## Laboring Fathers: Parenthood, Class, and Gender

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<1>For Condition-of-England writers and artists, the portrayal of working-class men presented something of a dilemma. The reformers often wished to show the sufferings of these men, whether it be the harsh working conditions or the sparse living conditions; however, such sufferings were often the reasons behind many of the uprisings in the early- and mid-nineteenth century and thus associated the men with violence in the minds of many in the upper- and middle-class audiences for these works. The goal of most reformers was to create sympathy for the working poor. For Victorians sympathy was the root of morality and thus desirable. It had the power to transform one's views of people unlike oneself, making it the ideal vehicle for those trying to explain the sufferings of the working classes to the upper and middle classes.(1) The problem then became how to create sympathy; the solution for many reformers was domesticity.

<2>In *A Man's Place,* John Tosh claims that Victorian middle-class culture was "constructed around a heavily polarized understanding of gender" and that the separation of duties during the Victorian era was more extreme than before or after (46). Tosh's assertion highlights the dilemma frequently raised in discussions of Victorian masculinity as it pertains to parenting: the emphasis on separate spheres of influence and the idealizing of the feminine, especially in terms of motherhood, excluded men from most discussions of parenting. For as Martin Danahay notes, Tosh's terminology, "polarized," "underscores the radical separation of men from women, and home from work in the Victorian period" (17). Further, the extreme separation of masculine and feminine sets masculinity as analogous to femininity and thus to motherhood; to be a caring, active father would place a man in danger of effeminacy to many Victorians. For reformers, then, associating working-class men with domesticity removed them from the public sphere and from the violence associated with the workplace.

<3>In literature and artwork, presentations of parenting among the middle and upper-classes tended to focus on mothers, nannies, governesses, and tutors—fathers were rarely seen.(2) In presentations of the working classes, however, a number of narratives focused on fatherhood, often presenting the father or father-figure as the sole parent or guardian. Several factors contributed to this distinction: working-class families could not afford to hire child care or instruction for their children, necessitating greater involvement by both parents. Also, increased mortality rates among young, working-class women, the result of a variety of factors including dangerous working conditions, poor food and sanitation, and increased complications from

childbirth, would force many working-class fathers to assume roles less likely to occur in middle- and upper-class households.

<4>But for many Victorians the image of the working-class parent would not be a readily accessible one.  To most Victorians readers, working-class adults, especially men, would be associated with images of machine breaking, Chartism, and mob violence.  The Luddite risings in 1812, Manchester's Peterloo Massacre in 1819, and machine breaking in 1826 and 1828 had created images of violent working-class mobs in the minds of many Victorians.  The workers in these early strikes were inevitably pictured as male, and the image of the worker as an ignorant, violent animal out of control was a frighteningly real one for many middle- and upper-class Victorians.  The fear of machines and the men who ran them was also fed by essayists such as Thomas Carlyle, whose warnings about the "Condition of England" played upon growing fears of mechanization.  In "Signs of the Times" (1829) he warns:

> Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.  They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force of any kind.  Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions—for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle.  Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character.  (228-29)

To Victorian readers, Carlyle's mechanized worker was an industrial Frankenstein's monster, a mad, destructive creature too repulsive, too horrible to even gaze upon.  But his image of the worker in "Chartism," a decade later, was even more fearful.  In the essay, Carlyle first reminds people of past incidents of violence by workers involving burnings, machine breakings, and vitriol attacks, then warns that things are little improved, that "Chartism means the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad, the wrong condition therefore or the wrong disposition, of the Working Classes of England" (119).  Periodical articles such as *Fraser*'s "Public Nurseries" (October 1850) reinforced assumptions, describing working-class children as "accustomed to misery, ill-usage, and privation from their earliest infancy; their spirits are broken from the cradle . . . worse than all, they never have their feelings touched by softening influence of parental love" (397).  Such portrayals were not unusual.  Claudia Nelson observes that "used to thinking of the poor in terms of Bill Sikes and Fagin, many Victorian social commentators depicted [working-class men] as uncivilized, and even subhuman, a criticism having especial urgency for child rearing:  ill-disciplined, oversexed, abusive, and unhealthy, working-class adults would make the worst possible parents" (176).  Visual presentations such as George Cruikshank's eight-print series *The Bottle* (1847) and Charles Allston Collins's *Drink* (c. 1850) furthered assumptions about abusive, dysfunctional families.  One of the most telling, Frank Holl's *Newgate: Committed for Trial* (1878), confronts viewers with an unforgettably forceful scene of a battered wife visiting her husband in prison (Figure 1).  As the husband's hand reaches out toward her, the woman seems to clutch tightly to her infant, a move highlighted by the gleam of her wedding ring.  The protective curve of her body around the infant, coupled with her emotionless expression, suggest that the threat is neither false nor uncommon.  Thus to many upper- and middle-class Victorians, the stereotypical working-class family included and absent or ineffective mother and a drunken and abusive father.

