

Becoming Heroines : Protest and Paradigm in Victorian Fiction

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Lady Glencora in Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* is treated with exaggerated care during the early stages of pregnancy by her proud husband—so much so, that she longs to be a milkmaid, whose health might be trusted to nature. As “her troubles” approach, the high risks attendant on childbirth in the Victorian age hardly bother this spirited woman. Yet she still lies awake trembling at night. What bothers her is the prospect of “disgrace if one of the vile weaker sex should come to disturb the hopes” of her lord and master (826, 827–28). The bitterness of her thoughts suggests that she has more in mind than the simple matter of inheritance: she recognizes the superior value her husband would attach to a male child, and the problems that would ensue if she bore a girl.

Fortunately for her, Lady Glencora is spared the shame of producing an infant of the ‘wrong’ sex, and the challenge of raising a daughter. Others, of course, are not. As a result, when reading Victorian fiction, we often find ourselves involved in the strenuous efforts of young female characters to resist the vituperation poured on them, and to reconcile the demands of self and society. Their individual struggles tend to fall into certain patterns.

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By the many Victorians who believed in original sin, all children might

be considered the devil's progeny. "Naterally wicious," snaps Dickens's Mr Hubble, putting down Pip in *Great Expectations*, much as Mr Murdstone puts down the young David Copperfield (57). Though the devil does seem to whisper in Pip's ear, there is little doubt that this child's nature is fundamentally good: his own uneasiness on that score is best explained by the disapproval of others, and the vulnerability of the young to feelings of guilt (Klein 7). But to be spared such calumny as Mr Hubble's, a child of this era would need to be both compliant and winning; Mrs Earnshaw cannot accept Heathcliff as "a gift of God" because he is neither (*Wuthering Heights* 77). As for a girl, the need for her to possess such qualities was even greater: girl characters who lack them are apt to be viewed as particularly loathsome and repugnant.

Looks are crucially important. The ideal of girlhood is represented by many juvenile portraits—both paintings and photographs—later in the period. A sweet, regularly-featured face, soft curls emerging from an old-fashioned mob cap, with its promise of mingled meekness and domesticity, are common features, as is an idyllic rural setting. Kate Greenaway's illustrations encouraged and exemplified the vogue, and were hugely popular from the late '70s onwards. Girls who departed from the traditional ideal of beauty were at a distinct disadvantage. Plain Jane (Eyre) is one of the best-known examples of such girls in Victorian fiction. Charlotte Brontë's heroine is seen, in her childhood, as a "thing" and a "creature" by her aunt (260), a "rat" by her cousin John Reed (43) and, most telling of all, a "toad" by Abbot: "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (58). The difficult behaviour which irks her relatives may be as much cause as effect of this girl's unappealing appearance; constant criticism is

bound to induce sullenness: "All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so" (48), says the browbeaten Jane to herself.

The author's resentment of such treatment is as plain as her heroine's face: it is Charlotte Brontë's secret and vengeful purpose to demonstrate that the self-satisfied members of the close little family circle which excludes and denigrates Jane are the ones who truly deserve the cruel epithets, not her heroine. Peaches-and-cream Georgiana turns out to be a "vain and absurd animal. . . a fat, weak, puffy, useless *thing*," and her sister Eliza "the most selfish, heartless *creature* in existence" (264, emphases added), while her bullying cousin is already seen (by Jane, of course) to have inherited such toad-like characteristics as his dingy skin, large features and heavy jowls from his mother: our final picture of him is Mrs Reed's nightmare vision of John "with a swollen and blackened face" (261). Jane's last contact with her aunt is when she touches her unpleasantly cold and clammy hand on her death-bed.

