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IT'S DIFFERENT FOR GIRLS: COMING-OF-AGE IN TWO VICTORIAN NOVELS

by

JAMILA MCTIZIC

Under the Direction of Dr. Paul Schmidt

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the feminine coming-of-age stories in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Hard Times* and seeks to redefine coming-of-age for Victorian girls as a movement into personal agency. The traditional bildungsroman has been defined in a way that largely excludes the experiences and stories of girls born during the early nineteenth century. Because these girls lacked the options and choices of their male counterparts, it becomes important to redefine what coming-of-age means when there are limited opportunities for personal growth. The middle-class Victorian woman led a largely prescribed existence and her well-being and security was often directly and indirectly tied to the status and conduct of the men in her life, usually her father. Given this, this work also explores the father's role in his daughter's coming-of-age story and how he influences the choices she makes in her life.

INDEX WORDS: Agency, Bildungsroman, Fathers, Dickens, Eliot

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JAMILA MCTIZIC

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INTRODUCTION

The coming-of-age story is one of the most familiar tropes in English literature. Indeed, the concept has been around almost since the introduction of the novel. The experience of coming to understand your purpose and place in the world is an almost universal journey that most people will navigate at some point in their lives. Many of the early coming-of-age stories, or bildungsroman, centered on male protagonists that often left the familiarity of their homes for parts unknown. Along the way these young men would meet new people and learn about the ways of the world before they eventually reached a point in their story where they could be content or at ease with who they have become and with their place in society.

As the novel gained in popularity, coming-of-age stories became popular as well. While there were no fixed and definitive rules for the bildungsroman that all works within the genre adhered to, there were certain conventions that many followed. A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or provincial town, where he finds constraints placed upon his free imagination; his family, especially his father, is hostile to his creative instincts and ambitions gained through unsanctioned reading, so he leaves home and travels independently to the city where his real education will begin (Buckley 17). Until the mid-twentieth century, women did not readily have the option to experience a coming-of-age in the manner described above. Esther Kleinbord Labovitz claims that the female bildungsroman was not possible until "cultural and social structures appeared to support women's struggle for independence, to go out into the world, engage in careers, in self discovery and fulfillment" (7). I believe Labovitz is mistaken in her assumption. It is not that the bildungsroman did not exist for women until they could make the same journey as men, but, rather, the feminine bildungsroman differed from its male

counterpart because a girl's reality was unlike her brother's reality and, as such, her story would be defined by a different set of standards.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a woman's place was in the home. Ambition in girls was seen as "dangerous" to the family and girls had few examples of independent, self-motivated women to admire (Bushnell 380). Few women sought to defy the conventions of the day and stories of women who did were not likely to become fireside reading. Instead, the female character stayed home but evolved intellectually and emotionally. Whereas male protagonists identify the deficiencies in their lives and then set out on a course to correct those shortcomings, female protagonists have to learn that they have the ability to challenge those limitations before they can take steps to effect change in their own lives. The heroine does not know that this action is possible because she lacks agency. Broadly defined, agency refers to the internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make the girl an active participant in the events around her (Barnes 25). However, agency, as it will be defined in this thesis, will emphasize the mental and emotional processes involved and will not simply be reduced to thought in action.

I believe it is important to stress the psychological aspects of agency because the heroine does not exist in a vacuum, subject only to her desires: she exists and acts with the knowledge of the social order. Family, community and society play important roles in the access to ideas as well as the ability and motivation to put those ideas into action. In keeping with societal norms of the era, a typical Victorian woman lived under the authority of her nearest male relative, usually her father and later her husband or brother. A Victorian father had a considerable amount of influence over his daughter and thus played an important role in her quest for agency. If a girl's father resisted the idea of education for his daughter, or if he restricted and directed the quality of

her contact with persons and institutions outside of his household, then she was undoubtedly limited not only in what she was able to do, but also in what she was able to believe about herself and her own ability to effect change in her life. If, at the beginning of the boy's story, he has already been imbued with the sense that he can change his circumstances, then his coming-of-age story is a saga of actions and consequences. On the other hand, because of the society in which she lives, a female protagonist must struggle to achieve a certain level of personal authority before she can attempt do the same. And when she does manage to connect with a deeper internal understanding of her own desires, her choices will be different because her options are different. The evolution of thought that has to occur to allow her to access her own desires and then act on them is her coming-of-age story.

I will explore the idea of the movement into agency as a coming-of-age through analysis of *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. In many ways, Maggie Tulliver's story in *The Mill on the Floss* fits the conventional definition of a bildungsroman. Maggie is the clever child that is stifled and often criticized by her family because her behavior does not conform to accepted mores. Though she does have a loving father who is amused by her intelligence, she faces a lack of understanding and at times hostility from other family members for her unconventional ways. Whereas a male protagonist in these circumstances would have to leave home in order to carve out an existence for himself that he can be satisfied with, Maggie has to accomplish the same feat while remaining primarily in her small country town. Maggie's story is interesting because her growth into a responsible agent is largely in sync with her natural, biological maturation from girl to woman. Maggie's lack of agency can partially be attributed to her age and immaturity. Additionally, unlike her male counterparts in their stories, some of what hinders Maggie's growth into responsible agency is

her sense of duty or moral obligation to her family and their needs. However, though she does encounter resistance to her transition into responsible agent, for the most part, as she matures physically, she also matures into her fuller, agentic self.

In *Hard Times*, Louisa Gradgrind's movement into agency is stunted primarily because of her father's influence. At an age when she should have the ability to analyze internal motivations and act or not act on those desires, she instead is emotionally and intellectually aimless. She has no hope or passion in life and does not even know that she has the ability to wish for something different. Louisa must go through an emotional and mental process of discovery before she can even form the desire to change her circumstances. When she finally acts as an agent, she does not get swept up into a grand adventure à la her male counterpart. Instead, she takes small steps that ameliorate her grief but cannot lead to everlasting contentment.

In Chapter One, I will explore the social and literary conventions that are illustrated in Maggie Tulliver and Louisa Gradgrind's stories, such as the concept of agency and what agency means when the agent may have freedom of will but does not have freedom of action. A person who has a certain level of mental acuity will have the ability to form desires. If she is able-bodied, then, ostensibly, she should have the ability to act or not to act on those desires according to her will. A Victorian woman would have had to trust that her will was in accordance with her father's or husband's wishes because she lived under the authority of her nearest male relative and he had legal rights to direct her movements. Even if she were to rebel against his authority, she would have to face the scrutiny of her community and thus would have difficulty acting on her desires. For that reason, I will also examine what agency means when one lives within a community with its particular standards and mores, as one does not form desires or intentions without knowledge of those expectations.

Chapter One will also explore the lives of middle-class Victorian women during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is important to understand the kind of life the typical woman led, the type of restrictions and limitations that she faced, and the opportunities for growth and fulfillment that were available to her. Fathers play important roles in Maggie and Louisa's stories and greatly influence choices they make as they evolve from non-agent to responsible agent. For that reason, I will examine family structures and the role both the father and daughter played in the family dynamics. Additionally, an understanding of the bildungsroman and its traditions will be examined in the first chapter as it will be important to recognize the conventions of the genre and why Maggie's and Louisa's coming-of-age stories do not quite fit the mold.

In Chapter Two, I will describe and analyze Maggie and Louisa's movement from non-agents to responsible agents through close textual analysis. I will begin by analyzing selected events where each acted mostly in her capacity as non-agent. I will highlight events where their actions are motivated by a lack of forethought and self-reflectiveness or events where their actions are simply dependent on someone else's will and desires. Because there is no moment of epiphany where a girl becomes a responsible agent, I will also discuss situations where she does not retreat as much in the face of negative responses to her assertion of her own authority. I will also touch on the psychological processes that allow her to make the intellectual and emotional change into a responsible agent. Finally, I will analyze the events where the heroines act as full, responsible agents in difficult situations or in the face of criticism as well as the underlining motivations for their actions and decisions. At each step in this process, I will analyze the role the father plays in his daughter's decisions and the events that shape her.

CHAPTER ONE

Agency

Social theorists continue to debate the concept of personal agency and free will. It is generally thought that for an individual to possess agency, she must possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an active entity who is constantly intervening in the events around her (Barnes 25). Most human beings could be considered agents because they are continually choosing to act or not to act on those internal motivations and desires. Yet agency is more than simply choice in action. Choice, as understood in this explanation of agency, appears to be subject only to a person's will and what she desires to do or not to do. However, an individual's capacity to act as a responsible agent is often hindered, constrained or governed by the society in which she lives and her relationships with others.

Agency or personal responsibility is sometimes reduced to freedom of will. Harry Frankfurt, in his seminal essay "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," argues that an agent's will is identified by the desires by which she is motivated or will be motivated to act (8). It is not enough to say that "Mary" wants to work; to identify "Mary's" will in that statement we need to understand why she is motivated to work and what desire she is fulfilling by working. "Mary" may be working because she desires to be financially independent or because she craves the social interaction. Her will is not in the desire to work: her will is the desire for independence or society, and work is simply the mode by which she fulfills these desires.

The notion that choice is commensurate with a responsible agent's ability to do otherwise is also a significant concern in discussions of free will. If an individual has free will then agency exists in what she does do and in what she chooses not to do. Both action and inaction require

choice on the part of the agent. However, if "Mary" cannot fulfill her desires because of circumstances she cannot control, it does not follow that her will is not free because "to deprive someone of [her] freedom of action is not necessarily to undermine the freedom of [her] will" (Frankfurt 14). Nevertheless, restrictions on and limitations of the agent's actions affect the direction or inclination of her will.

> When an agent is aware that there are certain things [s]he is not free to do, this doubtless affects [her] desires and limits the range of choices [s]he can make. … Despite the fact that [s]he is not free to translate [her] desires into action or to act according to the determinations of [her] will, [s]he may still form those desires and make those determinations as freely as if [her] freedom of action had not been impaired. (Frankfurt 14-15)

While freedom of action may not be a necessary feature of agency, freedom of action does affect the individual's ability to dream and to seriously consider alternate choices in her life.

