

ANCOATS AND THE MANCHESTER SLUMS IN TWO LATE VICTORIAN NOVELS.

Trefor Thomas

In the spring and summer of 1889 three remarkable women, Beatrice Potter (later Webb), Mrs Humphry Ward and Margaret Harkness were in Manchester, exploring the city and the surrounding cotton towns as part of their research into the problem of class relations and urban poverty. All three visited the Manchester slum districts as part of this journey into the 'unknown England' of poverty and deprivation concealed within the northern city. All three women came to Manchester with established reputations as experienced social investigators, familiar with poverty in the East End of London. Two of them were already published and successful novelists, committed to the use of fiction as a means of publicising and analysing social problems: the third, Beatrice Potter, was at the time planning to write fiction. In a diary entry for 30 September, 1889, she remarks that the form might provide 'a more dramatic representation of facts than can be given in statistical tables', and the opportunity to explore 'social laws' through an imaginative dramatisation of their effects upon individuals'. Although the attitudes of the three women to urban poverty, and to class-relations were individual and distinctive, socially and intellectually they had much in common beyond the fact of gender. All came from respectable middle-class backgrounds, and were part of a network of London based intellectuals, linked by family and personal contact, as well as social perspective, and with access to many sources of power in English political life; all had been engaged in practical attempts to bridge the divide between the classes in the East End of London, by active social and cultural interventions.

This article will consider two fictions, Margaret Harkness's *A Manchester Shirtmaker* (1890), and Mrs Humphry Ward's *The History of David Grieve* (1892), which drew directly on the researches undertaken in Manchester in 1889, and will explore their accounts of the slum districts of Ancoats and Angel Meadow. The third woman, Beatrice Potter, also published a book which was inspired by the Lancashire experience: her *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (1891) completes the triptych.

In November, 1883 Beatrice Potter, then a wealthy young woman of 25 living in London with her middle-class family stayed for a fortnight with relatives in the Lancashire towns of Bacup and Oldham, as part of an attempt to discover whether she had a true vocation for social investigation. Taking the pseudonym of 'Miss Jones', and the assumed identity of a farmer's daughter come north to experience life in an industrial town, she lived with a family of weavers, and later recorded her impressions. She also explored other parts of Lancashire, including in her itinerary visits to Manchester and to Oldham. In March, 1889 she was again in Lancashire, staying in Manchester, where she visited Margaret Harkness in her lodgings, while undertaking research for her planned book on the co-operative movement. Her family had deep roots in the region, and in Manchester in particular; her paternal grandfather Richard Potter was the brother of Thomas Potter, Manchester's first mayor, and her maternal family

came from a small village near Bacup. The visits to Lancashire had a profound and lasting effect on the young woman. In *My Apprenticeship* she remarks that the 'Bacup adventure' was a decisive and formative moment in her intellectual life. Her discovery of a powerful sense of local community among the mill workers, held together by a puritan religious faith, and expressing itself through the growth of co-operation, was contrasted unfavourably with her experience in the East End slums of London.²

Margaret Harkness was the second cousin of Beatrice Potter; they were often together as children, and travelled abroad as adults. She was a daughter of the vicar of Wimborne St. Giles in Dorset.³ In 1889, when visited by Beatrice, she was living in lodgings in Manchester, researching her novel. In diary entries, Beatrice Potter remarks on her 'great freedom, originality and variety of thought', and on her 'extraordinary activity of mind'. She was in many ways an example of the much-discussed 'New Woman' of the 1890s, attempting to live independently, and to earn her living as a writer and journalist. She was a close friend of Marx's daughter Eleanor, with whom she explored the East End slums, and was associated with Tom Mann, John Burns, and H.H. Champion. At one time in the late 1880s she was an active member of the marxist Social Democratic Federation and was politically active in the Dock Strike of 1889. Later, however, she



Mary Ward, the author of *David Grieve*.

became involved with the Salvation Army. She was the author of five novels, all dealing with aspects of slum life. *A Manchester Shirtmaker* is the only text in which she ventures away from the East End.

The History of David Grieve was first published in 1892, in the standard conservative three-volume format. Its author, Mrs Humphry Ward, was perhaps the most celebrated novelist of the period. Her *Robert Elsmere* (1889), which explored a crisis of religious faith, had been an astonishing success, and had brought international fame to the writer, selling, as she remarks '400,000 copies in the U.S.A. alone'. In an undated letter written to her brother in Manchester she remarks that the 'gains from David Grieve have been large . . . about £9,000 so far'. She was an establishment figure, the niece of Matthew Arnold, and a natural conservative by temperament. At the time of writing this novel she was becoming deeply involved in the Settlement movement in London. Her choice of Manchester as the setting for *The History of David Grieve* was partly the result of the influence of her brother W.T. (Willie) Arnold, who was employed as a sub-editor on the *Manchester Guardian*, and lived in the city at 75, Nelson Street.⁴ She made regular visits to Manchester in the 1880s, staying at his house. His influence as a guide to the city and its culture was a key factor in determining the final shape of the text. In her posthumous tribute to him she wrote that 'he made Manchester interests his own, its economic bearings, and its human implications; its art and music'. According to her he also 'invited street arabs home', and attempted to help them.⁵ Her investigation of the city was undertaken with his guidance. She describes herself as 'wandering, looking and listening' through the centre of the town, and finding the vegetarian restaurant and its radical culture which she uses to good effect in her novel. Although as she comments, her experience of Manchester was 'not long', its effects were 'curiously vivid', and she never forgot her explorations, finding in the spirit of the Lancashire people hope for the future.⁶