<5>For writers and artists sympathetic toward the poor, such views of families placed them among the undeserving poor and were thus detrimental. Further, they were not necessarily factual. Charles Booth, author of *The Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889-1902), notes that "the simple natural lives of working-class people tend to their own and their children's happiness more than the artificial complicated existence of the rich" (qtd. Himmelfarb 131 ).(3) And district-nurse superintendent M. Loane wrote in 1905, "The ideal of fatherhood is less developed among the poor than the ideal of motherhood" yet she also noted that many fathers were "tender and assiduous nurses" who were generous with their affection for their young children, with the children seeing them "as companions, as abettors of many forbidden practices, and as protectors from the occasional slaps and rather frequent reproofs [from] the acknowledged ruler of the family [the mother]" but not as figures of authority or abuse (228-29). Thus, if novelists and visual artists were to use working-class fatherhood as a means of creating sympathy for the working poor, they had two obstacles to overcome: gender expectations and assumptions of violence and abuse.

<6>As one looks at the representations of working-class fathers, the majority of sympathetic portrayals occur during three distinct periods, each influenced by economic and social concerns surrounding the working poor. The first period extends through 1850 to the Great Exhibition and is a response to the "Hungry '40s" and to the working-class agitation that resulted. The second period extends from the 1850s until the 1866 financial crisis. The final period continues from the late '60s until the end of the era and seems to be inspired by several factors, including the rioting sparked by fears of financial crises, the legalization of trade unions, and the agricultural depression that began in 1873. In all three cases writers and artists use images of working-class fatherhood to calm the fears of the upper classes by stressing the intelligence and caring of the fathers, demonstrating the fathers' strong moral spirit and thus their worth, and by casting them in a feminized role suggesting that they are too emasculated to be a threat.

<7>The majority of early Victorian portrayals of working-class fathers are literary and, for the most part, writers found working-class fatherhood problematic. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell's John Barton exhibits both the best and worst traits of gender and class. A widower and single father by the third chapter, his care and concern for his only child, a daughter, is beyond question: "Between the father and the daughter there existed in full force that mysterious bond which unites those who have been loved by one who is now dead and gone. While he was harsh and silent to others, he humoured Mary with tender love" (58). But he commits murder, anonymously striking down the son of a mill owner. According to Raymond Williams, John Barton is "a dramatization of the *fear of violence* which was widespread among the upper and middle classes at the time" (102). However, by showing the picture of the loving, devoted father before—and after—the murder Gaskell raises an interesting conflict for upper- and middle-class readers: how could a loving, caring father become involved in factory violence? While some critics, such as Williams, see John Barton's act as a flaw, a violation of the character's integrity, it can also be viewed as a warning from Gaskell. Within the novel there is a clearly defined progression of Barton's character: from caring husband and father, who happens to be working class, to a worker forced to watch the families of those around him suffer and die, to murderer, and finally to penitent. Gaskell's plotting would lull readers into seeing Barton as nurturing and caring, so that the violence of the murder would be a compounded shock. And her plotting makes it clear that it is the families, particularly children, starving and ill as a result of the strike

that motivate Barton, not personal suffering or gain.  Further, throughout the novel we are aware not only of Barton as a father, but also of Carson, the mill owner, as the father of the victim.  The climax of the novel is when these two fathers finally meet and share their suffering and loss as husbands and fathers, rather than as worker and master:

> "And have I had no suffering?" asked Mr Carson, as if appealing for sympathy, even to the murderer of his child.
>
> And the murderer of his child answered to the appeal, and groaned in spirit over the anguish he had caused.
>
> "Have I had no inward suffering to blanch these hairs?  Have not I toiled and struggled even to these years with hopes in my heart that all centered in my boy?  I did not speak of them, but were they not there?  I seemed hard and cold; and so I might be to others, but not to him! who shall ever imagine the love I bore to him?  Even he never dreamed how my heart leapt up at the sound of his footstep, and how precious he was to his poor old father.—And he is gone—killed—out of the hearing of all loving words—out of my sight for ever.  He was my sunshine, now it is night!  Oh, my God!  comfort me, comfort me!" cried the old man, aloud.
>
> The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears.  Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for little Tom, in years so long gone by that they seemed like another life!
>
> The mourner before him was no longer the employer; a being of another race, eternally placed in antagonistic attitude; going through the world glittering like gold, with a stony heart within, which knew no sorrow but through the accidents of Trade; no longer the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor, and desolate old man.  (434-435)

