the delights of heaven and torments of hell, implores, “Let me improve the hours I have / Before the day of grace is fled.”⁸

Watts first published his songs in 1715, but they were still popular reading for Victorian families, as Miss Monflathers’s adaptation (and Lewis Carroll’s later parody, “How Doth the Little Crocodile”) shows. Walter clearly takes to heart the ethic of improvement expressed in *The Divine Songs*. Although given his earliest scenes in the novel it is tempting to identify Walter with a fairy-tale, adventure-story version of masculinity, his trajectory is ultimately one of sober improvement, making him the ideal match for Florence and new “son” of Dombey and Son. From the novel’s opening, when

⁸ Watts, “Solemn Thoughts of God and Death.”

we find out that Walter's uncle Sol has sent him to work as a clerk in Dombey's firm and expects him to become a "[man] of business" (50), we see just how well-suited Walter is for such work. Admittedly, he dreams of going to sea and finding adventure, but he also has a keen, presumably innate business acumen. When his uncle begins telling him a frightening shipwreck story, Walter immediately identifies the exact vessel in question: "Private West India Trader, burden three hundred and fifty tons, Captain, John Brown of Deptford. Owners, Wiggs and Co.'" (54). The terms by which Walter describes this ship—its purpose, tonnage, and owners—indicate that not only the romance of the sea, but also its more practical possibilities have drawn him in.

It is interesting to note that while Paul is associated with the cyclical patterns of nature—waves and flowing water, specifically—Dickens describes Walter in the terms of fairy tales and adventure stories: plots that move in linear time with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. And so while Paul harkens back to some by-gone "old-fashioned" time, Walter continually looks forward to his future. The elder Carker, a disgraced but sympathetic thief within the Dombey firm, sees in Walter a younger version of himself: "giddy, youthful, inexperienced; flushed with the same restless and adventurous fantasies; and full of the same qualities, fraught with the same capacity of leading on to good or evil" (202). In Carker's view, Walter is at the beginning of a life-long journey that could lead to his improvement or to ruin. Walter himself feels no ambiguity on this point: when he is sent off to sea, he promises to send back gifts to his Uncle Sol "when I'm rich enough" (288). The constraints of the Victorian novel's form require a central hero like Walter, one with a past, present, and future, rather than like Paul, who has only

a brief present. In fact, Walter gains concrete benefits from Paul's death by stepping in as a replacement figure after his demise. In his very last moments, Paul implores his father to "remember Walter" (252). Later, Florence asks Walter to be her brother in Paul's stead, leading up to the romantic plot between the two. She even gives him a small purse of coin that she'd saved up for her brother (296), which presumably helps Walter advance himself when he goes abroad.

Given all this, we can see Paul's death, relatively early in the novel, as a necessary precondition for the triumph of the self-made man—Walter—and the bourgeois family he forms with Florence. Pat Jalland points out that death in the early and mid-Victorian period was "ideally a family event interpreted in terms of a shared Christianity, with the assurance of family reunion in heaven" (3). Paul Dombey's death qualifies as a "family event" in a different way; it triggers vital changes in the family, eventually helping to unite them around a stronger vision for the future. The novel's resolution indicates a perfect marriage of domesticity and capitalism. In Walter, Florence weds both her "brother"—concentrating the power of the Dombey family while still bringing in new blood—and her ideal lover, reemphasizing the power of the domestic in the world of capitalism. But none of this would have been possible if Paul, perpetually childish and precapitalist, had remained in the picture, wholly claiming his sister's devotion and not allowing for the reproduction of either the family capital or the family line.⁹ If Paul represents the values of a broad community drawn together by sentiment,

⁹ Recall Paul's vision of the perfect future, referenced in the previous section: "I mean . . . to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the

then his death brings about a replacement of those values with the nuclear family, what Eric Hobsbawm calls the necessary “basic unit of property and business enterprise” of bourgeois Victorian society (236).

What remains at the novel’s conclusion, in what Helene Moglen calls “the incestuous nature of the respectable bourgeois family” (176), is a near-perfect reproduction of the original Dombey family. But this family exhibits none of the former’s failings. Rather than an absent or weak maternal figure, the new family has Florence, an ideal mother. The new children, little Paul and Florence, share the names of the previous generation, but this Paul is strong, and this Florence benefits from her father’s (and grandfather’s) affection. And most importantly, as father figure Walter is not cold and mechanical like the elder Dombey but affectionate and warm. His influence in the world is burgeoning, not stagnant. This new family, then, is vital and dynamic, growing its affections and its capital in order to build a stronger nation. Even in the face of *Dombey and Son*’s critique of reified relationships under capitalism, Dickens admits the forces of biopower that are pushing towards propagation of healthy bodies and therefore of vigorous economies and robust nations. Dickens’s reconstruction of family and business returns to bourgeois values as an indispensable force for reproducing the proper society, which means abandoning—in terms of both plot and ideology—the censure embodied in Paul’s life and death. The sentimentalized child, for all his goodness, can act only as a reminder of the importance of affection and ethics in constructing a healthy bourgeois society; he cannot actively help in that construction.

country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!” (214).

Like Paul, Little Nell lives on as a memorial to prebourgeois values in the modern world. Indeed, the resolution of *The Old Curiosity Shop* seems in many ways a clear precursor to *Dombey and Son*'s in that it too stresses the rebuilding of both family and economic order in the wake of the sentimentalized child's death. The death of Little Nell, Kit's childhood love, makes space for the fertile reproductive pairing between Kit and Barbara, who have at least four children. Kit begins a gradual economic rise, which can be traced, in a roundabout way, to his former friendship with Nell. Time gradually transforms the old neighborhood and blots out its antiquated character, yet, as my epigraph states, Nell's memory endures as a moral lesson to the youngest generation. As in *Dombey and Son*, the necessary changes pointing forward to the future are welcomed gladly. After all Dickens's harping on the dangers of modernity, he at last seems to acknowledge its ascendancy. The old curiosity shop has been "long ago pulled down" (556) and with it Little Nell herself, the ultimate curiosity. The novel then concludes with a somber reflection on time's power: "Such are the changes which a few years bring about, and so do things pass away, like a tale that is told!" (556). Modernity has arrived, the passage suggests, and nothing can turn it back. Sentimentalized children may play a role in the story, but this role eventually fades into a mere "tale," a fable for the improvement of the next generation.

Nell, more so even than Paul, inhabits this world of fable during both life and death.¹⁰ The novel's initial unnamed narrator notices that she exists "in a kind of

¹⁰ This can perhaps be explained by Dickens's turn towards increasing social realism during the middle years of his career.

allegory” (22), “so very young, so spiritual, so slight and fairy-like” (20). As scholars from Adorno onward have noted, Nell’s picaresque journey through the countryside and to her final resting place can be described as a mythical quest outside the confines of modernity and beyond the prosaic bounds of Victorian England.¹¹ The final chapters of her story, set in and around a decaying Gothic church and its churchyard, present an especially strong rejection of Victorian bourgeois convention by defying its obsession with “appropriate” death and funeral rites. While, as John Morley states, Victorians typically found burial grounds to be “*directly* noxious” and dangerous to the health of the living (35), Nell develops an immediate fascination with the churchyard, succumbing to its peaceful, premodern allure in the face of Victorian sanitary concerns. Morley likewise describes a pervasive Victorian concern with appropriate Christian funeral rituals and especially the “wickedness” of pauper’s funerals (28). Nell’s funeral, either despite or because of her poverty, represents a heartfelt community affair with none of the trappings of bourgeois convention. There is brief mention of a “service” but much more description of the poor and sickly multitudes that comes to see Nell off (543). Indeed, her funeral seems to take more from pre-Christian ritual than Evangelical propriety; the set piece is decorated only with the trappings of nature: birds, wreaths, greenery, and “newly-fallen

¹¹ In his essay “Ruins, Refuse, and the Politics of Allegory in *The Old Curiosity Shop*,” Andrew McCann makes this point particularly clearly: “What the novel allegorizes above all is Nell’s quest to transcend, or fall out of, the time and space of the nineteenth century, in which value is never entirely free of its mutable, material signifiers” (180).

snow” (543-4). The Church of England’s Order for the Burial of the Dead, with its prescribed readings and even its directed pauses, makes no appearance.¹²

Nell, then, represents an especially potent encapsulation of pre-bourgeois, even pre-Christian values. After her death, however, those values all but disappear, remaining only in the tales of her virtue Kit tells his children. Nell, because of her near-mythological goodness, cannot be traded in the typical “woman-plus-property” exchange (Hobsbawm 236) of bourgeois marriage, and so Dickens writes her as a mere footnote to his novel’s resolution. Her story, like Paul’s, is symbolic; Kit’s, like Walter’s, is bildungsroman. The sentimental heroes must eventually be reduced to moral fables in order to make room for the self-made men who possess the physical strength and healthy ambition to advance the interests of family and nation.

Before moving on, it is useful to consider the deaths of Paul Dombey and Nell Trent as sacrifices to the needs of the greater society, both in terms of bodies and finances. Ilana Blumberg recently argued that both Christian and secular angles of Victorian culture valued a sense of duty that often included self-sacrifice (7). Surprisingly, the notion of sacrifice occasionally surfaces in utilitarian philosophy and therefore can fittingly be applied to these deaths. Jeremy Bentham opens his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* with a differentiation between individual and community interests: “The community is a fictitious *body*, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members*. The interest of the community then is, what?—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose

¹² The Victorian Order is described in detail by Rev. R. C. Trench in the Introduction of Priscilla Maurice’s *Sacred Poems for Mourners*.

it” (1.IV). The implication here is that some difference of interest might exist between the individual and the community, just as an exercise benefiting one bodily “member” might cause pain in another. The sum of these interests is greater than any individual’s interest alone, and so some members might indeed need to sacrifice in order to achieve the greater good. John Stuart Mill, writing in 1861, builds on this notion to define a utilitarian ethics of self-sacrifice:

The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it applauds, is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind. (148)

While Dickens is famous for his critique of utilitarianism in other works (*Hard Times*, most famously), I would argue that in both *Dombey and Son* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* he actually adopts a kind of utilitarian ethic, one in which the greater good of family, economy, and nation comes before the needs of the individual. While Ilana Blumberg claims that mid-Victorian novelists (including Dickens) “explored the ways that self-sacrifice resulted from and intensified not social cohesion, but a breakdown in social ties” (11-12) in order to promote an ethics—and economics—of mutual benefit, sentimentalized children harken back to older models of what Blumberg would call “maximalist altruism.” Heavily foreshadowed and loaded with symbolism, the deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey represent the culmination of their short lives of devotion and altruism. Despite the child’s overwhelming virtue, this altruism serves utilitarian ideals just as much as Christian ones, with the novelist offering up the idealized child as a

virgin sacrifice so that new families can arise, more productive and reproductive. But this is not a virgin sacrifice in the archetypal sense that Adorno identifies (173); despite the obvious symbolism in these deaths scenes, they point toward utilitarianism because they generate value for the community at the expense of the few. These events are not good in and of themselves, yet their lives (and sacrificial deaths) are by no means wasted. Instead, they lead to a greater good for the community interest both in a biological sense, by making space for fertile reproductive pairings, and in an economic sense, by reminding those around them of the need for vigorous personal effort. Reading these deaths as utilitarian-tinged sacrifices to the greater good calls into question Dickens's usual distaste for utilitarian philosophy and deflates his emphasis on building moral communities through sentiment. By concluding his novels with a reconstruction of the nuclear family and the self-made man, Dickens shows that even sentiment must eventually capitulate to the physical requirements of a strong nation and a robust economy.

4. Conclusion

If we look at idealized childhood as a sort of economic phase, distinct from the bourgeois capitalist economy, then it is clear why Nell and Paul must die. They are too entrenched in the ideology of this childhood, unable to grow into adults who can productively contribute to England's economic or geopolitical growth. In a section of the *Grundrisse* discussing the artistic productions of ancient societies, Marx pauses to compare childhood to an early system of social organization:

A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naiveté, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a

higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? . . . The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. [It] is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return. (246)

Marx, too, makes the connection between childhood and man's pre-capitalist history, noting that both evoke feelings of nostalgia in the adult. This nostalgia, I argue, is a large part of what we feel for Paul and Nell. The reader's cup of sentiment overflows not only because of the child's innate goodness and innocence, but also because of the socio-economic conditions, "the historic childhood of humanity," that he or she represents.

The only role these children can play in the modern world is that of moral fable, emphasizing the dangers of isolation at the expense of social bonds. We may admire them as artistic creations, but the social conditions under which they imagine themselves do not at present exist. Their moral strengths do not translate into the physical and mental capacities necessary for success. Just before the passage quoted above, Marx poses the question of whether or not modern conditions of production would have stymied the artistic productions of the ancients: "Is Achilles possible with powder and lead? Or the *Iliad* with the printing press, not to mention the printing machine?" (246). We might similarly ask, would Little Nell's goodness be possible if she worked, as Miss Monflathers proposed, in a textile factory? Would Paul Dombey remain innocent if he were in charge of carrying forth the mission of the House of Dombey? We can imagine ideal children under the conditions of capitalism, but we cannot imagine these children growing up into ideal adults and entering the world of isolated bourgeois individuals.

The sentimental narratives in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son* do not provide the final word on those novels' relationship to Victorian social and economic systems. The closing images, rather, focus on new nuclear families led by self-made men on the rise. As these resolutions show, the texts function as more than just reactions against the changes of modernity. Instead, they help create and perpetuate those changes by highlighting the importance of effort and improvement alongside compassion and virtue. The new families represent the sum of all these merits; they have adopted the goodness of the dead sentimental hero, which in turn tempers and improves their worldly exertions. With this impressive catalog of virtues both spiritual and fleshly, these new families represent the ideal liberal subjects, who possess proper emotions and strong social ties but who can also toil for the advancement of self and nation. With the demise of Nell and Paul and the subsequent rise of Kit, Walter, and their new families, Dickensian sentiment is impressed into the service of the liberal state while still appearing to be a resistant force outside of it.

3. Radical Emotions: Grief and Affect in the Chartist Poetic Tradition

Oh! who would not mourn for a victim like me,
A young heart-broken slave in the land of the free;
Hardly tasked, and oft beaten, oppress'd and revil'd,
Such, such is the fate of the poor factory child.
(J.E., "The Factory Child")

The sentimentalized child deaths discussed in the previous chapter were created by the quintessential bourgeois novelist—Dickens—and consumed in large part by a middle-class audience. With this configuration of author and readership, sentiment might work at times to build wide-reaching communities of affect, but it ultimately bows to the supremacy of the bourgeois values of family, ambition, and nation. This chapter also looks at portrayals of childhood sorrow and death, but with author and readership in a reconfigured relationship. I pose the question of what happens when Chartist authors, writing for working-class audiences, deploy the sentimental power of a child's suffering.

In this chapter I examine the use of two different sets of conventions in Chartist poetry of the 1830s and 1840s: those of sentimentality and those of the elegy. In both of these cases, the working-class poet appropriates language and structures traditionally associated with middle-class feeling in order to invest them with a new political consciousness. Inherent in this appropriation is the question of whether Chartist authors effectively radicalize middle-class sentimental forms or merely normalize them, mimicking and giving wider audience to the overwrought emotions common to middle-class descriptions of (especially poor) children. While Isobel Armstrong warns that a danger of the Chartist approach to poetry was its tendency to "tip over into sentiment" (195), I argue here that this tendency, especially apparent in portrayals of children,

actually forms one of the strengths of the genre. Far from Dickens's ambivalence about the politics of sentiment, these poets—his contemporaries—truly embrace its radical potential, using it to advocate for sweeping social change. Affect and grief serve not as ends in themselves but as tools turned to a political task: making the reader aware of the suffering common to the working-class experience, giving him language to describe it—and to resist.

This is not entirely a new contention. In two recent works on the literary projects of Chartism, Michael Sanders and Margaret Loose define the “Chartist imaginary,” or the political thrust of Chartist aesthetics over and beyond the overt subject matter of each poem. These poems actually perform their message, creating political agency through acts of imagination. Sanders writes that Chartist poetry works to “effect a total qualitative transformation of consciousness” in the reader (*Poetry of Chartism* 13); similarly, Loose claims that it teaches the working classes to “perceive the relations of their world and think about ways of changing them” (5-6). This process has everything to do with feeling and especially its power to unite people. Loose, writing about Chartist poet Ernest Jones, notes that his writings appeal to “both individual subjectivity and collective identity” (20), as the reader's reactions help him build ties with others. Sanders, too, points to poetry's ability to “generate the emotional bonds, the common feelings, which are as necessary a part of any movement's infrastructure as its organizational forms” (21). While both scholars connect the affective experience of reading to a blossoming of political awareness, neither goes on to single out the sentimental or elegiac traditions of poetry—works specifically designed for maximum emotive power—as especially useful

in considering the role of poetry within Chartism as well as its relationship to the overall poetic tradition. In this chapter I will amend and expand Sanders's and Loose's vision of the "Chartist imaginary" to include not only its radical aesthetic but also how its revolutionary purposes interact with the middle-class literary tradition, as Chartist poets adopt a seemingly bourgeois sensibility to define a political platform and create a sense of unity and potency in their readers.

The appropriation of these aesthetic conventions carries with it some problems, however. I would argue that sentimentality was not the primary mode in which the Victorian working classes actually experienced life, although of course one cannot adequately catalogue the full emotional range of a diverse group of individuals born two centuries ago. Nonetheless, many first-hand accounts tend to describe the struggles of working-class life in the terms of economy and necessity, not of melodrama. By depicting the laborer in the overdone terms of sentimentality, Chartist poets frequently take a position not unlike that of Dickens: a relatively privileged or educated author capitalizing on the suffering masses in order to convey a message. And from an institutional point of view this effort does not succeed. Chartism enters a slow decline after 1848, as the affective bonds built by sentimental poetry fail to sustain the movement through the political battles of the late 1840s.

Although Chartist poetry does not propel extensive democratic change in Britain during the 1840s, its writers do achieve more limited successes. Not the least of these is one of form, for Chartist poets fruitfully radicalize rather than merely normalize traditionally middle-class forms of sentiment and grief. Their elegies are concerned not

only with an isolated experience of mourning and the continuation of a poetic lineage, but with how grief and sorrow structure the lives of the laboring masses. Too, the emotions evoked in these works go beyond the middle-class standbys of sorrow and pity; instead, these poets aim deeper, for anger and outrage. While most sentimental literature strives to inspire intense feeling, a merely affective response is not enough for Chartist poets, who instead work to motivate mass action. Like Dickens, they hope their texts will bring together communities of feeling, but they want to these communities united in resistance, not merely in pathos.

I will divide my discussion of these suffering children into three parts. In the first I will consider the different forms of the sentimentalized child in Chartist poetry to show how passive suffering can produce a distinct type of political agency. In the second section I will discuss how Chartist authors borrow certain conventions of the pastoral elegy to mourn the nameless worker and present a revolutionary—not heavenly—consolation. In my third section I will limit myself to poems that use the terms of sentiment and of the elegy to grieve lost childhood, suggesting political possibilities that Dickens refuses to consider.

1. Children and Chartism

Poetry provides an excellent avenue through which to study the Chartist political project—better, I would argue, than the novel or some other literary form. During the middle part of the century, the novel remained mainly the purview of the middle-class reader (Altick 279), despite the increased accessibility provided by serialization and the

occasional work by a working-class novelist, especially after 1850. Altick notes, “Until the latter half of the [nineteenth] century brought cheap periodicals that printed the new work of outstanding writers, truly cheap reprints of contemporary literature, and free libraries, the masses had relatively little access to the best that was written in their day” (259). Even novels serialized in shilling periodicals would have been significantly less accessible, for financial reasons, than the poetry in a fourpence half-penny issue of *The Northern Star*. Perhaps because of this, a relatively small number of novels were written by and for the working class, although many middle-class novelists chose to depict members of its ranks.¹³

Chartist poetry, on the other hand, circulated primarily to an audience of workers. These poems were widely disseminated via radical periodicals like *The Northern Star*, which had a circulation as high as sixty thousand in the late 1830s (Altick 392) and a total readership that was likely much larger. Peter Scheckner estimates that “out of a total adult population of about ten million, perhaps as many as two or three million working people [in Great Britain] read *The Northern Star*” (17). Within the journal, poetry played a prominent role. Michael Sanders calculates that *The Northern Star*’s poetry column featured around 1,500 poems in sum, most of which were written by “hundreds” of individual working men and women associated with the Chartist movement (*Poetry of Chartism* 7, 70). These works circulated in a sphere in which poetry was produced, published, distributed, and consumed all by members of the working class. The shared concerns and values at every point along this path allowed the poets to assume a very

¹³ Notably, Disraeli’s *Sybil: or, the Two Nations* and Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* have plots that hinge on encounters with Chartism.

different kind of political consciousness on the part of their readership than that imagined by Dickens. As Gareth Stedman Jones notes, texts like these poems—words written or spoken or sung by Chartists—actually helped create, not just describe, the movement’s political agenda, since its political ideology can only be fully defined through what he calls “a particular linguistic ordering of experience” (101). Grief-stricken or sentiment-infused accounts of working-class life, then, might help the reader reinterpret his own experience and show how his troubles align with those of other workers. After all, Chartists came from diverse backgrounds, with the gap between skilled and unskilled workers being just the most obvious chasm. Yet poems that focus on universal conditions like suffering and grief help readers to see that a shared emotional event can compensate for great differences in day-to-day experience. In a movement that rested heavily on collective action—marches, petitions, etc.—a sense of shared feeling could act as glue holding together the diverse population of Chartists.

Suffering children abound in Chartist poetry, providing an especially vivid rallying point for class solidarity. Sentimentalized through their wretched miseries, their incessant tears, and their youthful naiveté, these children are cut from the same cloth as Little Nell and Paul Dombey in that they embody symbolic reactions against modernity rather than the psychically differentiated individuals of realism. Yet their political function extends beyond that of either Nell or Paul. They engender in the reader not just pity, but anger at the world’s injustices and, in the best case, the determination to correct them. Michael Sanders interprets certain repeated devices within Chartist poetry—appeals from the people’s voice, for instance, or the imagery of seasonal change—as

revealing competing notions of agency within the movement, none of which lead to long-term political success (“Poetic Agency” 114). I would argue that sentimentalized child suffering is another common Chartist trope representing one more view of political agency, one in which the child in distress, while seemingly passive and hopeless, actually exerts considerable influence as a rallying point for working-class reformers. Rather than simply uniting the readership through shared “proper” feeling, these children join sentiment with sweeping political projects and radical economic ideals.

Many Chartist poets weave a suffering child or children into their narratives as a way to lend further emphasis to the wrongs they decry. These children do not displace the oppressed adult worker as the main thread of a poetic narrative, yet their brief but poignant appearances draw attention to the fact that political and economic injustice harms all workers, even the most innocent. Edward P. Mead’s poem “The Steam King,” for example, published in *The Northern Star* in 1843, builds its narrative around an extended comparison between steam power and a near-demonic pagan god, “the ancient Moloch grim,” with his “Satraps” the mill-owners. The poem lists the many wrongs of this modern Moloch against “Labour’s sons,” including reveling in the worker’s cries of pain and trampling all his natural rights. Also included is this, at the end of the third stanza:

His bowels are of living fire,
And children are his food.

This accusation, among all the others in the poem, connects best to Mead’s overarching metaphor and therefore carries the most weight in his denunciation. Biblical accounts

condemn the god Moloch for requiring child sacrifices of his followers,¹⁴ and the narrator sees a modern-day parallel to this in the child labor—and subsequent child suffering—needed in the factory’s tight spaces. These children, Moloch’s food, appear only this once, and the poem takes no pains to individuate them. Instead, like Little Nell, they exist only as hyperbolized sufferers at the hands of modernity, called upon for a brief instant to strengthen Mead’s driving comparison and lend potency to the poem’s final call to “put down” the Steam King and his Satraps:

Then your Charter gain and the power will be vain
Of the Steam King’s bloody band.

Then down with the King, the Moloch King,
And the satraps of his might;
Let right prevail, then Freedom hail!
When might shall stoop to right!

The child-sacrifices required by the Steam King add to the condemnation of his evils, reinforcing the importance of the Charter as a political weapon and, symbolically, as a force for civilization and Christianity in the face of the pagan-tinged sacrifices required by capitalism. While Mead does not pause to heap the excesses of sentiment on suffering child workers, he uses their victimization as a call for radical social change.

Ernest Jones’s 1855 “Leawood Hall” uses suffering children to emphasize the worker’s hardships, but unlike Mead, Jones relies to a great extent on the conventions of the sentimentalized child. The poem tells the sad fate of an impoverished worker who turns to poaching on the land of the local elite in order to feed his starving family. This man is the poem’s protagonist, but the initial impetus to take this risk arises, of course,

¹⁴ See Leviticus 18:21, Leviticus 20:2, 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 32:35.

from his sickly wife and especially his famished children, whose cries are highlighted in the first stanza:

In a cottage on a moor
Famine's feeble children cried;
The frost knocked sharply at the door,
And hunger welcom'd him inside. (67)

Weeping children are introduced even before the protagonist himself, setting the tone for a poem in which extreme suffering awaits the poor family at every turn. Even worse, the poem goes on to tell us, this happens at Christmas-time. As with *Tiny Tim*, the contrast between the expectation of idealized Christmas merry-making and the reality of impoverished existence makes for an especially powerful affective experience. These suffering children haunt the rest of the tale, and their hungry cries, contrasted with the “festive strain[s]” of music coming from Leawood Hall’s Christmas feast, emphasize the injustice of the deep gap between heartlessly frivolous adults and innocent children who shoulder unbelievable cares.

The poem temporarily loses sight of these children as it progresses to follow several interesting sub-narratives. One, of course, is the worker’s failed effort to find food for his family, first through begging at Leawood Hall and then through poaching on its grounds, an attempt which ends in his death. Another sub-plot traces his troubled relationship with his wife, embittered by hunger and illness, while yet another follows the history of Leawood Hall itself, a Norman fortification once the domain of merciless barons but now the home of an even less compassionate bourgeois trader. Unsurprisingly, though, the conclusion of Jones’s narrative returns to its starting point: the suffering of the worker’s children. As the family slowly comes to realize that their father is dying,

they gather sadly around him as “oft he kissed each little child” (72). The final stanza echoes the first yet in many ways increases its intensity:

Courage now no more dissembled
Broken strength and baffled will;
The wistful children stood and trembled,
And the room grew very still. (73)

While the opening stanza emphasizes the family’s misery—the frost, the famine, the feebly crying children—the poem ends with sheer helplessness: the “broken strength and baffled will” of the worker and the shocked terror of the family, now left with no possible provider. Even the crying of the hungry children, that worn out convention of sentiment which sets the poem’s tone from its outset, has been silenced, as they can no longer reasonably expect aid from any quarter. The trailing off of the children’s cries represents a symbolic death as real as their father’s bleeding gunshot wound; they are bereft of their voices and have only the poet left to speak for them. Interestingly, Jones preaches no overt political message in this conclusion, perhaps because Chartism at this point (1855) is clearly in decline. Instead he breaks away at this moment of heightened pathos, much as Dickens does with the death of Little Nell, in order to achieve the maximum affective impact. The force of sentiment in this poem is directed not towards radical political goals but towards winning sympathy for the masses, silenced by their suffering.