She also made several trips to Derbyshire: in April 1889 she visited Glossop, which she describes as 'a smoky little town full of chimneys', and stayed overnight in a farmhouse at Hayfield, to absorb atmosphere for her proposed novel.⁷ The indefatigable Beatrice Potter was once again responsible for providing Mrs Ward with an introduction to the Lancashire families she had met in Bacup, and for arranging visits to a number of co-operative enterprises in Manchester and elsewhere in the region. In early 1889, for example, Mrs Ward was at the Sun Mill Cotton Spinning Co at Oldham, where she met workers active in the movement. She remarks in a letter to her son that she had seen 'everything there was to see' at Oldham, which impressed her with the 'wonderful development of its civic sense', and had met many of Beatrice Potter's relatives at Bacup, the 'best and nicest people' she had ever come across. She also conducted diligent researches into literary sources, writing to an unidentified Manchester bookseller requesting working-class autobiographies, and reading all she could obtain.⁸ In letters of the period she remarks constantly on the resilience and community spirit of the northern working people, and on the contrast she found with the slums of London.

Behind both texts considered in this article can be traced the influence of Beatrice Potter, and her particular convictions about Lancashire and poverty. Both treat Ancoats and its neighbouring districts as the symbolic epicentres of debate



Beatrice Potter (Webb) in 1891.

about slum living conditions in the north; both make dramatic use of a contrast between the degeneracy of the London slum dwellers, and the sense of community, identity, and moral purpose they identified among the Lancashire poor. To begin to understand the motivation which led these women from the familiar terrain of the East End to Ancoats requires an outline of the social context surrounding attitudes to poverty in the 1880s.

The moral panic surrounding the so-called 'rediscovery' of the problem of poverty in England in the period after 1883 is dominated by London, and in particular by the slums of the East End. As Stedman Jones remarks, fears engendered by the presence of a substantial and disorderly casual labouring class near the symbolic centre of government permeated 'conservative, liberal and socialist thought alike'.⁹ Mearns's *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, and the articles and novels of George Sims formed the beginnings of a distinctive literary tradition in which the problems of the East End poverty were explored and publicised. The Trafalgar Square riots in January 1886 were followed by a prolonged period of widespread unrest and general lawlessness, ensuring that the condition of the slums became a matter of urgent social concern. The fears of the propertied classes were articulated in the theory of urban degeneration, with its Darwinian account of the slow hereditary decline of slum dwellers into moral and physical brutishness, with the associated dangers of 'contamination' of civilised values. The increasing appeal to the working classes of the marxist political analysis promoted by the S.D.F. added a new urgency to the debate. While the literary tradition of fiction analysing and publicising social conditions in the East End slums during this period is well known,¹⁰ much less attention has been given to the equally significant tradition which focuses on Manchester, and in particular on its most widely discussed slum district, Ancoats.

F.W. Crossley's remark that Ancoats should be properly understood not as 'a district to the east of Manchester', but as a village 'lying at the foot of the Mountain of Transfiguration'¹¹ provides an insight into the underlying

attitudes which structure many accounts of the district. The comment indicates its importance as a site of social, cultural, and political experiment. The Ancoats Brotherhood, the Manchester Art Museum, and the University Settlement were only the best known of a wide range of social interventions whose aim was to bridge the gap between the classes, and to offer rational and elevating educational and recreational facilities to the inhabitants. Within this broad context, national publicity was also given to individual examples of cultural progress: the self-taught botanist Richard Buxton, who lived in Gun Street, Great Ancoats, all his adult life was constantly cited by middle-class commentators as a demonstration of what could be achieved by effort and determination. In his essay *Sweetness and Light for the Manchester Slums* the antiquarian Abraham Stansfield also comments on an 'old Ancoats Botanist' who 'resides in the very middle of the grimy region', but has transformed his 'dingy dwelling' into a 'paradise' of sweetness and light by his cultivation of rare and unusual plants.¹² The 'Ancoats Bard', Joseph Cronshaw, who began life as a barrow boy, and published several collections of verse, was another representative of this tradition of moral heroism. The district was also at the centre of many of the crucial debates which took place within the workers co-operative movement: a key conference of national delegates was held in the Public Hall, Kirby Street, Ancoats, in April, 1863.