The exchange is important on many levels: the experience of fatherhood creates a common ground between men of differing classes, allowing them to meet, albeit temporarily, without class being a dividing factor.  But more important is the sense of sympathy that is created for both men.  As Melissa Schaub explains:

> The cognitive nature of sympathy–its existence as a process of translation of signs of emotion (especially words) in others into a feeling in oneself–requires the exercise of rationality, and that makes it, in Gaskell's model, a tool of self-discipline.  . . . [S]ympathy will increase self-control rather than dangerously eroding it (as many nineteenth-century writers feared), but Gaskell achieves this effect by de-emphasizing the physicality of suffering and highlighting instead its emotional force. (16)

Thus for Gaskell, the ability of Carson and, more importantly, of Barton to feel sympathy removes the threat of further violence by returning both men to figures of rationality and understanding.

<8>A final indicator of the importance of Barton to the overall understanding of the novel is that Gaskell originally entitled the work "John Barton." As she later elaborated: "Round the character of John Barton all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went, with whom I tried to identify myself at the time, because I believed from personal observation that such men were not uncommon, and would well reward such sympathy and love as should throw light down upon their groping search after the causes of suffering" (42). It was only at the insistence of her publishers, Chapman and Hall, that the title was changed. Thus, for her, Barton is the central figure around whom the theme and plot develop.

<9>Interestingly, a year later in *North and South* Gaskell removes her most prominent working-class father, Higgins, from the central violence of the novel. Although portrayed as crusty and argumentative, Higgins is none the less a loving single parent who resists the desire to indulge in personal gratifications such as alcohol for his daughter's sake. When a factory lock out spurs talk of violence, Higgins is vehemently opposed:

> "And above all there was to be no going again the law of the land. Folk would go with them if they saw them striving and starving wi' dumb patience; but if there was once any noise o' fighting and struggling—even wi' knobsticks—all was up, as they knew by th' experience of many, and many a time before. They would try and get speech o' th' knobsticks, and coax 'em, and reason wi' 'em and m'appen warn 'em off; but whatever came, Committee charged all members o' th' Union to lie down and die, if need were, without striking a blow; . . . they didn't want to have right all mixed up with wrong, till folk can't separate it, . . ." (259)

It is important to note, however, that when violence does occur it is still tied to issues of domesticity, depoliticizing the issue: Boucher is motivated by despair over his inability to provide for his large and starving family, not by class hostility. Thus Gaskell again illustrates to readers that working-class fathers become violent not by nature but by circumstance. It is only when they cannot fulfill their role within the domestic sphere, by providing for and protecting their families, that they succumb to the corruption of the public sphere.

<10>A general change in attitude toward the working poor occurred during the early 1850s. Britain had practiced free trade since 1846 and the end of the Great Famine moved England from the "Hungry '40s" to the "Fabulous '50s." The Chartist movement had been in retreat since 1848 and the Young Ireland movement had failed. Further, the reigning peace of the Great Exhibition–no demonstrations, strikes, or violence–convinced many Victorians that the country was entering a time of general prosperity. In fact, Thomas Macaulay asserted that 1851 would "long be remembered as a singularly happy year of peace, plenty, good feeling, innocent pleasure, national glory of the best and purist sort" (206). Victorians believed that the violence associated with working-class reform was at an end and the conditions among the working poor were improving daily. Indeed, most historians agree there is a shift in discussions of British working classes between 1850-70. According to Keith McCleland, there are four factors relevant to the change: more secure and visible trade unionism (although still confined to small groups of workers); expansion of co-operatives (creating more security and resources); "citizenship" for a

significant minority in 1867; new legitimacy of the working class and its institutions in both civil society and state  (74-91).