Jones makes a more obviously political use of distressed children in his earlier poem “The Factory Town,” published in the monthly magazine *The Labourer* (edited by Jones and Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor) in 1847 and which would become one of the best-known poems of Chartism. His description of the town blends together all the familiar metaphors of attacks on industrialism: the factory as hell, dungeon, and fetid

graveyard; the master as cruel overlord or even criminal; the worker as slave or mere machine. Into this picture he also weaves suffering children: “half-naked infants shivering / With heart-frost amid the heat” (175). Later in the poem Jones goes on to describe these children at more length:

Young forms—with their pulses stifled,
Young heads—with eldered brain,
Young hearts—of their spirits rifled,
Young lives—sacrificed in vain.

There they lie—the withered corses,
With not one regretful thought,
Trampled by thy fierce steam-horses,
England’s mighty *Juggernaut!* (177)

The incongruity between the repeated “young” and these weakened, “elderly” children of course calls for sympathy for those who have been too early forced into the adult world of work, while the latter half of each line belies the active role children played in England’s industrial economy. The passage refers to them only in the passive voice, as figures to be acted *upon* by the forces of industrialism, which alone is accorded the power to “stifle,” “rifle,” “sacrifice,” and “trample.” The only active-voice verb performed by the “young forms” is to “lie”—hardly an active verb at all—and then only once they are dead. The industrial capitalism of the factory town has stolen any sense of agency from its children, who are unable even to think as “young lives” are transformed into a heap of “withered corses.”

Like many middle class deployments of child suffering, Jones’s text here clearly seeks to engender pity and sadness. Yet at this moment the poem takes a decided turn away from the hopelessness that concludes “Leawood Hall” and thus away from mere

pity as the primary end of sentiment. The dying children are not nearly so ineffectual as the preceding stanzas suggest, and the way they “lie” as corpses turns out to be quite active indeed as it provides the instigation for the mass uprising that Jones foresees in the future. The next three stanzas continue with both a heavenly and an earthly response to these deaths:

Over all the solemn heaven
Arches, like a God’s reproof
At the offerings man has driven
To hell’s altars, loom and woof!

And the winds with anthems ringing,
Cleaving clouds and splitting seas,
Seem unto the People singing:
“Break your chains as we do these!”

And human voices too resound:
Gallant hearts! take better cheer!
The strongest chains by which you’re bound,
Are but the chains of your own fear! (177)

This is a clear example of the radicalization of sentiment, as Jones turns his piteous depictions of child suffering into a call for resistance and transformation. The sight of dying children is the final injustice that calls down the condemnation of both God and men on the factory owners, leading to the recognition that the workers can and must take collective action. The poem’s tone shifts from pathetic to triumphant as the voiceless child workers trigger the cacophony of revolution.

The poem continues for thirteen stanzas beyond this moment of epiphany, describing both the bloodless revolution (“*Banded millions need not fight*” [178]) and the joyous future society (“echoing loud with children’s laughter” [178]), and ultimately landing with its final message of uniting all workers, whether from the land or from the

factory, in support of the People's Charter and a return to independent yeoman farming. All this optimism springs from the seemingly infertile ground of the child worker's misery, which draws the nation's workers together with bonds of sympathy and solidarity. While the text expresses one poet's (improbable) hopes for the future of England, the depictions of childhood suffering it contains are meant to instigate action in the real world as well as the imaginative one. Unlike Nell and Paul, who create affective bonds within their respective narratives but fail to represent any wider political movement, "The Factory Town" expresses the movement's optimism that the child in distress need not be a passive sufferer. He or she can also be a figure of significant political efficacy.

For some poets, the child acts less as a political symbol and more as a rhetorical figure, the "one who does not know" or "one who must ask." In this case, the sentiment attached to the child springs not from its suffering but from its innocence and naiveté. These qualities also allow the questioning child to function as a stand-in for the members of the working classes, who are frequently presumed, even by Chartist authors, to lack the necessary political acuity to fully understand and defend Chartism. According to this line of thinking, the worker, like the child, must be given a simple, straightforward introduction to Chartist ideals. In this the Chartist poet actually deploys a paternalistic strategy more often associated with privileged authors, legislators, and political economists.¹⁵ By using the child as a metaphor for the worker, thinkers from across the

¹⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* contains a memorable example of this type of paternalism. In a conversation between the novel's compassionate heroine, Margaret Hale, and its industrialist hero, John Thornton, both agree that the factory owner must

socio-economic spectrum emphasize the workers' ignorance and their need for proper direction or "up-bringing." The fact that Chartists as well as bourgeois authors take this stance places the worker at the center of an ideological tug-of-war between groups pushing for two different visions of re-education.

An example of this kind of Chartist paternalism is the poem "Father! Who are the Chartists?" by J. M'Owen, published in the February 10, 1844, issue of *The Northern Star*. The poem's title sums up the child's contribution to the conversation—posing a typical childish question—while the poem's five stanzas comprise the father's reply. While one could conceivably imagine a father reading this poem to his children, it seems much more likely that the poem would be read by the working men who subscribed to the journal. Thus M'Owen's use of the child as questioner allows him to address the working man's most basic questions about Chartism simply without seeming to condescend. Each stanza focuses on one function of a Chartist, starting with the assertion that he is first and foremost a skilled laborer:

Millions who labour with skill, my child,
On the land—at the loom—in the mill, my child.
Whom bigots and knaves
Would keep as their slaves;
Whom tyrants would punish and kill, my child.

stand in as a more or less benevolent parent to the childish worker. Thornton describes this relationship: "In our infancy we require a wise despotism to govern us. Indeed, long past infancy, children and young people are the happiest under the unfailing laws of a discreet, firm authority. I agree with Miss Hale so far as to consider our people in the condition of children, while I deny that we, the masters, have anything to do with the making or keeping them so" (119). This metaphor permeates early thinking about industrialism, leaving the worker always in need of guidance from some force, whether from without (the factory owners) or within (the Chartist leaders themselves).

The father's response to his son stresses the sorts of things a skeptical worker would need to hear in order to join the Chartists: the large number of this force (numbering in the "millions"), their status as respectable skilled workers (rather than the unskilled, drunken masses), and their oppression by tyrants. Clearly this is not merely a response to a typically childish question; it is also a call to action, as subsequent stanzas show:

Millions who suffering draws, my child,
To unite in a glorious cause, my child.
 Their object, their end
 Is mankind to befriend,
By gaining for all equal laws, my child.
...
Millions who *earnestly* call, my child,
For freedom to each and to all, my child;
 They have truth for their shield,
 And never will yield
Till they triumph in tyranny's fall, my child.

The repetition of "millions" at the beginning of these stanzas reiterates to the reader the mass nature of the movement, while phrases like "unite in a glorious cause," "gaining for all equal laws," and "freedom for each and for all" pose the Chartist ideals as heroic, larger than any one individual. The simplicity of the poem, with its repeated "my child" and sing-song rhythm and rhyme, maintains the text's overall conceit (a father answering his child) while simultaneously and effectively communicating the necessity of Chartism to a readership of varying levels of education and sophistication.

M'Owen paints with broad strokes the justice of the workers' cause and the injustice of those who seek to oppress them, yet this is not a poem meant to explain to the reader the six points of the Charter or define precisely the Chartists' political strategy. Instead the author's concept, reasoning, and tone all contribute to a text meant to

communicate the overall integrity of the Chartist movement. Given this, M'Owen writes to a dual audience: first, those already familiar with Chartism's goals but whose convictions need bolstering, and second, those unfamiliar with the movement but who might be convinced to join in without a detailed explanation, in a sort of "bandwagon" effect. In either case, the poem represents a paternalistic approach to the working classes, one in which the worker as "child" must be persuaded to build or maintain his ties to a political cause by a wiser father figure, though one with a manipulative streak. The poem's primary arguments—the "millions" of Chartists, the "glorious cause" of equality—play to the reader's emotions rather than his sense of logic, treating him as a child who could be won with rousing words rather than an adult who deserves a thoughtful, rational explanation. M'Owen makes radical use of the child's sentimentalized naïveté, but he also reproduces the middle class's insistence that the masses require heavy-handed guidance in order to recognize their own best interests.

Ebenezer Elliott, the so-called "Corn Law Rhymer,"¹⁶ constructs a mirror-image narrative in "Song (to the tune of 'Robin Adair')" from his 1843 volume *The Splendid Village, Corn Law Rhymes, and Other Poems*. Rather than beginning with a child's question, this text opens with an adult posing one to a young child, whose exaggerated innocence and intense suffering mark him as a creature of sentiment. The child's response makes up the main body of the poem, as he tells the story of his family's fall into poverty and despair. Although the child narrates most of the poem, he remains in the

¹⁶ Although an important precursor to Chartist poetry, Elliott himself qualifies only marginally as a Chartist poet. He briefly supports the movement in the late 1830s but eventually condemns its push for immediate full democracy, instead promoting the notion that laborers must earn the vote through education and improvement.

rhetorical position of “one who does not know,” as his response brings up many more questions than it resolves:

Child, is thy father dead?
Father is gone!
Why did they tax his bread?
God’s will be done.
Mother has sold her bed;
Better to die than wed!
Where shall she lay her head?
Home we have none.

After the opening query, the child begins a narrative peppered throughout with ambiguities and questions. To the question “is thy father dead?” the child gives no definitive answer, instead simply stating that his father is “gone.” He goes on to immediately pose a question about tax laws, just one of several queries that go unanswered throughout the poem. The child’s inability to gain any explanation for his sufferings beyond a trite “God’s will be done” places him in a position of total powerlessness; not only is his existence threatened by grinding poverty, but he cannot even understand the conditions that have created these circumstances. In this way, Elliott’s boy reflects the typical middle-class tropes of sentiment, with the child as the ultimate object of pity.

Yet Elliott turns this sentimental construction to a radical purpose by using it to scrutinize one common middle-class response to poverty: that it is God’s will. It is unclear who speaks the poem’s fourth line. It is possible that the child claims, “God’s will be done,” in an effort to reassure himself of an ultimate purpose behind his suffering, but this seems to me unlikely, as his immediately preceding question is an indictment of the human practices that led to his father’s death. More likely this line is spoken by the

questioning adult, who tries to soothe the child, not realizing that his situation has made him inconsolable.

The poem's two final stanzas support this reading:

Father clamm'd thrice a week—
 God's will be done!
Long for work did he seek,
 Work he found none.
Tears on his hollow cheek
Told what no tongue could speak:
Why did his master break?
 God's will be done.

Doctor said air was best—
 Food we had none;
Father with panting breast,
 Groaned to be gone:
Now he is with the blest—
Mother says death is best!
We have no place of rest—
 Yes, ye have one!

Here the voice of the listening adult intrudes again, most obviously in the poem's final line, promising the young child a home in heaven. Given the spiritual content of this response, it seems all the more likely that the near-refrain of "God's will be done" also comes from the listener, who can only respond to the child's re-telling of his earthly woes with religious platitudes that ring hollow next to the stark realities of the child's mournful tale. Again, the child's narration emphasizes the uncertainty of his situation, defined entirely by absence and lack—there is no work, no clean air, no food, no home, and eventually no father for this family. The child's suffering and his ignorance share equal parts in the creation of his pathos, as he is not worldly-wise enough to know why he and his family have been fated to endure such trials. The adult listener, sympathetic though he

or she may be, cannot answer the child's fundamental question: why his father had to die. Instead the child's concerns with poverty, hunger, and death—which of course are the concerns of the adult worker as well—can only be answered in vague promises of God and heaven. The poem's inverted structure, with the adult as "questioner" and child as "explainer," ultimately reveals the failure of bourgeois responses to working-class poverty. Cleverly, Elliott uses the middle-class convention of the sentimentalized child to demonstrate the moral bankruptcy of middle-class Christian paternalism. This approach allows him to catch his readers off guard as the internal contradictions of seemingly familiar rhetorical tropes hit the reader with even stronger force.

2. Chartists and the Elegiac Tradition

As Chartists apply the clichés of sentimentalized children—their abjection and pain as well as their innocence and naïveté—to overtly political ends, they do the same with another literary tradition: that of the English elegy. Perhaps because of the nature of the Victorian working-class experience, Chartist poems frequently take an elegiac tone in order to perform some work of mourning, whether for a fallen Chartist leader or for the injustices inflicted on those left behind. Here I turn my attention to certain conventions of the elegy—namely pastoral imagery, promised consolation, concern with poetic inheritance, and a tone of mourning—and how Chartists use them to call attention to the suffering of the all-too-often anonymous masses.

The tradition of the pastoral elegy in English is rich with the famous dead mourned by the yet-more-famous living. Tennyson mourns Arthur Hallam. Shelley

mourns Keats. Spenser mourns Sir Philip Sidney. Despite this obvious trend, scholars rarely discuss the classed nature of these pastoral elegies prior to 1900. Important works on the English elegy by Peter Sacks and others most frequently turn their attention to questions of gender and sexuality in these poems, and while these topics are certainly important, the absence of class from these conversations about elegy is striking. Indeed, the privileged status of the mourners and the mourned in such texts as Milton's "Lycidas" and Spenser's "Astrophel" is a foregone conclusion; without it, these poems would not exist. The deaths of the poor do not typically inspire the outpourings of carefully-structured grief that make up a pastoral elegy, and self-taught, working-class authors frequently did not have the necessary repertoire of classical sources to construct such an intricate web of mourning.

This did not stop Chartist and other radical poets of the early nineteenth century from appropriating the elegiac form and using it to mourn those who typically had been left out of the poetic framework of the elegy. Indeed, mourning became one of the key tasks of Chartist poetry as a whole, as the movement saw many men fall in the struggle for political rights for the British working classes. Timothy Randall notes, "An important function of Chartist verse was to pay public tribute to individual figures of the movement, especially during their imprisonment, release from prison, or their death" (174). But these Chartist forms of elegy do more than simply "pay tribute" to important individuals. Instead, Chartist poets adopt certain features of the traditional pastoral elegy, incorporating them into poetry with a radically different purpose and a novel means of circulation, and, in so doing, they create an entirely new trajectory for the form.

Chartist elegies, like the elegies of previous generations, perform a particular work of mourning, but these works mourn a very different kind of loss. While poems by important elegists like Milton, Tennyson, and others use the death of some friend (frequently also a public figure) as an occasion to express grief and to make a larger comment on poetic inspiration or the social situation of the times, Chartist elegies grieve powerless, frequently anonymous individuals. It matters little to the Chartist elegist whether these mourned individuals are actually deceased, for these poets mourn not only death but also the loss of potential—potential beauty, potential freedom, potential happiness—of the members of England’s working classes. The workers don’t have to be physically dead; they must simply be in any similarly powerless state. While Sacks sees the elegiac form as a way of responding to the castrative power of death through the substitutive power of language, we see in the case of these Chartist elegies that “kingly Death,” as Shelley calls it in “Adonais,” isn’t the only castrative, patriarchal power. For much of England’s laboring population, it may not even be the most frightening.

Chartist elegies grieve the political and economic impotence suffered by the working classes at the hands of unjust systems and institutions. Their appropriation of the conventions of pastoral elegy to make this point exhibits both the flexibility and the limitations of those conventions. They are flexible to the extent that they can be successfully transferred to an entirely different context—from the traditional pastoral’s idyllic expressions of grief to the grimy, bleak portrayals of the Chartists—and the elegiac task expanded to include a kind of mourning that springs not from death, but from a life that seems hardly preferable to it. A brief examination of several conventions of the

elegy will show how Chartist authors adapted them to their own purposes, mourning anonymous workers rather than famous literary or political figures. Despite this versatility, however, the elegiac form is nonetheless limited in its political efficacy, as I will discuss in my conclusion. The words of Chartist elegists might speak to a large sector of the working classes, but they fail to incite the nationwide changes the poets hoped for as the vast majority of Chartist texts quickly descended into literary obscurity.

Traditional elegies frequently invoke pastoral imagery as a kind of elaborately-constructed fiction, recalling the pastoral tradition of Greece and Rome through the use of complex poetic forms and rich literary allusions in order to express respect for the departed as well as showcase the poet's own literary skill. Chartist elegies, though, are not as preoccupied with highly-wrought exhibitions of skill. In fact, in pursuit of simplicity, clarity, and sentimentality, these poets do sometimes cross the border into the realm of the childishly overeffusive.¹⁷ Whereas traditional elegies often concern themselves with poetic inheritance—the question of whether the mourning poet will find a place among the pantheon of accomplished poets who have gone before—Chartist poets can frequently adopt this pastoral convention without engaging in corresponding levels of narcissism. These are clearly poems in which the political message outweighs the poet's concerns about his reputation; indeed, many of the poems and songs of the Chartists were

¹⁷ A particularly jejune example comes from a stanza of John Watkins's elegy, "Lines on Shell, Killed at Newport":

"Oh, horrid was the wound that bled!
And piteous was his look when dead!
He died a martyr for the Charter.
He died in pain,
But not in vain:
Who would not life for freedom barter?"

penned and published anonymously, or only under initials. These anonymous Chartist authors transform the elegy's typical interest in questions of poetic inheritance and the role of the poet in a changing literary landscape into a concern for quite a different kind of legacy: the political and economic inheritance of the working classes. The dissemination of these elegies might have something to do with this difference in focus. As I have mentioned, this poetry circulated mainly in working-class journals, allowing shared concerns of politics and economics to trump the mainstream poet's interest in polish and refinement. Thus the "badness"—the mawkishness, the sentimentality, the lack of formal sophistication—of Chartist elegies stands in defiance of the typical commodification of the poet's skill. The commodity on display in these texts is not technical ability but class sympathy, and this shift is made possible by the poetry's alternate paths of circulation.

This is not to say that Chartist poets completely abandoned personal ambition in favor of communal goals or had no interest in the broader scope of Britain's literary tradition. Martha Vicinus points out that many Chartist writers were inspired by the political poems of the Romantics (96), and numerous poetic projects showcase the authors' desire to claim a place in Britain's literary pantheon. William James Linton's "The Dirge of the Nations," a lengthy internationalist poem about the trials of the global working classes, is full of the kinds of classical allusions that Chartists more regularly eschewed. The poem itself is structured around an extended metaphor comparing the world's workers to Prometheus, daily tortured by "the gory-headed Vulture." The sophistication of Linton's allusions—including a reference to Milton as an explicit appeal

to England's poetic heritage—shows the poet's interest in attaining a place in this storied tradition. Similarly, Thomas Cooper wrote his lengthy prison poem *The Purgatory of Suicides* in Spenserian stanzas, clear evidence of his awareness of the British poetic tradition and his desire to stake a claim in it.

Indeed, simply because of their working-class status, many Chartist poets may have felt that they had something to prove in their work. Brian Maidment comments that many poems from working-class nineteenth-century authors evidence

some ambition to distinguish the author as a highly cultured, distinctive, and intellectual member of his (or, very occasionally, her) class. These poems all suggest an endeavor on their authors' part to step beyond the cultural constraints of working-class life into a more ambitious, even universal and trans-historical, poetic discourse. They also suggest a partially contradictory pride in their origins in working-class life. . . . These poets both wish to be compared with the highly educated writers and to insist on their distinctiveness as writers who endured low social status and whose educational and cultural deprivations had only been overcome by hard work, coupled with innate talent or 'genius.' (97)

Certainly no poet is entirely devoid of the desire to receive the mantle of the great poets of the past. Yet the emphasis on political consciousness and the corresponding class-consciousness inflects the authors' desires for poetic recognition. The aspiration to be known is linked with the wish to be known *as* a member of a certain class. These poets wish to enter the "universal and trans-historical poetic discourse" not simply to achieve some bourgeois goal of personal accomplishment—as Eric Hobsbawm points out, this end was "profoundly distasteful" to the more politicized of the working classes (200)—but because that conversation has had so little representation from the poor and self-taught. Thus, maintaining the distinctiveness of the working-class poetic tradition is essential to these poets' goals of acceptance and recognition.

Chartist elegies make this concern with the political role of the poet especially clear, as exemplified by Ernest Jones's 1855 poem "The Poet's Death." Born into privilege and schooled among Britain's elite, Jones was perhaps the best-known and best-educated poet to wholly embrace the Chartist cause. "The Poet's Death" mourns the impending death of an unnamed poet (perhaps Jones himself, although he actually dies about fifteen years after the poem's publication) and ends with this quatrain expressing the desire for a memory of his poetry:

Slow down the tide of the departing years,
The venerable shadow flits along.
No tears for him, who ne'er gave rise to fears;
His requiem be an echo of his song.

The narrator clearly wants the poet to be remembered for his work. But what exactly is this echoed "song"? The poem's opening has already laid out the work of this poet as a political project:

A brave old warrior of poesy,
Grown grey-haired in the service of his lyre;
...
Vain tyranny would chain his eagle wings,
Vain malice would his heavenly visions tame:
Still through the prison-bars the angel sings,
Still breaks through dungeon-walls the flashing flame.

The poet wants his memory to be bound up with memories of his political projects—his songs "through the prison-bars"¹⁸ and against all forces of "tyranny" and "malice." This juxtaposition makes it clear that for Jones, at least, the quest for poetic eminence accompanies an even stronger belief in the liberating mission of their work.

¹⁸ In 1848 Jones was indeed sentenced to two years in prison for sedition.

Indeed, Chartists frequently took the opportunity to declare their notions of the purpose of poetry and to condemn those poets who took a different point of view. Peter Scheckner notes that both Ernest Jones and Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor published scathing literary reviews of contemporary poets like Tennyson and Robert Browning in their periodical *The Labourer: A Monthly Magazine of Politics, Literature, and Poetry* (17). They criticized not the talent of these poets, but their priorities. According to O'Connor and Jones, in focusing on skill and form—in other words, on elaborate fictions like the pastoral elegy—these poets lost sight of the social function of poetry. In the preface to the third edition of his *The Ballad of Babe Christabel*, Chartist poet Gerald Massey describes this social function as follows:

It is not that I seek to sow dissension between class and class, or fling firebrands among the combustibles of society; for when I smite the hearts of my fellows, I would rather they should gush with the healing waters of love, than with the fearful fires of hatred. I yearn to raise them into lovable beings. I would kindle in the hearts of the masses a sense of the beauty and grandeur of the universe, call forth the lineaments of Divinity in their poor worn faces, give them glimpses of the grace and glory of Love and the marvelous significance of Life, and elevate the standard of Humanity for all. . . . It was not for myself alone that I wrote these things: it was always the condition of others that so often made the mist rise up and cloud my vision. Nor was it for myself that I have uncurtained some scenes of my life to the public gaze, but as an illustration of the lives of others, who suffer and toil on, 'die, and make no sign.' (201)

Massey, as one of the most distinguished of the Chartist poets to actually come from a working-class background—he started his career in the mills at age eight and formed part of the inspiration for Charles Kingsley's radical novel *Alton Locke*—wants his poetry to perform a social work, not just an aesthetic one. He appeals to notions of class sympathy, hoping that through an honest portrayal of England's workers, others will come to know and therefore to love them. Massey claims that even his use of autobiographical detail

isn't really "about him." We may rightly question his claims to total altruism, but as an idealized statement of the goals of Chartist poetry, Massey's preface points the way: this poetry is about an honest portrayal of the working classes in order to further their political rights. Thus it must come as no surprise that Chartist poets' adoption of elegiac conventions would bend the form to new, socially conscious ends. A brief discussion of the use of two key pastoral conventions—natural imagery and poetic consolation—makes clear this new direction.

First, the natural imagery itself, the fiction at the heart of the pastoral, takes on a new function for the Chartists. Raymond Williams points out that the pastoral tradition is filled with images of nature's bounty and of "the happy tenant, the idealized and independent self" (68) as the realities of labor have been stripped from descriptions of the countryside.¹⁹ Chartist poets, however, cannot adopt the pastoral conventions of referring to characters as happy tenants or as shepherds in idyllic natural settings; this would strip their poems of their core purpose of depicting the woes of average laborers. But Chartist poetry is filled to a surprising degree with images of nature, especially given the urban locus of the Chartist movement. Writing about the traditional pastoral elegy, Sacks interprets the descriptions of the changing seasons and the cyclical rebirth of vegetation deities as figures for nature's renewal. He notes, "The unique death is absorbed into a natural cycle of repeated occasions, and the very expression of mourning is naturalized as though it too were but a seasonal event" (24). But Chartist elegies deploy imagery of

¹⁹ Williams goes on to note that poets like George Crabbe and John Clare do re-associate labor and loss (often via enclosure) with the pastoral, though not within the context of the elegiac tradition that I am concerned with here.

changing seasons to *de*-naturalize the struggles of workers and to point forward to revolution as a regular and regenerative rather than violent and unfamiliar event. Part of a stanza of “The Patriot’s Grave,” an anonymous verse written to elegize the dead of the Irish rebellion at Tara-Hill in 1798, emphasizes the regenerative potential of the patriot’s blood:

There is blood on the earth—in vale and glen
It has water’d the flowers like dew—and men
Of the noblest heart and most fiery brain,
Have fallen, like Gods, immortal though slain.

Here the blood, compared to dew as a potent force for life, is connected to the lives of the patriots themselves who, though departed, are immortal. This comparison makes the dead patriots into a vehicle for further regenerative radical action; their example will lead to other uprisings, and their revolutionary spirits will live on. A similar moment occurs in Ernest Jones’s “We are Silent,” in which “Revolution’s soul,” originally pictured as being frozen and impotent, is eventually warmed into a springtime avalanche and flood:

Times will set the coldest burning,
Times that come with great events,
Like the deluge-tides returning
On decaying continents,
Sweeping worn-out wrongs before them,
Wrecks, and wrongs, and discontents.

This liquid potency, like the blood in “The Patriot’s Grave,” leads not merely to a regeneration of life but to the fostering of some kind of political action. The examples of the few will “set the coldest burning,” and, like an avalanche, the smallest tumbling stone can lead to massive shifts.

