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# 1 Introduction

The thesis at hand aims at analysing the literary representation of industrial relations in selected 19<sup>th</sup> century popular drama. In order to attain this goal, the focus will be put on a critical debate on the portrayal of the role of the employer and the employee in the respective plays. While the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a tremendously vivid theatrical activity as regards the quantity of plays, the qualitative standards of drama produced in this period have soon come under severe criticism (Schmidt 30). However, leaving the complex question of quality aside, it is nevertheless worthwhile to engage in an in-depth discussion of the literary development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially of the arguably most important genre flourishing at that time: the melodrama (Emeljanow 6). As the melodramatic form experienced striking popularity among contemporary society, irrespective of its doubtful level of sophistication, “[i]t deserves at least to be understood” (Booth, *Hiss* 9).

Consequently, the first chapter is dedicated to the most significant aspects relevant to a better insight into the working patterns of this peculiar genre. In addition, the discussion includes information on certain elements of drama in general. These theoretical considerations tackled on an abstract level then form the basis for the analysis of the texts chosen for this thesis.

The plays in question, six in number, cover a time-span of 82 years, ranging from 1827 to 1909 in terms of their publication date. *Luke the Labourer* by John Baldwin Buckstone was first performed at the Adelphi Theatre in 1826. *The Factory Lad* was first performed at the Surrey Theatre in 1832 and written by John Walker. Douglas William Jerrold’s *The Rent-Day* was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in 1832. *Lost in London* by Watts Phillips was first performed at the Adelphi Theatre in 1867. *The Middleman* was written by Henry Arthur Jones and first performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1889. *Strife* was written by John Galsworthy and first performed at the Duke of York’s Theatre in 1909.

In chapters 3 and 4, the literary representation of the economic superior, be it the factory or mine owner, the Squire or master, on the one hand, and the subordinate, be it the factory worker, miner, or tenant farmer on the other hand,

is scrutinised for tendencies of either negative or positive characterisations in the dramatic works just mentioned. The texts have been selected according to the following criteria: First of all, the temporal scope is basically limited to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The inclusion of *Strife*, implying an extension to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is meant to provide an outlook and a contrasting element in regard to the remaining set of plays. Such a rather tight time frame is necessary to ensure the comparability of non-fictional socio-economic and socio-political situations the texts refer to. Secondly, as far as genre is concerned, the focus is put on plays identified as melodrama proper or drama which at least features melodramatic aspects. Thereby, it is possible to structure the analysis along the same standards as regards typical features and characteristics of this particular genre. As the application of drama theory is consequently focused on this specific area of interest, the discussion can be developed in adequate detail and depth. Again, the decision to include *Strife*, the only play not building on considerable melodramatic aspects at all, is based on the idea that by means of drawing on the respective contrasting elements, the arguments worked out in connection with the remaining body of texts will become even more explicit and comprehensible. Thirdly, the contents of the plays most importantly have to broach the issue of industrial relations. The representation of both the employer as well as the employee needs to be tackled to a sufficient extent in order to offer enough material for a detailed analysis of the factors making each of them appear as either likable or rather dislikable.

In chapter 5, the theoretical information provided in chapter 2 is applied to the plays selected for analysis: As the melodramatic genre is considered to bear a remarkable entertainment potential based on maximised emotionality, the texts are scrutinised for examples of exaggerated sentiment as well as instances of sensation and suspense. Subsequently, the literary representation of the individual agents of industrial relations is reviewed in the light of the absolutist classification typical of melodrama. Another point of interest forms the question in how far the plays concerned might feature as means of social criticism and political motivation. Therefore, the most significant themes and messages are identified in an exemplary discussion of three selected plays, before the focus is shifted to the debate whether the texts chosen also pursue

an instrumental form of communication. Finally, the major points and outcomes are summed up in a concise conclusion.

## 2 The (melo)dramatic form

### 2.1 Overview

In order to ensure a meaningful examination of the texts chosen for analysis it is necessary to deal with the most important questions arising in connection with the plays' classifications according to genre. As the majority of works can be identified as either melodramas proper or show at least significant traces of typical melodramatic features, in the subsequent chapters the focus predominantly lies on the clarification of the meaning assigned to the genre of the melodrama and its characteristics, possible purposes and effects on the relevant audiences.