Thus Ancoats was represented in late Victorian bourgeois thought through a complex duality. On the one hand, it was an example of a northern slum to match the worst that could be found in London, with all the standard associations of violence, depravity, disease, and general social disorder. The historical connections of the district with radical political activity, and with rioting and looting, was a further aspect of the problem. New Cross, an open space on the edge of Ancoats, had been celebrated as a meeting place for Manchester activists from the late eighteenth century onwards; its use as a rallying point for political dissent in the nineteenth century gave it a symbolic importance within the life of the city. On the other hand, the district could be shown to offer a living demonstration of the power and truth of the dominant social doctrines of advance through self-culture and individual moral progress. At the heart of this cultural nexus was the question of literacy, the control of print, and the availability of suitable reading matter for the aspiring working class. Of particular interest in the context of this article is therefore the opening in 1867 of the Ancoats Branch Library, in a building designed by Alfred Waterhouse, followed in 1878 by the addition of the first boy's Reading Room in Manchester. By 1897, this Branch housed 17,000 volumes, of which 6,000 were fiction, and its 'light', as an early commentator remarked, 'illuminated the darkness around'.

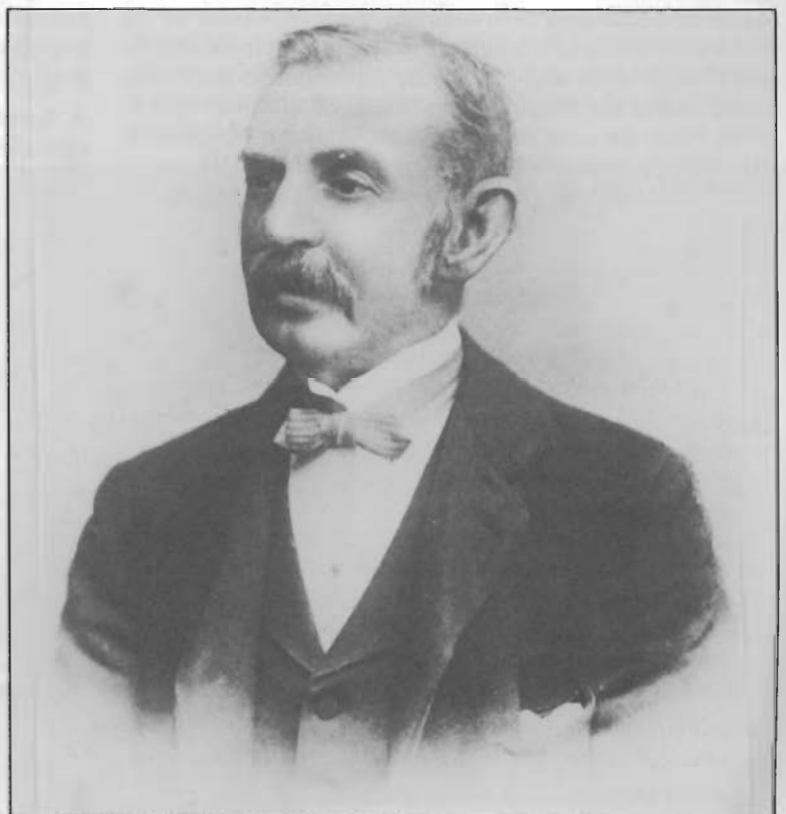
It is thus not surprising that some late Victorian novelists should identify Ancoats, and the districts surrounding it, especially Angel Meadow, as key locations within the symbolic topographies of Victorian culture. Fiction, in all its manifestations, was the literary mode most concerned with the complexities of social inter-action in Victorian England. Indeed, many realist novels of the period are best understood as asserting the values of community, co-operation, and social responsibility in a society perceived as increasingly divided, alienated, and threatened by violent upheaval. Ancoats, and other Manchester inner city slum

districts, provided a striking context for the exploration of the complex web of relations between the classes, and of possible solutions to the persistent threat to social order posed by the urban masses. Although the fictions discussed in this article may occasionally provide information about the detail of Manchester working-class life not readily available from other sources, their main interest to historians is in their status as influential and widely disseminated texts whose analysis gives an insight into the cultural formations which structure late Victorian bourgeois representations of the urban slum, and of its relation to other aspects of the northern industrial city.

David Grieve

Mrs Ward's decision to follow her great success with *Robert Elsmere* with a Lancashire story was influenced by her personal connections with Manchester, and by the contrast she made, following Beatrice Potter, between the London and Lancashire working classes. In this way she arrived at the central conception of *The History of David Grieve*, as a northern *bildungsroman*, tracing the moral and material progress of her protagonist from his origins in the rural, pre-industrial poverty of Hayfield, through his experiences as a Manchester second-hand bookseller, to his final apotheosis as an advocate of profit sharing, industrial co-operation,¹³ and housing reform. She remarks that David was to be 'a son of the North', 'strong, simple and meditative', 'a workman himself, and the leader of workmen'.¹⁴ The trajectory followed by David Grieve can thus be identified, on one level, as related to the pervasive self-help literature of the mid-Victorian period, and also to the earlier literary traditions of puritan biography and autobiography. The interest in co-operation and profit-sharing, however, places the text firmly in the 1890s.