The image of the avalanche and the coming spring in Jones's poem symbolizes a common consolation for the Chartist mourner: the imminent tide of revolutions. Indeed, most working-class elegies—indeed, much Chartist poetry in general—ends with the promise that conditions cannot long remain as they are. Jones's poem concludes with the image of revolution as the dawn of a new day:

Light your glittering chandeliers:
They must die when dawn appears,
Dawn of freedom's glorious day.

"The Patriot's Grave" ends with the similar promise that the dead patriots' blood will fertilize the soil for greater revolution; "The Poet's Death" concludes on the note that the poet's song will "echo" throughout the ages, ready to effect change. In the face of grief, Chartist authors offer a poetic consolation centered in revolutionary change, which they nearly universally proclaim as the worker's ultimate hope.²⁰

3. Mourning the Child Worker

I am particularly interested in poems that use conventions of both sentiment and of elegy to mourn the effects of industrialization on the youngest workers. Plaintive and wistful in tone, these poems express grief over the tendency of industrial life to strip a young person of his or her childhood, leaving the working child prematurely aged and

²⁰ A Christian version of this consolation also emerges at times. "The Death of the Factory Child" by John Critchley Prince (a minister as well as a poet, who was self-taught though not affiliated with Chartism) ends in an epitaph promising that "the widow's God" will return "in justice, wield[ing] an all-avenging rod." Similarly, "The Dirge of the Nations" concludes with the image of "One with a ghastly wound," an obvious Christ figure who appears to prophetically comfort and encourage the world's workers.

bereft of dreams or hopes for the future. Below I discuss two poems—Robert Lowery’s “The Collier Boy” and “The Factory Child,” published under the initials J. E.—that I call Chartist child elegies because they mourn precisely this death—the passing away of youth’s hopes and joys. Much as traditional elegists considered seasonal changes as part of the repeating patterns of existence, these poets regard childhood as part of the expected cycle of human life. Stealing a young person’s childhood amounts to breaking this cycle and perverting the “natural” path of human existence. To make this point, the two poets combine tales of tortured childhood with imagery of spring and summer in order to denaturalize the industrial experience, using the “death” of childhood to appeal to the reader’s emotions and call him or her to political action.

Robert Lowery’s poem “The Collier Boy,” published in *The Charter* in June of 1839, mourns the lost childhood of a young coal miner, employing pastoral imagery to vividly contrast with the bleak picture of the child. Lowery, a devoted Chartist during the 1830s and early 1840s, had personal experience with childhood suffering: he became lame in his early teen years and was forced to abandon his first career at sea for the less strenuous life of a tailor. His poem, despite its vernal atmosphere, holds out no promise of the sort of revolutionary consolation promised in the majority of working-class poems. Instead he draws heavily on some of the most clichéd descriptions both of nature and of the suffering child in order to reveal the enormous destructive power of a childhood consumed with work. The poem begins with a pathos-ridden portrayal of the lost potential of this child:

Oh! mark yon child, with cheeks so pale,
As if they never felt the gale

That breathes of health and lights the smile;
It tells of nought but lengthened toil.
Its twisted frame and actions rude
Speak mind and form's decrepitude,
And show that boyhood's hours of joy
Were never known to the Collier Boy.

The opening "Oh!" immediately declares the poem to be a work expressing the narrator's heart-felt sympathy with the child. The succeeding images—of the boy's pale cheeks and crippled figure—increase the sense of sympathy, even while calling attention to the boy's ugliness—"its twisted frame and actions rude" and his "mind and form's decrepitude." Lowery makes a point of negating each of the conventions of the idealized Victorian child. Rather than innocent, the collier boy is "twisted." Rather than healthy and hale, he is decrepit in both mind and figure. In fact, as the stanza makes clear, the collier boy has become an "it." The reader is meant to pity the boy not because of his perfect virtue—as in most middle-class iterations of sentiment—but because of the horrifying conditions that have disfigured him.

The next three stanzas contrast this vision of dehumanizing poverty with an aestheticized nature as full of romanticized clichés as the collier boy himself was devoid of them.

'Tis night, when youth and pleasure dreams
Of mead and woods and gurgling streams--
Soft cooling baths, in sunny hours
Whose banks are blooming with gay flowers;—
Of birds and beasts, and all the play
Fancy forms for the coming day:
The Collier's lonely calls destroy
Those dreams of bliss to the Collier Boy.

Bright morn has come, each young heart hies
To chase the gaudy butterflies,

Or to follow the flight of the humming bee
Amid the wild wood's minstrelsy;
Entomb'd in earth, far, far away
From all the light of glorious day,
Hard toil and danger doth employ
For the dreary mine, the Collier Boy.

'Tis eve—the cattle seek their fold,
The western sky's a flood of gold;
The old men sit, and tell the tale
Of youthful deeds, and quaff their ale,
And looking round them, smile to see
The urchins playing merrily;—
He wants, yet cannot it enjoy, so toil-worn is the Collier Boy.

The poem's middle stanzas follow the collier boy over the course of his day, contrasting the reality of his existence with idyllic portrayals of nature at every turn. The poetic clichés of nature—"gurgling streams," "gay flowers," "glorious day"—serve only to highlight the collier boy's own complete lack of typical childhood experiences. The nature images speak of fertility and regeneration; bees, flowers, and streams suggest that this is a springtime or summer scene, though the collier boy himself is stuck in a perpetually dark winter underground. The image of the child—usually the emblem of potential and futurity—here becomes associated with impotence and death, as the collier boy is pale, crippled, and exhausted from his day's toil. Far from the usual pathetic fallacy of nature mourning with the elegist, here nature stands oblivious to the boy's torments, and the poem's repeated contrast between the collier boy's state and the state of the world around him denaturalizes the whole notion of child labor. Indeed, what these stanzas actually mourn is the boy's lost potential. He is not free to play in the morning because of his work in the mine or in the evening because of his exhaustion. Anxieties

about work even invade his dreams. He is a child when measured in years, but his toil and cares have prematurely aged him.

These moments lead into a final stanza that, while pointing out the blame for this terrible state of affairs, refuses to provide any consolation for the mourning poet.

Oh! curse upon that love of gold
For which the young heart now is sold,
With care and sickness withering
The sunshine of its early spring.
Oh! shame upon that barbarous state
That toil for infant years create,
Whose accursed influences destroy
The mind and form of the Collier Boy.

The collier boy at last appears as a sort of slave, sold for “love of gold.” Tropes of slavery and freedom are common in Chartist poetry,²¹ but this example links slavery with the seasonal imagery I have already discussed. The cares of the collier boy are so much the worse because he should be in the “spring” of his life. There is, the poet suggests, no consolation for the loss of childhood; no revolution can return that spring-time freshness. The future, as is commonly said, is in the hands of the children. But this child has nothing in his hands but coal.

“The Collier Boy” expresses a reaction to the changes of industrialism that Eric Hobsbawm notes to be quite common: demoralization to the point of complete political apathy. While Hobsbawm lists several categories of the politically indifferent—“the believer in the second coming, the drunkard, the petty gangster, the lunatic, the tramp or

²¹ See the first chapter of Catherine Gallagher’s *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* for a more thorough examination of how the image of the slave appears in Chartist rhetoric. She notes, for example, that “industrial capitalism was depicted as a system of ‘wage slavery,’ which would only be ended by manhood enfranchisement” (32).

the ambitious small entrepreneur” (204)—the child laborer goes unmentioned, despite the fact that this figure perhaps best fulfills his characterization of the apathetic: “the least skilled, least educated, least organized, and therefore least hopeful” of the working classes (204). Yet the poem’s author, Lowery, could not be counted among the politically unengaged; he held leadership positions within the Chartist movement²² and clearly believed in the efficacy of collective action. The hopelessness with which Lowery ends this poem seems at odds with his biography. Because of it, one might be tempted to read this poem as a mimicry of middle-class sentimental tropes, fine-tuned for extracting maximum pity but without any radical potential. Just as Dickens does with Little Nell, Lowery paints the collier boy’s torments in the sentimental mode—dwelling on his wretchedness, contrasting it with refreshing nature and idealized childhood, and implying that the child worker has no respite but in death. But unlike Dickens’s, Lowery’s sentimentalized child suffering provides more than just a convenient space for an outlay for shared emotion; rather, given the poem’s circulation in a Chartist newspaper, it serves to unite the community behind some collective action. The poem’s final lines, which call down “shame upon that barbarous state”, hold a double meaning, with “state” denoting both the circumstances of child labor and the literal state—the governmental entity that has denied enfranchisement to the workers. The blame directed towards this second “state” adds an almost imperceptible radical tinge to a poem that otherwise seems to conform to bourgeois norms. While the poem holds out no hope for the collier boy, the

²² He was, for instance, elected Newcastle delegate to the 1838 Palace Yard meeting of Chartists.

consolation of political reform might still exist outside of the poem's bounds, if the readers take steps to convert their affect to action.

"The Factory Child," a poem published under the initials "J. E." in *McDouall's Chartist Journal* in 1841, uses a slowly dying child worker as the occasion for a more explicit appeal for action. Here too the gloomy, toil-filled life of the child worker contrasts strongly with the wholesome lives of children allowed to play in the summer sun. Yet this poem also presents a distinctive offering, in terms of the elegy. Unlike "The Collier Boy" and the majority of traditional English elegies, in which the mourner and the mourned are separate individuals, here the factory child tells his own story using the first person, effectively mourning his own impending death. This differs from the elegy's conventional insistence on the division between mourner and mourned (necessary in order for the mourner to successfully accomplish the task of grieving and move on as a whole individual), but it also crafts a new kind of opposition, an internal divide within a mourner torn between hope and hopelessness. Sacks explains that "the divided voice structure of the lament" is caused, at least in part, by the "'splitting' and self-suppression that accompanied the self's first experiences of loss and substitution" (35). In "The Factory Child," the fusion of mourner and mourned creates a childish voice who indeed is encountering a "first experience of loss," but the very newness of this experience lends itself to increased optimism regarding the social efficacy and political potential of the poem.

At first, though, the poem shows no signs of this optimism. It opens with a vision of idealized childhood but quickly turns this imagery to contrast with the bleak life of the factory child:

I hear the blythe voices of children at play,
And the sweet birds rejoicing on every spray;
On all things the bright beams of summer hath smiled,
But they smile not on me the poor factory child. (98)

The pastoral imagery of the first three lines—singing birds, summer sunbeams—lays out a framework for romanticized childhood immersed in nature and basked in healthful play. The stanza’s final line, though, sets up the factory child as an exception to this norm, the one who is *not* smiled upon, who cannot freely join with other children in play. This pattern of idealization followed by negation continues into the subsequent stanza:

The gay sports of childhood to me they deny,
And the fair path of learning I never must try;
A companion of creatures whom guilt hath defiled,
Oh! who does not pity the poor factory child.

Again, the factory child is defined in opposition to features of a normal childhood, like sport and school. But here also the child begins to imagine the power his words might have on the world around him, inciting a nationwide movement of pity and, in the next stanza, mourning. The poem continues:

Oh! who would not mourn for a victim like me,
A young heart-broken slave in the land of the free;
Hardly tasked, and oft beaten, oppress’d and revil’d,
Such, such is the fate of the poor factory child.

The shift in verb tense from “who does not pity” at the end of the preceding stanza to “who would not mourn” at the beginning of this one indicates a parallel move in the child narrator’s self-conception, one that effectively represents the move from a mere

normalization of middle-class sentiment to its radicalization. “Who does not pity the poor factory child” reveals only the child as a passive sufferer at the hands of an unjust system, but with the change from “does” to “would” in the next line the narrator suddenly perceives of himself not only as “victim,” but as symbol, an imaginative figure capable of drawing together a nation in protest. In other words, the child suddenly imagines himself as more than just a sufferer; instead, through his own words he becomes an active participant in the national struggle for equality. He takes the opportunity, in the subsequent lines, to employ one of the most common motifs of that struggle, one that also arises in “The Collier Boy”: that of slavery versus liberty. In invoking slavery as his “fate” and thus connecting his sufferings in England, “the land of the free,” with those of the now-liberated slaves abroad, the factory child shows his awareness of the power of this particular rhetorical move and acts accordingly. He is no longer content to passively mourn his sufferings but instead wants to use his pathetic situation to win new opportunities for workers.

In the next three stanzas the child further builds his image as a victim of modernity and also continues to call for action based on this suffering. The poem ends:

In the dead of the night when you take your sweet sleep,
Through the dark dismal street to my labour I creep;
So the din of the loom till my poor brain seems wild,
I return,—an unfortunate factory child.

The bright bloom of health has forsaken my cheek,
My spirits are gone and my young limbs grown weak;
Oh! ye rich and ye mighty let sympathy mild,
Appeal to your hearts for the young factory child.

Oh! pity my sufferings e'er yet the cold tomb,
Succeed my loathed prison, its task, and its gloom;

And the clods of the valley untimely are pil'd,
O'er the poor wasted form of the factory child.

Again, the narrator turns to now-familiar denaturalizations of child labor—the perpetual night-time, the weakness and premature aging of the child's body—yet he consolidates these worries into a poetic consolation that emphasizes the idea that the child's grim “fate” alluded to earlier in the poem is by no means fixed. While the child mourns his current “loathed prison” and foreseen “cold tomb,” he still displays faith that his voice can indeed reach the “rich and . . . mighty” and strike them with pity. This poem displays none of the pessimism about the efficacy of language that permeates traditional English elegies. Though “J. E.,” the poem's author, is presumably an adult, the poem displays a child's naive confidence that the world of words can indeed touch the world of objects and that achieving political transformation might be as simple as telling a compelling story.

4. Conclusion: The Limits of Sentiment

Despite their political overtones, these Chartist poems are in many ways indistinguishable from middle-class deployments of the trope of the suffering child,²³ raising the question of whether the clichés of bourgeois sentiment can adequately convey the working-class experience. It is interesting to note that real children in the exact position of Lowery's collier boy—namely, the children interviewed as part of the 1842 Royal Commission Report on Children in the Mines—show absolutely no tendency to

²³ For instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's “The Cry of the Children” uses many of the sentimental tropes I have discussed here, most obviously the unceasing tears of factory children but also the invocation of natural imagery to denaturalize their labors.

sentimentalize their own life stories. Admittedly these children are talking with a middle-class interviewer and thus cannot be expected to be wholly forthcoming, but they nevertheless speak the language of economics rather than sentiment. The majority of the interviewees, both children and parents, make pragmatic cost-benefit assessments of mine work. For these families, acquiring the concrete necessities of life is much more important than dwelling on the affect of hard labor. Quite a few children claim that they prefer mine work to school, and they most always say that they would gladly work even more hours if they could earn more money. In general, the children can very clearly describe the benefits and downsides of mine work, and they take the difficulties in stride. If they are beaten, in their view it is often deserved.²⁴ Mining work might even be said to bring pleasure, compared to other labors.²⁵ Even mothers cannot afford to sentimentalize childhood. One North Lancashire mother, Betty Duxberry, pragmatically explains her choice to let her children mine despite the physical dangers: “Colliers are all crooked and short-legged, not like other men who work above ground but there are always colliers and always will be” (27). Another mother, Ann High, admits the economic necessity of child labor for many families: “They [the overseers] are not such bad masters. They send them [the children] home if they misbehave. They are sent home to their parents and they beat them, they are forced to. They could not get a living without the children’s work” (30).

²⁴ Isaac Tipton of Shropshire reports, ““The men did not thump me very often. I was not very bad only middling. I sometimes deserved it because I would not do as they told me. They sometimes thumped me with the fist and sometimes with the stick; they made marks; I seldom complained unless they gave it me too bad” (45).

²⁵ John Galloway of Lancashire, age 14, says that “he likes working at the bottom better than the fields above. There is more pleasure. Anybody would like a dry pit very well if he did not get licked none. Some as gets licked very badly and does not like going” (26).

If we take these statements as representative, then the radicalization of sentiment originates less in the true feelings of the overworked laborer than in the poet's creative vision turned upon the his existence. There is a clear discrepancy between the Chartist poet's depictions of this life, bathed in tears, and those of the workers themselves, who are much more interested in bringing home a few extra shillings. These poems are not even a caricature of the laborer's emotions but instead a total rewriting of them. They take the workers' real worries, which are primarily economic—how to make ends meet and how to advance in life, if possible—and reimagines them as melodrama. This often requires forcibly, even ventriloquistically attaching middle class affect to working class positions. On the one hand, this strategy detracts from the unskilled labor's ability to participate fully in the political conversation, as their legitimate economic concerns are patronizingly transcribed as tragedy for a more educated readership. On the other hand, though, the radicalization of sentiment creates new imaginative possibilities for the workers themselves. The employment of middle class sentimental tropes to describe working-class life is not only designed to win the sympathy and perhaps even the acquiescence of bourgeois leaders. As Loose and Sanders argue, it is also meant to teach the worker, isolated in his individual struggle for existence, to reimagine his life in terms of the shared feelings of his class. In the case of the poetry of sentiment and mourning, these shared feelings might be embellished with the trappings of middle-class expectations, but their powerful expressions give the readers an equally powerful reason to unite in resistance.

Although the Chartist political project withers after 1848, the imaginative project of its poets—this reconceiving of the self in terms of class-consciousness—does not. Poetic expressions of suffering and grief fail to spur the political reforms that Ernest Jones, Edward Mead, Robert Lowery, and others hoped would provide the ultimate consolation. Yet compared with bourgeois authors, Chartist poets tend to express much more optimism in their ability to successfully heal society through expressions of grief and pathos. Because they mourn not for an individual but for an entire class—the workers—their project never becomes obsolete.

4. Sentiment, Interactivity, and the Fiction of the Liberal Subject in Victorian Boys' Magazines

“F. R. W. asks us whether we are not rogues. . .”
(*Boy's Own Magazine*, June 1855).

Thus far I have considered portrayals of childhood that were created primarily for adults and only incidentally for consumption of the children themselves. The deployments of sentimentalized childhood in these works, then, reflect adult projections back onto this earlier phase of life and do not give us a sense of the degree to which young people accept these sentimentalized visions. I now wish to turn my attention to a body of work that addresses this latter point: boys' periodicals, which began their run of massive popularity in the mid- and late-Victorian period. Emerging from the vastly different traditions of the penny bloods (sensational serialized tales) and chaste religious pamphlets for the young, these magazines became both a popular source of reading materials and an important item of British commerce. They appealed to the country's growing population of urban, working youths of the middle and lower middle classes—clerks, apprentices, and the like—a readership with a bit of disposable income and a thirst for excitement. Ranging from the wholesome entertainments of the Religious Tract Society's *Boy's Own Paper* to the more salacious allure of *The Bad Boy's Paper* and others, these magazines quickly multiplied as publishers raced to get in on the growing market; Richard Altick notes that from the 1850s onwards new boys' titles came out most every year (362). Significantly, these papers targeted boys in the formative years of their

adolescence, and given the countless iterations of the genre during the period, they did so successfully.

In this chapter I will focus on two mid-Victorian boys' story papers: Samuel Beeton's *Boys Own Magazine* (1855-1874) and Edwin J. Brett's *Boys of England* (1866-1899). These periodicals are an interesting pairing because they represent two different approaches to the genre. Beeton's paper—the first major Victorian boys' magazine—was considered more respectable, with plenty of “useful” knowledge and less sensationalism, while Brett's tales of crime and adventure attracted a more plebeian readership. Despite these differences, both share a similar—and unstable—ethic. As many scholars have argued, these texts foster capitalist and imperialist impulses in their young readers, encouraging their desires to compete and command. On the other hand, I would argue that the papers also display a sentimental ethic, drawing their central heroes with deep moral feelings alongside their competitive drive. In combining these two sets of values, boys' story papers extol what we might identify as the ideal liberal subject—driven, individualist, and self-regulating—and the immense popularity of these texts speaks to the general acceptance of this vision. But when we consider issues of reception and interactivity in boys' story papers—when boys are given the freedom to “write back” and contribute to their reading experience—these texts reveal the inherent instability of the liberal subject construct, as the capitalist/imperialist champion and the sentimental hero cannot easily be condensed into one figure.

To better define this instability, we must first trace the crisscrossing paths of boys' magazines, their readers, and the wider culture. Scholars writing about popular

culture, including children's magazines, usually attempt to define the relationship between these forms and the dominant, "high" culture. Frequently this endeavor arises from a desire to pin down the ideology of popular culture in some particular camp. Is it a resistant form, expressing the people's spirit in defiance of dominant economic and political narratives? Or is it inherently conservative, repackaging those narratives in simpler forms in order to sell them to the common man?

For those arguing for a resistant interpretation of popular culture, culture created by the working classes or other marginalized groups has the potential to disrupt the entire hierarchy of social relations. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe this process, "The 'top' [dominant or high culture, often differentiated by metaphors of the mind, physical body, or geographic location] attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other. . . but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life" (5). Ian Haywood also argues for the disruptive potential of popular culture, pointing out that the frequent motif of the "enlightened, radical common reader" (17) stands in opposition to the repressive politics of bourgeois culture. Yet for Haywood this is not an entirely oppositional relationship; in examining texts from Thomas Paine to Chartist fiction, he shows the complex relationship of "appropriation and reappropriation, of rapid response, innovation, imitation, assimilation, and subversion" (4), pointing to instances like Chartist authors' preoccupation with bourgeois concerns like temperance and respectability. Working with

a less clearly radical thread of popular culture, Peter Bailey points to the ways that new leisure opportunities presented an uncomfortable paradox for Victorian liberalism:

a society based on a paramount belief in the benevolent operation of free will had in theory to concede the right of the individual to pursue his own choice in leisure. . . . Yet the various discontinuities of modern life gave man at his leisure a mobility and anonymity which removed him from that supervision by his fellows which was still regarded as a desirable if formally unacknowledged constraint upon individual conduct. (20-21)

He argues that while the lower middle and working classes might pursue some degree of respectability in their leisure choices, this pursuit reveals a role performed, not an identity embraced (39), leaving significant room for a radical interpretation of their choices.

While those working with popular culture more broadly find room for this radical interpretation, scholars who study Victorian boys' story papers almost universally view them as a force for conventional values. In one of the most thorough studies of the genre, Kirsten Drotner argues that the boys' story paper gives its readers space to react to the changing expectations of becoming an adult, which results in their peculiar blend of morality and exoticism. For boys trying to find their place in the working world the stories provided a mental escape to far-flung locales while reinforcing Britain's dominant masculine values—"never sneak, never weep, never lie, and never trust foreigners" (107). John Springhall, while noting that sometimes popular material could "trickle up" into bourgeois publications (he cites the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins as an example of this [245]), proclaims that ultimately the works of publishers like Brett "were written for the people, but they were not of or by the people. Their 'point of view' was consistently aligned with that of hegemonic middle-class cultural values" (246). More recently, Kelly Boyd has argued that these story papers purvey British "manliness" of the

most traditional kind, as the heroes typically either come from elite backgrounds or, through their exceptional bravery and cleverness, earn a place in that stratum (47). Richard Fulton defines what he calls the magazines' "discourse of adventure" as a collection of sensationalized settings with a simplistic good/evil dichotomy, described in "colorful slang, jargon, and recurring metaphors (especially sporting and military metaphors) that emphasized action and excitement" (4). Here, too, conventional values win out, as the tales rely on assumptions of a shared ethical code that values the subjugation of natural forces and foreign peoples (18). Clearly the critical consensus surrounding these works is that they communicate predominantly conservative messages—whether about gender, sexuality, class, or broader cultural values—to a readership at the height of impressionability.

Scholars extend the general trend of this work to the subject of boys' story papers' complicity in British imperial projects. Patrick Dunae initiated this project in 1980, contending that boys' literature of the period "reflected the missionary zeal and the pragmatic materialism associated with empire during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as it reflected the militaristic and ultimately defensive face of empire in the early 1900s" (120). More recently, both Joseph Bristow and Kathryn Castle have argued that portrayals of imperialism in boys' adventure tales help their readers understand their role in the wider project of colonialism. Castle maintains that images of the racial other—particularly the Indian, African, or Chinese subject—provide a contrasting background against which boys could define their own British identity (8). Bristow's more complex argument links adventure tales with changing expectations in terms of masculinity,

politics, religion, and education. Tales of imperial adventure provide an opportunity to train up the working-class and lower-middle-class youth—a figure with considerable potential both to oppose traditional morality and to subvert ideals of middle-class effort—into a proper British manhood (19). For Bristow, as for the scholars mentioned above, these stories underline conservative values: they “take the boy into areas of history and geography that placed him at the top of the racial ladder and at the helm of all the world” (21).

The 1980s saw the emergence of one potential compromise between these two camps in the interpretation of popular culture, one that will inform my approach to popular Victorian periodicals. In the introduction to *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, Tony Bennett summarizes the competing trends of what he calls “structuralism” (popular culture as reinforcing dominant culture) and “culturalism” (popular culture as resisting dominant culture) and proposes a third way: “a turn to Gramsci” (xiv). By this he means thinking about popular culture as a contested site in the struggle to gain ideological hegemony.²⁶ This leads to an understanding of popular culture as “movable” rather than affiliated with any one ideological camp (xvi). This is the interpretive approach used, for instance, by Michael Denning in his seminal study of

²⁶ Gramsci defines the functions of this hegemony as:

1. The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
2. The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed. (145)

American dime novels. Although he sees the production of dime novels as a literary industry in the service of capital, he also cautions against reading them only as purveyors of dominant culture. Instead, “there are struggles both at the point of production, the writing of these dime novels; and at the point of consumption, the reading of cheap stories” (26). The notion of struggle or contest drives a Gramscian approach to popular culture, as dominant culture and resistant forces contend for prominence in the public sphere.

To return to my subject of boys’ magazines, I will show how the intrusions of sentiment into these texts support their inherent conservatism by constructing from their heroes an ideal liberal subject. But sentiment also plays a more subversive role, troubling traditional notions of mid- and late-Victorian masculinity. I would argue, with Bennett, that we must consider the location of cultural artifacts in a wider struggle for hegemony. In the case of boys’ story papers, this necessitates a consideration of not only their contents, but also their reception. Recently Louis James has argued that the interactive nature of boys’ story papers, with their contests, letters to the editor, and how-to pieces create a more intimate bond between the consumers and producers of these texts (79). In fact, I would argue that this interactivity disturbs the consumer/producer binary and also transforms the ideological affiliation of the papers, revealing the internal tensions in their emphasis on sentiment and appropriate subject-hood.