It is noticeable that melodrama is exposed to vastly negative criticism by an overwhelming number of scholars. They all seem to agree that the melodramatic form suffers from a remarkably bad reputation.<sup>1</sup> The most significant points of critique include its factitiousness and tendency to exaggerate (Booth, *Hiss* 9). Moreover, it is criticised for being hardly intellectually challenging but rather speaking to the emotions as well as drawing on clichés and vulgarity (James 151-152). At the same time one must admit that 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama incontestably was a highly successful means of entertainment for a large number of people stemming from a wide range of class backgrounds (Booth, *English melodrama* 13). After all, it is beyond dispute that melodrama “[...] is the most striking dramatic phenomenon of the period” (Booth, *Hiss* 9). This obvious ambivalence of clashing attitudes already hints at the enormous diversity of features which might be subject to a study of the melodramatic form. Therefore, the following discussion can by no means be considered exhaustive. Rather, the selection of issues primarily focuses on aspects relevant to the texts chosen for analysis in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Bentley 196; Booth, *English melodrama* 13; Booth, *Hiss* 9, Brooks, 11; Heilmann 75; James 151-152; Schmidt 9; Vicinus 127.

After a brief survey of its historical origin, melodrama is explored with regard to its most significant features such as a heightened degree of emotionality and sensationalism, the absolutist classification of the world in clearly defined categories of moral principles and the achievement of eventual poetic justice. It is noticeable that this division according to morality standards is strictly adhered to especially in connection with the design of characters, rendering them mere stereotypes. Their monopathic experience of the world provides them with a sense of wholeness which inevitably has implications not only for the dramatic content of the respective play but also for the audience perception. Next, a more detailed account on the two major members of a typical melodramatic cast, the villain and the hero, is given. Subsequently, possible thematic issues and the problematic question in how far melodrama shows an inclination to a realistic representation of contemporary life, form points of discussion. Following Brown, who states that “[a] theatre’s audience is an indication of its function in society” (41), at first the composition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century audience is discussed, before a closer examination of the drama’s possible purposes and desired effects is carried out. In this context, the reciprocal relationship between theatrical performance and spectators, the expressive as well as the instrumental force behind a human culture and restrictions on the communicative achievements of drama as a form of mass media are explored. In order to provide for an adequate level of background knowledge, historical information on the mutual relationship between the working class and theatre management make up another section. Moving on to the two primary purposes melodrama is construed to fulfil, first of all its ability to serve as a means of escape from reality is tackled. Besides this entertainment factor, melodrama might also be understood as a medium transmitting social criticism by mirroring and subsequently questioning the contemporary socio-political or socio-economic situation. In this context, melodrama’s function as a political theatre and its thematic concerns need to be examined. Following a discussion of the question whether a predominantly objective or rather subjective presentation of ideas is pursued, certain tendencies of affiliation are exposed. In addition, drama is analysed for its qualification as a means of didacticism. Finally, the most significant prerequisites for a successful communication of ideas are discussed.



## 2.2 Sentiment and absolutist classification of the world

The term *melodrama* is derived from Greek *melos*, meaning music or song, and can roughly be translated as music-drama (Lennard and Luckhurst 92; Smith, *Melodrama* 2; Schmidt 127). It therefore suggests itself to describe melodrama as a combination of a dramatic work with corresponding music (Morgan 72; Booth, *English melodrama* 36). It is important to consider the particular meaning which the respective choice of music conveys, though. The reason for the use of music lies in its precious capability to transmit or at least reinforce all shades of feelings and emotions known to the human being (Crampton 25; Booth, *English melodrama* 36). Thus, with the help of background music it is possible for dramatic works to “[...] create mood and manipulate emotions,” which is an essential aspect of the melodramatic form (Lennard and Luckhurst 92).

Although actual music accompaniment gradually decreased over the course of time (Booth, *English melodrama* 36; Smith, *Melodrama* 5), melodrama remained dedicated to the maximisation of emotionality (Brooks 11; Lennard and Luckhurst 92; Smith, *Melodrama* 9). For instance, Lennard and Luckhurst claim that in 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama “the central aim was to arouse *pathos*, [...] and every moment was wrung for maximum sentimental effect” (92). Next, the preference of “dramatic sensation” over logic, as well as “unpredictability and suspense” over a plausible and natural development of plot or character should be mentioned (Lennard and Luckhurst 92). Similarly, Smith describes melodrama as “[...] machine-made entertainment, dealing in vulgar extravagance, implausible motivation, meretricious sensation and spurious *pathos*” (*Melodrama* 6). Exaggerations of any kind and sensational happenings formed the basis of a form of art often denoted “gripping” or “poignant” (Heilman 76). Thus, Brooks correctly sums up “extreme states of being, situations, actions” (11) as significant aspects of a typical melodrama.