<11>Mid-century also proved to be a turning point in terms of gender issues.  In *Invisible Men* Claudia Nelson points to 1850 as a dividing line marking "the full flowering of the development of Victorian doctrine of separate spheres" (3), establishing the female, domestic sphere as the moral center and removing men from it, into the corrupt public sphere.  During this period, even fictional working-class families reflect the shift.  For example, Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*, focuses on a traditional family (as compared with a single father) with Ursula Halifax overseeing the family home and in scenes focusing on family or domestic issues appearing to be the driving force.  Nevertheless, the relationship between John Halifax and his oldest daughter, Muriel, provides another example of a working-class father who is notably nurturing.  Born blind and before Halifax's success moves him from working to middle class, Muriel is particularly doted on by her father.  Although readers do not often see the two characters interacting, when they do it is significant, whether it is the scene of Halifax taking his daughter with him to the works or a denial of the fact she is maturing.  But arguably the most significant presentation occurs with her death.  The evening of Muriel's death is fairly routine: the family gathers in the evening, talks, sews, reads from the bible while Muriel holds her baby sister, Maud.  The women in the family–Muriel, Maud, and their mother–fall asleep by the fire and remain in the family room when the men retire for the night.  The next morning, Muriel's birthday, they find her dead.  And while she dies surrounded by women, the sense of gendered space is violated two pages later, at the close of the chapter, when John Halifax visits his daughter's bedchamber to mourn her:

> John went to the door and locked it, almost with a sort of impatience; then came back and stood by his darling, alone.  Me he never saw–no, nor anything in the world except that little face, even in death so strangely like his own.  The face which had been for eleven years the joy of his heart, the very apple of his eye.

For a long time he remained gazing in a stupor of silence; then sinking on his knees, he stretched out his arms across the bed with a bitter cry—

> "Come back to me, my darling, my firstborn! Come back to me, Muriel, my little daughter– my own little daughter!"

> But thou wert with the angels, Muriel–Muriel! (355-56)

The depth of a father's grief is brought to the forefront by the accompanying illustration (Figure 2).  In it, Halifax's dark coat and pants create a strong horizontal line drawing the viewer's eye directly to Muriel's face, which is virtually centered in the woodcut.  Indeed, Halifax's outstretched arm and hand point directly to Muriel's sleeping cap and the diagonal created isolates her face and emphasizes the peaceful repose.  The simplicity and plainness of the furnishings and background provide little to distract from the two figures and the heavy darkness of Halifax's figure, balanced partially by the shadows above and to the side of the deathbed, emphasizes both the depth and the simplicity of the father's grief.  Together the text and the

illustration underscore the emotional, rather than stoic, nature of Halifax's grief which disrupts notions that align the masculine with the rational and the emotional with the feminine.

<12>Similarly, the visual artists of this period countered the suffering and violence of the images from the 1840s with portraits so idealized they border between the sentimental and the mawkish. In Arthur Hughes' *The Woodman's Child* (1860), a little girl sleeps under a tree while her parents work some yards away (Figure 3). Although the father is a distant figure in the background, a sense of parental love and concern is projected through the mat and wraps used both to cushion the child from the hard ground and to provide protection from the cool dampness of the shade. Foregrounded, and thus the main focus of the picture, the stocky child appears healthy and well cared for, and her peaceful slumber, indicated by the squirrel and robin that sit near her, combined with the carefully delineated wicker basket or trug, thickly woven clothing, and earthenware pot create a working-class pastoral. More direct in its presentation of the father/child relationship is Hughes's *Home from Work*, exhibited the next year (Figure 4). "A paean to the joys of parenthood" (Casteras 35), the canvas shows the loving greeting of a little girl to her father, a woodsman, as he returns from work. The ruddy complexion, dark clothes, and rather dirty condition of the father are strongly contrasted with the pale blond cleanliness of the young girl in her nightgown. To the right, a slightly older girl stands on the cottage threshold, smiling and looking down at the stooped father and younger child who clings to her father's neck as she kisses him. The heads of the three figures form a clear triangle just above the center of the canvas, further accentuated by the strong, white vertical of the child in the center of the picture, the framing of the father's head by the child's white arm, and the sharp incline of the older child's neck and head. Further highlighting the formation are the wallbound setting and the arched top of the canvas. The isolation of the three figures suggests that they are a closed unit, creating an underlying pathos from the lack of a mother figure. Typical of a follower of the Pre-Raphaelites, Hughes underscores the sentiment through the language of flowers: prominent in the painting are pussy willows (remembrance), crocuses (youthful gladness), and ivy (fidelity, constancy). Nevertheless, the bag of tools and wood indicates the father's hard work, while the obvious love of both parent and children within the closed, rustic setting creates a sense of tranquil domesticity and makes "a tender hero" of the laboring father (Casteras 35).