But this is later. Brontë shows that as an unprepossessing girl, Jane is powerless to assert her innate superiority. When she tries, she is trapped in the stifling Red Room—less by the menarchal confirmation of her gender (she is only ten, and so under-developed that the apothecary thinks her younger), than by the conventions it already imposes. "This violence is almost repulsive," cries the infuriated Mrs Reed (49); Jane cannot come out of this confinement, she is told, until she has become perfectly submissive and still. In other words, until she has internalized it. Olive Schreiner puts it like this: "They begin to shape us to their cursed end. . . when we are tiny things in shoes and socks" (*The Story of an African Farm* 189). Nature betrays Jane: she is brought out in a faint. One of those who cannot bear such suffocating of the self, she must now submit to being compared

unfavourably not only to her unworthy cousins, but also to the child (a boy) who tells Mr Brocklehurst that he would rather be given a verse of a Psalm to learn than a ginger-bread-nut to eat. Accused of deceit by the deceitful, she must be sent away. But after all, she has not been cowed down: before she goes, she finds the strength and courage to denounce Mrs Reed as passionately as she had previously denounced her tyrannical son.

Another “small mistake of nature” is driven to dip her dark, unruly hair in a basin of water, and even hack it off, in response to constant complaints by her mother about her looks and manner (*The Mill on the Floss* 61). This is George Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver, no less than Jane lacking in feminine graces, an alien, a changeling in comparison with a particularly appealing “pink-and-white” cousin (164). She too will be revenged, for Philip Wakem with his artist’s eye proves only too prescient when he says to her that “your fair little cousin will be quite quenched in your beams” (433); though this revenge, unintended as it is, will rebound horribly upon her.

The ugly duckling topos is fascinating. Many a young girl in the male writers’ work is unimpressive, too, like Meredith’s hearty, frowning, quarrelsome Janet in *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*: “she was not maidenly,” complains the young hero (260). But then Janet blossoms into a beauty of her own, literally comes into herself, later on. Nevertheless, the apparently ill-endowed, awkward and resentful girl is a type into which the Victorian women novelists, in particular, pour their dissatisfactions.

The range is from the quite neat and competent Jane Eyre, to the incorrigibly clumsy, short-sighted Ethel May in Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain*, or the same author’s awkward little ‘Countess Kate’—gloriously illustrated for Faber by Gwen Raverat, as she slumps in her chair in front of her

formidable Aunt Barbara. Mrs Oliphant's gawky Janey May in *Phoebe Junior* is a cheerfully unintellectual version of Ethel May (the allusion and challenge to Yonge's more famous family were intentional) but the eponymous heroine of Mrs Ward's *Marcella* is very much in the tradition of troubled and troublesome, clever, dark-haired, rebellious youth. Such girls need all their courage to make their way to the front of the stage, without the assurance lent by feminine graces. Yet those who have nothing to cushion them from criticism, nothing to redeem them from belonging to the "vile weaker sex," often struggle hardest to fulfil their own needs; these are the very ones to emerge as heroines.

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Appearance and demeanour are not infallible markers of a heroine, though. Thackeray does tell us in the first chapter of *Vanity Fair* that Amelia Sedley, beloved by family and friends, is simply too blooming and healthy (in other words, too pretty?) to be a heroine. Becky Sharp, on the other hand, is pale and interesting. Moreover, her struggles have already started: she has been beaten by her father in his cups, and dealt ably with duns; since her father's demise, she has been exploited by Miss Pinkerton. She seems to fit the bill exactly. But she fails on another score. Heroines like Jane Eyre and Ethel May eventually drop their protests and take on the mantle of domestic responsibility as they grow up. Becky does neither. Her lack of maternal instinct has already made her chores at the academy, attending to smaller children, harder than they need have been. Free spirits have always rallied to Beck's flag, but part of the irony of Thackeray's labelling *Vanity Fair* "A Novel without a Hero" is that what it really lacks, by Victorian standards at least, is a heroine.

The emergence from difficult childhood into the housewifely role, the

eventual donning of the mob cap, so regularly describes a heroine's progress in the novel of this period that it can almost be said to chart it. The paradigm that Becky fails to provide is shown by Dickens's Caddy Jellyby in *Bleak House*. Hampered by a neglectful mother, trained only to cover herself in ink, the girl is inspired by Esther Summerson to try to raise herself above the disadvantages of her background. From Miss Flite she learns the rudiments of housekeeping, and soon leaves the desk for the kitchen. She prides herself on being able to choose cuts of mutton and make puddings. Her rewards for all this are a rather simple-minded and weakly husband, for whose inadequacy as a breadwinner she must compensate; and an even more weakly deaf and dumb daughter, whose care fills up her "scanty intervals of leisure" (933). Her fate seems harsh to modern readers, but, fretting under her earlier burdens, coping cheerfully and competently with her later ones, to G. K. Chesterton she is "by far the greatest, the most human, and the most really dignified of all [Dickens's] heroines" (157). This panegyric shows Chesterton identifying, in one of the supporting cast, the characteristic progress and attributes of a female lead.