The melodramatic tendency of carrying any aspect of dramatic presentation to its extreme does not only play a significant role in the heightening of emotionality but becomes especially apparent in a thematic sense, namely the absolutist classification of the world: there is a clear

distinction between good or bad, right or wrong, and thus a highly simplified view on morality (Morgan 73). This “moral polarization and schematization” (Brooks 11) allows for “a world of absolutes where virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness” (Booth, *English melodrama* 14). Similarly, also Smith uses the graphic differentiation between “black” and “white” in order to picture the “ideal world of melodrama,” where “[...] life is once more simple and uncomplicated, character and motive [...] reduced to blackest black and whitest white” (*Introduction*).

In this context, one should note that it is a necessity of utmost importance that virtuous behaviour is finally rewarded, mostly with material goods (Booth, *English melodrama* 14; Smith, *Introduction*). At the same time, vice is always defeated in order to reach eventual poetic justice (Bailey 31; Booth, *Hiss* 9; Smith, *Introduction*). To sum up: “One knows where one is in the world of melodrama; there is no doubt about moral principles, or proper conduct” (Booth, *Hiss* 9). Booth emphasises that this precise distinction between desired and reprehensible qualities makes up a continuous line throughout all aspects of a melodramatic piece, such as “character, ethics and social relationships” (*Hiss* 9). Yet, in the following discussion the focus will be put on the use of these differentiations in connection with character descriptions.

## 2.3 The melodramatic character

In its most extreme form, the alignment of individual characters to the clear-cut definition of either good or bad, virtuous or vicious, leads to a formation of stereotypical figures, so-called stock-characters (Fielitz 184; Taylor 122). “The characters of melodrama were chiefly symbols of virtue and vice, personified moral qualities rather than complex people. The definitions were clear-cut, unmistakable at a glance” (Bailey 31). Smith calls them “a set of walking clichés who invite snap moral judgements the moment they appear” (*Introduction*). As every character is a priori defined as a certain type, his or her behaviour is perfectly predictable (Bentley 41): “People are true to their surface appearances and always think and behave in the way these appearances dictate” (Booth, *English melodrama* 14).

The usual cast consists of the “brave young hero, innocent and helpless heroine, sinister villain, sometimes a stock comic figure” (Morgan 73). This grouping makes up the basic set of characters which many scholars regard as an important characteristic of melodrama.<sup>2</sup> A more detailed discussion of two selected character types, the hero and the villain, will be carried out in chapters 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

In the melodramatic form, the dividing lines between the different stereotypical characters are always kept as clear as possible: “No teasing niceties of plausibility or motivation are allowed to [...] obscure [...]” them (Smith, *Introduction*). Similarly, Booth explains:

[C]haracter can only be presented in broad unvarying types; easily identifiable by appearance and action, they were known instantly to the audience for what they are – the melodramatist has no time for character development or the study of motivation. Neither has he time for moral searching and questioning; moral positions as well as character must be easily recognizable. In fact the audience of melodrama could identify both at once, for character type and moral viewpoint are inseparably linked. (Booth, *Hiss* 12)

In this context it should be mentioned that several scholars draw on the term *wholeness* in order to refer to the melodramatic characters’ perception of the world. According to this concept, a character can be described as “whole,” in contrast to “divided,” when he follows a clear line of thought, belief or action, thus steers clear of any traces of uncertainty or inner conflict. His action is always driven by a single, clear-cut impulse which forms an overwhelming part of his personality. As a result, the qualities assigned to the individual stock-characters remain perfectly pure and may not be blurred by the respective character’s doubts or conflicting thoughts (Heilman 79; Smith, *Melodrama* 7-8).

Summing up:

Wholeness, in other words, is a technical structure of character and personality; in itself it is morally neutral; it means simply that in goodness or in badness, in strength or in weakness, the protagonist is, at the level of significant action, not a composition of divergent inner forces that would push him into the arena of choice and self-knowledge. (Heilman 80)

In addition to the idea of “wholeness,” Heilman introduces the notion of *monopathy* to describe “the singleness of feeling that gives one the sense of

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Booth, *Hiss* 10; Lennard and Luckhurst 92; Schmidt 169.

wholeness" (85). In melodrama, states of mind are experienced in their purest form, "divorced from anything which might qualify, contradict or otherwise diminish" the magnitude of the prevalent mood (Smith, *Melodrama* 9-10). For instance, in a situation of triumph, not a single thought is given to possible negative consequences resulting from the defeat. Correspondingly, in a situation of despair or loss, a positive outlook or the introduction of alternative, compromising approaches is hardly possible (Heilman 85; Smith, *Melodrama* 10). In the world of melodramatic monopathy, there is thus no room for considerations of possible downsides connected to certain decisions or actions: "There is no counter-feeling to offset the dominant emotion" (Heilman 87).