<13>Although working-class fathers occasionally appeared in mid-century Victorian fiction, it was not until the later Realist movement that they became a recognizable figure in Victorian art, often as the central focus of the presentation. The last three decades of the nineteenth century are generally recognized as radically different socially, politically, and aesthetically from those of the mid-century, with many historians seeing 1866 as a turning point. That year for the fourth, and last, time in the nineteenth century there was a major cholera outbreak, which killed more than fifteen thousand people. It was followed by a harsh winter which drove the poor and unemployed onto the streets in protest, and made the destitute and homeless more visible. Earlier that year, discussion concerning the Second Reform Act had begun, and a meeting of the Reform League in Hyde Park grew heated enough to be labeled "a riot." Although the clash was unusual, discussion concerning the Act tended to be heated since its passage in August 1867 added large numbers of urban laborers to the electorate. Establishing the principle, though not the practice, of universal manhood suffrage,(4) the Act was viewed as "a leap in the dark," with the widespread conviction that political power was shifting from a responsible few to what Walter Bagehot described, in his introduction to the second edition of *The English Constitution*

(1867), as an "ignorant multitude."  Catherine Gallagher insists that the "reshaping" of social realism in the 1860s resulted from "stressing the necessary discontinuity between facts and values."  Often described as "somber or disillusioned," these later works of social realism lack "a certain optimism and naiveté" typical of earlier social protest literature (Gallagher 266).  Such realism also affected periodical publications.  While *Punch* had moved away from its early radical stance, in December 1869 W.L. Thomas founded the *Graphic*, a journal which soon became known for its social realism, especially in its engravings.  Using a single full-scale engraving, such as Luke Fides's "Houseless and Hungry" (1869) or Hubert von Herkomer's "Christmas in a Workhouse" (1876), the *Graphic* "captured the complex social and artistic mood" of the period with "stunning accuracy" (Keating 129).

<14>Complicating issues in the art world is the rise of the Aesthetic movement, signaled by the publication of Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1866 publication of his first series of *Poems and Ballads*.  And while publications such as the *Graphic* and Realist paintings such as those of Herkomer and Fildes can be seen as expression of Victorian society's curiosity and fear of those now being granted, at least in theory, political power, the rise of the Aesthetic movement can also be seen as reflective of the late-Victorian social and political climate.  For, in 1874 the Liberal Party, under William Ewart Gladstone, was defeated, ending twenty-eight years of Whig-Liberal dominance.  Thus, it is not surprising that while images of the "Great Unwashed" remained a constant feature of Victorian art, the majority of Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery exhibitors avoided disturbing viewers, sanitizing their characters and portraying the poor as suffering but surviving.  And it is only practical that the most pointed illustrations of poverty would occur in the popular periodical press rather than on the walls of public exhibitions; not only were the situations and solutions pointedly critical of the middle class, but also a magazine or book can always be closed if the image becomes too disturbing while a painting confronts its owner daily.  Yet, as Julian Treuherz concludes, "paradoxically, it was the successful introduction of 'difficult' subjects in a journalistic context which prepared public taste to accept them in works of art" (11).  And by their appearance, the works constituted institutional legitimization, whether grated by the editors of the periodicals or the board of the Royal Academy.  So, while social realism found its strongest foothold in periodicals such as the *Graphic*, it also appeared, albeit it in a more acceptable form, on gallery walls despite the dominance of the aesthetic movement.

<15>For the most part, Victorians adopted the Enlightenment's optimistic view of human nature, rejecting "the Hobbesian view of a viciously flawed human nature, which only a repressive state can control and only a god of grace can redeem," as Fred Kaplan explains (14).  Instead, Victorians embraced the ideas of eighteenth-century philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith, important not only for their concepts of human nature and sympathy, but also for their gendering of these concepts.(5)  Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) not only establishes the concept of sympathy as a product of unstable passion rather than of reason, but also, as Laura Hinton summarizes, introduces the concept of the sympathetic spectator through whom "sympathy becomes an expression of visual pleasure" (2).  In his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith built on and popularized many of Hume's ideas, including those of the sympathetic spectator.  Within his discussion of the sympathetic spectator Smith not only uses the conventional male reference, "man," but he also separates sympathetic spectatorship from

other humanistic acts along gender lines.  For Smith, "Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man" (274).  According to Smith:

> The fair sex, who have commonly much more tenderness than ours, have seldom so much generosity.  . . . Humanity consists merely in the exquisite fellow-feeling which the spectator entertains with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned, so as to grieve from their sufferings to resent their injuries and to rejoice at their good fortune. The most humane actions require no self-denial, no self-command, no great exertion of the sense of propriety. They consist only in doing what this exquisite sympathy would of its own accord prompt us to do.  But it is otherwise with generosity.  We never are generous except when in some respect we prefer some other person to ourselves, and sacrifice some great and import interest of our own to an equal interest of a friend or of a superior.  (274)