Drawing attention to the abuses which could rob the young, in one way or another, of the precious childhood days which they had hardly known themselves, the Victorian novelists frequently target the irresponsible mother as well as coercive or negligent paternal authority. The result is that while sympathy is being evoked for many a young female character who is trying to establish her own identity and find her own way in life, a goal is also being held up for her far-from-distant future. This goal is one of devotion to duty, or, as Mr Meagles puts it to the once disgruntled orphan Tattycoram in another Dickens novel, *Little Dorrit* (offering the heroine of that narrative as an example), "active resignation, goodness,

and noble service" (881). In due course, protest is expected to evaporate into paradigm, and produce—well, a paragon. The name provided for this paragon by Coventry Patmore, in his long poem sequence of that title is, of course, "The Angel in the House."

Dickens is not the only writer to promote domestic values. Male and female novelists collude here. Both condemn wives who leave their husbands, or mothers who busy themselves outside the nursery, to whatever purpose. Mrs Jellyby may be severely censured for expending her energies on missionary projects for darkest Africa, while her house is upside-down, her husband miserable, her daughter down-at-heel, her younger children's well-being, even their very lives, imperilled by lack of attention. But Charlotte Yonge sees to it that another mother's failure to breast-feed an infant, and to oversee the nursery properly, lead to the worst of disasters: at the end of *The Daisy Chain*, Flora's baby dies after being dosed with too much drug-laced 'cordial' by an ignorant nursemaid, while her mother is out socializing. Complete abandonment of children at any stage and for any reason is the ultimate crime, whether it takes place at birth—as in Eliot's *Adam Bede*, when it amounts to infanticide—or later, as in Mrs Wood's *East Lynne*, where it gives rise to the most notoriously tear-jerking scene of the whole era—the death of the adulterous heroine's young son (the play made of the novel is the source of the well-known exclamation, 'Dead, and never called me mother!'). In *Adam Bede*, a pointed contrast is made between Hetty Sorrel, the irresponsible mother, and the heroine, Dinah, who gives up her dream of being a Methodist preacher to become Adam Bede's wife, and the mother of their biddable daughter and sturdy, vigorous son. Again and again the Victorian novelists confirm that devoted and (if necessary) long-suffering domesticity is the ultimate feminine

ideal, and that any falling short is liable to produce unhappiness all round.

Becoming a heroine, then, is generally a matter of accommodation to a pattern, of living up to expectations raised in the eighteenth century by such model wives and mothers as Richardson's Pamela and Fielding's Amelia. Perhaps such demands also owed much to the personal needs of writers brought up in the harsh regimes of the early nineteenth century.

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Dickens may not be the only one to push for domesticity, but he is notorious for glossing over any difficult passages. Caddy Jellyby is a case in point: having learnt by bitter experience the necessity for housewifely devotion, she takes to domesticity like a duck to water. The heroine of *Little Dorrit* has to make even less transition between childhood and young womanhood, having willingly taken care of others all her life. In fact, what she experiences when temporarily released from her domestic role, during her father's numbered days of luxury, is not an opening of horizons but a strange kind of regression: "quite lost by her task being done," she becomes nothing but a "little solitary girl" (519). She is far happier when restored to all the worries and responsibilities of a dependent family, including her sister Fanny's neglected children and her scape-grace brother, than she was without them. Heroines like these, positively grateful to be balancing housekeys, teapots and family commitments from a tender age, have brought Dickens under fire from many modern critics.

