

ONLY CONNECTIONS:
THE REPRESENTATION OF COMMUNITY
IN FOUR ENGLISH NOVELS

By
DOUGLAS GORDON GESSELL, M.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

© Copyright by Douglas Gordon Gessell, June 1995

ONLY CONNECTIONS

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1995)
(English)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Only Connections: The Representation of Community in Four English Novels

AUTHOR: Douglas Gordon Gessell, B.A. (University of Alberta)
M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Michael Ross

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 245

Abstract

This dissertation illustrates the changes that have occurred in the representation of community from the publication of Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* in 1742, through Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818) and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), to the appearance of E.M. Forster's *Howards End* in 1910. Using the theories of Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the dissertation argues that not only ideological harmony but also difference — violence, antagonism, the clash of vocabularies — constitute the community. As a result, social and communal space is never, to use the words of Laclau and Mouffe, “fully sutured.” The essential unity for which community strives is perpetually denied. The thesis discusses the solutions each author employs to bridge this fundamental gap and traces the growing awareness of community as an object influenced by difference.

In *Joseph Andrews*, where Fielding attempts to defend the values of a *status quo* corrupted by the elites who most profit by it, the proper community is understood to resist difference. But the actions of the novel's characters, who often take matters into their own hands to establish the communal “law,” tell a different story. Joseph's

and Parson Adams's willingness to employ force to achieve their ends results in a kind of "irregular justice" that overlies community values and demonstrates the need for individual action to maintain that community.

Similarly, Jane Austen regards individual action as necessary for the life of the community. She goes even farther, however, by accepting the implications of this view: that communities are made, not simply inherited. In this way she is more like the Romantics than is generally assumed. George Eliot continues where Austen leaves off. Having assimilated Austen's insight regarding the artificial, fabricated nature of communities, Eliot seeks a method to overcome the disjunction between the ideas of the past and the ideas of the present. She recommends that imagination serve as the individual's tool for smoothing the bumps of disagreements between vocabularies. Maggie Tulliver adopts this advice; the rest of her community does not and fails her as a result.

Finally, *Howards End* presents a community that is entirely self-constructed, one without the tensions suffered in the earlier novels between the established order and individual desire. The novel completes the redescription of community the other novels begin. Forster consequently celebrates difference and attempts to enshrine it by "only connecting" the novel's various vocabularies. If he rightly suggests the degree to which community, as a constructed object, relies on individuals, he perhaps

exceeds his reach by proposing that “connection” somehow escapes ideology. Even so, *Howards End* gathers within itself the concerns of the three previous novels and demonstrates what Rorty, Laclau and Mouffe assert: that community cannot evade the individual’s contribution. The definition of any given community is constantly in play.

Acknowledgments

A dissertation is less the product of two or three years' research and writing than it is a culmination of academic experience. I would like, therefore, to note my sincere appreciation for the advice, instruction and fellowship received and enjoyed throughout my academic career that has made this thesis possible.

I would particularly like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Michael Ross, and my committee members, Dr. Mary O'Connor and Dr. Peter Walmsley, whose patience and comments provided me with invaluable assistance and insight.

I would like to thank as well Dr. David Clark, without whose influence my journey through academia would have been considerably altered and much less rewarding.

I would like to thank all the friends and colleagues with whom I've shared the last few years, and who have made the academic process both rigorous and great fun. There are too many of you now to name, for which I consider myself unaccountably lucky.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest thanks to Nina, who has graciously endured my ill humours, prompted my laughter and broadened my vision. Half my successes I owe to her.

For my parents:
Gordon Alvin Gessell
and
Mary Edna Sawyer Gessell

Table of Contents

Contentious Harmony: Community and Difference	1
“Extraordinary Cases in the Books”: Irregular Justice in <i>Joseph Andrews</i> . .	43
“Anne said what was proper”: Persuasion’s Difference in <i>Persuasion</i>	81
Imagination and the Failure of Community in <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>	137
“The battle against sameness”: Cosmopolitanism and Community in <i>Howards End</i>	188
Works Cited	237

Chapter 1

Contentious Harmony:

Community and Difference

“The existence of violence and antagonism is the very condition of a free society. Antagonism exists because the social is not a plurality of effects radiating from a pregiven center, but is pragmatically constructed from many starting points.”
Ernesto Laclau, “Community and Its Paradoxes,” p. 92

This dissertation illustrates the changes that have occurred in the representation of community from the publication of Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* in 1742, the middle of the Enlightenment, to the appearance of E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* in 1910, roughly the beginning of the modern era. It looks as well at Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818) and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), two novels which reflect changing social circumstances — in Austen’s case, the gradual ascent of Romanticism and the decline of Rationalism; for Eliot, the dislocations and ruptures of the Industrial Revolution. Many of the changes in the representation of community from Fielding to Forster result from technological and economic

development and are fairly straightforward. Forster's motor cars and increasingly wealthy middle classes dictate a kind of community — one of greater breadth and less telic conviction — substantially different from the poorer and more isolated villages with which Fielding is concerned. The particular focus of this thesis, however, is on another alteration in the representation of community, one that is not obvious and which might not have been easily predicted two centuries ago. This alteration is the degree to which difference and division, not just concord and unity, have been recognized as constitutive of the community.

Difference is not always consciously accepted by the authors examined here. Fielding, especially, defends a conservative vision of society which upholds the worthiness of the status quo. Yet his frequent contempt for figures of authority, both secular and spiritual, and his fondness for brawling (an activity highly subversive of traditional order) are tacit admissions of a place for alterity in the community. Both Austen and Eliot emend Fielding's construction of community to allow more individual freedom and to acknowledge the community's mutability. *The Mill on the Floss* is more willing to concede the inevitability of change than it is to trust the change that must come, whereas *Persuasion* assumes the reverse. Anne Elliot only gradually admits the desirability of change, but once she has done so embraces confidently the alternative possibilities available to her. Forster, as might be

expected, is farthest removed from Fielding and knowingly celebrates difference as a positive rather than a negative attribute of the community. He fights a “battle against sameness” and sees unity as the threat of the cosmopolitan automaton, the world “melted down” (*Howards End* 329), rather than as evidence of a society connecting “without bitterness until all men are brothers” (264).

The gradual unfolding of alterity as a component of the representation of community is characteristic of what Richard Rorty would call the development of a new vocabulary. Rather than see human history as a narrative with a fixed teleology, one in which humans are working toward an observable goal such as ultimate truth, he contends that history is a succession of metaphoric redescrptions of our environment. None of these redescrptions is closer to truth than another; they are merely more useful to and better suited for given historical circumstances. Redescrptions are always the product of a dominant vocabulary or mixture of vocabularies. The authors examined here contribute to a vocabulary that enables us to comprehend community in a way different from that to which we are accustomed, even if they were not always fully cognizant of the contribution they were making. As Rorty notes of earlier prominent vocabularies,

Christianity did not know that its purpose was the alleviation of cruelty,
Newton did not know that his purpose was modern technology, the Romantic

poets did not know that their purpose was to contribute to the development of an ethical consciousness suitable for the culture of political liberalism. But *we* now know these things, for we latecomers can tell the kind of story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot. We can view these people as toolmakers rather than discoverers because we have a clear sense of the product which the use of these tools produced. The product is *us* — our conscience, our culture, our form of life. Those who made us possible could not have envisaged what they were making possible, and so could not have described the ends to which their work was a means. But *we* can. (55–6; Rorty's emphasis)

This thesis seeks to explain the toolmakers Fielding, Austen, Eliot and Forster, and to describe the vocabulary to which they contribute. If it succeeds in helping us to understand the changing representation of community through the years as the evolution of a new and more useful vocabulary, only half of its job is accomplished. For in so doing, it should also help us to understand better, at least in some small way, “the product which the use of these tools produced” — ourselves and the communities to which we belong.

II

Community is typically considered “an aggregate of people who share a common interest in a particular locality” (Bender 5), the kind of small town or neighbourhood that probably most immediately comes to mind with reference to the term.

Community is also commonly seen as an ideologically harmonious space where the

concerns of the many take a natural precedence over the disruptions of individual desires. Assumptions of community as a locus of monolithic group identity feed into its myth as a quasi-utopia, one located at an ill-defined place and time when people simply got along better than they do now.¹ Such an ideal notion of community privileges “unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, [and] sympathy over recognition of the limits of one’s understanding of others from their point of view” (Young 300). Community, then, is generally understood to exclude violence and antagonism, the apparent antitheses of shared ideological and geographical spaces.²

¹ If community is considered less prevalent now, it is perhaps because it resembles what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the world of the epic: “a world of ‘beginnings’ and ‘peak times’ in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of ‘firsts’ and ‘bests’” (*The Dialogical Imagination* 13). Substitute “communal” or “family” for national and Bakhtin very nicely captures the typically rose-colored view of the past.

Raymond Williams, in the initial chapters of *The Country and the City*, categorizes the “loss” of community as the byproduct of the fairly constant literary claim — at least through the nineteenth century — that the rural ways have died. As he points out, every generation’s poets and novelists seem to feel that theirs was the last of the truly pastoral times. This is not the effect of simple nostalgia. Williams goes back to Virgil’s *Georgics* to show that the pastoral life there depicted always had some tension — while it was rustic and simple and attractive, it also contained hardship and was not to be mistaken for paradise. Later variations on the pastoral in English literature excised the tension that exists in the *Georgics*, leaving behind little more than sentimentality. Williams’s larger point is that rural ways have always experienced hardship and have always been changing. He feels it is shortsighted to see any one event or generation as the focal point in the change in rural and communal ways. Rural ways may alter, but they do not cease to exist.

² The view that community is a place of harmony, unlike the disunity which characterizes modern urban culture, is perhaps most widely found in contemporary sociology. This view, influential to the point where it has been virtually naturalized as a fundamental component of contemporary knowledge, originated with Ferdinand Tönnies in *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*). The belief in a split between the rural and the urban perhaps reached its peak in another classic sociological treatise, Georg Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” For a history of the scholarship on community see Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. For an attempt to break free of the constraints of sociological dogma regarding community, see Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change*.

The idea of community as a space founded on an originary harmony conforms with “the civic republican view of politics that puts a strong emphasis on the notion of a public good, prior to and independent of individual desires and interests” (Mouffe 71). This view opposes the liberal view that “citizenship is the capacity for each person to form, revise, and rationally pursue his/her definition of the good” (Mouffe 71), but it shares with the liberally-imagined community what Richard Rorty would call a metaphysical provenance. In other words, these competing conceptions of community space are beholden to philosophical beliefs and hinge on esoteric, mystical matters — the definition of truth, for instance. Yet as Rorty says, “the idea that liberal societies are bound together by philosophical beliefs seems to me ludicrous. What binds societies together are common vocabularies and common hopes” (86). He sets forward, in contrast to the usual metaphysical tug-of-war between philosophies, a vision of community which this thesis elaborates, in concert with the theory of hegemony postulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Rorty’s argument, and the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, makes alterity harmony’s co-constituent in the formation of community. Conflict management rather than the absence of conflict correspondingly becomes the determinant of successful social interaction.

The issue of what exactly constitutes community — especially in light of developments in philosophy and literary theory over the past twenty years — has lately elicited a growing critical interest.³ Richard Rorty, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, provide richly suggestive accounts of how we can profitably comprehend community. While Rorty is a pragmatic philosopher and Laclau and Mouffe are “post-Marxists,” their very different writings are united by an anti-essentialist view of the world and a belief that community is constituted by difference. Rorty articulates difference in the community as that which prevents unity between “one’s private ways of dealing with one’s finitude and one’s sense of obligation to other human beings.” That is to say that he thinks the contradiction between private desires and public necessity can never be resolved, which means in turn that we should struggle for “accommodation — not synthesis” (68), a sentiment similar, as we shall see, to one voiced by Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*. Rorty’s appeal for a community conditioned by accommodation is a natural consequence of his liberalism. The liberal utopia he

³ Recent books dealing with community from a postmodernist or poststructuralist perspective include: Dale M. Bauer, *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*; William Corlett, *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*; Miami Theory Collective, ed. *Community at Loose Ends*; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*; and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. This is by no means an exhaustive list. It should also be kept in mind that these books appear against the background of the works of other writers — notably Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, but also postmodernists such as Jean-François Lyotard — which, given their contribution to recent philosophical history, make reexamination of community necessary.

imagines is “one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution, by the free and open encounters of present linguistic and other practices with suggestions for new practice” (60).

Rorty is willing to accept the results of “free and open encounters” between vocabularies, and to rely on persuasion as the sole means by which these open encounters are decided, because of his convincing argument that language, self and community are all contingent constructions. Rather than considering humans as in some indeterminate way fundamentally alike, he contends that they are solely the product of historical circumstances, and thus will differ depending on their position in time and space. Rorty’s take on difference insists “that socialization, and thus historical circumstance, goes all the way down — that there is nothing ‘beneath’ socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human” (Rorty xiii). His idea of difference does not deny the similarities many human beings share; to do so would be to make a truly vacuous claim. It only denies that human beings are in some way essentially all the same, and that this similarity will determine their actions.

Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, writing out of the Marxist tradition, propose an alternative understanding of alterity’s function with regard to community. While they acknowledge the legitimacy of Rorty’s claim that the dispute

between private desire and public necessity is never to be resolved by the philosophical equivalent of science's Grand Unified Theory,⁴ they take issue with his utopian view that "the only important political distinction ... is that between the use of force and the use of persuasion" (84). Ernesto Laclau provides a series of examples to suggest that the dichotomy between force and persuasion is a false one and thus concludes that persuasion "structurally involves force" (Laclau 90).⁵ This conclusion leads him also to question Rorty's privileging of reform over revolution. More specifically, he argues that reforms contain within themselves the violence supposedly limited to revolution: "any reform involves changing the status quo, and in most cases this will hurt existing interests. The process of reform is a process of struggles, not a process of quiet piecemeal engineering" (91). For evidence that reform equals struggle and violence, we need only look to the persuasive reforms enacted by Anne Elliot and Margaret Schlegel. Their alterations result in subtle but inevitable and lasting damage to the established interests.

⁴ "Grand Unified Theory" refers to the goal of many contemporary scientists, Stephen Hawking among them, to reconcile the apparently contradictory theories of quantum physics and relativity.

⁵ Laclau's examples of the force inherent in persuasion take the form of philosophical generalizations. For instance: "I am confronted with the need to choose between several possible courses of action, and the structure of the language game that I am playing is indifferent to them. After having evaluated the situation, I conclude that there is no obvious candidate for my decision but I nevertheless make *one* choice. It is clear that in this case I have repressed the alternative courses of action" (Laclau 89-90). A more concrete example of force's relation to persuasion, however, is one of "somebody who wants to reform herself and decides to suppress a desire — e.g., an alcoholic who decides to stop drinking. From the point of view of the desire there is only repression — that is, force" (89).

The dispute between Laclau and Mouffe and Rorty regarding the way difference works amounts to a fine-tuning of their respective positions and the traditions out of which they write; Laclau himself admits that “I certainly agree with most of Rorty’s philosophical arguments and positions” (Laclau 82). These “philosophical arguments and positions” ask us to remove our idea of community from its familiar surroundings. To put it in Rorty’s terms, he and Laclau and Mouffe offer a vocabulary that challenges the existing, largely sociological, vocabulary now used to describe community. The present vocabulary for community rests on the distinction between community and society formulated by Ferdinand Tönnies over a hundred years ago in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Community and Society*). Briefly stated, Tönnies

uses *Gemeinschaft* to refer to local, organic, agricultural communities that are modeled on the family and rooted in the traditional and the sacred; and *Gesellschaft* to denote urban, heterogeneous, industrial societies that are culturally sophisticated and shaped by the rational pursuit of self-interest in a capitalistic and secular environment. The one signifies “community,” the other “society.” Together they constitute a typology, an ideal construct that boldly outlines prominent tendencies in a class of empirical cases. As ideal types, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are not fully realized by any group; rather, the opposite poles they define are standards by which reality may be described and understood. (Graver 14)

As Christopher Lasch has noted, Tönnies' theory is "less an argument than an appeal to common knowledge" (139), which is perhaps why it has gained such hegemony over the way in which we think of community. "Common knowledge" is, however, the sort of thinking that Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe wish to confute, especially if common knowledge consists of a dialectic between fixed terms. Community is not for these writers organic but constructed; not a question of geography but of recognition; and not opposed to society but coextensive with it. If Tönnies' book "embodied not so much a theory as a mythology of social change" (Lasch 140), Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe in turn set out not to correct that mythology but to rewrite it.

III

Richard Rorty's contribution to the rewriting of the community mythology in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* begins with the notion of an unflagging contingency and proceeds from there to detail the consequences of a world "where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything* — our language, our conscience, our community — as a product of time and chance" (22; Rorty's emphasis). The most obvious result of the de-divinization Rorty calls for is the observation that community is a human construction, dependent on ideological

circumstance and not an organic, naturally occurring phenomenon, a model to which we innately conform. Community possesses nothing that requires us to worship it as an ideal method for maintaining social harmony. It is rather a function of one or more vocabularies, or descriptions of the world, and its strength thus relies on the abilities of those doing the describing. For this reason, among others, the community in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* undergoes a subtle change. Anne Elliot's fresh vision of community, in concert with her ability to articulate that vision, usurps her father's tired attachment to the established social forms. Sir Walter seems incapable of seeing the world without reference to pedigree and breeding, and *Persuasion* quietly argues that such a world view no longer adequately accounts for people like Captain Wentworth and his colleagues, men whose merits are found largely outside their ancestry.

Rorty has two terms for the kind of strength Anne Elliot exhibits. One, borrowed from Harold Bloom, is the "strong poet." The strong poet refers to the person who strives against the influence of her predecessors to realize something genuinely new, to have some effect on the prevailing metaphors we use to describe the world around us. For Bloom the "anxiety of influence" is a condition limited to the literary world, but Rorty expands the term to encompass all sorts of vocabularies. Thus Aristotle, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Einstein are all strong poets because they offered

profound redescriptions of the world which have each in turn been accepted as more or less valid by a larger community. Strong poets may be found in all areas of human endeavour — Martin Luther in theology, for instance, or Jane Goodall in anthropology — but these “poets” will always be exceptional, the rare people who can offer a new description of the world and see it last. They can, moreover, only be known as strong poets well after they introduce their metaphors because it takes time for these metaphors to infiltrate society at large. By the time these metaphors do infiltrate society, they have become literalized — dead metaphors which provide the resistance to another strong poet’s new metaphors.

Rorty’s conception of the strong poet also owes debts to Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. Nietzsche provides the idea that the person most of value is the poet “genius who can say of the relevant portion of the past ‘Thus I willed it’” (Rorty 29) rather than simply say “so it was.” In other words, “to fail as a poet — and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being — is to accept somebody else’s description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations on previously written poems” (28). While Nietzsche’s idea of the strong poet is hugely beneficial to Rorty as a way of accounting for cultural change (since he disqualifies any telic conception of human history), it also possesses the unfortunate disadvantage of assigning a great deal of the world’s population to the category of

“failure.” This is an unappetizing prospect, solved for Rorty by Freud’s understanding of the unconscious as unique to everyone and thus incapable of conformity and dullness:

What makes Freud more useful and more plausible than Nietzsche is that he does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals. For Freud’s account of unconscious fantasy shows us how to see every human life as a poem — or, more exactly, every human life not so racked by pain as to be unable to learn a language nor so immersed in toil as to have no leisure in which to generate a self-description. He sees every such life as an attempt to clothe itself in its own metaphors. (36–7)

We are thus all, according to Rorty, potentially strong poets, people who work to define ourselves against our predecessors and who attempt to create a vocabulary that is our own, not merely borrowed from another.

Rorty’s other term for the kind of strength Anne Elliot exhibits relates to the way he uses Freud to make all of us into poets. This term is the “liberal ironist”; it describes Rorty’s ideal post-metaphysical world citizen. “I borrow,” he writes,

my definition of “liberal” from Judith Shklar, who says that liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do. I use “ironist” to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires — someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. (xv)

The liberal ironist is Rorty's answer to the world's thoroughgoing contingency. He uses "irony" to describe an individual's capacity to hold one set of convictions — a vocabulary — while at the same time realizing these convictions could never be absolute; he qualifies irony with "liberal" because he believes that we must retain a commitment to the democratic principles of a free society.⁶ An individual's strength will be realized, according to Rorty, through the number of vocabularies with which she is familiar, thereby providing her a greater chance of creating a vocabulary that is truly her own. One might thus see why, for example, Anne Elliot is successful in altering her community and Maggie Tulliver is not. Anne realizes, through the examples of the Musgraves and the Crofts and the rest of the navy crew, that alternative, *legitimate* vocabularies exist which may be employed to improve her own

⁶ In so doing Rorty seeks to provide a measure of assurance to those who are uncomfortable with the idea — promulgated by writers such as Derrida, Foucault and other French poststructuralists, though in slightly different ways — that the world lacks a metaphysical foundation. Rorty acknowledges in his introduction that his views are distinctly in the minority and confined generally to the intelligentsia. Theologians or metaphysicians, says Rorty, believe "in an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities. The ironist intellectuals who do not believe that there is such an order are far outnumbered (even in the lucky, rich, literate democracies) by people who believe that there *must* be one. Most nonintellectuals are still committed either to some form of religious faith or to some form of Enlightenment rationalism" (xv). These beliefs offer no difficulty to Rorty because he is not concerned with what is right and what is wrong, but with which descriptions of the world are most useful. For the "ordinary" person, however, who would appear to risk no small measure of metaphysical discomfort and spiritual alienation, Rorty's appeal for a *liberal* irony suggests that our understanding of the material world need change little if at all. Politically, at least, Rorty should not be thought of as any kind of radical.

circumstances.⁷ Maggie, on the other hand, has only fitful exposure to vocabularies different from that with which she is most familiar, and consequently lacks the self-assurance to believe — or confidently disbelieve — that the blandishments of Stephen Guest signal an improvement over the life she has always known.

Before Rorty puts forward his case for liberal irony, however, he first argues that irony or contingency best describes the world. Part one of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* devotes itself to discussion of the contingencies of language, selfhood and community. Rorty uses Ludwig Wittgenstein and, especially, Donald Davidson to assert that language is completely contingent. With Davidson, Rorty “breaks with the notion that language is a *medium* — a medium either of representation or of expression” (10). By medium of expression Rorty means one which “articulates what lies deep within the self”; by medium of representation one that “shows the self what lies outside it” (11). Choosing to view language as something other than a medium — to view it as what Wittgenstein would call a grammar or a tool — allows Davidson and Rorty to “set aside the idea that both the self and reality have intrinsic natures, natures which are out there waiting to be known” (11).

⁷ Anne and other characters in Austen’s novels would presumably be aware of what they consider to be illegitimate vocabularies — those of differing religious viewpoint, for instance. *Persuasion* is significant because it concedes that vocabularies might compete for attention. The novel thereby recognizes that in choosing one vocabulary one need not consign all others to the realm of the false. In other words, the novel no longer accepts a simple true/false, legitimate/illegitimate dichotomy but provides room to choose between alternatives.

If languages (or vocabularies⁸) should be viewed as alternative tools rather than as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which we attempt to fit together to discover a particular *telos*, the question arises of how we are to justify our activities if not by claiming that what we do fits better with some objective measure outside us. Rorty answers this question in several ways. He begins by arguing that because there is no Truth to be found, all that exists are more or less acceptable descriptions of the world. These descriptions are more or less acceptable because other people find them useful, not because they are more *right* than others. This situation is admittedly relativistic, but to see it as relativistic is to concede the appropriateness of the vocabulary of metaphysics. Rather than acknowledge the legitimacy of the vocabulary he disputes, Rorty prefers to follow the example of “strong philosophers — people like Hegel and Davidson, the sort of philosophers who are interested in dissolving inherited problems rather than in solving them” (20). To that end, then, Rorty agrees with Davidson’s view that “new metaphors are causes, but not reasons, for changes of belief” (50), and with Mary Hesse’s observation that scientific revolutions are “‘metaphoric redescriptions’ of nature rather than insights into the intrinsic nature of

⁸ “Vocabularies” is perhaps more accurate because it reduces confusion between terms and permits us to imagine the different registers within national languages. Rorty is much less concerned with language as a national characteristic than he is with the metaphors of description that languages of “thought” — of science, religion, art, ethics, etc. — bring to bear on the world. The concepts and metaphors embodied by the Enlightenment, for instance, interest Rorty more than how various national languages compete with each other. Rorty’s conception of vocabularies may of course be favourably compared with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism.

nature" (16). He continues on to conclude that "if one grants these claims, there is no such thing as the 'relativist predicament,' just as for someone who thinks that there is no God there will be no such thing as blasphemy" (50).

Rorty clearly thinks that there is no God, or at least no God that we do not ourselves define. As a result, he replaces the metaphysical idea of human history as a search for Truth or a progress to a defined end (heaven, for instance) with "a sense of human history as the history of successive metaphors." This endless succession of changing vocabularies does not mean that there is no truth, but that truth is found in the comparison of "languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called 'fact'" (20). This evaluation of truth squares with Rorty's ideal liberal society, for

it is central to the idea of a liberal society that, in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes. This open-mindedness should not be fostered because, as Scripture teaches, Truth is great and will prevail, nor because, as Milton suggests, Truth will always win in a free and open encounter. It should be fostered for its own sake. *A liberal society is one which is content to call "true" whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be.* (51–2; Rorty's emphasis)

This discussion of Truth and philosophical objectivity may seem to take us a fair distance from considerations of community, but it is precisely Rorty's point to

suggest that we can remove the traditional foundations of our culture and still maintain community and solidarity. Community, he argues, is our responsibility; it is not there to be found but must be created. We provide our own foundations, and if they are not eternal, guaranteed by some agency beyond language, they do still offer sufficient support to ensure that the community will flourish.

Even so, the lack of any one truth may seem to make quaint the notion of morality. Rorty borrows from Michael Oakeshott an answer regarding how we can refrain from embracing private pleasures to the exclusion of all else:

We can keep the notion of 'morality' just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language. We can keep the morality-prudence distinction if we think of it not as the difference between an appeal to the unconditioned and an appeal to the conditioned but as the difference between an appeal to the interests of our community and the appeal to our own, possibly conflicting, private interests. (59)

Apart from defining the limits of morality, this statement makes explicit Rorty's view that community is a function of shared vocabulary. Introduction into one vocabulary ensures that you share with a certain number of other people some basic precepts.

The important figures to Rorty, the strong poets, are special because they make their own vocabularies rather than simply accepting the ones to which they are

introduced. This feat makes them ironists, people who are able to understand — at least to some degree — that vocabularies are relative to each other, not static and unchanging. It is the purview of the liberal ironist, Rorty says, to understand many vocabularies, even if she cannot necessarily create her own: “The ironist takes the words which are fundamental to metaphysics, and in particular to the public rhetoric of the liberal democracies, as just another text, just another set of little human things. Her ability to understand what it is like to make one’s life center around these words is not distinct from her ability to grasp what it is like to make one’s life center around the love of Christ or of Big Brother. Her liberalism does not consist in her devotion to those particular words but in her ability to grasp the function of many different sets of words” (93–4).

To be a liberal ironist is always to be choosing, for one is always aware of another vocabulary and wondering whether or not it is better, wondering whether or not it suits one more comfortably than one’s present vocabulary. Anne Elliot is thus an ironist, though not always conscious of her ironism, for she must choose between the vocabulary of the gentry into which she was born and the vocabulary of the bourgeois navy which promises an alternate — and, to her mind, superior — ordering of society. Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End* more closely resembles Rorty’s idea of the liberal ironist, no doubt partially because she so well epitomizes

Forster's own liberalism. She, too, faces choices between the unseen and the seen, between the virtues of country and city. These choices are made more difficult because of their contingency — Margaret recognizes that no one of them is right when “it takes all sorts to make a world” (112) — but they are valid choices nonetheless, in no way disqualified because they lack the surety of the absolute.

The person who often chooses differing vocabularies — Joyce's Stephen Dedalus is one example; Forster's Rickie Elliot of *The Longest Journey* another — will flit among various communities in search of a home. Someone who chooses once or never chooses at all, on the other hand, one who simply accepts whatever community he or she was first introduced to (or socialized by), will obviously never change. If life as Rorty envisions it changes from a condition where people seek truth, or at least agree to be educated by people who seek truth, to one where they simply shop for suitable ideologies, there would appear to be a real danger of anarchy, or even triviality. The traditional foundations of religion or metaphysics are no longer as certain as once they were or seemed to be, and it is easy to imagine people everywhere blithely choosing among vocabularies and never settling on any of them. Chaos of this sort could only be of dubious benefit to society. Rorty anticipates this objection, and suggests that art — and especially novels — can provide the guidance once offered by theology. Novels present other communities and other situations,

many of which are attractive in various ways and consequently do attract adherents. Readers who adopt the vocabulary of a particular novelist or a particular represented community do so because they believe that this vocabulary is better — not better in regard to “reality,” but better to themselves. Novels also warn readers of the risks of certain ideologies which are undeniably tempting on the surface but problematic in their implications. Dickens, for example, often does an excellent job of stripping seemingly attractive ideologies down to their ugly core.

By contrast with the public benefits to be reaped from novels, philosophy is now, according to Rorty, an essentially private matter. This reversal is more than a little ironic since novels have so often been regarded as a strictly private pleasure. While recent influential philosophers such as Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida are to Rorty of little political use, they are important for the ways in which they aid individual self-realization. Public, political guidance must come from the realm of art because art is where vocabularies intersect and compete among each other. This makes literary critics the trusted “moral advisers, simply because such critics have an exceptionally large range of acquaintance. They are moral advisers not because they have special access to moral truth but because they have been around. They have read more books and are thus in a better position not to get trapped in the vocabulary of any single book” (80–1). Rorty sees accepting the advice of literary

critics regarding more or less profitable vocabularies as a good thing because it helps the ironist become the best person he or she can be. But novels are not limited to vocabularies and ideologies that reflect only on the individual person. They are of course much concerned with social matters as well, with the way in which individuals fit with the society around them. For this reason figures such as Anne Elliot and Maggie Tulliver take on a greater importance. They are pivotal figures in the recent Western narrative of the changing community, figures from whom readers may, as Rorty suggests, learn a great deal about the ways vocabularies and communities work.

Suggesting that art be the moral guide for Western civilization is hardly new, of course; Percy Shelley said the same nearly two hundred years earlier. The suggestion is provocative, however, and, given Rorty's initial premise that the twin events of the French Revolution and Romanticism have made the world what it is today, logical. But logic is not Rorty's goal, especially insofar as logic is thought to relate to the external world of "fact" or "reality."⁹ He would rather see argument and debate as

⁹ "The metaphysician thinks that there is an overriding intellectual duty to present arguments for one's controversial views — arguments which will start from relatively uncontroversial premises. The ironist thinks that such arguments — logical arguments — are all very well in their way, and useful as expository devices, but in the end not much more than ways of getting people to change their practices without admitting they have done so" (Rorty, *Contingency* 78).

conversation, communities and vocabularies as perpetually unfinished narratives.¹⁰ This quality of incompleteness is precisely what Rorty shares with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They also regard community as subject to “continuous redefinition” (*Hegemony* 144), an object without fixed limits and composed by difference. Where Rorty sees difference as “alternative,” however, Laclau and Mouffe are unafraid to think of it as antagonism. And while it may at first seem paradoxical to consider antagonism constitutive of community, the conflict-ridden examples of *Joseph Andrews*, *Persuasion*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Howards End* suggest otherwise. Conflict lies at the ever-shifting heart of community.

IV

Conflict can be found at the heart of Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s analysis of society, as well. In a phrase revealing of his Marxist origins, Laclau states that “any reform involves changing the status quo, and in most cases this will hurt existing interests. The process of reform is a process of struggles, not a process of quiet piecemeal engineering. And there is here nothing to regret” (“Community” 91). The text for which Mouffe and Laclau are best known is *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Its “principal conclusion is that behind the concept of ‘hegemony’ lies

¹⁰ For more on Rorty’s philosophical technique as conversation and narrative, see Michael S. Roth’s review of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

hidden something more than a type of political relation *complementary* to the basic categories of Marxist theory. In fact, it introduces a *logic of the social* which is incompatible with those categories” (3). The book goes on to explicate the history of hegemony as a concept basic to Marxist practice before describing how hegemony is a social “fact” quite independent of Marxism. “Fact” is here placed in quotation marks because Mouffe and Laclau, like Rorty, wish to make plain the contingency of their ideology.¹¹ They are very much in sympathy with Rorty’s view of a contingent and post-metaphysical world. Though Laclau’s discussion of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* in “Community and Its Paradoxes” accuses Rorty of insufficient theorizing in a couple of key areas, he nonetheless agrees with Rorty’s broader claims. Laclau and Mouffe are committed to what they call “radical democracy,” essentially an extension of the liberalism Rorty propounds. As a result, one might say — as Rorty does of Jürgen Habermas — that their differences with Rorty are “merely

¹¹ Mouffe and Laclau state their view of contingency explicitly: “Let us first say that there is not *one* discourse and *one* system of categories through which the ‘real’ might speak without mediations. In operating deconstructively within Marxist categories, we do not claim to be writing ‘universal history’, to be inscribing our discourse as a moment of a single, linear process of knowledge. Just as the era of normative epistemologies has come to an end, so too has the era of universal discourses. Political conclusions similar to those set forth in this book could have been approximated from very different discursive formations — for example, from certain forms of Christianity, or from libertarian discourses alien to the socialist tradition — none of which could aspire to be *the* truth of society” (3). The similarity to Rorty’s thinking is here, I think, obvious. Of course, such views place Mouffe and Laclau outside of conventional Marxist thought, a fact for which they have been upbraided in reviews of their work. “But,” as they say, “if our intellectual project in this book is *post-Marxist*, it is evidently also *post-Marxist*” (4).

philosophical" (67). In other words, they agree politically on what it is they wish to achieve. They disagree in how best to achieve it.

The differences between Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe reveal themselves in the latter's insistence that community — the preserve of the harmonious — depends on conflict and antagonism for its success. They argue that the fabric of society is made up of many "nodal points" or "partial fixations" which provide a relative sort of ground for citizens to stand on:

The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations — otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society*, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre.¹² We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*. (112)

¹² The idea that all discourse attempts to dominate the field of discursivity is an idea to which Rorty pays comparatively little attention. He assumes instead that vocabularies of all kinds are more or less equally accessible. But Maggie Tulliver's difficulty in discovering a vocabulary with which she can feel entirely comfortable suggests that the dominant vocabulary one is surrounded by — in Maggie's case, the beliefs and values of Aunt Glegg and her sisters — can interfere with an individual's choice of another, alternate vocabulary. It is perhaps safer to say, as would Laclau and Mouffe, that any vocabulary which manages to construct for itself some kind of centre will display some resistance to its usurpation.

These nodal points or social identities in turn become “the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic” (138). The ability of society and its component nodal points to include within themselves their polar opposites is what Mouffe and Laclau call hegemony. Speaking of the curious dynamic between force and persuasion that sees force as essential to its apparent counterpart, Laclau says that “there is a name in our political tradition that refers to this peculiar operation called persuasion, which is constituted through the inclusion, within itself, of its violent opposite: this name is ‘hegemony’” (“Community” 93).

Hegemony, then, is Laclau’s and Mouffe’s idea of how society works: it “is, quite simply, a political *type of relation, a form*, if one so wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within a topography of the social” (*Hegemony* 139). It is neither to be feared nor unduly respected, just understood as one of the primary mechanisms by which society attempts to gain the closed, “fully-sutured” status that Mouffe and Laclau claim it can never achieve. Because they agree with philosophers such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida who “have insisted on the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings,” they abandon “the premise of ‘*society*’ as a sutured and self-defined totality” (111). To say that society must be unsutured is to say that it cannot stand alone — it will always draw some of its meaning from what positively lies outside it.

The same holds true for community. Laclau and Mouffe use the terms society and community virtually interchangeably because community is to them first of all *social*. Society and community are parts of the same phenomenon, governed by shared principles of social interaction. Community and society are not the same, but they *work* in the same way. They are thus not opposed to each other but differ primarily according to size. The community is a generally smaller version of the society, its limits defined by what is knowable or recognized. The knowable community is, as Raymond Williams has remarked, “a matter of consciousness” (166): “what is knowable is not only a function of objects — of what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers — of what is desired and needs to be known” (165). Geography can be a measure of community, as in *Joseph Andrews*, where the social organization of the village around the Booby country seat defines the limits of what is known and what not. More often, however, geography’s contribution to the definition of community is uncertain. In *Persuasion*, for instance, as in all of Austen’s fiction, geography is of little consideration. The status of “neighbour” relies on class, not proximity. In *Howards End*, on the other hand, Forster employs geography — specifically Howards End and the countryside — to fashion a liberal definition of community which depends solely on the individual’s

imagination. Community is not limited according to place in *Howards End* but consists simply of those who the Schlegels determine are important to them.

Sociological attempts to distinguish between community and society have until now amounted to little more than imposed narratives of the sociologist's devising. The most obvious of these is Tönnies' view of the opposition between community and society, but the early sociologist Georg Simmel had a similar view of community as a rural phenomenon inhibited by the dehumanizing environment of the metropolis.¹³ At the end of a chapter on "The Sociological Tradition and the Idea of Community," one which finds sociological approaches to community wanting, Christopher Lasch writes that

a serious attempt to bring about a renewal of our political life will have to ... abandon the whole concept of 'community,' along with the discourse in which it has traditionally grown up — the discourse of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, 'tradition' and modernity — and strike out in a new direction. (166–7)

This need to strike out in a new direction is precisely what Laclau and Mouffe accomplish, in part because they too write in hope of bringing about "a renewal of

¹³ See Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life." For a similar and equally influential argument that essentially reiterates Simmel's ideas some three and a half decades later, see Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life." For a history of sociological approaches to community, see Bender, *Community and Social Change in America*, and Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics*.

our political life.” If they do not exactly abandon the concept of community, they demonstrate how community and society work according to similar principles and how we need no longer vex ourselves with fruitless searches after community’s identity.