Since the typical Victorian viewer or patron was predominantly middle class and male, such explications become relevant in the study of late Victorian realist paintings, and may suggest why the overwhelming number of paintings focus on female subjects.  Within Victorian society, the male role is often defined as that of paterfamilias;(6) thus, paintings focusing on women or children in need of help or protection would inspire a sense of duty, a need to aid those considered by their very nature helpless and in need of guidance and protection.  And the legal and cultural expectations were such that, for middle-class male spectators, such paintings would carry what Lacan describes as the "*belong to me* aspect of representations" (81).  Such would not be the case with pictures focusing on male figures.  Instead the male spectator would now be facing Lacan's mirror of identification, common traits or situations or fears which might trigger sympathy or generosity.  But combined with the sense of reflection is also one of distance, of separation, inherent in the act of gazing:  a viewer gazing at a canvas is always, at some level, aware that what is viewed is an object and thus different or "other."  Indeed, Smith noted a similar reaction:

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.  Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers.  They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.  . . . It is the impression of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy.  (9)

Further distancing the typical Victorian viewer would be the issue of class; indeed, class demarcation was arguably stronger than that of gender, with middle-class identity providing the standard by which others were implicitly judged.(7)

<16>Unlike Victorian women, men were never icons, there was no male equivalent to the Angel in the House.  As Claudia Nelson discovered, "It is difficult to argue for any kind of consensus about what characterized the ideal father, in part because so few Victorians seem to have imagined that ideal fatherhood was possible.  . . . the most common criterion for their categorization was probably economic, that of social class" (36).  According to Peter Searns, the

"nineteenth-century at large abandoned any participation effort to define daily family involvement for men" (57).  Ideal manhood rarely went beyond the physical.  For working-class fathers paternal satisfaction was chiefly gained through three roles: breadwinner/provider, "final disciplinary arbiters," and workplace mentors (passing their profession on to their sons); however, reduced contact with children at home weakened the position of fathers as disciplinary figures within the home and changes in employment alternatives and educational opportunities often meant a weakened sense of shaping a son's future (Searns 57-59).  But of the middle-class values tied to Victorian fatherhood, one of the foremost is the ability to provide for the family economically.  And the inability of many working-class men to provide for their families is the theme of many painters.  Works such as G.F. Watts's *The Irish Famine* (1849-50), Thomas Faed's *From Hand to Mouth* (1879), or Hubert von Herkomer's *Hard Times* (1885) and *On Strike* (1891) portray destitute families, while focusing on the male figure through placement:  as the apex of the triangle formed by wife and mother in Watts, and through the strong horizontal lines created by standing in Faed, and Herkomer.  And even when the artist suggests an underlying complexity to the scene, as Faed does with the subtitle of *From Hand to Mouth*, "He was one of the few that would not beg," for Victorians the inability of the man to provide for his family at the most basic levels would render the portrayal more emasculating than ennobling.

<17>A slightly different approach occurs in Fildes's *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward* (1874), which combines a father's inability to provide with an image of nurturing (Figure 5).  When it originally appeared as the etching "Houseless and Hungry" in the inaugural issue of the *Graphic* (1869), the scene was one long chain of suffering figures.  But when Fildes recreated the image for exhibition at the Royal Academy he enlarged the sixteen-inch illustration to almost epic proportions (eight feet) and incorporated detail and lighting to add emphasis and commentary.  Two sets of figures are highlighted in the composition: the mother and children foregrounded and to the left and the father and his family in the background and to the right.  Although her foregrounding and the light above and to her left ensure that the woman initially captures the eye, placement and light also mean that the viewer's attention soon moves to the man and the child he holds.  Similarly, Fildes's use of red, both in the young mother's shawl and in the neckerchief of the "out of work artisan," in a painting dominated by grays, browns, and blacks, links the two figures as it draws the viewers' attention to them.  As Treuherz notes, "the livid colour, the huge scale and the extended frieze of the tragic figures brought . . . a heightened emotionalism" (84).  Increasing the heart-rending potential is the inclusion of an extract from a letter Dickens wrote to Fildes describing a scene he witnessed in 1855 when the workhouse in Whitechapel was too full to admit more applicants:  "'Dumb, wet, silent horrors!  Sphinxes set up against the head wall, and none likely to be at the pains of solving them until the *general overthrow*'" (Forster 53-54).  For viewers, the tender nursing of the child and the tears of the ill wife would only increase the pathos underscoring the man's inability to provide for and to protect his family.  By emphasizing the failure of the men to meet the primary requirement of Victorian masculinity, economic provision, these figures are feminized for the masculine spectator and thus reduced to figures in need of paternal protection.  But such demarcation also distances the viewer to the extent that the figures become objects of pity rather than sympathy and are thus easier to dismiss.