But it is worth noting that they are by no means sacrificial lambs on the altar of patriarchy. The service of such little housekeepers is, we are shown time and time again, founded on love, "a love in the world," as Sleary puts it in *Hard Times* (308). We can see how it works in the case of

Florence Dombey. Neglected by her own father, she is waited on hand and foot by the sprightly Susan Nipper at home; but after running away, she at once blossoms in the warmth of Captain Cuttle's fatherly regard. She energetically shares the chores with him and even mixes him a "perfect glass of grog" —something she could have had no call to practice before (*Dombey and Son* 775). Amy Dorrit hates her days of enforced idleness because they rob her of all means of expressing her affection for her father. For Dickens, the assumption of domesticity is something active, the female equivalent of, say, Pip's commendable shouldering and soldiering on in his working life in *Great Expectations*; it is also a form of emotional self-expression. Those who love and are loved, go to it with a will.

When that basis is denied, the heart does literally go out of their homes. Louisa Bounderby in *Hard Times*, for instance, is one young bride whose drawing-room, like her marriage, has no warmth at all. Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*, embittered by her own tainted orphanhood, constructs a sterile parody of domesticity with Tattycoram. Worse still is the perfectly dead room (not unlike Louisa Bounderby's) in which Arthur Clennam finds an older Miss Wade in Calais. Whereas young Amy Dorrit can make a welcoming home in a prison, Miss Wade, her very antithesis, has made a chilly, dark prison of a home. These cases are sad, but not quite as striking as that of Miss Havisham, now an old woman, but one whose mouldy, insect- and rodent-ridden wedding feast and rank garden both bear disgusting testimony to the catastrophic blighting of her heart in youth. It is worth noting, however, that amongst these desolate figures, only Louisa Bounderby has any claim to be called a heroine.

There is one still more poignant situation, though. David Copperfield's first wife, Dora, is neither unloved nor unloving, nor is she an unwilling

helpmate. But she was over-protected and over-indulged in a childhood which has never really ended: she was treated as “a pretty toy or plaything” by her aunts right up until her marriage (*David Copperfield* 669). Compare the shambles of her dining room, when Traddles comes to dinner, with the pleasantly quaint but tidy drawing room presided over in girlhood by Agnes Wickfield. Dora’s is the real tragedy, as much for herself as for David; her death after a still-birth puts them both out of their misery. It also makes way for the more mature, competent (and fertile) Agnes—the real heroine, long earmarked for David’s partner in life.

The rationale which Dickens provides for the domestic ideal is not, after all, exploitive or patronizing; the warnings he issues about the failure to square with it are grim but not cold.

Other writers were evidently impressed. There could hardly be another Miss Havisham. But Dora became a model for ineffectual wives in several novels, notably Rosey in Thackeray’s *The Newcomes*, another pathetic child-wife who puts aside her “childish triumphs and vanities” and dies after a still-birth, in order to make way for a more capable heroine (*The Newcomes* 672).

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More interesting, however, than either the competent or the hopeless housekeepers of Victorian fiction, are those who try to resist the restrictions imposed on them by contemporary *mores*, those who clearly “need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do.” These are the girls who, as Charlotte Brontë says, “suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation” (*Jane Eyre* 141)—and make us aware of their frustrations. Olive Schreiner’s Lyndall certainly does that, declaring : “We wear the bandages, but our limbs have not

grown to them ; we know that we are compressed, and chafe against them” (*The Story of an African Farm* 189). Such are the unspoken sentiments of a number of other heroines who, like Clara Middleton in George Meredith’s *The Egoist*, possess “a spirit with a natural love of liberty” (44). These gain our sympathy not by revelling in the service of their loved ones, nor by suffering from their own inadequacies, but by trying to keep hold of their individuality. Time and again we see girls mutely or openly protesting against what is considered to be their appointed lot; some, like both Jane Eyre and Clara Middleton, earn at least the right to choose their own path in life, even if what this means is accepting a husband on their own terms.

The encouragement afforded to such characters reveals what might be called the hidden agenda of many Victorian novelists, and not only the women among them. Even those who uphold the old order are sometimes swayed by it. The most rabid traditionalist, like the anonymous author of *England’s Daughters: What is Their Real Work?* (published in 1870), who at one point declares that “no woman can educate a boy of good abilities, over ten, or twelve years of age” (8), can scarcely avoid putting in a word or two for the downtrodden. (This anti-feminist deplores the treatment of governesses, whatever their shortcomings.) As both Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot discovered, it was simply impossible to steer clear of the ‘Woman Question’ altogether, or to be untouched by its most fundamental demands.