1. Refashioning the Sentimental Hero

Despite the preponderance of modern scholarship declaring boys' magazines to be wholly conservative, Victorians were shocked by their violence, crime, and exoticism and therefore identified them as subversive.²⁷ Respectable Victorians frequently railed against popular literature and its effects on its readers. Such a notable thinker as Matthew Arnold blamed the British copyright system, "a machinery for the multiplication and protection of bad literature" (327), for the profusion of cheap, inferior literature like penny papers: "the contents offered to us for next to nothing, but in hideous and ignoble form and aspect" (328). Discerning parents banned the more controversial boys' papers, and religious organizations countered their appeal with respectable papers meant to deliver moral lessons.²⁸ The criteria by which we judge these texts progressive or conservative have changed in the intervening years, as bourgeois Victorians focused on morally questionable plot elements while today's critics see the conventional values embedded in those moments—violence furthering Britain's pursuit of empire or crime thwarted by the efforts of ambitious youths, for instance. The serials, regardless of their desire to excite

²⁷ For a more thorough discussion of Victorian attitudes to boys' penny papers, see Patrick A. Dunae, "Penny Dreadfuls: Late Nineteenth-Century Boys' Literature and Crime," *Victorian Studies* (Winter 1979): 133-151.

²⁸ The chief example of this is *Boy's Own Paper*, as I have already mentioned. But Beeton and even Brett promote their magazines as forms of healthful entertainment. The introduction to Beeton's first issue promises, "The pages of the *Boy's Own Magazine* . . . will contain . . . matters of interest, amusement, and healthful and moral excitement, calculated at once to produce pleasure and convey instruction" (Jan. 1855) and proclaims that it will hold up as models virtuous young men throughout the ages. The subtitle of *Boys of England* presents a list of attractions for the reader: "A Young Gentleman's Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun, and Instruction"—"instruction," of course, is listed in the final spot, but it is not omitted altogether.

and amuse, trace well-worn paths, with an honorable young hero invariably triumphing over a greedy or savage or cowardly villain, who is eventually served with his humiliating just desserts.

It is to these heroes that I want to turn my attention, and particularly to the ways in which they fuse different heroic types in a way that elevates the traits of the ideal liberal subject while also broadening the range of acceptable Victorian manhood(s) to include less rigorously masculine models. Scholars frequently point out that the boy-heroes at the center of serialized stories set an example of respectability for their readers in the urban lower-middle classes. They typically start in humble circumstances but then frequently rise to positions of greater power, wealth, or respect; they model an ethic of hard work and determination; they exemplify masculine strength and energy (especially in relation to imperial projects) for the new generation. In this way, the young heroes model what it means to be a successful Victorian man and justify the rising ambitions of their readers. Significantly, though, these heroes also retain elements of an earlier model of protagonist: the sentimental hero. Clearly the boys in story paper serials are not sentimentalized in the same way as Little Nell, Paul Dombey, or the suffering children of Chartist poetry. Although they do not aim to wring tears of pity or grief from the reader (and rarely cry themselves), these tales nonetheless rely on conventions of sentiment, though of a different variety.

The etymology of “sentiment” and “sentimental” is a project that still engages scholars, making a simple definition of “the sentimental hero” problematic. Marie Banfield pursues the lexicographical course of “sentiment” and its associated words over

two centuries and demonstrates that its meaning at any given point is in flux, though she proposes the following general trajectory: “The history of the word *sentiment* as revealed in its eighteenth and nineteenth century dictionary definitions, suggests a movement away from a predominantly rational or intellectual concept, involving mental states and moral judgments, to a term increasingly imbued with feeling, sensation or emotion that is linked to sensibility rather than distinct from it” (4). Fred Kaplan, on the other hand, emphasizes a greater difference between the two constructs, noting that while the person of sensibility is, after a Romantic model, isolated by his or her suffering, the sentimental hero has a communal aspect that appealed to the Victorians. He writes, “The distinction between sentimentality as an expression of the doctrine of the moral sentiments and sensibility as a register of the capacity to respond to external stimuli needs to be emphasized.

Sentimentality is the possession of innate moral sentiments; sensibility is a state of psychological-physical responsiveness” (32-3). With the Victorian sentimental hero, shared feeling leads to right action, making it a “key weapon against the elimination of the moral ideal” (38) by the new realism that located few of the traditional virtues in human nature. While it seems clear that “sentiment” and especially “sentimentality” came to be identified with extreme or exaggerated feeling by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the figure of the sentimental hero survived without the attendant negative connotations.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will be defining the sentimental hero as one who recognizes and appreciates the bonds of sociability that tie together individuals and societies. This recognition may result in tears or similarly emotional displays, or it may

simply manifest itself in a deeply felt impulse towards fairness and right action. The sentimental hero holds friendship with worthy individuals in the highest regard, but he also senses his necessary attachment to the scorned and neglected of his community. Following Kaplan, this individual is not necessarily subject to extreme vicissitudes of feeling, as would be the man of sensibility, but he is instead one who feels the profound moral imperatives of shared humanity. Personal integrity is indelibly inked upon the sentimental hero's character, and he acts rightly not out of a calculated attempt at respectability but out of a genuine sense of sympathy and a desire to further the common good. As Banfield's work indicates, my definition refers back to an older meaning of sentiment, implying careful consideration and judgment rather than the whims of sensation.

Indeed, this version of the sentimental hero harkens back to the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Smith's 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith opens this treatise with the assertion that shared feeling is a fact of human existence: "That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it" (11). He goes on to define sympathy as "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (13) and to set this up as a basis for morality. Significantly, Smith's notion of sympathy is not rational or even virtuous, in the sense of a deliberately pursued course of good action. Instead, it is bodily and, to a degree, involuntary: "When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer" (12). The force of

sympathy is not something that can be controlled, and it is common to most all men, even “the most hardened violator of the laws of society” (11). Of course, sympathy is necessarily limited in its scope. For instance, sometimes another person’s emotion, if we do not fully understand or share it, might provoke quite a different reaction in us (14). In general, though, this notion of sympathy forms a solid basis both for Smith’s explanation of human virtues and for a society held together by communal responses to shared experiences.

The heroes of boys’ story papers classify as sentimental heroes, after this definition, because they act with innate morality and good sense, even if they sometimes succumb to mischievous urges.²⁹ Despite the obvious superiority vested in them by their authors, they possess a sense of fellow feeling and sympathy with those around them, not only with those who clearly merit their affections (hard-working English young men and lovely English young ladies, invariably), but also with those not generally accorded the power of fellow-feeling (villainous Frenchmen or savages, for instance), making the protagonists’ moral feelings another marker of their general superiority. This is important, because the hero inhabits a society where only a select few share his keen impulse towards the good. Otherwise he is adrift in a world in which his moral sense conflicts with the predominant ethic of selfishness. From prowling murderers to shrieking

²⁹ In this sense, the protagonists of boys’ story papers are not much different from Fielding’s Tom Jones, whom scholars often cite as a forebear of the Victorian sentimental hero. Like Tom, the boys must navigate a world full of scandal and wickedness, and through their own pluck and curiosity they sometimes land in complex predicaments. In both cases, the boys push forward with confidence in their own worth and good feelings towards those around them, and their respective tales end with their reward. See Kaplan (27) and Valerie Purton, who traces Tom Jones’s lineage to include Dickensian heroes like Nicholas Nickleby and Pip (23).

savages, the most shocking kinds of evil often surrounds the protagonists in boys' story papers. For maintaining proper sentiments (and therefore his superiority) in the face of these evils, the hero is eventually rewarded with honor, prosperity, romantic conquests, or a combination of the above. This basic plot outline holds true both in respectable papers like Beeton's and in the more sensational, like Brett's.

Boys' story papers do not, however, incorporate the tradition of the sentimental hero without some adjustments, and a deeply-felt respect for the sympathetic ties between individuals is not the only distinguishing characteristic of their protagonists. The sentimental scenes in these texts are juxtaposed—often jarringly—with scenes of intense action and even violence. In these moments the protagonists part ways with the sentimental tradition because alongside their innate moral compass they also display the core traits of bourgeois Victorian individuality: industry, competitiveness, improvement, and accomplishment. The hero of the boys' serial might build strong affective bonds with those whom he identifies as sympathetic, but he is also defined as an exceptional individual, fundamentally superior to those around him. When he competes—whether mentally, through matching wits, or physically (in a fight, race, or game)—with those around him, he invariably wins. The conclusion of each story leaves him elevated above his peers, the conquering hero. Indeed, the hero's very exceptionality, by definition, compromises certain normative values. Claudia Nelson notes that during the last decades of the nineteenth century, in the wake of Darwin, ideal masculinity came to be identified with the general requirements of species survival, including “normal” interest in sexuality. She says, “Ideas of propriety focused less and less on the exceptional, more

and more on the average: to conform to the general pattern was often seen as wholesome, sound, and somehow uniquely English” (526). The boy-heroes, however, refuse to “conform.” They stand out as pinnacles of bravery and wit and even, in their way, of goodness. As we will see, though, excellence can be its own kind of deviance, and as such it leaves in its wake certain other aberrations from the standard norms of the community. In almost every case, the serials ultimately favor individual values at the expense of the communal, rewriting the sentimental hero by subtly shifting the emphasis from his sympathies to his accomplishments.

It may seem, then, that the sentimental bents of these protagonists are inconsequential, mere traces of older social bonds that are erased by the texts’ eventual turn to individualism. Yet the serials’ melding of the traits of sentimental hero and successful bourgeois man is crucial to their interpretation for two reasons. First, it complicates any simplistic narrative of masculinity in boys’ story papers. Scholars frequently examine how these texts foster certain formulations of Victorian masculinity. Kelly Boyd, for instance, argues that these texts encouraged a type of manliness that was “upper class, athletic, arrogant, and chivalrous” (51) and inextricably bound up with imperialism and nationalism. Nelson claims that in the movement from mid- to late-Victorian boyhood “the gradual displacement of mid-century religiosity by late-century biology involved a shift from an ideal for boys that was essentially androgynous to one that was self-consciously masculine” (525).³⁰ But an acknowledgment of the sentiment, in

³⁰ Clark makes a similar point, using *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* as a turning point in Victorian visions of masculinity: “If early in the century the ideal of manhood included

the eighteenth-century meaning of the term, in these stories cuts a wider swath of the acceptably “masculine,” even in the later decades of the nineteenth century, than scholars often recognize. This version of manliness is not merely violent or ambitious or oppressive. It can also be deeply moral and occasionally communal. That this vision of masculinity was promoted in some of the period’s most widely-circulated periodicals displays its acceptability to a wide range of young men.

Second, the addition of bourgeois striving to the roster of the sentimental hero’s traits refashions him as the ideal subject for the Victorian liberal state. In many ways, the sentimental hero is an important forebear of this liberal subject in that he regulates himself through internal feelings and desires rather than externally imposed rules. Moral sentiment looks outward, using collective experience to build a system of ethics instead of viewing humans as discrete entities in pursuit of their own aims. In the liberal state, however, individualism is the rule. John Stuart Mill explains the importance of individualism in his influential treatise “On Liberty” (1859), which is roughly contemporary with the early days of Beeton’s *Boy’s Own Magazine*. Mill recommends total liberty of action and thought not only for reasons of justice (all men deserve to direct the course of their own lives), but also because a civilization of wholly free individuals would allow men of genius to prosper, providing an escape from the “collective mediocrity” Mill saw all around him (73). This individualist ethic pervades boys’ story papers, where the hero’s exceptionality makes him a paragon of his society at the same time that it isolates him from his companions. Complete individual freedom presents a

traits that could be considered androgynous, then by the end of the century the ideal was more likely to include traits that could be considered adolescent or even boyish” (20).

civic conundrum: how could a collection of men at total liberty possibly combine into something resembling a society? This problem necessitates the serials' return to bonds of sympathy even in the face of Mill's and others' commendations of individualism. With their insistence on exceptional ambition and individualism, these texts resurrect the sentimental hero as the model liberal subject, capable of tremendous effort yet, because of his innate moral compass, always turning that effort towards socially acceptable ends.

It is this particular blend of ethics that forms the conservative tendency of the boys' story paper, and the authors of boys' serials depict them again and again. To show how this pattern emerges in Beeton's and Brett's magazines, I want to look at examples from three representative sub-genres of the boys' serial: the historical romance, the imperial adventure, and the school story. Each of these forms transports a boy-hero, carrier of the core values of liberal, imperial Britain, into a different fantasy setting. The fantasy element of these stories of course allows the reader to temporarily escape his monotonous existence, but crucially, these are not fantasies set in imagined worlds or on new planets. By connecting the readers to the great moments of England's past, the glories of her present empire, and the wealth and power concentrated in her public schools, these stories allow working-class boys to imagine themselves, via the very British-ness of these scenes, as integral contributors to their nation's success and partakers in her power.

A. The Historical Romance

The historical romance was given pride of place in Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine*, often occupying the paper's opening pages and accompanied by a detailed drawing of one of its scenes. The typical boys' historical romance is set in medieval or early modern times and portrays the glory of England (and frequently the misdeeds of France or Spain) alongside the chivalrous adventures of its characters, who are usually a mix of fictional and historical figures. At the center of these tales is a young hero, usually peripheral to the major historical action but whose scrapes and mischiefs, as well as romantic hopes and personal ambitions, form the main point of identification with the reader. These stories seek to connect their protagonists—and through them, their readers—with the glory days of “Merrie Olde England,” yet despite the trappings of castles and destriers, the morals of these stories are often fully modern.

Just such a striving young protagonist is the titular character in *Hubert Ellis: A Story of King Richard's Days the Second*, by Francis Davenant, which was serialized in *The Boy's Own Magazine* in 1865. Both assistant and adoptive son to prominent London merchant John Philpot, Hubert rises through the ranks of London society in the late 1300s through diligence and feats of bravery while still making time for youthful adventures, mainly naval skirmishes with the French and Scottish, and romantic pursuits. His narration reflects nineteenth-century Whig sympathies for bourgeois traders and religious reformers (in this case, John Wyclif, a recurring character in the tale) and suspicion towards the idle, corrupt gentry and the established church. In the opening pages, Davenant uses the dying words of Hubert's father to direct the young orphan's

aspirations towards both worldly success and sentimental attachment. The advice begins the novel on an uncertain ethical footing; Hubert should, as far as possible, support both liberty and order in English society. Violence is not prohibited, but he should only resort to violence when forced by the actions of others. The speech culminates in an admonition to be a true gentleman—“and by gentle I do not mean womanish”³¹—leading by example and sympathizing with the lower orders, unlike the greedy and dishonest nobility, for whom Hubert’s father foretells a calamitous end. Yet, paradoxically, Hubert is also encouraged to pursue material success himself. The tensions inherent in his father’s advice—ultimately the conflict between individual and communal loyalties—result in a surprising degree of psychic ambivalence throughout the serials.

Young Hubert takes his father’s words to heart and soon begins his rise from humble assistant, sleeping on a bed of straw in an outbuilding, to respected member of the highest circles of London society. He achieves this respectability by virtue of a vigorous masculinity that rests not only on his physical prowess but also on less virile pursuits: quiet study, reflection, and religion.³² In his role as sentimental hero Hubert

³¹ BOM 5.25, 10. January 1865.

Appropriately citing boys’ story papers regularly presents some logistical challenges. Not all pages of each magazine are numbered, and the scanned, digitized versions of the magazines sometimes cut off what pagination does exist. Gale’s digital database does not always provide dates for its magazines. I will always attempt to provide the most thorough documentation possible, including, when available, page number, date, and volume/issue number, though frequently one or more of these will be absent. So as to minimally disrupt the reading experience, I will provide these citations in the footnotes rather than in the main body of my text.

³²Hubert’s description of his favorite readings displays this duality: “I made considerable progress in studying the books which the abbey boasted. The writings of some of the Latin authors, especially the orations of Cicero and Caesar’s history of his western

abides by his father's warning not to resort to violence unless provoked, and he frequently uses his strength in chivalrous defense of the weak. In one case, during a raid in France, he turns against two of his own English compatriots who wish to despoil the corpse of a Frenchman in the presence of his newly-widowed wife:

‘Shame on you!’ I cried, as I rushed into the room. ‘For God’s dignity let the woman

go!’ As the only answer I could get was a caution to mind my own business, and I saw that one of the brutes was in the act of pricking the poor creature away from her husband’s body with his dagger’s point, I did not stay to make a second appeal, but, bidding the man nearest to me to defend himself, attacked him as I would have attacked an untamed beast. The fight was sharp but not long. . . and I . . . proceeded to comfort the woman and to help her raise her husband’s body on to the bed.³³

Outraged by the soldiers’ pitiless thievery, Hubert sympathizes with the Frenchwoman and strives to bring her justice by any means necessary, even to the point of attacking his own brothers in arms. Their curt warning that Hubert should “mind [his] own business” only reiterates the core value of the sentimental hero: his “business” is the well-being of his fellow humans, regardless of nationality, gender, or class.

Hubert’s tale progresses through various other deeds of valor but reaches its climax at a decidedly unchivalrous moment: the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt led by Wat Tyler. Throughout the tale Hubert’s narration has revealed his sympathy for “the dear rights of

wars—these, and the *Confessions of St. Augustine of Hippo*, the *Art of Hawking*, and the *Whole Science of War*, were, with some of Master Chaucer’s tales, my favorite books. The Holy Bible in the Latin tongue was also well known to me, and so great an admiration and a love did I come to feel for the beautiful things contained in it, that I much regretted it could not be written in English and read out to the common people, as Master Wyclif taught it should be.” BOM 5.28, 288. April 1865.

³³ BOM 5.28, 288. April 1865.

the commons against kingly tyranny on the one side and feudal despots' greed on the other,"³⁴ and while he cannot countenance acts of wanton violence or rebellion, he acknowledges "how thin the separation is between a great saint and a great sinner; how circumstances may pull even an archangel down."³⁵ Hubert is conflicted over his loyalties, fully feeling both his ties to the business community—and their need for secure private property—and the unjust oppression of the commons. He says, "I hope I shall ever be on the side of order as well as of liberty, but I cannot help censuring those who, knowing better, give occasion for outbreaks, more than those who, being ignorant, are the promoters of the strife."³⁶ Given the admittedly conservative values of Beeton's paper, this statement evidences surprising sympathy with the rebelling peasants, whose rights have been trampled on in the name of feudalism. Liberty and order, the twin virtues propounded by Hubert's father, here are revealed in uneasy coexistence, meaning that Hubert, the sentimental hero, is torn between his sympathetic instincts—favoring increased freedom for the peasants—and his desire for personal and national success, which relies on an orderly society.

Unsurprisingly, the material impulses win out, though Hubert maintains a cautious sympathy towards England's peasantry to the last. The tale ends without any improvement of their situation, however, as the leaders of the revolt are brutally executed and the peasants must return to the strictures of feudalism. Liberty gives way to order for

³⁴ BOM 5.29, 377. May 1865.

³⁵ BOM 5.29, 374. May 1865.

³⁶ BOM 5.33, 198. September 1865.

the vast majority of England's population, but Hubert, as both the sentimental hero and the bourgeois achiever, maintains his ties to both values. Upon his death, Master Philpot entrusts Hubert with the management of his estate and, more significantly, with the hand of his daughter Alice, whom Hubert has grown to love. This marriage officially brings Hubert into his employer's family, according him the material rewards that have been foreshadowed by his growing esteem around London. By giving Hubert a financial and familial stake in an orderly society, this conclusion effectively neutralizes his sympathy with the cause of the peasants' liberty. His success as an exceptional individual overrides his humane sentiments, yet because he has been shown capable of sympathetic feeling, Hubert exemplifies the ideal liberal subject, this fusion of the tale's dual themes of liberty and order. The moral of this "happy ending" is clear: liberty must be earned. It cannot be accorded to rebellious peasants, who might resort to violence without "due cause," but only to figures like Hubert, who have proven that they will not attempt to overthrow the social order—in other words, who can be trusted not to pursue real liberty at all.

B. The Imperial Adventure

When the young protagonist journeys out into empire, his attempts to impose order (rarely to promote liberty) at the periphery demonstrate his intrinsic British-ness and civilization. In this case, even the hero's moral sentiments—his ability to identify with the savages, yet remain apart from them—mark his superiority and exceptionality. One example of this is the tale *The Rival Crusoes*, serialized in *Boys of England* between November of 1869 and March of 1870. Ned Summers, the protagonist, follows in the

footsteps of Defoe's titular character, as he and his cowardly, spiteful companion Samuel Petworth, both young midshipmen on a British frigate bound for India, are marooned on an island full of vicious savages. The action follows typically hair-raising adventures through the jungle, including near misses with crocodiles, quicksand, killer monkeys, and fierce natives. Samuel decides he will win the natives' favor by betraying Ned to them, but the hero is, naturally, much too clever and brave to be trapped by their efforts. Before long, Ned discovers another youth, Harry (later revealed to be Harriet, in a wholly unsurprising plot twist) Thornton, who had been shipwrecked on the island a year earlier. The island is apparently a magnet for stranded English youths, for eventually another boy, Fred Blount escapes from pirates to join them, thus completing their little "tribe" of English boys who, with the exception of Samuel, stand together against the uncivilized forces of the island.

In the same chivalric mode as Hubert Ellis rescuing the Frenchwoman from his greedy countrymen, Ned Summers develops a protective relationship with the weaker, less clever "rival Crusoes," showing that in a homosocial space like the island, sentimentality and even romance can thrive as well as competition. He schemes to lead his crew safely out of dangerous scrapes, and they always humbly acquiesce to his directives. In particular, he wants to shield Harry from the island's horrors not out of any calculation but simply because "he loved the gentle, tender-souled boy as he would have loved a younger brother."³⁷ Interestingly, Ned develops his intense affection for Harry because he sees him as a particularly sensitive, girlish boy, and the nature of his feelings

³⁷ BOE 7.163, 82. January 1870.

do not appear to change when it is eventually revealed that Harry is in fact Harriet, as sentimental attachment almost imperceptibly morphs into romantic attraction. The relationship between the two young people highlights the difference between the sentimental hero and the man of sensibility. Harry is a model figure of sensibility, prone to faints and overreactions, while Ned masters his feelings but nonetheless is tightly bound both to his little group of comrades and to his moral code. Ned as sentimental hero stands at the pinnacle of the island's pecking order, where he sets the ultimate standard for the acceptably masculine; Harry/Harriet, the weaker and more sensitive "man," turns out to be no man at all. To be masculine means to be dominant, and those who prove too docile cannot be admitted into that exclusive fellowship.

Ned would be but a poor sentimental hero if he only felt bonds of shared humanity with his close friends, however. Though the narration perpetually vilifies his shipmate Samuel Petworth, Ned rescues him almost as often as his allies. Samuel reveals his duplicity on numerous occasions, selling Ned to the savages, kidnapping Harry, and even trying to kill their faithful dog Carlo. Ned feels no affection for his cowardly companion, but he nonetheless feels it would be wrong to abandon him to a horrible fate: "It went against his noble and generous heart to leave him to the devices of the savages."³⁸ At one point, when Samuel is about to be sacrificed, Ned fires into the crowd of natives, giving up his own location in order to give Samuel a chance for survival. On another occasion, when pirates have captured Samuel, Ned speaks to him from above like

³⁸ BOE 7.168, 171. March 1870.

a voice from God, giving him a way to get into the pirates' good graces.³⁹ This generosity toward his enemy stems, according to the text, from the heart of the civilized Englishman, who cannot in good conscience abandon another civilized man to the evils of savages or pirates. This sentimental Englishness is contrasted with Samuel's increasing savagery. Samuel slowly "goes native," offering to trade his companion's life for his own and then running naked with the natives to chase him down. Ned even appeals to him on the basis of their shared whiteness: "Are you a Christian?—do you own to having white blood in your veins," cried Ned Summers, "and will you leave me a prey to the brutal redskins?"⁴⁰ But Samuel rebuffs even this plea, and so after his death he is buried in the middle of the Indian village, permanently affixing his connection to the uncivilized.

Ned feels a sense of shared humanity not only with proper British men like Harry Thornton and Fred Blount, nor even with lapsed British men like Samuel Petworth, but also with the savages who are attempting to kill him. While he is willing enough to kill a much larger savage in a fair fight, he refuses to pursue an unfair advantage: when a young native armed only with a tomahawk chases him through the jungle, Ned chooses only to trip him rather than to shoot. The narrator says, "His blood was up, and yet to kill a comparatively unarmed man was entirely repugnant to his feelings."⁴¹ The "feelings" in this passage are of central importance: Ned's chief aim is to escape, but his sense of justice extends even to his enemies and overrides his instinct for self-preservation.

³⁹ BOE 7.164, 100. February 1870.

⁴⁰ BOE 7.168, 170. March 1870.

⁴¹ BOE 7.160, 34. January 1870.

Ironically, though, the desire to fight fair and preserve life when possible demonstrates the superiority of the British sentimental hero over the savages, who react only with primitive, unrestrained passions like fury and revenge. One scene, borrowing from Defoe's original *Crusoe* narrative, further illustrates this superiority. Ned and Harry watch from their hiding place as the natives bring a group of prisoners from a rival tribe to the island, presumably to sacrifice and eat them. Like *Crusoe* rescuing Friday, Ned feels he must stop this horrifying spectacle, and so he fires a gun into their midst. This intervention does not have the same happy effects as *Crusoe*'s, however, and the two tribes immediately fall upon each other in a pitched battle. Ned, tenderhearted despite his bravery, is disgusted: "With a sore and dejected heart he turned away. The sight of so much bloodshed was sickening."⁴²

Ned's compassion for his fellow humans, no matter how malicious, marks him as a sentimental hero, and this coupled with his status as a civilizing "Crusoe" and a natural-born leader distinguishes him as a model liberal subject. Unlike Samuel, whose transformation and death imply his failure as a liberal subject in that when he is removed from the confines of British society he rejects its value system, Ned preserves his civilized demeanor even when an ocean separates him from the institutions that would govern him. This ability to self-regulate without the external trappings of society marks one aspect of the liberal subject, one directly derived from his moral sentiments. Self-regulation in this case looks outward, relying in part on benevolence in order to preserve moral values. But it is equally an expression of the inner self—a self so civilized that not

⁴² BOE 7.164, 98. February 1870.

even immersion in a savage world can taint it. This is the inner reality of Ned Summers, whose moments of sentiment are more than balanced by his feats of bravery and shrewdness. Of course, a popular story that revolves around the dramatic adventures of a set of marooned young people cannot spend too much time focusing on their efforts to tame the island. This is a sensationalized version of *Robinson Crusoe*, stripped of the themes of religion and industry. In their place are inserted more hair-raising adventures, but in each case the capers emphasize Ned's exceptionalism as an individual—his ability to outwit, out-fight, and out-man everyone else on the island. He navigates a system of ancient burial caves to escape attacking Indians; he uses a flaming boat to distract his pursuers and save his friends; he leads an effort to build a seaworthy raft in under an hour. Everyone around him senses his superiority. In one scrape, his friends tell him, “Decide for us. . . We are ready to obey.” The narrator then astutely comments, “There will always among three men be a chief, and therefore, why not among boys?”⁴³ Of the three companions, Ned is the most “manly,” “to whom the others looked up as leader in all things.”⁴⁴ The sentimental hero *feels* as his primary verb, but Ned Summers, alongside moments of intense feeling, *acts*. He is an ideal subject for the liberal state because in addition his desire to play fairly and do right by all mankind, he is marked out as an extraordinary individual, one who can single-handedly accomplish impressive feats of civilization and English-ness in the face of horrifying dangers.