In contrast to tragedy, where the dividedness of character forms an essential part of the genre's nature, clashing interests are thus not found within a character, but between characters and in relation to things in the genre of melodrama (Heilman 79). There are only external pressures the melodramatic character is confronted with (Fielitz 185). Ranging from "an evil man, a social group, a hostile ideology, a natural force, an accident or chance, an obdurate fate or malign deity" (Smith, *Melodrama* 8), the sources of possible challenges are manifold. Melodrama can thus be said to focus on "the reordering of one's relations with others, with the world of people and things," rather than a detailed examination of a character's inner conflicts (Heilman 86).

In order to conclude this subchapter on the general aspects of the melodramatic character, once again attention should be drawn to the fact that melodrama tends to give ample room to rapid action, sensational plot and thrilling situations at the expense of a more elaborate presentation of character (Booth, *English melodrama* 14-15; Booth, *Hiss* 12; Hamilton, *Introduction* xxxviii; Wallis and Shepherd 13-14). Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance for the thorough understanding of the texts under analysis to discuss the individual character types in more detail. Due to the overwhelming importance of the male antagonists, the villain on the one hand and the hero on the other hand, in the following sections these two melodramatic stereotypes will be presented.

### 2.3.1 The villain

According to melodramatic conventions, a character's villainy is usually made clear as he enters the stage for the first time (Herold 26). Often, he comes to attention as a greedy, lustful and cruel person, enjoying a luxurious lifestyle (Bailey 31). Moreover, Booth states that "[...] the genuine villain is heartless, unprincipled, hateful, and entirely evil" (*Hiss* 10). Typical melodramatic villains may appear in the form of personalities such as "swindlers, vile seducing aristocrats, evil landlord or factory managers, lecherous commanding officers, and so on" (Herold 22). Bailey lists "a squire, a banker, a rich curmudgeon, or a criminal" as a possible professional status conventionally associated with the miscreant (31).

However, it is important to consider that two distinctive specifications of villainous characters have evolved in the course of time. On the one hand, there is "the grim, determined, immensely evil" villain, and on the other hand, "the shifty, cowardly, half-comic" one (Booth, *English melodrama* 18). Thus, when for instance Smith describes the typical villain by referring to "a heartless libertine in shiny boots and jet-black whiskers" (*Introduction*), he obviously hints at the first mentioned variety.

Disregarding the possible development of character complexion, the melodramatic villain always assumes the role of a driving force behind the plot development and spurs the action. Especially in comparison to the scope of action assigned to the hero, the villain's activities appear even more diverse (Booth, *English melodrama* 18; Fietz 94; Smith, *Introduction*). For instance, the villain "[...] plots and counterplots, gloats, wheedles, threatens, curses, cheats, steals letters, forges cheques, hides wills, kills witnesses, wrecks trains, blows up banks and air-balloons, and generally does his bit to get the action started" (Smith, *Introduction*). In more general terms, "[t]he villain thinks, chooses, initiates action, alters his plans, makes new ones" (Booth, *English melodrama* 18). He is thus the "primum mobile" of the melodramatic action (Schmidt 170).

As far as the villain's motives and objectives are concerned, Herold primarily names sexually or financially driven interests. Often, the villain also draws on "[...] his social superiority, whether real or assumed, as leverage to prevail" (22). Smith bluntly describes the villain's "[...] whole existence [as]

devoted to encompassing the heroine's chastity, her hero's downfall, or their combined destruction" (*Introduction*). Similarly, Booth mentions "revenge on the hero, the acquisition of his money and property, and the possession (sometimes the death) of the heroine" as major objectives (*English melodrama* 18). Usually, attempts of making a villain's motive appear sympathetic or at least slightly more understandable fail and cannot make up for the villainy of the current happenings the audience is confronted with (Booth, *Hiss* 10). Nevertheless, Herold's statement that "villains make no attempt to justify their behaviour, once found out" (22), consequently seems slightly narrow-minded and needs qualification.