If community and society are so obviously similar, it follows then that what Laclau and Mouffe say about one applies to the other. This is an important affirmation because demonstrating conflict within society is not difficult, where ideologies are painted in broad strokes and are thus easy to determine. Communities may act as nodal points in society — partial fixations — but they do so only relative to the broader society itself. Their status as nodal points does not give them any inherent fixity of meaning. Communities are just as much prey to the divisions and conflict that characterize society. These divisions, however, tend to be of a more subtle nature, perhaps because the community’s status as nodal point disguises ideological deviations in much the same way the sun’s brightness hides the chaos at its surface. Because communities are smaller and composed of a restricted range of ideologies compared to society, conflicts will be found more at the level of individuals and families than at that of identifiable social groups. Distinctions may be fine, but no community escapes difference.

In fact, the boundaries of society, insofar as they can be discovered, are represented by antagonism:

Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of objectivity are *shown* — in the sense in which Wittgenstein used to say what cannot be *said* can be *shown*. But if, as we have demonstrated, the social only exists as a partial effort for constructing society — that is, an objective and closed system of differences — antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the ‘experience’ of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not *internal* but *external* to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself. (125)

One should not take this quotation to mean that conflict exists in the interstices between various self-contained and unified communities. Such a mistake is easily made if one fails to keep in mind that what applies to Laclau’s and Mouffe’s idea of society applies as well to community. Antagonism is not external to society as a broadly defined whole; it is not external to, say, nationally defined cultures or social groups. Rather, antagonism is external to the social as such. The social ceases to be the social at the point of antagonism. This holds true for community as much as for society, and we can thus say that antagonisms constitute the limit of community. Without them there is no community, just as there can be no community without some agreement. But we must be more precise: antagonisms are not easily defined

and categorized in such a way that one may pronounce with confidence the limit of community: “they believe this and we believe that, and so we know the community.”¹⁴ On the contrary, community will be composed of a play of antagonisms at all times, a perpetual push and pull between agreement and difference, between harmony and discord which means, on the one hand, that community is never fully *defined* (there is no kernel of community that rests safe within the conflicts at its periphery); and which means, on the other hand, that the shape of community will never be symmetrical (community will always show up in odd places and spaces because of its constant redefinition). Community cannot be *assumed*; it must be renegotiated every day. It is not self-evident, and it will not reward those who are unwilling to work to understand how its limits will change or how its antagonisms will differ.

Since antagonism prevents society from becoming what it wishes to be — that is, complete unto itself — it plays a role in the “continuous redefinition of the social and political spaces and those constant processes of displacement of the limits constructing social division, which are proper to contemporary societies” (144). The fact that society perpetually reinvents itself may not seem like news. Each of the

¹⁴ Thomas Bender notes that “when a scholar undertook in 1955 to inspect and compare the definitions of community used in the literature of the social sciences, he found no fewer than ninety-four meanings given to the term” (5).

novels examined in this thesis, after all, is testament to the necessary changes communities and societies undergo as they seek a more permanent configuration that will forever escape them. What is new, however, in Laclau's and Mouffe's theory is that antagonism is a perpetual condition of society, not one that is limited to the convulsions and revolutions of orthodox Marxism.

Ernesto Laclau expands upon the issue of antagonism and community in "Community and Its Paradoxes." While the article accords with most of Rorty's assertions, Laclau states that Rorty's "notion of 'liberal utopia' presents a series of shortcomings that can be superseded only if the liberal features of Rorty's utopia are reinscribed in the wider framework of what Chantal Mouffe and I have called 'radical democracy'" ("Community" 83).¹⁵ The primary consequence of reinscribing Rorty within the terms of radical democracy follows from Laclau's questioning of the persuasion/force opposition. "The radical democratic 'utopia' that I would like to counterpose to Rorty's liberal one," says Laclau, "does not preclude antagonisms and social division but, on the contrary, considers them as constitutive of the social" ("Community" 91). Two "paradoxes of community" stem from Laclau's radical democratic project. One "paradox of a free community: that which constitutes its

¹⁵ Allan C. Hutchinson, in "The Three 'Rs': Reading/Rorty/Radically," approaches Rorty's argument from a very similar direction. Like Laclau, he believes that Rorty's argument is more valuable when it is freed from the constraints of liberal politics.

condition of impossibility (violence) constitutes at the same time its condition of possibility” (“Community” 92). Questioning Rorty’s seemingly firm distinction between the private and the public — one very necessary to Rorty because it allows the community to consider “dangerously” apolitical philosophies to be strictly of private benefit — leads Laclau to a second paradox. This paradox stems precisely from Laclau’s understanding that there are multiple public spaces opposing the private realm, not a single, neatly-defined bifurcation:

I see the *strength* of a democratic society in the multiplication of these public spaces and its *condition* in the recognition of their plurality and autonomy. This recognition is based on the essential *discontinuity* existing between those social spaces, and the essential character of these discontinuities makes possible its exact opposite: the contingent-hegemonic articulation among them in what could be called a global sense of community, a certain democratic common sense. We see here a second paradox of community: it has to be *essentially* unachievable to become pragmatically possible. (“Community” 95)

Laclau concludes by reiterating that antagonism is central to the successful society that wishes to free itself as far as possible from unnecessary violence:

Despite the plurality of these [public] spaces, or, rather, as a consequence of it, a diffuse democratic culture is created, which gives the community its specific identity. Within this community, the liberal institutions — parliament, elections, division of powers — are maintained, but these are *one*

public space, not *the* public space. Not only is antagonism not excluded from a democratic society, but it is the very condition of its institution.
 ("Community" 96)

Laclau's insistence on the constitutive role violence and conflict play in community is of course counter to established thinking on the subject, which considers community a stable and well-ordered refuge from the world's larger ills. Analysis of community tended until recently, especially in the discipline of sociology, to wonder why community no longer existed. Community was thought to be part of a dialectic that opposed it to society, and since society was demonstrably multifarious it was not perhaps unfair to ask where community had disappeared to. The value of Rorty, Mouffe and Laclau is that they demonstrate that community has never disappeared. A way of life may have disappeared — the bucolic idyll found in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* which is so often associated with community, for instance — but community still exists. As Martin Buber writes,

The question is rather one of openness. A real community need not consist of people who are perpetually together; but it must consist of people who, precisely because they are comrades, have mutual access to one another and are ready for one another. A real community is one which in every point of its being possesses, potentially at least, the whole character of community. The internal questions of a community are thus in reality questions relating to its own genuineness, hence to its inner strength and stability. (145)

Buber would assume that community could very well be “fully sutured,” but his point that it consists of people who have “mutual access to one another” holds force nonetheless. Community requires none of the usual attributes ascribed to it: “‘shared understandings and a sense of obligation’; ‘intimate, and usually face to face relationships’; an emphasis on ‘affective or emotional ties’ as opposed to self interest” (Lasch 166). It needs only people who are “ready for one another,” people involved in a relationship of “knowability” which allows them to recognize each other. This “knowability” is the difference between Austen and Forster, for example. Both communities are limited not just in who or what is known, but in who they are *willing* to know. Forster simply presents a community which imposes fewer conditions than does that of Austen.

As this thesis will argue, community is a two-part construction. On the one hand, it includes the known — those familiar people, customs and institutions which structure our lives and which manifest our shared vocabularies. On the other hand, community is also about the possibility of knowing, the willingness to know, which presumes difference. It requires the *individual's* contribution — his or her understanding — to make community complete, whether that contribution is subsumed within the irregular justice advocated in *Joseph Andrews*, the persuasion of *Persuasion*, the imagination of *The Mill on the Floss* or the “unseen” world of *Howards*

End. The known and concretely shared portion of community is not the end; it is merely the start because the known must always be interpreted by the individuals who form the community. Each of the novels examined in this thesis demonstrates — not always consciously — that its vision of community remains unfinished unless it takes into account the conflicts and antagonisms which help to structure the various vocabularies of community on an on-going basis. In other words, community is not simply a place even if it is often identified with one. It is a vocabulary or practice which comprises both commonality and the difference which shapes that commonality. Otherwise community is merely a monolithic set of assumptions which will not admit alteration. If that were the case, community would be dead. More precisely, it would never have lived at all.

V

The preceding pages can offer only a brief introduction to the theories of Rorty and Mouffe and Laclau. I hope, however, that this introduction stands as an example of an alternate way of thinking of community.¹⁶ The need for an acceptable alternative is readily apparent given the spirit of nostalgia that seems a permanent

¹⁶ With Rorty, I do not wish to fall into the trap of claiming that these theorists or my interpretation of them constitutes the “right” way of viewing community, or even a better way in comparison with some objective standard. Instead, I have tried “to make the vocabulary I favor look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics” (*Contingency* 9). The “proof” of my vocabulary, and any success in my efforts, will depend on my readings of the novels themselves.

side-effect of industrial, capitalist societies. The constant impression, identified by Raymond Williams, that simpler times — rural and communal in nature — are a thing of the past leads often to the conclusion that community no longer exists. Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe help correct that impression by acknowledging the contribution difference makes to the community. Equally importantly, they affirm community and the social bonds it necessarily implies at a time when influential post-structural and post-modernist thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault have increasingly challenged social structures generally. Because Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe are themselves within the post-structuralist current, their work provides a welcome counterpoint to those critics who consider much literary theory an unwholesome attack on established verities. While Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe may deconstruct our conventional notions of community, they certainly do not destroy them. And insofar as community is popularly believed to have disappeared, they substantiate community's continuing relevance.

If Rorty, Laclau and Mouffe demonstrate that community still exists — even prospers — in a literary philosophical milieu which tends to throw doubt on matters such as communal bonds, the four novels examined in this thesis provide examples of the practices which encourage community to flourish. While George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is recognized to be sensationally preoccupied with community, each of

the novels discussed in this thesis is written in and documents a time of social change. For Fielding, social tension consists of the battle between established, Church-sponsored hierarchy and the rising, individualistic commercial ethic. Austen's society confronts an individualism in full flower which gives birth to Romanticism and bids a slow goodbye to the eighteenth-century notions of order typified by Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*. George Eliot, of course, writes in *The Mill on the Floss* of a society approaching the divisions and dislocations prompted by the Industrial Revolution. Finally, the society of Forster's *Howards End* struggles with liberalism's apparent successor, the impersonal, imperialist forces of the metropolis.

These novels are not always so clearly socially-oriented as, say, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*. But they do all appear at signal moments of our recent history when choices have been or were about to be made that would profoundly influence the shape of the Western societies we recognize today. Furthermore, even if these novels have no overt agenda or message regarding communal change, they nonetheless say a great deal about the politics of the time in which they are written. *Persuasion* clearly falls into this category, especially considering the fact that Austen was for so long thought to be entirely uninterested in political questions, but the same could be said of *Joseph Andrews*, which is more remarked upon for its comedy and contribution to the novel as a genre than for its social analysis. By examining the choices made by

communities in times of social upheaval we will better understand how those communities retained continuity even though they experienced great change. One of the arguments of this thesis is that community continuity is not ensured by considering difference an external threat the community periodically encounters and attempts to subdue. On the contrary, difference is always within the community. The community's familiarity with difference enables it to cohere.

Ultimately, the theories of Rorty, Laclau and Mouffe, combined with the novels of Fielding, Austen, Eliot and Forster, work to demonstrate an alternate way of imagining community at those times of social division when an alternative seems most necessary. I hesitate to say that the theories of Rorty and Laclau and Mouffe represent entirely *new* ways of viewing community. Rorty says early in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that we only know of changes in vocabulary — for instance, the shift to a Romantic conception of the artistic self — well after the fact because we have to wait for new metaphors to become literalized. It stands to reason, then, that the view of community outlined in this chapter comes from the analysis of the practice of community over time. I mean to suggest by this that each of the writers this thesis looks at explores some fundamental questions of community — what it is, where it is located, how it accounts for difference and conflict — without the benefit of having theorized community in the ways that Rorty and Mouffe and Laclau do.

These thinkers see community as in some sense comprised by the very questions the novelists address. If community is in part about choosing between competing vocabularies, Jane Austen sets Anne Elliot to that task without first knowing that choosing is part of community. And if community is about demarcating space, be it geographical or intellectual, E.M. Forster approaches that topic without intending to define community. In other words, each of these writers is in his or her way one of Rorty's strong poets. Their strength will undoubtedly surface in the arguments their novels make most compelling.

Other facets of the work of the theorists I discuss here will make themselves apparent as the thesis progresses. It will be impossible, for instance, not to give closer attention to Laclau's examination of the persuasion/force dichotomy in my own reading of Austen's *Persuasion*. The linguistic battle within which Maggie finds herself in *The Mill on the Floss* as she attempts to discover a vocabulary better suited to her interests demonstrates the imperative of any given vocabulary to dominate the discourses around it. In addition to any specific use of the various theories of community I will employ in concert with each other, I hope always to remind the reader that every community is a site of conflict, and every vocabulary another way of dealing with that conflict. Community is not about the happiness and contentment that literary characters often remember as part of their past rather than

correspondent with their present. It is instead about the management of the conflict that goes hand in glove with the harmony of community, and about drawing happiness and contentment from the conflict that one might first expect would deny it.

Chapter 2

“Extraordinary cases in the books”:

Irregular Justice in *Joseph Andrews*

According to the typology of community and society established by Ferdinand Tönnies, Henry Fielding is not an author whom readers would normally associate with ideas of community. In contrast to Samuel Richardson’s fetishistic approach to the private lives of his characters, Fielding is remembered for his attention to society. The broad life of the nation, not the closely-scrutinized lives of a few people, captured Fielding’s interest; as he states in the introduction to *Tom Jones*, one which could preface all his works, “the Provision then which we have here made is no other than HUMAN NATURE” (26). Each of the major genres to which he contributed — drama, novel and political essay — testifies to his urge to examine society and improve it. Fielding believed that English society faced severe difficulties: the gradual decay of a proper Christian morality, especially as it regards charity and good works; the debasement of language and the attendant erosion of principles it should

describe; the plight of the poor; and the ravages of the lawless, to name only a few.¹

From Fielding's perspective, no one is immune to the consequences of these problems. As a result, he directs his writing to all types of people, and he bases his comic theory on the view that he describes "not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species" (*Joseph Andrews* 189).

Such an estimation corresponds naturally with a belief in the homogeneity of societies, and of English society specifically, notwithstanding its evident class differences. Whatever is wrong with society must therefore be addressed at the level of society because change or remedy anywhere means change or remedy everywhere. Fielding views society in profoundly national terms, a disposition he shares with many eighteenth-century writers. While the twentieth century has tended to equate England with Britain, and now speaks of the "world community" and the "global village," the eighteenth century maintained firm distinctions between England and her closest neighbours. The Irish particularly were considered foreigners — note the example of Foigard in Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem*, considered so effectively alien that for most of the play he impersonates a French priest, or the difficulties experienced by Dr. Swift in attaining the clerical status he cherished. Sterne's *A*

¹ Glenn Hatfield's *Fielding and the Language of Irony* offers a useful analysis of Fielding's view of the debasement of language. Not everyone, however, agrees that Fielding's novels engage in a meaningful way with social issues. Malvin R. Zirker argues the contrary in *Fielding's Social Pamphlets*, explaining the disjunction in tone he sees between Fielding's pamphlets and his novels by claiming that Fielding manipulates the novels to avoid social issues.

Sentimental Journey through France and Italy explains differences in customs on a strictly national level, while Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* focuses on the national differences between Scotland and England.

Fielding's macroeconomical approach to social ills is rooted in his position within the tradition of humanist discourse (where humanism is understood as an interest in the human race, not individuals). Although he has more in common with latitudinarian divines² than with writers such as Shaftesbury or Berkeley, like them he sees society as a "body" politic. Humanist writers of the eighteenth century (as opposed to writers exemplifying the bourgeois ethics that would help to sponsor liberalist thinking) were fond of metaphors that considered society a "body" where damage (or benefit) to any one part would be realized throughout the whole. Thus in Fielding's *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robbers*, "the problems posed by robbers are presented in the context of a discussion of the nature of the constitution, which reveals all the traditional humanist preoccupations with the health and moral well-being of the body politic" (Copley 11). With this metaphor and that which compares the world to the theatre (a commonplace throughout his fiction), Fielding asserts that society is best understood as a whole — breaking it up into its constituent parts is not a useful exercise because the parts of society cannot

² For more on Fielding's religious opinions — specifically his affinity with latitudinarianism — and the way in which they influence his fiction, see Martin Battestin's *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*.

work on their own. He makes no distinction between community and society as social units with separate ideologies, nor does he think society to be a collection of differing communities. To speak of one is to speak of the other. Fielding does distinguish between city and country, but the distinction serves to emphasize the nation's ideological bifurcation, a split that should not exist. While he thinks the city should re-embrace the values of the country, values the city has forgotten, he fears that the country will be corrupted by London's many vices.

While social interdependence was an important concept to humanist writers, they believed that this interdependence required some guidance, a brain to direct the motions of the constitutional body. The obviously hierarchical nature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English society was thus insisted upon by humanist writers worried about the pace of social change.³ Though humanist writers such as Steele, Berkeley and Shaftesbury all wrote well before the publication of *Joseph Andrews* in 1742, Fielding shares their concerns about the loss of traditional social structures. The vices of the city are to be avoided; the simpler values of the

³ In a series of essays written in 1720, Richard Steele makes explicit reference to the need for patriarchal social leadership in his submission to Parliament regarding his misgivings over the formation of the South Sea Trading Company. See James Cruise, "Fielding, Authority, and the New Commercialism in *Joseph Andrews*," p. 253. For the issue of the decline of patriarchal concepts of government, see also Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England*, and Wallace Austin Flanders, *Structures of Experience: History, Society and Personal Life in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel*, especially chapter 3, "Family in Eighteenth-Century Fiction."

country should be adopted — these sentiments are clear in each of his major novels. It would be a mistake, however, to see Fielding as a writer wholly within the humanist tradition. Humanistic reasoning was “already rhetorically transparent” by 1720 (Cruise 253), and it is obvious that Fielding’s writing was given more attention than that due a discredited philosophy. The Licencing Act of 1737 — a direct result of Fielding’s politically-sensitive playwriting — and the lingering suspicions of Fielding’s critics that Walpole bought Fielding’s compliance (thus suppressing *Jonathan Wild*)⁴ indicate his social and political relevance. Whatever debt Fielding’s works owe to humanist thinking is more than offset by his own contribution to the field of social criticism.

Of what, exactly, this contribution consists is a much-debated question. Criticism of Fielding vacillates; it suggests alternatively that he was a progressive social reformer or a reactionary hoping to sustain the *status quo*. Earlier critics, attending to Fielding’s apparent advocacy of democratic principles, believed that he was indeed a reformer well ahead of his contemporaries,⁵ but later writers have suggested that

⁴ For a full examination of the intriguing possibility that Walpole purchased Fielding’s silence, see Martin Battestin’s biography of Fielding (written with Ruth R. Battestin), *Henry Fielding: A Life*.

⁵ See, for example, Frederick T. Blanchard, *Fielding the Novelist* and B.M. Jones, *Henry Fielding: Novelist and Magistrate*. Blanchard sees in *Joseph Andrews* a “democratic spirit” counter to the eighteenth century’s usual emphasis on social hierarchy, while Jones views Fielding as a humanitarian reformer well in advance of his time. For a refutation of Jones, see Malvin R. Zirker, *Fielding’s Social Pamphlets*.

Fielding values a hierarchical society: democracy leads not to individual freedom, but to social chaos.⁶ Even so, Fielding is, as James Cruise says, an “ambiguous aristocrat.” He argues not so much for the upper classes or the social elite — as Brian McCrea suggests⁷ — as he does for a stable society that involves a commitment to values that seem to have lost their currency. Rather than defending the interests of the upper classes, Fielding calls them to account. He believes in the model of society that the English upper classes have put forward — a better one not immediately forthcoming — rather than in the interests of the upper classes alone. The two are not equivalent (at least for Fielding), and it is important to maintain the distinction between them because it ensures that one does not see him simply as a mouthpiece for the socially privileged.⁸ The upper classes have instituted a system that works

⁶ Brian McCrea, in “Rewriting *Pamela*: Social Change and Religious Faith in *Joseph Andrews*,” discusses again the question of Fielding’s “democratic spirit.” He argues persuasively that Fielding wrote *Joseph Andrews* not only to satirize *Pamela* but to better defend the social hierarchy Richardson’s novel questions. McCrea sees Fielding’s resistance to democratic impulse as largely religious in nature. James Cruise, in “Fielding, Authority, and the New Commercialism in *Joseph Andrews*,” comes to a similar conclusion by way of analyzing Fielding’s economic beliefs.

⁷ McCrea argues that *Joseph Andrews*, “which opens by seeming to question ‘existent class relations,’ closes by vindicating them” (McCrea 1988, 127). This issue is discussed in more detail at the close of section IV of this chapter.

⁸ Charles Knight makes the same point: “it seems a mistake to read the ending of *Joseph Andrews* simply as an aristocratic cop-out or as an affirmation of providence.... The novel’s shifting narrative makes the reader account for the conflicts manifested by its consciously constructed gaps. To argue that the comic artifice of the ending displaces the discordant reality of the middle books is to simplify the complexities of Fielding’s art” (122).

very much to their advantage, but at the cost of incurring noteworthy obligations.

Fielding seeks to see these obligations honoured.

Fielding's ambiguities are not revealed only through his social theory. Though his novels all warn against the evils of the city, for instance, he was most at home there, first as a playwright and later as a magistrate. And though the morality of rural England is held up as a model for the city-dwellers to follow, the countryside is seen to best advantage when city gentlemen such as Mr Wilson live there. These contradictions are only two of many that make Fielding's fiction so entertainingly entangling. Perhaps the best place to start untangling these knotty problems, then, is in the city. London is always of great importance in Fielding's fiction, and *Joseph Andrews* is no exception.

II

London is central to Fielding's approach to community in *Joseph Andrews*. It represents the ideology or vocabulary to which the whole of the novel responds. On the one hand, London appears comparatively seldom. Though Mr Wilson's story deals almost entirely with London, and the novel more or less begins with Joseph in the city, it is not otherwise a factor apart from a few references to Parson Adams's wish to visit it to sell his sermons. On the other hand, the example of London, at least as presented in *Joseph Andrews* (and Fielding's other novels), determines

Fielding's view of society. The city does not receive a flattering portrait. It is a place of "affectation," one of Fielding's favourite terms of disapprobation, where people drink, gamble and commit carnal infidelities, thereby satisfying selfish desires at the cost of a loss of sense of community. "London," writes Joseph to his sister Pamela, "is a bad place, and there is so little good fellowship, that the next-door neighbours don't know one another" (32). The city, in short, represents individual liberty run riot. The riotous aspect of the city may explain why Fielding favoured continued social hierarchy rather than increased democracy. Not only is the city a place of uncontrolled personal liberty, thus making it less receptive to ideas of social duty, but it actively disengages people from the responsibilities they already possess. The most obvious example is Lady Booby, who "condescend[s] a great deal below [her]self" (40) with her interest in her footman, but nearly every element in Wilson's story demonstrates the same problem.

Fielding might possibly accept an alternative order of social responsibility, a different vocabulary promising adequate social organization, but London appears to offer no practical method for guaranteeing responsible social behaviour. It suggests anarchy instead. The "Rule of Right" club with which Mr Wilson is briefly associated functions as a synecdoche for the city because it substitutes a morality centred on "the infallible guide of human reason" (212) for a properly religious ethic.

The option the “Rule of Right” club offers, however, is no option at all because its morality is entirely self-centred. Members of the club are responsible only to themselves and their most fundamental emotional desires in the end, since the “Rule of Right” may be used to justify whatever they wish. Mr Wilson soon suspects as much, “but when I communicated my thoughts to one of the club, he said, ‘There was nothing absolutely good or evil in itself; that actions were denominated good or bad by the circumstances of the agent’” (213). The result is that for members of the club, and for anyone else tempted by its atheistic thinking, community concerns are excluded from desire. Fielding argues that people will not work for their collective good without something which forces them to do so, some compelling common purpose or direction. Thus the prevailing — though increasingly questioned — social hierarchy must stay in place to maintain a social order. The alternative is no order at all.

London’s dissipation is not limited to the city itself. The public houses Parson Adams and Joseph visit and the country gentlemen they meet in their various adventures all testify to a lack of civility. Whether because of lawyers who seek their own gain rather than strive for justice, clergymen who provide poor examples for their flock or the “public houses that take a virtue once associated with the pastoral world, hospitality, and make a business out of it” (Cruise 257), the society with which

Joseph and Adams come in contact outside of London is nearly as debased and corrupt as is the city itself. Joseph and Adams find many people but little *community*, little sense of anything common among these people beyond the fact that they share a comparatively small geographical space. What they find instead is stagnation and an unwillingness to encourage substantive justice.

Fielding demonstrates that, as with the “Rule of Right” club, self-interest is fundamentally unproductive. The several marriages observed by Joseph and Adams as they pass through a succession of public houses consist chiefly of husbands and wives trying to make each other equally miserable. The casualty of this misery is not confined to the marriages alone; people who cannot look after those with whom they share their lives cannot be expected to look after anyone else, either, as Mrs Tow-wouse makes clear: “‘Common charity, a f—t!’ says she, ‘common charity teaches us to provide for ourselves, and our families; and I and mine won’t be ruined by your charity, I assure you’” (56). Mrs Tow-wouse makes much of caring for her family, but she clearly deems it a flexible term for here her husband is the victim of her excoriating invective. Appealing to the needs of her family is little more than a disguise for her disinclination to assist Joseph after his beating. Mrs Tow-wouse looks to her own interests, and she is the first in a pattern that is repeated during Joseph’s adventures homeward.

This pattern obviously consists of characters who see no virtue in charity, but it also comprehends the social impasse implicit in the many disputes to which Joseph and Adams are privy. The problem with these disputes is that they are never solved; none of the combatants ever seems to see the validity of a viewpoint not his or her own. Thus the hunters whose conversation Adams overhears move easily and pointlessly from one squabble to another (74). So also can Barnabas and the surgeon endlessly argue because, "as this parish was so unfortunate as to have no lawyer in it; there had been a constant contention between the two doctors, spiritual and physical, concerning their abilities in a science, in which, as neither of them professed it, they had equal pretensions to dispute each other's opinion" (68). And in what is possibly a metonym for the entire culture the public houses represent, the two lawyers who with self-interested motives intervene in the fight between Adams and the innkeeper "congratulate each other on the success of their good offices in procuring a perfect reconciliation between the contending parties" (122). The lawyers have in fact accomplished nothing, and the reconciliation they speak of is simply the result of "the conquerors being satisfied with the vengeance they had taken, and the conquered having no appetite to renew the fight" (120). In other words, the disputes of the English countryside through which Joseph and Adams travel are settled only through force; persuasion or appeals to logic have little discernible effect. Richard

Rorty says of “logical arguments” that they “are all very well in their way, and useful as expository devices, but in the end not much more than ways of getting people to change their practices without admitting they have done so” (78). He issues this dismissal in order to defend his view that logic guarantees no epistemological or ontological foundation. Logic remains useful nevertheless as an element of persuasion because it implies that two parties share and respect a common vocabulary. On the evidence of lawyers who look out solely for their next shilling and clergymen who pursue only their own ease, a common vocabulary appears to be sorely lacking in Fielding’s England.

This absence of a common vocabulary is nowhere more evident than in the literal inability of characters in *Joseph Andrews* to agree on the meaning of charity. Adams defines charity as “a generous disposition to relieve the distressed,” a definition which Peter Pounce swiftly turns to his advantage by suggesting that charity “is, as you say, a disposition — and does not so much consist in the act as in the disposition to do it” (274). The extent to which the absence of a common vocabulary is a concern is suggested by the fact that in all his travels Adams can find only one man of the cloth with whom he agrees on the subject of charity. That man, however, is “a priest of the Church of Rome” (253) and therefore an outsider, at least in theological temperament. The others with whom Adams appears to find common counsel are

also outsiders: the sailor-turned-innkeeper who argues with Adams about the value of books as opposed to experience and yet gives him charity nonetheless, and Mr Wilson, who has retired “from a world full of bustle, noise, hatred, envy, and ingratitude, to ease, quiet, and love” (224).

Fielding apparently finds community in the unordered society of Joseph’s and Adams’s travels only where it is most unexpected or where there are fewest people. By implication, community is not a spontaneous occurrence; it is achieved despite people, not because of them, and without social ordering it is little more than accidental. Although we are supposed to see the “Rule of Right” club as a devious temptation away from regular social harmony, Joseph’s travels make the self-interest the club represents appear to be, by virtue of its ubiquity, the default social order. Community must be taught through close attention to traditional secular and religious laws, and achieve immanency by way of hierarchical social engineering. Unlike Jane Austen, who in the figure of Anne Elliot places much faith in the individual’s ability to establish community, Fielding does not find faith in individuals altogether warranted. He believes that without external order — the authority of law and religion — there is no community. This much becomes clear if we look more closely at the kind of society Fielding advocates against the corrupted examples of London and the system of public houses which surrounds it.

III

Community, quite clearly, exists in two highly-ordered places in *Joseph Andrews*: Parson Adams's parish and the Wilsons' country retreat. We know the parish to be a community, or a place where proper society may be found, largely on the basis of the narrator's assertion of its charity. So Parson Adams is "greatly perplexed" by Parson Trulliber's stinginess because "he knew that he could easily have borrowed such a sum in his own parish" (169). The parish reveals its community as well in the welcome it gives to Adams on his return home, where his parishioners "flocked about him like dutiful children round an indulgent parent, and vied with each other in demonstrations of duty and love" (277). It is difficult to imagine either Barnabas or Trulliber receiving a similar response, especially since they are so much at the heart of the divisions that Joseph and Adams witness in their travels. Adams's parish is above all a place of community because it resembles him:

his word was little less than a law in his parish; for as he had shown his parishioners, by an uniform behaviour of thirty-five years' duration, that he had their good entirely at heart, so they consulted him on every occasion, and very seldom acted contrary to his opinion. (48-9)

Parson Adams is often naive, but he is also Fielding's religious exemplar, the figure who embodies the religious principles to which society should attend and which must

be counted of equal importance to secular law. Adams's parish represents proper society because it is Christian as Fielding defines it and not subject to the self-division that plagues so many of the people and villages through which Adams passes.

This lack of division is also what characterizes the novel's other example of community, Mr Wilson's country retreat. The Wilsons' existence is delineated in Elysian, pastoral terms, where the natural takes precedence over all affectation. Their garden, for instance, is excellent because of its simplicity:

No parterres, no fountains, no statues, embellished this little garden. Its only ornament was a short walk, shaded on each side by a filbert-hedge, with a small alcove at one end, whither in hot weather the gentleman and his wife used to retire, and divert themselves with their children, who played in the walk before them: but, though vanity had no votary in this little spot, here was variety of fruit and everything useful for the kitchen. (226)

When one adds to this paean to simplicity Mr Wilson's testimony regarding the value of working in his garden, which allows him not only to feed his family but also maintain his health "without assistance from physick" (226), it is no wonder that Adams remarks to Joseph as they leave "that this was the manner in which the people had lived in the Golden Age" (229).

But if Mr Wilson has "experienced that calm serene happiness, which is seated in content, is inconsistent with the hurry and bustle of the world" (227), he shares that

happiness with Parson Adams for the same reason: they both wield patriarchal authority. Though Mr Wilson does not “perceive that inferiority of understanding which the levity of rakes, the dulness of men of business, or the austerity of the learned, would persuade us of in women,” he also “would not be apprehended to insinuate that his own [wife] had an understanding above the care of her family” (227). In other words, the former Harriet Hearty is, like Adams’s wife, a good woman partially because she knows her place. Wilson’s authority and Adams’s differ slightly, however, in that Wilson’s authority is primarily secular rather than religious. He has authority precisely because he is a man of experience, the exact opposite of Adams’s naïveté and book learning. The many vices and peccadilloes related by Mr Wilson exist largely to provide empirical evidence of the superiority of the retired, quiet life that is far distant from the pretensions and masquerades of the city. Wilson’s attention to and respect for secular authority are further solidified by his response to the death of his eldest daughter’s dog. While the squire’s act in shooting the dog is reprehensibly callous, it is also legal.⁹ Wilson’s complaint that the squire’s “father had too great a fortune to contend with” (228) emphasizes the nature of the dispute: this contest will not be settled by the kind of thrashing Joseph

⁹ For more on the legality of the squire’s action and its implications for Fielding’s argument in *Joseph Andrews*, see Brian McCrea, “‘Had not Joseph Withheld Him’: The Portrayal of the Social Elite in *Joseph Andrews*.”

visits on the Captain, and which Adams would like to give full rein to here, but must be decided in the legal arena.

The twin examples of authority provided by Parson Adams and Mr Wilson, in addition to Fielding's own search for authority as narrator,¹⁰ suggest that Fielding desires what Michael Oakeshott calls *universitas*, "an engagement in an enterprise to pursue a common substantive purpose or to promote a common interest" (Mouffe 76). *Universitas* is opposed to *societas*, "a society conceived as a band of eccentrics collaborating for purposes of mutual protection" (Rorty 59).¹¹ *Societas*, in other words, is a mode of "relation in which participants are related to one another in the acknowledgment of the authority of certain conditions in acting." Modern Western society is perhaps better described by *societas* than by *universitas* because it does not demand that its citizens "pursue a common substantive purpose"; "what links them is the recognition of the authority of the conditions specifying their common or 'public' concern, a 'practice of civility'" that Oakeshott calls *respublica* (Mouffe 76). *Joseph Andrews* perhaps displays the beginnings of *respublica* in demonstrating how

¹⁰ For more on Fielding's use of authority, especially as it relates to narrative authority, see Cruise, "Fielding, Authority, and the New Commercialism in *Joseph Andrews*"; Knight, "*Joseph Andrews* and the Failure of Authority"; and Raymond Stephanson, "'Silenc'd by Authority' in *Joseph Andrews*: Power, Submission, and Mutuality in 'The History of Two Friends'."

¹¹ Chantal Mouffe deals with Oakeshott's *On Human Conduct* and its distinctions between *societas* and *universitas* at some length in "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community"; see especially pp. 76–81. Richard Rorty, however, also employs Oakeshott to help answer questions about the outcome of morality in a community based on contingency. See *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pp. 57–60.

people agree to disagree and thereby articulate “a specific language of civil intercourse” (Mouffe 77) that will define the *respublica*. That is to say, there is a common understanding that dispute is to be resolved within a framework acceptable to both parties, though legal action is the most obvious and usually the first suggested.

If *Joseph Andrews* presents *respublica*, however, it is difficult to imagine that Fielding believes this to be a positive development. If his characters are united by their belief in particular forms of conflict resolution, this is for Fielding the wrong kind of unity. The many instances of stalemate that Joseph and Adams witness as they travel home suggest, in fact, that the form of unity to be found in *societas* is false unity. Proper unity will be discovered in *universitas*, in ensuring that England is England all the way through, not simply in isolated pockets that prompt Adams to give thanks “to find some Christians left in the kingdom; for that he almost began to suspect that he was sojourning in a country inhabited only by Jews and Turks” (177). The society Fielding believes we should strive for is an ideal one that resembles the peace and contentment characteristic of the Wilsons, and this ideal is not to be reached through recognition of contingency or by encouraging a multiplicity of discourses. Sharp distinctions should be maintained between the English and others, distinctions that border on xenophobia in their insistence on some form of national

purity. At the same time, one should not see Fielding's desire for an England united in "a common substantive purpose" as a wish for a form of totalitarianism. He would not *impose* his view of right on anyone, just as "nothing could provoke Adams to strike, but an absolute assault on himself or his friend" (168). Fielding would rather persuade his countrymen, both through words and deeds, of the worthiness of the society he promotes.

This inclination toward persuasion, however, is what prevents Fielding from achieving his desire. As with the earlier humanist writers whose concerns he shares about the health of the body politic, Fielding thinks society to be a fully-sutured totality which can realize its identity by itself, without any reference to what Chantal Mouffe calls a "constitutive outside" (78). But his reliance on persuasion as the means to his end implicitly reveals the divisions that must reside within society because the need for persuasion acknowledges the existence of more than one discourse. Fielding pursues a homogeneous social discourse because he thinks that homogeneity defines society as it is properly understood. For Fielding society is about unity; people form a society not simply when they get along but when they think the same. Thus we know Adams's parish to be a good example of society because his parishioners "consult him on every occasion, and very seldom act contrary to his opinion" (49). The need to convince others that homogeneity defines society, however, betrays its

impossibility, for “what writing *Joseph Andrews* forces Fielding to do, however unwittingly, is to tolerate political heterodoxy, a premise that threatens the foundation of patriarchalism” (Cruise 257).¹²

The novel may divide its discourses into the legitimate and the non-legitimate, the pure and the corrupt, but it is clear that in fact the corrupt contributes to what Fielding conceives to be the pure. Otherwise we are left with the untenable notion that there is a pure society and an impure society, which defeats the idea that society can only be pure. The intermingling of pure and corrupt is apparent in the religious and secular authorities which Fielding is most interested in establishing as the foundations of proper society. While we may favour his attempt to prove the beneficence of adhering to the laws of the religious and secular realms, those realms are themselves more often than not poorly served by their representatives — lawyers and clergymen are some of the greatest fools and knaves in *Joseph Andrews*. The novel shows us that the strength of social principles is limited by the strength of the servants of those principles. Notwithstanding Fielding’s opinion that individuals cannot be trusted to realize community, a great deal depends on them all the same. If

¹² Cruise expands on this point by calling attention to the difference between what Fielding was capable of as novelist and as magistrate: “As a magistrate and projector, Fielding at least could envision a society unencumbered by the listless and rapacious (once confined they would learn the virtues of station and work); as a novelist, he confronts what he otherwise finds intolerable and in doing so potentially compromises the kind of absolute authority he wields as a social legislator and political projector” (257).

Fielding's characters are any guide, there will never be an improved society without an improved people, and thus the purity of any given society will always be at the mercy of those who contribute to it.