The plot of *The History of David Grieve* can easily be summarised. He is an orphan, brought up with his sister Louie, by his uncle, on a small farm in Hayfield. Although



Joseph Cronshaw: the Bard of Ancoats.



Ancoats Branch Library, designed by Alfred Waterhouse and opened in 1867.

books are difficult to obtain, he learns to read and write. He attends a narrow, Primitive Methodist sect, where the preacher befriends him, and provides some reading matter. After a series of rebellions, he leaves home, and runs away to Manchester, where he obtains work with a second-hand bookseller, Purcell. Eventually, he breaks with Purcell, and sets up his own bookshop in Potter Street, off Deansgate. He courts, and marries Purcell's daughter, Lucy. His business is successful, and he diversifies into the publication of local political and social tracts. Towards the end of the book he becomes involved in a project to improve derelict houses in Ancoats. Much of the novel is occupied with the detail of bohemian and radical culture in the city, centred around the vegetarian restaurant run by an old Chartist, 'Daddy' Lomax¹⁵, and with David's social and intellectual movement from sectarian methodism to secularism. Although some of the plot relates to David's religious life, to his problems with his materialistic wife, and part of the action occurs in France, where David has a tempestuous sexual relationship with an artist, Elise, for most modern readers Ancoats, Manchester, the carefully researched account of its radical culture, and of David's intellectual development, are at the heart of the novel.

Indeed, it can be argued that Ancoats itself is the true moral core of the novel. It is a street scene in the district which begins the process by which David begins to identify in himself a new sense of social and moral responsibility:

*The mill-girls standing on the Ancoats pavements; the drunken lurryman tottering out from the public-house under the biting sleet of February; the ragged barefoot boys and girls swarming and festering in the slums; the young men struggling all around him for subsistence and success . . . these for the first time became realities to him.*¹⁶

David's discovery of a sense of social purpose is represented in two ways, both of which bear directly on Ancoats. His

printing company, which publishes pamphlets on social and economic questions relating to the problem of poverty, is run as a profit sharing co-operative enterprise in Ancoats. Mrs Ward's visits to co-operators in Lancashire had led her to believe that this was the way forward. Some details of the scheme operated by the company of Grieve & Co are given in the text:

*I have left for myself adequate superintendence wages, a bonus on these wages calculated in the same way as that of the men, a fixed percentage on the capital already employed in the business, and a nominal thirty per cent of the profits . . . fifty per cent of the profits is employed in bonuses on wages, and twenty per cent set aside for the benefit and pension society . . . my thirty per cent must provide me with what I want for various proposals connected with the well-being of the workers.*¹⁷

The system is a success, and expands to employ 300 workers. The social benefits of the profit-sharing scheme are made apparent when the workforce refuses to join a strike, and continues to run the company when David is distracted by personal problems. David remarks that 'the number of men who take a personal interest in the House, who do their utmost to forward work, and to prevent waste and scamping, is growing fast'. A further refinement to the process is the formation of an Apprentices School within the works, to educate the younger operatives:

*Six of our best men give in rotation two hours a day at the time when work and the machines are slackest. And we have one or two teachers from outside. Twenty-three boys have entered.*¹⁸

The printing house itself is also engaged on the broader enterprise of publicising these ideas through the series of pamphlets on social and economic problems which it produces.

A further aspect of the Ancoats theme in the novel is the character of Dora, the spiritual and idealistic daughter of 'Daddy' Lomax, the old Chartist bookseller who employs



Ancoats Branch Library, Reading Room.

THE HISTORY
OF
DAVID GRIEVE

BY
MRS HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR OF 'ROBERT ELDERER'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1892

[All rights reserved]

David as a young man. Dora, unlike David's materialistic wife Lucy, has a natural empathy for the poor, and she determines to live in the slums herself:

Dora went to live in Ancoats, that teeming, squalid quarter which lies but a stones throw from the principal thoroughfares of Manchester, and in its varieties of manufacturing life presents types which are all its own. Here are the cotton operatives who work the small proportion of mills remaining within the bounds of Manchester — the spinners, minders, reelers, reedmakers, and the rest. Here are the calico-printers and dyers, the warehousemen and lurrymen, and here too are the sellers of fents, and all the other thousand and one small trades . . . there are innumerable low, red-brick streets where the poor live and work, which have none, however, of the trim uniformity which belongs to the worker's quarters in the factory towns pure and simple . . . Manchester in its worst streets is more squalid, more haphazard, more nakedly poor even than London . . . yet the native Lancashire element, lost as it is beneath many supervening strata, is still there, and powerful, and there are strong and well defined characteristic interests and occupations which bind the whole together.¹⁹

Dora too established a School for the Ancoats mill-girls, in her own home: she teaches reading, writing, and the study of the Bible.