When the villain goes about his undertakings, he pursues his aims with remarkable purposefulness (Booth, *English melodrama* 18). As his sophisticated plotting, generally speaking, requires a sufficiently high level of intelligence, one has to admit that the villain must be a rather clever, resourceful human being. Booth goes so far as to argue that "[w]hat intelligence, design and thought there is in melodrama is resident in the villain [...]" (*Hiss* 10). Irrespective of his intelligence, however, the melodramatic villain never manages to conclude his actions the way he actually planned it. The "[...] league of darkness is always just about to be entirely successful" when they are finally interrupted (Smith, *Introduction*). Booth lists the crucial factors in the course of the villain's failure:

[F]ortunately for goodness his grim efficiency is only superficial. He is always bungling his plans, killing the wrong person, being overheard, delaying the murder of the hero too long, or being interrupted at the crucial moment. Going wrong at the last minute is an ethic weakness among villains. At the moment of fruition they are defied and humiliated by the objects of their desire [...]. (Booth, *English melodrama* 23)

In the end, the melodramatic villain is confronted with scorn and ridicule, loses all his unearned gains and might be imprisoned or even brutally killed. The reason for the villain's downfall can either be located in the realm of responsibility of his opponent, the hero, or of nature and its various forces (Booth, *English melodrama* 20). The villain's defeat also forms the obligatory victory of virtue over vice, guaranteeing the compliance with the melodramatic convention of poetic justice (Herold 22; Smith, *Introduction*). For instance, Booth

explicitly says that the villain's destiny is a fate he "justly deserves," bearing in mind his previous conduct (*Hiss* 11).

Concluding, the villain contributes significantly to the exciting and sensational action melodrama is widely known for. Albeit a highly intelligent man, the miscreant turns out to be a thoroughly dislikable character owing to his Machiavellian motives and objectives.

### 2.3.2 The hero

In stark contrast to the melodramatic villain, the hero takes up a comparatively passive role in terms of plot development. While the villain is responsible for the initiation of the action, the hero can merely react to the situations induced by his antagonist's deeds. The main reason for his inactivity lies in the fact that the hero is simply often absent, due to various different reasons (Herold 24-25). For instance, he could be "[...] cast adrift on stormy seas, wandering in foreign parts, or tied up and left senseless at the bottom of a mine-shaft" (Smith, *Introduction*). Furthermore, he could be restrained "in prison" or "tied up in a cave" (Booth, *Hiss* 10). In order to ensure that the hero will not thwart the villain's plans but is disabled to the greatest possible extent, violence is a common occurrence (Booth, *Hiss* 9):

[...] [T]he hero may be chloroformed or clobbered, coshed, abducted, lynched, exploded, executed, shot, speared, poisoned, punctured, set on fire, locked in a condemned cell or private lunatic asylum, precipitated from an iceberg, mountain peak or high stone wall, attacked by lions, cobras, dervishes, Jahrejahs, revolutionaries or red-skins, asphyxiated by the Upas Tree, or dumped overboard tied in a sack and weighted down with heavy rocks. (Smith, *Introduction*)

Disregarding what the hero's predicament may exactly be, in the end he always achieves his task of serving up justice. Miraculously, the hero succeeds in freeing himself from all obstructions and manages to fulfil his most important function as upholder of moral standards (Smith, *Introduction*). Without exception, the final goal of poetic justice, "[...] ultimate happiness, the triumph of virtue, and defeat of vice," is met (Booth, *Hiss* 9). The indestructible hero thus makes sure that "the innocent and the oppressed" are rescued and that his "noble nature" is sufficiently demonstrated (Smith, *Introduction*).

Further character qualities usually assigned to the virtuous hero read as follows: “honesty, industry, thrift, purity of life, goodness of heart, and horror of sin” (Bailey 31). Similarly, Smith identifies the hero as “[...] brave and kind and strong and chivalrous and often quite absurdly stupid” (*Introduction*). On the one hand, at first glance it may seem highly improper and hardly conceivable that the heroic character should suffer from a certain lack of intelligence. On the other hand, though, his intellectual weakness plausibly accounts for the hero’s lot of always getting caught in the villain’s traps (Smith, *Introduction*). For example, Booth observes that “[...] the basic hero is really rather stupid, [...] always in trouble, and spends much of his time trying to clear his good name of crimes the villain has committed” (*English melodrama* 17). Nevertheless, one must not forget that the hero primarily conveys positive, desirable character traits which justify his standing as a virtuous fighter against evil.

It is noticeable, though, that in some exceptional cases the hero might have “[...] a dreadful past of drunkenness, gambling, and desertion of family,” which he can only make up for by means of repentance and future courageousness (Smith, *Introduction*). On the other hand, even if his history is actually stainless, the melodramatic hero is “[...] enormously virtuous, defying and deriding the forces of evil, and uttering moral speeches of which he has a large stock” (Booth, *English melodrama* 17). Usually “an ambitious young man,” the hero may stem from any professional background, be it “[...] a bank clerk, a sailor, a farmer, a laborer” (Bailey 31).