So while Fielding is not entirely pleased with the religious and secular rules set before us, he also is unhappy with the ways those laws are enforced. He argues that "far from being 'uniform and permanent,' the constitution varies according to the 'order and disposition' of its elements," thus indicating that "legal knowledge must be complemented with historical insights" (Merrett 246) if the law is to retain maximum efficacy. At the same time, "Fielding demands that legislators, magistrates, and parish officers be more conscientious" because "he is certain that conscientious magistrates can make society more cohesive and can increase the deterrent effect of the laws" (247). Cohesiveness is then a matter of living according to the social template provided by the constitution and the purposes it describes of reducing crime and poverty. This is a form of cohesiveness that belongs to *universitas* rather than *societas*, which consists of "loyalty to one another" (Oakeshott 201) and whose rules do not prescribe any particular purpose.

Fielding's view of society may rest heavily on legal authority and homogeneous discourse which ensures that citizens agree on the issues of greatest importance to them, but he is unable, at least in *Joseph Andrews*, to enact the sort of closure his

vision of society implies. Indeed, it is difficult to be certain of the degree to which Fielding subscribed to his own social philosophy. His first novel and the later *Tom Jones* both provide ample evidence that he found the strict rule of law insufficient to a just society. Difference — the presumed corruption of his closed, unitary society¹³ — is necessary to achieve Fielding's vision of society. In the crudest terms, difference as conflict and antagonism is constitutive of the Wilsons' perfect society, for instance, because Mr Wilson requires the lessons of vice in the city to make apparent to him the value of a retired life. More subtly, however, difference appears as what I will call "irregular justice," Parson Irwine's term for Mrs Poyser's tongue-lashing of Mr Donnithorne in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. Whereas in *Adam Bede* irregular justice amounts to little more than careful insubordination that tends by minute adjustment to reinforce hierarchical social relations rather than oppose them, in *Joseph Andrews* it refers to the personal justice which many characters, but most successfully Joseph and Parson Adams, choose to take into their own hands. Fighting is the irregular justice of this novel, and if Fielding is clear that readers should respect the law rather than the "rascallions" who often administer it, he is just as clear in stating that sometimes the law simply will not answer immediate questions.

¹³ To be clear: I do not mean by Fielding's wish for a "closed, unitary society" that he is a xenophobe, opposed to intercourse with other societies. I mean only that he thinks society should have a consistent, unified character that is defined according to itself and not with the assistance of a "constitutive outside."

IV

Henry Fielding's other career as a magistrate has naturally occasioned much interest in the role law plays in his novels. As with so much analysis of his work, this interest has centred on whether or not Fielding was a progressive social reformer or a reactionary hoping to sustain the *status quo*. Fielding's ambiguous status with regard to law has in the past been found in an "ideological gap" between Fielding's novels and his political pamphlets. This gap suggests that "he deals with legal and social problems in his fiction in a fanciful and sentimental manner and that he becomes increasingly reactionary in his non-fiction" (Merrett 251). Robert Merrett concludes otherwise, arguing that Fielding's "sense of reform is not repressive" (247) and that the novels consistently show that "Fielding is not content that there should be a gap between professional and private values in those who administer the law" (242). Though Fielding may be discontented with this gap he is not unwilling to exploit it for comic effect.

Joseph Andrews presents two very different pictures of the law. On the one hand, the lawyer is coeval with "the first mean selfish creature [who] appeared on the human stage, [and] who made self the centre of the whole creation" (189). Though the lawyer is not, as James Cruise maintains, "the chief villain" of "the History of the World in general" (Cruise 259), neither is he a paragon of virtue. Even taking the

view that the lawyer exists to protect us from the selfishness of others, we must yet accept that the legal profession stems not from society's best instincts but from its worst. There should be little surprise, then, that lawyers do not always remain untainted by society's baser instincts. For every lawyer willing to protect there is another willing to prosecute; for every Serjeant Bramble there is a Serjeant Puzzle ready to cast issues into "doubt and obscurity" (45). While lawyers perform an undeniable good, this good is mitigated by the necessarily adversarial nature of their profession.

On the other hand, Fielding goes out of his way to uphold the value of lawyers. Commenting on Lawyer Scout's conversation with Lady Booby, the narrator tells us that

This Scout was one of those fellows who, without any knowledge of the law, or being bred to it, take upon them, in defiance of an act of Parliament, to act as lawyers in the country, and are called so. They are the pests of society, and a scandal to a profession, to which indeed they do not belong, and which owes to such kind of rascallions the ill will which weak persons bear towards it.
(286)

This passage clearly directs us to a judgment of lawyers different from that which *Joseph Andrews* has previously encouraged. All the evidence presented to this point in the novel has been to the contrary of what the narrator implies here; law, the

narrator has suggested, deserves ill will not simply because of “rascallions” like Scout but because it is poorly served even by those who are properly trained. The lawyer who urges the coachman to transport a naked and beaten Joseph to the nearest inn because he knows the consequences of leaving the scene of a capital crime is not a pettifogger like Scout. Quite the contrary, he knows very well the laws of the realm and how they are to be administered. His flaw is a lack of charity, not a lack of professionalism. Similarly, the two lawyers who offer each to take a side in the dispute between Parson Adams and the alehouse host in one of the novel’s many fights demonstrate the selfish ways law can be turned from its disinterested pursuit of justice. As if the point is not made clearly enough by Adams’s and the host’s rejection of the lawyers’ offered services, the narrator sketches a heavily ironic picture of “the two gentlemen congratulating each other on the success of their good offices in procuring a perfect reconciliation between the contending parties” (122). Lawyers are perhaps supposed to facilitate reconciliation, but that was hardly the intent in this case.

The untrustworthiness of lawyers leads to a consequent untrustworthiness of law itself because there is no easy distinction to be made between the statutes enacted by Parliament and the lawyers and justices who apply those statutes. Indeed, though the narrator’s fulminations against Lawyer Scout stem partly from Scout’s contention

that “the laws of this land are not so vulgar to permit a mean fellow [i.e., Joseph] to contend with one of [Lady Booby’s] fortune” (285), Scout’s observation is perhaps more correct than the narrator would have it, especially if we consider Fielding’s sometimes harsh appraisal of magistrates and his feeling that “all ranks of society [are] responsible for reform” (Merrett 251). Though the narrator professes great respect for law, there are few representations of the profession to be found that are as saddled with incompetence and corruption as is law in *Joseph Andrews*. And while Scout’s claims regarding “the laws of this land” may be specious, one can plausibly argue that it hardly matters when men such as Scout and all the other lawyers met with in this novel manage as best they can to subvert the nation’s statutes to their own selfish ends. After all, Joseph and Parson Adams only ever escape their entanglements with the law by virtue of who they know, not because the law has correctly determined their blamelessness. The portrait of law Fielding delivers is that of a profession obsessed with appearance, whether it is the lawyer in the coach concerned, in the event Joseph should die, “to prevent the jury’s finding *that they fled for it*” (52) or the justice’s assurance that “nobody can say I have committed a gentleman since I have been in the commission” (149).

The gap between law and its implementation is not merely a question of how well lawyers and justices acquit themselves in the performance of their duties. On the

contrary, the distance between the ideal of social behaviour that the law sets forth in its codification of social mores and the actions of the citizens who putatively agree to live by that law is dangerously close to becoming constitutive of society, and thus ensuring the failure of Fielding's social vision. In other words, lack of respect for the law, whether secular or religious, threatens to constitute the society in *Joseph Andrews* as much as does any wish to honour it. The confusion between what the law is supposed to be and what citizens take it to be is nowhere more evident than at the conclusion of Adams's meeting with Parson Trulliber. Just when hostilities are reaching their peak, Trulliber's "wife, seeing him clench his fist, interposed, and begged him not to fight, but show himself a true Christian, and take the law of him" (168). Similarly, after Adams has explained his role in turning away Fanny's would-be rapist and is sharing a glass with the justice, "the persons who had apprehended Adams and Fanny" are to be found "all fallen together, cuffing each other without any mercy." The justice soon puts an end to the battling but reports

"That the occasion of the quarrel was no other than a dispute to whom, if Adams had been convicted, the greater share of the reward for apprehending him had belonged." All the company laughed at this, except Adams, who, taking his pipe from his mouth, fetched a deep groan, and said he was concerned to see so litigious a temper in men. (150)

The fruitless arguing between the men who had taken Adams and Fanny to the justice, coupled with Adams's story of a similar situation between contestants for a clerkship, followed by his own trivial dispute with the justice regarding "whether he ought not, in strictness of law, to have committed him, the said Adams" (151) all suggest that law does not exercise the influence on social relations that it should.

This difficulty is easily solved: the legal profession need only interpret and enforce the law correctly so that the citizenry can respect it and again make it represent the community in practice as it does in theory. But the evidence of *Joseph Andrews* indicates that this possibility, if not positively unlikely, will not be realized soon. Law in *Joseph Andrews* is an abstract quantity more likely to benefit the uncharitable than to aid in the redressing of injustices done to the poor and disadvantaged. Law in practice proves to have little to do with the values Fielding and his characters advocate. This being the case, one expects religion to overlap law and "pick up the slack," as it were, in the harmonious ordering of society. In Fielding's case this overlap is considerable since religious values are "the law's ultimate imperative" (Merrett 240). This should mean, presumably, that the clergy function as a spiritual adjunct to secular law, and that between the two authorities — the religious and the secular — the values of the community will be well defined and enforced. Such is not quite the case. Although lawyers are the object of much

criticism in *Joseph Andrews*, the clergy fare no better. As Robert Merrett notes, “In Fielding’s eyes, lawyers, clergymen, and magistrates debase the practice of law and the religious ideals which should underpin the law because they unquestioningly accept the acquisitive and callous attitudes of the rich” (240). The uncertain morality of the professions most expected to uphold the morality of the nation leads to a critical imbalance between what Fielding believes the society should be and its manifestation. What is needed to correct this imbalance is a third realm of law, one that can exist alongside the extant canons of secular and religious instruction: the realm of irregular justice. By encouraging irregular justice Fielding gives notice that the gap between the judiciary and the people it serves is too great to permit further inaction. Between the two evils of approving what has become the *status quo* (the debased status of contemporary society) and the introduction of difference into the presumed harmonious space of the community, the latter proves to be Fielding’s preferred course.

Of course, the “introduction of difference” into the community is not how Fielding would describe the fighting which transgresses his social ideal. To him it is simply fighting, a plot device he can use in the service of comedy. But there is no other way to account for the violence in which Joseph and Adams so often find themselves engaged. Their journey through the English countryside helps to define

Fielding's ideas both of community and of law because it provides the opportunity for them as exemplars of society to put in action a responsible code of ethics, to act, as Chapter I would have it, as "valuable patterns to the world" (17). While neither character is supposed to be perfect, their general behaviour is sufficiently moral that we need not discount their propensity for fighting as an indication of immorality — unless it is because they seem to enjoy it too much.

For it is clear that one of the primary messages Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams deliver regarding law is that it is best to take it into one's own hands upon occasion, to enforce social values that otherwise go unchampioned. Yet the steady stream of arguments and battles that populate *Joseph Andrews* are not so much about dispute in general as they are about dispute settlement. People will disagree. The essential task for any community is to generate a method for resolving these disagreements and in so doing contribute to the community's definition. Rather than imagining that community begins with harmony, then, we might see instead that it begins with conflict and its subsequent resolution. While Fielding would have us follow some prelapsarian model of society based on centralized, patriarchal authority, the example of *Joseph Andrews* indicates that community cannot be realized without the alterity of conflict.

Communities, insofar as they are discrete units of society, agree generally to abide by the laws of that society. But Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews discover, if not for themselves then for the reader, that the laws they follow are inadequate for maintaining peace or preventing injustice. Worse, religious instruction cannot be depended on to foster civic responsibility because of the fallibility of those who impart such instruction and who will, the implication is clear, inevitably twist such instruction to their own selfish ends. Faced with these discouraging truths, many options are available to Joseph and Adams, not the least of which is making a concerted effort to reform the institutions which so inadequately reflect the proper character of Christian society. The pursuit of reform is not always practical, however, especially if, like Mr Wilson, one finds that those in authority have “too great a fortune to contend with” (228). The option Joseph and Adams choose, then, is that of irregular justice.

Law is in large measure about satisfaction, and what Parson Adams and Joseph do a good deal of the time is satisfy themselves. Their behaviour leaves them open, of course, to charges of vigilantism, of setting themselves before the laws of the people. As the rest of the novel demonstrates, however, the laws of the people are not necessarily consonant with the laws of the nation. Moreover, the freedom with which Joseph and Adams range into battle implies a theory of power that parallels

Fielding's desire for narrative authority. As Ernesto Laclau points out, "any theory about power in a democratic society has to be a theory about the forms of power that are compatible with democracy, not about the elimination of power" ("Community" 91). For Fielding, it seems clear, the power inherent in irregular justice is within the limits of what his society will tolerate even though it originates outside those limits. If "antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social" (*Hegemony* 125), we can see Fielding's advocacy of irregular justice as his own "'experience' of the limit of the social," his own (conscious or unconscious) realization that the construction of social identity requires the assistance of difference.

A number of examples make clear the necessity of resolving disputes through recourse to fighting. Parson Adams and Joseph first enter into battle when the coach in which they are travelling stops for dinner at an alehouse. The host takes exception to the ministrations his wife performs on Joseph's injured leg because he thinks Joseph too poor to bother with. A few insults hurled at Joseph prompt Adams to lay the host "sprawling on the floor" (119). Later Adams must rescue Fanny from a would-be ravisher; subsequent to that Joseph and Adams must fend off the attack of a pack of dogs. After defeating the dogs and escaping from the squire's house, they soon must furiously and futilely defend Fanny from the clutches of the Captain. But

with Fanny returned and Joseph and Adams set free, Joseph “then grasped a cudgel in one hand, and, catching the captain by the collar with the other, gave him a most severe drubbing” (271). This fight, at least, is unnecessary and simply punitive because all is as it was before. No harm has been done. Joseph pummels the Captain merely to vent his rage and deliver the punishment every reader no doubt feels the Captain deserves.

But the brawling does not stop there. Even once the intrepid travellers reach their destination the combats continue: Joseph must first protect Fanny from the less-than-virtuous inclinations of Beau Didapper’s footman, and then, when Didapper “offers a rudeness” to Fanny at Parson Adams’ cottage, Joseph “presented him with so sound a box on the ear, that it conveyed him several paces from where he stood” (320–1). Order is soon restored, but not before Joseph and the dandy threaten to fight each other with cudgel and sword. Parson Adams gets in on the fun as well in the comic series of mistaken identities of the night scene at Lady Booby’s house. Each of these battles (and those as well of the other combatants in the novel, the various hosts and hostesses of the public houses who seem unable to get along with each other) stems from the belief that resolution will come no other way. Equally important is the belief that resolution of the dispute is preferred to the stalemate evident elsewhere in the novel. In each of these violent incidents the law of

the land is inadequate, either because the situation does not merit the intervention of the relevant authorities or because those who administer the law cannot be trusted to do so fairly. In the majority of the cases legal intervention would of course be unnecessary, and Fielding in no way suggests that the disputants in each situation should “go to law.” What he suggests instead is that Parson Adams and Joseph, and by extension the type of society they represent, see the need for a kind of law beyond the institutional laws of government and religion.

This “irregular justice,” in contrast to the laws of church and state, best represents community because it is the community’s own creation. It alone decides how to resolve those disputes deemed too minor to fall under the authority of the state, whether because the disputes themselves are small or because the state finds them beneath its interest. And though these disputes are not beneath the notice of the church, Joseph and Parson Adams ignore the church’s teachings in this regard. Christ says “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:38–9). Joseph and Adams evidently think this advice to have only marginal practical application, perhaps because the succeeding verse — “and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well” — has so little application to the society at large.

Christ's message here has two components: eschew violence and be charitable.

Society's lack of charity seems to have led Joseph and Adams to conclude that they themselves can only live up to one half of Christ's dictum. If in times of difficulty they can expect little or no assistance, they must then seek to preserve themselves.

Whether or not Joseph and Parson Adams should refrain from fisticuffs is not an issue about which many readers are likely to care. More probably they will urge each man to lay in a few extra blows, since much of the novel's comedy arises from its various battles. What is at issue is the novel's obvious belief that a fight now and then is the most appropriate, even if irregular, method for resolving disputes. Brian McCrea suggests that "Fielding vindicates the law — the law controlled by the elite" (McCrea 1988, 127). He supplies two or three incidents as evidence to support this claim, including the improved conduct of Lady Booby at her country seat, especially during the night scene; and the reappearance, at the novel's end, of the incompetent justice who tells Adams that he has found Fanny's would-be ravisher and committed him to gaol. Though Fielding's satire of the upper classes is perhaps less severe in the latter half of the novel than it is in the former, it does not constitute a complete vindication of the law. To the contrary, *Joseph Andrews* questions the law of the elite by proving its insufficiency in meeting the society's needs. The novel rails against no laws, only lawyers, and in that sense vindicates the law as statutes, especially those

statutes about which greedy businessmen like Peter Pounce complain: “the greatest fault in our constitution is the provision made for the poor, except that perhaps made for some others” (275). But the law is not merely a list of rules with which the society agrees and which citizens are expected to obey. It is also the enforcement of those rules, the way those rules are mediated and understood by the judiciary and ultimately by the citizenry itself. And for this part of the law — still the law of the elite — Fielding has little good to say. E.P. Thompson has noted that “the essential precondition for the effectiveness of law, in its function as ideology, is that it shall display an independence from gross manipulation and shall seem to be just. It cannot seem to be so without upholding its own logic and criteria of equity; indeed, on occasion, by actually being just.”¹⁴ In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding implies that the incompetence of those who serve the law makes dubious its capability to render justice. Irregular justice is thus required to fill in the gap, and though perhaps Fielding would prefer the situation were otherwise, he seemingly has no choice but to encourage the alterity which is at once society’s final suture and its proof that society can never be fully closed. Henry Fielding was not the sort to passively accept, however, that such a gap could not be narrowed. An ambiguous aristocrat all his life, Fielding would strive always to make law both less equivocal and less elite.

¹⁴ From *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*, 266. Quoted in McCrea, “‘Had not Joseph Withheld Him’: The Portrayal of the Social Elite in *Joseph Andrews*,” 123.

V

Fielding's dependence in *Joseph Andrews* on irregular justice may seem an appropriate contradiction for a writer who can speak with perfect seriousness about the nation's immorality while remarking of Fanny that "she was so plump that she seemed bursting through her tight stays, especially in the part which confined her swelling breasts" (152). But the intrusion of irregular justice into Fielding's world should be considered less a contradiction than an inevitability. Fielding desires the kind of society that does not exist, the kind of society that exists only in the past, coloured with the gentle and affirming hues of nostalgia. Parson Adams's parish, for instance, seems so far removed from London that it might be thought backward in time; Adams's own naïveté regarding everything from the "liberal gentleman's" behaviour to the realities of publishing only gives this notion more credence.

Fielding would like to draw a picture of society as the perfect circle, neatly ordered and defined within its sphere of influence, but he is perhaps the last major author to make that attempt without any sign of self-consciousness. Austen and Eliot both wish at times that society could be conceived in such a way, but expect that it cannot and respond accordingly. Forster assumes otherwise from the very beginning. Fielding's achievement, then, is that of a writer who looks in two directions. On the one hand, he looks back to the past in an attempt to recover a form of society he feels is of most

benefit to the greatest number of people. And on the other hand, he anticipates the struggle of the writers to come who will define our society and our communities bereft of the ancient certainties. These definitions take some time to mature. If Fielding does not consciously contribute to them, he at least suggests the course they are to take.

Chapter 3

“Anne said what was proper”:

Persuasion’s Difference in *Persuasion*

Henry Fielding’s view of society did not encourage distinctions between society and community. The nation as a whole was the community. The hierarchical nature of English society that Fielding approved of and championed in his novels meant that England’s character was supposed to be internally consistent, even if that consistency proved difficult to realize. England was England everywhere, and familiarity with one part of the nation signified familiarity with all of it because the social relations were in all places similar. Fielding’s view of England was half truth and half fiction, half what he wanted England to be and half an accurate representation of a society much influenced by the hierarchical structures defended by Tories.¹ Twenty years after *Tom Jones*, Tobias Smollett would both continue

¹ Stephen Copley’s *Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England* argues, after the historian Christopher Hill, that “the 1688 Revolution determines the political structure of Britain for the next hundred years. The Revolution Settlement represents a victory for the great land-owning and merchant classes in society, which then form an unchallenged establishment, monopolising political and economic power and dominating the social life of the country throughout the eighteenth century”

Fielding's tradition and modify it: content to expand upon Fielding's distinction between the corruptions of the city and the purity of the country, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* also demonstrates that England is not the homogeneous and familiar society Fielding wishes us to believe in. If the travels of Matthew Bramble and his family show Matthew how much he has to be thankful for in his country estate, they also make clear to the reader the variegation of English society. Unlike Tom Jones, Matthew and his family do not naturally comprehend, with the gentlemanly ease inherent to the blue-blooded, every social situation they encounter. Behavior as famously crotchety as Matthew's helps indicate the degree to which difference is very much a part of England, and his journey is not so much through England and Scotland as it is through a collection of English and Scottish communities.

If what Fielding understands to be proper English society could be considered a closed system, one that maintains internal consistency and that draws a distinct line between interior and exterior, Jane Austen's depiction of English society is quite different again. Where Smollett uses the travel narrative to show that England is perhaps less familiar than its citizens might think, Austen positively assumes English

(1). With this in mind, Copley places Fielding's writings in the humanist tradition espoused by many Tories. The Tories were averse to the new emphases on trade and business, and preferred to defend the hierarchical structures of the *status quo* on the grounds that trade and business were breeding grounds for immoral and unacceptable social behavior.

difference and unfamiliarity. Fielding has little use for explicit representations of community because he thinks community and society should correspond: the upper classes are to provide the moral example for how the rest of the society is to behave, and this social constant is to transcend geographical differences. Community affiliations are, therefore, in theory if not in practice, less significant than national ones. Austen, on the other hand, assumes that community and society are not at all the same thing; the affairs of a few families in one corner of England do not necessarily reflect the whole of the nation. The conflict within her novels is not, as is commonly argued, about the struggle to conform to an ideal social standard.² On the contrary, that conflict regards the need to manage the evident differences that exist within and between communities. Social ideals are for Austen flexible, constructed artifacts that must change as the circumstances dictate.³ Instead of employing

² One of the clearest proponents of the idea that Austen's novels wrestle with the problem of achieving the ideal society mandated by external, objective principles is Marilyn Butler: "The class [Austen] deals with has local and not national importance: in eighteenth-century terms, she is a Tory rather than a Whig. She believes that the gentleman — as her words 'consequence' and 'usefulness' imply — derives his personal dignity from the contribution he makes at the head of an organic, hierarchical, small community. It is for such a community, *ideally perceived*, that her novels speak" (2–3; italics mine).

³ In this regard I agree with Claudia L. Johnson, who rejects the view that Austen is something other than a pragmatic writer. Johnson wishes "to reconceptualize the stylistic and thematic coherence of Austen's fiction by demonstrating how it emerges, draws, and departs from a largely feminine tradition of political novels, novels which are highly informed and often distinctively flexible, rather than ferociously partisan, in their sympathies" (xix). Marilyn Butler's contention that Austen is a partisan writer is also disputed by Terry Lovell: "[Alistair] Duckworth and Butler are correct in identifying Jane Austen's world-view with modern conservatism. But they mark off the boundaries, between that conservatism and co-existing ideologies, too sharply" (26). Lovell describes Austen as a "realist," but because of the ideologically-charged tenor of that word I prefer to see her as a

propriety as the ultimate goal of a civilized society, Austen uses it as a tool to meet the more important objective of negotiating social conflict. In other words, Austen concerns herself with the social facts of alterity and conflict rather than with the pleasant fiction of an ideal conduct. While each of Austen's novels redefines community to some degree in search of an adroit balance between opposing ideologies, the communal transformation that takes place within *Persuasion* makes it the novel where Austen's assumptions of social difference are most apparent.

II

Persuasion occupies a curious place in Austen studies. There is an easily-understood tendency to associate it with *Northanger Abbey* because the books have been published together, both in their original posthumous first editions and in R.W. Chapman's definitive scholarly editions.⁴ The novels are of a similar length — both of them much shorter than Austen's other novels — and because they act as bookends, as it were, to Austen's career, it is tempting to note their similarities. Yet the novels are more different than alike. As a mature work, *Persuasion* lacks the high spirits found in *Northanger Abbey*, a burlesque, after all, of gothic romances of the pragmatist.

⁴ Roger Gard, for instance, argues that *Persuasion* mixes Austen's "late" style together with her earlier, more "naive" style. He feels that this effect is intentional, and that the novel requires fewer final authorial revisions than is sometimes supposed. See *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity*, p. 184.

1780s and 1790s. The tone of *Persuasion* is also quite different from that of Austen's previous novels; many critics have noted its sobriety and dwelt on the novel's faintly elegiac atmosphere. As a result, partly, of this tone, *Persuasion* has been considered Austen's finest work, on a level beyond the admitted excellence of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.⁵ The more usual evaluation, however, is simply to acknowledge *Persuasion*'s status as a novel written in a key different from Austen's previous fiction and leave it at that.

Because *Persuasion* follows an unfamiliar course compared to Austen's other novels — Anne Elliot is a mature woman of twenty-seven who sees the loss of her family seat before she has safely settled elsewhere, and who, moreover, has already “lost her bloom” through the rejection of a suitor whom she loved — analyses of Austen's work often treat the novel as a kind of appendage. It lacks, according to this view, the consistency of moral purpose to be found in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*. Marilyn Butler, for instance, concludes that “if *Persuasion* cannot rightly be described as a conservative novel, this is because it neither takes up an intelligible new position, nor explicitly recants from the old one. It is the only one of Jane Austen's novels that is not whole-heartedly partisan, and it is none the better for

⁵ David Daiches says of *Persuasion* that it is “the novel which in the end the experienced reader of Jane Austen puts at the head of the list” (quoted in Bradbury, 383). Malcolm Bradbury also prefers *Persuasion* — or at least rates it highly. He argues that we must adjust the criteria by which we judge the novel because “Austen is here trying to create effects that differ from [her] other novels” (385).

it" (291). Butler has little choice but to dismiss the novel because she cannot make it square with her contention that Austen was a fiercely anti-Jacobin writer. Other critics face the same dilemma, though; criticism of *Persuasion* often struggles to relate the novel to the other fiction. As a consequence, Austen's greatness nearly always ends with *Emma*, while *Persuasion* stands alone, seeming to question much of what the previous novels have argued.⁶

Butler's claim that *Persuasion* does not argue an "intelligible new position" is perhaps unfair, especially because the other novels have the benefit of some essential philosophical similarities to help readers understand Austen's point of view. The preceding novels engage themselves with the questions of how to repair or stabilize community, and the answers always appear to be the same: a reaffirmation of the value of propriety and good manners, and a revitalization of the *status quo* through the replacement of "the bad trustees [and] inadequate stewards of the traditional order" (Lovell 23) with people genuinely interested in preserving the life of the community. *Persuasion*, however, looks toward the necessity of transforming community rather than simply reasserting the validity of tradition. It should not

⁶ Several critics have noted in *Persuasion* a reversal of attitudes regarding manners and propriety, among them Mary Poovey and David Monaghan. Alistair Duckworth, however, states the matter most succinctly: "Jane Austen seems in her last novel to have lost faith in manners, that mode of public conduct which ideally exists as the outward and visible sign of an inward moral condition" (181). After a succession of brilliant novels advocating the importance of manners, Austen's turn away from them provokes what Poovey calls a "dilemma of propriety" which further contributes to the difficulties readers face in placing the novel within the context of Austen's work.

come as a great surprise that Austen's last novel in so doing sometimes displays less conviction. In a time of social change, it is generally unclear which convictions will remain and which will be consigned to the past.

Persuasion's reluctance to accept all of the established verities does not make Austen any less moral a writer as a result. The novel confirms, however, that Austen does not believe in a universal morality applicable in all circumstances. On the contrary, her morality and the morality of the community represented in *Persuasion* respond to events solely according to her limited perspective. The propriety she advises and the measures she counsels suit the situation with which she is familiar, the geographical and ideological part of England she knows. These measures will clearly be appropriate to many other situations as well, but they cannot be considered necessarily relevant to the whole of society because Austen does not take the rest of society for granted.

Austen "limited herself to the world she knew at first hand" (Lovell 34) partially because she had no choice; it was all a woman of her resources could be familiar with at the time. But she also limits herself because she knows the rest of the world is different. Austen emphasizes the validity of local knowledge when, preparing for *Mansfield Park*, she asks her sister Cassandra "if you could discover whether Northamptonshire is a country of Hedgerows" (*Letters* 298). At the same time, she is

conscious of the extent of that same knowledge. To a niece composing her first novel, Austen writes: “we think you had better not leave England. Let the Portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the Manners there, you had better not go with them. You will be in danger of giving false representations. Stick to Bath & the Foresters. There you will be quite at home” (*Letters* 395). And in a letter to James Stanier Clarke she dismisses the thought of writing a novel with larger scope:

You are very kind in your hints as to the sort of composition which might recommend me at present, and I am fully sensible that an historical romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg, might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem... I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other. (*Letters* 452–3)

Austen’s “own style” constitutes a moral vision which clearly differs from one like Fielding’s. Yet if Austen cannot be said to speak for the society as a whole, who is it that she speaks for? There has been, especially in the last two decades, much debate on this issue.⁷ I will argue in this chapter that Austen’s community — the portion of

⁷ The groundbreaking study in this regard is Marilyn Butler’s *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975). Butler argues that Austen’s novels should be read in the context of the anti-Jacobin debate of the 1790s and early 1800s. She concludes that Austen was conservative, almost to the point of extremism, in her opposition to the Jacobin belief in radical democracy. Butler’s conclusions have been echoed by many other critics, most prominently in Warren Roberts’s *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (1979). Roberts argues that Austen was affected by the French Revolution to the point that

society known to her — is the gentry, but a gentry that she understands is changing and that therefore requires her to modify her ideas of community. On the one hand Austen's community is obvious enough: her novels invariably deal with a few reasonably well-to-do families who live on estates. Towns and villages, staples of our stereotypical ideas of community, seldom play a significant part in the novels' plots, and townsfolk themselves are even more rare. When urban areas do play a role of some consequence, they are nearly always — as with Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park* or Bath in *Persuasion* — portrayed in a negative light. On the other hand, critical evaluation of Austen too often overlooks the extent of the gentry's change around the turn of the century, and the degree to which that change manifests itself in

Austen's novels.⁸

her novels exhibit a decided "Francophobia."

Butler's worth lies less in her primary argument, as influential as it may be, than in the fact that she introduced to Austen studies the vaguely-heretical notion that Austen could be considered a political writer. Before Butler's work appeared, Ian Watt's introduction to *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1963) summarized "the enduring problem of Jane Austen criticism: scale versus stature; the slightness of the matter and the authority of the manner" (2). Critics were divided into two camps at this time. The conventional view regarded Austen as "Gentle Jane," a harmless, entertaining writer of domestic fiction. The "Subversive School," led by such writers as D.W. Harding, David Daiches, and Marvin Mudrick, held that Austen disliked her society intensely but could only express such disfavour through the irony in her novels. Nobody before Butler seriously felt that Austen was to any degree a political writer.

Jane Austen and the War of Ideas has changed Austen studies so greatly that the central debate regarding Austen now is whether she was a progressive or conservative writer. Several critics have convincingly argued against Butler's basic premise: Claudia L. Johnson, in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988), places Austen in the context of the popular fiction of the time and considers her a progressive author, while Margaret Kirkham's *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (1983) urges the reader to see Austen in the tradition of feminist writers such as Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft.

⁸ Critics who do concentrate on the changes occurring within the gentry include Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*; Daniel P. Gunn, "In the Vicinity of Winthrop: Ideological Rhetoric in *Persuasion*"; Terry Lovell, "Jane Austen and the Gentry:

The image of the English gentry as a timeless class existing undisturbed from after the Restoration to sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century, sudden victim of the increasing pace of industrial capitalism, is a seductive one. It is aided no doubt by the authoritatively serene depictions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to be found in authors such as Austen and George Eliot, and by the kind of nostalgia that, as Raymond Williams notes in *The Country and the City*, seemed

endemic to each successive generation.⁹ This image is misleading, though; increasing

A Study in Literature and Ideology"; and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. Terry Lovell's well-reasoned article is especially valuable in making clear the contradictions and ideological alterations that appear among the gentry around Austen's time. By providing a brief history of how the gentry contributed to the rise of agrarian capitalism, Lovell demonstrates that the gentry were not at all a homogeneous class. They were, rather, a class able to do more or less what it wanted, atypically capitalist because they "remained a class of consumers, rather than of investors." Many gentry farmers were improvers, but many others were not. Where tenant farmers had little choice but to follow the trend of agrarian capitalism, gentry landlords had the option of using their land as capital and pursuing more lucrative investment opportunities overseas. (For an analysis of colonialism in Austen's novels, see Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*.) While all gentry lands were improved sooner or later, when years of neglect would force upon them "capitalist rationalisation," families could, if they wished, maintain an essentially eighteenth-century lifestyle. Lovell suggests that, "squeezed between the rising capitalist tenant-farmer and the upper gentry, whose estates had been consolidated and increased in size at their expense, the lesser gentry, to which Jane Austen's family belonged, was in a more exposed position. A position from which the perception of a general threat to their class might be perceived, from which the social and ideological *differences* between traditional rural society and the new urban capitalist order would appear very great" (21). The position I take in this chapter is that Austen is indeed very conscious of ideological differences. Contrary to Lovell, however, I argue that Austen seeks to manage difference rather than keep it at bay because of its threat to social stability.

⁹ Enclosures at the end of the eighteenth century were bitterly opposed by those who relied on common lands to keep their small stock of animals. While enclosures undoubtedly increased agricultural efficiency, they also hit hardest the poor, those who could least afford the loss of commons. Raymond Williams takes some time to demonstrate that enclosures were only one contribution to class divisions that were well underway in English society. The Acts of Enclosure of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries prompted many writers to lament the end of the rural way of life, and insofar as *Persuasion* shows a rural gentry community in decline, it may be read that way too. But as Williams points out, every generation seems to feel that theirs was the last of the truly pastoral times. He traces this feeling back to Virgil's *Georgics* to show that the pastoral life depicted there always had some tension — while it was rustic and simple and attractive, it also had hardship and was not to be mistaken for paradise. Later variations on the pastoral in English literature

capitalism had a much deeper effect than has generally been perceived. What Austen ultimately stood for will remain subject to continuing discussion, and this chapter will but add a new voice to the debate. But it should first of all be understood that Austen wrote in a turbulent time, and that the apparent placidity of her novels only masks the ineluctable changes they witness.

III

Literary critics conventionally regard any absence of harmony in Austen's novels as a fault of the people involved, not the social structures they inhabit. In other words,

Austen's romantic comedy is not revolutionary and does not hold up romantic love as a value transcending all social convention and tradition. Rather, the plots of her novels enact the integration of the authentic individual self (the heroine) into a social order and social institutions that remain fundamentally unchanged outwardly, but renovated from within by the authentic beings now inhabiting them. (Kelly 117)

The novels' conflicts, then, are not simply battles between the outdated ideas of the old and the fresh thinking of the new. Rather, they document the benefits of

excised the tension that existed in the *Georgics*, leaving behind little more than the sentimentality. Austen escapes sentimentality through her pervasive irony, but the apparently untroubled social surface of her earlier novels can encourage a sentimental reading. For a fuller discussion of rural nostalgia, see *The Country and the City*, pp. 13–59.

regeneration as opposed to replacement, and emphasize that which Austen considers most valuable: the inherited code of social tradition.

Austen's approval of tradition is often cited as evidence in determining her political affiliation, especially by those critics who think her to be a conservative author. Other critics who wish to think of their Jane as something other than a horrible Tory often perform terrific interpretative contortions to show how Austen preferred progressive to conservative politics.¹⁰ But there is another way to approach Austen's thinking in this regard, and that is to suggest that she was interested in social tradition not for its inherent stability but for its contribution to stability. Or to put it otherwise, we may regard Austen as a pragmatic writer who recognized that custom did not guarantee stability, but could, in fact, promote its opposite. Austen was surely interested in change — one can hardly laugh along with her incisive irony and conclude that she was entirely in accord with all of her society — but did not favour too much change too fast.

¹⁰ Much of this problem can be explained by too ready a willingness to accept as the terms of debate Austen's status as a progressive or a conservative. As Claudia L. Johnson explains, "because the code words of conservative and reformist polemicists were not at first antithetical, but in fact share a common tradition, representations of social and political debates in fiction are rarely as pat as modern commentators have considered them" (xxii). Anticipating objections to her feminist/historicist approach to Austen, Johnson dismisses the view that "the only genuinely 'unanachronistic' Austen is the Tory conservative" (xix) and argues that "few ostensibly 'historical' truths are as stubbornly persistent and as entirely *ahistorical* as the belief that, with the exception of a few unseemly radicals, Austen and her ladylike contemporaries were not curious about or concerned with the moral implications of gender distinctions, and that as a sensible woman, Austen never mixed with the political debates of her time" (xx). It may be useful to see Austen as deeply involved with political issues, but not aligned with any one viewpoint.

Persuasion demonstrates that managing conflict takes precedence over the maintenance of any social tradition. The problem indeed with the social tradition in Austen's last novel is that it engenders more conflict than it moderates: Sir Walter abuses his position and wrongs his tenants, while Lady Russell's "prejudices on the side of ancestry" (11) encourage hypocrites like Mr Elliot. Anne Elliot's own thwarted hopes also stand as a substantial criticism of the *status quo*, not because of the advice she is given (which Anne defends in any event) but because her life is out of joint. Social custom does not favour late marriages. What the social tradition emblemizes is not necessarily wrong, however, because Anne's qualities are all that a proper member of the gentry's should be even with her disappointments. But given a choice between what is supposed to be — the moral order ideally represented by the gentry — and what actually exists, Austen eschews sentimentality and chooses that option which promises a more effective approach to managing conflict.