Given that limitations of the agent's actions can affect the ability of the agent to form desires and make choices, examinations of the agent's structure or her relationship with and status within her society are unavoidable. Because human beings are social creatures who live and act in relationship to others, the ability to truly act as an individual on one's own terms is often limited in practice based both on personal will and societal constructs. When agency is reduced to discussions of free will and choice, it denies the power of norms and rules to determine actions (Barnes 47). Agency, according to Barry Barnes, has been "used to proclaim to autonomy of the individual over all kinds of allegedly causal factors both 'structural' and 'cultural'" (47).

Limiting agency to choice, free will and the individual's ability to act on things external to herself denies the very real social pressures and expectations that the agent has to navigate in her life. To take an example from the male perspective, if a man desires to be a full-time father to his children but instead chooses to work full-time, asserting that his agency makes him alone responsible for that choice denies the power of the social and cultural pressures that play a part in his decision, such as the expectation that men will be the family breadwinners or the reality that men typically have a higher earning potential, which make them better able on the whole to provide financially for their families.

Individuals do not exist or act outside the knowledge of their social order. The society in which we live comes with customs or traditions, patterns of expected or accepted behavior and its own value system. The social order is maintained by the individual's adherence to those behavioral norms that the community has adopted. When an individual makes a choice, her choice depends on that "stock of knowledge" she is drawing upon as well as how that knowledge has been "assimilated" and "utilized"; her calculation will reflect not just the "rationality of the individual" but her participation in "specific social relations and social processes" (Barnes 52). So while agency certainly resides in the individual, how the individual exercises her agency is heavily influenced by the society and the social norms under which she lives. It is also important to recognize the possible ends the individual seeks in exercising her agency. Many of the outcomes she seeks "are only achievable through interdependent efforts;" this forces the individual to have to work within her group "to secure what [she] cannot accomplish on [her] own (Bandura, "Exercise" 75).

What is true for the agent on a macro or societal level is also true for the agent on a smaller scale, such as within family units or even in one-on-one interactions. Within a family

structure the choices an individual makes or how she chooses to exercise her agency can be highly dependent on the norms and values she has learned within her group. If an individual grows up in a household where manipulation and abuse are the norm, she grows up with the knowledge that she must lie and cheat in order to achieve her desired goals. The choices she makes and how she expresses her will are directly tied to the understanding of the world that she learned in her family structure. Her ability to form desires and make choices outside of the main will be limited by her access to ideas that are not recognized or are rejected by her structure. She retains her status as a responsible agent; however, her knowledge of herself as someone with agency and her ability to make choices are heavily influenced by the beliefs and the view of the world and of herself that she has acquired within her family unit.

Given the individual's relationship with others and to society, agency, it seems, cannot be purely defined as an exercise of an individual's free will. Freedom of will, if not freedom of action, is certainly an aspect of personal agency. If actions can be constrained, limited, or influenced by external concerns such as societal mores and norms, then agency has to exist outside of the agent's ability to act. To this end, Albert Bandura identifies four core properties of agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness ("Toward" 164-165). Intentionality requires the formation of intentions as well as the "action plans and strategies for realizing them" (Bandura, "Toward" 164). Forethought, in Bandura's explanation is not just consideration of what may happen in the future, but behavior "governed by visualized goals and anticipated outcomes" as opposed to an "unrealized future state" because the "future cannot be the cause of current behavior [as] it has no material existence" ("Toward" 164). An agent must be able to self-regulate: "having adopted an intention and an action plan [the agent] cannot simply sit back and wait for appropriate performances to appear" she must have the "ability to

construct appropriate courses of action" and manage their implementation (Bandura, "Toward" 165). Most importantly, an agent is a "self-examiner": [she] "reflect[s] on [her] personal efficacy, the soundness of [her] thoughts and actions, and the meaning of [her] pursuits," while making "adjustments" to both actions and thoughts if necessary (Bandura, "Toward 165).

Heretofore, explanations of agency have been centered on the adult as responsible agent; however, it is useful to note the differences in agency in children versus agency in capable adults. We would not suppose that children understand or express their will in the same manner that reasonable adults do. Children are capable of making independent decisions about their behavior and how they wish to interact with others. They are also capable of making connections with others and altering their behavior to affect change within their environment. Yet children tend to either lack those four properties of agency previously outlined or be immature in the implementation of those traits. How a child learns to recognize her own power to act in her life and affect her environs is due in part to how those in authority over her manage and respond to her demands: "agency may be an inborn capacity; yet for it to mature, it requires responses that recognize and inform the child about [herself], physically and emotionally" (Weisel-Barth 302). That is to say, as children mature and grow physically, they also have to mature and grow into their agentic selves.

It is important to reiterate that, though a factor in agency, the choices made or actions taken that are based simply on the desires and motivations of the agent cannot be construed as an explanation of agency in its entirety. Desire as a motivator can be quite base and instinctual. When actions or choices are constrained because of the agent's structure, the ability of the individual to act as a responsible agent does not disappear. Agency is manifested in the emotional and mental processes the responsible agent uses to consider the choices and actions

she can take. Agency is in the choices that the individual makes with critical internal analysis of her desires, motivations and knowledge of herself and the possible outcomes or consequences of her choices.

The Middle-Class Victorian Woman

To understand why this concept of agency is being used to describe the coming-of-age stories of Maggie Tulliver and Louisa Gradgrind, it is important to get a better understanding of who the middle-class Victorian woman was and the various roles she played or was expected to play in society and in her family.

The emergence of the modern middle class came about in large part because of the Industrial Revolution. Changes in technology, agriculture and transportation as well as other areas led to economic changes that allowed the middle class in Britain to grow and expand their influence into different spheres of public life, including political and social environments. Much like current standards, those who could claim membership in the middle class were a varied and diverse population both socially and economically. The people who made up the middle class during the Victorian era could be prosperous farmers and landowners, businessmen and investors, or part of the professional classes, such as lawyers, doctors and writers. By and large, most middle-class families were not wealthy, though they did have some disposable income. Typically, good families had at least one servant who worked beside and was supervised by the lady of the house, and most of the middle class held aspirations of upward social mobility.

While there were riots and social unrest in some sectors of England related to economic conditions and the early resistance to reform in the Parliament, the country did not undergo the sort of "cataclysmic revolution" that other parts of Europe went through; instead, England

"experienced a gradual movement towards higher standards of living" prompted in part because of "industrial capitalism and legislative reform" (Harrison 24). Still, over the course of the nineteenth century, the economic condition of England and her inhabitants did undergo massive changes and immense progress. Many of these advancements resulted in a perceived change in the character of some groups of people and left others discombobulated and struggling to integrate their beliefs in good, Christian values of charity, virtuousness, and honor with the evident greed and ambition that manifested itself in public life.

Socially, the aspirations the Victorian middle class had towards gentility informed much of how they behaved in public and in the home. Members of the middle class frequently mimicked the behaviors of those in the upper echelons of society, such as eschewing actual physical work for women and encouraging education for sons as opposed to apprenticeships in work that required physical labor. The "nature of the work" being engaged in was often used as a shorthand for class status; "for all that work was a virtue among the Victorian [middle-class], the kind of work was all important" (Young 57). Manual work was seen as work for the lower classes, while non-manual or highly skilled and specialized work became the domain of this newly educated, growing class of people.

Though the middle class saw work as a virtue, unlike their upper-class compatriots, in other ways they closely mirrored the behavior of the aristocracy. Middle-class men worked in part to provide their wives and children with the leisured lifestyle of the upper classes. However, despite their social aspirations and outward displays of economic prosperity, the typical middle-class family could not afford to have a wife that did not share in the physical labor needed to run a successful home. For her part, the middle-class wife also tried to emulate the nobility in her personal behavior, which led to numerous "conduct books" or guidebooks on correct behavior in

dealing with both the public and her own family as these books were less about "etiquette" and more about "the daily business of living as a respectable woman" (Young 73).

The lives of girls born in the first part of the Victorian era varied considerably from those born in the latter half of the century. Girls born into middle-class families during the first half of the era could expect to have a large number of siblings though not all would make it to adulthood; additionally, because life expectancy was much lower, a girl born during this time had a greater risk of losing a parent before she reached adulthood herself (Gorham 15). Social class can be credited for some of the greatest variation in mortality; however, gender was also a factor (Gorham 16). After the age of five, girls had higher mortality rates than boys due in part to a greater susceptibility to diseases like tuberculosis (Gorham 16). Additionally, the sedentary lifestyle adopted by many of the middle-class left them confined to homes heated by open coal fires that would have left them vulnerable to unhealthy air and conditions (Gorham 16).

The more wealthy or well-to-do the family, the more likely the children would have been primarily reared by domestic staff; otherwise, the mother served as the primary caretaker. Though children of all classes were susceptible to infections or communicable diseases because of poor nutrition, clothing and housing, lower-class children were more likely to succumb to their illnesses; this reality was only slightly less likely for the middle class (Branca 99). Mothers were held largely responsible for the high infant mortality rate, which, according to most authorities on the subject of infant care, was primarily due to the mismanagement of children by the mother; it was a criticism of women that lasted throughout the Victorian period (Branca 99).

Then, as now, how children played and the toys they were allowed to have was determined, in part, by gender. There were toys that were considered unisex "but toys like model railways and dolls were made for one sex or the other" (Gorham 18). Even literature

written for children in the form of periodicals and books stressed the differences between the sexes and served as one of the Victorian era's main avenues for "inculcating sex role differentiation" (Gorham 18). The existence of these toys and literature for children emphasized the "increased awareness of the importance of intellectual and psychological development in childhood" which contributed to a "childhood experience" that was increasingly separate from the adult world yet maintained and even widened the gap between girls and boys (Gorham 18).

On the whole much of the education of young middle-class girls during the early part of Victorian era was handled inside the home. Mothers of moderate means tended to be primary instructors though sometimes an older daughter was sent to school and she would teach the younger children upon her return and relieve her mother of those duties (Gorham 20). Governesses were usually employed to instruct the children in wealthier families. Young children, both boys and girls, would share their lessons; however, as children moved past their early childhood and into adolescence, boys' and girls' educations became more differentiated. Boys were sometimes tutored at home or quite often sent away to boarding schools to network with children from better families or to prepare for a career. A middle-class girl, in contrast, rarely attended a boarding school unless she was orphaned or had other extenuating circumstances (Gorham 22).

The quality of the education for girls varied from family to family during the early part of the era, as there was little to no uniform standards for educating children. Nevertheless, there were many sources for advice and materials designed for instruction that families could consult (Gorham 20). Mothers, being largely responsible for the early education of their children, were also entrusted with responsibility of imbuing children with proper moral principles and correct standards for behavior, which could be cultivated through a proper education (Simonton 35).