⁴³ BOE 7.167, 153. February 1870.

⁴⁴ BOE 7.164, 99. February 1870.

Just as in the case of Hubert Ellis, the ideal liberal subject must eventually meet with his reward, and here too that reward is both marital and material. The tale ends with a last-second rescue of Harry and Fred by British sailors, assisted by Ned himself. Harry-turned-Harriet's rich parents settle their entire fortune on her when she marries—and of course she chooses Ned. At this point he leaves his menial work in the navy to become the head of a significant estate. The serial ends with him retelling his story for future generations: “The end of all was—that, one year from their arrival in England, the Rival Crusoes were married; and of an evening, for many years, it was the delight of the children to hear from papa, when in a particularly good humour, how he met their ma, all by herself on a desert island, for all the world like Alexander Selkirk—monarch of all he surveyed.”⁴⁵ Ned's storytelling, of course, requires some revisionist history. It was Harriet who actually tamed the island during her long-term residence, making the monarch a “she” rather than a “he.” And Ned, embroiled in constant skirmishes with natives or pirates, could hardly be considered the island's undisputed ruler. Instead of real sovereignty over the island, Ned's tenure there instead reveals his mastery of himself, a mastery that makes him the perfect British man: self-controlled, ambitious, and always civilized.

C. The School Story

Unlike the historical romance and imperial adventure, the school story takes place close to home and therefore cannot usually rely on violence and exoticism for its

⁴⁵ BOE 7.169, 190. March 1870.

appeal.⁴⁶ But, within the pages of boys' magazines, the heroes of this enduring story type vary but little from the protagonists like Hubert Ellis and Ned Summers. The school story as a genre emerges before the rise of popular boys' story papers, with works like Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1844).⁴⁷ Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), the most-read example of the genre in our day, was also wildly popular in its own. The text joins the sort of rollicking adventures—grand sporting contests, country jaunts, spars with bullies—that would become a hallmark of the genre with a moral lesson about appropriate manhood. Significantly, this lesson, and therefore the text, drips with sentiment. Vigorous, outgoing Tom must learn to be more like sensitive, quiet Arthur, whom Claudia Nelson claims as “the most adult and the most genuinely manly” of the boys at Rugby (536), and relations between the two are deeply felt.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ I say “usually” because the more sensational school stories do include these, after their fashion: a pitched battle between schoolboys and town boys, for instance, or vicious foreign villains.

⁴⁷ While Quigly asserts that the school story begins with Tom Brown, Beverly Lyon Clark traces its genealogy further back, to Martineau, Sarah Fielding, and others, noting that these early school texts, with their didactic bent, were often written by women as an extension of their duty of moral instruction (7).

⁴⁸ Arthur's serious fever, for instance, occasions intense grief in Tom who sees him and remembered a German picture of an angel which he knew; often had he thought how transparent and golden and spirit-like it was; and he shuddered to think how like Arthur it looked, and felt a shock as if his blood had all stopped short as he realized how near the other world his friend must have been to look like that. Never till that moment had he felt how his little chum had twined himself round his heart-strings; and as he stole gently across the room and knelt down, and put his arm around Arthur's head on the pillow, felt ashamed and half angry at his own red and brown face, and the bounding sense of health and power which filled every fibre of his body and made every moment of mere living a joy to him. (197)

With its dual emphasis on mischievous capers and strong relational ties, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* establishes the pattern of virile hero who is also a man of sentiment.

Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine* republished a few bits of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in 1858, a year after its first appearance, and also included short snippets describing life and traditions at England's most famous public schools. But the school story as a frequent format for serials only emerges later. The *Boy's Own Paper*, the publication of the Religious Tract Society, embraced the school story, most famously those by Talbot Baines Reed.⁴⁹ But even Brett's *Boys of England* saw the potential of the public school as an exciting setting for fiction, beginning the adventures of its long-lived hero Jack Harkaway with *Jack Harkaway's Schooldays* in 1871 and then serializing other tales of public school exploits. Brett's school stories make only briefest mention of the kinds of moral lessons learned by Tom Brown, instead focusing on the deeds and misdeeds of a hero removed early from his home and placed in a society composed almost entirely of boys of his own age and class. There is much less emphasis on tenderness of feeling in these stories; nonetheless, moments of sentiment occur, and they serve in every case to draw the hero closer to those whom the text sets out to be worthy companions for him.

Like the imperial adventure, which locates the boy hero outside the norms of British civilization in order to show his inner worth, the school story places the young hero in a place of considerable freedom: namely, in a society constructed and directed by

⁴⁹ The most enduring of Reed's tales for *Boy's Own Paper* was *The Fifth Form of St. Dominic's* (serialized 1881-1882) which follows the adventures of a pair of brothers at the titular school, and, according to scholars like Isabel Quigly and Beverly Clark, established a general template for the school story for years to come.

the boys themselves. John Chandos describes the liberties accorded public school students thus:

This, then, was what public-school traditionalists meant when they talked of ‘freedom’: not freedom of an individual to flout or evade the customs and exactions of his peers, but freedom of boys as a self-governing tribe, to live their lives and grow to manhood without prying surveillance and interference by their titular overlords. There had always, of course, been conflict and tension between the powers of masters and of top boys. (175)

The public school serves as a kind of training ground for the future liberal subject, developing his ability to act appropriately even in the absence of monitorial authority. Sentiment, in this world of masculine self-development, serves two functions: one, to guide the protagonist into right action through shared feeling (as I have discussed in the examples of Hubert Ellis and Ned Summers), and two, to present an alternative to the individualistic, competitive vision of masculinity that pervades school life. This happens chiefly by way of the “chum” relationship, which I will discuss next.

Sentiment in school stories can emerge in several ways. One frequent example is the tears shed by a young hero upon leaving his mother, but the tales make a concerted effort, within their first few pages, to wipe away these tears and erase any vestige of sentimental attachment to the domestic space. Sometimes the text sentimentalizes the young hero’s relationship with his sweetheart. But the most common sentimentalized relationship in the school space is not with a sweetheart in a traditional sense, but between a boy and his “chum.” Like Tom Brown and his pal East or Jack Harkaway and his friend Harvey, school stories almost always focus on a central pairing of boys—both good, brave, and clever, but one slightly better, braver, and more clever. The centrality of this relationship is foregrounded in the title of *The Schooldays of Jack at Eton; or, the*

Adventures of Two College Chums, serialized in *Boys of England* in 1881. The chums in question are the protagonist Jack Dashley and his friend Owen Tudor, a Welsh lad Jack meets in the opening installment of the serial, on the train to school. The following chapters trace the two boys' adventures throughout their time at Eton. Along with the central chum relationship, *Jack at Eton* is a conventional school tale in other ways, including its fearsome bullies, the sweetheart in peril, the Arnoldian master caring for his boys' moral development, and a vigorous interest in fights and sporting matches with a minimum of references to Virgil and Ovid. Each serial installment consists mainly of snappily-narrated action sequences—a hunt for swans' eggs, a run-in with gypsies, a visit to a counterfeiter's secret underground lair—and ends on the appropriate cliff-hanger.

Competition—whether with masters or other boys—seems to define the boys' relationships in *Jack at Eton* (and indeed in all school stories), but the chum relationship allows for the intrusion of shared values into the individualist world of the public school. The opening scene demonstrates this. Before he even boards the train for school, Owen is confronted by Timor, a large Russian boy also bound for Eton. After Timor frees Owen's pet bird, the two almost come to blows on the station platform, setting up a contentious relationship that will continue throughout the serial. Immediately thereafter, though, a completely different sort of relationship emerges when Owen meets Jack, who immediately establishes a cooperative relationship by telling Owen, "If it had come to a row I'd have helped you."⁵⁰ The relationship between the boys might be described as

⁵⁰ BOE 30.768, 289.

“chums at first sight,” as the two size each other up and identify some unnamed but immediate affective bond between them. Owen says,

‘I say, we ought to chum up, you and I.’
‘We will. I’m agreeable,’ said Jack Dashley. ‘I like your looks.’
‘So do I yours. Is it a bargain, old fellow?’ cried Owen.
‘It is, as far as I am concerned. We will be chums all the time we are at college, and make an alliance offensive and defensive against the Russian Bear [Timor].’
‘Agreed.’
They shook hands cordially and the compact was sealed.⁵¹

The budding chum relationship, even so early in the boys’ school experience, has already replaced familial ties. About his family Jack says, “My people wanted to see me off, but I chose to come alone. We have been down to Eton, and I know where I am going, so I didn’t want any kissing and hand-shaking at the station; it is bad form.”⁵² In this way the text condemns as babyish the sort of sentimental homesickness that so often appears in the opening pages of school stories. Instead, it affirms a bond forged through conflict—“an alliance offensive and defensive.” The unspoken rules of chums are that they must always believe the other’s stories, always participate in the other’s adventures, and most importantly, always back the other up.

But the warlike description of “an alliance offensive and defensive” belies the strong ties of feeling that undergird the “chum” relationship. Boys who avoid sentiment at all costs throughout the rest of the text often are overwhelmed by its power in scenes of

⁵¹ BOE 30.768, 290.

⁵² BOE 30.768, 290.

the sickbed,⁵³ a frequent convention in school stories. When Jack is struck down with scarlet fever and removed to a sanitarium, Owen Tudor follows him regardless of the risk of infection, saying, “I am his chum. It is my duty, and I would run every risk to be of service to him.”⁵⁴ Once there he finds Jack’s mother caring for him through her tears, exactly the sort of display of sentiment that Jack himself eschewed in the first chapter. When it seems that Jack will surely die, Owen too succumbs to the emotional pull of the sickbed:

The tears began to stream down Owen’s face, and he sobbed aloud.
“Don’t say he will die, sir,” he exclaimed.
“God’s will must be done, my dear boy. There is one inside there who
loves him more than you, and her lot is hard to bear.”
“Not more, sir.”⁵⁵

By drawing deliberate parallels between mother and chum—both wait tearfully by the bedside, both volunteer to nurse Jack at any risk to their own health, both display the most intense devotion and love—the scene reveals the sentimental bond between Jack and Owen to be a kind of family tie.⁵⁶ Given the intensity of the school setting, this sort of devotion comes naturally to the boys, who live together and dine together, even make each other’s tea. As many scholars point out, domestic relations brought from home recreate themselves in the boarding school, and the chum relationship provides one more

⁵³ Both Claudia Nelson and Peter Stoneley identify the sickbed as a potential location for incursions of values contrasting with the dominant masculinist ethic.

⁵⁴ BOE 31.781, 83. 4 November 1881.

⁵⁵ BOE 31.782, 97. 11 November 1881.

⁵⁶ Notably, this love must be sublimated. Owen “declares” his devotion only through negation and absence; his “not more, sir” avoids any mention of “love” itself while still revealing the strength of his affections.

demonstration of this. Identifying this bond as one of intense feeling—like that between siblings, or in this case, parent and child—reveals something important about its effect on masculinity in these texts. The strong bond between chums counters the individualist ethic pervading the rest of these stories, opening them up to a communal brand of masculinity in which the homosocial space must not always be defined by competition.⁵⁷

Indeed, this kind of relationship extends beyond the boyhood of Jack and Owen, and into their adult careers. Because of a decline in his father's fortunes, Jack's story ends with him being removed from Eton and put to work in a trading company with concerns in Russia. Upon hearing this, the devoted Owen declares, "I don't want to be separated from Jack"⁵⁸ and then continues to appear in the further serialized adventures of Jack Dashley.⁵⁹ The world of work, like that of the boarding school, is predicated on competition, but the loyal chum demonstrates an alternative possibility for male-male relations. The intense allegiances inspired by the years at school, and then extending into

⁵⁷ *The Fifth Form of St. Dominic's* makes this lack of competition between two school chums a central plot point. Both Oliver Greenfield, the protagonist, and his chum Horace Wraysford compete for the Nightingale Prize, the greatest annual award at St. Dominic's. Yet despite this intense effort, they do not consider themselves in competition with each other: "They had both worked hard since the holidays, generally together, neither concealing from the other what he had read or what he intended to read. Very bad rivals were these two, for though each was intent on winning the scholarship, each felt he would not break his heart if the other beat him, and that, as every one knows, is a most unheard-of piece of toleration" (Ch. 20, pg. 332, Feb. 18 1882, Issue 162).

⁵⁸ BOE 31.785, 148. 2 December 1881.

⁵⁹ This is not an isolated example of the chum's extra-novel loyalty. Jack Harkaway's chum Harvey follows Jack to sea in *Jack Harkaway, after Schooldays: His Adventures Afloat and Ashore*. Harry East leaves for an army post in India at the end of *Tom Brown's schooldays*, but he does return in the final chapters of the sequel, *Tom Brown at Oxford*, and the two quickly resume their close friendship.

the young man's future, provide a potential identity beyond individual ambitions or the nuclear family. In reality, though, these loyalties frequently evolved into the network of "old boys" associated with the public schools, re-making potentially subversive relationships into yet another instrument upholding elite domination. While the chum on the page can threaten bourgeois individualism, the chum in real life all too often serves to advance the interests of a select group.

2. Interactivity and Instability in Boys' Story Papers

As I have argued, these serials construct a dual narrative of boyhood, one focused on the social bonds of sentiment and the other on individualism and accomplishment. In the majority of serials, these two narratives meld together to form the ideal liberal subject, with the young hero forming proper sentimental attachments to family and nation but also working in vigorous pursuit of his own interests. This neat cooperation is upset somewhat, however, when one considers features of the boys' story paper outside of its serialized tales. Recently, Louis James has argued that interactive features in boys' story papers work to deepen the bond between reader and publication. These interactive features take up several pages of each issue and include contests, puzzles (often submitted by the boys themselves), prize drawings, correspondence sections, and how-to pieces. Beeton's paper included an "Exchange" column, a forum where boys could advertise their prize possessions and trade them for other items. Brett's magazine even raised money for a *Boys of England* lifeboat and crew, set to rescue stranded sailors in rough seas. And of course both papers cross-promoted other products and publications,

like Brett's *The Boys of England Angling Guide*. James usefully reads these features as part of a magazine's overall appeal, helping to build a stronger relationship with readers, but he does not consider what the interactivity does in terms of the papers' ideology. Yet this is a crucial consideration, as it can give us some insight into boys' reception of and reaction to these magazines, which is necessary for a complete vision of their ideological work. In other words, it is the interactive features that reveal boys' story papers as part of a larger struggle for cultural hegemony, rather than simply a voice for conservative values. I will look at certain of these interactive elements in more detail to show how they introduce instability into the studied sameness of the serials. By pointing to the differences between reader and protagonist, and between reader and editor, these features ultimately reveal the ideal liberal subject to be just as much a fiction as the shrieking savages that surround him.

One instability that draws attention to this fiction is the very different set of assumptions made about the periodicals' readers, as opposed to their boy-heroes. The papers introduce opposing visions of Victorian childhood—one invested with the innate goodness of the sentimental hero, the other untrustworthy and in need of constant regulation. They idealize their protagonists, setting them loose upon the world stage to perform brave and heroic acts, but simultaneously assume their readers to need considerable guidance and supervision. This is not surprising, given the overall conservative nature of these papers, but as these papers have done so much to construct the young hero as an ideal subject for the liberal state, it is significant that the readers are not trusted to fill the same role. The papers assume that they lack appropriate bonds of

sentiment and even suitable ambition, and are instead driven only by pursuit of baser pleasures.

For instance, the “Exchanges” column in *Boys of England* reveals the papers’ need to constrain the commercial instincts of their readers. Brett introduced this feature within about two years of the paper’s first issue, and its notices are filled with typical boyhood infatuations: collectible coins and stamps, fishing-rods, maps, musical instruments, and sporting apparatus like boxing gloves and cricket bats. Some boys mention particular items they wish to trade for, while others are open to any “fair” exchange. The column’s size indicates its popularity—it frequently had more than twenty entries. Interestingly, though, the boys are strictly limited in how they are to use the “Exchanges” column; they may only set up trades for their goods, never sales. Likely the magazine did not want to assume responsibility for how boys would acquire money and then send it across the country, but the prohibition also reveals an assumption that unregulated commerce only works for certain populations—lower-middle-class youths not among them—and a related discomfort at the idea of boys at total liberty to pursue their financial interests. When one considers that a significant portion of Brett’s readership was, in fact, already financially independent, the ban on sales seems even more perturbing. The readers may earn their keep as clerks or apprentices, but they may not, according to Brett’s magazine, use of their hard-earned cash to pursue any leisure beyond buying *Boys of England* and its related publications.

Another example of the tension between liberated protagonist and regulated reader comes in a genre I will refer to as the life-counsel column. A feature in both

Brett's and Beeton's papers, life-counsel columns speak directly to the youth, providing recommendations for how best to maximize one's potential, often in the realm of work. This genre is an enduring one in boys' story papers, with the first example called "Don't You Do it, Boys!"—a title phrased so emphatically in the negative that it already gives away its stance of reigning in the reader's unhealthy habits—in the second installment of the *Boy's Own Magazine*, in February of 1855. The article, likely not one of the issue's most popular, consists of a column and a half of admonitions to the young reader: "Don't believe in the midnight lamp and all that. . . .Don't waste fragments of time, or neglect them. . . . Don't allow your books and papers, few or many, to get into confusion."⁶⁰ A few months later, the paper turned its attention to a similar topic in a piece called "Early Rising": if the reader succumbs to the temptation of sleeping in, "you will then rise in haste, hurry through the task of dressing—your morning prayer—be late for breakfast, at class you will prove a dunce, and perhaps look like a sloven; and you will be behindhand throughout the day."⁶¹ These dire warnings rest uneasily beside the more stirring elements of Beeton's paper: tales of the conquest of Mexico, accounts of hunting bear and bison, directions for breeding various birds and small animals, descriptions of weapons from around the world, and of course, the serialized historical romances. The latter features emphasize the young man's freedom to pursue his personal interests and enthusiasms, but the life-counsel pieces imply that the actual reader could not possibly be

⁶⁰ BOM 1.2, 39. February 1855.

⁶¹ BOM 1.5, 141. May 1855.

out hunting bear or building a slingshot, since in all likelihood he has not even gotten out of bed.

Brett's paper, despite its generally more exciting contents, also includes instances of the life-counsel column. One significant example is a series called "My Son: What Shall I Do With Him? A Question for Parents and Guardians on the Durability of Trades and Professions," one of the rare moments in which Brett's magazine lives up to the promise of "Instruction" made in its masthead. Each article focuses on a different career possibility,⁶² including architecture, engineering, farming, mining, and various types of manufactures, like silk, woolens, and ships. Typical articles in the series explain the job's history, its importance to Britain, and its suitability as a position for a boy, including information about wages, growth potential, education, and anything that might hinder a boy's eligibility. The unnamed author purposefully limits himself to the types of careers he calls "the trades": "I shall steer clear (for I do not wish unnecessarily to enlarge the canvas) of the professions on the one hand, and on the other of those slenderly paid unskilled avocations to which formal apprenticeship is not a *sine qua non*, although informal training and preparation are. I propose to make a survey of the leading mechanical callings of our country."⁶³ This of course matches the magazine's target readership, for whom these jobs represent suitable but not over-reaching ambition. In fact, the author acknowledges from the outset the necessity of choosing a calling

⁶² Early articles in the series actually tackled multiple career tracks and sometimes divided one career article between two issues; only in the March 19, 1869 issue did the series settle into the one article, one career pattern.

⁶³ BOE 5.117, 196. 12 February 1869.

appropriate to one's station, noting that the first step in choosing a boy's profession should be to think about his gifts and inclinations, but quickly points out that following those inclinations might not always be practical, given the costly and lengthy training of certain occupations.

Indeed, the author clearly believes that the boys' chief inclination should be making a good living and getting ahead in the world, and much information is directed towards helping the reader assess that potential. Regarding architecture, for instance, the author points out, "More men have risen from the ranks through these trades than through any similar group."⁶⁴ A similar point is made about mining, which would supposedly provide excellent prospects for making one's way, provided he were willing to emigrate.⁶⁵ Similar claims regarding growth potential are made about other professions. On the other hand, the author denigrates farming as a career choice for most boys, for the farmer's position has improved

positively, but not relatively. He has risen with the other classes of the community, but his rise and elevation have not been nearly so high nor so great as the rise of the millions who follow mechanical trades or work in factories.

This applies equally to the rate of his wages, his general social condition, his slender, but greatly augmented, store of the comforts of life, and, above all, to the degree of mental and educational cultivation which he has obtained.

...

It is hardly necessary to say that, until much more tangible and decided indications of an improvement in the status of the class than have as yet been displayed make their appearance, he would be a very unkind counselor indeed who endeavoured to implant in a youth's mind the desire to seek employment as the hired tiller of the soil, or tender of the horned and other animals that it

⁶⁴ BOE 5.119, 228. 26 February 1869.

⁶⁵ BOE 5.120, 245. 5 March 1869.

maintains. . . Even one so favoured by fortune will, in nine cases out of ten, gain a smaller return upon his invested outlay, than if it were judiciously embarked in trade, or even laid out in the expense of tuition and training for certain of the higher professions.⁶⁶

The lengthy description of farming's disadvantages directly contradicts the author's personal view of the trade: it is both a "delightful calling" and a necessary one, a pursuit that countless squires and even Queen Victoria herself take a strong interest in.⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the author urges young men and their families to think about this "calling" only in economic terms, pointing out that the farmer's status has risen, but not nearly as quickly as that of the manufacturing trades. Likewise, the return on investment for a farmer doesn't nearly match that of other careers. This series directly addresses the youth as an economic being, dissuading him from allowing sentiment to drive his career choices and instead emphasizing the rational, practical choices facing a young man hoping to advance in the lower-middle classes. Interestingly, the column tries to dissuade boys from pursuing a career in the army because of the expense involved in getting set up as an officer. The very sort of adventuring life enjoyed by so many of the serials' protagonists is denied to the readers, who, it is emphasized, should be more interested in their economic advancement than in the thrills of travel and combat. These and other examples of the life-counsel column construct the British boy in a very different light than the adventurous, cavorting fellows portrayed in the serials. While the fictional protagonists follow their hearts through a life filled with excitement, the reader is encouraged to live a life of practical decision-making and staid productivity.

⁶⁶ BOE 5.123, 292-3. 24 March 1869.

⁶⁷ BOE 5.123, 292. 24 March 1869.

These papers aim to foster in their readers the appropriate attitudes towards a variety of subjects—not only ambition and career, as discussed above, but also race. Invariably the “proper” attitude to racial difference is the one displayed by the serials’ protagonists—good-natured superiority paired with a dose of knowing wit. Boys’ story papers are filled with racist caricature and British exceptionalism, as Kathryn Castle and Joseph Bristow have shown. One example from *Boys of England* foregrounds the way that the paper specifically guides the boys into racist readings. In a serialized piece called *Robinson Crusoe: The Comic*, the editor italicizes certain words and phrases in order to highlight its moments of supposed humor, frequently jabs at the expense of Friday’s manner of speaking: ““the fust *Indian-vidual* I met,”” or ““*Berry* well. . . that’s what I call *going a black-berrying*.””⁶⁸ The italicizing of jokes, especially puns, is standard practice in Brett’s paper, but the example of *Robinson Crusoe: The Comic* points to this practice as a way to control boys’ reading practices, essentially teaching them racism. While heroes like Ned Summers, Jack Dashley, and Hubert Ellis display their inborn integrity at every turn, the young reader is assumed to more closely resemble Samuel Petworth—in need of considerable guidance if he is to become a proper British subject. To effect this transformation and justify British imperialism, the next generation must buy in to notions of racial superiority.

A second instability in the magazines’ portrait of the boy as liberal subject arises because of frequent misalignments in the interests of reader and of editor. I mean “interests” here in both senses of the term—both enthusiasms and financial/material

⁶⁸ BOE 7.159, 32. December 1869.

stakes. In either case, publishers and readers of boys' magazines often relate to this material in vastly different ways. First, the content of the periodicals is not a direct representation of what boys find most appealing; rather, it is the publishers' best approximation of what would attract them. Because of that gap, we often find that the readers' most profound interests are not represented in the imperial adventures and historical romances that hold their attention for a few hours each week. Second, because of the fundamentally different incentives for editors and readers (the former driven to appeal to as many boys as possible in order to maximize returns, the latter hoping to gain as much entertainment value for as little money as possible), any situation related to the costs and profits associated with publishing or purchasing boys' magazines could reveal friction between the two groups. An examination of communication between readers and editors further clarifies these misalignments.

Both Brett's and Beeton's papers contain a twist on the idea of the letter to the editor, Beeton's called "Notices to Correspondents" and Brett's simply "Correspondence." The columns follow an identical formula: boys write in with questions on every imaginable topic, and then the editor includes a short response in the paper. The original questions, however, are omitted, leaving the reader to imagine what might have been asked. Often this results in responses that are the more touching because of their ambiguity, such as:

James C.—If your brothers persecute you, answer and treat them kindly. They certainly seem to have taken a great dislike to you; but remember the old saying, "*Omnia vincit amor*."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ BOE 2.28, 32. 1 June 1867.

By leaving the reader to imagine the source of the correspondent's distress, the enigmatic responses can also provide some humor:

C. J. Dubery (Hackney.)—Use milk of roses, and avoid hot water. As to the other question, consult your hair-dresser.⁷⁰

Aside from simply adding some sense of a puzzle to this feature, the omission of the correspondent's question also serves a less benign purpose: by removing the actual words of the boy in question, it allows the publishers to more tightly control the magazines' messages. Later examples will show how this work of elision attempts to bolster the publishers' interests at the expense of the readers.

Another occasion for communication between readers and editors is the essay contests run by *Boy's Own Magazine*. Like the correspondence columns, these contests give the reader a chance to write back to the publishers, engendering a feeling of agency while still granting the publishers the ultimate control of deciding which "winners" to publish. While the contests typically steer clear of contentious topics, preferring to request essays on lighthouses or the orders of English knighthood, more controversial topics did occasionally arise, including slavery and "the right use of money." These contests gave boys of a broad range of opinions the chance to practice expressing themselves on important topics, but as the papers only published the winning essays—invariably those expressing the most conventional of opinions—any chance to examine the variety of boys' opinions on these topics is now lost. We are left with statements like this blandly utilitarian perspective on slavery by Edgcumbe Staley, aged 17 years:

⁷⁰ BOE 2.28, 32. 1 June 1867.