Eliot, despite her sympathetic identification with Maggie Tulliver, has not always found favour with feminist critics, and is still looked at somewhat suspiciously by them. How could a woman who outraged her contemporaries in her private life so often seem to recommend self-sacrifice to other women? But ‘seem’ is probably the operative word. For

instance, the ending of "Amos Barton," in which Patty Barton is shown obediently taking her dead mother's place by her father's side, while the rest of the Barton children are forging on in life, is often criticized; but it is not presented as an ideal situation. Far from it. Consider this girl's background. At nine years old, she is a serious girl who notes her mother's slight pallor, cares for her siblings and helps her mother cover books for her Evangelical father to present to the library. Since the Bartons' sitting room is also their day nursery and schoolroom, she can be having little education. In other words, like so many eldest daughters in a large family, with a mother frequently indisposed by pregnancy, she is being brought up to be no more and no less than her mother's right hand. When this mother (one of those domestic paragons, besides) asks her on her death-bed to love and comfort her father, and care for the smaller children, there is no hint of blame for the gentle, self-effacing mother, nor any question of the girl's pursuing a life of her own choosing. Yet suffering is undoubtedly there; compassion for it is evoked by the author's depiction of the lines which have become prematurely etched into the still youthful Patty's face by the end of the story. This is just a small detail, but Eliot's reservations about the way Patty's life has developed are clear. Nor was this author under any illusions about the rewards of such a life of service. She went on to focus much more closely on the plight of the circumscribed girl in her full-length works.

However, no one dealt better with the problems of thwarted female potentiality than Charlotte Yonge, and nowhere did she do so better than in *The Daisy Chain*. Ethel, as noted above, is one of those clumsy and difficult girls like Maggie Tulliver who have special problems in adapting themselves to the feminine role, and who make immense claims on our

sympathy. She has a governess who holds her back from the intellectual challenges she yearns for, and insists instead on the tidiness she scorns. The whole weight of family and Christian ethics is produced to quash Ethel's ambition, though it is quite clear that, given the time and encouragement that the boy gets, she could more than keep pace with her scholastically-gifted elder brother Norman. But it is Norman himself who says, "I assure you, Ethel, it is really time for you to stop, or you would get into a regular learned lady, and be good for nothing." Thus, while Norman goes on to win academic laurels, she must allow herself to drop behind, to concentrate instead on being a good daughter and sister. Even her project for building a church and opening a schoolhouse in nearby Cocksmoor must not be allowed to "swallow up all the little common lady-like things" (181-82). Ethel's reward for selflessness, in these matters and in giving up her chance of a particularly eligible match, is to displace her invalid elder sister as her father's companion. Yonge, like Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*, seems to have put her own deepest yearnings into her heroine; but she faced the facts squarely. Ethel knows the limits of her reward: she foresees a lonely old age after her father has died and her younger siblings have grown up. As far as this world is concerned, nothing can quite compensate for the checking of personal aspiration. While Yonge's avowed purpose is to check it, she by no means glosses over the pain involved. As for the consolation of heaven (the "Final Rescue" which Eliot offers Maggie Tulliver), it seems a distant one.

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It may be argued, of course, that the ultimate objective in such cases is never really questioned, either by the author or the heroine concerned: "A

little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile searching for work, a little passionate striving for room for the exercise of our powers, —and then we go with the drove,” says Lyndall bitterly in Schreiner’s novel/manifesto (*The Story of an African Farm* 189). This heroine’s own refusal to capitulate to domesticity, even to the very end, is rare: she dies after bearing the baby of a man she refuses to marry. Most heroines eventually surrender to the conservatism or caution of their author, however hard they have tried to keep up with their brothers or struggled to find themselves an occupation beyond the home front.

In Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, the capitulation is especially humiliating, for Rachel Curtis’s ventures into philanthropy have had the direst consequences, resulting in the death of a little lace-maker. Early hints to the contrary, even Charlotte Brontë’s convention-flouting Shirley Kildare disappoints in the end. The ‘winding up’ up of *Shirley* makes no mention of the day-school that she and Caroline Helstone were to help run, the “something more” that had been demanded by the author earlier in the novel through the feisty young Rose Yorke (386).