Education was embedded with ideas of social and gender differences; because the female mind was thought to be different from the male mind, it followed there should be differences in education between the sexes in form as well as content (Simonton 35-36). It was essential that girls of all classes receive instruction on how to conduct themselves in society according to their station in life, as they would be responsible for passing these ideas on to their own children and thus affecting society as a whole.

Religion also helped solidify this gendered caste system. Women outnumbered men in many Christian denominations, and some historians believed "Christianity became increasingly feminized" during this period (Stott 102). Women were believed by many to have a sort of spiritual superiority to men, and religion played a "pivotal role in the development of proto-feminism" in the early eighteenth century (Stott 103). While officially women were not allowed to be clergy in the major denominations, they did often take active roles in the church. Women of "exceptional courage and devotion," those who preached, taught Sunday School and opened their homes to fellow believers, were sometimes given the title "mother in Israel;" with its "layered meaning," the title offered "vindication" for women who sought public leadership during an era when women were denied those roles in non-religious settings (Stott 102). Conversely, the church often reinforced women's duties and responsibilities in the home. During the nineteenth century, sermons addressing domestic responsibilities and concerns were not uncommon and included subjects such as the management of domestic servants and the proper attitude and manner each group should take towards the other (Langland 49).

Once middle-class girls left their schooling behind and entered adulthood, they were expected to marry and raise their own families. An adult daughter's "years as a 'daughter-at-home' could extend from her mid-teens until her middle or late-twenties" (Gorham 27). Before

she married, a young woman would take up some of her mother's household duties. Though those duties could vary depending on the family's social standing, a young woman could likely expect that she would help with the younger children as well as accompany her mother while she made her social visits. Within the privacy of their own homes, girls were expected to "adorn the household with their skills music, painting and fancy needlework"; in addition to those duties, women in the lower middle class would be expected to "be engaged in actual housework: sewing, cooking and even cleaning" (Gorham 27).

Once she married, a young woman moved from the care of her family into the keeping of her husband. Marriage was a very important step for any young woman to take and her choice of a spouse affected the rest of her life. In previous generations, marriages tended to be arranged by parents and were based on shared economic or social interests; by the nineteenth century, "personal affection, physical attraction and personal affinity" were considered valid reasons for considering marriage, and it was "taken for granted that children would choose their own spouses" (Vanden Bossche 89). While ideas about equality were changing, women were not yet considered equal to men in most Victorian marriages. The "doctrine of separate male and female spheres" dictated that men were the family breadwinners while women managed the home and children; the idea of equality was supported in that both men and women had areas of authority (Vanden Bossche 90). However, "it also implicitly supported the older assumption that women's sphere was relative and subordinate to men's" because his work helped sustain the household and those "financially dependent on him" (Vanden Bossche 90).

When a woman married, her well-being and any property or monies she possessed legally became her husband's property or under his purview. If a woman married the right partner, she could be relatively content with her lot. Yet a bad marriage could be devastating for a woman.

Divorce was almost impossible to attain even after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which took the power to dissolve marriages away from religious courts and gave it to civil courts. Ending a marriage was a relatively expensive proposition; there were limited grounds for divorce and almost none that a woman could use to petition the courts (Baird 403). While a man could accuse his wife of adultery, a woman could not use infidelity as a reason to dissolve her marriage unless his "adultery was compounded with some aggravating circumstance, such as incest or cruelty" (Baird 403). Women, however, were not without resources in escaping from or shaming abusive husbands and by the early nineteenth century, public opinion and the law increasingly demanded that husbands treat their wives humanely and violence was seen as a neglect of husbandly duties and even unmanly (Evans 65).

While marriage certainly had its disadvantages, a good number of women preferred marriage to the life of a spinster (Vanden Bossche 89). A woman who did not marry would either remain forever dependent on her family, sometimes acting in the capacity of an unpaid servant, or be forced to seek employment. Middle-class women who wanted or needed to work had few options available to them. Some middle-class women were able to support themselves through professional or creative pursuits, such as writing. Other women were forced to work in occupations far below their station, such as sewing, mending or taking in laundry, depending on how dire their circumstances.

Many women looked toward the field of education in order to earn a living. Working as a governess was possibly the most respectable way for a woman to support herself during the early part of the nineteenth century; however, it too had its drawbacks. Governesses were poorly paid and had very little job security; moreover, they were often caught between worlds as they were thought to be "too lowly to be welcomed as one of the family, but of too high of a

background to mix on easy terms with the servants" (Gleadle 53; Gorham 28). Though governesses were poorly paid, the financial costs of employing a governess were not within reach of much of the middle class, which meant that many women who had to seek employment were forced to work in a school setting.

Given the limited roles for the middle-class woman both inside and outside the home, it is understandable that her family held an important place in her life. Much of the literature of the time depicted girls as a sort of "angel in the house"; the good daughter was gentle, loving and self-sacrificing while the bad daughter was vulgar, selfish, lazy and sexually impure (Gorham 37). To her mother, a female child was a helpmate and companion who was groomed to assist in the running of the household until the time she married and made her own home and family. As mentioned, older girls and unmarried daughters were expected to help teach and care for younger children as well as partake in their mother's social engagements and charitable exploits. The books and art of the Victorian era conveyed an expectation that the mother/daughter relationship would be mutually loving and respectful; a girl who was loving and helpful towards her mother would be rewarded with her mother's love and gratitude (Gorham 47). The mother was the ultimate example of a feminine and virtuous woman, and she was expected to impart her wisdom and manner of being to her daughter so that she too could be a treasure to her family.

Although the mothers and daughters were imagined to share a close bond based on the camaraderie of the role they both shared, in many ways the brother-sister relationship was depicted as a much more intimate connection. The relationship between brother and sister represented "the ideal relationship between males and females" as it could have the "emotional intensity of marriage" yet avoid any issues of sexuality (Gorham 44). In popular images of the brother-sister relationship, the brother is often seen as his sister's "chosen champion and hero,

while she is pledged to him as his future clever little housekeeper, companion and nurse" (qtd. in Gorham 44). Older brothers acted in some ways as surrogate fathers. In the absence of an attentive, loving or clever father, brothers would stand in as guides and mentors. Even with an involved and present father figure, a brother was often expected to advise his sister on "intellectual and practical matters" (Gorham 45). An older sister was imagined to be a "moral guide" for her younger brother, a "second conscience" that would enlighten him "whenever he was doing anything amiss" (Gorham 45). A good sister would be, for her brother, a "moral touchstone," but she would also give deference to him in "worldly matters, recognizing that he knew 'far more of the world' than she could" (Gorham 46).

Central to the depictions of the girl in the home was the image of the girl with her father. A daughter was expected to be calming presence to her father after his long day working and providing for his family. The home may have been the sphere of women and mothers but a father and his needs were of the utmost importance and much of a family's daily life was structured around his comfort. A father served as a model of behavior and manliness for his sons and as protector and provider for his wife and daughters. Until the Industrial Revolution, much of a man's work kept him close to home and to his family so that he was largely physically present with his family because he was likely working either his own farm or as a tenant farmer for a more prosperous landowner (Zoja 176). With the rise of the middle-class and the emerging avenues for employment, a good deal of work kept men away from home during the day and thus away from their families. In memoirs from Victorians born during the first half of the nineteenth century, fathers were regularly depicted as remote but benevolent; they were often absent on business, yet, on one hand, they maintained their central, authoritative role and, on the other hand, "often showered their children with indulgences" (McKee 18).

In the literature of the period, daughters in good families provided "gentleness and cheerfulness," as a hardworking father had "a right to expect smiling faces, cheerful voices, and a quietly happy welcome" to calm his "harassed spirit" when he returned home from work (Gorham 38). The father was thought to have a right to expect that his daughters would "adorn the household with their ladylike accomplishments" and that they should be "sunbeams that make everything glad" and "creatures whose self-forgetfulness, whose willingness to help others, would create a harmonious environment (Gorham 38). A daughter's primary duty was to her home and family and within the family her father's needs should be uppermost in her thoughts.

If a family was less than happy or was in some real distress good daughters were characterized as having an even greater role to play (Gorham 39). Difficulties gave a daughter the opportunity to uplift her father and provide "moral and emotional support" in addition to "genuine practical assistance" (Gorham 39). Negative portrayals of girls also served to reinforce the image and expectations of young, Victorian girls; wicked or immoral girls were written to be a type of object lesson, "so that readers could be admonished about attitudes and behavior that they should avoid" (Gorham 49).

These images or perceptions of the good daughter and sister were not necessarily accurate depictions of the lives of young, early Victorian girls. Nevertheless, these depictions helped shape the lens through which a girl saw the world and how she saw herself in it. The literature reinforced social expectations for girls, expectations that a girl's place was in the home and her duty was to her father and her family. These expectations undoubtedly affected the choices the middle-class girl could and did make as she moved forward in her life.

The Bildungsroman

Given that there were constrictions and limitations on the lives of women and they had fewer opportunities to exert control over their lives, it follows that female coming-of-age stories would present themselves in ways different from the stories with male protagonists. Daughters were obligated to their families in ways that sons were not. A son had a duty to look after his mother and sisters if his father was unable to meet that obligation, but he was allowed to fulfill his duty at a distance. Men were able to go out into the world and forge an existence that was separate from the family they were born into, while a daughter was brought up to believe that her world revolved around her duty to her family.

In very broad terms, the traditional bildungsroman had certain thematic characteristics. It usually described the development of a single protagonist from childhood to adolescence, leaving him on the threshold of maturity (Labovitz 3). The general consensus has been that the protagonist in the bildungsroman is a male who navigates and discovers his place in the world through experiences with "love, friendship and the hard realities of life" (Labovitz 2). According to Jerome Buckley, the classic plot of the bildungsroman features:

> A child of some sensibility [who] grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to his new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and

> also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city. (Buckley 17)

While positioned as an outsider for most of the novel, at its conclusion the hero is typically reconciled with society. The hero is reconciled in that he forges his own place in the world, a role that allows him to slip seamlessly into the fabric of society. Because the male hero chooses his place in the social order, it usually follows that he is satisfied with society and his place in it. There are variations in how this story is told and in general no one novel will encompass all elements, but, more often than not, the traditional bildungsroman will not ignore more than two or three of the principal elements of the genre – "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy" (Buckley 18).