“Slavery is a subject upon which every man has his own opinions and desires. As an industrial system it cannot be made profitable everywhere: and what its success or failure depends on is the adaptation of the productive industry of the country to the qualities and defects of slave labour. It has several defects—for instance, it is given reluctantly; it is unskillful; and it is wanting in versatility. . . The economic advantage of slave labour is, that it admits of complete organization; whereas, the labour of peasants does not permit it to such a perfect extent. But, I think, it will be proved eventually that it is almost impossible to carry on the great culture of sugar, cotton, etc., in tropical countries by the agency of a really free population” (76-77). While this winning essay shows little originality of thought and few progressive tendencies, the contests themselves would have given boys the chance to expound, refine, and likely even discuss opinions that differed greatly from those of Edgcumbe Staley, aged 17 years.

Though clearly mediated through the adult editor, boys’ magazines’ interactive features nonetheless provide one of our best windows into the day-to-day concerns of lower-middle-class Victorian youth. These concerns are in some ways expected: responses cover how to advance in one’s careers, how to engage in various leisure pursuits (like taxidermy and watercolor painting), and how to be included in upcoming prize drawings. Boys ask about current serials and present their suggestions for topics the magazine should cover. Perhaps unexpectedly, they have a voracious appetite for random facts and trivia, asking questions about historical figures and far-flung locales. Joseph Bristow links this tendency in correspondence to the editor’s authority and to Britain’s position as colonizer:

These editorial ripostes, often opening with a forceful imperative, adopted an authoritarian tone that kept their near-anonymous readers at a distance. Boys were expected to look up to the editor—a veritable fount of knowledge. . . . Useful knowledge, therefore, was held within the narrow confines of measurable facts that enabled the boy to imagine he could size up and control his world. Illusory power—the power of what it meant to be a boy—was granted to him in his own repository of carefully remembered details. . . . Skill at remembering details that were in themselves useless was one of the major defining features of imperial boyhood. (42-43)

The boys do seek to amass the kinds of facts that glorify Britain’s history and her contemporary colonial endeavors, but the correspondence sections do more than simply repeat the imperial ideology promoted in many of the serials. They do not indicate a readership in awe of the all-knowing, “authoritarian” editor so much as a body of youths that do not always read the way they are expected to read or uphold the values they are expected to uphold.

In almost every correspondence section one can see young people writing in with an independent assessment of what matters to them. Within the first year of publication of *The Boy’s Own Magazine*, for instance, the editors must publish this response to apparent criticism:

F. R. W. asks us whether we are not rogues. He inquires whether the “distribution of the watches” [a prize raffle instituted in the magazine’s very first issue] is not a hoax, got up for the purpose of promoting the sale of the magazine. F. R. W. is probably unaware that twenty five gold watches and a hundred gold chains have already been distributed (by the same proprietors) amongst the subscribers of another magazine, ‘The Englishwoman’s Domestic.’⁷¹

F. R. W. correctly asserts that the watch raffle is meant to encourage sales, though it is unlikely that the exercise was a complete hoax. The reader turns his perceptive skepticism towards the motivations of the magazine’s publishers, acknowledging that

⁷¹ BOM 1.6, front matter. June 1855.

they and he have entirely different sorts of stakes in the paper's success. But because the magazine shrewdly publishes only the response and not the original question, they are able to filter the reader's criticism so that they continue to appear benevolent.

Frequently the correspondence sections present a sharp break from the fantasy version of boyhood presented in the rest of the periodicals. In one issue of *The Boy's Own Magazine*, there is this response:

Z. V. Q.—We do not like to interfere with advice between apprentices and masters; but to compel you to sit without a fire through such a winter as the last was certainly not according to contract.⁷²

The grim situation of the boy addressed here reveals the feebleness of the exhortations, in Beeton's life-counsel columns, to rise early and work dependably in order to ensure success. Despite this prevailing ethic, many of the paper's young readers are entirely powerless to better their situation and exist rather at the mercy of masters and employers who do not see boyhood as a time of grand adventures.

In fact, concerns about work and career mark one of the constant refrains of the correspondence columns. Boys write in with questions about breaking their indentures of apprenticeship or about going to sea—a practice which, despite forming the basis of many imperial adventures, the editors generally discourage. To a boy who has apparently asked about purchasing a commission in the army, Brett responds with a list of prices for various officers' posts.⁷³ This moment directly contradicts the meritocratic nature of the majority of serials, undermining once again the individualist ethic of the boys' story

⁷² BOM 1.6, front matter. June 1855.

⁷³ BOE 3.55, 48. 1867.

paper. One of the most frequent topics brought up by the boy correspondents is their handwriting, which the editor then assesses with a designation of “excellent,” “legible,” “fair,” or otherwise. This intense interest—most issues of both *The Boy’s Own Magazine* and *Boys of England* include at least one response along these lines—apparently arises from the boy’s desire to find a situation as a clerk. It marks the readers’ concern less with the issues of empire and adventure, the purported topics of the magazines, and more with day-to-day questions of existence and advancement. Indeed, by writing in for an assessment of their handwriting, the youths turn this particular feature of the magazine to their own use, flouting its purpose as a supposedly entertaining look at boys’ day-to-day lighthearted concerns and instead using it as a metric to judge their own vocational efforts.

Just as these letters to the editor display the distance between boyhood imagined and boyhood lived, another incongruity highlights the stark difference the magazines’ core ideology and those of its readers. Here I mean the difference between the private reading experience of the individual and the shared, collective way that many youths read boys’ story papers. While the publishers always controlled the final product of these periodicals, the boys themselves contributed to their production in significant ways—not just in the Correspondence sections, as I’ve noted, but also by sending in puzzles and essays for publication and, in *Boys of England*, by posting notices in the exchange columns. Thus a collective effort went into the creation of these magazines, including participation from the readers themselves. Some readers also collaborated in their enjoyment of the papers, trading and sharing issues amongst themselves in a kind of

secondary market that countermanded the private reading experience required by the liberal subject.⁷⁴ Of course, publishers wanted each boy to purchase his own copy of each issue and attempted to encourage this through prize drawings that required obtaining a collection of “stamps” from certain papers. But these boys’ magazines could not be enjoyed in isolation; they were by nature a collective creation and communal experience.

3. Conclusion: the Fiction of the Liberal Subject

These two instabilities—one revealed in the clear distinction between readers and protagonists, the other shown by the divergent interests of readers and editors—disrupt the magazines’ conservative values and ultimately work to show that the serials’ liberal subject hero is just as fictional as the adventure narrative surrounding him. While at one level the serials appear to be male conduct manuals, educating boys in the values of capitalism, imperialism, and liberalism, the possibility of an unrestricted, self-regulated adulthood does not actually exist for many of the magazines’ readers, who would never enjoy the raucous freedoms of a public school education or the civilizing responsibilities of a post in India. As the life-counsel columns make clear, the readers do not have, and according to the editors do not deserve, true liberty. Instead, their aspirations should be restricted to an industrious life in a mid-level position in mining or industry. The sentimental tradition, appropriated by the papers to demonstrate the proper desires and attachments of the self-regulating liberal subject, emerges as its own kind of fiction, since the grand gestures of sentiment on display in the serials are unnecessary for youths

⁷⁴ Christopher Mark Banham briefly discusses this in his dissertation, a history of Brett’s *Boys of England* (243-44).

directed to attend only to their own moderate rise in the world. Boys' magazines, then, might exist to instruct their readers in the ideal liberal subject's sentiments and ambitions, but even if these goals are achieved, even if the boys rise early every day and colonize a deserted island and marry the boss's daughter, they cannot *all* be the exceptional subject described in the serials. The very notion of exceptionality prohibits it. One individual on the rise is an inspiration. A whole class of boys on the rise is a threat. Thus the magazines' purported project—the training of the ideal liberal subject—collapses under the weight of its own futility.

There is evidence, though, that the boys are not overly concerned with this project. In every issue of Brett's and Beeton's papers, one theme recurs: that boys can be the carriers of imperial, masculine, liberal values. This was perhaps an aspirational message for some readers, but the interactive features of the paper demonstrate that readers do not always embrace this message uncritically. In the struggle for cultural hegemony, boys can read freely even when editors do not trust them to do so, meaning that they might very easily identify the doubly fictional nature of the serials, with their imagined plots and their contradictory values. The papers might not trust their readers to embody proper subject-hood without consistent regulation, but the boy reader is indeed liberated, free to absorb the fiction of the adventure narratives while rejecting their conventional values.

5. A Poor Future: Childhood and Threat in Brontë and Dickens

“The sons and daughters of peasants will not always be found such rosy cherubs in real life as they are described to be in romances.”
(Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* 35)

Up until this point I have looked at three different case studies in sentiment: first, the deployment of sentimental conventions by a bourgeois author in two canonical novels; second, the radicalization of those same conventions by Chartist poets; and third, the repackaging of the sentimental tradition in Victorian boys’ magazines. In each of these cases, sentiment (and the affect it produces) is part of an overall strategy for creating a good citizen, whether the ideal liberal subject of the British middle class or the self-aware, radicalized subject of the Chartist movement. In this, my final chapter, I turn away from the sentimental tradition as such and towards Victorian children imagined *without* the warm glow of benevolence or the soft lens of pity. These children take several forms: the miserable child in all-too-realistic poverty, the rebellious youth, or the undifferentiated mass of children ill-advisedly bred and then left to bring themselves up. These are the children who do not manage to rise above their circumstances; they do not face their poverty with angelic long-suffering. If sentimentalized children can be used to cultivate the suitable subject for a given economic or political system, then *unsentimentalized* children can illustrate the traits that threaten that system. By examining darkly cynical portrayals of children, especially those written during the height of Victorian sentimentality, I hope to show how authors sometimes use childhood to symbolize not future hopes, but their opposite. Children, when not appropriately

socialized or sentimentalized, can shock the reader with a hazardous denial of sexual norms and bourgeois values.

In formulating this argument, I incorporate but ultimately resist Lee Edelman's recent thesis regarding childhood as a force opposing the queer. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Edelman argues that the future, as symbolized by the figural Child, should not play such a large role in our politics, for this extended focus on tomorrow can threaten our present. He posits that queer theory should stand in opposition to this Child-Future alliance because futurism's energy moves "not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition" (60). The sameness promoted here is the continuance of the heterosexual agenda, which itself feeds back into a stable futurism. If either side of this continuum were to falter, Edelman asserts, the whole fabric of our heteronormative social system would begin to unravel, and with it that system's constraints. Edelman illustrates his argument through the Dickens novella *A Christmas Carol*, with Tiny Tim as the symbolic Child who must be rescued and the unreformed Scrooge as the future-negating "old screw." Investigating "the potent effects of the cultural fantasy linking Scrooge to the fate of Tiny Tim" (43), Edelman points out as a chief feature of that fantasy Tiny Tim's important place in the quasi-religious, future-oriented sentimental tradition. But Edelman's real interest is in the fact that "*A Christmas Carol* would have us believe that we know whom to blame [for Tiny Tim's sufferings] already" (42): Scrooge, the *sinthomosexual*, who denies the promised meaning that "tomorrow" weaves into today. The novella's hopeful ending, Edelman explains, is the necessary production of a

heteronormative culture, as heteronormativity defines itself in relation to the future and therefore always reinforces the triumph of reproductive futurity over the death drive.

Taken as a whole, Edelman's argument makes a necessary political statement about the many ways our society sacrifices the present in deference to some imagined future, and he grants a crucial, oft-unacknowledged role to the queer community as the force opposing society's constant drive towards futurity.

In a narrower view, however, Edelman's adoption of the Child as symbol of reproductive futurity sometimes feels limiting rather than instructive. His declaration that "the sacralization of the Child . . . necessitates the sacrifice of the queer" (28) ignores the ways that the categories of child and queer might overlap, or, similarly, the ways that childhood, even sentimentalized childhood, can itself deny the promise of reproductive futurity. His reading of *A Christmas Carol* in particular, by narrowing its focus to only sexuality, ignores the role that socioeconomic class plays in our relationship to the future, determining when we produce children and how we raise them, how we think about tomorrow and what we make of it. Like Scrooge himself, some Victorian children resist futurity's magnetic pull. Unlike sentimentalized children, who embody society's most treasured values, these children represent sentimentality's inverse—what exists beyond the reaches of fellow-feeling and is therefore unworthy of an emotional investment. What removes these children from the realm of the sympathetic and the sentimental is, in almost every case, the vaguely threatening implications of their socio-economic class. Threat, as Brian Massumi explains, is "affectively self-causing," in that whenever one begins to feel it, it comes into existence (54). In this way, threat is always located in the

future: “It is what might come next. Its eventual location and ultimate extent are undefined. Its nature is open-ended. It is not just that it is not: it is not in a way that is never over. We can never be done with it” (53). The threat of poor, unsentimentalized children is thus doubly located in the future—first, because of what those children might grow up to be, and second, because of the nature of threat itself.

Just as Edelman uses Tiny Tim, the quintessence of the Victorian sentimentalized child, to show the energies we invest in childhood as a fetishistic imaginative construction, I will here examine several roughly contemporary fictional children to show that, even in the Victorian heyday of the sentimentalized child, childhood (especially poor childhood) signifies danger just as often as it does promise. Each of these examples will threaten one or both of the dual values of liberal subjecthood that I have discussed in earlier chapters. Children without sentiment focus on present pleasure rather than future achievement; they refuse the proper desires of the liberal subject, embracing neither individual effort nor communal values; they engage not in the healthy competition of the free market (poor children do not enjoy “free” access to the free market, after all) but in an animalistic struggle for survival; and they proliferate in nameless, faceless poverty, posing a Malthusian threat to the health of society. To make these points I will turn to *Jane Eyre*, Edelman’s own example of *A Christmas Carol*, and—more briefly—several other Dickens novels that challenge that author’s image as the grand purveyor of Victorian sentiment. These examinations complicate Edelman’s linking of childhood and futurity. Tiny Tim might be a focal point for sympathy and a symbol of futurity, but I will

show the distinct class-bias of that symbolism, as sentiment always relies on bourgeois assumptions about what can be considered sympathetic.

1. 'What Will You Do with Your Sentiments?': *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is a treatise on the power of an individual's belief in her own intrinsic worth regardless of her seeming insignificance, and the long history of critical conversations about the novel center mainly on the protagonist's journey towards self-actualization and its intersections with questions of gender, class, religion, and empire. As part of that larger journey, Jane's sympathetic attachments have also earned recent critical interest, with scholars considering the oppressive nature of those bonds as well as their subversive potential.⁷⁵ Despite St. John Rivers's assertion "that human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on" Jane, she often indulges in gleeful judgment of those whom she deems unworthy of those affections. Fully convinced of her own value, Jane nevertheless believes that the worth of others is both variable and knowable. Jane's ideal subject must display *internal* sophistication rather than external, and only to those who achieve this ideal—like Helen Burns and the Rivers sisters—does

⁷⁵ Amit S. Rai claims that sympathetic attachments are "the fundamental mystery that the narrative grapples with" (245) and identifies them as an "occult, even pagan" force (257) in opposition to the discipline- and improvement-oriented Christian projects described in the text. Laura Freeburg Kees argues that Jane's sympathetic system serves to unify her with some while simultaneously distancing her from those who appear inferior (885), creating a "meritocracy" that "cannot escape the allure of the power structure" (887). Lorri G. Nandrea traces the genealogy of sympathy versus sensibility from the eighteenth-century, showing that the totalized "I" of Jane's sympathies must always coexist with the fractured "assemblage" of external influences created by sensibility (131). Similarly, Ashly Bennett discusses sympathy as a force imposing a burdensome "sameness" of feeling (301) and offers up shame as an alternative, a proposal which I will discuss at length later in this chapter.

she extend the hand of true friendship. To others, like her poor and uneducated students in the isolated village of Morton, Jane turns a cold face of rebuke, withholding her sympathy and resisting the sentimental tropes that characterize her earlier descriptions of Helen. By refusing to sentimentalize any but the “best” of her child characters, Jane shows a political dimension to feeling: the Morton schoolgirls represent the “outside” of Jane’s ideology of hard work and refined tastes, while she as bourgeois narrator only invests her emotional capital in children who, given their place in society, embody the proper orientation towards the future.

Jane Eyre evinces a vigorous class-consciousness from the opening pages of her narration, when even as a persecuted young orphan she acknowledges that she is “not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste” (20). Yet later in the novel she appears to do just that, fleeing the luxuries of Thornfield Hall and her privileges as governess there in exchange for the daily indignities of teaching poor girls from a small village. In doing this Jane must abandon her association with Rochester, but she does not entirely renounce her perceived “caste”; Jane’s connections in her new home are the educated and genteel (if shabby) Rivers family, with whom she feels an immediate bond of kinship. And kinship, of course, implies affinity, even equality, as Jane sees her own values reflected in the Rivers’ modest dignity. Her own inherent sense of respectability and worth derives not from her class, per se—she is a penniless, plain orphan, a mere governess, and in every way seemingly insignificant—but from her rich inner life. Famously, she argues that her equality with Rochester comes from her feelings, her sentiments: in one moment of intense passion she tells him, “I have as much soul as

you,—and full as much heart!” (216). Yet Jane’s ability to feel is classed from the novel’s first pages, as her relationship to books and later to art provide early hints of the depths of her emotive power. As leisure-time pursuits, these outlets of sentiment require both education and a quiet, solitary environment—privileges that her Morton cottage girls do not enjoy.

While Jane declares that her judgments of human worth spring from universal human traits like feeling and “soul,” her narration shows that she is often swayed by decidedly un-spiritual evidence. Jane frequently declares, with no apparent embarrassment, her own superiority to those around her,⁷⁶ a conviction that arises from her most bourgeois attributes: her education, her religion, her work ethic, and her refinements. Jane bestows upon herself a halo of exceptionality from earliest youth, and by her teenage years, during which the bulk of the novel’s action takes place, she has accumulated the successful liberal subject’s most necessary values: hard work, achievement, and liberty. Her desire for freedom, in particular, is one of the driving forces of Jane’s life. She decides to leave Lowood because she says, “I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer” (72). Later, just before Rochester proposes, she emphasizes, ““I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you”” (216).

Despite her rather overstressed liberty, Jane chooses to conform to a vision of futurity that is heteronormative and, more crucially, middle class. Her constant pursuit of

⁷⁶ As a child she announces that her wealthy but cruel relatives the Reeds “are not fit to associate with” her (22), and later, at Thornfield, she explains that Blanche Ingram “was a mark between jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. . . She was showy, but she was not genuine” (158).

independence actually cements this devotion to futurity, since because Jane is never quite satisfied with her level of self-determination she always looks forward to some yet-to-come time when she might enjoy perfect liberty. Of course, Jane defines “perfect liberty” according to her own longings and dreams, which are determined to a large degree by her ideas about class and gender norms. This means that, paradoxically, Jane’s desire for liberty poses no real threat to convention, for as Jane grows she abandons many of her youthful impertinences and learns increasing respect for social norms. She quietly works at an acceptably feminine profession, rejects Rochester’s proposal to become his mistress, and even, after inheriting great wealth and at last true independence from her uncle, declares that her first task will be a cleaning spree, as “domestic endearments and household joys” are “the best things the world has!” (333).

Just like her sense of self-worth, Jane’s social relations rest on foundational bourgeois values, as even her all-important sympathies are tinged with class-bias. Her strong sympathetic bonds connect Jane only to genteel or wealthy characters—Rochester, Helen Burns, the Riverses—and never to characters who lack refinement. While Jane feels some moderate affection for Mrs. Fairfax or Adele Varens, she never enjoys the intense fellow-feeling with them that characterizes her relations with her inner circle. Jane sees her closest relationships as spiritual in nature, but I would contend that her sentiments throughout the text create an understanding of affect that is neither wholly internal nor fully reflexive. To a large degree Jane’s relational postures are, as Kathleen Stewart writes, internalizations of “publicly circulating styles, sensibilities, and affects” (105), particularly Victorian attitudes surrounding social status and respectability. Jane’s

sympathetic bond with her childhood friend Helen Burns arises not only from the girl's great virtue but also from a secular source: her broad education, which speaks to her gentility despite her diminished situation. As Helen reveals her knowledge of history, French, and even Latin, Jane finds her "organ of Veneration expanding" (62). Helen's many accomplishments *earn* her Jane's sympathies, her affective reaction tracing the path laid out by social assumptions about class.

A similar moment occurs upon Jane's first meeting of the Rivers sisters, Diana and Mary, whom she immediately recognizes as "two young, graceful women—ladies in every point" (283) and goes on to observe them reading to one another in what she later identifies as German. The peaceful scene marks the sisters as sympathetic spirits to Jane's own, and she notes, "Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant—to resume my natural manner and character" (287). Despite her greatly reduced circumstances, Jane claims to effortlessly discard the mien of the "mendicant," and she sets up her current beggarly status in opposition to what is most "natural" to her. The Rivers family, aided by Jane's "pure" accent and her "fine" if muddy clothes (289), see through the trappings of her destitution to identify the fellow refined spirit beneath them. In this case, too, Jane's sympathy is less an instant recognition of shared humanity, as in Adam Smith,⁷⁷ than an immediate reaction to certain social cues—the graceful bearing of the ladies, their facility with foreign language—signifying refinement. In other words, her reflexive responses

⁷⁷ See chapter three for a discussion of sympathetic attachments in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

and sympathetic attachments to other characters are shaped as much by nurture (since society has taught her how to read those social cues) as by nature.

Although Jane's work ethic and her social relations indicate her bourgeois value system, her narrative does not implicate childhood—sentimentalized or not—as a collaborating force in the project of conventional futurity. As Susan Zieger argues, sentimentalized children can actually be subversive figures (143), and I would add that sentimentalized dying children in particular tend to approach their passing with an acceptance bordering on delight, indulging the death drive that Edelman sees as the natural partner of queer politics.⁷⁸ Tiny Tim may “NOT DIE,” as Dickens so forcefully exclaims, but other sentimentalized children do, embracing the great disjunction of death rather than reproductive futurity's emphasis on perpetual sameness. As I have discussed in previous chapters, figures like Paul Dombey and Nell Trent go gladly to their deaths because there is no place for them in the modern world, while the suffering children of Chartist poetry accept death because a life of industrial toil appears too overwhelming. Similarly, Helen Burns, the sentimentalized child figure in *Jane Eyre*, represents for Jane the possibilities of a bourgeois future. However, I would argue that Jane to a degree misreads Helen's allegiances, because she also embodies threat: the dual temptations of queered economics and sexuality. Her blissful greeting of her own death represents the novel's neutralization of those threats, but through her scenes the text represents (and thus reproduces) the seductive allure of annihilation.

⁷⁸ According to Edelman, “As the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability” (9).

Helen displays many of the traits of the sentimentalized child that I discussed in my first chapter. Jane describes Helen as “a martyr, a hero” (57), and like those archaic figures she is wholly unfitted for life as a modern Victorian. Her purpose in the text, like a Paul Dombey or a Little Nell, is to pass on some lesson to the future bourgeois liberal subject—in this case, teaching Jane that she must apply herself to her studies and abandon her resentment towards those placed over her.⁷⁹ And also like Paul and Nell, Helen eventually must be sacrificed to the god of reproductive futurity. Too weak and spiritualized for a life of productive labor, she accepts her impending demise on economic grounds: “I had not the qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world” (69). The very education that so impresses Jane marks Helen’s worldly uselessness, for how does a facility with literature and Latin serve a poor, sickly female? Because she correctly foresees nothing but failure in her adult life, Helen prefers death to the inability to make a living for herself.⁸⁰ Unlike Rochester, whose sexual fruitfulness compensates for his economic sterility (he loses much of his economic productivity after his maiming⁸¹ but is still able to further his genetic line), Helen represents an additional,

⁷⁹ Jane shows this influence as she leaves her little tea party with Helen and Miss Temple reinvigorated for life at Lowood: “I from that hour set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty. . . . I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (63).

⁸⁰ The famous opening of *Great Expectations*, which I discuss later in this chapter, echoes these concerns.

⁸¹ After Jane’s disappearance, Rochester “[breaks] off acquaintance with all the gentry, and [shuts] himself up, like a hermit” (364). After the fire at Thornfield, he removes himself to a remote manor-house called Ferndean, a place he cannot rent because of “its ineligible and insalubrious site” (366). While we can assume that Rochester, even when

sexual threat to futurity: a deep bond nurtured in the homosocial space of the boarding school that must be broken in order to advance the novel's marriage plot.⁸²

Because Helen promises neither reproductive nor economic fecundity, she must be removed from the novel's plot. Like other sentimentalized children, she harbors no apparent regrets about her shortened days and sinks willingly into eternal rest, telling Jane that she is "very happy" (69) and "comfortable" (70) upon her deathbed. This acceptance is due in part to her grim future prospects, as discussed above, but also to her religious beliefs—she sees herself on the cusp of her "last home" presided over by a "mighty, universal Parent" (69). But although her exit from the novel makes space for a sexually and economically normative future, her vision of heaven queers the nuclear family structure that later becomes so important to Jane. In describing her God as a "universal Parent" and heaven as a "home," Helen emphasizes an eternal bourgeois family structure—a major tenet of reproductive futurity. Yet in death this family is necessarily different; with God as an eternal parent, young Helen must stay an eternal child. Her heaven offers no opportunity for procreation or production; it simply *is*, leaving Helen free of reproductive futurity's emphasis on improvement and achievement over successive generations. Helen's peaceful, even pleasant passing recalls Edelman's own discussion of the death drive and its relationship to *jouissance* as an "escape from

"blind and a cripple" (365), still takes in some rents from his properties, his efforts at improving or growing his holdings are clearly at an end.

⁸² Note also that with her facility with Latin, history, and French literature, Helen has been educated not like a poor woman but like a privileged man. As I have mentioned, Jane finds these abilities very attractive, and they form a chief component of the two girls' sympathetic bond.

the alienation intrinsic to meaning” (25). The scene allows Helen to be read, simultaneously, as the sentimentalized dying child and the figural queer, for both deny the inherent desirability of futurity.

This scene, the emotional climax of the novel’s first ten chapters, also provides an important didactic moment within the text, for it reveals a noteworthy tension in the individualist ideology later embraced by Jane. In a liberal state where individualism is the rule, the death of the unproductive child usefully purges society of its extraneous members, yet that death can never be described in such utilitarian terms. Instead, it must be sentimentalized and deeply felt in order to allow productive individuals to exercise their proper range of emotions. If the sentimentalized child in life teaches the values of compassion and fellow-feeling, his or her subsequent death provides the liberal reader with an opportunity to practice those lessons. The death of the sentimentalized child, while necessary, must always be felt as tragedy.