Finally, David becomes involved, with a group of wealthy Manchester business men, in a scheme to demolish 'one of the worst bits of James Street' in Ancoats, and to 'build new houses for working-people.'²⁰ David remarks that the 'old tenants' will have a prior claim on the new rooms when completed. This project, with the profit-sharing scheme adopted in the print-shop, occupies a central place in the social symbolism of the novel, and it marks David's final conversion from the political radicalism which preoccupied him at an earlier stage.

The History of David Grieve, it can be argued, is best read as a late Victorian variant of a literary tradition most prevalent around the middle of the century and sometimes identified as the 'fiction of reconciliation'. Such novels explored the division and contradictions implicit in industrial culture, and indeed, within bourgeois consciousness itself, and offered, within the confines of literary form, solutions to the intractable problems of class relations. *The History of David Grieve* is of especial interest as a text produced in a later period, when the issues of class relations, slum living conditions, and political violence were once again at the centre of social debate. The key to this text is its concentration on the dramatisation of upward social mobility, on the value of the artisan culture, and on the need to form new patterns of industrial relations based on co-operation and profit-sharing rather than paternalism, and the doctrines of individual self-culture. The choice of Manchester as a setting, and on Ancoats as a symbolic centre around which the narrative hinges, represents a conviction that Lancashire, rather than London, possesses in its working-class tradition of self-education and independence, the power to offer models of regeneration which can transform society. The boundaries to the debate set within the fiction are inevitably bourgeois, and socially conservative: social advance requires the leadership of charismatic individuals of whom, David Grieve is a type, and the text rejects socialism as a way forward, arguing that it 'weakens the most precious thing in the world . . . the spring of will and conscience in the individual', but the stress on a combination of profit-sharing and co-operative production does indicate a new approach to the problems of urban poverty.



Market Place, Manchester. From the Westmoreland Edition of Mary Ward's novels.

A
MANCHESTER SHIRTMAKER:

A REALISTIC STORY OF TO-DAY.

By JOHN LAW,

AUTHOR OF "OUT OF WORK," "CAPTAIN LOBE," ETC.

LONDON:

AUTHORS' CO-OPERATIVE PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
20 & 22, ST. BRIDE STREET, E.C.

A Manchester Shirtmaker

It is hardly possible to imagine a sharper contrast in readership and mode of publication than that offered by these two texts. *A Manchester Shirtmaker: A Realistic Tale of Today* was published in 1890 by the Authors' Co-operative Publishing Company, in a single volume, at the price of one shilling. The novel received little publicity, and has not been reprinted. The novel utilises the conventional *bildungsroman* mode, although many of its classic features are overturned or subverted. It traces the life history of a young woman, Mary Dillon, who is found in Manchester as a baby, hidden behind a curtain in a chapel, beneath a statue of the Virgin Mary. The child is sent to the workhouse, later becomes a servant, and marries a respectable skilled workman, Jack Dillon. In their cottage she was 'perfectly happy at last', and the city streets and shops were images of hope and opportunity. This phase of her life represents the beginnings of a conventional progress from workhouse to respectable skilled working-class life, but the readers' expectations are sharply challenged. Jack Dillon is crippled in an industrial accident, and dies after a long illness. To support their child, she is forced to move to Angel Meadow, and to obtain work in a sweatshop in Ancoats:

... it was a long low room that held at least two hundred women. There was a deafening roar of machinery, for each woman sat before a sewing machine.²¹

The accommodation in Angel Meadow is 'a little, two-roomed cottage, with no outlet except a front door leading to the street... an old house, full of rats and mice.' The community is violent and threatening:

Such faces there were in those houses! Women with bloated features and matted hair, whose language none could understand except the initiated, men besotted with drink, who barely spoke at all... two women were fighting with clogs, those weapons which are so much worse than nails or fists. They held the clogs in their hands, and struck out at each other, stamping their bare feet in the mud, and cursing in Lancashire dialect.²²

After the theft of her sewing machine, a last contact with the world of work, she uses the remains of her money to buy a headstone for husband and child in Ardwick Cemetery, and poisons her child with opium, as she cannot feed him. She is tried for murder, and found to be insane, despite a passionate plea from the dock on behalf of women. She is taken to the County Lunatic Asylum, where she strangles herself with a white silk pocket-handkerchief given her by a Manchester philanthropist who visits her in the Asylum.

The trajectory followed by the main protagonist in this fiction is an ironic reversal of the standard pattern. Here, the traditional patterns of reconciliation and resolution through negotiation, familiar to readers of all nineteenth-century social realist fiction, are replaced by a pattern in which the city, and the slum, is not represented as the site of potential social regeneration, but as the actual cause of poverty and deprivation. Mary Dillon's decline into poverty and madness is a mirror image of the processes described in *The History of David Grieve*. Thus the novel articulates with careful detail the gradual processes of her fall. None of the elements in the plot which produce the decline can be said to relate to weakness of character or to lack of resolve. The novel also offers a detailed account of working conditions in a typical Ancoats sweatshop, as part of the analysis of economic process which underpins the novel:

... two hundred heads were bent over the machines... the noise made her quite bewildered. A long counter shut the workers off from the door, through which she had entered; and leaning against the counter were women and children, all of whom had bundles of shirts, wrapped in old clothes, or pocket-handkerchiefs.²³

The only assertion of collective will, as opposed to individual passivity, in the novel, occurs at this point. The women stage a mock attack on a Jewish employer of sweated labour, forcing him to the ground:

He drew back, but he could not escape, for he was already hemmed in by the shirtmakers. Each girl caught up her old meat tin, and the whole two hundred advance upon him, rattling the reels of cotton and the scissors, crying loudly 'Sweater!, Sweater!'²⁴

In *A Manchester Shirtmaker*, therefore the rhetoric of class reconciliation through individual moral progress is replaced by a new consciousness of the powerlessness of the individual. None of the traditional agencies of charity penetrate to the real situation of the poor: a 'sleek, well-fed curate, such as is seen at a garden parties' represents the Church, offering the 'remedies' of emigration, temperance, and smaller families. The Law is equally distant from the lives of the slum dwellers, and in addition represents a masculine hegemony. Mary Dillon's cry in the dock — 'Oh, gentlemen,

if you were but women' — sums up a constant theme in the text. The medical profession is represented by the chemist from whom Mary Dillon steals the opium with which she poisons her baby.

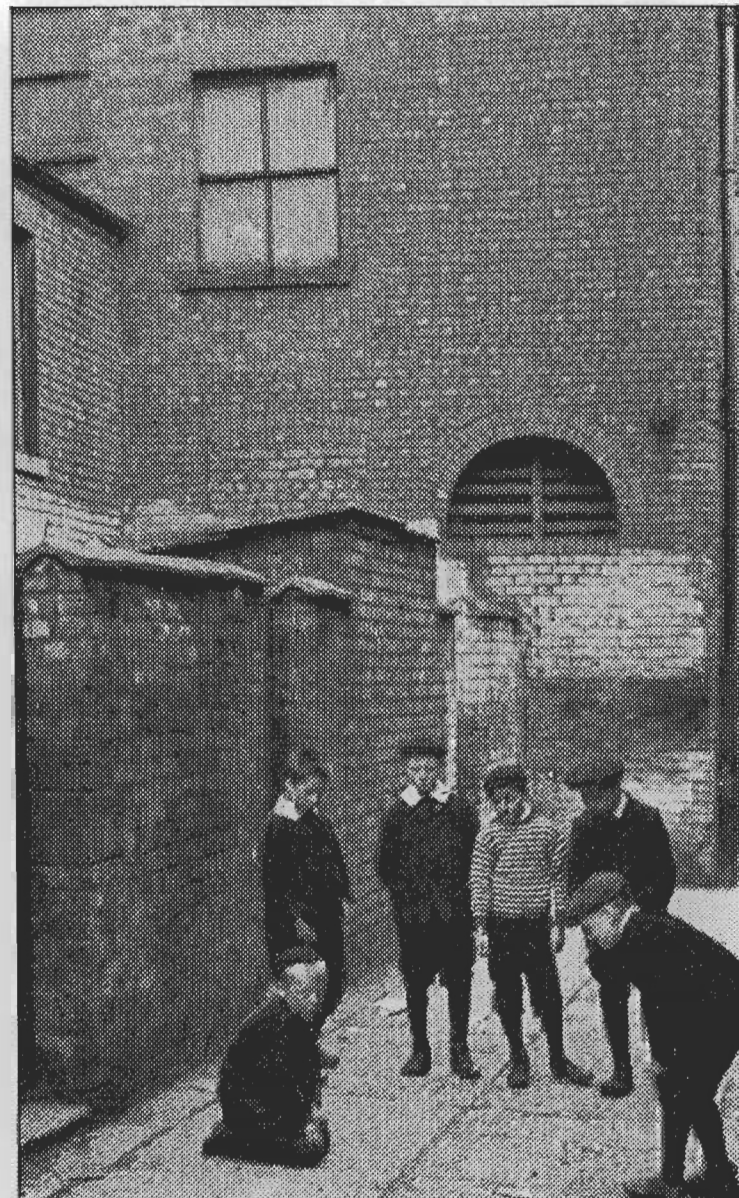
In many ways this text is related to the work of Zola, whose naturalistic fictional accounts of working-class life were becoming available in English translation in the late 1880s. Zola's English publisher, Henry Vizetelly, who was jailed in 1889 after a campaign by the National Vigilance Association, for his part in making Zola available in England, was also the publisher of Margaret Harkness's first novel. Zola's belief in the power of naturalism as a literary mode, and his view of the novelist as scientist-observer, were strong influences upon a new generation of English writers, of whom Margaret Harkness was one. His claim that fiction could 'show the mechanism of the useful or harmful' in social life so that society might later be directed better is represented in the discovery of a spark of rebellion in the sweated Ancoats labour force. This is related to the well-known letter to the author from Engels, who urges her to 'include in the domain of realism; a spirit of rebellion.'²⁵ It is also significant in this context that the seeds of rebellion in *A Manchester Shirtmaker* come from a female sweated labour force, and that they are found in Manchester as opposed to London.