<18>Much more problematic for Victorian viewers would be the portraits of nurturing working-class fathers, still poor but distinctly tending to the needs of their children.  Some studies of the

early nineteenth century, such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes*,(8) describe a society in which domesticity and masculinity coexists harmoniously with men having "intense involvement" with their children.  Further, an evangelical revival stressing importance of child rearing while celebrating primacy of men supported this view with fathers overseeing variety of domestic issues:  discipline, education, marriages, careers, and religious practice. During the eighteenth century fatherhood had been considered analogous to the concept of God, the Father, making patriarchy something to be respected and celebrated.  Thus William Cobbett could write: "How many days, how many months, all put together, have I spent with babies in my arms! My time, when at home, and when babies were going on, was chiefly divided between the pen and the baby. I have fed and put them to sleep hundreds of times, though there were servants to whom the task might have been transferred" (176).  But as Tosh observes, "As the gendered character of man and woman, of father and mother, became more polarized, there was less tolerance for paternal behavior which appeared to encroach on the maternal role" (87).  As early as 1824 Thomas Carlyle expressed horror at the sight of his mentor, Edward Irving, bathing his baby while taking care of his children:  "I declared the washing and dressing of 'him' to be the wife's concern alone" (*Letters* 167).  According to Carlyle the visual impact of the six-foot tall Irving holding small baby was repulsive.  And he felt that such behavior was bad enough indoors but even more frightening in public:

> Oh that you saw the giant with his broad-brimmed hat, his sallow visage, and sable matted fleece of hair, carrying the little pepper-box of a creature, folded in his monstrous palms, along the beach; tick-tiking to it, and dandling it, and every time it stirs an eye-lid, 'grinning horrible a ghastly smile,'(9) heedless of the crowds of petrified spectators, that turn round in long trains gazing in silent terror at the fatherly Leviathan!" (*Letters* 172)

By 1850, however, paternal devotion such as Cobbett's or Irving's would have been viewed as "womanly" and outside the typical masculine realm.

<19>As the concept of fatherhood changed, so did the concept of the ideal mother.  The image of the Victorian mother as "unworldly, self-sacrificing, loving, and pure . . . identical to the ideal Christian" reached its zenith about mid-century (Nelson, *Invisible* 29).  In fact, "a woman's motherhood was usually seen as putting [her purity] beyond doubt" as demonstrated in novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) where "maternity could cleanse even the fallen."  But while Nelson argues that "this trope applied only rarely to men and fatherhood" (30-31), perhaps it provided the inspiration for reformers' portrayal of single parent fathers.  Further complicating the gender issues, discourses of both Ten-Hours Movement and Chartism stressed twin ideals of male breadwinners and female domesticity, to the point of symbolism; thus, violations of these codes undermined the ideology upon which the movements were based.  For reformers, then, the concept of androgynous men who could behave more like mothers than fathers, who could be portrayed in the domestic rather than the public sphere, would be one that completely removed the threatening aura of violence from the working-class men portrayed.

<20>In Thomas Faed's *Worn Out* (1868) a poor carpenter sleeps at the bedside of his sleeping child (Figure 6).  Faed described the painting as "'represent[ing] a working man who has been watching his little boy through a *restless* night.  The child, holding on by his father's shirt sleeve,

has fallen asleep: daylight finds them both at rest—*worn out*'" (Treuherz 44).  The bowl of food on the floor, the mat blocking any draught from under the door, the coat providing extra warmth, and the child's book and violin all convey the domestic scene of  a laborer who nurtures rather than abuses his family.  It was a message recognized by the critic for the *Times*, who commented that the details "help to tell the story of the struggle of love and care and some refined tastes with poverty'" (Treuherz 44).  Further, the bright dawn and brilliant colors, coupled with sense of companionship created by the father's hand resting on the bed with the child clenching the sleeve, all suggest a happy outcome.  And just as a mother's duties were typically seen as being "so all-consuming as to preclude involvement in public affairs" (Nelson 18), the working-class father who so tenderly cares for his child, in both illness and health, must also be removed from the public issues of strikes, labor reform, and Chartism.