To conclude, the combat between the villain and the hero does not only form the major driving force behind the development of the action, but also helps to stress even more the moral principles which melodrama considers desirable. As in the melodramatic world the eventual victory of virtue over vice is in fact inevitable, only the honourable, courageous man will eventually triumph.

## 2.4 Themes and claim to reality

The melodrama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pursues two clashing objectives: On the one hand, it tries in certain respects to picture contemporary reality as accurately as



possible. On the other hand, the absolutist classification of the world in terms of either good or bad or the extreme sentimentalism for which melodrama is known can only function with an appropriately clear-cut and exaggerated composition of plot, action and character (Heilman 87).

Firstly, one has to bear in mind that in melodrama experiences tend to be idealised and strongly simplified (Booth, *Hiss* 9). In this context, Booth uses the notion of a “dream world” where “dream people” enjoy adequate “dream justice” (*English melodrama* 14). Already the term *dream* implies that Booth believes this setting to be in fact unattainable but longed for by the respective audience. He thus sees melodrama as “[...] a dramatization of this second world, an allegory of human experience dramatically ordered, as it should be rather than as it is” (*English melodrama* 14). The question arises what this dream world should actually look like. Following Booth: “In this world life is uncomplicated, easy to understand, and immeasurably exciting” (*English melodrama* 14). Typical sensational happenings and connected stylistic peculiarities for example include:

[P]ursuit and capture, imprisonment and escape, false accusation, [...] mysterious identity, lovers reconciled, fraudulence revealed, threats survived, enemies foiled; the whole realm of adventure from dangerous exploits to foreign-legion doings to struggles in exotic scenes to intrigue, spying, and secret missions; the whole realm of mystery from the supernatural to esoteric science to the whodunit; the whole realm of vice and crime from the terror or horror of the evil deed to the detection of the evildoer to the reform of corrupt persons or situations. (Heilman 76)

Despite this thrilling action, the melodramatic life is marked by clarity and simplicity. There is no room for “confusion, doubt, and perplexity;” quite the contrary, “character, conduct, ethics, and situations are perfectly simple” (Booth, *English melodrama* 14). Also Smith notes that melodrama draws a picture of life which can hardly be attained in reality. In his opinion, this “ideal world of melodrama” is “clear-cut, simple, morally benevolent and enormously exciting” (Smith, *Introduction*).

The authors just mentioned actually make an implicit value judgement when they refer to the melodramatic world as an ideal one. They obviously seem to believe that contemporary audiences would consider the peculiar portrayal desirable (Booth, *English melodrama* 14; Smith, *Introduction*). A possible reason for the authors’ attitude might be that, despite the fact that the

melodramatic convention requires exaggeratedly exciting action, established moral maxims are notwithstanding observed and even strengthened. One could even go a step further and claim that this depiction should actually serve as a role model for the respective audience. Yet, this highly important question regarding of in how far melodrama tries to manipulate the audience, will form the subject of a separate chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the melodramatic world is characterised by exaggeration and idealisation, it is nevertheless possible to detect highly accurate and consciously realistic portrayals of contemporary life. One aimed at an “[...] exact reproduction of the details of ordinary daily life” (Booth, *English plays* 6). For instance, Smith claims that reality could be traced “with photographic accuracy,” be it working hours at the factory, leisure time in the pub or life in the tenement (*Introduction*). Additionally, also Lennard and Luckhurst assume melodrama to have “*realist* concerns about setting and characterization” (93). At other times, though, “[...] settings offer unashamed escape into a never-never-land of medieval castles, Mayfair opulence or oriental splendour” (Smith, *Introduction*). These inconsistencies can be traced back to different subcategories within the genre of melodrama. For instance, there is the Gothic melodrama which includes:

[...] bandits, dark forests (where the heroine often gets lost), secret caverns (in which hero and heroine are often imprisoned), woodmen’s cottages (the home of innocence and oppressed poverty), and crumbling castles occupied by mysterious tyrants, full of dungeons, concealed passages, and dreadful apparitions. (Booth, *Hiss* 24)

Supernatural elements and sensational happenings supported by sophisticated stage technology ensured that the audience would be bewitched by the comfort of a miraculous dream world (Emeljanow 7). Next, the nautical melodrama draws on “[...] exciting confrontations between pirates and sailors, augmented by shows intended to glorify the achievements of English sailors in the war against Napoleon,” and features spectacle as well as unswerving patriotism (Emeljanow 8). Finally, the domestic melodrama should be mentioned. In this form the setting is typically a village on the countryside, and domestic values are standing at the centre of attention. The domestic melodrama “[...] reflects directly the everyday concerns of its spectators” and is thus built on the

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2.5.3.2.2.