These two virtually contemporary novels are united in their choice of Manchester in general, and Ancoats or its immediate vicinity in particular, as the settings for their representations of urban class relations. The contrasts and similarities between them are instructive. Both texts work with the assumption that there are important differences between the slums of the East End of London, and those of Manchester. Stedman Jones remarks that when Victorian writers wished to 'extoll the virtues of the working classes', it was to Lancashire they turned for the evidence of an indigenous tradition of self-help, sobriety, and religious dissent. The breakdown of community and of social and moral responsibility which is a dominant theme of the literature of the East End is not simply replicated in the Ancoats texts. A revealing narrative comment in *A Manchester Shirtmaker* makes the distinction clear: '... in London, it is possible for poor people to live without knowing the names of their neighbours; but in Manchester... each person is known and watched, more especially in Angel Meadow, which is like a village'. Mrs Ward, too, finds in the urban slums a sign of hope in the 'true spirit' of northern co-operation, and the 'native Lancashire element' in Ancoats is 'still there and strong' beneath the surface confusion. This view of Ancoats is shared by the *Manchester Guardian* reviewer of *The History of David Grieve*, who comments favourably on a passage in which Mrs Ward refers to 'the native Lancashire element' as a 'strong binding force' in the life of the city, and remarks that 'Manchester is a city with a common life, which London is not'.²⁶

Both writers find in Ancoats a symbol of hope, though for very different reasons: *A Manchester Shirtmaker* identifies in the violent response of the sweated women workers a sign of a new consciousness of communal strength, which may break down the 'individualistic social system', and replace it with a scientific socialism. Ancoats, it is argued, is important because the population has not declined into the degenerate individualism characteristic of the East End, and the 'Lancashire' spirit may be translated into effective political consciousness. *The History of David Grieve*, on the other hand, represents cultural continuity: the choice of Ancoats and Manchester is governed by a need to demonstrate that even in the worst slums in the country, the older conservative

rhetoric of social advance through individual effort, modified by a new interest in co-operation and profit-sharing, is still valid. Thus, in this fiction, Ancoats stands as a symbol of the profoundest social darkness, out of which can grow a seed of regeneration — here represented by David Grieve and his conversion to co-operation and profit-sharing — which may develop in ways which offer, in Mrs Ward's words, 'hope for the future'. Although these two novels offer different solutions to the social problems symbolised by Ancoats, both begin with the premise that, even in the worst city slums of the north, a potential for regeneration exists in the traditions of self-help and community spirit which are seen to characterise Lancashire working-class life, and which are conspicuously absent among the London poor.

This image of the character of the Lancashire operative was deeply rooted in middle-class perceptions: its origins can be traced to theories of the 'Saxon' directness, independence, and reliability of the character, and is also in part formed by a view of the widely proclaimed patience and endurance of the Lancashire workers during the Cotton Famine of the 1860s. A rejection of the fashionable life of London, and an assertion of the older virtues of custom and community, associated with the north, is also part of this cultural nexus.²⁷



The gable end of the hall in Kirby Street, Ancoats, in which the Co-operative Wholesale Society was formally constituted in April, 1863.

The demography of Ancoats, and indeed the history of co-operative production in the nineteenth century indicates that the factual evidence for many of the assertions and assumptions made in these texts is limited. Co-operative production enterprises were in fact fraught with problems, and the failure rate was high. The idea of co-operative production (as opposed to retailing) and profit-sharing divided the co-operative movement deeply. The immigrant population of Ancoats could not be realistically ascribed to a 'Lancashire' inherited culture, despite Mrs Ward's assertion that the identity was 'still there and strong'. Although the identification of the north, and Manchester in particular, with the growth of the co-operative movement on the one hand, and the evolution of collective socialism on the other, has some historical justification, the implied contrast of East End selfish individualism to Ancoats communal spirit may have more to do with rhetoric than reality.

However, although these fictions may not provide the historian of Ancoats with many new facts about the district, they do offer valuable evidence concerning the perception and construction of attitudes to poverty, class relations, and the north/south division, among the middle-classes. Fiction offers a context for the exploration or definition of the boundaries of acceptable debate about class relations: the texts are in effect myths of re-generation or re-construction, in which the city slum is represented not for itself, but as a context for the exploration of a crisis of bourgeois self-identity. *The History of David Grieve* uses Ancoats as exemplary of deeply held beliefs about the need to resolve

the threats it poses to social order by the encouragement of working-class co-operation and profit-sharing, unlike similar texts from the earlier nineteenth century, which often rely on a cruder conception of individual moral and material progress. *A Manchester Shirtmaker* offers a more radical social analysis, advocating collective action as the only possible resolution of class division, and rejecting much of the long tradition of reconciliation and negotiation. Here too, however, Margaret Harkness's earlier East End fictions present the London 'residuum' as hopeless victims of an oppressive economic system. It is to the latent radicalism of the sweated women in Ancoats that she turns for the key images of rebellion, rather than the seamstresses of the East End.