An interest in managing conflict means, in essence, that Austen does not place her faith wholly in the established social structure. Certainly this is the case in *Persuasion*, but it is true as well for the previous novels insofar as we may see that conflict management precedes social tradition, rather than the other way around. Such a conclusion naturally follows the realization that community is constituted by difference, by "an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible"

(Mouffe 78). If the inherited social code guaranteed freedom from conflict there would be no need to consider alternatives. But it guarantees nothing; it merely mediates conflicts that never really go away. And when it provokes as many conflicts as it resolves, its primary purpose goes unrealized. Austen's decision in *Persuasion* to present a community in transition is the logical extension of her belief in difference and particularity. Faith in established social structures without some corollary expectation of what benefit they should provide is ultimately faith in a homogeneous and transparent world, a belief that the world may be ordered *just so* and that such order will solve all inequities. Austen's world view acknowledges that England is made up of a great number of differences, and insists that these differences be accounted for and managed.

If difference was previously seen by Fielding and other eighteenth-century novelists to be important largely at the level of nationality, and therefore excluded from the construction of social identity, Austen's solution is not to disregard national conflict so much as it is to stress that small conflicts precede large ones. Austen maintained the value of manners and propriety in all her novels, but not just because they make domestic life easier. Propriety lies at the heart of any nation's ideology, as she suggests in a dialogue between Mrs Percival and her niece, Catharine, in an early short story:

"But I plainly see that everything is going to sixes and sevens and all order will soon be at an end throughout the Kingdom."

"Not however, Ma'am, the sooner, I hope, from any conduct of mine," said Catharine in a tone of great humility, "for upon my honour I have done nothing this evening that can contribute to overthrow the establishment of the kingdom."

"You are Mistaken, Child," replied she; "the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of its individuals, and any one who offends in so gross a manner against decorum and propriety is certainly hastening its ruin. You have been giving a bad example to the World, and the World is but too well disposed to receive such." ("Catharine" 222)

Despite Mrs Percival's exaggerated alarm at the impending decline of the nation, the passage indicates that communal conflict matters because difference begins not at the national or tribal level, but at the most basic levels of human interaction. Mrs Percival correctly points out that the welfare of a nation depends, at least in part, on the virtue of its citizens. Her error is to define virtue too narrowly, for Catharine's "crime" is to have been the recipient of some unexpected courting.¹¹

By focusing on individual behaviour, Austen makes clear that one cannot comprehend geographically larger difference without first giving some thought to

¹¹ The notes to "Catherine" in *Catherine and Other Writings* contextualize Austen's early work very well. Here the editors show that Austen is playing with the conservative reaction to the French Revolution, a reaction which insisted on "female chastity, modesty, and propriety in order to preserve England against the onslaught of revolutionary ideas and consequent disintegration" (358). Catherine's reply to her aunt suggests that if she has given offence, it is only to Mrs Percival and not to the entire country.

the geographically smaller. Thus she fights assumptions of English homogeneity by concentrating on the England she knows — the England of a few families gathered together in the counties with which she was most familiar. Austen's determination to be as accurate as possible in her writing (as in her epistolary question regarding hedgerows in Northamptonshire) also indicates her understanding of the importance of not mistaking what one knows for what everyone else knows. Austen wrote not of small things, as many critics through the years have thought, but of a small space, and she limits herself to such a space precisely because she knows that space elsewhere (and in England, especially) is different.

IV

Austen's focus on small space has an immediate and unsurprising consequence: where Fielding's novels explore England's national character, assuming as they do one's ability to move comfortably between "social commonwealths," *Persuasion* deals with distinct communities. These communities seem to be obvious: various critics have argued that Captain Wentworth and the navy represent a rising tide of bourgeois middle-class values that challenge the sedate, old-fashioned principles of

the gentry.¹² But this view oversimplifies the novel's conflict, suggesting in essence the triumph of new over old. Several factors complicate this picture. First, the rising naval class is little more than an extension of the gentry. A "naval officer was very often the younger son of a peer, or a country gentleman, or a parson (himself probably a younger son)" (Chapman, "Reply" 154). Second, Wentworth and the Crofts fit in with their new gentry neighbours. They speak the same language — in other words, their manners are fine — and there is no indication from anyone other than the hopelessly vain Sir Walter that the navy men are not looked upon as social equals. "There is no hint that Wentworth," for instance, who nearly marries Louisa Musgrove, "thought of [Charles] Musgrove as belonging to a different class" (Chapman 154). Similarly, while Mary Musgrove looks with disdain upon Charles Hayter, her husband's cousin and an eldest son who stands to "step into very pretty property" (76) upon his father's death, Captain Harville's modest accommodations cause her no distress. While he may not be wealthy, he is not out of place. Third, conflict between gentry and navy presumes that the gentry have some reasonably strong representation to counter the option presented by the navy. Yet Sir Walter abdicates all the responsibility that accompanies his position as landholder,

¹² The most recent proponent of this idea is probably David Monaghan in *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*, pp. 143–4, but see also Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, p. 232; Joseph M. Duffy, Jr., "Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," p. 280–3; and Nina Auerbach, "O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*," 120–2.

preferring to give up his station rather than live in reduced means, while “the Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new” (40). The Crofts, Captain Wentworth and his friends represent less an alternative communal ideology than they do a continuation, with modifications, of the one already prevailing. This is nowhere made clearer than in the Crofts’ tenancy at Kellynch-Hall, which shows how easily one family may substitute for the other. The encouraging welcome that the Crofts and Wentworth receive from the Musgroves — and, by implication, from all the Musgroves’ social circle — confirms their status within the community. The navy should not be considered exterior to the gentry but part of it.

The two communities at the heart of the conflict in *Persuasion* are the gentry and Bath. The navy men already hold values sufficiently similar to the gentry’s to be accepted by them even if they do not own land. Bath is the real alternative to the gentry values upheld by Anne and the navy. The vocabulary of Bath — to use Richard Rorty’s term — is the vocabulary of the self, one influenced by the pressures of urbanization and polite society. Bath is the sort of place where Sir Walter’s heir, Mr Elliot, can expect to find the anonymity necessary for one unwilling to wait for a measure of social stature. Such anonymity is important because it disguises the extent

to which self-interest may form the basis of one's actions. Anne, after hearing Mrs Smith's story of Mr Elliot's past, says that "Mr Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness" (208). She is undoubtedly right, but Mr Elliot is also, by some standards, successful. Lady Russell's opinion of him as a man with "good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart" (146) demonstrates how fully he wins her support and the support, presumably, of other discerning figures of the community. Mr Elliot is successful — at least in presenting a respectable face to the world, if not in his designs on Anne — because he can count on the anonymity of urban experience to help hide the less agreeable parts of his character.

As an urban centre, Bath necessarily employs a vocabulary subtly different from that to which the gentry is accustomed. This vocabulary is not shown directly in the novel — the only Bath resident with any substantial dialogue is Mrs Smith, and she is a socially marginal figure — but the fact that Bath maintains a different vocabulary is apparent nonetheless in the local society's emphasis on status and formality. Anne, as we might expect, understands the crucial difference between the kind of vocabulary that Bath allows without fear of recrimination and the vocabulary she finds customary in her own circle:

Mr Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,— but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection. Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. (161)

A lack of openness is the very failing of which the anonymous, urban centre might best be accused. It is also a failing shared, to a certain degree, by Sir Walter and Elizabeth. When they visit the Musgroves to invite them for a party, Anne feels “an instant oppression, and, wherever she looked, saw symptoms of the same. The comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister” (226).

Sir Walter’s and Elizabeth’s “heartless elegance” may not be representative of Bath as a whole, but neither can it be considered outside the city’s accepted manners. Bath suits Sir Walter’s vanity and it encourages the kind of toadying he displays toward the Dalrymples. The differing vocabulary and expectations of Bath are, however, perhaps best demonstrated in Elizabeth’s decision to invite Captain Wentworth to the party for the Musgroves:

The truth was, that Elizabeth had been long enough in Bath, to understand the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as his. The past was nothing. The present was that Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing room. (226)

In Bath, appearance and superficiality are what matter. Elizabeth might have persisted a little longer in her resistance to accepting Wentworth were she still in the country. But living in Bath has provided her with a new knowledge, one that combines apparent self-abnegation (her desire *not* to know Wentworth is put aside) with the desire to benefit the community (since he will be at the party along with everyone else). Elizabeth, however, will be noted for having a fine party at which Captain Wentworth was in attendance; she invites him out of self-interest, the element in Bath's vocabulary that all its residents understand, and not out of any sense of shared social welfare.

A resort town that caters to the desires of those wealthy enough to visit there, and that is thus emblematic of the ability to pursue self-interest, Bath suggests that there are two courses for the gentry to follow. One is to take Sir Walter's path and accept the inevitable diminution of responsibility promised by a world that no longer maintains similar values across all strata of society. This option prefers the superficiality of wealth and status, the indulgence of self-interest and self-importance, to the substance of shared social goals. The other option is offered by

Wentworth and Anne, who suggest that the best values of the gentry need not be abandoned even if the society changes. These two options mean that the novel's basic community, the gentry, is operated on by twin influences, one internal and one external. There has always been a division at the core of every community in Austen's novels — otherwise there would never be any need to inject the society with what Gary Kelly calls “authentic” new blood — but that division is most clear in *Persuasion*. Unlike Austen's earlier novels, *Persuasion* does not end with the simple revitalization of the *status quo*.¹³ Wentworth and Anne do represent a change from what has gone before, and the fact that some form of social change is inevitable is what makes *Persuasion*'s community so divided.

Social change seems inevitable partly because of the obvious differences between social groups in the novel. The hierarchical structures of the gentry-dominated eighteenth century¹⁴ clearly show some strain as they become progressively less able

¹³ The idea that Austen's earlier novels end with the revitalization of the *status quo* is open to dispute, especially if one sees *Persuasion* as an understandable extension of the previous fiction and not as a radical break from it. While there is insufficient space to deal with this issue in proper detail, it should be noted that “to end a novel with marriage is not necessarily to accede to the central institution of bourgeois culture” (Brown 307). As Julia Prewitt Brown goes on to contend in a rather caustic review-essay deploring the “feminist detractors” of Austen's work, “Austen shows the increasing modernization of marriage, from the first novel, in which marriage is linked to the general functioning of society and to the land, to her last, in which it is separated from the land and from a stable community. In *Persuasion* especially we see the origins of modern marriage, with its intense focus on the quality of the ‘relationship’ that a secular society imposes and its anticipation of the modern egalitarian marriage of companionship, represented by Admiral and Mrs Croft” (311).

¹⁴ Terry Lovell notes that the gentry “dominated political power and social influence throughout the eighteenth century. Gentry hegemony was unquestioned and unshared” (20). One of the most evident differences between Fielding and Austen is that Austen does question gentry hegemony. She is

to accommodate gracefully the divergent interests of the novel's various characters. The established order is, essentially, no longer so established. The Musgrove family's state of transition; the introduction of new, naval voices to the community, who carry with them the authority of recent victories; Sir Walter's lack of appetite for duty; and Anne's questioning of Lady Russell's advice not to marry Wentworth — all these help to destabilize society.

Austen's consciousness of differing vocabularies introduces alterity into the social discourse as a neutral value. For Fielding and other eighteenth-century moralists, difference was equivalent to deviance. Morality was characteristically described in terms of nature, and to be "unnatural" was to offend the proper order in the worst manner.¹⁵ Austen, however, refrains from organic metaphors that provide any form of "natural" basis for society. She appeals instead to propriety, the reservoir of social conventions. Faith in propriety is the very opposite of belief in an organic social order, for it speaks to the human disposition to *not* get along. Propriety is an artifice we employ to disguise the rough edges of society. Straying from propriety brings

given no choice because of the many changes occurring within the gentry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Where Fielding would be keen to perpetuate the identifiable ideal, Austen is more concerned with maintaining personal integrity in a changing world.

¹⁵ Fielding defends *Joseph Andrews*, for instance, by claiming that "everything is copied from the book of nature, and scarce a character or action produced which I have not taken from my own observations and experience" (10). Similar sentiments can be found in *Tom Jones*, though they probably reach their height in *Jonathan Wild*, where Fielding contrasts the deceptive Wild with the pure and innate goodness of the Heartfrees, Wild's intended victims.

those rough edges into view and threatens social order. Austen's focus on propriety, then, leads us to understand that she is well aware that social and communal order is entirely constructed. Arguing with Captain Harville about the qualities of male and female love, Anne allows him "no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything" (234). In short, Anne will not accept that history is the simple observation and recording of human events; on the contrary, history is a made thing, subject to the biases of those who write it, just as society is fabricated and subject to the biases of those who help set its rules.

As a result, difference to Austen is not to be feared but simply recognized. Given the inadequacy of male history, one might even encourage difference in order to discover a useful and superior substitute for the present social arrangements. Critics such as Claudia L. Johnson and Margaret Kirkham, who argue for Austen's committed attention to political issues, would consider her an author who does approve of difference defined in this manner. At the very least, alterity is better considered alternative rather than deviant, a neutral value that requires moral discrimination to determine whether it is good or bad. Gary Kelly has remarked that "More than novelists of manners and more even than 'silver-fork' novelists, Austen is

a novelist of discrimination, discrimination as not just a set of social codes and languages, but as the central practice of the self engaged in society" (113). The practice of discrimination requires the recognition of social difference and the realization that difference cannot be construed as only unnatural. Further, Austen's view of the centrality of discrimination means that the community is not to be assumed or taken as pre-given. Instead, it must be worked at and constantly negotiated. The necessity of working for the community is, I think, evident in all of Austen's fiction, but *Persuasion* brings home this point with special force because the community is so obviously weakening and in need of direction.

That *Persuasion* is a novel — and Austen a novelist — concerned with managing difference is apparent in a number of ways. Most obvious is Austen's focus on the small and the particular rather than the social panorama: "whereas the eighteenth century novelist, generally speaking, can accept society whole, as a given structure within whose terms the individual must act, the nineteenth century novelist tends to question the ethical constitution of society and to set against it a morality generated by the interaction of two people or a small group" (Duckworth 27). The eighteenth century's regard for the existing hierarchical social structure, especially evident in Fielding, treated the nation itself as the community. Fielding believed that England was or should be the same everywhere, equally accessible to all English citizens, even

footmen and orphans. Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews both travel without difficulty through various towns and counties. While they may find sin and deviation, they do not find anything unfamiliar. Social access was limited by one's position in society, but since the idea was that one belonged to that position, one should be able to fit in anywhere in the country. The possibility that society might operate differently depending on which part of the country one visited would have been anathema to Fielding and evidence that the body social was in ill health.

Anne Elliot, unlike Tom and Joseph, is struck by how "a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea" (42). This acknowledgement of the significant changes that can accompany small movements suggests that Austen questions the extent of the hierarchical social structure Fielding assumes. All of Austen's fiction of course deals with hierarchical order and the role propriety plays in maintaining it, and many critics agree with Alistair Duckworth's argument that

Jane Austen affirms society, ideally considered as a structure of values that are ultimately founded in religious principle, at the same time as she distinguishes it from its frequently corrupted form.... She is aware, as Fielding was, of an ideal society behind corrupted forms, which provides in its manners and conventions, properly understood, a framework of morality and order to which the self can authentically respond. (28)

Yet just as D.W. Harding and other early critics overstated Austen's objections to her society, Duckworth overestimates her attachment to the ideal. Faith in an ideal society understood to exist behind its corrupted forms implies a resistance to change by equating change with deviation, and while Austen's earlier novels may seem — especially in the case of *Mansfield Park* — to recommend the *status quo*, *Persuasion* provides drastically different evidence. Even the earlier novels suggest that, rather than reaffirming the social institutions, Austen's fiction affirms the people within them. Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot and Emma Woodhouse all share a certain independence of spirit that stamps them as people who would exercise judicious discrimination no matter what manner of society they found themselves in, and this independence makes it plain that Austen's best characters excel more despite the society into which they are born than because of it. This disjunction between social institutions and those who populate them aligns Austen with "the Victorian moralists, who had to learn to assume, with increasing unease from Coleridge to George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, that there was no necessary correspondence between class and morality" (Williams 117).¹⁶

¹⁶ Fielding may also belong to this constellation of authors, though he does ultimately appear to believe that blood will tell. Assumptions Fielding might make regarding the lack of correspondence between class and morality are at least as much unconscious as conscious.

If the Victorian moralists gradually learned that morality and class did not operate according to eighteenth-century ideas, Austen is a pivot point in the accession to this knowledge. On the one hand, she replaces Fielding's emphasis on hierarchy and the social homogeneity it entails with class allegiance. At the same time, however, she recognizes that class maintains only a limited homogeneity of its own. Community is not in Austen's fiction geographically-oriented, a function of a well-defined space; unlike the fiction of George Eliot, Austen's novels will usually encompass a town only at the fringes of social acceptability. Bath in *Persuasion* is one example, but so too is Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park*. The villages of Longbourn and Meryton in *Pride and Prejudice* suggest that even the smallest civic congregation can prove an unfortunate distraction for the empty-headed, as Elizabeth Bennet's sisters illustrate:

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton; a most convenient distance for the young ladies, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner's shop just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Catherine and Lydia, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their sisters', and when nothing better offered, a walk to Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening. (75)

The social groups in Austen's fiction, at least as they are represented by the ideal characters, tend to see the town as a necessary evil rather than as a space of social opportunity where one may meet others to make or affirm social connections. Insofar as it provides a haven for the superficial and worldly (Bath) or contributes to any lessening of decorum (as does Meryton's headquartering of the army), the town is positively to be avoided.

Fielding also thinks "the town" — i.e., London — merits little attention, but because it offers an alternative social ordering that thereby subverts the stable social hierarchy. For Austen the town is more of a distraction, a place where the usual components of communal bonding — the dances and visits that are the neighbourhood's entertainment — are indulged to excess. As a result entertainment is pursued for its own sake rather than to affirm social bonds. The behaviour of Catherine and Lydia makes fairly evident this self-interested distortion of what are at bottom communal events. Sir Walter's vanity and sycophancy are further species of the same problem, but they are again examples of excess. Austen thus takes issue with the town not because it offers something different — as presumably London does in *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones* by questioning the value of hierarchy — but because it perverts the rules of propriety.

By avoiding the town, the community in *Persuasion*, as in all of Austen's novels, becomes very exclusive. The lower classes do not belong except in the most abstract way as a responsibility accruing to the higher station of the gentry. While Austen employs the city / country distinction so often appealed to by writers who believe that the country offers a purity the city lacks, her version of the country is not a unified rural paradise. Where fifty years earlier it was possible to speak with confidence of the gentry as a class and know exactly what the term meant, by the turn of the century the gentry were experiencing considerable change. Enclosures and the increasing pace of agrarian capitalism saw the landowning gentry divided into families who maintained traditional farming practices and improvers who saw change as beneficial.

These changes are reflected in *Mansfield Park*, for instance, with the debate about the value of improvement (the Crawfords demonstrate their inadequacy by being heartily in favour of improvement as an end in itself) and in *Sense and Sensibility*, where John and Fanny Dashwood's pursuit of available land for improved agricultural production leaves them in straitened financial circumstances. Added to these changes were tenant farmers who gained by agrarian capitalism. Such men could be accorded some respect, as Mr Knightley's high estimation of Robert Martin in *Emma* makes clear. These changes to the gentry called in question the

homogeneity of the class, in addition to Austen's questioning of English social homogeneity. As a result, the values of one estate-owning family could not with certainty be said to match the values of other families; the gentry were no longer uniform in their actions. Gentry hegemony was at the turn of the century slowly becoming gentry unpredictability as the class as a whole moved in divergent political directions.¹⁷

Were Austen as conservative as some scholars think her to be, the novels would likely promote a nostalgia they conspicuously lack. Furthermore, they would give no hint that the power and usefulness of gentry hegemony had subsided. Her emphasis on the narrow spaces to which the gentry confines itself suggests, to the contrary, that she is fully aware of the differences — both real and impending — in her world.¹⁸ To say that Austen recognizes and validates difference is not to say that she

¹⁷ Warren Roberts writes that "Austen belonged to a family that was Tory in the eighteenth-century sense of the word." Because eighteenth-century politics revolved around the internal machinations of the Whigs, there were no political Tories, only Tory types "committed to the Church of England, loyal to the institution of monarchy..., tied to local, provincial ways and customs, opposed to a standing army, and convinced that England's strength lay in her navy" (17). With the crisis of the French Revolution, English politics was changed considerably. One of the primary consequences was a division within the Whigs that led to the formation of separate parties. The slow birth of the Tories as a political entity inevitably meant that the gentry would be divided as well.

¹⁸ The gentry are not, of course, literally limited to a confined space given that their estates are situated on greater or lesser tracts of land. As Austen's novels make clear, however, the gentry define themselves according to spaces small enough to be comfortably known. Geographically this means the "neighbourhood" — the families of similar social status within an easy carriage ride. Outside of this small circle the gentry are ill at ease, as the allusions to London's generally uncertain moral status suggest. As in Fielding's novels, the characters of Austen's fiction view the city with distrust. Only the very capable, such as Mr Darcy, are seen to be effective in the metropolis.

Fanny's return to Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park* paints a similar picture of the gentry's discomfort

focuses on it, however. Community and shared values remain for Austen vital concerns; what interests her is maintaining community in a world that provides so many opportunities to indulge self-interest instead. Communities act as what Ernesto Laclau calls “nodal points,” partial fixations in the sea of social meaning which appear to keep difference at bay.¹⁹ Whether or not difference constitutes the limits of community and helps to establish it as surely as do community’s shared concerns, community depends on the appearance of unity and harmony, on the idea that members of the community share similar knowledge about it. They must

outside its usual territory, one that is all the more remarkable for the extent to which it demonstrates how Fanny has assimilated gentry values:

She was at home. But alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as — she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of any importance to her family? She could have none, so long lost sight of! William’s concerns must be dearest — they had always been — and he had every right. Yet to have so little said or asked about herself — to have scarcely an enquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much — the dear, dear friends! But here, one subject swallowed up all the rest. Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush must be now preeminently interesting. A day or two might shew the difference. *She* only was to blame. Yet she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle’s house there would have been a consideration of the times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which there was not here. (376)

Fanny’s reaction to her return home, coupled with her observations about the “parlour, so small that her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better” (371) and “the smallness of the house, and thinness of the walls” (375) suggest to what degree the gentry are lost outside their accustomed haunts. If Fanny is any guide, we might argue that gentry ideology induces a kind of cultural amnesia, one that causes Fanny and the rest of the gentry to forget that there are other lives outside the narrow bounds within which they operate.

¹⁹ Considering community a nodal point does not mean that its meaning is fixed or mean that it is removed from the play of differences. Relative to the society, however, community may be seen as a meaning or partial fixation, one nodal point of many attempting to dominate the field of discursivity, even if it is itself subject to the same negotiations with difference that society perpetually engages. For more on this subject, see section IV of the first chapter of this thesis.

possess, as Richard Rorty says, a shared vocabulary that indicates their membership in the community. Thus community is about managing the conflict that makes the suppression of self-interest necessary and rewarding. Rather than attempt to extinguish alterity, community, at least for Austen, means above all the recognition of margins and the prevention of a surplus of conflict, conflict so extensive it defies management.²⁰

Persuasion displays two approaches to managing the conflict at its centre: the external pressure of the inherited social code that seeks to ensure that members of the community conform to the established rules of behaviour, and the internal pressure for individuals to resist moral failing when temptation offers itself. Austen has long been recognized as an author who is much concerned with morality and the part it plays in maintaining social institutions. Critics generally take this interest of Austen's to be an indication of her politics since "the analysis of social ills in terms of the moral failings of individuals is a time-honoured one for conservatism.... Reform

²⁰ Chantal Mouffe calls attention to the need for margins in the construction of communities: "Political life," she says, "concerns collective, public action; it aims at the construction of a 'we' in a context of diversity and conflict. But to construct a 'we,' it must be distinguished from the 'they' and that means establishing a frontier, defining an 'enemy.' Therefore, while politics aims at constructing a political community and creating a unity, a fully inclusive political community and a final unity can never be realized since there will permanently be a 'constitutive outside,' an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible. Antagonistic forces will never disappear, and politics is characterized by conflict and division. Forms of agreement can be reached, but they are always partial and provisional since consensus is by necessity based upon acts of exclusion" (78). To this I would add only that while Mouffe speaks specifically of politics, I think we can read "politics," especially with the example of Austen before us, as the social as such.

was never envisaged as requiring any far-reaching structural change, merely the removal of corrupt officials, and a renewal and re-affirmation of the old values and practices” (Lovell 24). Similarly, “Austen’s awareness of violence and political repression is one of the keys to her Toryism” (Roberts 18). This view of Austen’s political affiliation is possibly supported by her earlier novels, though their irony sometimes renders verdicts of any kind problematic.

One can, however, equally easily interpret Austen’s awareness of conflict as a foundation for the more “progressive” stance of accepting the validity of difference; there is no necessary correlation between the recognition of difference and the desire to erase it. *Persuasion* supports the former contention because the established social structure is in the process of transformation. Austen is obviously aware of this transformation; one of its implications is the ascendancy of urban ideology, and Austen concedes as much by setting a substantial part of her novel in Bath. The transformation of society evident in *Persuasion* suggests that we should consider the possibility that Austen no longer cleaves (if she ever did) to the idea that the social structure is to go unquestioned.

The community’s strict organization reveals the external pressure imposed on its constituents to ensure that they conform to the community’s definition of socially acceptable behavior. Social space in Austen’s fiction is highly regulated and reflects,

perhaps, an impulse similar to the panopticism and discipline that Foucault speaks of as representative of modern civilization in *Discipline and Punish*. Community geography is not so much the space where families live — the houses, their gardens and parks, and the surrounding countryside — as it is those still more confined spaces where community activity is supervised: the sitting room, the dining room and the other areas of the great houses which admit public interaction.²¹

Austen's society was a highly ritualized one, as the courtships in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park* make clear. Anne Elliot is a faintly scandalous figure because she challenges the rituals which to that point in time have seemed so necessary to communal peace. The extensive rituals of the Austenian community require a disciplined social space wherein everyone knows and agrees upon the proper way to act at all times. Even the outdoors demands regulation as a component of communal space. Outdoor activity is often modulated by demands for social propriety. Carriage rides, even for relatively short distances; pathways that indicate where and where not to walk; and the view, exemplified in *Mansfield Park*, that

²¹ Judy Van Sickle Johnson, in "The Bodily Frame: Learning Romance in *Persuasion*," argues that "Jane Austen's claustrophobic, confined settings in drawing rooms and carriages do not restrict the romantic possibilities of this love story" (45). On the contrary, they provide "wonderful opportunities for physical intimacy, vexation, and anxiety" (54). Van Sickle Johnson's contention that "it is this new excitement of physical contact, this arousing consciousness of growing intimacy, that lends *Persuasion* its 'peculiar beauty'" addresses an underexamined area of Austen studies — the passion that Charlotte Brontë and Mark Twain both complained Austen lacked. Whatever passion Austen's characters possess, however, exists *in spite of* their highly-constraining society.

nature should stand as a kind of adornment to family houses — all very carefully delineate properly restrained outdoor behavior.²² So too does Bingley's sisters' disapproval of Elizabeth's willingness to walk a muddy mile on a rainy day to ensure that Jane is all right when she takes ill at Bingley's residence. This control over the environment serves to extend distinctions between communal and private space, and stems again from a desire to manage conflict. Where there are no rooms with ceilings and doors to provide clues as to how to act, the community creates the metaphorical equivalent to ensure that potential misunderstandings are kept to a minimum.

²² One notable exception to this general behaviour is Mr Elton's proposal to Emma:

To restrain him as much as might be, by her own manners, she was immediately preparing to speak with exquisite calmness and gravity of the weather and the night; but scarcely had she begun, scarcely had they passed the sweep-gate and joined the other carriage, than she found her subject cut up — her hand seized — her attention demanded, and Mr Elton actually making violent love to her: availing himself of the precious opportunity, declaring sentiments which must already be well known, hoping — fearing — adoring — ready to die if she refused him; but flattering himself that his ardent attachment and unequalled love and unexampled passion could not fail of having some effect, and in short, very much resolved on being seriously accepted as soon as possible. (*Emma* 148)

Few authors aside from Austen could make this passage so comic, but it is notable for the attention it draws to its rarity: Mr Elton must avail himself of the "precious opportunity" of speaking forthrightly to Emma because he is offered such chances so seldom. The opportunity is perhaps all the more precious because of where it takes place. Carriage-rides are, like everything else in Austen's world, scrupulously watched over. This scrutiny is either explicit, as when Fanny acts as a quasi-chaperone to the Bertrams and Crawfords on the trip to Mr Rushworth's estate, or implicit in that the patriarch's regulation of the carriage — the women in Austen's families invariably have to ask permission to use it — means that the family knows always who is in it.

That it is Elizabeth, with whom the reader identifies,²³ who exercises sufficient independence to act outside the restrictions of the community implies that those restrictions ought sometimes to be re-examined. This idea is not developed much further in *Pride and Prejudice*, but in *Persuasion* it is central to the movement of the novel. The description of the Musgrove family before Anne visits them is decidedly ambivalent: "Mr and Mrs Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant." Their eldest daughters have "manners unembarrassed and pleasant" though Anne "would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments" (41). Anne's feelings of superiority, however, are replaced later in the novel by a "fond regret" for "the bustles of Uppercross" (135), and by a recognition that her "cultivated" manners are not the only attractive kind. The navy manners also have their allure:

There was so much attachment to Captain Wentworth in all this, and such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display, that Anne felt her spirits not likely to be benefited by an increasing acquaintance

²³ Interestingly, Marilyn Butler argues that Elizabeth Bennet is a character with whom readers should *not* identify; she believes the novel's education is of Elizabeth alone rather than of Elizabeth and Darcy. For Butler, Fanny Price exemplifies the modesty and conformity women are to strive for in Austen's society. Terry Lovell ("Jane Austen and the Gentry: A Study in Literature and Ideology," p. 25) rightly counters Butler's argument with the observation that Austen's letters reveal her to be like Elizabeth Bennet, not Fanny Price. Butler's original and forceful reading of Austen has been highly influential, but her interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice* leaves something to be desired if it asks us to even partially reject Elizabeth's independent spirit.

among his brother-officers. 'These would have been all my friends,' was her thought; and she had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness. (98)

Later the narrator comments that "Admiral Croft's manners were not quite of the tone to suit Lady Russell, but they delighted Anne. His goodness of heart and simplicity of character were irresistible" (127), and Anne's change in perspective is complete. Her alteration is not an insignificant one. On the contrary, it strikes at the heart of the established communal order because Anne appreciates manners so different from her own and Lady Russell's. If Anne's manners are elegant, one can be sure that Lady Russell places a premium on elegance and propriety as well. Her evaluation of Mr Elliot proves this to be so, and proves also that she is "unfairly influenced by appearances" (249). Admiral Croft's manners, by contrast, are the manners of honest, plain talking, as are the manners of all the navy figures. Anne's appreciation of the "truth and sincerity of feeling" (113) characteristic of the navy families signals a move away from the manners with which she is most familiar, and indicates that change need not necessarily be a negative thing.

The transformations taking place in the community in *Persuasion* suggest that Austen is no longer confident about the ability of social structures to work in the best interests of the collective without modification. Or, perhaps more accurately, Austen appears to be suggesting that there is a limit to how much people may do in

revitalizing social structures. Where previous Austen novels end with the happy union of heroine and hero within the established social framework, *Persuasion* posits a decidedly uncertain future for Anne Elliot: “the dread of a future war was all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance” (252). Anne’s association with a profession rather than with the landed gentry interest suggests that the uncertainty here is not mere contingency. While land is a resource often indifferent to its quality of management, professional life is inextricably tied to the individual’s skills. Austen’s previous novels celebrate women who find their (deserved) fortunes. *Persuasion* tempers Anne’s fortune slightly with the realization that it is not free from indeterminacy.

If stability is no longer to be found in the social institutions the community constructs, an alternative method of dealing with conflict will have to be relied on. Each of Austen’s novels is about social alternatives and deciding where the best course lies, and each of her novels depends on exceptional individuals who make the proper choices. All the novels have, for instance, marriage options the heroine may choose among. The correct choice —Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* — will lead to improved social harmony; the incorrect choice — Mr Collins — will mean a

continuation of whatever ails the body social. *Persuasion* is no different. Where Anne had in all the years since she first rejected Wentworth only one interested suitor (Charles Musgrove), she is suddenly faced with two: Wentworth and Mr Elliot. As in Austen's previous novels, the heroine is equal to the task at hand. Her choice signals the direction in which the community will move. If previous novels have been, according to Austen's critics, reluctant to present an alternative to the *status quo*, *Persuasion* sets aside any such hesitancy.²⁴ *Persuasion's* community at the end of the novel is to a singular degree a creation of the self because it depends on the propriety of the navy families, families who belong to the gentry but whose values are profoundly influenced by the competitiveness of the war arena. The importance of social structures diminishes as the ability to modify them increases; as a result,

²⁴ This chapter puts aside, for the most part, speculation about the extent to which Austen's previous novels conform to the *status quo*. It is necessary to ask, however, how these novels can possibly approve of the *status quo* when each of them offers solutions which are clearly separate from it. Darcy, for example, appears to be an eminent representative of proper society. He is exceptionally *rare*, however, a wealthy character with good sense and sound morals. Other characters, both rich and poor, generally lack the perceptiveness that goes toward a sound moral sense, yet they make up by far the majority of the community in *Pride and Prejudice*. Bingley is harmless but clearly a lesser choice, while Mr Collins and Mr Bennet are both flawed in different ways. *Mansfield Park* offers a similar situation. We are led to believe that Edmund is the novel's best character, though his infatuation with Mary Crawford should lead the reader to seriously question just how ideal he is. Henry Crawford, Dr Grant, Mr Rushworth, and Thomas Bertram all prove themselves to be less than competent citizens. Even Sir Thomas himself is an ambiguous figure if we balance his approval of Fanny against his marriage choice and the upbringing of his daughters. Patriarchs such as Darcy and Edmund indicate that the *status quo* is deeply flawed, and it is difficult not to see them as alternatives to the established social order rather than as icons of its ideal achievement.

community becomes ever more a product of the individual's direction rather than a process by which the individual is directed.²⁵

The self-regulation of community and the management of its conflicts are nowhere more apparent than in Anne's propriety and persuadability. Much is made of Anne's propriety. When Mary complains that Lady Russell has not paid her the respect she is due (she feels that Lady Russell has not visited frequently enough), Anne replies with "what was proper" (37) to calm the waters. Later, and more significantly, when Anne agrees to help tend Louisa after her fall at the Cobb, Wentworth exclaims that there is "no one so proper, so capable as Anne" (114). Anne's capability and propriety are beyond doubt, especially after the scene at the Cobb where she is the only one to demonstrate sufficient wit to comprehend the situation and take action. These incidents are significant because they help to define what propriety is. Propriety is not in *Persuasion* simply correctness or rightness in the abstract. Rather, propriety is self-sacrifice to community goals, and thus the

²⁵ We can observe the same effect in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*: the more often Joseph and Parson Adams resort to "irregular justice," the less important are the social structures they are presumably striving to uphold. Power accrues to that part of the network employed most often, and as Joseph's and Adams's irregular justice necessarily inscribes a new, quasi-legitimate vocabulary in the social dialectic, the previous vocabulary extolling the traditional, hierarchical virtues weakens as a result. This effect ties in well with Rorty's theory of the strong poet, which argues that those with strikingly new vocabularies instate social change, the metaphors they use gradually hardening into a literality challenged in its turn by new metaphors. Though neither Anne nor Parson Adams would likely characterize themselves as strong poets, especially insofar as that designation implies a degree of conscious separation from the community, their actions *are* suggestive of a detachment which affects the course the community will follow. In other words, Anne and Adams are not only influenced by the community; they influence it in return.

management of conflict even at the expense of one's own interests. Both with Mary and Wentworth Anne works to bridge points of possible disagreement between community members — Wentworth might have to take rather more responsibility than he wishes, for instance, and fulfil implicit promises to Louisa Musgrove he had not intended to make. Since Anne is so much identified with the community as the person insistent on a “higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity” (12), it is little wonder that propriety should be defined according to the community needs, or that Anne is one of the few people capable of living up to the community's demands.

Anne meets these demands by virtue of a persuadable temper, but more than that the novel suggests that openness to persuasion is the best way to protect and perpetuate the community. Early in the novel, when the issue arises of how Sir Walter and Elizabeth (Anne is given little consideration) are to adjust to their increasing debt and the limitations it imposes, Anne hopes that “there might be little more difficulty in persuading them to a complete, than to half a reformation” (13). And later in the novel, as Wentworth, Anne and Henrietta Musgrove leave Lyme after Louisa's fall at the Cobb, the narrator reproaches Wentworth's seeming faith in the resolute character:

Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel, that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character. (116)

Both of these instances of persuasion reveal it to be a positive value, something good in and of itself and something intrinsic to a sense of community. The novel of course focuses on Anne's ability to persuade and be persuaded, and insofar as Anne is the novel's central character and the one who best represents the values of whatever community the novel ends with, persuasion has to be considered a force necessary to the communal good. The alternatives are the selfishness of her cousin, Mr Elliot, which is nearly equivalent to evil when we consider the hypocrisy that goes along with it, or the "resolute character" of Louisa Musgrove, which means no harm but lacks sufficient understanding to recognize when compromise is necessary. Faced with these options persuasion is an attractive third choice that offers hope of mediation where mediation is so obviously needed.

Persuasion anticipates in its focus on the power of rhetoric and reason Richard Rorty's vision of the ideal liberal society.²⁶ His society would have only persuasion;

²⁶ Claudia L. Johnson draws attention to Austen's participation in the English tradition of Lockean liberalism (see pp. xx–xxii, 13–14), though, as Julia Prewitt Brown complains, "she never comes straight out and simply says that Austen was possessed by a sense of national destiny" (309).

rhetoric would replace all force. But as Ernesto Laclau points out in his reading of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, force is an inseparable part of persuasion.

Persuasion means alteration of one's views, and no matter how gently it might be done, it indicates that there is some conflict to be resolved. Perhaps unexpectedly, it is Henrietta Musgrove who hints at the power and importance of persuasion.