For instance, in Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, the reader is introduced to the title character virtually at his birth, though an older Copperfield reminiscing about his youth narrates the story. Despite the fact Copperfield's own father has died before his birth, the novel still manages to adhere to the father/child conflict in his relationship with his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone. The young protagonist is largely left to make is own way in the world at a very early age, as he shuffles from home to home and situation to situation even before his mother dies. His travails continue into adulthood, though he does find love a time or two along the way. Eventually, however, he is able to come to a point in his life and a place in the world where he can settle down and be content with himself and with his life. Similarly, William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Pendennis* also features a protagonist who seems to learn many lessons about life and finds his place in society by leaving home and exploring different possibilities for his life. Arthur Pendennis leaves behind a mother and foster-sister who live in near poverty in order to

support him. Pen's foster-sister, Laura, sacrifices what small bit of money she has in order to support him and pay his debts because a sister's duty to her brother is seemingly more important than his duty to his female relations.

It is tempting to try to force coming-of-age stories for young women into this same mold. In fact, in *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver's story seems to fit the genre in several ways. She, too, is born into a provincial town where she encounters many constraints on her intellect and imagination and readers can assume her education is mostly inadequate, though much of her formal education happens outside of the action of the novel. Whereas a male protagonist in Maggie's situation would eventually leave home in hopes of fulfilling some unnamed dream, Maggie primarily remains in St. Oggs. She has to come into her sense of self and realize her capacities as a responsible agent without the benefit of the varied and diverse experiences male protagonists go through. Coming-of-age stories with female protagonists do not follow the same pattern as those of their male counterparts because the experiences and expectations for women were different. Maggie does not stray far from her town and her family because her primary concern must be her relationship with her family. Moreover, it will be far harder for Maggie to achieve any personal goals she may have without the support of her family.

Many critics of the feminine bildungsroman tend to critique the girl's coming-of-age story in relation to how it does or does not conform to the general guidelines outlined by Jerome Buckley in *Season of Youth*. However, because girls were limited in their ability to act, some critics read the female coming-of-age story during the nineteenth century as a kind of devolution. Susan Fraiman asserts that many girls in these stories have a sense that "formation is foisted" on them and that they are "largely, what other people … will make of them" (6). It follows that if the girl's growth as an individual is not of her own doing and is instead dictated by the will of

another, then she has not truly come-of-age. The critic takes a similar view to Esther Kleinbord Labovitz's assertion that the bildungsroman was not truly possible for women until "cultural and social" changes allowed for more independent women (Labovitz 7). As a result, Fraiman sees development novels for women as an exercise in humiliation for many of its heroines, who are "diverted from their early goals, and otherwise mocked by the project of Bildung" (144).

Notwithstanding the critics of the feminine bildungsroman, I maintain that the novel of development for early nineteenth century women did exist but was expressed in a manner unlike the stories of its male counterpart. Because women could not take the physical action to change their circumstances, they had to evolve in emotional and intellectual ways. Thus, Maggie's drive for independence is not merely a precursor to some future time when she will come into her own sense of being or maturity, but rather it is the result of her realization of her own agency. In other words, for Maggie, coming-of-age does not depend on her going out into the world and proving herself, finding her niche in society or a place of contentment; coming-of-age for her is the mental and emotional process she must go through to even contemplate living independently of her duty to her family or societal expectations.

That mental and emotional process that a girl goes through in order to develop into her fuller, agentic self is even more evident in Louisa Gradgrind's story in *Hard Times*. Louisa moves from her father's home to her husband's home and is never said to leave the town of Coketown, yet the experiences she does have shape her and help usher into her own sense of agency. Outside of her father's unconventional philosophy and child-rearing methods, Louisa's life follows a fairly conventional path in that she grows up, is educated, and marries a man largely for the benefit of her father and brother. Before her marriage, Louisa has moments where she expresses a nascent sense of agency, yet it is only because of the intimacies she experiences

in her relationship with James Harthouse that she is finally able to look inward and reflect on her wants and needs and make her own decisions about her life.

To frame coming-of-age as a realization of personal agency and self-determinism does not mean that agency as seen in novels with female protagonists did not exist in stories with their male equivalents. Agency is also important in novels with male protagonists; however, men in novels of development are usually invested with a sense of agency at the outset of the novel, which allows them to make the choices that enable them to go out into the world in order to grow and mature. Women seem to have the opposite experience; they grow into their agency through the experiences they have, some or even all of which they had no control over because their experience of the world is largely a prescribed experience with little deviation from the main. A close reading and analysis of the text in the next chapter will give insight into why a young woman's realization of personal agency is an appropriate way to examine coming-of-age in these narratives.

CHAPTER TWO

Girl as Non-Agent

A girl's movement into agency is not a linear process. There is no straight line or universal sequence of events that moves her from non-agent to agent. Rather, a girl's realization of her own agency is a process that happens in fits and starts. What shape this process takes is unique to each girl and depends on many different factors, such as her relationship with her family and her family dynamics. One such factor is the relationship each girl has with her father that sometimes helps and at other times hinders her passage into responsible agency. Additionally, one of the problems facing both Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is their limited or questionable access to intellectual and educational resources as well as how their education becomes a problem that isolates them from their larger community (Banerjee 34).

There are undoubtedly many parallels between the stories of Maggie Tulliver and Louisa Gradgrind; however, each girl travels a different route towards embracing her personal agency. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver's maturation and development into a responsible agent seems to track in a very traditional manner, in that, as she matures from child to adult, her early experiences allow her to quietly come into her own sense of personal agency. When the novel begins, Maggie is a child of nine who is often indulged by her father and criticized by her mother for not being a model child. Maggie is smarter than what is necessary for a girl and headstrong to boot. She chafes under the supervision and criticism of her mother and revels in her father's frequent, yet qualified, praise. Indeed, our first impressions of Maggie come not through her own actions, but through a conversation between her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver.

While discussing how best to educate his son Tom, Mr. Tulliver laments the fact that Maggie appears to be the smarter of his two children. Her father declares that she is "twice as 'cute as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid." (Eliot 12). Mr. Tulliver seems to be of the belief that intelligence is not a virtue in a woman and though Maggie's cleverness is amusing in a child of nine, it will be worthless and undesirable as she gets older. As he says to his wife, "It's no mischief while she's a little 'un, but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep …" (Eliot 12). Her mother, however, latches on to the word "mischief" and complains that Maggie's nature is problematic, as her cleverness and strength of will is "a mischief" as it "all runs to naughtiness" (Eliot 12). Maggie's nature causes her to defy her mother and the expectations Mrs. Tulliver has for her daughter, expectations that are as small as Maggie staying clean for more than two hours. This exchange establishes the tone in the relationship between Maggie and her parents as she grows older. Mrs. Tulliver is continuously trying to teach Maggie how to be a respectable lady, which for her means trying to curb Maggie's natural tendencies by making her conform to certain ideas and standards. On the other hand, Mr. Tulliver seems to find Maggie delightful and reinforces and sometimes encourages much of her behavior, all the while realizing that her nature may not serve her well in the future. Indeed, her adeptness at reading sometimes disconcerts and embarrasses her father as when she relates a story of a woman killed because she was suspected of being a witch in front of Mr. Riley (Banerjee 37). However, while Mr. Tulliver does not encourage her reading, he does not actively discourage or forbid her seeking alternate intellectual outlets.

Mr. Tulliver's easy acceptance of Maggie allows her to enjoy what Eliot seems to depict as a relatively carefree or idyllic childhood, in the face of her mother's and brother's disapproval. We, as readers, see Maggie moving from one childish mishap to another with little thought to the

consequences of her actions. Maggie lacks forethought, which as noted in the previous chapter, is one of the fundamental aspects of human agency. Children, by nature, have a limited capacity for forethought. It is rare for a child to give careful consideration to what may happen in the future before they take action; and when they do consider the consequences of their behavior, they are still held at a disadvantage because they have an insufficient fount of knowledge upon which to draw. As a result, a child can make a decision and take action without those actions being the actions of a responsible agent.

For instance, Maggie makes a purposeful yet misguided decision to run away from home and join the gypsies. In a fit of jealously due to Tom's preference and attention toward their cousin Lucy Deane, Maggie pushes Lucy into a patch of mud. Feeling sorry for herself and fearing the censure of her family, Maggie resolves to run away and join a gypsy tribe living nearby. Maggie has limited knowledge of gypsies and the gypsy lifestyle; what she knows is that she has been told often that "she was like a gypsy and 'half-wild'" (Eliot 104). She also believes that the gypsies will "gladly receive her, and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge" (Eliot 104). She gives short shrift to Tom's previous statements that gypsies are little more than thieves. More than any other reason, Maggie is motivated by the desire to punish Tom for his inattentiveness and condescending behavior toward her. She believes that if she runs away, Tom will feel the loss of her and come to appreciate and truly value her. It is a less than fully informed choice, that is motivated by particular desires, but it is not the choice or actions of a responsible agent. Maggie's decision to run away is impulsive and a reaction to her immediate feelings of misery and hurt. She is able to form intention, but because of her youth it is fair to assume that she lacked both forethought and self-reflectiveness. Eliot, in writing a young Maggie, has given us a character that lives in the now, where her only

thoughts are of the immediacy of the moment. To come into a mature sense of agency, she must move from thinking and reacting based on how she feels in the moment to processing and filtering her emotions and behaviors before making a decision whenever possible. It is a transition that for most comes with age and experience.

A girl's inability to act as a responsible agent does not always hinge on a lack of maturity or capacity to understand or connect with her own sense of self. As she matures and tries to assert her own agency, she is often met with considerable pushback in the form of societal or familial expectations. In *Hard Times*, we are first introduced to a fifteen or sixteen-year-old Louisa Gradgrind in the opening chapters of the novel when her father catches her surreptitiously watching traveling circus entertainers. Mr. Gradgrind is characterized as being intimately involved in Louisa's and Tom's education and upbringing. He has raised his children to value truth and facts and to esteem what is real above all that is fanciful or false. Sleary's circus represents human "vitality" and "spontaneity" and Louisa's desire to partake such recreation, in any way, flies directly in the face of Mr. Gradgrind's teachings (Leavis 368). Once caught, Dickens describes Louisa as looking at her father with "more boldness" than her brother Thomas, who did not look at his father but "gave himself up to be taken home like a machine" (15). Louisa is further described in this passage as "sullen" and a child that "would have been self-willed … but for her upbringing" (Dickens 16). Indeed, Mr. Gradgrind initially holds Thomas fully responsible for his and Louisa's misadventure before Louisa corrects him.