Yet even for Jane Eyre, whose relationship with Helen demonstrates her strong capacity for sympathy, not all children evoke the emotional indulgences of sentiment. In fact, Jane begins her work in Morton with the assumption that poor girls could not possibly elicit the same emotional attachments as Adele Varens or the students at Lowood—girls with at least some level of polish. When St. John Rivers first offers Jane the teaching post, he lays out its limitations:

‘It is a village school; your scholars will be only poor girls—cottagers’ children—at best, farmers’ daughters. Knitting, sewing, reading, writing, cyphering, will be all you will have to teach. What will you do with your accomplishments? What with the largest portion of your mind—sentiments—tastes?’

‘Save them till they are wanted. They will keep.’ (303)

Jane accepts without contention Rivers's premise that cottagers' daughters do not require the full engagement of her mind or, crucially, of her emotions. His warning links Jane's affect—her “sentiments”—with her class-inflected “tastes” and “accomplishments.” These three qualities distinguish Jane from her students, for, as Pierre Bourdieu writes in his seminal study on the subject, “Taste classifies, and classifies the classifier” (6). Interestingly, Jane's teaching work in Morton is not meant to recreate her level of taste or accomplishment in her students. Her education has suited her for the position of governess and teacher, necessitating “refinements” like a facility with foreign languages and handiwork, art and music. For the Morton girls, these refinements are unnecessary; their education purposefully stops well short of this target, and so Jane says her tastes and accomplishments will “keep,” set aside, packed on ice until she meets more worthy recipients. Bourdieu sees this divisiveness as a pervasive problem in all of education: “The official differences produced by academic classifications tend to produce (or reinforce) real differences by inducing in the classified individuals a collectively recognized and supported belief in the differences, thus producing behaviors that are intended to bring real being in line with official being” (25). Courses, grades, degrees—all of these partition a society into categories of achievement, the foundational groupings of a supposed meritocracy. According to this culturally accepted form of discrimination, Jane has every reason to let her sentiments “keep” until she can decide who is worthy of them. Education, a supposed force for improvement and equality, perpetuates the gulf between Jane and her pupils, and sentiment is not enough to bridge it. Instead, it is just another distinguishing factor, like taste, that sets Jane apart.

Jane's students at the Morton village school earn no sentimental attachment from Jane or from the reader despite the harsh circumstances of their lives because they reject both productive labor and respectable bourgeois attitudes. The pitiful poverty that helps build the reader's sentimental response to Helen earns for these girls only disapproval. They, like Helen, have no interest in cultivating an improved future, but unlike her they do not have the decency to die and clear the way for their more ambitious counterparts. If Jane idolizes Helen because of her sophisticated education, she does exactly the opposite with these young girls, whom she describes in the literary equivalent of a monotone: "I had twenty scholars. But three of the number can read They speak with the broadest accent of the district. At present they and I have a difficulty in understanding each other's language. Some of them are unmannered, rough, intractable, as well as ignorant; but others are docile, have a wish to learn, and evince a disposition that pleases me" (306). For a young woman who has evinced such passion throughout her tale, Jane withholds any glint of sentiment in her relations with her young charges. They do not merit any emotional investment and thus barely register as Jane's fellow humans. In this way, the Morton schoolgirls complicate Gayatri Spivak's pivotal reading of *Jane Eyre*. According to Spivak, the novel is about Jane as "female individualist" maneuvering her way towards full autonomy and personhood at the expense of the "native female" Bertha Mason (244-45), whose "function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal" (249). While descriptions of Bertha as vicious and sub-human do indeed solidify Jane's social status by way of contrast, the Morton girls show that this sort of exclusion does not reject only the subjects of imperialism. Because of poverty and

ignorance, the schoolgirls hold no place in the community of human sympathies, so they clearly cannot participate in Spivak's "soul making," that process by which the feminist-individualist earns full recognition (248). They are English and they are female, but they can never access the "self-marginalized uniqueness" (246) of a subject like Jane, whose work in the Morton school is just as much a missionary project as St. John Rivers's labors in India.

By setting aside her sentiments, Jane rejects her body's affective capacity. If, after Deleuze and Spinoza, we define a body as that which has that very ability to affect and be affected (59), then Jane has in fact distanced herself from her own bodily existence as well as that of her ironically-named "scholars." They cannot affect her, and she cannot be affected. In saying that her sentiments will "keep"—in other words, that she can divorce her innermost being from her affective reactions to the physical world—Jane claims for herself an unattainable spirit-existence, one in which distinctions of class, education, and accomplishment can be neutralized and stripped of their power to influence perceptions.

However, Jane's later descriptions showcase the impossibility of this claim, as her much-touted sentiments do not "keep" as well as she might hope. Despite her efforts to simply set aside her affective capacity, Jane *is* in fact touched by her scholars, though her response is one of shame, not warmth:

Was I very gleeful, settled, content, during the hours I passed in yonder bare, humble school-room this morning and afternoon? Not to deceive myself, I must reply—No: I felt desolate to a degree. I felt—yes, idiot that I am—I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness of all I heard and saw round me. But let me not hate and despise myself too much for these feelings: I know them to be wrong—that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them. To-morrow, I trust, I shall get the better

of them partially; and in a few weeks, perhaps, they will be quite subdued. In a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress, and a change for the better in my scholars, may substitute gratification for disgust. (306)

Jane's affective response to her new situation—her shame, her disgust—differs from her purportedly rational response, which is to identify her reaction as wrong and aim to change it. Her feelings of repulsion, by their very definition, distinguish the refined Jane from her students, who with their “ignorance, . . . poverty, . . . [and] coarseness” do not know to be ashamed of their condition. Sara Ahmed calls disgust “a sticky sign” and our utterance of disgust performative (93), so that as Jane announces the “degradation” of her new position she marks herself as separate from—and superior to—her pupils, even as she claims that eventually she will “substitute gratification for disgust.”

Jane's shame at her association with cottage girls arises not only from their social situation but also from her own. Ahmed explains that with shame “*the badness of an action is transferred to me*, such that I feel myself to be bad and to have been ‘found’ or ‘found out’ as bad by others” (105, author's emphasis). Jane's experience of poverty has not been as extreme as that of her students, but she knows what it is to be dependent, disadvantaged, and despised. Throughout the novel Jane feels innately superior to most people around her, but her close proximity to a group of poor, ignorant village children reveals that the distance between Morton schoolgirls and a Lowood-educated governess is not nearly so great as Jane would hope. The “badness” of their poverty rubs off on her, creating her sense of shame in this passage. As Ashly Bennett notes, shame structures Jane's narrative, beginning with her punishment in the red room. Bennett aims to

rehabilitate shame⁸³ as an alternative affective experience that “negotiates the extremes of anger’s potentially antisocial alienation and sympathy’s potentially oppressive socialization” (301), since techniques of “shameful signification” emphasize the distances between/within individuals and disjunctions in their relations and perceptions (307). “Shameful signification” gives the individual space to respond differently to stimuli through time, while sentiment seeks to flatten any nuance of feeling. Yet unlike Bennett’s examples of shame,⁸⁴ which help to distance Jane from the empowered bourgeois position she takes at the end of the novel, her shame at the Morton school actually confirms that position. Jane’s shameful response to her association with poor girls reveals her sense of distance from her own experience of childhood poverty; her lack of sympathetic response reveals the capricious nature of human affect, prone ever to bow to outside attitudes and pressures.

Even when Jane distances herself from her shame, claiming that she can eventually “get the better of” those feelings, she communicates her own sense of moral superiority in a reaction just as involuntary as her earlier disgust. Though Jane partially amends her perceptions as time passes, she remains—for a teacher of poor girls, and a poor girl herself—shockingly unwilling to extend her sympathies to those who do not share her accomplishments. She eventually declares, rather self-righteously, that her eyes

⁸³ Bennett’s project relies in a significant way on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analysis of shame in the work of psychologist Sylvan Tomkins: while it makes the feeler fully aware of his or her own distinct individuality, it also “derives from and aims toward sociability” because of its very reliance on shared standards and expectations (37).

⁸⁴ Bennett describes, for instance, Jane’s public punishment at Lowood and Rochester’s public maiming and ruination.

have been opened to certain of the girls' hidden virtues, though her discovery feels something like Europeans finding a "new world" that had been there all along. These virtues are not evenly distributed among her students, however. When Jane finally allows herself to form attachments with her pupils, it is only with those whom she calls "the best girls":

Some time elapsed before, with all my efforts, I could comprehend my scholars and their nature. Wholly untaught, with faculties quite torpid, they seemed to me hopelessly dull; and, at first sight, dull alike: but I soon found I was mistaken. There was a difference amongst them as amongst the educated; and when I got to know them, and they me, this difference rapidly developed itself. . . . I discovered amongst them not a few examples of natural politeness and innate self-respect, as well as of excellent capacity, that won both my goodwill and my admiration. These soon took a pleasure in doing their work well; in keeping their persons neat; in learning their tasks regularly; in acquiring quiet and orderly manners. . . . Besides, I began personally to like some of the best girls; and they liked me. I had amongst my scholars several farmers' daughters: young women grown, almost . . . I found estimable characters amongst them—characters desirous of information, and disposed for improvement. (312)

As Jane realizes, even poor village girls have their own internal class distinctions: the "best girls" are independent farmers' daughters, while the others are from cottage families. These farmers' families have passed down to these girls their limited store of what Bourdieu calls academic and cultural capital (23), but even that meager inheritance places them ahead of the cottagers. With this small advantage, the "best girls" place greater worth in bourgeois notions of futurity: they, like Jane, are "disposed for improvement" and, as they "[take] a pleasure in doing their work well," promise a life of productivity. School is, by definition, a space aligned with future values,⁸⁵ and the best

⁸⁵ Notably, though, the homosocial pleasures of the boarding school can undermine this drive towards futurity. See chapter 3.

girls embrace this principle. They adopt middle class manners and are polite, quiet, and pliable.

The future-oriented stance of education means something quite different for poor Morton cottage girls than it does for most men, for whom education affords at least the possibility of advancement. Even Jane's education at Lowood teaches her certain refined skills like languages and art and therefore prepares her for a relatively promising career—as a governess in a fine household rather than a poor schoolmistress. In contrast, Jane's task at the Morton school is to prepare the girls for the harsh realities of married life. The “knitting, sewing, reading, writing, [and] cyphering” that St. John Rivers tells her she must teach are the essential skills of humble housewifery: preparing and mending clothes, keeping track of expenses, and maximizing household economy. Unlike Adèle, these girls will serve not as ornaments for a refined household but as essential laborers, though hopefully “quiet and orderly” ones, in the work of keeping house. Their work at the school, then, does not promise any increase in their social standing, but rather a life just like their mothers and grandmothers have known. The girls are merely preparing themselves for a pre-determined future of endless labor, and so it is hardly surprising that the majority of the girls do not set themselves, docilely and persistently, at the task of improving themselves.

The girls Jane does not deem to be of best quality fade into the background without another word; she provides no description of these less privileged “scholars” beyond her initial assessment that they are “torpid,” and “dull.” Thus we are left to infer their characteristics as the opposite of what distinguishes the “best girls.” If the “best

girls” are polite, neat, and quiet, then the others, by inference, are rude, sloppy, and loud. If the “best girls” find their pleasure in work well done, then the others prefer leisure to labor. If the “best girls” aim to learn and improve themselves, then the others desire present satisfactions. In other words, the girls to whom Jane refuses sentimental attachment are those with no allegiance to the future—at least, not any future created by bourgeois fantasies. The girls essentially call the bluff of narratives of social improvement—they have no reason to invest in the future because their futures hold no “great expectations,” no bourgeois promise of increased wealth or standing. Learning geography and history and finer things does not make cottage girls or even farmers’ daughters into genteel ladies. Their ambivalence towards their lessons signifies not indolence but a rebuttal to Jane’s faith in aspirational futurity. Correspondingly, then, Jane invests no emotion in these girls, since unlike the “best girls” they have no part in the productive future to which Jane is so devoted. Edelman writes, “The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer” (28), but in this case the sacrifices are themselves children, young girls with a queer relationship to time, written out of the novel because of their allegiance to the now rather than the yet-to-come.

This conclusion is a result of form as much as ideology (or perhaps of ideology bred into form). After all, the novel by its nature encourages a trajectory of growth—in the protagonist, the reader, or both—and novel-reading has been marked as a bourgeois pursuit since the genre’s inception. According to the internal logic of the novel form, then, the “best girls” are indeed of greater worth than their indolent companions because they equate the future with growth and improvement. Jane herself is the prototype for this

belief, moving from isolation to community, from imprisonment to liberty, from poverty to independence, and from desire to fulfillment. Chris R. Vanden Bossche poses the question of *Jane Eyre's* agency—what does the novel “do” in terms of class relations?—and answers by saying that Jane negotiates various subject positions but persistently attacks “entrepreneurial ethos” and occasionally “invokes an egalitarian ethos that seeks inclusion of the ‘people’” (56). But Jane Eyre’s truest allegiance is not to populism or to aristocracy, but, in true middle-class fashion, to the future she hopes to build for herself. Her orientation towards work, effort, and improvement mark her as fundamentally better than Bertha Mason with her illicit pleasures or Blanche Ingram with her “poor” mind” and “barren” heart (158). Likewise, the novel invests its emotional capital in characters—like Jane, like Helen, and like the “best girls”—who believe in the power of a better future.

2. The Perversity of Reproduction: *A Christmas Carol*

For children who deny this power, aside from the threats posed by their future-negating, anti-social qualities, perhaps the greatest looming danger is their quantity. We do not get a sense of this in *Jane Eyre*, except to conjecture that the rude and noisy cottagers’ daughters both outnumber and overwhelm those “several” girls who display some refinement. Yet the question of numbers often occupies the foreground of Victorian thought on childhood⁸⁶ because a profusion of children can indicate not the steady growth

⁸⁶ This is not only the case in fiction, of course. In his *London Labor and London Poor* Henry Mayhew obsessively relates the numbers of children engaged in menial tasks and

of a healthy nation but a perverse turn towards overpopulation, with all its attendant dangers. As Catherine Gallagher has pointed out, the robust and reproducing individual body, in the Victorian imagination, creates a disordered social body, a surplus of hungry mouths that gnaw away at the nation's resources. In this way the Child, Edelman's symbol of hopeful futurity, actually embodies the greatest threat to a healthy public space. The child's very existence implies procreation, and so when an excess of reproduction troubles social stability—whether through starvation, disease, unemployment, or the wasting of public funds—the child becomes a potent symbol for the perversity of reproduction.

This view of unbounded reproduction's threatening potential originates with Adam Smith,⁸⁷ but it is most thoroughly expounded by Thomas Malthus in his *Essay on the Principles of Population*,⁸⁸ in which he puts forth “two postulata. First, that food is necessary to the existence of man. Secondly, that the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state” (19). The need for food is clear;

street work throughout the city. Similarly, the 1842 Royal Commission Reports on child labor in mines tabulate the number of child colliers working in the various coal-producing counties of Britain and Ireland. This interest in numbering poor children indicates a dual anxiety, both for the children's welfare and for the welfare of the state, which faces public outcry for ignoring the deplorable—and increasingly visible—conditions of child labor.

⁸⁷ Smith acknowledges that his “invisible hand” does not work unfailingly when it comes to human bodies: “Poverty, though it no doubt discourages, does not always prevent marriage. It seems even to be favourable to generation. A half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children, while a pampered fine lady is often incapable of bearing any, and is generally exhausted by two or three. . . . But poverty, though it does not prevent the generation, is extremely unfavorable to the rearing of children” (90).

⁸⁸ All references to Malthus's text will be to the first and most frequently cited edition, published in 1798.

without it, we die. On a species-wide level, the need for “passion between the sexes,” or reproduction, seems equally vital. Survival, in the long run, requires both sex and nourishment, but those two needs don’t always work in concert. Rather, reproductive desire struggles against the desire for a comfortable living amongst men of all classes, but especially for the laborer “who earns eighteen pence a day and lives with some degree of comfort as a single man, [but who] will hesitate a little before he divides that pittance among four or five” (Malthus 34). No one wants to have children he cannot support, Malthus claims, and so the current generation must make a decision: produce fewer children and better support them, or raise larger families but put everyone at risk of suffering the discomforts of hunger and poverty. David Collard refers to this Malthusian negotiation between present and future desires as the “generational bargain” (706), as the older generation sacrifices its reproductive desires for the wellbeing of its children. He cites “Malthus’s *fundamental rule*: do not father children unless you reasonably expect to be able to afford to bring them up” (Collard 707). Catherine Gallagher refers to this in starker terms: “The healthy, and consequently reproducing, body thus is the harbinger of the disordered society full of starving bodies” (85).

Malthus calls this conundrum “misery,” and sees the solution as “Alas! beyond the power of man” (42). He finds “passion between the sexes” an unavoidable part of the human condition, and if it does not take the form of early marriage, it will lead to “vice,” or sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage (35). This second of Malthus’s “postulata” seems to refer to a bodily drive for sex as opposed to a larger human need for reproduction, but he cannot divorce the two—sex implies reproduction. Since effective

birth control practices were not widely known in Malthus's day,⁸⁹ it becomes difficult to extract the notion of reproduction from that of sex.⁹⁰ Indeed, Malthus's two postulata construct an impossible paradox for childhood and futurity: without "passion between the sexes," no children will be born. With it, too many will be, and in the ensuing

⁸⁹ Peter Engelman provides a concise introduction to historical birth control practices in the first chapter of his *A History of the Birth Control Movement in America*. He lists a number of options available to couples prior to the twentieth century, which range from the somewhat effective to the downright dangerous and include withdrawal, extended nursing, cleansing after intercourse, and various herbal/medicinal concoctions. Condoms had existed in Europe since the Early Modern period, but because of their association with prostitution they were not widely used for family planning until the twentieth century (3-4).

⁹⁰ Malthus's claim that "passion between the sexes... will remain nearly in its present state" did not go unchallenged, even in his own day. His contemporary William Godwin, against whose arguments Malthus directs much of his *Essay* (Godwin in turn directs much of his own essay *On Population* against the arguments of Malthus), takes a radically different view of human sexuality, claiming that Malthus's second postulate, "if explicitly unfolded, must mean, that 'the passion between the sexes' always exists and acts, in all persons, in all countries, and in all ages of the world, under all institutions, prejudices, superstitions, and systems of thinking, in the same manner" (530), a notion he finds patently ridiculous. As a counter-example he points out virtuous British ladies, whose average age at marriage he claims to be "two-and-twenty" (531) and who marry not to satisfy some "passion between the sexes" but to "better their condition" (532). For Godwin, increased education and virtue could lead to a decline in uncontrolled sexual passions, but Malthus retorts that "no move towards the extinction of the passion between the sexes has taken place in the five or six thousand years that the world has existed" (66). He continues by noting the "improbability that the lower classes of people in any country should ever be sufficiently free from want and labour to obtain any high degree of intellectual improvement" (68). For Malthus, class and sexuality are inextricably tangled, and since he sees class to be a fixed category without much potential for change, then sexuality likewise will remain unchanged.

Friedrich Engels poses yet another challenge to Malthus's theory. He argues that the notion of surplus population comes not from an innate drive to reproduce but from a sort of twisted supply and demand developed during capitalist economic fluctuations from boom to bust. When times are good and many laborers are needed for production, he argues, the poor have many children. However, these boom times inevitably lead to a glut of manufactured goods and, ultimately, reduced demand. During this time, laborers are laid off—this is the true "surplus population"—and must do anything they can to support themselves until the economy rights itself (84-89).

competition for resources, some will die. Malthus sees this tension as part of a larger divine plan: “the acknowledged difficulties occasioned by the law of population tend rather to promote than impede the general purpose of Providence” (116) as “evil exists in the world not to create despair but activity” (124). Yet the quasi-optimism of this conclusion excludes the children who have been born in contradiction to Malthus’s central dictum, and those children, representatives of the threatening potential of reproduction, are themselves sacrificed for a greater future.

Centuries later, Foucault cites Malthus as a prime architect of nineteenth-century sexual attitudes. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* he draws the Malthusian, over-procreative couple as one of the four major threats—along with “the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, . . . and the perverse adult” (105)—around which modern sexual discourse has shaped itself. Since the unbounded reproduction of the Malthusian couple endangers the nation, society pushes back against these over-procreative individuals by developing a discourse featuring “a political socialization achieved through ‘the responsabilization’ of couples with regard to the social body as a whole (which had to be limited or on the contrary reinvigorated)” (Foucault 105). Modern sexual discourse, according to Foucault, trains individual adults to consider the broader social needs regarding procreation; Edelman might rephrase this to say that it trains individuals to place the ideal of futurity ahead of their present pleasures. But Foucault labels this threat as particularly Malthusian, which challenges Edelman’s vision of the Child as the most appropriate symbol for futurity. Foucault’s parenthetical “*limited* or on the contrary *reinvigorated*” (my emphases) shows the limits of Edelman’s thesis in *No Future*: over-

procreation endangers reproductive futurity just as much as the queer refusal to reproduce. Or, to say nearly (but not exactly) the same thing, over-procreation itself can be considered queer in its refusal of the “broader social needs” I mentioned earlier.

Malthus’s apocalyptic vision presents a jarring break from Edelman’s portrayal of the sentimentalized Victorian child as stand-in for uninterrupted heteronormative futurity. Victorian texts themselves—and particularly the novels of Charles Dickens—equivocate between these depictions. As crystallizations of heteronormativity, some Victorian novels reproduce the tropes of idealized, endangered childhood, projecting onto the Child “our wishes of or fears about children,” in the words of Laurie Langbauer (91). Other texts, however, more fully express the second half of Langbauer’s point, the part Edelman’s thesis ignores: we project not only desires onto children, but also fears, and not only fears *about*, but also fears *of*. If the sentimentalized child figure, the Paul Dombey or Nell Trent, represents the desires projected onto children, then the nameless, non-individuated masses of (mostly poor) children that populate the background of Victorian novels represent society’s fears of a future overrun by the hungry, insolent, and ever-multiplying poor.

In part these depictions of nameless and faceless poor children are a response to the limitations of the novel form; some characters must be round, some flat, and still others just subtle brushstrokes filling out the novel’s setting. Not even in fiction can every child can be a nobly suffering Little Dick (of *Oliver Twist*) or Bessy Higgins (of *North and South*); some must also be Fagin’s broadly-drawn gang of street urchins, or the barely-glimpsed crowd of angry youths throwing stones at their employer. But the chasm

between the sentimentalized child and the muted masses runs deeper. One is poor but sympathetic, drawn in the soft glow of pity, while the others languish under the harsh lights of a glum realism. Sentimentalized children are too holy for reproduction or ambition, despite the fact that the progression of human history towards that ever-distant “future” requires children growing up to pursue both of Malthus’s postulata. They exhibit no earthly desires, no bodily hungers or fleshly lusts, miraculously denying the Malthusian dyad of “food and passion between the sexes” as the basic human instincts that work together to give shape to reproductive futurity. On the other hand, children without sentiment, perpetually hungry and threatening to multiply, embody these needs in excess, and they do not have the good manners to ask sweetly, with *Oliver Twist*, “Please, sir, I want some more” (27). While they may not be explicitly sexualized, the threat of their teeming multiplicity always lurks just out of sight. Susan Zieger notes that the physical sufferings of poor children, especially Dickensian poor children, are frequently bound up with sexual precocity: “By consistently emplotting economic threats to children’s innocence, Dickens’ texts render them ‘queer’ in his signature sense of eccentric, strange, quirky, and wonderful; as well as in the theoretical sense. . . as presumptively sexual-economic beings” (144). But when these children are multiplied, not even Dickens can rely on their fundamental innocence. Instead of facing outside threats, they themselves comprise the threat. They point to negative futurity, the extinction rather than the perpetuation of heteronormative and capitalist values.

As I have discussed throughout this work, all these children can sometimes be read as threateningly deviant, the sentimentalized children because they deny the core

Malthusian dyad and the children without sentiment because they take those needs to excess. Of course, the sentimentalized dying child bows to the needs of liberal society and presents its subjects with a necessary tutorial in proper feeling before making his or her timely exit. Poor proliferating children, on the other hand, represent the limitations of liberal ideology. They must always be excluded from true subjecthood because they lack the liberal subject's required self-determination; their lives are driven by economic necessity rather than ambition. The sentimental child, after teaching his or her lesson, has the decency to die off, a quasi-Darwinian self-selection that removes any true menace from the child's queerness. But Malthus's whole point is that poor proliferating children do not die *enough*. Since they do not expire in proper quantities to balance out the surfeit of births, their numbers constantly swell, and with them their threat. The proliferating poor children in Victorian texts harken back to Malthus's warning from 1798 and show that the child's value is derived from a brutal calculus: an overabundance of poor bodies, even poor *children's* bodies, adds up to a frightening sum of future peril. Because of their class and because of their numbers, these children reveal that while one poor child might merit sentimentalization, groups of them threaten social stability. They may suffer, but the reader is not meant to respond to these children with pity, sorrow, or any of the standby emotions of the sentimental tradition. Instead they are shown as alternately humorous, threatening, or simply invisible, as faceless set pieces for sentimental protagonists or as outright antagonists, representing everything the heroes stand against.

Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* highlights just such a gulf between the child of sentiment and the child starkly bereft of it. Tiny Tim, the narrative's idealized but

imperiled child, functions for Edelman as “futurity’s fragile figure” (45), “parading its patent vulnerability with the all-too-sure conviction of embodying the ruthless spiritual uplift, the obligatory hope for the future to come, imposed by the celebration of Christmas” (42). We first meet Tiny Tim in Scrooge’s vision of the Cratchit family Christmas, where Tim is immediately distinguished from his mob of siblings by the frailness of his figure and the piety of his spirit. So sickly that, in one the vision of Christmas Yet to Come, he actually dies, he is the primary receptacle of the reader’s emotional investment: we hope to see Scrooge transformed mainly because we want to see Tiny Tim survive. And this emotional investment pays off, for Dickens eventually—and forcefully—informs us that Tiny Tim does “NOT die” (116), unlike so many other sentimentalized child-heroes. In this way Scrooge’s reformation ensures a victory for reproductive futurity—and indeed, for the liberal state⁹¹—but one that Edelman claims comes “at our expense in a culture that always sustains itself on the threat that [the Child] might die” (48). Crucially, though, this is not an unqualified victory. Tiny Tim is still crippled; he survives, but his care will continue to burden the rest of his family. By ignoring this conclusion, Edelman disregards the scenario that Dickens describes so clearly in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Dombey and Son*—namely, that a dead sentimentalized child often does more to perpetuate reproductive futurity than a living one.