Speaking of her wish that Charles Hayter might find a curacy with Dr. Shirley, she says:

'I wish Lady Russell lived at Uppercross, and were intimate with Dr. Shirley. I have always heard of Lady Russell, as a woman of the greatest influence with every body! I always look upon her as able to persuade a person to anything! I am afraid of her, as I have told you before, quite afraid of her, because she is so very clever; but I respect her amazingly, and wish we had such a neighbour at Uppercross.' (103)

Besides establishing Lady Russell's position as one of pre-eminence in the community, "able to persuade a person to anything," Henrietta's speech sees persuasion as both a boon and a terror. It is a boon because it offers a way out of the conflict she has created through her wish that Dr. Shirley move to Lyme and allow Charles to take his place near home. But it is a terror because persuasion has the

Rorty says that "J.S. Mill's suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and preventing suffering seems to me pretty much the last word" on political liberalism (63), but one can discern a connection from Locke through Austen to Mill and Rorty without too much difficulty.

consequence, unarticulated by Henrietta though no less real, of stealing a little of the self. If once you believed one thing and later you believe another, some part of you is gone, replaced by the suggestions and rhetoric of someone else. Persuasion is certainly a more polite form of force than that of the conquering army, but it is force nonetheless. Austen uses the novel to argue that this kind of force is socially beneficial, especially considering the alternatives. But it is also a very powerful thing prompted by the need to manage conflict, whether it is the conflict Anne experiences upon seeing a former lover return or the conflict she feels between what her father should stand for and the option Wentworth offers. This conflict, however, contained as it is within the community, serves only to demonstrate that community is less about unity than about difference. The perfect community has no need of persuasion. Where there is no difference or disagreement, everyone is persuaded in advance.

If propriety may be seen in *Persuasion* as the arts of persuasion — knowing both how and when to persuade and to be persuaded in order to minimize conflict — and if propriety is essentially a question of good manners, we are left with the proposition that to be well-mannered in the best sense of the word is to be persuasive or persuadable. This seems true if we consider that the two best representatives of community in the novel — Anne and Lady Russell — are characterized by their

relation to persuasion. Lady Russell may indeed go too far in her persuasion of Anne. Wentworth, at least, thinks so, but it might also be said that Anne went too far in allowing herself to be persuaded. When Wentworth provides “what persuasion had once done” as reason for suspecting Anne to be likely to marry her cousin, her answer reaffirms the validity of persuasion:

“You should have distinguished,” replied Anne. “You should not have suspected me now; the case so different, and my age so different. If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here [to encourage marrying Mr Elliot].” (244)

Wentworth certainly offers an alternative to the heartlessness of her family, but the value of persuasion is something that Anne evidently will continue to insist on.

“Persuasion exerted on the side of safety” indicates that Austen believes persuasion to be positive when exercised on the conservative side of the ledger. Persuasiveness toward risky ends would be rhetoric that had at its core something other than the good of the community in mind; it would be rhetoric based on the self, not the collective. Thus far will Austen concede that persuasiveness cuts two ways. At the same time, though, Anne’s belief that Wentworth “should have distinguished” lays the blame for any difficulties at the door of the individuals involved. The process

itself is not fundamentally questioned, for while Anne may have been “wrong in yielding to persuasion once” she was, by implication, right to have yielded to it on many other occasions.

So *Persuasion* offers two challenges to the philosophy of Austen’s previous novels: it questions to some degree the amount of faith we should place in social institutions, and it demonstrates that moral order is largely created by individuals. What *Persuasion* does is define an alternate “institution” — persuasion — within which individuals may best work for the life of the community, another order like the irregular justice of *Joseph Andrews* that upholds the community at the same time it derives from outside of it. This “extraordinary” persuasion must be distinguished from the persuasion related to the wisdom of the community; it reflects Rorty’s view that “a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change” (*Contingency* 7) because this difference relates to the individual, not to the canons of established logic. Anne’s persuasion is extraordinary precisely because it seeks to articulate new ideas, because it indeed “speaks differently.” The extent to which one relies on persuasion of this sort is the extent to which one may be considered a strong poet, the type of person responsible for cultural change. Again like *Joseph Andrews*, “extraordinary” persuasion accomplishes the kind of structural change conservative readings of Austen argue she opposes.

Citizens do not depend on social structures alone, but on the people who construct those structures as well. The alternate order of persuasion is more of a process or a technique than any achieved result; it originates as a response to changing social circumstances and remains flexible in anticipation of further changes, whatever they may be. Change means conflict of some kind, and persuasion is posited in this novel as the best way to manage that conflict, a subtle force to meet the subtle force of social modification.

This response to change further means that persuasion defines the community. Rather than shared ideology or agreement on what constitutes the moral order, aversion to the overt conflict threatened by social change becomes the community's ethos. The "objective moral and religious values which must be learnt in a sound moral education and which are not revealed to individual intuition" (Lovell 24) no longer offer the security they once did. They are now malleable, subject to rhetoric and persuasion in the same way that members of the community are. Even if Austen believes that only negligible modifications to the community are necessary, the principle behind *Persuasion* differs from the usual conservative view of the preceding novels. Anne Elliot has had little choice but to rely on her intuition. Given the lack of guidance received from her family after her mother died, and given her mother's

apparent lack of success in educating Elizabeth, Anne may be forgiven for thinking that the established moral order answered rather fewer questions than it posed.

One may possibly see this replacement of the objective with the subjective as an entirely negative action, a response to a community that is coming apart. Persuasion and conflict would thus only be representative of the community in the last resort, and in other, less stressful periods community would be defined by shared concerns that rise above defense of territory. On the other hand, we can read this dissolution another way — as a confirmation of the fragility of community and the necessity of basing it on a more effective method of conflict resolution. Moreover, we can see it as Austen appears to — as a process of negotiation and as an understanding that the community is forever undergoing redefinition.

Such a view has profound implications, suggesting as it does the transportability of community.²⁷ It could be argued, for instance, that the principles the landowning

²⁷ The transportability of community is an issue in *Joseph Andrews*, as well; Joseph and, especially, Parson Adams become so bound up with the novel's idea of community that the novel risks the danger of transferring all attributes of community into the person of its major characters. This is partly Fielding's desire because he favours patriarchal authority, what Foucault would call the "power of the prince," in whom the imprint of society can be seen. Followed to its logical conclusion, however, this sort of authority is open to abuse if we allow individuals *carte blanche* decision-making power on behalf of the community. The violence in which Joseph and Adams engage, for instance, may thereby cease to maintain any distinction between its objective (in the service of the community) and subjective (the satisfaction of personal desires) functions, resulting in tyranny. The corollary danger in *Persuasion* would be to see Anne employ the violence of persuasion and rhetoric to remake community in her own image. But if persuasion is simply a force to influence the twin pressures of social change and the inertia of tradition, we can fairly safely surmise that other persuasions will arise to meet the excesses theoretically possible in Anne's rhetoric.

community is supposed to live up to are more than a sufficient basis for community, especially in the figure of Anne. Yet Anne plays a curious role in *Persuasion* because she demonstrates the inadequacy of the community that she represents at the same time that she is its ideal representative. Anne contributes to the dissolution of community rather than attempting to prevent that dissolution because she *is*, as Austen says, “too good.” Her exemplary principles make her comfortable in every social milieu. The narrator turns Anne’s gossip with Mrs Smith about William Elliot’s faults into a gift rather than an example of improper behavior: “She had never considered herself as entitled to reward for not slighting an old friend like Mrs Smith, but here was a reward indeed springing from it!” (212). Though she dislikes her family’s disrespect for their social obligations, she knows and accepts her diminished place within that family, at least until Wentworth returns. She adapts easily to life at Uppercross despite her fears to the contrary, and she also has no trouble conforming to the relaxed manners of the navy families. Though her spirits may sometimes be temporarily overcome by the depth of her attachment to Wentworth, she is never really at a loss for a correct word. As a result of these impressive abilities, Anne becomes propriety — wherever she goes, she brings with her all the community needs, as is more than evident from her effect on the people around her, who quickly come to depend on her steadiness and ability (even if, in the

case of the Musgroves, they are largely unaware of this dependency). Anne is a kind of communal glue herself, someone able to bring people together and mediate underlying conflicts such as those that exist between Charles and Mary Musgrove. The novel uses Anne's self-reliance to demonstrate the inadequacy of the prevailing community, even though she is a creation of it and its best representative.²⁸

Anne's position as representative of the gentry is, however, highly problematic. She cannot bequeath land or status to any of her children or relations, and her values seem to be shared only by Lady Russell. Further problems develop from the fact that the established community is ready to go completely awry. While Sir Walter is bad enough as steward of his estate, William Elliot's deceptions and hypocrisies do not bode well for the future. Lady Russell herself is tainted as a representative of the community: "she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them" (11). In short, Lady Russell places too much faith in the community's established order precisely at the time that it needs most to be questioned. Furthermore, she

²⁸ For a useful examination of the contradictory ideologies that inform *Persuasion*, see Daniel P. Gunn, "In the Vicinity of Winthrop: Ideological Rhetoric in *Persuasion*." He names the novel's contradiction as that "between the moral language of *Persuasion*, which presupposes a static social order, and the novel's basic way of imagining the world, which implies very strongly that such an order no longer exists" (414). This is, I think, an accurate assessment of the novel, but where Gunn disagrees with the suggestion that "Austen has turned away from her earlier sense of traditionally defined right conduct toward a validation of feeling and the needs of the self" (416), I would argue that proper conduct, whether defined according to tradition or the self, is subsumed by the need to manage conflict.

contributes to its greatest fault, a tendency to trust to appearances at the expense of substance. As a result of these incongruities between the principles of the community and the people who are supposed to uphold them (including the Musgrove parents), Anne finds herself virtually alone as a representative of the community. All things to all people, Anne is the distillation of her community and its gentry values and is thus in a sense a community of only one.

A community of one is not a community at all, however, and so in the instant that Anne forges more permanent connections between herself and others — between herself and the Musgroves and the navy families — Anne distances herself from her community even as she represents it. When Anne chooses to make her community more broadly representative she is at the same time criticizing the community she already represents because she implicitly acknowledges that it is incomplete and unsatisfactory. Thinking fondly of the bustle of Uppercross or feeling acutely that Wentworth's friends would have been hers had she married him, Anne endeavors to expand the limits of her community. As she does so, we understand that the gentry community she best represents, strictly defined, is not the community she would choose because it does not satisfy her needs for society and companionship. Were the community adequate, one might see Anne accepting others into it without making any special effort to expand it. The gentry principles which she embodies,

especially in their emphasis on duty and obligation, presumably provide enough society and companionship to meet her needs. But no one else in the novel believes as strongly in those principles or implements them as well as Anne does. It is clear that advancing social change requires a modified community that will both accept Anne's views and acknowledge the social reality of the slow decline of gentry values.

As a result, we cannot consider it any coincidence that Austen places Anne's future in the hands of the navy, a group of men who display their finest virtues *away from* the land. While the navy as an institution shares important similarities with the principles of the gentry — it depends greatly on a firm adherence to hierarchy, for instance — it also has some notable differences, chief among them the validation of individual merit in determining a person's success. But the differences and similarities between navy and gentry are ultimately less important than the simple fact itself that Anne can so easily transfer her allegiances from one to the other and still remain Anne, the very best example of the importance of social duty and obligation. Anne transfers allegiances to the navy men because in them she sees something of herself, naturally, yet in doing so her virtues undergo a fundamental change. Not in and of themselves — her virtues remain her virtues, those that prompt Austen to suggest that her heroine is “almost too good” for her. But community values transported to another community, no matter how little different

it may be, no longer remain the values of the original community. They are perpetually made new by the difference of their surroundings, in much the same way Bakhtin's utterance conceives even reiterated communication to be unique because of the (temporal) change in context. In reconfiguring the community, in accepting the community's internal option of change (as opposed to the external option represented by Bath), Anne has removed the values of the gentry from their accustomed concrete positions within gentry hierarchy to the realm of the abstract. Community values thus become a matter of personal integrity rather than structural integrity. Austen suggests more openly in *Persuasion* than she was willing to suggest in earlier novels that community does not depend on the values associated with one's position in it. On the contrary, community is to be created in a process of negotiation with those by whom one is surrounded; values are to be determined by the strength of personality and persuasion individual people possess.

As a consequence of Anne's internal reorientation of the community — the community is, after all, still basically comprised of all the same people though its organizational principles have shifted from land-based gentry values to a basis in individual ability — the idea of community and what it can be is much changed from Austen's previous fiction. No longer is community a fixed concept constantly replicated according to its initial values. It possesses rather an element of flexibility

that allows it to meet changing circumstances as necessary. It need not resist change but can contribute to it and thus work to benefit its members.

V

If Fielding's portrayal of the ideal community was highly teleological — the Wilsons' Eden prefiguring the glories in heaven to come — the representation of community in *Persuasion* significantly dissents from a teleological orientation. Because Austen's view of community comprehends the inevitability of difference, we must see community in *Persuasion* as an alternative rather than as one element in a progression toward a final, ideal end. Though Austen personally disliked urban areas such as Bath, considering them corrosive and corrupting influences, they do present possibilities that are not necessarily all bad. Consider, for instance, Elizabeth Bennet's merchant uncle in London, whose good manners impress Darcy and help lead to his and Elizabeth's eventual union. Removing community from the realm of the teleological goes along with Austen's shift toward making community a matter of individual rather than structural integrity. As a result, we might think Austen more Romantic than she is normally given credit for. She is usually seen as quite separate from Romantic visions and goals — one need only consider Anne's suggestions for Captain Benwick's reading ("the strongest examples of moral and religious

endurances" [101])²⁹ to see where Austen's sympathies lie — but the idea that community depends on individual effort, that it is a constructed thing rather than a naturally-occurring one, resembles the Romantic view that the individual creates truth. Certainly in *Persuasion* Austen contributes to truth-making. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* we will see where Austen's contribution to the truth of community leads.

²⁹ Anne's suggestions are in contrast to Captain Benwick's taste for both the "tenderest songs" of Scott and the "impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony" of Byron. To counter Benwick's rather too great a fondness for the poets, Anne "ventured to hope he did not always read poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly" (100–1). The next day "they walked together some time, talking as before of Mr Scott and Lord Byron, and still as unable, as before, and as unable as any other two readers, to think exactly alike of the merits of either" (107).

Chapter 4

Imagination and the Failure of Community

in *The Mill on the Floss*

Jane Austen represents a turning point in the way we perceive community. As a writer who refines eighteenth-century sensibilities while anticipating those of the century to come, she introduces to community an understanding of the legitimacy of individual liberties and the effect they have on altering the community. She is not untouched by the changes wrought by Romanticism, but contributes in *Persuasion* to what Richard Rorty conceives the Romantics' greatest insight: that truth may be created rather than found. George Eliot continues in the tradition Austen establishes, and insists that respect be paid to the individual whose desires deviate from the mainstream. More specifically, Eliot meditates on the role imagination plays in the creation of community. Her novels — *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* most prominent among them — record the reception given to new vocabularies promoted by women such as Dorothea Brooke and Maggie Tulliver. These women,

with the changes their reformist vocabularies propose, do not always share Anne Elliot's success in *Persuasion*. This lack of success does not mean that they have no appreciable effect on the community. Rather, it indicates Eliot's knowledge that "any reform involves changing the status quo, and in most cases this will hurt existing interests. The process of reform is a process of struggles, not a process of quiet piecemeal engineering" (Laclau 91). She is a less optimistic writer than Austen, one who is concerned to document the failures as well as the successes in communities touched by change.¹

While George Eliot's world view may be less sanguine than Austen's, the two writers do share a belief that the individual — whether Anne Elliot or Maggie Tulliver — who does not readily conform to society's bidding should not be broken to fit narrowly-defined social views. However community is determined, Eliot and Austen agree that it should not be defined through exclusion. Both writers move away from the model of community preferred by Henry Fielding, which gives more weight to the hierarchy that defines the community than to the value of the individual within it. Both also strenuously affirm the merits and necessity of community, but they affirm it at the same time they question the possibility of

¹ These failures are rather numerous. Maggie Tulliver's is obvious, but she is in good company: her father, Tertius and Rosamond Lydgate, Bulstrode, Hetty Sorrel, Arthur Donnithorne, Godfrey Cass, Mrs Transome — all of these characters fail in one way or another, either as a result of their own misguided exertions or because the communities in which they live fail them.

community's timelessness. Eliot and Austen know that to be successful a community must adapt; their novels call attention to those crisis points where adaptation is either not easy or is actively opposed.

Like Charles Dickens, Eliot was stimulated by the wrenching alterations Britain underwent during the nineteenth century and the implications these alterations had for effective communities. Eliot's concern with the effectiveness of community perhaps reaches its peak in *The Mill on the Floss*, the only one of her novels to end in unreserved tragedy.² Maggie Tulliver, whether because she is unable to make the appropriate concessions to her community's traditions, or because her community fails her in its attempts to mold and thereby distort her basic nature, appears out of place from the beginning of the novel. Her mother has little love for her as a child, her educational ambitions are thwarted and belittled, her brother sees only how they differ and how the differences reflect poorly on her, and her other relations cannot understand her. Each of these issues places Maggie in an awkward position, and calls attention to the loci of disruptions that any community will inevitably have, the

² Critics who wish to emphasize Eliot's attention to the past and the importance of its continuity with the present feel that Maggie's death is tragic because she has just been reconciled to the community in her decision to renounce her desire for Stephen and accept the ties of her family. Those who stress the legitimacy of Maggie's wants consider her death tragic because she can apparently be reconciled to the community only through death. Interpretations of Maggie's and Tom's deaths are complicated, however, by the oft-stated claim that the ending of the novel is somehow unsatisfactory. Such a feeling seems based more on a wish for Maggie to live than on any structural inadequacy of the novel. Eliot's notebooks reveal that the flood was envisioned from the start as the novel's conclusion. For more on Eliot's notebooks, see Thomas Pinney, "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels."

interjections of difference that need to be managed. Against the view that Maggie must bend to be happy or successful is the narrator's high estimation of Maggie's compassion, beauty, intelligence and imagination, qualities that most communities would gladly wish to share. And yet disjunctions remain, perhaps even flourish. *The Mill on the Floss* identifies imagination as both the root of and the solution for these disjunctions, and insists on the pre-eminence of the two qualities Maggie's community most resists, imagination and change: the first because it comprehends not just Maggie's escape from unhappiness but all constructions of community, and the second because the novel is a narrative of failure, or of the unfortunate consequences that sometimes attend on change.

The conflict of the novel is not its surface dispute between the material world of the Dodsons and the fancies of Maggie. It is instead between the competing visions of community proposed by various constituencies, visions which attest to community's status as a product of the imagination, and the very real, concrete problems these competing visions engender. *The Mill on the Floss* is less a novel about a community than it is a novel about community's limits and the need to understand that they cannot be fixed into place. The novel, after all, makes no attempt to blame anyone for its tragic outcome. It merely describes the difficulty of change and leaves it to the reader to learn what lesson she will.

II

The last few years have witnessed an explosion of critical interest in Eliot's fiction. This vast outpouring of criticism understandably comprises all manner of critical orientations. Eliot's Radical sympathies with regard to religion combined with her many unconventional life choices — she was twice briefly involved in what may have been *menages à quatre* or experiments in free love³ and eventually cohabited for life with the married George Lewes — provide ample resources for autobiographical and psychoanalytic approaches to her writing. At the same time, her impressive intellect offers considerable sustenance for those who would prefer to concentrate on her philosophy. Despite the breadth of topics Eliot's work can sustain, however, critics examine most often her views on society and social reform; few writers are as fixated on community and society as is George Eliot.

There are two primary strains to criticism of Eliot and *The Mill on the Floss*, and they divide more or less along conservative and progressive political lines. Any one of Eliot's novels reveals a mixture of sympathies. As Thomas Pinney has explained,

³ One incident was with John Chapman, his wife and his mistress; Chapman was soon to be the editor of the *Westminster Review*, and though Eliot's stay with the Chapmans went poorly, she was soon coaxed back to London to act as assistant editor for the journal. The other incident was with Dr. Brabant, a German scholar sometimes posited as the model for Mr Casaubon, and his wife and sister-in-law. She went to stay with him and aid his work, but was forced to leave earlier than she planned after Brabant's wife and sister-in-law objected to her presence. Circumstances were similar with Chapman — his wife and mistress demanded that Eliot leave, seemingly because they feared her as competition for Chapman's affection. In neither case is there any sure evidence of physical intimacy between Eliot and Chapman or Brabant, though the jealousy of the women involved is suggestive. For further details, see Laski, pp. 29, 34–7.

The woman of enlightened opinion who broke with the Church, translated Strauss and Feuerbach, and edited the *Westminster Review* had her part in writing the novels: their liberal and sympathetic point of view, their interest in the problems of reform, and their wide range of allusion to the concerns of contemporary science and philosophy are enough to show this. Nevertheless, the chief values of the novels are on the whole conservative, cherishing what is known and familiar, seeking the good in outmoded forms, and remaining skeptical of all hopes for swift and inevitable progress. When George Eliot wrote to one of her correspondents that “the bent of my mind is conservative” she appealed to her novels for the proof of her description. (133)

Counter to Pinney’s assessment of Eliot’s work is much recent feminist scholarship,⁴ which has emphasized Eliot’s interest in women’s education and independence and has argued that her legacy is a subversive one championing more progressive concerns. This contention is perhaps most evident in the argument that characters such as Hetty Sorrel or Rosamond Vincy are not examples of egoism, people who, because of their selfishness, must be excluded from the life of the community. On the contrary, they merely represent the expectations for women at that time. The example of Rosamond in this regard is especially strong, for if Eliot presents an

⁴ George Eliot has not always enjoyed the approval of feminist critics. Elaine Showalter’s “The Greening of Sister George” surveys the differing evaluations made of Eliot’s work by feminist critics. Earlier feminist accounts of Eliot were often harshly critical, both because she did not assume a more visible role as a feminist in her own life and because she appeared to advocate renunciation — at least in such characters as Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke — as a woman’s only hope for acceptance within a patriarchally-dominated society. *The Madwoman in the Attic*, by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, has done much to influence new feminist thinking regarding Eliot’s work. Recent scholarship by such writers as Gillian Beer, Jennifer Uglow, Nancy Paxton and Nina Auerbach (to name but a few) has been very generous in its assessment of Eliot’s feminism.

unflattering portrait of Rosamond, she disapproves nearly as much of the education Rosamond receives.⁵ According to this view Rosamond's education leads her astray more than does her character. As a consequence, we may read her as Eliot's attempt to call attention to the poverty of women's education.⁶

⁵ For further elaboration on the idea that Eliot's "negative" women characters simply reflect what the mid-nineteenth century wanted women to be, see Zelda Austen, "Why Feminists Are Angry with George Eliot," and Kathleen Blake, "*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question."

⁶ This theme is evident in *The Mill on the Floss* as well, where Maggie Tulliver's inability to find an appropriate outlet for her cleverness highlights the shortcomings of women's education. Education in general is of special significance to *The Mill on the Floss*; the novel's first scene begins with Mr Tulliver's pronouncement on the subject:

"What I want, you know," said Mr Tulliver — "what I want is to give Tom a good eddication; an eddication as'll be a bread to him.... I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholar, so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish." (9)

This laudable sentiment is followed soon by Mr Tulliver's questions regarding the matter, however: "But," continued Mr Tulliver after a pause, 'what I'm a bit afraid on is, as 'I'om hasn't got the right sort o' brains for a smart fellow. I doubt he's a bit slowish.'" The fact that Maggie is "twice as 'cute as Tom" does her little good; it only makes her "Too 'cute for a woman" (11). After such an inauspicious beginning the tone for the novel is set. Tom proceeds to have an expensive and inappropriate education that does him more harm than good, while Maggie's talents are neglected. On the one hand, Maggie appears to have no need for education: as Mr Tulliver says, "'an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep — she'll fetch none the bigger price for that'" (11). And on the other hand, the established, professional opinion dismisses Maggie's possibilities. Mr Stelling, when asked by Tom if girls can "do Euclid," answers that "They can pick up a little of everything, I daresay.... They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go very far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (132).

Mr Stelling is obviously educating the wrong Tulliver, but the only people who may be aware of it are Tom and Maggie themselves. The fact that Tom's education would much better suit Maggie demonstrates Eliot's opinion that the education system — insofar as there is any system — requires serious re-examination. An educational process that leaves Maggie to conclude that "it would have been better to be slow, like Tom" (132) ridicules itself and demands reordering. While Tom's schooling is desperately unsuited to his needs, the implicit evaluation of the other educated men of the novel suggests that their learning is of little more use. Philip Wakem, his lawyer father and Stephen Guest are all faintly superfluous, no one of them really necessary to the successful functioning of the community. Lawyers habitually bear the stigma of being considered social parasites, while Philip occupies the marginalized position of the artist and Stephen, at least when he is first introduced, fits nothing better than the description of coxcomb. Compared to the uneducated Bob Jakin, whose

Eliot's liberal thinking on education has been long acknowledged, but it has seldom been thought to correspond to her politics. For the majority of readers, Eliot's conservatism has taken precedence over possible progressive tendencies with regard to social reform. The tendency to interpret her work in this fashion is easily understandable. While she viewed women's education as a necessity for an improved society, she considered women's suffrage "an extremely doubtful good" (Laski 89). Similarly, she wrote during a political crisis in 1873 that she wished "there were some solid, philosophical Conservative to take the reins" (Laski 97). *Felix Holt the Radical* further contributes to Eliot's perceived conservatism, for it does little to challenge the *status quo* or to argue for increased representation by the lower classes in the political process. Felix Holt's "Radical" solution is to espouse education as the answer to the political problems of the lower classes. While Eliot's willingness to advocate proper education for all classes must be applauded, her opinion on this matter is certainly safer than, say, petitioning for a wider franchise.

Given these political clues, one can without difficulty see Eliot's early and genuine Radical tendencies as growing pains, idiosyncratic ideas that are replaced with more conventional thinking once she has seen more of the world. To cite a

sympathy and understanding embodies much of the community spirit Eliot admires, the novel's educated men appear to be even more irrelevant. Eliot's opinion of the value of education *per se* is well known. *The Mill on the Floss* makes clear, however, that her opinion of what passes for education — for both women and men — is not favourable.

typical summary of Eliot, we might say that her “mind was a mixture, though not a balance, of conservative and reforming tendencies” of which “the conservative was consistently the stronger” (Pinney 132). In accordance with this assessment, many critics have been content to document the values which they believe result from Eliot’s conservatism — duty, renunciation, retribution and loyalty to the past.⁷ And when they look to Eliot’s fiction they find no scarcity of evidence to support their contention that continuity and its attendant conservatism rules above all in Eliot’s fiction.⁸ Mary Garth, for example, chooses to remain true to Fred Vincy even when

⁷ Philip Fisher, for example, argues that “the harshness of Eliot’s moral world depends on the loyalty to judgment and expiation in spite of her more prominent mentions of sympathy... Sympathy does not forgive, because that runs against the process of nemesis — Eliot’s repeated assertion that evil acts have inevitable, destructive consequences both in the one who does the act and in the lives of the innocent around him” (88). Thomas Pinney draws attention to Eliot’s belief “in the virtue of piety, understood as the spirit that preserves the oneness of the individual consciousness and cherishes as a sacred inheritance the good in our past months and years” (140). George Levine concludes that “in all the novels but *Daniel Deronda*, heroism takes the shape of resignation exclusively, a willingness to renounce not only personal satisfactions but the possibility of great achievement for good causes” (“Determinism” 271). And Jennifer Uglow, though a feminist critic who emphasizes Eliot’s interest in social reform, concedes that Eliot believed “for women, duty must come before desire” (4).

⁸ Critics who think Eliot to be a conservative author often write persuasively of a novelist who is, like Fielding, more concerned with the society as a whole than she is with the fate of individuals within that society. They argue that figures such as Maggie Tulliver and Hetty Sorrel — even Dorothea Brooke — must be sacrificed rather than have their desires upset the balance of the community. This position is best exemplified by Philip Fisher and K.M. Newton, both of whom underscore Eliot’s philosophical conservatism and her belief that the continuation of society must rank above all other goods: “for Eliot, loyalty to society is a product of loyalty to the history it embodies. In other words, it is a product of loyalty to one’s own past.... The form of this loyalty makes it one with nostalgia, but, more important, it is one with a peremptory demand for continuity” (Fisher 15–6). This “demand for continuity” explains, for instance, Maggie’s decision to return to her brother rather than elope with Stephen Guest. Where her loyalties are in conflict, her ties to the past necessarily carry greater weight than does her new-found desire for Stephen. K.M. Newton also affirms Maggie’s decision to reunite with Tom. Because Eliot “believes that the only valid form of human identity is an organic one: there must be a sense of continuity between the formative experiences of one’s past life and one’s present self, and the individual should act and choose in

the prospect of a better offer materializes in the figure of Mr Farebrother. The fact that Mr Farebrother is the “cleverest man in her narrow circle” cannot overcome her long-standing attachment to Fred:

“I have too strong a feeling for Fred to give him up for any one else. I should never be quite happy if I thought he was unhappy for the loss of me. It has taken such deep root in me — my gratitude to him for always loving me best, and minding so much if I hurt myself, from the time when we were very little. I cannot imagine any *new* feeling coming to make that weaker.” (561; *italics mine*)

Mary’s opposition to Mr Farebrother is built on her childhood relationship with Fred, the sort of relationship Maggie Tulliver would have liked to have had with Tom or anyone else. Mary retains her childhood experiences, but more importantly she recognizes their importance to the present. Mr Farebrother’s considerable intelligence and easy charm are no competition against Mary’s sense of continuity. Maggie’s greatest wish could very well have been to have made her own choice between continuity and the exciting alternative of a new desire as easily as does Mary Garth.

relation to this sense of continuity” (97), Newton concludes that “only [Tom’s and Maggie’s] union can fully achieve” their necessary “continuity of being” (107). That Tom’s and Maggie’s union can only be achieved through their deaths is the unfortunate consequence of maintaining a stable community.

But Maggie's choice is not that easy. If anything, it is the most difficult thing she must confront in a life punctuated by difficulties. For this reason it is important to note that if Eliot's conservatism was genuine, it does not mean she was motivated solely by conservative impulses, nor that her conservatism overwhelmed her reformist instincts. She always upheld her early rejection of Christian dogma, and while she feared the results of possible social upheaval, this fear seems attributable to her distrust of the English population rather than to any settled belief that revolution could have no positive consequences.⁹

⁹ One of Eliot's letters to John Sibree, Jr., regarding the Revolutions of 1848, is instructive in regard to Eliot's thoughts on revolution. She commends him for "thinking rightly (that is, of course, as I do) about la grande nation and its doings" and is heartened to find that he lacks no "revolutionary ardour." Eliot herself has "little patience with people who can find time to pity Louis Philippe and his mustachioed sons. Certainly our decayed monarchs should be pensioned off: we should have a hospital for them, or a sort of Zoological Garden, where these worn-out humbugs may be preserved" (Haight 47). Such sentiments are not those we customarily associate with Eliot, and she goes on to provide a qualification to her own "revolutionary ardour":

I should have no hope of good from any imitative movement at home. Our working classes are eminently inferior to the mass of French people. In France, the *mind* of the people is highly electrified — they are full of ideas on social subjects — they really desire social *reform*.... The revolutionary animus extended over the whole nation, and embraced the rural population — not merely as with us, the artisans of the towns. Here there is so much larger a proportion of selfish radicalism and unsatisfied, brute sensuality (in the agricultural and mining districts especially) than of perception or desire of justice, that a revolutionary movement would be simply destructive — not constructive. (Haight 47)

Eliot goes on to explain that "Our little humbug of a queen is more endurable than the rest of her race because she calls forth a chivalrous feeling, and there is nothing in our constitution to obstruct the slow progress of *political* reform. This is all we are fit for at present" (48). Her words here make clear her preference in terms of reform. Equally clear, however, is her interest in reform generally, an interest that is too often overlooked or dismissed in accounts of Eliot's conservatism.

Eliot clarifies her mixture of political sentiments in a passage from her essay “Looking Backward.” “Nor can I be sorry,” she writes, “though myself given to meditative if not active innovation, that my father was a Tory who had not exactly a dislike to innovators and dissenters, but a slight opinion of them as persons of ill-founded self-confidence” (*Theophrastus Such* 20–1). Walter Allen takes this passage to indicate that Eliot “was as much a Tory as her father” (Allen 20), but he ignores her admission that she was “given to meditative innovation.” It is better, perhaps, to see Eliot not as a writer and thinker caught between the *status quo* and reform or, as she calls it, innovation. She is rather a novelist debating the *pace* of reform; her novels attempt to determine what amount and sort of innovation the population is “fit for at present” (Haight 47).

Stating the problem of Eliot’s political affiliation in this way does not, of course, exempt her work from political analysis — it is easy enough to take issue with her interpretation of the English public as characterized by “selfish radicalism and unsatisfied, brute sensuality” (Haight 47) and suggest that she over- or underestimated its ability to cope with the change she thought was inevitable and necessary. Still, treating Eliot as an “evolutionary reformer”¹⁰ has the advantage of

¹⁰ For an engaging look at the Lyell-Darwin-Eliot dialectic that takes place in *The Mill on the Floss* and focuses on the issue of evolution, see Jonathan Smith’s “The ‘Wonderful Geological Story’: Uniformitarianism and *The Mill on the Floss*.” Other critical works which deal with Eliot’s interest in science and the way it is played out in her novels include Nancy Paxton’s *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer*, Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth*

explaining her many ambivalences and their consequences for her representation of community. Eliot's community, as virtually all of her writing makes clear, is a locus of conflict, not a haven from the vicissitudes of indifferent society.

This conflict goes mostly unacknowledged. Though many of Eliot's critics touch on the question of community, their analyses have been pretty well confined to orthodox ideas of what comprises it. Suzanne Graver's *George Eliot and Community*, for example, the most exhaustive look at community in Eliot's fiction, explicitly recasts the terms of debate in the lexicon of Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, a founding piece of modern sociology.¹¹ She does so partially to show how great was the influence of Eliot and her circle on questions of community and society, though she also does so in order to argue that "community as communication is not only a meaningful concept, but one generated by the nineteenth-century writers I am discussing" (23). One must, as Graver notes, acknowledge the centrality of Tönnies to any discussion of community since the late nineteenth century. Her use of Tönnies, however, cannot help but often limit her discussion of community to the primitive distinction Tönnies makes between community and society, between the open and rural on the one hand and the closed

Century Fiction, George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists*, K.M. Newton's "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Darwinism" and Sally Shuttleworth's *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*.

¹¹ For a brief discussion of Tönnies' theory, see the opening chapter of this thesis.

and urban on the other. Graver's discussion minimizes the contribution difference and conflict make to the community, a contribution that Eliot recognizes in her sense of the community's debt to imagination and in her awareness of its mutability.

The conflict at the heart of community takes many forms, but is most clearly demonstrated in Eliot's heroines. Eliot would seem to be consistently sympathetic to the plight of women in her novels if we take the examples of Romola, Maggie Tulliver, Esther Lyon and Dorothea Brooke as typical. Yet each of these women is forced at various times to renounce her personal aspirations in order to conform with exterior circumstances or pressures. We can view these renunciations as evidence of Eliot's own political caution. But we may also, and more profitably, see that these women are influenced by opposing forces of equal strength, that the dual vocabularies with which they are familiar and which they attempt to articulate are both valid.¹² Eliot's setting for many of her novels — the early nineteenth century, in the last tranquil years before the waves of reform that accompanied the Industrial Revolution — indicates her interest in the differing vocabularies which are slowly materializing and promising to take English society in unaccustomed directions. *The*

¹² John Hagan comes to a similar conclusion, at least regarding Maggie Tulliver. He says that her "yearnings for a wider life" and her need to admit the ties of the past are "to be regarded as *equally* legitimate, *equally* worthy of fulfilment. By not allowing that both kinds of need deserve satisfaction, that it would be best for Maggie if neither had to be sacrificed, one misses either the fact that her life is a tragedy, or the fact that the essential nature of that tragedy is one of having to choose between goals that are equally good but incompatible" (57).

Mill on the Floss demonstrates these nascent vocabularies in the very different social visions represented by Tom and Maggie, of course, but also in the business-class possibilities suggested by Lucy Deane and Stephen Guest. Community must locate itself within the space of the contest between these characters, and for this reason it is greatly precarious. Eliot's attachment to community thus results from her understanding of its fragility rather than from a desire to preserve it against all change. She knows very well that in times of social transition the known, familiar community can evaporate as easily by resisting change as by submitting to it. Whatever her politics may seem to be at a given moment, they give way before her understanding that community is not static. It must acknowledge the past, certainly, but it cannot live in it. A passage from "Looking Backward" in *Theophrastus Such* perhaps captures Eliot's view best:

Many ancient beautiful things are lost, many ugly modern things have arisen; but invert the proposition and it is equally true. I at least am a modern with some interest in advocating tolerance, and notwithstanding an inborn beguilement which carries my affection and regret continually into an imagined past, I am aware that I must lose all sense of moral proportion unless I keep alive a stronger attachment to what is near, and a power of admiring what I best know and understand. (18)

Community is very much lived in the present, a mediation between the competing visions of the future and the past. For Eliot it is vital that we recognize both these visions as necessary to the life of the community; not to look toward the future means that we run the risk of the kind of stagnation that Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews encounter on their journey home. Aunt Glegg and the rest of the Dodson sisters contribute to this stagnation when, as often happens throughout the novel, they obstinately hold to their traditions simply because they are *their* traditions. The fact that they are Dodson traditions is all the legitimacy they require; they need no reference to logic, or to changing circumstances, or to anything else to justify their worthiness. While the past the Dodsons represent may often win more respect than the future, their “painful inability to approve ... the conduct of families ungoverned by the Dodson tradition” (38) indicates that choosing between conflicting vocabularies is hardly easy. If anything, Eliot’s novels narrate the difficulty of such choices and suggest that community will only be found where hard decisions are taken. These hard choices imply a lack of clarity regarding community alternatives and suggest that community is not a simple case of right and wrong.