In this initial sketch of Louisa, Dickens reveals some important aspects of her character. Louisa is a girl who is forced to suppress or divorce herself from her natural feelings or emotions because of her father's expectations and teachings. Mr. Gradgrind turns a deaf ear to Louisa when she says that she is "tired" and has been "tired a long time" as an explanation for her

behavior; he instead dismisses Louisa as "childish" (Dickens 16). It is apparent that Louisa is dissatisfied with her life such as it is. Dickens seems to hint at a core of strength that is simmering just beneath the surface in Louisa, yet she is still relatively cowed by her father's dismissal and is unable to remain emboldened in the face of Mr. Gradgrind's criticism. In exposing this conflict, Dickens expects the reader to both admire Louisa for her intellectual abilities and defiance of her father's system and wonder at her inability to behave with a woman's natural dependence and loyalty (Cowles 441).

Family allegiance or familial expectations are major factors that hinder the growth of both Maggie and Louisa and each girl's ability to make choices in their lives that are in accordance with their own desires. Both are asked to subjugate their desires to further the aims of a family member, Louisa through her marriage to Bounderby and Maggie in prematurely ending her friendship with Philip Wakem.

From the very first mention of Mr. Bounderby, it is clear that Louisa finds him distasteful. Bounderby, though a contemporary of Mr. Gradgrind, seems to hold romantic intentions regarding Louisa. When, early in the novel, Bounderby hints that he deserves a kiss, Louisa "coldly" and "ungraciously" offers her cheek and says that he "can take one"; afterwards, she spends the next few minutes rubbing red the spot on her face that Bounderby touched (Dickens 25). If Louisa allowed herself to consider her own desires when the idea of marrying Bounderby is presented to her, it is almost certain that she would never consent to the marriage.

Mr. Gradgrind considers Louisa the perfect pupil and sees in her everything that he expects of a student of his philosophy. In his daughter, he has essentially shaped a person who is instilled with reason and has reasoned out any of the baser emotions. As he tells her before informing her of Bounderby's proposal:

> You have been so well trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation. (Dickens 108)

The dispassion and rationality that he praises in Louisa leaves Mr. Gradgrind embarrassed and unsettled as she receives Bounderby's proposal (Leavis 373). He cannot expect or imagine that Louisa can have any reasonable objections to a marriage with Mr. Bounderby and thus is momentarily disconcerted when she brings up the issue of love and if there is an expectation of love within the proposed marriage. Mr. Gradgrind responds to Louisa using the only method of understanding he has, which is his philosophy of facts.

> "Father," said Louisa, "do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?" … "[D]o you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?" … "[D]oes Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?"
>
> "Really, my dear," said Mr. Gradgrind, "it is difficult to answer your question –"
>
> "Difficult to answer it, Yes or No, father?"
>
> "Certainly my dear. … Because the reply depends so materially, Louisa, on the sense in which we use the expression. … Therefore, perhaps the expression itself – I merely suggest this to you, my dear – may be a little misplaced."
>
> "What would you advise me to use in its stead, father?" (Dickens 111)

Mr. Gradgrind's teachings have stripped away not only the reality of love from Louisa's life but also the ability to even imagine the possibility of love. Issues, like love and emotion, which are

reduced to formula are rendered devoid of meaning (Leavis 375). Louisa has no goals, direction, or sense of potential for her own life, so when in that moment she appeals to her father, she seems to be doing several things. Louisa may be looking for any reason to reject the proposal; she may also be asking her father what hopes he held for her life other than that she be a devotee of his philosophy. I do not believe that Louisa truly understands her father's purpose in raising her the way that he has nor what he expects her to do with her acquired knowledge. Despite her education, Louisa has led the conventional life of a Victorian woman and has been expected to defer her judgment to that of her father, her younger brother, and even at times Mr. Bounderby. When Louisa has erred from the path of strict, unrelenting reason that her father has laid out for her, Mr. Gradgrind has almost always dismissed her as a full actor in her folly and has instead tried to hold Thomas accountable for Louisa's wayward behavior. In his way, Mr. Gradgrind has asked that Louisa repress any urge or desire not in line with his ideology, and Louisa for her part seems to be expressing a perhaps fleeting yearning for some sort of deeper intimacy between her and anyone else, but especially her father who has ordered every step of her life thus far.

In the end, Louisa agrees to the union for no other reason than that she has no acceptable rationale to reject it. Her questioning the expectations for the marriage is no resistance to the marriage at all; her childhood has left her vulnerable to Bounderby who sees her as another asset to be had (Adrian 115). Mr. Bounderby's age, situation, and temperament are seen as favorable attributes to Mr. Gradgrind and thus far in her life Louisa has never truly challenged her father's will or logic. For Louisa, the next logical step in her life is to, in her words, "do the little I can, and the little I am fit for" because in the end, "what does it matter?" (Dickens 112)

In a similar fashion, Maggie Tulliver struggles to find the meaning in her life after her father's bankruptcy. Through her friendship with Philip Wakem, Maggie tries to seize some

little bit of pleasure in her life. Maggie's life after the family is bankrupted is devoid of joy and a sense of serenity, but, unlike Louisa, it is not because her family forbids her the chance for a personal sense of peace. Rather, Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy has depressed the spirits and hopes of the entire family and Maggie embraces a philosophy of renunciation in order to cope with her changing circumstances. In embracing renunciation, Maggie has changed how she reacts to and moves within her world versus her behavior prior to the bankruptcy. Certainly, some of her behavior could reasonably be attributed to a growing maturity and levelheadedness that should occur as one moves into adulthood. Maggie, however, had always exhibited an effervesce of spirit in her early childhood that she suppresses and tries to will away after the family's belongings are sold to pay creditors and her father finds himself working for the despised Mr. Wakem, Philip's father.

Walking through Red Deeps with Philip Wakem lightens Maggie's burden. His attention and affection allows her small moments of contentedness when she has denied herself all other forms of self-indulgence. Maggie keeps her relationship with Philip secret, for, though it is doubtful the Tulliver's wish Maggie to be unhappy, none of her immediate family members would countenance any friendship between the two because of the role Mr. Wakem has played in the family's declining fortunes.

Maggie desires and allows herself the small respite that her relationship with Philip provides. Given that she keeps the relationship secret, it is understood that her personal desires are not the only things she considers when allowing herself the communication with Philip. Tom, when he realizes that Maggie has been seeing Philip, demands that she break off all communication. In essence, he requires that she subjugate her will, her desires and her judgment to what he believes is his superior logic and judgment. Tom requires a solemn vow on the

family Bible; otherwise, he will reveal the relationship to Mr. Tulliver. Mr. Tulliver is irrational when it comes to the subject of Mr. Wakem, and Tom threatens to reveal Maggie to her father as "a disobedient, deceitful daughter, who throws away her own respectability [through] clandestine meetings with the son of a man that has helped to ruin her father" (Eliot 342).

Mr. Tulliver and Tom both have deep, if not entirely earned, feelings of animosity and resentment towards the Wakems. Maggie, on the other hand, values the ideas of compassion and charity toward her fellow human beings. In fact, her compassion and pity for Philip Wakem is part of what drew her to him as children and plays a role in her maintaining her friendship with him despite the objections she believes her family would put forth if they knew. It is Maggie alone who tries to stop Mr. Tulliver from entering a curse against Mr. Wakem into the family bible because, as she tries to argue, it is "wicked to curse and bear malice" (Eliot 267). Tom, however, applies heavily to Maggie's sense of duty to their father and family. She agrees to give up the friendship but initially refuses to swear on the bible that she will never see Philip again as she feels her word is binding enough.

> "If I give you my word, that will be as strong a bond to me as if I laid my hand on the Bible. I don't require that to bind me."
>
> "Do what *I* require," said Tom. "I can't trust you, Maggie. There is no consistency in you. …" (Eliot 343)

Tom does not see Maggie as particularly principled or honest. Because he cannot possibly understand why she would have any relationship with Philip Wakem, he deems her behavior disloyal and untrustworthy. Tom has also appointed himself as a proxy father figure who delivers to Maggie the guidance and direction that Mr. Tulliver would have done had he known of Maggie's transgressions. To Tom, Maggie is deficient in character and judgment and it is

right and natural that she should defer to him and their father. Though ending her friendship with Philip goes against her personal inclinations, she eventually agrees because of the specter of her father's wishes and precarious health. In acquiescing to Tom's demands for the reasons she does, she undermines her own agency and substitutes Tom's wishes and her father's desires for her own.

Girl in Transition

It is important to reiterate that neither Louisa nor Maggie is ever completely without agency; rather, each moves from a period in her life when she is mostly a non-agent in her own affairs to a point when she acts primarily as a responsible agent. To understand how Maggie and Louisa make the transition into responsible agents, it is important to understand how they come to understand the world, how the way they process that knowledge changes, and how those changes affect their relationship with themselves and with others.

When the action begins in *Hard Times*, Louisa has already been thoroughly educated and inculcated in Mr. Gradgrind's peculiar ideology. Mr. Gradgrind spells out his philosophy in the novel's opening sentences when speaking at the school he has founded.

> Teach these boys and girls nothing but the Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principal on which I bring up my own children … (Dickens 3)

Because Louisa is an adolescent when the novel begins and she has been indoctrinated in Mr. Gradgrind's theories, it is difficult to determine what her own natural inclinations or mode of being would be had she been able to explore different ideas and form views and beliefs

independent of her father and his teachings. At the novel's outset, Louisa is what Mary Field Belenky and her co-authors would term a "received knower" in their work, *Women's Way of Knowing*. This type of learner or knower tends to "rely on received knowledge" and "think of words as central to the knowing process"; in short, she "learn[s] by listening" (Belenky et al. 36-37). A received knower has little confidence in her own ability to form views about the world based on her perceptions and experiences and tends to think of others, especially those in authority, as "sources of truth"; she equates "receiving, retaining, and returning the words of authority with learning" (Belenky et al. 39). The received knower does not trust in her own authority as a learner and looks to others to express and affirm ideas she may have but is too inhibited to express.