But what if an intelligent Victorian girl *did* set her heart on “something more”? As Rachel Curtis complains at the beginning of *The Clever Woman of the Family*, the only paid occupation open to a woman of good breeding (Rachel is the squire’s daughter) was teaching. The 1851 Census shows that the total of women in the profession was double that of men. Inevitably, some were forced into it without any particular love of children, and since Charlotte Brontë herself was one of those, perhaps it is not surprising that Shirley and Caroline forget about this possibility after their marriages. The governess’s lot was notoriously difficult: those who hoped to “train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day” like

the heroine of Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (400), were in for a dreadful shock. Barring the extraordinary experiences of Henry James's governess in "The Turn of the Screw," nursery mayhem was the ugliest response of Victorian children to their isolation in the upper reaches of the house, with a young woman denied the power to either exert discipline or complain. Better a loveless marriage, Gwendolen Harleth decides in Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, than the fate which might await her as governess to the three daughters of the "rather... high" Mrs Mompert (355). Teaching in the local school might perhaps be more rewarding, but it was likely to be exhausting in those days of inadequate staffing. What was worse, it seems to have been considered marginally more demeaning than private teaching. When Cecily in Mrs Oliphant's *The Curate in Charge* becomes a schoolmistress in order to support her orphaned half-siblings, she quickly loses caste with the local gentry, the snobbish Ascots.

Philanthropy was another matter. Since this was unpaid it was hardly the answer to everyone's problem; but, for the daughters of the well-to-do, it provided a permissible outlet for pent-up energies and talents. Occasional resistance, such as Fanny Burney's Camilla had encountered when she took a poor woman's infant her arms, gave way in the Victorian age to widespread encouragement, which was offered to girls of all ages: "This is better than dressing dolls, better even than fancy work, my dear" (notice that 'even'), one mother tells her daughter approvingly in "The Ragged Girl" (*The Girl's Birthday Book* 216). Once the idea of the "ministering angel" took off in the 'hungry forties,' with the publication of social novels like *Michael Armstrong* and *Sybil*, it became the very thing for young women to busy themselves with. Mrs Ward's saintly and beautiful Catherine Leyburn, the heroine of her best-selling *Robert Elsmere*, not only takes

on her widowed mother's family responsibilities while still in her mid-teens, but attends to the needy in the valley of Long Whindale as well. This was at a time (in the late '80s) when one landowner wrote in his diary, "Great Distress, and Scarcity of work, all over England" (Calvertt 129). But it is a fair reflection of life in families and communities throughout the period. "[P]hilanthropy was in the air," writes one memoir-writer, who invited working girls to tea to cultivate their reading (Lubbock 254).

A warning note, however, was sounded by Yonge, in the series of calamities which befall her philanthropic Rachel. At the death-bed of the little lace-maker, this so-called 'clever woman' most bitterly regrets her wrong-headed efforts to help:

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, my poor child," said Rachel, kneeling by her, the tears streaming down silently.

"Please, ma'am, don't cry," said the little girl feebly; "you were very good to me. Please tell me of my Saviour," she added to Rachel. (*The Clever Woman of the Family* 2 : 82)

It is dreadfully overdone, but there is a fine irony in those words of gratitude (which echo Jo's "He was very good to me, he was!" in *Bleak House* 203). Rachel's total incompetence makes her restlessness at the beginning of the novel seem mere affectation: she is *not* able, not *fit* to be other than a man's helpmate. Now she knows it, she can step into the confines of marriage with relief. Taking her on, the dashing Alick Keith says (and we feel the double edge to his words), "These last weeks have shown me that your troubles *must* be mine" (2:150). This novel was published in 1865.