<21>It was the model of the mechanic holding his child in *Houseless and Hungry* and the *Casuals* who gave Fildes the idea for *The Widower* (1876):

> "I was painting in a rough-looking fellow with his child.  He got tired of standing, so I suggested he should res.  He took a chair behind the screen.  I went on with something else— no movement reached me, so I peeped behind the screen and there I saw the motive for 'The Widower.'  The child had fallen asleep, and there was this great rough fellow possibly with only a copper in the world, caressing his child, watching it lovingly and smoothing its curls with his hand." (qtd. Treuherz 85)

The resulting oil painting, even larger than the *Casuals*, is a sorrowful work in which a laborer holds his infant who has just died (Figure 7).  The indication given by the title and the ages of the small children that this is the second recent loss further compounds the pathos.  The scene is sorrowfully over looked by an elder daughter, who has apparently assumed many of the duties of the mother, while three other small children play on the floor unaware of the tragedy.  Critics of the time called attention to the seeming contradiction of the burly laborer tenderly clutching the child:  "'Note the powerful, yet subdued expression of the principal idea, viz. the rough helplessness and momentary tenderness of a rugged nature,'" instructed the *Academy Notes* (Treuherz 85).  For Victorians gender was clearly marked through a series of binary oppositions: male/female, public/private, worldly/domestic, reason/emotion.  Thus, the emotion of the moment, shown in the bowed head and the kissing of the lifeless hand, feminizes the figure.  Nevertheless, male viewers could empathize with the tie between father and son, creating a bond across classes.  Ideally, male viewers would be drawn in, forced to reject preconceptions of working-class men as drunken, violent brutes and reconsider them as fathers similar to the viewers; yet the feminization of the figure through pathos keeps him in the realm of "other" and would remove the unconscious threat evoked through the implied an linking of classes.

<22>The choice of working-class fatherhood as a subject, then, would allow the viewer a sense of self-reflection (the common bonds of fatherhood) while the markers of class difference (tools, clothing, setting) would cast the subject in a role of *other*, worthy of sympathy and dutiful charity.  Further, pictures of working class fathers caring for children removed the men from the contaminated, morally questionable public sphere and moved them into the private sphere and gave them moral standing; thus any feminization that occurred with the move from public to

private was not a fall but rather an ascension.  And for the middle-class male spectator the reflection would be sympathetic rather than pitiable; the other would be a figure worthy of admiration and aid rather than dismissal.  Thus we can see that while many Victorian artists and writers portrayed the suffering of the poor in graphic terms, working to alleviate upper- and middle-class fears concerning the laboring poor by countering the stereotype of the violent male laborer with images of working women and children suffering under the yoke of a cruel system, others sought to remove fears in a more subtle way.  By showing him in an emotionally vulnerable situation, as a nurturing father, writers such as Gaskell and artists such Faed and Fildes changed the Victorian conception of the male worker from a brutal alcoholic with an ever-present potential for violence to that of a domestic caretaker whose concerns centered around family rather than politics.

Endnotes

(1)For a fuller discussion of the Victorian concept of sympathy see Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*.  Ithaca:  Cornell UP, 2000.(^)

(2)Claudia Nelson's title for her study of representations of middle-class fathers in Victorian periodicals illustrates the problem:  *Invisible Men*.(^)

(3)Himmelfarb goes on to observe, however, that Booth is speaking of the upper tier of the working poor, not the destitute.(^)

(4)Although the agricultural working class were not included until the Third Reform Act of 1844, the Second Reform Act was nevertheless seen as the pivotal movement.  Although a propertied franchise, it included laborers who were: 1) householders, subject to a one year residential qualification and payment of rates; 2) lodgers in accommodation worth £10 per year, subject to a one-year residential qualification; or an occupation franchise for those with lands/tenements worth £10 per annum.(^)

(5)For a fuller discussion of Hume's and Smith's creation of the sympathetic spectator and its application to the Victorians, see Laura Hinton's *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy* (NY:  SUNY Press, 1999).(^)

(6)For a fuller discussion of representations of paterfamilias see Joseph Kester's *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Brookfield, VT:  Ashgate Publishing, 1995).(^)

(7)See Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: a History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (NY: Oxford UP, 1977).(^)

(8)Davidoff and Hall's work focuses primarily on pre-Victorian, middle-class families and ends in 1850.(**^**)

(9)Milton's Death in *Paradise Lost,* II. 846.(**^**)

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