⁹¹ Crucially, Scrooge’s reformation transforms him into the ideal liberal subject, productive in the world of work but also connected through bonds of charity to those around him. The benevolence of men like the reformed Scrooge makes both economic regulation and the welfare state unnecessary.

In addition, Edelman's critique does not take into account all relevant instances of the Child in this text. *A Christmas Carol* has its poor, nameless children as well, which significantly complicates Edelman's reading of the Child's allegiance with futurity. At the end of Stave Three, Scrooge has just been escorted through Victorian London by the Ghost of Christmas Present. As Christmas Eve draws to a close, two very un-Cratchit-like children emerge from underneath the Spirit's robe:

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meager, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shriveled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked; and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread. (92)

The two children are named Ignorance and Want, and the Spirit tells Scrooge that they were born of Man. They appear from under the Ghost's skirts, he claims, because "they cling to me" (94), using Christmas as an occasion to momentarily reclaim their joy and humanity before reemerging not as the angelic children of sentiment but the demonic offspring of a heartless society. As the Spirit's own day draws to a close, so does their ability to hide their wretchedness in his jollity, and so their true, debased selves come forth. Because Ignorance and Want have temporarily bedecked their miserable existence with the festive trappings of Christmas, hiding beneath the Spirit's robes, they might in fact be the true faces of Tiny Tim and the other Cratchit children, who do not appear threatening in the soft glow of a Christmas fire but whose day-to-day life is one long, ugly struggle for survival.

The point of their appearance, like that of the other spectral visitations in the tale, is to teach Scrooge a lesson: to “beware them both, and all of their degree” (94). This scene is crucial to Jessica Kilgore’s reading of *A Christmas Carol* as a rejection of determinacy and a celebration of the power of sentiment: because Scrooge can change the course of his life through developing more human(e) feelings, the future of Ignorance and Want, too, is not fixed (154). Thus she reads this scene as a direct refutation of the determinist Malthusian theories Scrooge proclaims elsewhere in the narrative. Yet the Spirit’s solemn warning is nothing like the sentimental scenes he and Scrooge visited earlier, and the inhuman appearance of the two children contradicts Kilgore’s argument that the *Carol*’s Christmas setting functions to humanize the poor (147). Clearly Scrooge must amend his utilitarian view of poverty—that it is the responsibility only of prisons and workhouses—but the reasoning here is not based in compassion. The Ghost of Christmas Present, in his final words, delivers not a benevolent, humanitarian argument for charity nor a tender plea based on the sanctified sufferings of Tiny Tim but a sternly Malthusian warning about the dangers of poverty to overall social stability, for upon the “wolfish” boy Ignorance’s brow the Spirit foresees “that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased” (94). The real dangers posed by ignorance and want threaten not only poor children; they also spell “Doom” for any society that turns a blind eye to the ever-expanding impoverished masses. These children represent not the queer threat but the economic threat to futurity, and this threat seems especially deadly. Of course, Ignorance and Want do make their own kind of promise about the future, but this harsh promise stands in direct opposition to that of Mrs. Cratchit’s warm hearth, surrounded by

children who are eating their fill. As if to reemphasize this point, the eerie Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come in his dark cloak appears the moment after these two small spirits vanish, foreshadowing the threatening potential of a future in which Ignorance and Want are given free reign.

These two phantom children—antitheses of the pure and innocent Tiny Tim—cannot but be seen as a challenge to the warm futurity the novel posits as the solution to inhumanity. As Malthus would say, these two are the products of reproduction taken to extremes; they are another capitalized abstraction: Misery. Though their sexuality (as boy and girl) is implied, they are barren, wizened, embodying the point at which further reproduction is not feasible. In these disturbingly aged children, the Malthusian checks on population growth have reached their terrifying, degraded end. Given this clear ideological lineage, it is unsurprising that Malthus includes a similar moment in his own essay, demolishing the conventions of sentimentalized poor children by contrasting them with the reality of poverty and hunger:

The sons and daughters of peasants will not always be found such rosy cherubs in real life as they are described to be in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth and are a long while arriving at maturity. Boys that you would guess to be fourteen or fifteen are, upon inquiry, frequently found to be eighteen or nineteen. And the lads who drive plow, which must certainly be a healthy exercise, are very rarely seen with any appearance of calves to their legs: a circumstance which can only be attributed to a want either of proper or of sufficient nourishment. (35-36)

Like Edelman, Malthus gestures towards the idealized Child—his “rosy cherubs”—but he shows that hard labor and poor nutrition have ruined this idyllic picture of familial bliss. Like Dickens’s Ignorance and Want, the children in Malthus’s text are physically

marked: “stunted in their growth” and without sufficient muscle mass. Their age, too, is indefinite. Just as Ignorance and Want are ancient concepts trapped in the shriveled, prematurely aged bodies of children, the children in Malthus occupy a doubly ambiguous position; their biological age does not reflect the status of their physical growth, nor do their childish bodies prevent these children from doing hard labor—“man’s work.”

Obsessed with threats to childhood and childhood as threat, Dickens yet again repackages Malthusian worries in *Great Expectations*. Famously, the novel opens with Pip looking at the graves of his entire family, including “five little stone lozenges,” the tombstones of his brothers, “who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle” (9). The scene foreshadows the class-mania of the novel, with death described as a financial condition, and the responsibility laid at the feet not of ill-health or accident but poverty. Pip believes his brothers, overwhelmed by the socio-economic odds stacked against them, have merely given up, succumbing to the Malthusian population checks that state that they never should have been born. The Pirrip family has clearly overstepped the bounds of the generational bargain and has paid an ugly price: only Pip is left to carry on the family line.

Later on, Mr. Jaggers, the novel’s prickly solicitor, gives the reader some clue as to what might have happened to Pip’s brothers had they survived. His career has given him ample opportunity to observe children irresponsibly bred and then cast upon the world, and he bemoans the results:

‘Put the case that he [the lawyer] lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children, was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their

being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net—to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, be-devilled somehow.’ (307)

Jaggers notes that children are “being generated in great numbers” despite the fact that this leads to inevitable unhappy endings. Clearly certain segments of London’s population are ignoring the generational bargain and trading in their (or at least their children’s) economic well-being in favor of the procreative pleasure of the parents. Just as clearly, Jaggers sees this choice as not only tragic, but perverse. His final lines turn the children into animals: “so much spawn, to develop into the fish,” showing the dehumanizing results of this type of reproduction, especially among the poor. Yet one could see these “spawn” as the lucky ones, for at least they have an existence beyond the graveyard.

Because of his enduring interest in the internal mechanisms of the Victorian family, Dickens often examines what effect robust procreation might have on the domestic sphere. A remarkable number of Dickens novels include a large, bustling family teetering on the edge of poverty and, at times, described with a peculiarly Malthusian *schadenfreude*. It seems that even for Dickens reproduction can be perversion, especially when parents defy the generational bargain and place their own desires ahead of the needs of their family. This is a risky choice regardless of the family’s social station, as Dickens shows in his portrayal of the large and chaotic Pocket family in *Great Expectations*. Although the Pockets are humbly genteel, the sheer number of Pocket children—Pip says, “I had scarcely arrived at the total [of six little Pockets] when a

seventh was heard . . . wailing dolefully” (147)—serves as a living condemnation of their parents for having broken Malthus’s “first commandment”: to only have as many children as one can afford to raise. Despite their two nurse-maids, the children seem under-supervised and constantly find their way into many scrapes and difficulties, prompting Pip’s comment that they “were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up” (146). The children trip and fall, the nurses trip and fall, Baby Pocket is nearly flung across the room, and all the while Mrs. Pocket ignores everyone and Mr. Pocket can do nothing but sink into a chair “in the attitude of the Dying Gladiator” (153), wholly defeated. His children, his future, are in a constant state of danger, yet his wife does nothing and he, by virtue of the sheer scale of his family, cannot do enough. Dickens relishes the irony of this man who educates others for pay yet cannot properly bring up his own family, and so the irresponsible Malthusian couple—exemplified by the Pockets—is pathologized as dysfunctional and neurotic. This is especially significant because of their pretensions to aristocracy, especially on the part of Mrs. Pocket. An overabundance of children is typically associated with the poor; the middle classes are expected to better control their desires, thus limiting the number of their offspring. Because the Pockets have not been able to do this, and because Mrs. Pocket chooses a life of aristocratic leisure rather than capably managing her large household, the family can only barely maintain their bourgeois status.⁹²

⁹² Dickens creates an earlier incarnation of this attitude in the Jellyby family of *Bleak House*. Mrs. Jellyby is a philanthropist with her sights set constantly on African projects, while Mr. Jellyby is “a non-entity” (48). Between them they have a small crowd of children who are entirely ignored and so are both hapless and starved for affection. The Jellybys can technically afford this large family, but they do not take care of them; the

Yet the over-procreative family is a figure of considerable ambivalence in Dickens's work, simultaneously problematic and sympathetic. Although these families must struggle to survive, they can still reflect the proper liberal values of sympathy and ambition, which means that not every Dickensian example of vigorous reproduction is pathologized. The Cratchits could easily be condemned as over-procreative, since, with six children (and one of them an invalid who cannot even walk unaided), they have clearly grown beyond the father's ability to support them. However, they escape criticism by aligning themselves not with the "wolfishness" of the poor but with the middle-class values of religion, work, and the nuclear family. Catherine Waters notes that the Cratchit family Christmas scene "contains all the essential ingredients for a happy Dickensian home: a clean snug house, a hot fire, good homely food and drink, a bustling little woman superintending the household, and a large number of obedient and well-washed children" (76). Those final terms are crucial. The children are "obedient and well-washed," not "ragged, scowling, wolfish" like Ignorance and Want, which makes the large number of children a blessing rather than a burden. Led by father Bob Cratchit, the liberal subject who weds his (admittedly humble) career with a sentimental family life, the Cratchits refuse, despite their meager circumstances, the allure of *desire*, let alone envy. Though his daughter Martha must go out to work and though Bob Cratchit makes a pittance

children and indeed the entire household are in a state of total chaos. The family's clothes and furniture are shabby and worn, and Mrs. Jellyby's reckless disregard endangers her children's health—one falls down the stairs, another becomes stuck in a railing, and the eldest daughter works so hard as her mother's secretary that her health is compromised (51). In Mrs. Jellyby, as in Mrs. Pocket, Dickens again critiques the careless mother who neglects her duty to the nuclear family; her children, rather than being sentimentalized, are drawn in exaggerated travails that highlight the dangers of a couple reproducing beyond its ability—or desire—to provide.

working for Scrooge, the Cratchits thrill over their shared Christmas dinner, and at its conclusion, “nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family” (81). Instead, their Christmas scene shows a family nourished on that most un-Malthusian meal: love. Not even the foreseen death of Tiny Tim can change their family values, for as Bob reminds them, ““We shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it”” (107). Too, the Cratchits’ poverty does not translate to either idleness or hopelessness; even after Tiny Tim’s death, in Scrooge’s last vision, Bob envisions the family on the rise, expecting that Scrooge’s nephew will find a better position for the eldest son, Peter (106). Ultimately the Cratchits represent capitalism’s best hopes: productive families of docile laborers with enough—just enough—resources to get by, but plenty of hopes for the future.

Other Dickensian families are also able to manage the demands of an overly-large family through sentiment and pursuit of advancement. The Micawbers, from *David Copperfield*, are a family much like the Cratchits in this respect, although Dickens plays upon them for humor rather than feeling. Mr. Micawber, good-hearted but extremely uneven in his personal affect and his worldly effects, bounces from home to home and occupation to occupation throughout the novel in an effort to make a living for his family. His four children would not be considered an outsized family by Victorian standards, but they certainly exceed the father’s ability to support them, thus invoking Malthus’s harsh admonitions about the generational bargain. As if aware of this danger, Dickens highlights the ravenous nature of Micawber’s growing family from the start; his wife is introduced “with a baby at her breast,” one of twins, and Nicholas subsequently remarks,

“I hardly ever, in all my experience of the family, saw both the twins detached from Mrs. Micawber at the same time. One of them was always taking refreshment” (168). Yet the reader is not meant to perceive the Micawber family as close kin of Ignorance and Want. For one thing, they are invoked for comic relief; for another, Micawber’s constant endeavors to find a suitable profession for himself finally pay off, as upon his emigration to Australia he slowly transforms into the “distinguished fellow-colonist and townsman, Wilkins Micawber, Esquire, Port Middlebay Distract Magistrate” (875). One of his sons is revealed to be a gifted singer, and one of his daughters is well-married, thus removing any threat of their joining the ravenous and disaffected masses of the poor.⁹³

It seems, then, that some large Dickensian families act as hothouses of virtue and familial devotion, which neutralizes any threats of Malthusian over-procreation.⁹⁴ In

⁹³ One could make a similar point about the troop of “plump rosy-cheeked wholesome apple-faced” Toodles children in *Dombey and Son* (24), whose readily apparent health undercuts Malthusian warnings of over-procreation. This working-class family represents not Ignorance and Want but familial warmth—Mrs. Toodles arrives as wet-nurse and caretaker for poor Paul Dombey—and future ambitions—Mr. Toodles joins up as an early railroad worker, welcoming in a new era of British commercial expansion. And like Bob Cratchit, *Our Mutual Friend*’s Reginald Wilfer is a good-hearted but shabby clerk of completely “commonplace extraction” with “a limited salary and unlimited family” (31). Despite the snipping and bickering of his wife and daughters, at least one member of the family—his daughter Bella—sees a moral transformation from “wolfishness”—dissatisfaction and desire—to contentment and marital harmony, which sparks an upturn in the fortunes of the entire family.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting that even the least threatening Malthusian families often requires rescue by an outside source, and frequently this rescuer is a “second father” figure, like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* or Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend*. These second fathers informally adopt impoverished young people (Tiny Tim and Bella Wilfer, respectively). Though the adoptions look slightly different in each case, economic power is the defining characteristic of each “second father,” who invests both personal and financial resources in the survival of the next generation but who almost always chooses not to physically reproduce. The biological father, on the other hand, represents reproductive power with

these families, neither of Malthus's two postulata poses any real danger: the parents' sexual urges are contained within the confines of a virtuous family unit, and the need for food is discounted through the Dickensian focus on contentment rather than desire. As Catherine Waters notes, these idealized families set the standard against which all others—those marked by “grotesque failure to exemplify the domestic ideal”—must be measured (27). Eventually these families are rewarded for their desire-less-ness by a move into a more stable middle-class position, and they celebrate this transition with yet more hard work in the public sphere and filial devotion in the private. This is the future promised by the children of the Cratchits and the Micawbers. But the children of the Pockets and the Pirrips are a different matter altogether. Like Ignorance and Want, these children are left to shift for themselves in a world that is often unkind. As they “tumble up”—if they are so lucky—they may acquire any number of undesirable habits; certainly they will not develop the deep family bonds that are so central to the Dickensian vision of England. And this is problematic, because for Dickens, the justification for having many children depends entirely upon who those children will eventually become.

3. Conclusion

Childhood, as a present state that is by definition future-oriented, can symbolize hope. But due to this same allegiance it can also embody threat. Not every child is a draftee in the army of feeling. The familiar face of the Victorian sentimentalized child is

its attendant Malthusian threat. This explains Natalie McKnight's observation of Dickens's “tendency to make his most appealing male parents non-biological fathers” (129).

balanced by the many figures, often rudely sketched or hazily ill-defined, of the child without sentiment. These children are disinterested in improvement; they have no suitably future-oriented ambitions; but most importantly, they are many. Jessica Kilgore reinterprets *A Christmas Carol* to focus on the power of feeling in the text—feeling as a force against encroaching rationalism and political economy, and feeling as an impetus for positive change in individuals and societies. The Child should be—*is*, according to Edelman—the central figure around which these compassionate feelings crystallize. However, the numbers of Victorian children portrayed without hint of sentiment—the rude cottage girls at whom *Jane Eyre* turns up her nose, “wolfish” Ignorance and Want, and the over-large families of mid- and late Dickens—reveal sentiment’s bourgeois foundations. Suffering alone is not enough to create a sentimentalized child; the child also must respond to that suffering in a way that poses no threat to the established order. The sentimentalized child must repulse the strictures of ignorance and want and uphold middle-class values like hard work and the nuclear family.

In my introduction I claim that our cultural construction of childhood rests on two discourses: the economic and the sentimental. Yet these two discourses often rely on a shared value system. As I have shown, we only form sentimental attachments to the virtuously suffering child, not to the ravenously desiring one, and a sentimental child who cannot make his way in the world must himself make way for young people who value ambition and achievement. More than a century after Dickens, children still stand at this crossroads, as our sentimental attachments are built to the blueprint of our economic systems. As we invest in our children—invest our time, our money, our feelings—we

cannot help but reflect both these discourses, crafting appropriate subjects for some imagined future.

6. Coda: A Question of Value(s)

“I can have no confidence in any system of education which is not based on the great doctrines of religion.”
(Earl of Shaftesbury, July 25, 1870)

What is the real source of a child’s value? And what emotional investment does he or she merit as a result? These questions permeate not only literary accounts of childhood but also the distinct historical moments when childhood emerges at the forefront of public interest. One such moment is the passage and implementation of the 1870 Education Act, which provided the structures and funding necessary for universal elementary education in England and Wales. When taken with Malthus’s 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*, the 1870 Act neatly bookends my project here. While Malthus declares the unwise *bearing* of children to be an issue of prime national concern, even a cause of national crisis, the 1870 Education Act identifies the proper *raising* of children as a possible solution. It gives the management of the child’s powers over to the state (rather than the family, who might prefer that their children work instead of study) so that all children can be prepared for the life of a modern working adult. But as we have seen in previous chapters, one cannot address the role of children in society without getting at the key issue of what a society values, and unlike more mundane policy issues, these questions are always fraught with intense feeling.

The bill’s key purpose was to allow all children from ages five to twelve to attend elementary school (22, 66.1). To this end, it provided for the creation of local school boards to establish and maintain sufficient schooling for all children in each parish. Of

course, this bill did not arrive on the scene of an educational vacuum. Many religious schools already provided education to the local populace, and they received state funding to do so. However, under the 1870 Act, if the education of a particular borough was deemed insufficient for the population of young residents, the subsequent establishment of a school board could mean that these religious schools would lose their autonomy. Loyal churchmen feared, under this provision, that school boards would be staffed by “secularists” who would advocate a shift away from religious education. Indeed, the bill already contained the so-called “Conscience Clause,” which stipulated that for a school to be designated “public” and awarded money under the law, “No scholar shall be required . . . to attend or abstain from attending any Sunday school, or any place of religious worship, or to learn any such catechism or religious formulary or be present at any such lesson or instruction or observance as may have been objected to on religious grounds by the parent of the scholar” (3, 7.3). Religious educators saw this as just the first attack in what would soon become a pitched battle for the souls England’s youth.

The fear of encroaching secularism tinged many of the public conversations about the bill. An article from *The Bath Chronicle* on December 1, 1870, reports a local Church of England meeting about the issue of fundraising for church schools in order to keep out a secular school board. Sidney Pike, a local reverend, sums up the heart of the matter in a question that makes a direct link between religious values and economic value: ““Is the sacrifice of the money worth the effort to keep out the secular education party?”” (“Church of England”). This question implies that the worth of England’s religious heritage can be measured in monetary terms; it can be converted into pounds and pence.

And this question was no mere rhetorical device. In many areas educational costs were a serious concern, as parishioners strived to determine how much, exactly, should each parishioner be encouraged to contribute in order to maintain the local church schools.

For many religious Englishmen, the scales balancing spiritual values and material possessions tipped decidedly towards the otherworldly, and the public rhetoric surrounding the issue supported that evaluation. An editor from *The Derby Mercury*, for instance, warns against “the secularists, in terrible earnest” and calls upon “every man who cares in any degree for the future welfare of the country,” “Churchmen and Nonconformists,” to work diligently to “give every child such a sound, religious education as will fit him for the life before him” (“Church Action”). In an even more forceful example, a letter to the editor of *The Standard* objects strenuously to the Bishop of Oxford’s embracing of the 1870 Act, allowing government interference—and thus secularism—to infiltrate church schools. The author, one George A. Dinesen, proposes that the Church,

instead of bartering her principles for State aid, and forsaking her trust, go forth in humble faith in her Divine Master, and undertake the building and maintaining of schools, in which she may, without let or hindrance from civil society, teach her own children . . . the whole truth of God. . . . Indeed, I never heard before that the way to keep a man outside your front door is to let him in at your back door. (5)

As these excerpts make clear, the public did not just view education as a means to improve England’s economic situation (although that certainly played a role—the *Mercury* editor sees even a religious education as a way to “fit” the child for “the life before him”); instead, it is also a question of core values, one that gets at the heart of England’s beliefs about itself. Despite the advocacy of men like the Bishop of Oxford,

many religious Englishmen feared that the Act would encourage secular values in the nations' youth, thus slowly eroding the presumed foundations of England's national character. In these discussions, the students themselves exercise no independent thought or agency; instead, the schools must do the crucial work of filling these empty vessels with the proper religious values. The remaining questions, then, are how to create schools that will fill students with the right ideas and, even more significantly, who will pay for them.

Pragmatically, the realities of creating a program of universal education meant that the creators of the Education Act could not help interpreting childhood as an economic problem to be solved. Scholars typically cite the growing demand, on the part of industrialists and manufacturers, for a more educated workforce as a significant reason for the Act's passage; children who could read and cipher were simply more useful in a modern economy. At other times, vague wishes about the spiritual applications of education run up against the concrete economic forces at work in children's lives. In the House of Lords, the Earl of Shaftesbury merges these seemingly disparate patterns of thought in his July 25, 1870, speech about the bill, questioning the its efficacy on grounds both spiritual and economic. He first describes in detail the difficulty of convincing poor, itinerant students to attend any school on a regular basis, then adds, "It would be a very serious infliction to deprive [poor parents] of the earnings of their children while they would be under the necessity of clothing and feeding them during the time they were being educated" (Elementary Education Bill). A better solution, in his mind, would be to "introduce the factory system, that combination of labour and education" (Elementary

Education Bill). This “combination” would be especially apt because, in Shaftesbury’s view, the great purpose of education (at least for the poor) is to prepare students for a life of work, and some religious instruction is vital to this end:

I can have no confidence in any system of education which is not based on the great doctrines of religion, and which does not impart to the mind of a child a deep sense that it is an immortal and responsible being, that an invisible Eye sees into its inmost heart, and that there will come a day when it must render an account not only of its actions, but also of its thoughts. Idleness is, I believe, ten times more dangerous than ignorance. (Elementary Education Bill)

This last speech, while ostensibly focused on the spiritual basis of education, nonetheless weaves in a practical message. The religious purpose of education, in Shaftesbury’s view, is not to instill in children love, joy, peace, or any of the other spiritual fruits. Instead, it should provide children with a strong sense of conscience—or more sinisterly, of being watched by some exterior “invisible Eye”—in order to avoid “idleness.” Here, then, the religious grounding of education becomes just another inducement to productivity, and the strong feelings of the men I’ve cited might arise as much from class-consciousness as from devotion.

In all the debates over the 1870 Education Act, the children themselves remain in the shadows. What stands at center stage are the national “values,” in both senses of the term, that the law encourages. Should England be secular or religious? And should either religion or secularism be compelled in schools? What kind of education will best support England’s industrial aspirations? What must children know to be effective workers, and what must they believe? Through the 1870 Act, Parliament declared that the value of an educated child easily justified the necessary monetary investment. The public response to this move demonstrates the equally intense emotional investment in childhood as a time

to fix certain belief systems. Paradoxically, these two forms of investment are mutually sustaining, for as the Earl of Shaftesbury's speech shows, feelings (in his case, religious feelings) direct in great degree our economic choices, while economic realities drive our sense of proper feeling. These separate strands can never be fully teased apart.

For the Victorians, childhood condensed these two forces in a particularly powerful way. From the sentimentalized dying children of canonical novels to the boy heroes of adventure tales to the underprivileged children targeted by Parliamentary reforms, the nineteenth century makes one long case study in the ways that emotion can direct economics and, conversely, that economics can direct emotion. In that sense, we can read childhood itself as a site of exchange, a marketplace in which the nation must decide where to invest not only its capital but also its feelings. Although one is not necessarily limited to a fixed budget in an emotional investment ("I have x units of sentiment to invest in the nation's children."), emotional resources, while renewable, are certainly not unlimited. Since profligately expending emotional energy on hopeless causes is dispiriting and ultimately exhausting, one typically invests it only in children where a return seems sure. In the case of the 1870 Education Act, for instance, the nation decides to invest both money (to finance public elementary schools) and emotion (in children as the carriers of national values) in the next generation because of the potential benefits for England's industrial economy and for the nation's self-conception. The Act aims to take Ignorance and Want, those most frightening specters in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, and transform them into literate workers with proper loyalties to family and state.

As it turns out, the most fruitful grounds for these dual investments lie at the intersection of childhood and some core value—especially liberalism, but also middle-class striving and reproductive norms. Paul Dombey and Nell Trent demonstrate the importance of “right” feeling for the liberal subject but also, in evolutionary deference to those who would carry the torch of Britain’s continued economic and imperial might, remove themselves from their respective narratives when their continued existence becomes inconvenient. Investment in these characters promises the emotional return of shared, powerful feeling as well as the practical return of a lesson in liberalism. Similar patterns hold throughout my previous chapters. The suffering children of Chartist poetry make a strong statement about economic inequality while tugging at the readers’ heart-strings. Jack Harkaway and his ilk make for wildly successful boys’ publications while also educating the reader in proper feelings toward friend, foe, and country. Jane Eyre demonstrates two interwoven nineteenth-century values: heart-felt religion as well as the religion of hard work. And the poor children debated in the context of the 1870 Education Act are stand-ins for discussions about Britain’s industrial standing as well as her religious loyalties.

This leads to one final observation about the interlocked nature of feeling and finance. Economic values can embed themselves in anything, including and perhaps most especially in those ideas that are dearest to our heart. This means that our individual feelings—to quote St. John Rivers, our “accomplishments. . . tastes. . . [and] sentiments” (Brontë 303)—are never as private and interior as we might hope. Jane’s own beliefs notwithstanding, they rarely serve to distinguish us from others, for our strong and noble

feelings standing out in stark relief against the impoverished souls around us. Instead, they join us with others in communities of feeling, as shown by the examples of Paul Dombey, Little Nell, and the nameless children of Chartist poetry. Nor are these feelings an independent force. We internalize, and then ourselves circulate, wider social attitudes about others, whether island savages or poor Yorkshire schoolgirls. We invest where there seems to be general agreement that we will see good returns. As the individuals debating England's 1870 Education Act certainly realized, we value what we have been taught to value.

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