Mr. Gradgrind wants his children and the other children of Coketown to be received knowers that "shun the qualitative and welcome the quantitative" (Belenky et al. 41). That which is real, factual and grounded in science or scientific thought is to be given absolute authority and all other ideas are null. Critical thinking that imagines things not in existence does not exist in Mr. Gradgrind's world, as there is no use for that type of analysis when an individual has facts that are grounded in reality to rely on to make her decision.

When Louisa and Thomas are found out at the circus, Thomas gives "himself up to be taken home like a machine" (Dickens 15). Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy results in making little machines out of his children, little machines that regurgitate acquired and sanctioned knowledge. He does not seem particularly interested in his children expanding their minds and thinking critically of the information they receive. Critical thinking requires imagination, and imagination is an anathema to Gradgrind. Louisa subscribes to his way of thinking because, until Sissy Jupe enters the Gradgrind household, she has never been exposed to another manner of being.

However, being exposed to Sissy and learning about how she has lived does not and cannot effect an immediate change in Louisa. Louisa may have nascent feelings of empathy for Sissy and Sissy's story gives her an idea of what she is missing in her life, but Louisa does not see Sissy as an equal and thus cannot learn from her. Sissy is the daughter of a circus performer who has abandoned her and she now lives off the charity of the Gradgrind household. Louisa may show curiosity about Sissy's life, but she cannot disavow an ideology she has been inculcated in to embrace what is essentially a foreign way of life. Once Louisa's engagement to Bounderby is announced, the expression of pity and sorrow evinced by Sissy causes Louisa to become "impassive, proud and cold" and "changed to [Sissy] altogether" (Dickens 114). Similarly, Louisa views the workers of Coketown as akin to cogs in a wheel. Mr. Gradgrind's philosophies have so shaped her life and perceptions that when she actually speaks to a member of the working class she sees him as "something to be worked so much and paid so much … something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand" (Dickens 175; Ingham 81).

While Louisa has been educated to be an unimaginative and uncritical thinker, Dickens gives indication throughout the novel of Louisa's unhappiness with her life and the possibility of change for her. In scenes such as the incident at the circus, Louisa is seen questioning or trying to subvert her father's teachings. When she openly defies her father, as she does when she takes Thomas to the circus, she is met with considerable pushback from Mr. Gradgrind. Even when Louisa privately expresses sentiments contrary to Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy, she finds herself on the receiving end of a lecture; for instance, chapter 8 of *Hard Times* opens with a reminisce in which Louisa begins a conversation with "'Tom, I wonder' – upon which Mr. Gradgrind, … stepped forth into the light and said, 'Louisa, never wonder!'" (56).

There are several moments in the novel when Louisa expresses outright dissatisfaction with her existence. As noted, when caught at the circus and publically chastised, Louisa responds by saying, "I was tired, father. I have been tired a long time" (Dickens 16). Later, as Louisa and Thomas converse, she laments her lack of womanly abilities, such as the ability to sing or relate amusing stories to make the Gradgrind home more enjoyable for her brother.

> "… [A]s I get older, and nearer growing up, I often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I cannot reconcile you to home better than I am able to do. … I can't play to you, or sing to you. I can't talk to you so as to lighten your mind ..."
>
> …
>
> "It's a great pity," said Louisa, after another pause, … "it's a great pity, Tom. It's very unfortunate for both of us." (Dickens 58-59)

Louisa is cognizant of the lack of meaning and purpose in her own life. If she possessed the womanly skills her contemporaries possessed, she could at least attempt to create a happier home life for her brother, on whom she expends most of her emotional resources. Louisa's awareness of her condition and her earlier defiance of her father suggests the possibility of change and the capacity for her to act as a responsible agent in her future.

Dickens also alludes to Louisa's future awakening through use of the fire imagery. The imagery is used to give insight into Louisa's character and her inner struggle.

> … [Y]et struggling through the dissatisfaction of [Louisa's] face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brighten its expression. (16)

Dickens wants his audience to understand that, just as an untended fire smolders, there is a controlled passion that simmers in Louisa beneath the surface. The fire in Louisa conveys an independent spirit or character that has been left undeveloped and neglected because of her father's ideology.

Louisa herself uses fire and the idea of fire as a way to make sense of her world. Her father's teaching have left her so emotionally crippled that life seems a futile effort. Her musings foreshadow that lack of emotion and hope Louisa exhibits when presented with Bounderby's proposal.

> "I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it." (Dickens 60-61)

Mr. Gradgrind has taught Louisa that there is nothing in life that cannot be calculated and reasoned out. Louisa should not question the purpose of life in general or the purpose of her life in particular; if Gradgrind's philosophy is sound then the meaning of one's life should be clear if an individual is fluent in the concepts of reason and logic.

During Louisa's first interview with her father when he presents her with Bounderby's proposal, Louisa says to her father, "there seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!" (111). While it could be argued that her words foretell Louisa's near-elopement with Harthouse, her connection to fire is much more of an allusion to her untapped potential as a person and her fragile sense of herself as an agent than it is to latent sexual longing. When Louisa stares into fires or speaks about fires, she is reflecting on an existence she is thoroughly dissatisfied with and cannot hope will bring her any happiness. Mr. Gradgrind labors under the belief that the adherence to facts and figures is all

that is necessary to get on in the world and to live a productive and meaningful life. He neglects to impress upon his children the value of traits such as honesty and integrity, as he believes rational thinking will lead to the same outcomes as would appealing to someone's better nature. Mr. Gradgrind has passion for and in his ideology, an ideology that systematically saps the passion and the zest for life out of his children. Spreading these ideas motivates him and gives him purpose while they do the exact opposite for Louisa. He cannot understand what it means to be raised from birth under the philosophy of facts so he does not know a life with the inability to imagine different possibilities for himself; he is a born again believer with all the fervency of a true believer. His zeal for facts goes counter to his philosophy's actual stance against irrational behavior or emotional states. Though he believes his philosophy is based on Hard Facts and cool, rational logic, that Mr. Gradgrind refashions his entire life to live his ideology and sets out to raise a generation of Coketown's children in that same philosophy belies the idea that he can be coolly rational about its implications. Louisa does not have his enthusiasm for Hard Facts; for her, facts are appropriate and correct answers to questions, but they leave her bereft of deeper emotions.

In her interactions with James Harthouse, Louisa finally has an awakening that cannot be reduced to simply sexual in nature. Harthouse's motivations for engaging Louisa may have sexual overtones; however, Louisa becomes more emotionally open and honest on an abundance of levels due to her interactions with Harthouse. She has lived a staid and lonely existence and Harthouse introduces her to the possibilities of what her life might have been had she had the tools to imagine and reach for something different. Harthouse sees a depth of character in Louisa that everyone else in her life has ignored or pretended did not exist. Harthouse immediately sees Louisa as "constrained" yet "careless"; "reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold

and proud and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility … "utterly indifferent, perfectly self-reliant, never at a loss, and yet never at her ease" (Dickens 142).

James Harthouse is an amoral character that resolves at the beginning of his acquaintance with Louisa to seduce her. He is bored yet intrigued by Louisa and he sees the untapped potential and emotion in her and is determined to exploit it for his own baser needs. Louisa is overwhelmed by the feelings that Harthouse evokes in her. She is brought to the edge of temptation and very nearly elopes with Harthouse because she does not have the tools to resist him. Mr. Gradgrind has taught his children facts but he has not taught them ethics. The logical, pragmatic choice is not always one with the ethical, moral choice, so Louisa is left to wonder, "what [is] in her soul for James Harthouse to destroy?" (Dickens 184). Louisa's relationship with Harthouse forces her to not only ask herself questions like this but also releases something in her that seeks to answer those questions.

Unlike Louisa, Maggie Tulliver's upbringing and education is more conventional and appropriate for the era. She is not crippled by a philosophy that is antithetical to human nature and so only has to learn to develop and trust herself as a responsible agent at her own pace. Most of Maggie's formal and sanctioned education happens off screen; however, what can be surmised about her education seems consistent with Victorian standards for young middle-class girls during the early part of the era. Maggie is expected learn the social graces necessary for interacting in the community at large; additionally, she is expected to learn how to be a wife and mother and run a respectable household. That little is mentioned of her education beyond teaching her "to greet Philip Wakem in the street with due propriety" suggests that her formal training really is just an "extension" of her mother's instruction (Banerjee 37). Much of her early conflict with her mother stems from her resistance to learning and assuming these

responsibilities and her disregard for the standards of correct behavior that was set for young, Victorian girls. Maggie, however, has an innate curiosity about the world and love of actual learning, which leads her to self-education.

Maggie is proud of the knowledge she has acquired and wants people to recognize how clever she is such as when she relates the contents of her book to her father and Mr. Riley in chapter 3 of *The Mill on the Floss*. Mr. Tulliver mostly sees Maggie's intellectual curiosity as a novelty, an amusing yet pointless exercise as their world has no use for clever girls. Maggie, however, is unable to stifle her inquisitive nature and she consumes knowledge wherever and whenever she has access to it. When Maggie sits in on Tom's lessons during her visit at the Stellings residence, she is able to comprehend and process the material much faster than her brother. It is Maggie's tradition of self-education that leads her to the philosophy of renunciation as a coping mechanism for her family's changing circumstances after the bankruptcy.

Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy marks a major turning point in the novel's action and in Maggie's personal development, and its aftermath helps to move her into her role as a responsible agent. Before Mr. Tulliver loses his lawsuit, Maggie's major concern in life is simply winning and holding onto her brother's affection. Though Maggie does strive to gain the good opinion of those closest to her and finds herself frustrated when she fails in her efforts, she basically lives secure in the knowledge that she is loved and valued by her father. With Maggie, Mr. Tulliver is generous in his affection and sparing with his criticism and punishments, such as when he meets Maggie on the road after she has run away to the gypsies; he only briefly scolds her by saying "what 'ud father do without his little wench?" (Eliot 115).

Though Maggie's maturation after the bankruptcy is partly the result of age and experience, in many ways Maggie changes because her father changes. Mr. Tulliver's identity is

tied to the mill and his place in the community. When he loses his lawsuit and is no longer "Mr. Tulliver of Dorlcote Mill," he literally has a stroke and emerges from his illness a changed man who sinks into depression, shuns all social discourse and "grudges every morsel his family eats" (Weiss 91). Maggie becomes Mr. Tulliver's only source of solace and her affection for him compels her to take his side and defend him from the criticisms of the Dodsons and even Tom and their mother.