By the '90s, Mrs Ward, herself a noted philanthropist, had also lost some of her confidence in such social gestures. The young heroine of *Marcella*,

an idealistic girl fresh from art school in London, is quite a different type from Catherine in *Robert Elsmere*. Her diamond engagement ring sparkling on her ungloved hand, she makes a strange picture in the Hurd family's scene of misery—the village labourer's wife, with her infant wrapped in an old shawl, is icy with cold, as are her two little daughters and haggard, chesty son. Marcella's father feels she is making herself "ridiculous" by her sympathy with these destitutes, and we are told that Mrs Hurd herself resents Marcella's interference, feeling her presence "a burden and constraint": the fact is that "the villagers keep away when she's there" and Mrs Hurd would prefer the kind of support which they could offer (*Marcella* 299–301). There is also some tension between the idea that compassion, in itself, is ennobling, and the suggestion that Marcella finds much personal satisfaction in her involvement. In other words, Ward reveals some very profound reservations about the worth and appropriateness of, even the motives for, such "tendance" (259).

The fact is, that for a girl to do good work in this as in any other area, she needed aptitude and training. Marcella has neither, having been a particularly fractious child and having wasted the years up until fourteen at a particularly inadequate school. Behind her new devotion to the poor labourers lie years of uncertainty about her own position in society, a certain histrionic religiosity which developed at her second school, and the socialist ideals recently acquired in London. Quite apart from the difficult question of whether personal gestures can or should be expected to set right large-scale social injustice, there is *still* (in the '90s) the more specific issue of the girl's preparation for life—or rather, her lack of it.

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No wonder the Victorian heroine is a woman in crisis. Pulled this way and that by the pressure of domesticity on the one hand, and dawning ambition on the other, without the means to make an informed choice—and very little to choose from, anyway—she often succumbs to a strong-willed man in the end. As in Charlotte Brontë's novels (even *Jane Eyre*) psychosomatic illness or some catastrophic excursion into the larger world may mark her progress along the way. It is not the novelist's job to propose solutions to social problems: the major women novelists of the age steered clear of feminist propaganda. But by expressing their own tensions, even strait-laced traditionalists like Yonge allowed protest to peep through paradigm, and in so doing suggested what the first items on the new agenda had to be: the provision of equal educational and career opportunities for women.*

*This matter is discussed at more length in my article on "Girls' Education and the Crisis of the Heroine in Victorian Fiction," to be published by *English Studies* later in the year.

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要 約

ヴィクトリア朝小説における反抗と定型 パラダイム

ジャクリース・バナジー

ヴィクトリア朝時代には、子供であるというだけでもつらいことだった。女の子であるというのはいっしょにつらいことだったのであろう。この時代の女性小説家たちはその満たされぬ思いを、器量がよくなって反抗的なジェーン・エアや（シャーロット・ヤング作『ひなぎくの花輪』の）エセル・メイのような女性主人公に注ぎこんだ。わたしたちはこのような少女に共感を覚えるのだが、彼女たちが成長するにつれてその反抗が鎮まっていってしまう傾向に気づく。男性作家も女性作家も、結婚と家庭生活を女性主人公たちの究極の到達点と定めていたのである。

この定型例はディケンズの作品に明らかに見られる。『荒涼館』の苦悩する子供キャディ・ジェリビーはあっさりとかわいい善良な主婦になってしまう。しかしさすがはディケンズ、キャディやリトル・ドリットのような人物の奉仕は心からのものであり、深い満足感をもたらしている一方、愛がなければ（『つらい時勢』のルイザ・バウンダービーの場合のように）家庭にも幸福の可能性はないことを明示している。

とは言え、他の作家たちはもっと模範例のかけから反抗をのぞかせ、束縛のもとで苦悩したり（たとえばジョージ・エリオット作「エイモス・バートン」のパティー・バートン）、より大きな世界にエネルギーのはけ口を見つけようとする年長の女性主人公を描いてみせる備えができていた。しかし、そのような主人公たちの努力は、ハンフリー・ウォード夫人の描くマーセラや、ヤングの描くレイチェル・カーチス（『家族のなかの賢い女』）の慈善事業的な冒険で例証されるように、悲惨な結果に終わりがちである。

ヴィクトリア朝時代の女たちがよりよき教育や職業の機会を必死に求めて

いたことは、ヤングのようながんこな伝統主義者の作品からですら、明白になる。そういう機会がないので、女主人公たちは、シャーロット・ブロンテの描くシャーリーのようにダイナミックにも、エリオットの描くダイナ・ポイサー(『アダム・ビード』)のように決然ともなりうるのだが、やはりその活動を家庭の炉辺に限定しなければならないのだ。