Eliot dramatizes this confusion in the discussion between Maggie and Stephen in their hotel room near the end of *The Mill on the Floss*. Though Maggie chooses to forsake Stephen for her family, their discussion does not end with a clear decision

concerning what is right. Maggie's most important point in favour of returning to her family is a question: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie?" (417). The phrasing suggests that the past should define our actions not because of its inherent value but because no other guidance — Eliot having long ago discounted religion as a suitable guide — makes itself apparent or is just now imaginable, Stephen's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Though Stephen is the loser in this debate, his argument is not a specious one, and it would be a mistake to consider him a straw man set up only to be knocked down. He perhaps overstates the philosophical depth of his reasoning by appealing to "natural law," but his observations regarding the hypocrisy of "outward faithfulness" and "constancy without love" (417) ring true. The result of Stephen's strong argument is that Maggie's choice is not between right and wrong. There is no manifestly correct choice to make in this situation; her options are *both* appealing, and her decision is so difficult to make because "love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too" (395).

What is perhaps most right about Maggie's dilemma is that she consciously confronts it. In other words, her confusion and uncertainty demonstrate that community lies in the choices we make. Like Anne Elliot, Maggie is not simply subordinate to the community; she also has the ability to influence it. It is an exaggeration to claim that the community will vanish should Maggie choose to elope

with Stephen or to argue that “only [Tom’s and Maggie’s] union can fully achieve” their necessary “continuity of being” (Newton 107).¹³ What Maggie does is choose a community she imagines and with which she is more comfortable in the end; she does not choose the “right” community, if only because the community in her mind and the one she returns to are not precisely the same. When imagination is called to fill in the gaps and disjunctions of community, we should not be surprised to find community refracted rather than simply mended.

III

The pre-eminent disjunction in *The Mill on the Floss* is one every reader immediately notices: the relationship between Maggie and her family before and after the loss of the lawsuit and Mr Tulliver’s subsequent fall from his horse and descent into insensibility. Mr Tulliver’s failure is comprehensive. With the loss of

¹³ Gillian Beer, for example, sees Maggie’s decision to return to her family as further evidence of her independence because all would have been well had she married Stephen: “Maggie’s *Bildung* takes her only to the point where she knows that there is no place for her in her own community, since she has rowed away with Stephen and returned not married to him. All would have been forgiven in time if they had married. But her individualistic insistence on old attachments, not on social forms, puts her irrevocably at odds with the codes by which her community is conditioned, despite their lip-service to kinship” (99). Beer argues that Maggie’s decision to return to her family fractures the community rather than knits it together by focusing on the presumed principle of that community, kinship. This is much against the reading of most critics, who feel that Maggie’s return reaffirms community as an organic unity. But Beer’s argument should suggest that community is not something to be recovered or re-established. It is rather a continuing process. Beer’s discussion of Maggie’s return centres not on her effect on the community but on whether she assents to it. From Beer’s perspective, she clearly does not.

the lawsuit he becomes a bankrupt, his family dependent on the charity of relations to replace the furniture and goods sold up to pay off his debts. And with the fall from his horse he is broken physically and mentally, no longer able to assume his wonted confidence and unsure of his competence to guide his son and daughter. Though he works hard for small wages to pay the remainder of what he owes to his creditors, his moral legitimacy is questioned from this point forward in the novel. Tom and Maggie receive advice from other quarters, most obviously their aunts and uncles, but also from books such as the Thomas à Kempis Maggie reads which persuades her to follow a course of self-renunciation until Philip Wakem convinces her otherwise. Given the patriarchal organization of Eliot's community in *The Mill on the Floss*, Mr Tulliver's failure means more than just a personal loss. His legacy is a broken family.

For the majority of critics this legacy is the signal development of the novel because it is intimately tied to what they view to be the novel's attempt to rediscover community.¹⁴ *The Mill on the Floss* is thus split between the childhood Maggie

¹⁴ Suzanne Graver states explicitly that "George Eliot participated in a tradition of social thought that was preoccupied with the rediscovery of community" (3), and critical commentary has generally confirmed this observation through its focus on Eliot's interest in continuity and the past. K.M. Newton, for example, makes the subject of continuity central to her chapter on *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot, Newton says, "believes that the only valid form of human identity is an organic one: there must be a sense of continuity between the formative experiences of one's past life and one's present self, and the individual should act and choose in relation to this sense of continuity" (97). Thomas Pinney also identifies childhood and its bonds as the defining period of one's sense of community: "George Eliot agrees with Wordsworth that the experiences of childhood are the 'root of piety,' establishing what is to be best and dearest in future years" (139). George Levine considers the novel's "predominant theme ... the quest for unity" ("Intelligence" 404), which concisely sums up the feelings of many critics who share a belief that community, or something central to it, is lost in the course of *The Mill*

idealizes in retrospect and the unsheltered, unfeeling, unloving wider world that the loss of that initial community creates. Maggie's quest is read to be one that seeks to find what she has lost since the unfortunate failure of her father. Even if Maggie's childhood is recognized as less than ideal given her frequent disagreements with Tom and her mother, it makes no difference to this central disjunction; Maggie's childhood is still *relatively* the best part of her life:

The point is not that Maggie's childhood is an unadulterated idyll (it obviously is not), but that this is the time when her need to be loved and accepted by her brother and father is most fully satisfied. It is true, of course, that even in this period Tom's need to love Maggie is much less than hers to love him. But it is also true that, in comparison to the later periods of her life, Maggie's childhood is the period of least frustration and greatest fulfilment. It becomes for her the touchstone of what her loving relations to her brother and father should be. (Hagan 58)

As a "touchstone" Maggie's childhood leaves much to be desired. The doll on which she vents her frustrations suggests that her early years are no more easy than her later. And her flight to "her unknown kindred, the gypsies" (93) indicates that Maggie's self-division is not a product of her family's misfortunes. She seeks out the gypsies precisely because they symbolize lack of division, and they prove to be, at least for a short while, "just what Maggie expected: the gypsies saw at once that she

on *the Floss* and that Maggie's struggle is to get it back. As I hope the rest of this chapter will show, however, community is rediscovered only insofar as it is constantly being created anew.

was a little lady, and were prepared to treat her accordingly” (94). Maggie’s yearning — not to be set down “at the first glance as an idiot” (94) — is rather affecting in its simplicity, and if her feeling that “she was really beginning to instruct the gypsies, and gaining great influence over them” (95–6) is ultimately illusory, it still says a great deal about Maggie’s unhappiness as a child.

Rather than describing Maggie’s attempt to return to a more innocent time, then, a time of surer values than those that seem to pull her in conflicting directions as she matures, *The Mill on the Floss* documents Maggie’s wish to find *any* community with which she is comfortable, given the fact that the familiar one of St. Ogg’s seemingly cannot accept her as she is. Young Maggie’s wish to be “a very good queen” of the gypsies, “kind to everybody” (96), implicitly specifies what is wrong with the community she knows: it is not “kind to everybody,” Maggie most especially, and it does not give her any respect. It certainly will not make her queen. Maggie struggles continually with this knowledge and what it indicates about her position in the community. Critics who prefer a more conservative view of Eliot find Maggie’s struggle to be one to conform; those who accentuate Eliot’s reformist tendencies think that Maggie fights to break away. The issue, like so many in Eliot’s work, is vexing and denies easy solution. Still, there are a number of clues to suggest that opposition to change is not the novel’s goal.

The first clue is the novel's portrait of Maggie, which is sympathetic to the difficulties faced by a young woman of intelligence. Eliot may not always agree with Maggie's egoistic desires, but she makes us understand why she has them. Secondly, those who speak for the *status quo* do not occupy a position of narrative privilege. Quite to the contrary, the Dodsons are often the butt of gentle irony, partially because they are unable to distinguish between that which might truly be considered meaningful and that which is trivial or ephemeral:

The religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable: it was necessary to be baptized, else one could not be buried in the churchyard, and to take the sacrament before death as a security against more dimly understood perils; but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well-cured hams at one's funeral, and to leave an unimpeachable will. (239)

Thirdly there is the explicit admission, halfway through the novel in chapter one of "The Valley of Humiliation" (Book 4), that the novel does not oppose change as such. Referring to the provincialism emblemized by the Dodsons and the Tullivers, the narrator says,

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie — how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in

the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. (238)

The “onward tendency of human things” denotes unceasing movement or progression, as does the narrator’s observation that Tom and Maggie “have risen above the mental level of the generation before them.” The passage includes an important qualification, however; despite their advance, whatever it may consist of, Tom and Maggie are “nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts” to the preceding generation. The conjunction, “nevertheless,” makes it plain that there is a conflict between the claims of progress and the life of the affections. These two instincts are not necessarily compatible, and when they are not so they present a disjunction much more meaningful than that of Mr Tulliver’s failure.

This passage regarding Tom’s and Maggie’s apparent improvement compared to the generation of their parents is less than “an endorsement of moral and mental progressionism” (442), as Jonathan Smith has pointed out.¹⁵ But the contradiction between progress and the affections suggests that *The Mill on the Floss* does not mean

¹⁵ Smith holds that there is, at best, a qualified endorsement of mental progressionism in this passage because Eliot’s appeal to science “does not really support claims of progress but of interrelation” and because “the passage as a whole is embedded in a chapter that discusses the deep traditionalism and religious paganism of the Dodsons and Tullivers” (443). Certainly Eliot’s reiteration of Tom’s and Maggie’s ties to the past demonstrates some mixed feelings. However, the narration approaches the Dodsons’ “deep traditionalism” with more irony than reverence; it observes what the past was like more than it suggests what the present should be.

to set one above the other. The novel desires to show not the necessity of social change or the need to guard against it, but the *difficulty* of such change. The emphasis is important. Writers who advocate without reservation the need for social alteration do not usually care about the cost, or care about it only insofar as they are willing to acknowledge it as a cost worth paying. Similarly, writers who oppose all change do so because they believe it to be contrary to their interest and/or the interest of their society. Social change to them is not a force independent of good and evil (though, to be sure, change may be turned to good or bad purposes) but a malevolent character in and of itself. Eliot, by contrast, assumes the need for change, or realizes its inevitability, and thus feels no particular need to defend it — only to describe its consequences.¹⁶

Eliot's narration of the difficulty of social change explains much of the seeming ambivalence of her novels because metamorphoses inevitably involve failure as well as success. Eliot does not end her later novels¹⁷ with marriages that reaffirm the *status quo* — as in Fielding or some of Austen's novels — or suggest refuge from it (as

¹⁶ Jonathan Smith and Sally Shuttleworth both ascribe Eliot's approach to change to her interest in the evolutionary science of the day and the theories of men such as Charles Lyell, Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. For more on Eliot's relationship with Spencer, see Nancy L. Paxton's *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*.

¹⁷ *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner* do end with seemingly affirming marriages — Adam to Dinah and Eppie to Aaron — but in both novels the social structure is compromised by the actions of its patriarchs. Any affirmation of the *status quo* we read into Adam's or Eppie's marriage must be tempered with the knowledge that it reflects an innocence that will not withstand the changes soon to come to the British social landscape.

in much of Dickens's work) because to do so is to ignore the fortunes of those who do not benefit from the altered circumstances. *Middlemarch* exemplifies this principle. Though the novel ends with three of its couples married, none of the three marriages embraces the solid and conventional. That is to say, none of the three can be said to predict security or to affirm standard values. Dorothea's marriage to Will, though presumably a happy one, leads to an uncertain future dependent on the strength of Will's individualism (often an ambiguous quality with Eliot). Tertius and Rosamond's marriage proves a disaster despite the fact that it should have been a great success, given that Tertius is a professional of no mean accomplishment and Rosamond has an education the envy of many of her peers, if not of anyone of real intelligence. Fred and Mary's marriage, last of all, is perhaps the most predictable of the three — Fred and Mary will farm and have children and generally cause no harm — and yet doubts linger. Fred marries more because of the good efforts of others than because of his own merit. While he clearly loves Mary, one must ask if love is good enough (just as, in Maggie's case, readers often wonder if Tom is deserving of her love). For Mary, one of the most engaging characters of *Middlemarch*, the answer is obviously yes. At the same time, with the estimable Mr Farebrother lurking on the periphery, it is not hard to imagine a different outcome — and not hard to imagine that the outcome might have been equally acceptable to all concerned except Fred.

Middlemarch is an excellent example of Eliot's descriptive approach to the difficulty of social change, because while it contains many instances of her famous didacticism, it does not prescribe a single course of action. Rather than finding a character whose example we might prosper by if only we would emulate his or her principles, we see a variety of people of differing talents struggling to move forward, some more successfully, some less. Wisdom is confined to characters such as Caleb Garth, whose convictions regarding honesty and hard work cut across ideological lines. And even Caleb is not without faults, no matter how decent a man he is.

Middlemarch assures its readers that there are no clear-cut answers. Eliot can provide useful guideposts — do not gamble, for instance, or live beyond your means or accept stereotypes of women — but she cannot say that any ideology or any imagined community will guarantee happiness.

The Mill on the Floss shares much of *Middlemarch*'s perspective. The novel maintains a marvellous grip on the imagination because it deals so extensively with social change and, by extension, failure — the consequences of change. This is not failure in the form of judgment, or as a contention that those involved should have done or known better. Failure here is rather an observation, an acknowledgment of a lack of success and the need, therefore, for further change. The failure in *The Mill on the Floss* has been likened to martyrdom, the idea that Maggie must be sacrificed if

the community is to thrive.¹⁸ Such an argument suggests, however, that martyrdom is a *requirement* for the life of the community when Maggie's unhappiness and eventual death are just consequences of the changes occurring all around her. Failure in *The Mill on the Floss* is thus not about blame; the novel is not about whether Maggie or the Dodsons are guilty for sins that deny any effective reconciliation between her and the rest of the community but about the changes that threaten to consign the Dodsons and their ways to the dustbin of history.

Failure in *The Mill on the Floss* consists of two parts. One part is Maggie's inability to accept the limitations imposed on her by the community into which she was born. As a child she meets disappointment and rejection with a fierce antagonism utterly unlike Tom's stoicism. She vents her anger on the

Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks; but was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie's nine years of earthly struggle.... The last nail had been driven in with a fiercer stroke than usual, for the Fetish on that occasion represented Aunt Glegg. But immediately afterwards Maggie had reflected that if she drove many nails in, she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor to comfort it, and make believe to poultice it, when her fury was abated; for even Aunt Glegg would be

¹⁸ See, for example, Putzell and her view that Maggie's "temperament and action demand this unique moment of death for the reconciliation of the conflicting forces within her" (240).

pitiable when she had been hurt very much, and thoroughly humiliated, so as to beg her niece's pardon. (24-5)

This passage usefully describes the self-division that Maggie strives to overcome with her visit to the gypsies. While her violence is, in one sense, acceptable because she is involved in an “earthly struggle” that necessarily demands a strong response, her reflection on the consequences of that response suggests that she is not entirely comfortable with it because it interferes with her compassion. Even as a young girl Maggie is cognizant of what is at issue: individual satisfaction versus acceptance within the community. Significantly, she gives little thought to the possibility of individual satisfaction within the community, as if in this case the two are mutually exclusive.

Maggie's inability to reconcile her own satisfaction with the demands of the community continues through to her adolescence, when she reads Thomas à Kempis and concludes that self-renunciation is the answer to her woes and the only method by which she can still her wants. Philip Wakem's famous response to Maggie's renunciation — “Stupefaction is not resignation,” he says, “and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance — to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you” (288) — is imbued with such great force because it so accurately describes Maggie's condition. By inhibiting herself Maggie only

marginally improves her status within the community. She ceases to cause trouble to her family, presumably, but because she does not live as fully as she can she satisfies neither herself nor those around her. Tom has harsh words for her “perverse self-denial” (345) while she herself

rebelled against her lot, she fainted under its loneliness, and fits even of anger toward her father and mother, who were so unlike what she would have them to be — towards Tom, who checked her, and met her thought or feeling always by some thwarting difference — would flow over her affections and conscience like a lava stream, and frighten her with a sense that it was not difficult for her to become a demon. (251)

Knowing that there is a disparity between what she wants and finds pleasurable and what the community has decided women *should* want and find pleasurable, Maggie has tried to fit in and failed. No blame should accrue to her for that effort;¹⁹ after all, she is wise enough to know that the community of the Dodsons and St. Ogg’s is not fully her community because it cannot comprehend her. Like Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, Maggie tries to be what Richard Rorty calls a strong poet, a person who attempts to exercise some influence over her environment rather than passively

¹⁹ Two critics who *do* blame Maggie for pursuing her policy of renunciation are Jerome Thale in Ch. ii of *The Novels of George Eliot* and William R. Steinhoff in “Intent and Fulfillment in the Ending of *The Mill on the Floss*.” For a discussion of their view that *The Mill on the Floss* “is a tragedy of repression and regression,” see Hagan, pp. 53–4.

following the lead suggested by her surroundings. As a result, she is to the rest of the community a perpetually unknown quantity, a woman who can finally reveal her solidarity with the community only through her absence. She is the obverse of Anne's success, the woman suspected of being a witch because of her difference. At the end of the novel she is in the river "to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned — and killed, you know — she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman" (16). For the community in *The Mill on the Floss* difference is either evil deviance or silliness, the names they attach to what they do not understand. Significantly enough, Maggie *is* innocent. Sadly, she is at novel's end also dead.

Maggie completes her failure in the aborted elopement with Stephen Guest. Caught between her attraction to Stephen and her attachment to her family Maggie struggles to find a safe course. The decision she faces is made more difficult by the fact that there is more than one path to follow. To depart with Stephen and live with him and perhaps return, married and respectable, is one avenue morally acceptable to the community, and likely to meet with the approval of "the world's wife": "What a wonderful marriage for a girl like Miss Tulliver — quite romantic! Why, young Guest will put up for the borough at the next election. Nothing like commerce nowadays!" (431). Maggie is passionately attracted to Stephen, and they are in some

respects a good match: unlike the rest of the community, Stephen speaks to Maggie in a voice which understands at least part of her being. Though the narrator often ascribes Stephen's attraction for Maggie to vanity or to a "vague state of emotion" which makes her "strong for all enjoyment, weak for all resistance" (366), it is a valuable attraction nonetheless because so few people *appreciate* Maggie enough to let her have a "sense of her own beauty" (383). Were there no other considerations, there can be little doubt of what Maggie would do, and Stephen's shortcomings do not appear to be so overwhelming as to make him a poor marriage choice. There are, however, other considerations, famous ones that suggest a different road. Maggie chooses these considerations, of course — her ties to her family and to Philip, and Stephen's ties to Lucy — and resolves not to elope. Whether Maggie's choice is ultimately correct,²⁰ however, is less important than the reception she receives when she does return. Tom disowns her, and the townspeople, because they are convinced of Maggie's unworthiness, put such pressure on Dr. Kenn that he is forced to terminate Maggie's employment as his children's governess. Again Maggie has tried

²⁰ There are critics willing to argue both sides of the issue. Critics who emphasize Eliot's belief in the importance of the past understandably favour Maggie's choice as the one which most logically ties in with the rest of the novel. Others demur. Gillian Beer, for instance, mirrors the opinion of the "world's wife" and argues that "all would have been forgiven in time if [Maggie and Stephen] had married" (99), while Suzanne Graver asserts that "the onward evolutionary process George Eliot would affirm is denied by the resolution of the conflict [i.e., Maggie's decision to return to Tom], which depends on the writings of a medieval monk and primitive kinship needs" (198–9).

to reconcile her own satisfaction with the community's, this time by considering the wishes of others more important than her own, and again she has failed.

Though Maggie may, for whatever reason, be inadequate to the task of incorporating herself into the community, her community fails her at least as much as she fails it. The Dodsons' inflexibility with regard to Maggie, their unwillingness to understand her difference, constitutes the other part of failure in *The Mill on the Floss*. The "oppressive narrowness" that the novel's narrator would have us feel is largely responsible for the community's unwillingness to accept Maggie's nature. The narrowness of the Dodson world makes itself evident chiefly in the incapability of the Dodson sisters and their husbands to imagine a community that might comprehend someone like Maggie and accept her as one with differing yet legitimate aspirations. Maggie is pushed to conform from the very beginning. Her mother despairs because "her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzy about having it put i' paper, and I've such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with th' irons'," while her "cousin Lucy's got a row o' curls round her head, an' not a hair out o' place" (12). After Maggie cuts her hair because she wants "people to think her a clever little girl, and not to find fault with her" (56), Aunt Glegg exclaims loudly that "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread-and-water — not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles" (59).

Conformity — the Dodsons' "particular way of doing everything" (38) — is all to the Dodson sisters and to Aunt Glegg in particular. But this emphasis on conformity, while not necessarily a detriment to a young child who needs to be educated in the ways of her community, fails Maggie because no effort is made to discover why she acts as she does. "Little gells as cut their own hair" are unknown to the Dodsons, and this alone makes them unacceptable. But a strong community needs an element of imagination to be able to negotiate the unknown ideas it will regularly meet; without it the realm of the acceptable will gradually shrink until there is virtually no community left except that which exists in memory and in the past. While it is an undoubted benefit to recognize the legacy of the past, it is of no use if it cannot be made relevant to the present.

Tom's patriarchal attitude toward his sister emphasizes the failure of the Dodson community to allow for Maggie and the irregularity she represents. While Sara M. Putzell has argued that Tom and Maggie are more alike than different, and that it is a mistake to think of Tom as a Dodson and Maggie as a Tulliver,²¹ in his wish to look after Maggie in his own way Tom reveals himself to be of Dodson inclinations and therefore representative of the community. Tom is not a Dodson because he inherits the attitudes of his Aunt Glegg — he is too much of a risk-taker in his

²¹ See the first part of Putzell's essay "An Antagonism of Valid Claims': The Dynamics of *The Mill on the Floss*."

investments and too dour and vengeance-minded to qualify as a true Dodson, and the early view that “poor Bessy’s children were Tullivers, and that Tom, notwithstanding he had the Dodson complexion, was likely to be as ‘contrairy’ as his father” (53) is more or less accurate. Tom does, however, follow in the Dodson footsteps in that he has a limited imagination and unhesitatingly accepts his heritage. Since the legacy of the past is to his benefit as a man there should be no surprise that Tom acts as he does, but this does not change the fact that Maggie’s community fails her. For instance, Tom says to Maggie, in response to her observation that because he is a man, he has “power, and can do something in the world,” that “if you can do nothing, submit to those that can” (305). He suggests also that she “might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself” (345). In both cases Tom’s words, because he is an accepted voice of the community, indicate that the community is unable to accommodate either Maggie’s desires or her abilities. Just as Aunt Glegg made no effort to determine why Maggie should act so contrary to the established way of doing things when she cut her hair, Tom makes no effort here. He — and the community as a whole — assume that received wisdom is all the wisdom that is necessary: “Tom was not given to inquire subtly into his own motives, any more than into other matters of an

intangible kind; he was quite sure that his own motives as well as actions were good, else he would have had nothing to do with them" (302). But if Tom's bit of tautological reasoning is true, then the Dodson community can only ever be a community of the past, destined to wither and watch as the present passes it by.

Maggie is usually made out to be the outcast in *The Mill on the Floss*, the outsider who runs away to the gypsies because she does not feel sufficiently appreciated at home. However, given the Dodson community's general resistance to other influences, not only Maggie but the community itself will eventually suffer isolation if it cannot take heed of the new.

Because Maggie and the community of which she is a part both fail, *The Mill on the Floss* can be read as a novel about how to deal with change and the failure that accompanies it. It discusses "the dimension of violence within reform" (Laclau 91), the idea that choices must be made, many of them difficult, which will not always have happy consequences. There will be a "suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind" (*Mill* 238) because, as Ernesto Laclau says, "it is in this active process of struggle that human abilities — new language games — are created" (91). In showing the difficulty of social change Eliot implicitly affirms that change and its difference may be managed. The pace of change in Eliot's world relative to that of Austen's may be speedy, but the principle

behind each author's approach is the same: the lasting community recognizes the difference within itself. The secret to establishing any sense of community is managing that difference, not pretending that it does not exist or attempting to extirpate it wherever it may be found.

Where Austen sees difference as a function of persuasion and rhetoric, though, and where Fielding relates it to "irregular justice," Eliot connects it to the imagination. Maggie (along with Philip) is generally associated with imagination in *The Mill on the Floss* because of her sympathetic and compassionate nature. Tom, always vigilant in the name of justice, represents the opposite of Maggie's imagination — he lacks, as she says, "a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than [his] own conduct and [his] own petty aims" (304–5). This criticism, though appropriate to Tom, applies as well to the rest of the community (but especially the Dodsons, because they are the largest part of the community we see) because it is so self-satisfied; the conflict between imagination and its opposite subsumes all others in the novel. Forest Pyle argues that "the imagination is figured in the novels [of George Eliot] as the source of obstruction and as the condition that must be overcome in order for some imaginary social resolution to be narrated" (5). The aptness of Pyle's argument is easy to discern, since there would be no real difficulty in *The Mill on the Floss* if Maggie had no imagination — she would blandly

accept her lot and we would have a story on the order of Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* if we had any story at all.

What is more important, however, and what Pyle acknowledges, is that imagination as a "source of obstruction" is not limited to Maggie, but describes all those who have any conception of community: "the 'rousing' of imagination ... leads characters and readers alike to confuse 'idealizing' fictions with 'hard, real life.' It is a form of mystification that we also call ideology" (19).²² The Dodsons and the Guests, in other words, promulgate their own fictions of community though they do not recognize them as such. The conflict then is not between imagination and the real, but between imaginations or vocabularies. This kind of conflict naturally requires a specialized resolution, and Pyle contends that for Eliot "sympathy, unlike the imagination, is the medium of resolution" (6).

Pyle's argument that "'sympathy' is the means which Eliot employs to provide the solution to the ideological predicament she inherits from Romanticism..., the means by which the romantic wound opened by the imagination is to be sutured" (5) is very strong. He is most original perhaps in suggesting that "since no individual character in Eliot's novels can make sympathy work, and since imagination creates in

²² Suzanne Graver comes to a similar conclusion: the "movement in George Eliot's fiction and in the social theorists toward individual psychology and even toward idealizing abstraction is most accurately seen not as a withdrawal from social fact and action but as a prolonged, troubled, and conflicted confrontation between community as fact and community as consciousness" (25).

these stories 'thorny thickets of sin and sorrow,' the effective work of sympathy must be assigned — 'transferred' — to the act of narration itself" (12). Pyle contends that Eliot wishes to "teach" community into existence, and he does an excellent job of documenting this desire. However, his argument is incomplete for two reasons. One is that he makes insufficient allowance for the fact that sympathy is not merely an emotion but another articulation of ideology, and thus will inevitably produce more conflict. Sympathy requires an ideology or vocabulary to facilitate its expression. While each of us may possess a capacity for sympathy, an ability to share the feelings of others, its exercise will be limited by our individual ideological orientations. Sympathy, quite simply, can be no answer to the problems of imagination if ideology demarcates in advance when sympathy is appropriate. There is a difference between observing or comprehending another's emotions and sharing them. Insofar as sympathy is constrained by imagination it is only one more option in a community's imaginative battles.

The second reason Pyle's argument is incomplete is that, based on the evidence of *The Mill on the Floss*, the conflicts of community are not mediated solely through sympathy but also through the subtle interplay between the vocabularies or

differences that contribute to the community.²³ Sympathy may arise from one or more of these vocabularies, and is therefore only one possible response to the problems of imagination. Whether or not sympathy is the key to managing difference is immaterial if one does not first understand that difference matters. Otherwise the need for any “medium of resolution” will go, as in Tom’s case, resolutely unrecognized.

The same holds true for the majority of the community in *The Mill on the Floss*, which is of Tom’s persuasion. Tom and the rest of the Dodsons see little need for resolution, especially insofar as we might equate resolution with compromise. Conformity to the established principles is all that is required for communal harmony so far as they are concerned. And yet if imagination constitutes a kind of obstruction to community at the same time that many people are unable to recognize that something like sympathy is required to surmount that obstruction, how then does community prevent itself from atrophying into irrelevancy? Pyle’s answer that “the sympathy that is withheld at the level of the *récit* must be supplemented by the work of the *discours*” (12) is only of use to the readers of Eliot’s fiction, the *observers* of community, and assumes the influence of a disinterested party remote from the

²³ Were it otherwise, sympathy (or even imagination) could potentially lead to tyranny, the same trap to which Austen’s persuasion and Fielding’s “irregular justice” are prone. Community’s conflict is best managed through a multiplicity of imaginations, not through the imposition of one imagination that defeats all others.

community itself. A better answer is Richard Rorty's idea of the strong poets who create alternative visions of community life that might then be followed by the common mass. Though he identifies strong poets as those people who have contributed a significant insight to the human condition and thus affected the way others see the world, it is not unreasonable to think of the measure of a poet's strength as relative. As a result we can consider Maggie a strong poet because she suggests another way to conceptualize existence, one that emphasizes compassion rather than conformity. Her death might lead us to think of her as a failed rebel in this way, but she does effect some permanent change on Philip Wakem. If we are optimistic, or wish to enhance the tragedy of Maggie's untimely passing, we might believe that Maggie enduringly affected Tom just before he and she perish.

Maggie's status as a strong poet is complemented by the interplay among the community's various imaginations. This interplay explains the evident attachment *The Mill on the Floss* displays to the past by locating the past as one of several vocabularies in the community, each of them legitimate in its way. These vocabularies together make up the community; it would be wrong to consider the Dodsons or Maggie the community's only representative. Maggie is thus unlike Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, who is in some ways the only representative of her community. The difference in their situations is that Anne speaks for the principles

of her community, but does so in isolation because the rest of the community's authorities show little interest in defending its principles. While Maggie may also be construed to speak for the principles of her community, especially insofar as she focuses on the need for compassion, her aunts and uncles do not abdicate their responsibility. Aunt Glegg in particular defends the community's interests as she sees fit. Much of Anne's success in reorienting her community can be credited to the indifference of those around her; they are willing to follow her lead. Maggie's relations are of course a different story.

Maggie is at once both in and out of the community, part of it by virtue of her family ties and yet autonomous because of her understanding that her own desires — to be appreciated and to live passionately and with compassion — do not mesh with the Dodsons' world view. If Maggie's dual position is clear enough, however, Tom's is not. He is most often associated with the Dodsons and with the established order of the community, but this is because the other influential vocabulary in the community of *The Mill on the Floss*, the new capitalism which serves as the backdrop for the novel, has more influence on the Dodsons than does Maggie's.

In addition to extolling the virtues of sympathy and compassion, Maggie can also be seen as a proponent of education, especially in contrast to her father's mistaken ideas about the kind of education valuable to Tom. But since the Dodsons specialize

in self-satisfaction,²⁴ education is not for them a high priority. Tom's interest in money matters, motivated primarily by his desire to repair the dishonour done to his family by his father's bankruptcy, coincides more nearly with the Dodsons' view of the importance of sound finances. Tom is a speculator who succeeds in an economy just beginning to encourage that kind of business, and he works for a company that specializes in the abstract. The novel never says what it is exactly that Guest and Company do, perhaps because no one really knows. Though they transport goods, more than that is unclear. They certainly do not engage in the traditional and concrete occupations of farming or mining or even selling merchandise with which the Dodsons are familiar. Guest and Company is at the root of Tom's success, however, and we can be fairly sure that his success is what makes him so attractive to Aunt and Uncle Glegg.

Tom's success is obviously the promise of the new economic circumstances, which just as obviously have no wish to advertise the increased insecurity they bring to the world of business because uncertainty reduces the number of potential investors. Uncle Glegg tells his wife, "you couldn't go into trade, could you? You can't get more than five per cent with security'" (280). But the possible insecurity of

²⁴ "It is remarkable," writes the narrator, "that while no individual Dodson was satisfied with any other individual Dodson, each was satisfied, not only with him or her self, but with the Dodsons collectively" (38). Like Tom, the Dodsons possess the dubious distinction of considering themselves complete.

Tom's speculation with Bob Jakin is of little account. More important is the fact that the Gleggs, as identified as they are with the ways of the past, are in matters of business willing to be more contemporary and assist Tom with his investments; they are not impervious to the influence of other vocabularies. Another example of the same kind of influence is Mr Deane's marriage into the Dodson clan. At the beginning of the novel Aunt Glegg can exclaim with some asperity,

"It used to be the way in our family for one to be as early as another, — I'm sure it was so in my poor father's time — and not for one sister to sit half an hour before the others came. But if the ways o' the family are altered, it shan't be *my* fault — *I'll* never be the one to come into a house when all the rest are going away. I wonder *at* sister Deane — she used to be more like me." (48)

By the end, however, the Deane financial principles bear a close looking into, as do Tom's speculations, and Lucy Deane is considered a "perfect gell" who embodies many of the Dodson attributes. If she is a Dodson, however, she is also a Deane, as comfortable with Stephen Guest and other members of "Society" as she is with her aunts and uncles, and familiar with prospects different from those of her relations at her age. The disjunction, then, between the traditional expectation of saving money and the new economic promise of making it is resolved, if largely unconsciously,

through the mediating force of economics, a force that for the Dodsons speaks much more persuasively than does any talk of sympathy or fellow-feeling.

Economics is perhaps more persuasive than sympathy because it is concrete: profits counted in pounds and pence are easy to see, whereas the profits of sympathy are rather more abstract. But both are equally products of imagination; one is no more real than the other. Economics for Tom and the Deanes and the Gleggs is just a financial ordering of society, eminently artificial, constructed and ideological. The Gleggs make this much very clear by consciously eschewing one mode of financial organization for another. They trade the security of saving for the risk of speculation, though one could also say that by accepting capitalistic financial ordering they reduce the risk (in the abstract, at least, since the Gleggs evidently have plenty of money) of not saving enough. At any rate, the capitalism Tom espouses is another ideology, another example of imagination, proposed as a path for the community to follow. While not necessarily in conflict with Maggie's preference for a life guided by compassion, we can discern easily enough the difference Tom's and Maggie's choices have made in their characters. Tom has gained no compassion through his pursuit of money.

As a result, we see that if imagination is a “source of obstruction” in *The Mill on the Floss*, it is also the means to overcoming that obstruction.²⁵ Whatever obstacle imagination presents will be met with an imaginative reply. Imagination resembles “irregular justice” in *Joseph Andrews* and the role of persuasion in *Persuasion*. That is to say, it endlessly refracts the community because it is both problem and answer. It supplies the necessary response to community inadequacy but in so doing denies the fulness to which community aspires. As a function of imagination, community will never be whole. It “is always and by definition ‘at loose ends’: it always and by definition stands in need of the suturing that does not so much restore as make it” (Pyle 21). Imagination fills in the gaps of community, but then more gaps are created which in turn require more imagination.

Imagination is thus an alternate order or process invoked to support the established social order. In *Joseph Andrews*, the established order consists of religious and secular law; in *Persuasion*, society is understood according to the more general term of propriety. *The Mill on the Floss*, of course, conceives of society largely according to custom (though law also is important, as Mr Tulliver’s battles with

²⁵ Though I have here formulated it in a different way, Eliot’s approach to community echoes Ernesto Laclau’s “first paradox of a free community: that which constitutes its condition of impossibility (violence) constitutes at the same time its condition of possibility” (Laclau 92). We can, if we wish, consider imagination a kind of metaphorical violence because of its disruptiveness, but more important is that Eliot identifies it as the community’s condition of impossibility even though she requires imagination to institute or suture the community.

Wakem make clear). But custom is clearly an insufficient description for the community, one that is ultimately too structured to accurately reflect the nuances of community life. Community requires the irregularity and chaos implied by the difference imagination represents, and like Henry Fielding in *Joseph Andrews*, Eliot concludes that a dose of Parson Irwine's "irregular justice,"²⁶ because it forces the community to confront its difference, is good for the constitution.

In *The Mill on the Floss* this irregular justice is chiefly apparent, as in *Joseph Andrews*, in recourse to fighting: "Tom was not fond of quarrelling, unless it could soon be put an end to by a fair stand-up fight with an adversary whom he had every chance of thrashing" (135). Tom's imagination, as one might presume, is a limited one; the "fair stand-up fight" he envisions is biased in favour of his expectation that *he* will have "every chance of thrashing" his opponent. No thought is given to the opposite possibility, probably because Tom considers it so unlikely given his confidence that his justice is equal to the justice of the community. Bob Jakin, on the other hand, proposes a remedy for injustice similar to Tom's, though with the rather better motive of resolving another's sorrow, not just his own. To that end he asks Maggie if she owes a "grudge" to anyone, and when she answers no, he responds,

²⁶ In *Adam Bede*, Parson Irwine refers to Mrs Poyser's tongue-lashing of Squire Donnithorne as "irregular justice ... that a magistrate like me must not countenance" (335). He cannot countenance it *officially* because it reduces his own influence and thereby contravenes the established hierarchical order, but he tacitly accepts Mrs Poyser's action because it *is* just by the lights of the community.

“O, lors, Miss,” said Bob, pinching Mumps’s neck harder than ever, “I wish you did — an ’ud tell me — I’d leather him till I couldn’t see — I would — an’ the Justice might do what he liked to me arter.” (430)

Maggie’s response is predictable, stressing that she would not wish to punish anyone because she has so often done wrong herself. Bob’s sentiment, however, is perfectly understandable, a reaction to a situation where all the established rules seem inadequate to repairing Maggie’s — and, by extension, Bob’s and other community members’ — hurt. Bob’s mention of the Justice makes explicit the law’s inability to heal this conflict, just as Maggie’s response makes clear what action she feels is best able to answer her problem. More importantly, both Maggie and Bob understand the situation to be one outside the purview of the rules and regulations that define society. The community will be composed of conflicts of all kinds, whether they are between Maggie and Tom because of Stephen or because of Philip (Tom tells Philip “I’ll thrash you — I’ll hold you up to public scorn” [303]), and they will sometimes require “irregular” answers devised by the community on an *ad hoc* basis.