Mr. Tulliver's depression and the general lack within the Tulliver household takes a toll on all its inhabitants. For Maggie, her tradition of self-education and her unwillingness to be an additional burden on her father and family leads her to a philosophy of renunciation. When Maggie initially reads the Thomas a Kempis text she immediately feels "as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in a stupor" (Eliot 289). The religious text helps Maggie make sense of the changes she is experiencing in her home and in her relationships. By embracing renunciation, Maggie makes an active and thoughtful choice, but her rationale is flawed and her results are mixed. In renunciation, Maggie changes her behavior in ways that allow people like the Dodsons and her mother to appreciate qualities that heretofore were hidden. Mrs. Tulliver now wonders that Maggie should be "growing up so good," where a once "contrairy [sic]", strong-willed child could now be submissive; yet, while Mr. Tulliver is not surprised by the evidence of Maggie's virtues, he is still saddened because he believes it is all a waste as their circumstances will not allow her to make a good marriage (Eliot 294).

Maggie's friendship with Philip Wakem reveals the flaws in Maggie's newfound philosophy. Renunciation is a "frustration" and "self-denial" that has sabotaged a girl who "held the promise of blossoming into a brilliant woman" (Banerjee 38). Maggie considers her own

selfishness and "egoism" the cause of her problems and believes being self-effacing will alleviate her unhappiness (Bushnell 389). Like Harthouse to Louisa, Philip is one of the few in Maggie's world that sees real depth of character in Maggie, a trait that she has suppressed in embracing renunciation. Philip may want Maggie in his life, but he does not seek to exploit her vulnerabilities; rather, he wants Maggie to be the best of herself and embrace the spirit of that girl who befriended him during school visits. Their relationship reminds Maggie of past pleasures and lays a foundation for her transition into a completely realized, responsible agent.

In adopting renunciation, Maggie makes an active and reasoned choice that fails to speak to her authentic self but that gives her tools on which to draw later in her life. It is only in the immediate aftermath of Tom forcing Maggie to give up Philip that she finally has a genuine breakthrough in her quest for agency. Maggie abandoning her friendship with Philip for the sake of her father's pride and health and her brother's ire is injurious to her sense of autonomy and personal independence, qualities renunciation has helped her cultivate. Maggie has learned to make critical decisions about her life with little involvement from others and has seen the results of her choices in action. She has incorporated intentionality and self-examination into her mode of thinking and has a strong enough sense of self that Tom's use of emotional coercion to force her hand regarding Philip causes Maggie to rebel and lash out at him in the wake of that confrontation.

For most of her life Maggie has struggled to attain and retain Tom's affection and approval. She is depicted as being intellectually and spiritually superior to her environs, yet she is tied to her community and family by "the strongest fibres of her heart" (Eliot 273; Hagan 57). Her tête-à-tête with Tom after she has let Philip go is the first time Maggie honestly and sincerely questions and challenges Tom with respect to his behavior towards her and those he

does not see as his equal. Maggie's "pent-up, long gathered irritation" results in her telling Tom that she "despise[s] the feelings [he] has shown in speaking to Philip" and she challenges his assuredness of his own rightness because he has not "a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than [his] own conduct and [his] own petty aims" (Eliot 347). Maggie has confidence enough in her own authority to tell Tom that while she has been wrong it is because she has "feelings that [he] would be the better for, if [he] had them" (Eliot 347). This confrontation helps bring about Maggie's movement away from total renunciation and into her fuller agentic self. In renunciation, Maggie has been "preoccupied with [the] choice between self and other"; challenging Tom is the moment where she shifts from "denying self and living for and through others" to evaluating her own needs and acting based on her own values or moral precepts (Belenky et al. 77).

Girl as Agent

Book Five of *The Mill on the Floss* ends with Maggie's confrontation with Tom, Tom's expunging of the family debts and Mr. Tulliver's death. When Book Six begins, Maggie is nineteen and has been working for two years in a school because, as Lucy Deane relates to Stephen Guest, she is "determined to be independent" (Eliot 365). Maggie's actual decision to work and the reasoning behind her decision is handled outside the action of the novel; however, the basis for her decision is rooted in her family's altered circumstances after the bankruptcy and her relationship with her brother.

Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy and his loss of social status affect Maggie's sense of financial, social and emotional stability. When Mr. Tulliver loses his sense of self, he is no longer able to be Maggie's emotional bulwark and instead he relies on her for solace. The bankruptcy forces

Maggie to look inward and make changes in her own behavior or way of being; but she also sees how her father's altered situation has changed the dynamics in her immediate and extended families. She watches as her mother grows more and more anxious about losing the items of value that she brought into her marriage with Mr. Tulliver. Mrs. Tulliver literally sits with her "laid-up treasures" weeping because she knows they are ruined and their property, including some personal effects, will be sold to pay off creditors (Eliot 202). As a consequence of her husband's folly, Mrs. Tulliver is going to be relieved of items she holds dear, some of which she made with her own hands. She says to Tom in Maggie's presence, "to think as your father should ha' married me to bring me to this" because for Mrs. Tulliver, as with most women of the era, her fate lay with the fate of her husband (Eliot 202). Once she married Mr. Tulliver, not only were his joys and triumphs hers to take pride in, but his failures and difficulties were hers to lament as she would have little ability to alter the family's circumstances through her own means. Mrs. Tulliver is subject to her husband's whims and left vulnerable by his bad fortune. As much as Maggie loves and honors her father, she has sense enough to understand how the family came to this pass, and, after immersing herself in renunciation, she has the wherewithal to think about her options and what power she is willing to give over in her life.

Maggie also knows that regardless of her father's wishes and sentiments, she cannot depend on Tom or his support once Mr. Tulliver dies. Throughout their lives together, Tom has shown himself to be all too willing to withdraw affection, honor, love and support from Maggie when she disappoints him or appears to challenge his place in the family and social strata. When Maggie and Tom argue after she ends her relationship with Philip, Maggie expresses to Tom her frustration with the unbalance in their emotional relationship.

> … [Y]ou have always enjoyed punishing me – you have always been hard and cruel to me: even when I was a little girl, and always loved you better than any one else in the world … . You have no pity: you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. (Eliot 347)

In those moments, Maggie is no longer overly concerned about Tom's view of her, about making him happy or whether she will lose his affection and approval. He does not approve of her behavior but Maggie is learning that she has a right to her own feelings and ideas about the world. When Tom asks Maggie if she shows her affection by "disobeying and deceiving" their family and professes to having a "different way of showing [his] affection," Maggie replies that that is "because you are a man, Tom and have power, and can do something in the world" (Eliot 347). While Maggie may say that she does not have the power to effect change in the world, her intention to do only what she "acknowledge[s] and feel[s] to be right" in the face of Tom's demand that she submit to those who do have power reveals an emerging understanding that she does have the capability to change things in her world (Eliot 347).

Working would seem a natural consequence of a careful evaluation of her options. In making the decision to work, Maggie will have considered the stability of her relationship with her brother. She would also have been keen not to relive the anxiety of the Tulliver's lean years or leave herself vulnerable to the same pain her mother experienced in losing her treasures. She will also have considered how working would affect her status in the community, especially in light of her family's willingness to support her. This self-reflectiveness and critical analysis of her situation in the face of possibly strong disapproval of her decisions indicates a woman who has grown into her fuller agentic self.

Maggie's relationship with Stephen Guest reveals a young woman who is becoming aware and more in tune with her passionate and adult sensibilities. However, more important than her relationship with Stephen is her decision to give him up as well as how she handles the fallout in the community and her family when public opinions turn against her. Maggie may enjoy Stephen's attentions and may harbor romantic feelings toward him, but her sense of moral rightness will not allow her to intentionally inflict emotional distress on another when it is in her power to do otherwise. We see evidence of this throughout Maggie's life but most especially when she embraces renunciation and becomes the good daughter and a balm to both her parents. Stephen is informally promised to her cousin Lucy Deane and no matter Maggie's feelings for Stephen or his feelings for her, her ethics will not allow her to be with Stephen even if it means sacrificing her own happiness or her good standing within the community.

Maggie's moral values are born of experience and what Belenky et al. term "connected knowing." Connected knowing builds on the "conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience rather than pronouncements of the authorities"; these knowers also develop procedures, such as empathy, to gain access to other people's knowledge (Belenky et al. 112-113). Maggie has always used empathy as a way of connecting with others and drawing on their experiences. Much of why she is drawn to Philip is due to the compassion and pity she feels for him because of his deformity and how other, stronger people, like Tom, treat him. She is able to view the world through both Philip's and Stephen's eyes, and in doing so reconsiders her assumptions about herself and her own needs. Philip is able to make her appreciate qualities within herself that she has suppressed because of renunciation, and Stephen allows her to understand true pleasure and joy. With Stephen she is able to realize that Philip

was right and that she did not understand true renunciation as "she had renounced all delights then, before she knew them, before they had come within her reach" (Eliot 470).

While Maggie may allow herself to be borne along by the tide during her rowing trip with Stephen, she makes the decision not to remedy her situation by marrying him because she feels in that moment that she has been deprived of choice and because of the harm it will cause her family and friends. Maggie goes home to the mill hoping for refuge and understanding from her brother, but it is not entirely shocking that Tom refuses to forgive her actions. Her previous decision to work prepares Maggie for this eventuality as well as gives her options. If Maggie had never worked or had the experience of supporting herself, she would have been in a much more vulnerable position after her adventure with Stephen. She would have been more susceptible to the pressure from both Tom and the St. Oggs community to right her wrong by marrying Stephen. Some critics see either option, whether it is marrying Stephen or living in disgrace, as a "variation on the same catastrophe" (Fraiman 122). However, Maggie's principles prompt her decision to stay in St. Oggs because she desires to make amends to Lucy, though she could have left for the anonymity of a school situation. Giving up Stephen in those circumstances and facing the social consequences in her community and family is a choice of a responsible agent that has weighed her desires against her options. Maggie's choice may be at odds with the values of her community but she understands her inner self and knows that she cannot be good to herself or feel good about herself if she feels her actions have wronged others.