“immediate recognition of familiar environments and motives” (Emeljanow 9). Thematic issues incorporate “the humble home, the sufferings of the family, the farmer, the workman, the employer, the squire, the factory, drink, crime, life in the big city, and so on” (Booth, *Hiss* 28).

Based on the basic rule that in a fight between virtue and vice, the former must always emerge victorious, melodrama draws on a wide range of subject matters in order to make this pattern come alive. Notwithstanding its focus on dramatic spectacle at the expense of content, soon “contemporary social concerns” such as “familial, domestic, professional, and class issues” make up a major fraction of interest (Lennard and Luckhurst 92-93). For instance, the problematic conflict between rich and powerful employers, be it factory, mill or mine owners on the one hand and oppressed, poor and defenceless employees on the other hand, form an important point of interest (Vernon 118-119). Furthermore, Booth lists “[p]athetic stories of domestic woe in city and country, violent stories of modern crime, patriotic stories of naval and military conflict” as further examples of melodrama’s thematic richness (*Hiss* 16). Moreover, life and home as well as problems stemming from the domestic realm are mentioned often: “household matters and family relationships, and the concerns of the daily life of homes, shops, streets, and villages in a modern society” (Booth, *English plays* 10). Finally, Lennard and Luckhurst sum up in more general terms that “[o]ppression, injustice, exploitation, crime, poverty, and abuses of power [...]” are frequently tackled topics (93).

It is legitimate to conclude that melodrama has obviously managed to bridge the gap between the attempt to provide the audience with a spectacular presentation of an idealised world on the one hand, and to present a highly accurate picture in terms of setting or even a realistic view on the contemporary social situation on the other hand. Praise of moral principles or even explicit criticism on prevailing socio-political deficits is successfully linked with thrilling, sensational action.

## **2.5 Purposes and effects on the audience**

### **2.5.1 Drama as a form of collaboration**

As drama functions as a collaborative piece of work between the parties responsible for the production on stage on the one hand, and the group of people exposed to the theatrical event on the other hand, a discussion on the composition of the audience of 19<sup>th</sup> century drama should be included in this thesis. The audience constitutes a significant part in the overall conception of drama as a form of art which is entitled to receive immediate, direct and collective response from its spectators. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the latter actually make an active and constructive contribution (Dukes 198-199; Schmidt 65). Consequently, there is a reciprocal relationship between audience composition and the development of the dramatic repertoire (Booth, *The Theatre* 4; Carlson 221; Emeljanow 1; Schmidt 31).

Firstly, one could argue that drama is meant to produce a replica of reality and thus simply mirrors its audiences' knowledge and beliefs about their community. In other words, this approach towards the role of drama draws on the idea of culture in its expressive form. Secondly, there is the possibility of drama acting as a role model for its spectators who are confronted with instructions on how to behave. This approach forms part of the instrumental aspect of human culture (Goodlad 4). At this point it can already be stated that especially the instrumental approach will play a significant role in the subsequent discussion of melodrama's potential as a means of social criticism.

In this context one should not forget, though, that "[t]he dramatic medium sets obvious limitations on the author's opportunities for direct, unambiguous communication with the audience" (Morgan 87). The reason for this claim is based on the fact that in order to transmit their messages, the authors have to draw on dramatic characters who in turn enjoy independence and autonomy from their creators and thus might veil or deform the authors' thinking (Morgan 87). What is more, in the end these dramatic characters become again personified in the form of human beings, the actors, who are, in fact, in a

position which enables them to assign completely new meanings to the ideas set out by the authors. Thus, it seems legitimate to refer to the actors as co-authors who, besides being audible and visible to the audience, have a precious power any script writer is obviously lacking: presence. Presence, ultimately equalled with personality, gives the actor the opportunity to aim at their spectators' feelings on a level beyond mere seeing and listening, namely sensing (Bentley 175-176). Bentley offers a good example in order to illustrate this idea: "What a person says in a letter is one thing; his presence in a room is another. A presence is not just seen or heard; it is sensed. One never 'feels the same' when one knows someone else is present. Hence the shock if one suddenly discovers one is not alone" (176). One should keep these thoughts on the limitations on the unfettered communication between author and spectators in mind, when in chapter 2.5.3.2.2 the discussion moves on to the possible effects drama tries to create within its audience.