These irregular answers expose the blindness to which all institutions, even those that help to establish community, are prey. Irregular justice occupies a paradoxical position in the community power structure. On the one hand, it is a marginal force because it *is* irregular and thus by definition other than central. At the same time,

irregular justice is often the province of the innocent, whether Parson Adams or Bob Jakin, the domain of those integral to the community because they most believe in and depend on it. Bob Jakin, for instance, is an innocent and uneducated man who acts with the welfare of others in mind, whether it is to bring books to a suffering Maggie or to advise Tom of an investment opportunity. As a result, Bob is keenly alive to the social as such, to the bonds which bring people together. After he fights with Tom early in the novel, we see that

Bob's voice began to falter a little as he said, "An' I'n gi'en you everything, an' showed you everything, an' niver wanted nothin' from you.... An' there's your horn-handed knife, then, as you gi'en me".... Here Bob flung the knife as far as he could after Tom's retreating footsteps. (46)

Bob's voice falters because he realizes the history of sharing between them that Tom turns his back on, and we can read his subsequent retrieval of the knife he has thrown after Tom as at least a partial acknowledgment of the symbolic value of the knife as a gift. But if Bob may be taken as an exemplar of the community, he is not one with much of a voice in it; those with authority in the community are those who live closer to its institutions, like Stephen Guest or Lawyer Wakem. Irregular justice is therefore a viable and necessary outlet for people such as Bob, whose principles are

central to the community but whose class status is not, to express views that are as legitimate, though often unrecognized, as the opinions of those in authority.²⁷

Bob Jakin's indifference to potential punishment from the Justice indicates the extent to which he supports Maggie in her struggle with the rest of the community. More significantly, though, his reliance on irregular justice validates Maggie's position within the community. In making imagination concrete he makes clear the community's need for that imagination, complete with all the chaos imagination implies and Maggie confirms. If Maggie is not exactly central to the community, neither is she peripheral to it. As a figure of imagination she is marginal and central at the same time, most definitely *of* the community, and most surely belonging to it. This is not to say that Maggie could not be happier in a community that better appreciated her talents, for she most certainly could be. It is simply to say that she should not be excluded from her community because it does not or cannot understand her. Community requires difference both to challenge it and to hold it together; it requires imagination, the very essence of the new and contemporary, to help make its history relevant to the present and to the future. The unspoken threat

²⁷ A potential objection could be raised: if irregular justice is largely the province of the innocent and disadvantaged, why then do Tom Tulliver's actions count as irregular justice when he himself is hardly disadvantaged? The answer to the question is relatively straightforward. Irregular justice — or persuasion or imagination — is a necessary contributor to community. It is not, however, necessarily beneficial. Tyrants like Tom are just as capable of employing irregular justice to help establish their vision of community, no matter how narrow-minded it may seem, as is a conscientious objector like Bob Jakin.

in *The Mill on the Floss* is that the traditions of the Dodsons will have no meaning if they cannot connect those traditions to the present. Maggie offers the necessary connectedness between past and present, between tradition and the imagination which obstructs and supports that tradition. As a result she offers her complacent relatives the opportunity to rethink their assumptions and, as does Aunt Glegg, “wonder *at*” the changes that surround them. The degree to which they fail to do so is the degree to which Maggie’s untimely death is a tragic one.

IV

Jane Austen moved away from Fielding’s teleological orientation to suggest that communities are created and do not follow some natural impulse toward an inevitable utopia. George Eliot continues where Austen leaves off. She embraces firmly the idea that communities change and that the people who live in them influence their transformation. Where Austen tentatively explores the Romantic truism that truth is made, not found, Eliot accepts this insight and demonstrates it nowhere so well as in the communities she creates in each of her novels. She follows the sedate path of Wordsworth rather than the more epistemologically challenging road of Shelley, and this choice is revealed in the fondness she has for the past, for tradition, for the objects and customs that connect us with those who came before

and those still to come. Nonetheless, Eliot knows, because she understands its attraction, the limitations of the past. Though one must exercise a certain loyalty to it — as does Maggie or Mary Garth or Romola — it is a context, not an end in itself. Working only to continue the past leads to self-effacement because the past is no less a part of the imagination than the fancies and dreams of Hetty Sorrel or Rosamond Vincy. E.M. Forster also understands the attraction of the past. In *Howards End*, however, the past is valued for the difference it promises and the difference it makes. Because of his respect for that difference, Forster does not neglect the connection that Maggie Tulliver represents and which her community overlooks; he insists upon it.

Chapter 5

“The battle against sameness”:

Cosmopolitanism and Community in *Howards End*

The connections between E.M. Forster and Henry Fielding, Jane Austen and George Eliot are many and various. With Austen, Forster shares an understated, ironic style focused on the comedy of manners, a debt to his literary predecessor he has explicitly acknowledged.¹ He finds common ground with Eliot in his concern with the constraints placed upon individual freedom in a sometimes repressive and narrow society. The options available to Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room With a View*, for instance, are not so different from those of Maggie Tulliver; Lucy simply has available to her a more accommodating family, one willing to support rather than deny her wishes. Finally, Forster agrees with Austen and Fielding in his emphasis on the importance of rural culture to the health of England. In both *Howards End* and

¹ “Forster, who acknowledged his great debt to Jane Austen, is commonly linked to Austen and James as a novelist of manners. One might better say that he is a novelist of bad manners, who attends less to the shared norms and values which govern a community than to the moral awkwardness that results when incompatible norms and incommensurable values collide” (Levenson 298).

Joseph Andrews London is opposed to the genuine life of the country, where people may prosper free from the affectation of the city. For Forster and Fielding alike, rural life maintains “an elder race, to which we look back with disquietude. The country, which we visit at week-ends, was really a home to it, and the graver sides of life, the deaths, the partings, the yearnings for love, have their deepest expression in the heart of the fields” (*Howards End* 263–4).

With these connections among Forster, Fielding, Austen and Eliot, the representation of community comes, as it were, full circle. For where Fielding thought chiefly of the primacy of the collective over the individual — even though he accepted the necessary intrusion of difference into the community as a supplement to the nation’s laws — and where Austen and Eliot both advocated some adjustment to Fielding’s model, Forster merges the concerns of the three authors who precede him. Like Fielding he identifies the country as the heart of communality, but like Austen and Eliot he insists that difference constitutes that communality, that the “elder race” of the country understands the curse of homogeneity that London attempts to impose on its denizens. In other words, Forster thinks that the usual view of country and city is exactly backwards: the country encourages diversity of opinion because it lacks the city’s pressure to conform to cosmopolitan fashion. “‘Left to itself,’ was Margaret’s opinion, ‘this county would vote Liberal’” (263) and thereby champion

more progressive issues. To define the country of Howards End “was difficult, but Margaret knew what it was not: it was not snobbish. Though its contours were slight, there was a touch of freedom in their sweep” that the geography of the rest of the novel lacks. “The comradeship, not passionate, that is our highest gift as a nation was promised” (263) by Howards End and the surrounding countryside. London, by contrast, only contributes to the “daily gray” of conformity (328).

Forster does not look only to the past. With the modernist writers who are his contemporaries, Forster shares an interest in the individual’s identity in the twentieth century, when established institutions appear to possess less and less ability to exert a unifying social force. But unlike T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, who questions where lack of faith will lead society, or James Joyce in *Ulysses*, who gazes on the disintegration of individual identity not with concern but with dispassion, Forster sees the fracturing of society as a mixture of opportunity and amnesia — opportunity because it releases the individual from unnecessary constraints, but amnesia because the society threatens to forget that which makes it properly social. The unwillingness of Henry Wilcox and Leonard Bast to remember their origins contributes to the antagonism that “as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the ‘experience’ of the limit of the social” (*Hegemony* 125). This amnesia is a product of cosmopolitanism, and it goes hand in hand with the mobility Forster so much

distrusts. Mobility inhibits community by replacing the quality of relationships with a greater quantity of them; it makes it difficult or impossible to know others, and thus reduces the opportunities for generating connections. In *Howards End* no greater ill can be imagined.

While connection lies at the heart of Forster's conception of community, that connection depends on stability. Mobility is in *Howards End* generally associated with the city, while the country receives praise for its static timelessness. To say, however, that the novel opposes city to country is only partially correct. Forster's crucial distinction is between stability and instability; though the former is found mostly in the country, it is not unknown to the city, as the Schlegels' long residence at Wickham Place suggests. Stability matters more to the successful community than ideological harmony because it provides the space — metaphorically, to be sure, but literally as well — to make connections in a world of difference. London lacks this space, by and large, replacing it with a ubiquity of mobility that induces sameness in its inhabitants. As a result, it "only stimulates, it cannot sustain" (155). But as Margaret tells Helen, "people are far more different than is pretended" (327). Cosmopolitan sameness offers only colourlessness. Alterity is life, and this life is to be found, Forster argues, by insisting on a measure of stability that will allow people to comprehend and value the differences between them. As important to Forster as

the value of difference is the fact that sameness is pretended. Insofar as this pretense is a consequence of cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitanism is to be avoided. Avoidance will not always do, however. Cosmopolitan conventions, as the Wilcoxes show, lead to stagnation; to break them, suggests Forster, is our only hope.

II

Fielding, Austen, Eliot and Forster all agree, despite their various ideological differences, that the individual neglects the past at her peril. None of them thinks the past may be safely ignored or cast aside in favour of whatever social trend may be currently fashionable. All the same, each author believes the past to make a slightly different contribution to the life of the community. With Fielding, the past, insofar as it sets out the virtues of properly hierarchical society, is expected to help rule the present and minimize any unnecessary change. *Joseph Andrews* provides little sense of a progressive telos; instead, telos is limited to the Christian vision of Eden, represented in the novel by the Wilsons and their country paradise. This respect for a previous society's imagination is understandable given the long influence Christian thinking has maintained over Europe, but it also ensures that Fielding's fiction lacks any commitment to material progress. More important is the Christian approach to spiritual improvement. Because progress is thus defined in terms of the individual's

prospects in the next life rather than in this one,² the *status quo* — or, rather, what was the *status quo* before its bastardization by sundry individuals too selfish or incompetent to realize their social responsibilities — is sufficient for Fielding. *Joseph Andrews* sees no need for a fresh vision of society. Belief in the old one — or at least in what it is understood to have been — will do.

Austen and Eliot differ from Fielding in that they imagine a telos that is not limited strictly to the Christian view of heaven or of an earthly paradise. Austen, though few critics think so, contributes in *Persuasion* to the Romantic insight that truth is made and not found. Anne Elliot does not accept the established verities; she questions them and moves to establish her own. For her part, Eliot holds the same view though with some hesitation because of its possibility for promoting social discontinuity — a possibility that is realized in *Howards End*. As a result of their deviation from the orthodoxy represented by Fielding, Austen and Eliot understand that community will change as its citizens do, and that to expect a stasis based on a seemingly adequate or even “perfect” past is unreasonable. As circumstances change, as people change, so will the flavour of the society that comprehends those people and circumstances. The past should be thought of, in Austen’s and Eliot’s view, as a

² Fielding does not, of course, insist on the distinction between this life and the next one in the way that Daniel Defoe does in *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*, or the way Samuel Richardson does in *Clarissa*. Nonetheless he reflects his society’s general faith in religious certitude. If he does not lightly dismiss the pleasures of corporeal existence, neither does he forget the ultimate Christian telos.

guide — a welcome guide and one not to be ignored — rather than as a yoke. The past conflicts not so much with the present as with the future, with what people can imagine or want to occur. Thus Anne Elliot breaks with her father and marries a man with whom she will create a new community of sorts; the conflict for Anne is not with the now of where she will live or whom she will see, but with the future of what kind of woman she will become and what sort of community she wishes to contribute to. As with Anne, so with Maggie Tulliver: both women deal essentially with questions of evolution. Maggie abides by the ties of the past not because she believes that her community should remain ever the same but because she cannot convince herself that the options available to her — marriage to either Philip or Stephen — will maintain those ties to the past without undue disruption. Maggie wants more than anything *some* kind of change that will make her place in the community a happier one, but only if the cost is not too dear. Her tragedy is that the changes she might embrace ask her to pay too much.

Forster represents a synthesis of Fielding, Austen and Eliot. He is not slavish to the past and does not wish in Fielding's way for an arrested society in order to prevent further social damage. He recognizes well enough that the community and the society progress — in the largest sense of the word, without denoting any qualitative assessment — because they depend on the principles of the people who

comprise these social structures. The motor has come, and though it is a frightfully ugly invention, it is here to stay. London is a red rust creeping into the countryside that will not stop, and imperialism is apt to lead to imperilled societies that are unlikely to change because of that peril. At the same time, however, Forster sees in the past and in country tradition useful resources for social cohesion, resources that are either forgotten or go unused because they are perceived as inappropriate by the imperialists and capitalists who dominate contemporary society. He is attracted to the kind of simple country living that Fielding may safely be said to have had in mind as part of a healthy hierarchical society, but he is attracted to it because it provides in its basic principles for a less static, less hierarchical form of community. He believes in the land and in space, "the basis of all earthly beauty" (204), as the foundation of a different kind of progress, one focused on the personal rather than on the impersonal issues which dominate the politics of the day.

In other words, *Howards End* tries to articulate a vision suitable for an individualistic world whereby individuals may most easily achieve whatever they desire and yet also maintain a positive regard for the aspirations of those with whom they must live. London only half succeeds in accomplishing this goal: it promotes individualism, but with an attendant anonymity that also fosters a lack of respect. Forster's approach to the past is one which does not see it as a retreat, a simple

gathering again of all that made England great, but as a springboard to an alternate and more satisfying future. Fielding advocated the hierarchical society of the past because he felt no improvements were necessary, especially given the Elysian example of the Wilsons.³ Forster advocates the Elysian example of the “elder race” because improvements are very much necessary. The “elder race” does not show us what these improvements are, but it can show us how to achieve them.

Forster’s approach to the past is really then his approach to the future, and it begins with the desire to manage conflict. *Howards End*, like *The Mill on the Floss*, is preoccupied with conflict, made up as the novel is of so many opposites: absolutism versus proportion, imperialism versus culture, city versus country, rich versus poor. Of more importance than these oppositions, however, is the fact that community is ruptured to the point where connection must be pursued rather than be taken for granted as a condition of communality. There is no “irregular justice” in *Howards End* because the established communal order has by and large disintegrated.

Irregular justice — the individual’s contribution to the community — is now the

³ The Wilsons make an interesting contrast to the Wilcoxes. The Wilcoxes are presumably analogous to the Wilsons insofar as they both represent a model for others in the society to aspire toward, yet their situations differ markedly. Most prominent among these differences, of course, is that the Wilcoxes measure their success according to trade — Fielding’s greatest fear — rather than according to “that calm serene happiness, which is seated in content” (*Joseph Andrews* 192). Fielding would be gratified to know that Forster also thought the mercantile ethic fostered “virtues of the second rank” (*Howards End* 112).

regular justice. Community itself is no longer a matter of adherence to social structure but is the result of whatever imaginative structure the individual creates.

The need to pursue connection raises the question of how much difference a community can withstand before it runs to anarchy, and the answer *Howards End* appears to supply in the union of the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels is “not much more.” But if the novel insists on connection, it does so to ensure that difference is recognized and respected. The novel has no interest in a sublatory social dynamic, one which would take the Wilcoxes and Schlegels and all they represent and forcibly assimilate them to create a new kind of society, even if readers might be forgiven for thinking that that is exactly what it does.⁴ *Howards End* encourages people to comprehend each other because it acknowledges that they are and should be different. Writing to her sister on the “superiority of the unseen to the seen,” Margaret tells her not to “brood too much. It’s true, but to brood on it is medieval. Our business is not to contrast the two, but to reconcile them” (112). The idea of reconciliation is at the centre of Forster’s novel since it is closely allied to his

⁴ Influential critics such as Lionel Trilling and Frederick C. Crews have interpreted *Howards End* as an attempt to define England, and see in Helen’s and Leonard’s son the unity that could make England great. While the unnamed baby does have symbolic value, considering him the distillation of Schlegel and Bast and, through Henry’s presence, Wilcox goes much against the grain of the novel’s sentiment that “it takes all sorts to make a world” (112). *Howards End* is understood to be a novel regarding the “Condition of England,” and while it is tempting to see in Margaret’s possession of Howards End and the birth of Helen’s son the dawning of a new, hopeful order, the idea of a new order runs counter to Forster’s commitment to difference. Helen’s son ought better to be seen as a new possibility, another of many; to do otherwise is to make him the representative for a new form of homogeneity, the canker that the novel most ardently resists.

imperative “only connect,” but reconciliation is not unification.⁵ Unification, at least in *Howards End*, resembles homogeneity, the London disease that Margaret and Helen eventually escape. Forster has written that “*Howards End* is a hunt for a home” (*A Room with a View* 232). The home the Schlegels find, however, is not like the homes aspired to by the characters of previous writers.

III

Howards End differs from *Joseph Andrews*, *Persuasion* and *The Mill on the Floss* in two readily apparent ways: the increased scope of the community and the absence of an influential extended family. In terms of numbers, the community’s size is not noticeably larger than that to be found in *Persuasion*, unless we are to count the unnamed culturally-minded souls with whom Helen and Margaret presumably share the concerts and art exhibitions they choose to attend. Even so, the various balls and parties of *Persuasion* and the rest of Austen’s fiction at which attendance is *de rigueur* are analogous to the Schlegels’ inability to “break loose from culture,” with time “wasted by concerts which it would be a sin to miss, and invitations which it would never do to refuse” (155). The community of *Howards End* is nonetheless of greatly increased capacity because of who is granted access to it. The members of the

⁵ Recall Richard Rorty’s view, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, that society ought properly to aim for accommodation of differing perspectives, not synthesis.

community — the Schlegels, Wilcoxes and Basts — range beyond the confines of class or geography, and so the community's scope is limited only by the Schlegels' ability to connect with and know other people. Margaret and Helen are as willing to chat up the wealthy Wilcoxes on a trip to the continent as they are to converse with Leonard Bast after Helen has mistakenly appropriated his shoddy umbrella.

Though *Howards End* begins with Helen's stop at the Wilcoxes, neither they nor Leonard Bast are friends of the Schlegel sisters until much further into the novel. Friendship, however, is not the determinant of community — recognition is, and that is why the lower classes make no entrance into Austen's fiction. The Schlegels are happy to recognize all sorts of people — “it takes all sorts to make a world,” thinks Margaret (112) — because they believe in connecting for the sake of connecting. Connection is, for the Schlegels, a good in and of itself, one that is not to be mitigated by the demands of any social or cultural *realpolitik*. Margaret and Helen follow the example of their father. His example is perhaps best expressed when they remind Aunt Juley of his idea of rent:

‘You remember “rent”? It was one of father's words — rent to the ideal, to his own faith in human nature. You remember how he would say, “It's better to be fooled than to be suspicious” — that the confidence trick is the work of man, but the want-of-confidence trick is the work of the devil.’ (55)

Margaret and, especially, Helen live in a world of ideals. If they do not always act in accordance with them, that does not mean that the ideals are not worth striving for. Their belief in "rent" means that they have no prohibitions (such as class, religion, geography and so on) regarding their pursuit of connections. As a result, they are free to participate in a potentially very large community, one certainly more inclusive than those to be found in Austen or Eliot.⁶

The idea of the large community also occurs elsewhere in Forster's fiction. The Emersons, Honeychurches and Vyses of *A Room with a View*, for instance, each occupy a slightly different stratum of English society. Their class differences help to make clearer Lucy's romantic dilemma. Perhaps even more revealing about the novel's community is its inclusion of Eleanor Lavish, a novelist — not the kind of character who generally finds her way into superior fiction prior to Forster. In *Where*

⁶ While the Schlegel sisters set no limits themselves on who they will admit to the community, they still must contend with the external limits set by economic reality. Generally speaking, a certain amount of money is necessary to have much chance of connecting with the Schlegels because of the middle-class cultural circles they run in. Leonard Bast would appear to be the exception who proves the rule, though Jacky Bast perhaps indicates otherwise. As Leonard's poor, jangling wife she exists merely to demonstrate the depth of Leonard's poverty. But her chance meeting with Henry Wilcox performs the important task of reinforcing his connection with a class several orders removed from his own. One might after all think Henry's influence on Leonard strict coincidence; had he not appeared at the Schlegels' house at the end of Leonard's teatime, Margaret and Helen's familiarity with poverty would likely have remained very much hypothetical. Jacky's revelation of prior acquaintance with Henry makes it clear, however, that intercourse between the classes is not as uncommon as the Wilcox sort would like to think. The parallel between Jacky and Leonard as people who both suffer exploitation by capitalist imperialism is obvious, but Jacky's knowledge of Henry confirms that Leonard is more than an accidental member of the novel's community. The Schlegels may happen to meet Leonard by accident, but that does not invalidate him as a member of the community. Jacky's example suggests that such "accidents" occur frequently enough for us to question whether they are not accidental but in fact common.

Angels Fear to Tread and *The Longest Journey*, as well as in *A Passage to India*, social dynamics similar to those in *Howards End* may be observed: a feeling that community should generally be larger rather than smaller, and that it should not be defined by terms of narrow exclusivity. Adela Quested and Mrs Moore take special pains in *A Passage to India* to expand their sense of community by insisting that they meet natives and not limit their socializing to the British. Forster not only critiques colonialist attitudes in this way; he also calls attention to the artificial and arbitrary means by which we often define our communities.

Forster seems most concerned above all to dismiss the notion of class as a fundamental organizing principle of the community.⁷ Austen, of course, maintains the community according to the strict class lines on which her neighbourhoods are based. She even indirectly suggests, in *Mansfield Park*, that family is less important than class in determining community, for the Crawfords are clearly of greater relevance to the Bertrams than the forgettable Prices. Eliot departs from Austen's example to directly portray, especially in *Adam Bede* and *Felix Holt*, the labouring

⁷ Perhaps because as a homosexual he could not afford artificial distinctions such as class to interfere with his own search for happiness. Forster's relationship with his Egyptian lover, Mohammed el Adl, a tram driver who occupied a step on the social ladder far removed from Forster's own status as a Cambridge intellectual, was for Forster a significant achievement. According to P.N. Furbank, in his biography of Forster, the relationship was "the realization of all his secret ambitions. He had, or so he felt, broken through the barriers of class and colour; and this had been the fruit of courage and persistency — of that 'athletic love', or taking trouble over relationships, which he had often preached" (vol. II, 40).

class, but the novels show very limited interaction between the labourers and their social superiors. This is especially apparent in the friendship between Adam Bede and Arthur Donnithorne; the two boys who played together when they were young find that their relationship loses most of its mutuality once they are grown because they can meet only on Arthur's terms. As a consequence, the portrayal of community in *Adam Bede* is noteworthy more because it presents a previously-neglected class than because it materially expands the equality of relations that is part of community.⁸ *The Mill on the Floss* perhaps best hints at the future Forster realizes: the interchange between Lucy Deane, Maggie and Stephen Guest, with its implicit mixture of classes and vocabularies, looks forward to the inclusive community of *Howards End* more than it mirrors the exclusive traditions of the Dodsons.

The change in orientation of the community from exclusive to inclusive is significant, yet Forster appears to accept the idea of a larger community as an established fact. He shows no regret that the foundation of community has altered; he has no wistful glances back at the past wishing for what was. This lack of regret is

⁸ Compare Raymond Williams's assessment of *Adam Bede*: he writes that "it is good to see the farmers and the craftsmen, and almost the labourers, as people present in the action in their own right.... Into a novel still predicated on the analysis of individual conduct, the farmers and craftsmen can be included as 'country people' but much less significantly as the active bearers of personal experience.... Though George Eliot restores the real inhabitants of rural England to their places in what had been a socially selective landscape, she does not get much further than restoring them *as a landscape*. They begin to talk, as it were collectively, in what middle-class critics still foolishly call a kind of chorus, a 'ballad-element'. But as themselves they are still only socially present, and can emerge into personal consciousness only through externally formulated attitudes and ideas" (*The Country and the City* 168).

understandable given the many advantages of an inclusive community. It can, for instance, do away with unnecessary distinctions, class primary among them, which arbitrarily keep people apart. A broader range of experience within any one community may also improve the life of the community by making it more adaptable and therefore better equipped to respond to social change. A familiarity with a greater number of social practices can only increase a community's chances of surviving to pass along its values to those who will follow.

The community's expansion also has the benefit of conferring upon its members more freedom. Because the rigid class distinctions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are being slowly replaced by the liberal belief in individual equality regardless of social status, the Schlegel sisters enjoy a variety of entertainments and experiences that would be unthinkable for Maggie Tulliver. Similarly, Leonard Bast's (implied) deference to Henry Wilcox is less than that of Bob Jakin to Tom Tulliver, even though Henry is of much higher social standing and Bob and Tom were childhood friends. Compare as well the behaviour of Adam Bede to Arthur Donnithorne, which is impeccably formal despite Adam's obvious superiority of character. Granted, Leonard is nervous when he meets with the Schlegel sisters. This nervousness, however, results from his own anxieties about measuring up to women he perceives to be his superiors. If he does not entirely account himself the

Schlegel sisters' equal, he at least has the opportunity to do so, an opportunity that is denied the likes of Adam Bede or Bob Jakin because they are identified with a particular social position and are expected to stick to it. The community of *Howards End* is essentially a liberal community, "an amalgam of Forster's own manufacture" that "one is tempted to say is the product of his hope rather than the outcome of his observation" (Wright 60). Forster's hope is obviously the hope of liberals everywhere, an optimism that the future will improve upon the past by ensuring that the past remains relevant to the present.

Whether an optimist's fancy or highest verisimilitude, the entrenched liberalism of Forster's community in *Howards End* has disadvantages as well. If it generously provides for a greater measure of theoretical equality among the general populace, it also makes possible the withering away of important connections with the past that help to define individual communities by making connection the province of the individual rather than of the institutions and traditions that represent the collective. He has little choice in this matter because connection as he defines it — as sympathy or, more broadly, as the imagination so important to Eliot⁹ — is not an integral part

⁹ "It is those that cannot connect who hasten to cast the first stone," the narrator informs us (*Howards End* 304). *Howards End* never supplies a single synonym for "connection," but the quotation above suggests that sympathy is as relevant as any other. Andrew Wright defines connection at slightly greater length: "in Forster's view we can connect by refusing to deny our sensual nature even as we rejoice in the clarities of the mind; we can connect by recollecting our indebtedness to the earth; and by being true to one another; we can connect by making judgements and forming ties based on personal trust and respect for personal freedom" (64).

of the community tradition; there are no traditions, or too few, which promote connection as such. The Dodson sisters, for example, cleave to traditions which oppose the sort of community Forster imagines. Their insistence on their own superiority encourages *family* connections but no other kind, and leads to a community insufficiently inclusive for Forster's taste. Their community is ultimately one based on lineage: "There were some Dodsons less like the family than others — that was admitted; but in so far as they were 'kin,' they were of necessity better than those who were 'no kin'" (*The Mill on the Floss* 44).

At its worst, the Dodsons' sort of community tends toward xenophobia and the eventual transformation or death of the community as it suffocates from a lack of social interaction. Forster would rather base community on values and establish connections between different sets of values. As a consequence *Howards End* lacks the influential extended family found in Fielding, Austen or Eliot because connection does not rely on it. Liberal wisdom as it is personified by Margaret is independent of family advisors — Margaret thinks herself well able to take care of her family when she is just thirteen years old, and accordingly politely refuses Aunt Juley's offer of assistance (28).

Margaret's values abide in the ideals promulgated by her father. The strength of these ideals, however, lies in their intrinsic merit, not in their association with Ernst

Schlegel. The ideals themselves, not their mediation through her father, help Margaret to navigate her society. The importance of the world of ideals is apparent from Margaret's and Helen's return, again and again, to the realm of imagination and questions of the "inner life." Their own experiences seem to be referred back to their ideals rather than directly shared.¹⁰ Even so, experience is not dismissed. Ideals, at least for Margaret, are not immutable; they are subject to alteration when experience suggests that they are inadequate or incorrect. Without this flexibility Margaret would never have left Henry. Insisting on a slavish devotion to ideals, as Helen does, merely replaces the stiffness of custom and tradition with more intractability. In the interplay between ideals and experience, the community Forster presents thus meets Richard Rorty's requirements for a liberal society. "It is central to the idea of a liberal society," writes Rorty, "that in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes.... *A liberal society is one which is content to call "true" whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be*" (51-2). Like Rorty, Forster thinks that the modification of ideals through *individual* experience is

¹⁰ When Margaret and Helen first discuss Margaret's marriage, for instance, Margaret meets Helen's objections by arguing that "there is the widest gulf between my love-making and yours. Yours was romance; mine will be prose" (177). Later, after Helen has made her distaste for Henry even more clear, she urges Margaret to "go on and marry him" anyway (194) because "you mean to keep proportion, and that's heroic, it's Greek, and I don't see why it shouldn't succeed with you" (195). Margaret's and Helen's references to "prose," "romance," and "proportion," ideas which they discuss elsewhere in the novel, suggest that their experience must be related to their ideals and tried on to check the fit, not merely accepted as is.

appropriate and even expected if there is to be any improvement in the human condition. He has faith that the individual's ability to determine her own community is sufficient to the task.

Making connection the obligation of the individual works well for the Schlegels, but laying so much responsibility on the individual has its dangers, as the Wilcoxes aptly demonstrate. No mention is made of Mr Wilcox's ancestors, while Mrs Wilcox's family is notable primarily because it has died out — she is the last Howard. Mr Wilcox perhaps ignores his ancestry because he prefers to think of himself as another Josiah Bounderby, entirely self-made. Or, again like Dickens's Bounderby, he maybe forgets his origins because he thinks them embarrassing or irrelevant. Hearing Dolly recount Miss Avery's history — the last male Howard once asked her to marry him, but she refused and he later "went out and was killed" (203) — Henry affirms the story's validity "negligently" (204). Earlier he says of Miss Avery that "lack of education makes people very casual. Hilton was full of women like Miss Avery once" (203). Henry's unconsidered rejection of Miss Avery points directly to the Wilcox family's problem: Miss Avery, through Mrs Wilcox, *is* their past, and they appear unable to recognize it. Miss Avery is a fit subject to Mr Wilcox and his family only for ridicule and a faint contempt.

The Wilcoxes' inability to recognize their past shows the risk inherent to the community Forster portrays. The absence of a Wilcox or Howard patriarch or matriarch who may guide the family and remind it of the values they collectively hold dear leaves them drifting and directionless. Worst of all, they have no tools with which to repair the damage, no way to express their interest in and care for each other: "the Wilcoxes were not lacking in affection; they had it royally, but they did not know how to use it" (319). Their trouble is summarized by Charles's reflection, after the wedding at Oniton, that the Schlegels are involved in an "orderly conspiracy" against his family, one meant to deprive them of their "just" share of money:

Two ladies were strolling up and down the garden terrace, and as the syllables 'Imperialism' were wafted to his ears he guessed that one of them was his aunt. She might have helped him, if she too had not had a family to provide for. 'Everyone for himself,' he repeated — a maxim which had cheered him in the past, but which rang grimly enough among the ruins of Oniton. (215)

Charles's sentiments extend to the rest of his family, and they are problematic because neither Charles nor any of his relations knows an alternative. The Wilcoxes exist in a kind of permanent isolation, only ever nibbling at the edges of community until someone such as Margaret breaks them to show them how isolated they are.

The Wilcoxes' isolation is emblematic of capitalism, at least as *Howards End* sees it. The family's disposition toward ridicule of Miss Avery and, by extension, anyone else deemed "unfashionable" displays the Wilcoxes' weakness; their lack of respect is the polar opposite of the connection that Forster thinks vital to a living community. Mrs Wilcox was important to the family because she could make connections, even when, as at the luncheon Margaret gives in her honour, she is clearly not in her element. Mrs Wilcox perhaps personifies respect; it seems impossible to imagine her dismissing anyone. Her family, however, is a different story because of their allegiance to capitalism and to cosmopolitan fashion. Disrespect is constitutive of capitalism insofar as it allows the Henry Wilcoxes of the world to get rich with the help of the world's Leonard Basts and then not care about their welfare. Capitalism promotes impersonality to the point where Henry can confidently dismiss Leonard as a "type" (152), knowable without regard for individuality. *Howards End* notes the irony of this situation explicitly when Leonard tells Helen about his "people":

His parents, who were dead, had been in trade; his sisters had married commercial travellers; his brother was a lay-reader.

'And your grandparents?'

Leonard told her a secret that he had held shameful up to now. 'They were just nothing at all,' he said — 'agricultural labourers and that sort.'

(234)

Leonard's ancestors are, in other words, not unlike the Howards and, presumably, the Wilcoxes.¹¹ But the similarities do not end with ancestry. Henry Wilcox and Leonard Bast are, for all their differences in class and sophistication, much the same at bottom. They are equally mobile (though surely not, in Leonard's case, because he wants to be) and share a remarkably reverent view of women. Leonard reveals himself at tea with Margaret and Helen:

His wit was the Cockney's; it opened no doors into the imagination, and Helen was drawn up short by 'The more a lady has to say, the better', administered waggishly.

'Oh yes,' she said.

'Ladies brighten —'

'Yes, I know. The darlings are regular sunbeams. Let me give you a plate.'
(143)

Leonard's quaint view of women could easily be seen as a simple criticism of his intellectual shortcomings. But only a few pages later we find Henry bantering with Margaret on the subject of socialism, unresentful of her arguments because "women may say anything — it was one of his holiest beliefs" (160).

¹¹ This similarity between the Basts and the Howards is not exact because the Basts did not own their land. Even so, while Forster certainly believes in the value of land, he just as surely dislikes class distinctions which prevent people from connecting. The Basts and the Howards performed a similar kind of work that connects them even if they profited from that work in different ways.

The substantial difference between the two men is that Henry prides himself on being a self-made man, while Leonard strives to be one. The narrative makes clear that Leonard will never be a self-made man in financial terms, but he nevertheless attempts to construct for himself a new identity because he cannot see through or around the walls capitalist ideology has built to enclose him. Leonard himself considers his past a “shameful” secret, and he is forced to create a new identity because he thinks the old one no longer acceptable. Much of this effort focuses on Leonard’s attempt to understand culture and through “sudden conversion” become like the Miss Schlegels with “their hands ... upon the ropes, once and for all” (62–3). Leonard fails partly because the Ruskin he studies is

full of high purpose, full of beauty, full even of sympathy and the love of men, yet somehow eluding all that was actual and insistent in Leonard’s life. For it was the voice of one who had never been dirty or hungry, and had not guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are. (62)

Given the emphasis *Howards End* places on connection, including connection with the past, however, one cannot help but feel that Leonard also fails partially because he already has an identity, as the descendent of “agricultural labourers,” that it is no shame to acknowledge and retain. He is a victim of the disconnectedness capitalism encourages, but doubly a victim because he does not at least have the amelioration of

an income adequate to his needs. Capitalism defines Leonard's unfortunate circumstances as *natural*: "The poor are poor, and one's sorry for them, but there it is," says Henry. "As civilization moves forward, the shoe is bound to pinch in places, and it's absurd to pretend that anyone is responsible personally.... It's just the shoe pinching — no one can help it; and it might easily have been worse" (192).

Both the trials and the blessings of a community that has increased in scope and that lacks the traditional focal point of the family can be explained by Forster's celebration of difference. Where difference is tentatively explored by Fielding, Austen and Eliot, Forster shows no hesitation. He consciously promotes difference as a constitutive, if generally unrecognized, part of community. He does so in a number of ways: by redefining conflict, redefining truth, asserting difference as a positive value, and by dissociating tradition from the concrete particulars with which it is generally identified.

The last of these methods for advancing difference is also the one that imparts to *Howards End* its feeling of spirituality. The curious means by which Margaret comes into possession of Howards End reveals that the past, or the "elder race" that inhabited the country, is imbued with a mystical spirituality that makes it independent of time's linear progression. In other words, the virtues of the past as the novel sees them are not tied to their usual means of transmission from one

generation to the next. Normally, of course, this would mean that the children learn the values of the parents, and then pass on those values to their own children. Values can be inscribed in communal activities (the school and the church are the most obvious) as well, but the chief source of traditional wisdom will move from parent to child.

In *Howards End* this process is interrupted in both the Schlegel and Wilcox families. The Schlegels have no past, in a way, because Ernst Schlegel left Germany and repudiated the legacy of his country; instead of communal wisdom he gave his children liberal ideals. The Wilcoxes, on the other hand, are unaware of the past because they choose to ignore it. Ruth Wilcox was all the connection her family needed, but it was a connection they humoured rather than learned from. The Wilcoxes as a whole avoid connection ("everyone for himself"), and the manner in which they relate to the past proves to be no exception. If there is any representative of mainstream culture in *Howards End*, it is the Wilcoxes. Their isolation and lack of communality are thus more alarming because it is easy to imagine so many others who are very much the same, and whose approach to the past is equally dismissive. As a result, Forster conceives of the past as a force that exists on its own, independent of the majority of people and kept alive by the spiritually adept to be handed on as a gift to those who understand its worth. He needs to do so because the past has value

and he can see no other way — disdaining the institutionalism of custom and tradition — by which that value may be communicated to others.

The issue of what value the past possesses I will leave until later. For now it is important to realize the implications of Forster's decision to treat the past as a thing of specialized transmission. Miss Avery's eerie foretelling of Margaret's eventual possession of *Howards End* designates her as the elder race's heir. But by treating the past as an object that can be passed about at will, Forster separates it from any grounding in time and makes it simply one more vocabulary among many. Instead of functioning as it did in Austen or Eliot, as a background of which everyone is aware and which consequently affects (or "colours," to use Forster's word) all people, the past as we see it in *Howards End* is now "frozen," the distillation of history up to a certain point. Recent history, for instance, is not included in Forster's vision of the past, and so the past is no longer alive, no longer an evolving story. It is only a set of values now lost to the majority of people and sometimes rediscovered (as in Margaret's case) by those with enough acuity to discern the legitimacy and relevancy of those values.

This action of freezing the past into a single, identifiable set of values and thereby making it another one of Rorty's vocabularies is the consequence of Forster's belief in difference. The past as he sees it and all it stands for must be *chosen*; it cannot be

imposed. To simply accept the past as the root of all morality would lead to either of two possibilities, neither of them of much advantage to Forster's way of thinking. On the one hand, it could leave the community in the same predicament evident in *The Mill on the Floss*, with the Dodsons' narrowly-defined vision of right and wrong inhibiting the growth of any other thinking. Or it could lead, as it seemingly has done, to the present situation vis à vis the Wilcoxes, where the lessons of the past are entirely ignored without any concomitant improvement in the life of the community. Neither the provincialism of the past nor the self-absorption of the present satisfies Forster's sense of what community is or should be, and so he suggests that community is in reality quite different from what people have supposed it to be — rather than consisting of an agreed-upon set of principles that unite people, it allows people to disagree and to respect those disagreements.