Similarly, Louisa's association with an inappropriate lover precipitates her emergence as a responsible agent. James Harthouse allows Louisa to see and experience herself through a different set of standards. Her near elopement with Harthouse prompts her second interview with her father where she lays before him the defects of his teachings.

> "I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny."
>
> …
>
> "How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!"
>
> …
>
> "I never knew you were unhappy, my child."
>
> "Father, I always knew it. In this strife I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon. What I have learned has left me doubting, misbelieving, despising, regretting, what I have not learned; and my dismal resource has been to think that life would soon go by, and that nothing in it could be worth the pain and trouble of a contest." (Dickens 236-238.)

The feelings, sensibilities and beliefs that Dickens has hinted at from the very beginning of the novel come pouring out of Louisa in her dialogue with her father. Louisa has believed that life is so futile and meant so little that there was no use fighting against injustices or fighting for happiness. Instead of being fulfilled by the peace and calmness of mind rational thinking and logic was supposed to instill in her, she learns that it is best to avoid confrontation and wait for life to end because life is short and there is little she could hope to do with it or in it. Her interlude with Harthouse opens Louisa to feelings she does not know how to process because of her father's system of Hard Facts that rejects softer emotions. For Louisa, all the facts and reason she has been taught cannot save her from the ruin her heart wants to lead her to. Though

she says that he has quashed all feeling in her, the fact that she can identify the wrong done to her says that she is not without hope of moving past the deficiencies in her upbringing.

Louisa's breakthrough with her father leads her to make her first true decision as a responsible agent, that being her decision to leave Bounderby. While her association with Harthouse has made Louisa more open to her own emotional state, her interview with her father solidifies her desire to affect change in her life in what little way she can. Louisa has gone through the motions of life thinking that any attempt to change the course of her ship would prove futile. When she spoke to her father before her marriage with Bounderby, she was looking for an inkling of feeling or direction from him that would allow her to choose something different for herself than a loveless marriage with someone who was not equal to her in any way. Opening up to her father after her planned assignation with Harthouse allows something in Mr. Gradgrind to open to her in return. Mr. Gradgrind finds himself shaken in his beliefs.

> Some persons hold … that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but as I have said, I mistrust myself now. (Dickens 246)

Louisa's breakdown in their previous conversation opens Mr. Gradgrind to a new understanding of both himself and his daughter. Mr. Gradgrind tries to support his daughter by relating his new consciousness and nascent understanding of Louisa to Bounderby. The audience is meant to understand that this is a sea change for Mr. Gradgrind as he is finally seeing the results his system has had on his children. He knows now that there are facets of Louisa's character that she has suppressed and never allowed to develop; and it is those circumstances that brought her to her current state and made her susceptible to Harthouse.

Seeking to give Louisa a respite, he requests Bounderby give Louisa a period of rest at her family home. Bounderby, however, is full of his own consequence and cannot fathom a changed Louisa and so orders her return to his household by noon the next day or be estranged from him thereafter. The threat is made to Mr. Gradgrind; however, Mr. Gradgrind's new understanding of Louisa and the blight he himself has been to her life precludes the idea that Mr. Gradgrind did not relate Bounderby's ultimatum to Louisa. Thus, the choice to forever leave her husband's home and return to her father is Louisa's alone to make and represents a recovery of sorts from the "effects of her father's former teaching" (Thomas 66). Her decision, no matter the outcome, is the culmination of her passage into full, responsible agency. Louisa has to understand how leaving her husband's home will affect the rest of her life as there is no real possibility for divorce for her and thus no chance for a woman's happiness (Thomas 66). Nevertheless, Louisa's choice is the product of all her experiences and the culmination of her emotional development. Before, Louisa could not see the possibilities in her life and thus married Bounderby because she had no hope that she could ever do much or be happy in her life. Leaving Bounderby offers Louisa a chance to make a difference in, at least, her world and some measure of peace going forward.

CONCLUSION

By examining George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, we are able to acquire a greater understanding and fuller appreciation of the female coming-of-age story and the father's role in her tale. In my first chapter, I analyzed the social and literary concepts that were central to the examination of the two novels as coming-of-age stories. I

explored definitions of agency and what it means to be an agent when you live within a society with its particular set of standards and norms. Many accepted definitions of agency give rise to the idea that everyone is an agent and everyone is equally in possession of free will or the ability to do otherwise. While it seems to be true that everyone possesses some modicum of agency, the term agency as it is frequently used is not just meant to denote a person's ability to form desires and act on those desires. Rather, agency seems to require critical thinking on the part of the agent. We learned that a person could make a decision and act on desires without those actions being the actions of a responsible agent. For instance, children often act based on their desires and personal motivations, but we rarely confer the same level of agency in children as we do in adults because we believe that children tend to lack the unfettered capacity for forethought or self-reflectiveness. Children are restricted by their lack of knowledge borne of their own immaturity. As the girl must move from child to adult, so to must she grow into her fuller, agentic self.

I also examined the lives of middle-class Victorian girls primarily during the first half of the era. If agency is somehow constrained or influenced by the society in which a girl lives then it was important to understand the expectations that were placed on girls of the period and the aspirations she may have had for herself. Much of the middle-class Victorian girl's life was centered on her training to be a respectable middle-class Victorian woman. Almost from birth, this girl leads a largely gendered existence. The games she plays, what she is taught, how she is taught, and what she wears are all designed to inculcate her with the ideas of womanhood and her duty to her family. The family played a significant role in the life of the Victorian girl. Who she was and what she could become was chiefly dictated by the position of the family in the community and the dynamics of the family within the home. Because society at that time was

largely patriarchal, much of the energy of the women in the household was centered around the comfort of the males, but most especially the father. The father in Victorian homes played an important role in the life of his daughter. He had the ability to dictate the terms of her life, and she had little legal recourse if she found herself at odds with his wishes. A daughter was expected to be a source of pride and pleasure to her father and was to ease his burdens and provide him solace until such time as she moved from the keeping of her father into the keeping of her husband. Because the father was a major influence in his daughter's life, a poor or harmful relationship with her father could have a damaging effect on the girl's passage into responsible agency.

Additionally, I examined the bildungsroman and its conventions. The bildungsroman in English literature of that era was mainly about a boy's quest for self. Because boys are typically invested with agency at the outset of their stories, the conventions for the traditional bildungsroman do not always apply neatly to stories that focus on women. The heroes in the male coming-of-age stories are able to imagine different lives for themselves and then contemplate how to make that happen. For boys, the doing is their act of agency because they have always been gifted with the ability to dream a different reality. It is different for girls because girls have to fight for the ability to dream before they can take even tiny steps toward action.

In chapter two, I closely analyzed the coming-of-age stories of Louisa Gradgrind and Maggie Tulliver. Viewing a girl's coming-of-age story as a movement into agency, I first examined the events where Maggie and Louisa acted as non-agents in their lives. Our introduction to these characters and their stories helped define the expectations and the limits set for them within their families. Maggie Tulliver appears to have a fairly conventional family and

is expected to conform to traditional notions of womanhood. Maggie, we are shown, is not a conventional child and struggles with the expectations set for her. Maggie's non-agency, however, is not rooted in her strong will or struggle to conform; rather, Maggie's youth makes her a non-agent because she lacks the intellectual and emotional maturity to affect change in her life. Louisa Gradgrind's lack of agency is rooted in the defective teachings of her father. Louisa has been groomed in the philosophy of Hard Facts and has lived a life devoid of fancy and imagination. Her father has raised her to be a logical and rational, thinking person, yet neither he nor her mother respects Louisa's ability to manage her own behavior as she is expected to defer to her younger brother Thomas, and he is often called to task over her words and actions. Louisa's lack of agency culminates in her marriage to Bounderby, which she enters into because she lacks the capacity to imagine of a different possibility for her life.

The move into responsible agency is not seamless transition where a girl begins her story as a non-agent, has an epiphany and thereafter acts only as a responsible agent. It was important to examine areas in the story where Maggie and Louisa tried to act as responsible agents, yet they retreated when they received pushback or criticism from people close to them. There is always some give and take as a girl moves toward full agency. She is never completely a non-agent, yet once she begins acting as an agent she does not always maintain her status as a responsible agent. In many small ways, Louisa challenges her father's teachings and expectations. From the beginning of Louisa's story, we are persuaded that she understands that her father's teaching have created a lack in her life, even if she is not quite aware of where that deficiency lies. Maggie makes a move toward responsible agency through embracing renunciation in the face of her father's bankruptcy. Maggie evaluates her circumstances and tries

to find ways that she can affect change in her life. While living renunciation is an agentic choice, bowing to the pressure of her brother to end her friendship with Philip is not.

In chapter two I also analyzed the events where Maggie and Louisa acted in their capacity as a responsible agent. Most significant for Louisa is her confrontation with her father after she effectively ends her inappropriate relationship with James Harthouse. Louisa finally lays bare for her father the shambles he has made of her life. Her interlude with Harthouse has revealed to her how empty her life has been. Louisa is now able to imagine a different path for her life, and, as her first interview culminates with her marriage to Bounderby, her second ends with the dissolution of their marriage. Maggie Tulliver's most significant agentic decision is her decision to work. Maggie's decision is the result of her experience and critical thought about her life. Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy has a devastating effect on the entire Tulliver clan, and Maggie would not have been eager to repeat the experience of financial deprivation if there is anything in her power to change it. It is made known early in the novel that Maggie is an intelligent girl, and she strives to increase her knowledge base wherever she can. She is also very perceptive and is empathic to feelings and desires of others. Maggie would clearly know what working would mean to her socially as well as what it would mean to her family, yet she weighs those factors against her options and desires and decides to work. Maggie also stands on her moral principles and refuses to back down in the face of her brother and the St. Oggs community when it appears that she has eloped with Stephen Guest. It would be easy for Maggie to give into the pressure she faced and retreat from her decision. By not doing so, she solidifies her position as a responsible agent.

It is not always easy to determine when the actions of the protagonist are prompted by her own desires or the expectations set by others as family structure and family politics play

important roles in the girl's quest for agency. Often she is motivated by a combination desire and expectations. If Maggie and Louisa were boys, they could learn to navigate between the two forces by leaving their homes and creating their own place in the world where those sometimes opposing desires could remain largely in sync. But because they are women they cannot make that physical journey and instead have to look inward and develop the intellectual and emotional resources to travel beyond the limitations set for them.

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