The three texts considered in this article — *A Manchester Shirtmaker* (1890), *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (1891), and *The History of David Grieve* (1892) — are related to each other on a number of levels. They share a particular and deeply rooted perception of the moral distinction between the corrupt and degraded life of the metropolis, and the moral integrity of the north. Each explores Lancashire poverty in order to identify and publicise the true nature of this perceived provincial, protestant identity, which possesses, in this construction, the power to redeem and restore English life. Although the solutions offered range from socialism, through co-operative production, to profit-sharing and the promotion of working-class capitalism, a bedrock of Lancashire identity and community spirit is always present as a dominant element in the value-system of these texts.

NOTES

1. *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, London, 1982, Vol I, p.298.
2. For a more detailed discussion of the Lancashire experience, see S Walsh, 'Beatrice Webb in Bacup', *Manchester Region History Review*, 1989 Vol III no 2.
3. Further information concerning this still shadowy figure can be found in the *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals*.
4. See Mrs H Ward, and C.E. Montague, *W.T. Arnold*, M.U.P., 1907 for details.
5. *op cit.* p.75.
6. Introduction to *The History of David Grieve*, Westmoreland Edition, London, 1911. This edition includes illustrations chosen by the author, and a long Preface. Mrs Ward discusses the reception of the book, remarking that it brought her more correspondence than any of her other publications, and that interest in it was still alive, especially in America, where it had large sales over many years.
7. From unpublished journal entries of Gertrude Ward, Mrs Ward's companion and secretary, held in the Pusey Library, Oxford.
8. The figure of David Grieve is an amalgam of literary and Manchester sources. In her Preface Mrs Ward cites especially Alexander Somerville, *Autobiography of a Working Man*, but may have received other examples of the genre from the unidentified Manchester bookseller to whom she wrote. In this letter she remarks that she possesses 'William Lovett, and Thomas Cooper', but requires examples of 'the processes and incidents of self-culture' in Manchester. An obvious candidate from the city is Abel Heywood, the radical bookseller, secularist, and publisher, who later became Mayor of Manchester. In F. Hall, *A Northern Pioneer* (London, 1927) a biography of the Ancoats born local politician and antiquarian bookseller J.R. Lancashire (1848-?) it is claimed that Mr Lancashire met the authoress in Manchester, and that he was the true original of Grieve (p.12). This biography also mentions a work by J.R. Lancashire, *Experiences of an Old Bookseller*, which is untraceable. Information about this from any reader would be welcome.
9. G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, (1971) p.1.
10. P. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (1971) gives a full account of the genesis of this tradition, and a list of texts.
11. J.R. Harris, *Life of F.W. Crossley*, London, 1899, p.129.
12. A. Stansfield, *Essays and Sketches* (1897), p.228.
13. Mrs Ward has depended heavily on Sedley Taylor, Sedley, *Profit-Sharing Between Capital and Labour*, London, 1884, for details of the relations between David Grieve and his workforce. Taylor has a chapter on the Maison Leclair, a Parisian printshop which operates profit sharing, and which is favourably cited in the novel.
14. *The History of David Grieve*, Westmoreland Edition, Introduction, p.111.
15. F. Hall *A Northern Pioneer* describes a Manchester tradition of radical coffee-houses or restaurants, with brightly painted murals, as in *The History of David Grieve*. He identified the Merchants Restaurant, Market Street, as being run by an old Chartist. As often, Mrs Ward's researches into Manchester are intelligent and accurate. Her choice of the second-hand book trade as a way into city life for her protagonist is equally perceptive. Slater's Directory for 1889 lists 18 booksellers in the city, selling either 'old' or 'second-hand' books. This extensive trade is often ignored or underestimated by historians of popular reading in the industrial city. It was a crucial source of affordable books for the poor, and must have provided much material not readily available in libraries.
16. *The History of David Grieve*, p.408. References are to the one-volume edition, as the three-decker is difficult to obtain.
17. *op. cit.* p.450.
18. *op. cit.* p.490.
19. *op. cit.* p.412.
20. Municipal intervention to demolish or improve bad housing in Ancoats was in progress in 1889. Part of the district was designated as an 'Unhealthy Area' in that year, and houses were subject to removal or improvement. There were a number of other housing improvement schemes which Mrs Ward might have seen.
21. *A Manchester Shirtmaker*, p.55. There are copies of this scarce book in Manchester Central Reference Library, and in the Working Class Movements Library, Salford.
22. *op. cit.* p.67.
23. *op. cit.* p.55.
24. *op. cit.* p.59.
25. K. Marx, & F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p.479.
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Jan 1892.
27. In the case of Mrs Ward, her views about London fashionable life may have been unconsciously coloured by her problems with her son Arnold, a compulsive gambler who frequented London clubs, and was often in debt. The recent biography by J. Sutherland gives details.