Forster is perhaps most explicit regarding the importance of difference to the community at the end of *Howards End*. Helen wonders if, given the example of Margaret and Henry, there is not something wrong with her because she feels no desire to marry anyone. Margaret's reply stands as the keynote of the novel:

'It is only that people are far more different than is pretended. All over the world men and women are worrying because they cannot develop as they are supposed to develop. Here and there they have the matter out, and it comforts them.... A place, as well as a person, may catch the glow. Don't you

see that all this leads to comfort in the end? It is part of the battle against sameness. Differences — eternal differences, planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily gray.’ (327–8)

The passage is remarkable for the extent to which it deviates from standard calls for peace; such calls ordinarily emphasize, through some appeal to the “brotherhood of mankind,” how much we are alike despite our apparent differences. Here the opposite is true, and it is no accident that Forster has Margaret begin this passage by maintaining that we “are far more different than is pretended.” He would do away with what he considers to be false suppositions of essential similarity. Forster strengthens his point with Margaret’s attention to the “eternal differences” that “colour” the “single family” of humanity. He obviously feels there is no point in striving for the sort of community that will not exist. To do so would be to follow the dangerous path of Imperialism and the attempted imposition of sameness that results from colonial rule. Difference, *Howards End* suggests, simply *is*. Best to acknowledge the fact and make whatever community one can rather than deny it and forever feel the frustration of never reaching utopia. Like Rorty, Forster does not seem to think “that the history of culture has a *telos*” (Rorty 17); he believes rather that it is the product of contingency. Communities are *made*, just like the one that concludes the novel.

If communities are made, and made up of difference, this still does not explain how the conflicts that inevitably arise from that difference are to be managed. One of the most pressing questions facing the society depicted in *Howards End* regards how it is to prevent itself from bifurcating into haves and have-nots and so developing an outright antagonism that will effectively mean the end of the former society and the creation of two new ones. This is an alarming possibility for which the novel posits some radical answers. In this respect, at least, Forster resembles his modernist contemporaries by disregarding established ideas of a foundational truth. He begins by redefining conflict as a positive rather than a negative social attribute in the context of Margaret's realization of "the chaotic nature of our daily life, and its difference from the orderly sequence that has been fabricated by historians. Actual life is full of false clues and signposts that lead nowhere." To this Forster adds the comment that "life is indeed dangerous, but not in the way morality would have us believe. It is indeed unmanageable, but the essence of it is not a battle. It is unmanageable because it is a romance, and its essence is romantic beauty" (115). By suggesting that life is unmanageable Forster means that it defeats *preimposed* order: "the most successful [career] is not that of the man who is taken unprepared, but of him who has prepared and is never taken" (115). In other words, we are met every day with chaos and must order it not as we think we should but as we can.

The indeterminacy Forster recognizes here is not the ill one might initially think it to be. Life is not a futile battle to bring order out of the chaos, a singularly unattractive prospect because of its connotations of untiring strife. It is instead a romance because romance is unexpected; the chaos it creates is inherently neither good nor bad. Conflict is thus for Forster a question of expectations, not a matter of oppositions. If expectations fail to match experience, which is to Forster's thinking nearly always the case, then it is best to adapt oneself to circumstances rather than ceaselessly struggle to adapt circumstances to oneself. Life, like any romance, is arbitrary; it lacks the logic of the historian's account, and the absence of logic is what Forster takes to be the primary conflict resulting from difference. Regarded in such terms, then, conflict is inescapable and contributes, as a cause,¹² to whatever order we do manage to create.

Part and parcel of Forster's redefinition of conflict is his redefinition of truth. The vision of truth put forward in the novel is the philosophical basis for its advocacy of difference and relates as well to the virtues of proportion that Margaret

¹² I mean "cause" in this instance in the same way that Rorty thinks "new metaphors are causes, but not reasons, for changes of belief" (50). Metaphors are causes rather than reasons because they have no place in a language game — language games deal with meaning, and metaphors do not. According to Rorty, "tossing a metaphor into a text is like using italics, or illustrations, or odd punctuation or formats. All these are ways of producing effects on your interlocutor or your reader, but not ways of conveying a message" (18). Forster, I believe, approaches conflict in the same way. There is no specific meaning attached to it, but insofar as it must be responded to it conditions the kinds of (inevitably temporary and incomplete) order we create.

espouses. It is not a vision, it need hardly be said, that entertains any absolutist ideas of what is true and what false. The novel's definition of truth arises, in fact, in the context of Margaret's thinking that

At every turn of speech one was confronted with reality and the absolute. Perhaps Margaret grew too old for metaphysics, perhaps Henry was weaning her from them, but she felt that there was something a little unbalanced in the mind that so readily shreds the visible. The businessman who assumes that this life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side and on that, to hit the truth. 'Yes, I see, dear; it's about halfway between,' Aunt Juley had hazarded in earlier years. No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and, though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility. (195-6)

To take up the cause of proportion at the outset is sterile because it replaces one absolute — the one that pretends to know true and false — with another that depends on the already established poles of thought. Margaret distrusts absolutism because it leads to the death of meaning. Truth is "alive" and ever shifting to take account of the continual difference which we must all negotiate. Forster's truth is like Austen's community: it is without nucleus, and will differ from day to day and from viewpoint to viewpoint. But where Austen discovers that community is made up of difference by exploring the options available to Anne Elliot when she finds herself dissatisfied with her community as it stands, Forster realizes in advance that

difference must constitute community because alterity cannot be avoided. Where Austen and Eliot understood that difference contributes to the community, Forster goes one step further in believing that difference contributes to everything, and so community cannot simply be decided by difference. The question Forster addresses is what, besides difference, makes a community.

His answer is that community depends on stability. *Howards End* mentions in several instances and in various ways the importance of connection, but connection has more to do with comprehension than with ideological battle. The novel in no way calls for one ideology or community to assimilate another or to establish pre-eminence.¹³ Community is for Forster not an issue of like minds; he does not mistake individual preference for one vocabulary for the idea that all people should subscribe to that vocabulary. He is instead preoccupied with re-establishing the stability that the early twentieth century's reversion to "the civilization of luggage" (154) has lost. A primary deficiency of the cosmopolitan culture is its mobility, undoubtedly because there must be some question as to whether there can be any community

¹³ Elizabeth Langland makes a similar argument by reading the novel from a feminist perspective: "Forster's central opposition between man and woman would seem, initially, to be played out between Henry Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel. It begins on the level of houses.... Forster's feminist vision removes Margaret as a single term within the traditional dialectic, replaces her with Helen, and reinterprets Margaret as the principle that will complicate the hierarchical oppositions and provide a new kind of connection. That new kind of connection is not the old androgyny, a merging or blurring of terms and traits; it is a condition that preserves difference" (256).

when individuals are forced to be excessively mobile,¹⁴ and the narrative continually reminds us of this shortcoming. When the novel introduces us to Leonard Bast at some length, he lives at Camelia Road, “at present his home” (59). “At present” implies that Leonard moves about a good deal, and this possibility is borne out by the fact that apart from family and the Schlegels he has seemingly no one to turn to for help when he loses his employment, no one who can provide even emotional support. Leonard is dispossessed; he has no roots.

The same problem extends to the Wilcoxes, but it is worse because they cannot recognize it as one. After resolving all the difficulties she experiences with Helen and the Basts at Evie’s wedding, Margaret feels “at one with her future home, colouring it and coloured by it” (241). She imagines, in other words, that she has some effect on Oniton just as she understands that it has some effect on her. She does not exist in a vacuum separate from her location; for her a sense of place is paramount in establishing community. At Oniton, however, it is not to be because

the Wilcoxes have no part in the place, nor in any place. It is not their names that recur in the parish register. It is not their ghosts that sigh among the alders at evening. They have swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind. (246)

¹⁴ The mobility with which Forster is dissatisfied is of course altogether different from the mobility of nomadic tribes. In the latter case, the community as a whole moves; in the former, only the individuals do, and thus their connection to the community is strained.

The Wilcoxes' vocabulary and the belief in movement and in motors represent absence of community. They establish themselves according to what they own rather than by where they stand relative to other people. The Wilcox lifestyle undoubtedly prompts the narrative to predict that "historians of the future will note how the middle classes accreted possessions without taking root in the earth, and may find in this the secret of their imaginative poverty" (154). One place is as good as another for the Wilcoxes, and thus they are all meaningless. The vocabulary they promote is doubly at fault because it forces others into a mobility they would rather not have. The Wilcoxes at least can claim to prefer moving about between houses, even if, as a result, they "have no part in the place." But the Basts have no choice. They are forced to move about, either because they have no money to pay the landlord, or because they must search for new employment. They have no alternative, and their connection with the community — weak to begin with if Leonard's conversation with Mr Cunningham (60) is anything to judge it by — suffers in consequence.

The sore of excessive mobility afflicts both the high and the low, but the middle-class Schlegels also feel some pain. Not at first, though. It takes Mrs Wilcox to recognize the importance attached to the move from Wickham Place:

'It is monstrous, Miss Schlegel; it isn't right. I had no idea that this was hanging over you. I do pity you from the bottom of my heart. To be parted

from your house, your father's house — it oughtn't to be allowed. It is worse than dying. I would rather die than — oh, poor girls! Can what they call civilization be right, if people mayn't die in the room where they were born? My dear, I am so sorry —' (92–3)

Not until much later, nearer the moving date, does the truth of Mrs Wilcox's alarm make itself apparent to the Schlegels. The narrator says that "the Schlegels were certainly the poorer for the loss of Wickham Place. It had helped to balance their lives, and almost to counsel them" (154). That is to say, Wickham Place has a character, and moving is a little like death because it means the absence of that character. The narrator has bitter words for the landlord who has been enriched by his decision to develop flats on the site, for "he has spilt the precious distillation of the years, and no chemistry of his can give it back again" (155). The value of a place, then, is that it makes time itself concrete by providing an associative tool for memory. "What is valuable about Howards End," writes Anne Wright, "is its history and function. It is a family house, embedded in a community, and it represents continuity" (38). The same may be said of Wickham Place, and that is why having to leave there so distresses the Schlegels. Living there means for the Schlegels that all of their history is available to them because they have the house as a yardstick against which they can measure their activities.

The corollary of a house's importance as a place for memory is that human beings by themselves are inadequate for the job of maintaining memory. Sustaining a collective memory requires assistance, whether of the bard trained for the task centuries ago or of property. Forster demonstrates the need for this assistance when Margaret and Helen accidentally meet Mr Wilcox a few years after his wife's death and he informs them that he and Evie are moving from Howards End:

The tide had begun to ebb. Margaret leant over the parapet and watched it sadly. Mr Wilcox had forgotten his wife, Helen her lover; she herself was probably forgetting. Everyone moving. Is it worth while attempting the past when there is this continual flux even in the hearts of men? (143)

Rather than remember his wife and the experiences he shared with her, Mr Wilcox seems to do everything in his power to forget her, including moving from Howards End. But that is only to be expected; the cosmopolitanism which the Wilcoxes so well represent has no interest of its own in the past — it is fixated on the here and now, on immediate gratification, on whatever may be defined as progress. Its character, if it may be said to have one, is forgetfulness. It opposes the stability of place that Forster so obviously admires because that stability is inextricably intertwined with memory. A house has no character without memory, and the same may be said for the community or the society. The community which has no

memory ceases in short order to be a community. That is not to say that the community cannot change; for all his interest in the “elder race” and the past, Forster has shown how much the community has changed by reorienting it toward the individual and away from the collective. At the same time, however, the individual needs a community in part to retain memory which she cannot retain herself. The path the Wilcoxes travel might seem at first to indicate opportunities for maximum individualization, but Forster shows that it in fact accomplishes the very opposite: people who have no memory, who are rootless and endlessly moving, are all the same. Places confer memory as much as they are invested with it, and these memories are as different as every place. People without a place have no memory and thus no individuality.

The affliction of excessive mobility means that the opposition between country and city is not as clear in *Howards End* as it is in *Joseph Andrews*. London as the centre of a mobile culture — whatever that might amount to — is what *Howards End* takes issue with, not London as a city. “London fascinates,” the narrator informs us. “One visualizes it as a tract of quivering gray, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled, as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity” (116). If the novel perhaps damns the city with faint praise, it is not damned because, as in Fielding’s fiction and even

some of Austen's, it is a pit of temptation and vice. So long as the Schlegels are at Wickham Place London has nothing really wrong with it; it may be seen as a collection of places, each of them with some potential value. Once the city forces the Schlegels to move, however, London betrays itself as a location that cannot guarantee, and is indeed uninterested in, stability. Its places cease to have value beyond their economic worth, and its inhabitants become important as numbers rather than as people.

The country, then, is not preferred to the city because of its values, as it is in *Joseph Andrews*. *Howards End* does not adumbrate a country ideology that, if only it were paid attention, would cure all social ills.¹⁵ The "oppressive narrowness" often associated with the country — most obviously in Eliot — interests Forster not at all because it indicates conformity and would therefore be no improvement on the sameness imposed by the city. *Howards End* prefers the country because it supplies the freedom for people to do as they wish. In other words, it encourages difference by making difference possible. In London, difference can only be a response to the

¹⁵ Judith Weissman's "E.M. Forster: Gasoline and Goddesses" is an otherwise excellent article spoiled by the conclusion that *Howards End* argues for a "holy agricultural economy," one that is "holy because it is productive" (288). However, means of production are only of incidental concern to the novel, and it does not try very hard to persuade its readers of the merits of a certain kind of business. Memory and freedom are of more concern to the novel than is agricultural production and the economy it engenders. In fact, to argue that Forster places the "holy agricultural economy" above all others is surely to miss one of the novel's central desires — the wish to connect differing ideologies and by so doing reduce the misunderstandings which lead to antagonism.

sameness the city imposes. In the country, however, difference can be proactive. The individual may express herself in the manner she believes best because she has the twin advantages of space in which to grow and an absence of social coercion. This again is opposite to the standard view of the country, which is notable for its tendency to coercion. One need only think of *The Mill on the Floss* or any of Eliot's other novels to see the coerciveness country folk can exhibit. But Forster would have us think of country and city in terms of their capability. Both country and city can obviously be turned toward a coercive ideology. The country does not have to be, though, whereas the city offers little alternative.

The value the country finally holds is the value of the past. This is the value of what Forster conceives to be a non-ideological binding, a difficult concept to envision. The past can signify the oppressiveness that results from a situation such as the one Maggie Tulliver must endure. *Howards End* does not evoke this part of the past, no doubt because oppressiveness better describes the life of the Wilcoxes than that of the Schlegels. One of the novel's most emotional moments occurs when Margaret meets Helen at Howards End and the two sisters put aside their present difficulties:

Explanations and appeals had failed; they had tried for a common meeting-ground, and had only made each other unhappy. And all the time their

salvation was lying round them — the past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would after all be a future, with laughter and the voices of children. Helen, still smiling, came up to her sister. She said: "It is always Meg." They looked into each other's eyes. The inner life had paid. (292)

In contrast with the Wilcoxes' affection, which they apparently possess in abundance but do not know how to use, Margaret's and Helen's simple *rapprochement* eloquently restates one of the novel's core beliefs, the superiority of the unseen to the seen. But this superiority is not a thing of the past even if it may be associated with it (as here), not something to be found through the example of the Boobys or the Musgraves or the Dodsons. It belongs to the realm of ideals — to the imagination, in Eliot's terms, as opposed to the quotidian world that people such as the Wilcoxes and the Dodsons take to be the extent of reality — and so does not depend upon transmission from one generation to the next.

The part of the past that *Howards End* valorizes is its stability and the reason for that stability, which the novel does not ascribe to superior politics. The stability to which the novel aspires is a function of the land and rootedness, a point it makes clear when Margaret and Henry are discussing where they might live, since Oniton is apparently out of the question:

Marriage had not saved [Margaret] from the sense of flux. London was but a foretaste of this nomadic civilization which is altering human nature so profoundly, and throws upon personal relations a stress greater than they have ever borne before. Under cosmopolitanism, if it comes, we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle, and the binding force that they once exercised on character must be entrusted to Love alone. May Love be equal to the task! (256–7)

Apart from its prescience — for trees and meadows and mountains have, for the majority of the populace, become little more than spectacle — this passage explains why the novel looks to the past for its foundation of community. Trees and meadows and mountains offer a groundwork — *a* binding force because they clearly cooperate with Love, and thus are not essential — apparently independent of politics and ideology, for two reasons. The first is that they are common and must be lived with and known, and the second Forster's supposition that they offer the same thing in their commonality to everyone. He understands community to be composed of differences, but within a climate of stability. If the differences that comprise community are essentially ideological, then an ideological stability is impossible because it would inevitably mean the subordination of some ideologies to others and a corollary reduction in tolerance and in the wish to connect.¹⁶ A stability based on

¹⁶ Elizabeth Langland believes that *Howards End* rejects entirely the idea of subordination. Discussing the meaning of Margaret's view at the end of the novel that she has "conquered" the Wilcoxes (331), Langland offers another view of conquest: "'Conquer,' in this context, is not an act of self-assertion and dominance but is redefined as nonassertion, an opening up of space, a refusal to accept the exclusivity of opposition between Henry and Helen." After noting the similarity between

what Forster thinks to be the impersonal measure of land, however, provides a way out of a possible impasse and allows him the luxury of maintaining stability in a world of difference without the usual cost of a dominant ideology.

This luxury is illusory. On the one hand Forster's representation of the contribution the country makes to community accounts for its timelessness. The country belongs to the past, to the elder race, but to a past that is itself apart from history. Forster is uninterested in whatever "orderly sequence" may be fashioned from the past to create history. He prefers the "peace of the country" which "has no commerce with memory, and little with hope. Least of all is it concerned with the hopes of the next five minutes. It is the peace of the present, which passes understanding" (307). One might as well say that he prefers peace, which he happens to identify with the country.

But this preference leads us to a necessary qualification, the "other hand." For no matter how hard *Howards End* tries to divorce the value of the past from whatever vocabulary may be associated with the history of the past, that value ultimately becomes another vocabulary in the present. Trees and meadows and mountains are not, ultimately, free from ideology. They do not have similar meanings for all

Henry and Helen (both think at different times that they are "ended"), Langland observes that "the man of action and the woman of emotion reach the bankruptcy implicit in their exclusive positions. Margaret's conquest or victory, then, is not the patriarchal one demanding suppression of an other but one that emerges as the traditional oppositions destroy themselves and clear a space for difference" (262).

people, even if it might be good for our communities if they did. While Forster views the country as an aspect of nature, and thus invests it with a sublimity reminiscent of Romantic imaginings of the wilderness, others do not share his perception. Most obviously, imperialists and cosmopolitans such as the Wilcoxes do not share his perception. For them and countless others, trees and meadows and mountains deliver profits and nothing more. The difference between the two positions is purely ideological. Thus Margaret must *choose* to live at Howards End. If the house seems in some way to choose her, too, that is part of the mysticism the novel fosters in line with its view that the ineffable is as much a part of community as anything else. It would be a mistake to rely on that mysticism or to believe that Forster has somehow implausibly escaped ideology. Like it or not, connection alone is insufficient to accomplish Forster's goals of understanding and stability. These things are entrenched within ideology, and so inevitably there must be some battling to ensure that understanding and stability are possible.

Ultimately, what Forster offers is what Laclau and Mouffe argue is impossible. Ideological closure of the kind imagined here, even in the name of difference, is closure nonetheless. Forster would like to suture society to ensure the tolerance he believes constitutes civility and civilization, to make it a "self-defined totality" (*Hegemony* 111) that resists the divisive impulses so obvious within his society. While

he may not consciously favour the ascendancy of one ideology or vocabulary above all others because he respects difference, that respect itself threatens the monopolizing of imagination — the interpretation of the “unseen” — that he most fears. Forster recognizes the contribution the individual makes to the community and celebrates it. Together with that celebration, however, is a degree of risk, for the world of the imagination and the unseen need hardly be the province of enlightened liberals alone. There might come a time when the liberal ideals of the Schlegel sisters make no adequate answer, even in a novel, to the imperialist and cosmopolitan vocabularies by which they are surrounded. Community then will not cease to exist; it will merely be different, perhaps impoverished, from what Forster would like it to be. It is a chance he will have to take.

Notwithstanding the evident shortcomings of Forster’s vision, Margaret’s choice, given her circumstances, remains a wise one that allows her comfortably to comprehend the differences that have entered the making of her community. As the novel puts it, “in these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect — connect without bitterness until all men are brothers” (264). Connect, that is, not until all men are the same, but until they all know each other. In a world that Forster

correctly prophesied would require more connection and more communities that would allow that connection, it is the first step toward a worthy goal.

IV

The country's capacity to encourage difference through stability supplies the novel's concluding optimism. Its sanguine ending strikes some critics as out of tune with the novel's preceding complications; they find especially offensive the idea that a return to a little country living and a crop of hay is going to be any proof against the impersonal demons of the big, bad city. Looked at in such a way, the novel's ending is of course an inadequate response to the problems creeping into modern society, problems of which the remainder of the novel is more than well enough aware. But the Schlegels' return to the country should not be taken as a return to a more innocent time in the hope that the rediscovery of innocence will solve the crises bedevilling personal relations. The novel works hard to dispel the notion that Margaret and Helen take up where agricultural labourers left off a generation or two previous. The sisters instead try to recapture the stability the country represents, in part because they are liberal-minded and tolerant and wish to remain that way. Though Margaret thinks that, if "left to itself ... this county would vote Liberal" (263), a cursory examination of Eliot's work (or of election results) proves that the

country voters were not always so progressive. They *could be*, however, because of the country's stability, and Margaret's qualifying "left to itself" suggests that outside ideological influence is as much to blame for rural voting patterns as anything else. In any case, the value of the country, and the reason why Margaret and Helen wind up there, resides in what it makes possible, not what it is and has been in the annals of history. The country allows every person the chance to be a strong poet, and it makes the task of redescription — a task which the strong poets of each of the novels discussed in this thesis attempts — easier. If the earlier novels only begin the redescription of community that makes us see it as composed equally of difference and harmony, *Howards End* completes it. Forster's only mistake is to believe country necessary for that redescription rather than merely helpful.

For this reason, then — the possibility of the country — Forster shares with Henry Fielding the opinion that genuine community is viable provided it is given the space in which to flourish. The two differ in that Fielding was impressed with the vocabulary of the country, and thought that it was an example worthy of emulation — the only example, really, that was necessary because it so well encapsulated the values of the *status quo*. Forster perceives the country to be a place that offers room for all manner of differences, a place that does not force imagination, or persuasion, or irregular justice to the periphery. If he is not entirely in favour of the Wilcoxes

because of their thralldom to the vagaries of cosmopolitanism, he will still, like Margaret, “refuse to draw [an] income and sneer at those who guarantee it” (178). And though the Wilcoxes certainly represent cosmopolitanism, it is fair to say that they are its victims, too, caught up in the impersonal forces of motion that impel society forward in a blind rush. But give community some space — for Forster, literally some land — so that it may provide individuals the freedom to use their imaginations and to contemplate the unseen without the disconnection that modern society perpetually threatens us with and the situation is far from hopeless. As Margaret remarks to Helen near the end of the novel,

‘Because a thing is going strong now, it need not go strong for ever,’ she said. ‘This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won’t be a movement because it will rest on the earth. All the signs are against it now, but I can’t stop hoping, and very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house is the future as well as the past.’ (329)

“The future as well as the past.” Presumably this is all a community should be expected to provide — memory and the possibility of continuity. The communities of which Anne Elliot and Maggie Tulliver were a part were no longer able to supply the possibility of continuity; neither woman looked to the future with contentment. Once faced with the prospect of losing their home, the Schlegels discovered that

they also had no foreseeable future. They found that “either some very dear person or some very dear place seems necessary to relieve life’s daily gray, and to show that it *is* gray” (150–1). Community requires some place to stop, whether metaphorical or literal, to enable connections and to make sense of them once they are made. Later authors will know just as much, but as the twentieth century examines the insecurities of individual identity these authors will contend with the question of whether connection as Forster imagines it is possible. Joyce and Beckett and Derrida and Rorty may lead us to think of Forster as a naive liberal, but he was prescient in many ways. Maybe the past *will* once again be the future.

Works Cited or Consulted

- Aers, David. "Community and Morality: Towards Reading Jane Austen." *Romanticism and Ideology: Studies in English Writing 1765-1830*. Ed. David Aers, Jonathan Cook and David Punter. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. 118-36.
- Allen, Walter. *George Eliot*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1964.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993.
- Anderson, Douglas. *A House Undivided: Domesticity and Community in American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Auerbach, Nina. "O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*." *English Literary History* 39 (1972): 112-28.
- Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. In *The Novels of Jane Austen*. Ed. R.W. Chapman. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923.
- . *Pride and Prejudice*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972.
- . *Mansfield Park*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.
- . *Sense and Sensibility*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980.
- . *Catharine and Other Writings*. Eds. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglas Murray. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bartolomeo, Joseph F. "Interpolated Tales as Allegories of Reading: *Joseph Andrews*." *Studies in the Novel* 23.4 (1991): 405-15.
- Battestin, Martin C. *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1959.
- Battestin, Martin C., and Ruthe R. Battestin. *Henry Fielding: A Life*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bauer, Dale M. *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1985.

- Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1978.
- Blanchard, Frederick T. *Fielding the Novelist*. 1926. Rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.
- Boone, Joseph Allen. *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction*. Chicago, 1987.
- Bradbrook, Muriel. "Barbara Bodichon, George Eliot and the Limits of Feminism." *Women and Literature, 1779-1982*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982. 49-65.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. "Persuasion Again." *Essays in Criticism* 18 (1968): 383-96.
- Brooks, Douglas. "The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews* Again." *Modern Philology* 65 (1968): 208-13.
- Brown, Julia Prewitt. "The Feminist Depreciation of Austen: A Polemical Reading." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 23.3 (1990): 303-13.
- Burns, Bryan. "The Story-telling in *Joseph Andrews*." *Henry Fielding: Justice Observed*. Ed. K.G. Simpson. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1985. 119-36.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Carlisle, Janice. "The Mirror in *The Mill on the Floss*: Toward a Reading of Autobiography as Discourse." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23.2 (1990): 177-96.
- Chapman, R. W., ed. *Jane Austen's Letters*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1952.
- . "A reply to Mr. Duffy on *Persuasion*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9.2 (1955): 154.
- Copley, Stephen, ed. *Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Croom Helm, 1984.
- Corlett, William. *Community Without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.
- Cottom, Daniel. *The Civilized Imagination: A study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Crews, Frederick C. *E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- Cruise, James. "Fielding, Authority, and the New Commercialism in *Joseph Andrews*." *English Literary History* 54.2 (1987): 253-76.
- Delany, Paul. "'Islands of Money': Rentier Culture in E.M. Forster's *Howards End*." *English Literature in Transition* 31.3 (1988): 285-96.

- Duckworth, Alistair M. *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- Duffy, Joseph M., Jr. "Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 8 (1954): 272-89.
- Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
- . *Adam Bede*. New York: Signet, 1961.
- . *Middlemarch*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965.
- . *Silas Marner*. New York: Bantam, 1992.
- . *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. Ed. Nancy Henry. London: William Pickering, 1994.
- Feltes, N.N. "Community and the Limits of Liability in Two Mid-Victorian Novels." *Victorian Studies* 17 (1974): 355-69.
- Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews*. Ed. Martin C. Battestin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- . *Tom Jones*. Ed. Sheridan Baker. New York: W.W. Norton, 1973.
- . *Jonathan Wild*. Ed. David Nokes. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Fisher, Philip. *Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1981.
- Flanders, Wallace Austin. *Structures of Experience: History, Society and Personal Life in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1984.
- Forster, E.M. *Howards End*. Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975.
- . *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.
- . *The Longest Journey*. New York: Vintage Books, 1962.
- . *A Room With a View*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.
- . *A Passage to India*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977.
- Fraiman, Susan. "The Mill on the Floss, the Critics, and the *Bildungsroman*." *PMLA* 108.1 (1993): 136-50.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty between Romanticism and Technocracy." *Consequences of Theory*. Ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. 39-62.
- Friedman, Ellen G. "Doris Lessing: Fusion and Transcendence of the Female and the Great Tradition." *Centennial Review* 30.4 (1986):

- 452-70.
- Fuchs, Eva. "The Pattern's All Missed: Separation/Individuation in *The Mill on the Floss*." *Studies in the Novel* 19.4 (1987): 422-34.
- Furbank, P.N. *E.M. Forster: A Life*. 2 vols. London: Secker & Warburg, 1977-78.
- García Landa, José Angel. "The Chains of Semiosis: Semiotics, Marxism, and the Female Stereotypes in *The Mill on the Floss*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 27.1 (1991): 32-50.
- Gard, Roger. *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.
- Gibson, Mary Ellis. "Illegitimate Order: Cosmopolitanism and Liberalism in Forster's *Howards End*." *ELT* 28 (1985): 106-23.
- Green, Donald J. "Jane Austen and the Peerage." *PMLA* 68 (1953): 1017-31.
- Gunn, Daniel P. "In the Vicinity of Winthrop: Ideological Rhetoric in *Persuasion*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41.4 (1986-87): 403-18.
- Hagan, John. "A Reinterpretation of *The Mill on the Floss*." *PMLA* 87 (1972): 53-63.
- Haight, Gordon S, ed. *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.
- Hardy, Barbara. *A Reading of Jane Austen*. London: Peter Owen, 1975.
- Hatfield, Glen W. *Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Henke, Suzette A. "Howards End: E.M. Forster without Marx or Sartre." *Moderna Språk* 80.2 (1986): 116-20.
- Hoy, Pat C., II. "The Narrow Rich Staircase in Forster's *Howards End*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 31.2-3 (1985): 221-35.
- Hutchinson, Allan C. "The Three 'Rs': Reading/Rorty/Radically." Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard Rorty. *Harvard Law Review* 103.2 (1989): 555-85.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Jeffers, Thomas L. "Myth and Morals in *The Mill on the Floss*." *Midwest Quarterly* 20 (1979): 332-46.
- Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Jones, B.M. *Henry Fielding: Novelist and Magistrate*. London, 1933.a
- Kaiser, Volker. Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard

- Rorty. *MLN* 105.5 (1990): 1073-76.
- Kamuf, Peggy. "On the Limit." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991. 13-18.
- Kelly, Gary. *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*. London: Longman, 1989.
- Kirkham, Margaret. *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1983.
- Knight, Charles A. "Joseph Andrews and the Failure of Authority." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 4.2 (1992): 109-24.
- Lachterman, David R. "Post-Modernist Reverberations." Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard Rorty. *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History and the Philosophy of History* 18.4 (1989): 391-99.
- Laclau, Ernesto. "Community and Its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty's 'Liberal Utopia'." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991. 83-98.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985.
- Langland, Elizabeth. "Gesturing Toward an Open Space: Gender, Form, and Language in E.M. Forster's *Howards End*." *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*. Ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland. Amherst: U of Mass. Press, 1990. 252-67.
- Lasch, Christopher. *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991.
- Laski, Marghanita. *George Eliot and Her World*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- Levenson, Michael. "Liberalism and Symbolism in *Howards End*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 21.3 (1985): 295-316.
- Levine, George. "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot." *PMLA* 77 (1962): 268-79.
- . "Intelligence as Deception: *The Mill on the Floss*." *PMLA* 80 (1965): 402-9.
- . *Darwin and the Novelists*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.
- Lovell, Terry. "Jane Austen and the Gentry: A Study in Literature and Ideology." *The Sociology of Literature: Applied Studies*. Ed. Diana Laurenson. Hanley, England: Wood Mitchell & Co., 1978. 15-37.
- Lumpkin, Ramona. "(Re)Visions of Virtue: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Moorland Cottage* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*." *Studies in the Novel* 23.4 (1991): 432-42.

- MacDonagh, Oliver. *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard Rorty. *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 708–11.
- Marshall, P. Scott. "Techniques of Persuasion in *Persuasion* — A Lawyer's Viewpoint." *Persuasions: Journal of the Jane Austen Society of North America* 6 (1984): 44–47.
- Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1967.
- McCormack, Kathleen. "The Sibyl and the Hyena: George Eliot's Wollstonecraftian Feminism." *Dalhousie Review* 63.4 (1983–4): 602–14.
- McCrea, Brian. "Rewriting *Pamela*: Social Change and Religious Faith in *Joseph Andrews*." *Studies in the Novel* 16.2 (1984): 137–49.
- — —. "'Had not Joseph withheld him': The Portrayal of the Social Elite in *Joseph Andrews*." *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*. Ed. Donald C. Mell Jr., Theodore E.D. Braun and Lucia M. Palmer. East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988. 123–28.
- McDowell, Frederick P.W. "'The Mild, Intellectual Light': Idea and Theme in *Howards End*." *PMLA* 74 (1959): 453–63.
- Merrett, Robert. "The Principles of Fielding's Legal Satire and Social Reform." *Dalhousie Review* 62.2 (1982): 238–53.
- Meyersohn, Marylea. "Jane Austen's Garrulous Speakers: Social Criticism in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*." *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners*. Ed. Bege K. Bowers and Barbara Brothers. Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Research Press, 1990. 35–48.
- Miami Theory Collective, ed. *Community at Loose Ends*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Mill, J.S. *On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Miller, Nancy. *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*. London: Macmillan Press, 1980.
- — —, ed. *Jane Austen in a Social Context*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981.
- Mouffe, Chantal. "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991. 70–82.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Ed. Peter Connor. Trans.

- Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, Simona Sawhney.
Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- — —. "Of Being-in-Common." *Community at Loose Ends*. Ed. Miami Theory Collective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1991. 1–12.
- Newton, K.M. "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Darwinism." *Durham University Journal* n.s. 35 (1974): 278–93.
- — —. *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist: A Study of the Philosophical Structure of her Novels*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981.
- Oakeshott, Michael. *On Human Conduct*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Palmer, R. Barton. "Languages and Power in the Novel: Mapping the Monologic." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23.1 (1990): 99–127.
- Paxton, Nancy L. *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Peltason, Timothy. "Imagination and Learning in George Eliot, Mill, and Dickens." *Essays in Criticism* 38.1 (1988): 35–54.
- Perl, Jeffrey M. "Anagogic Surfaces: How to Read *Joseph Andrews*." *Eighteenth Century — Theory and Interpretation* 22 (1981): 249–70.
- Phillips, Holliert E. "The Ironist's Utopia: Can Rorty's Liberal Turnip Bleed?" Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard Rorty. *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32.3 (1992): 363–8.
- Pinkerton, Mary. "Ambiguous Connections: Leonard Bast's Role in *Howards End*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 31.2–3 (1985): 236–46.
- Pinney, Thomas. "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21 (1966): 131–47.
- Poovey, Mary. "Persuasion and the Promises of Love." *The Representation of Women in Fiction*. Ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R Higonnet. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983. 152–79.
- Postlethwaite, Diana. "Of Maggie, Mothers, Monsters and Madonnas: Diving Deep in *The Mill on the Floss*." *Women's Studies* 20 (1992): 303–19.
- Putzell, Sara Moore. "An Antagonism of Valid Claims: The Dynamics of *The Mill on the Floss*." *Studies in the Novel* 7 (1975): 227–44.
- Pyle, Forest. "A Novel Sympathy: The Imagination of Community in George Eliot." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 27.1 (1993): 5–23.
- Roberts, Warren. *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.
- Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- — —. *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

- Rosecrance, Barbara. *Forster's Narrative Vision*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Roshier, Bob, and Harvey Teff. *Law and Society in England*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1980.
- Roth, Michael S. Rev. of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, by Richard Rorty. *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 339-57.
- Rousseau, Mary F. *Community: The Tie that Binds*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- Schneider, Aaron. "Hearts and Minds in *Joseph Andrews*: Parson Adams and a War of Ideas." *Philological Quarterly* 66.3 (1987): 367-89.
- Schochet, Gordon. *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.
- Showalter, Elaine. "The Greening of Sister George." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35 (1981): 292-311.
- Shuttieworth, Sally. *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. New York: The Free Press, 1950. 409-24.
- Smith, Jonathan. "The 'Wonderful Geological Story': Uniformitarianism and *The Mill on the Floss*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 27.4 (1991): 430-52.
- Steinoff, William R. "Intent and Fulfillment in the Ending of *The Mill on the Floss*." *The Image of the Work*, ed. B.H. Lehman et al. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1955. 231-51.
- Stephanson, Raymond. "'Silenc'd by Authority' in *Joseph Andrews*: Power, Submission, and Mutuality in 'The History of Two Friends'." *Studies in the Novel* 24.1 (1992): 1-12.
- Thale, Jerome. *The Novels of George Eliot*. New York: Columbia UP, 1954.
- Thickstun, William R. *Visionary Closure in the Modern Novel*. London, 1988.
- Thompson, E.P. *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*. Trans. Charles P. Loomis. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. [1887].
- Uglow, Jennifer. *George Eliot*. New York: Pantheon, 1987.
- van Sickle Johnson, Judy. "The Bodily Frame: Learning Romance in *Persuasion*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 38.1 (1983): 43-61.

- Warhol, Robyn. "The Look, the Body, and the Heroine: A Feminist-Narratological Reading of *Persuasion*." *Novel* 26.1 (1992): 5-19.
- Weissman, Judith. "E.M. Forster: Gasoline and Goddesses." *Half Savage and Hardy and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Middletown, CT, 1987. 262-90.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Chatto, 1973.
- Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a Way of Life." *American Journal of Sociology* 44 (1938): 1-24.
- Woodward, Wendy. "The Solitariness of Selfhood: Maggie Tulliver and the Female Community at St. Ogg's." *English Studies in Africa* 28.1 (1985): 47-55.
- Wright, Andrew. "The Emergent Woman: *Howards End* and the Denial of Doom." *Fictional Discourse and Historical Space*. London, 1987. 58-73.
- Wright, Anne. *Literature of Crisis, 1910-22*. London: MacMillan Press, 1984.
- Zirker, Malvin R. *Fielding's Social Pamphlets*. Berkeley, 1966.