Irrespective of the hindrances to its communicative potential, drama nevertheless firmly established itself as an important medium of mass communication (Goodlad 6; Hamilton, *Introduction* xl-xli; MacDonald 1). By calling their audiences "the public," theatre managers already express the "universal appeal" drama is said to have (Dukes 202; Watson 3). Obviously, in contrast to printed literature, dramatic works are not consumed in isolation but in a collective of like-minded people: "the theatre is a collective experience. The reaction it evokes happens in public" (Esslin 100). Especially in the course of a melodramatic performance audiences experience a great range of different emotions which they then express freely in the auditorium: "Audiences also of course reacted with delight and admiration. Melodrama extracted gasps of sympathy and shrieks of horror, actors knew how to wring maximum effect, and spectacular sets provoked spontaneous cheers and applause" (Lennard and Luckhurst 219). As the spectators evince their feelings in a public environment, "[...] the message (political or otherwise) which a play contains always coexists with a demonstration of its reception by a social unit, the collectivity of the audience" (Esslin 100). The ideas presented on stage are thus immediately subject to a critical examination the outcome of which the analysts in the auditorium immediately and effectively express.

## 2.5.2 Historical background: the working classes and their theatres

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the urban working classes considerably rose in numbers as a result of the progressing Industrial Revolution and the subsequent immigration to the cities (Booth, *The Theatre* 4): Britain's economy changed significantly from a system of agricultural patterns based on self-supply towards a stark division of labour and industrial manufacturing by means of steam-driven machines (Humphries 287). These great masses of predominantly illiterate, uneducated people had to endure miserable and squalid living conditions in the cities not prepared for such an inflow. Work at the factories was exhausting and exploitative. Therefore, it is not surprising that they longed for some sort of distraction and entertainment (Booth, *Hiss* 15; Smith, *Introduction*). In the following chapters, the question will be answered in how far melodrama managed to cater for this elemental need.

At this point, though, it can already be stated that melodrama's reliance on physical spectacle, farcical incidents, exaggerated emotionality, sensational effects and thrilling situations formed an important aspect in its appeal to the audiences, increasingly made up of members of the illiterate, uneducated working classes, as it did not take much intellectual energy to follow the plotline or understand the characters' motivation and actions (Booth, *Hiss* 15). It is therefore quite comprehensible that the melodramatic approach might also be characterised as a "show for the sake of show" (Crampton 26). As a result of its enormous success among the working class, melodrama is even said to have come under their patronage (Basuki 4; Booth, *English melodrama* 13).

Consequently, a considerable number of new theatres were built in order to cater for the increasing demand of theatrical entertainment. Especially in London, a "theatre-building boom" was visible (Booth, *English plays* 1). Yet, it is important to note the clear line of division between two different kinds of playhouses. On the one hand, there are the two "patent" theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which were the only ones allowed to present "legitimate" drama, meaning "spoken drama in English" (Newey 3), which is primarily tragedy or comedy (Booth, *Hiss* 18). On the other hand, the so-called "minor"

theatres were restricted to “illegitimate” drama marked by “a certain number of songs in each act, and musical accompaniment” (Booth, *Hiss* 18). It suggests itself that especially these theatres would become the major advocates of melodrama. Even though the patent theatres’ monopoly on legitimate drama was abolished in 1843, the minor playhouses stayed on the chosen path and successfully satisfied its growing audiences’ needs for entertainment (Booth, *Hiss* 18-19). At the same time, the traditional patent theatres suffered from dwindling numbers of spectators as they were unable to recognise changes in demand (Emeljanow 2; Jackson, *Victorian* 10). Obviously, there was a “falling-off in theatregoing by the aristocratic, the fashionable and the middle-class” (Booth, *The Theatre* 8). Consequently, ticket prices fell to affordable rates in order to offer the lower ranks of society the opportunity to attend theatre performances. Additionally, the repertoire of course needed to be aligned with the tastes of the new audiences as well, meaning a considerable increase in “simple melodrama, low farce, jolly pantomime” on the stages (Booth, *The Theatre* 8-10). Typical playgoers included: “[...] immigrant farm workers, artisans, people involved in servicing the import and export of goods [...], domestic servants, and soldiers and sailors [...], shop owners and their assistants [...]” (Emeljanow 2).

## 2.5.3 Functions

### 2.5.3.1 Escape from reality

The entertainment potential of the 19<sup>th</sup> century melodramatic form is first of all derived from its absolutist classification of the world in either virtuous or vicious forces, which enables the audience to detect easily the moral conclusions hinted at and hence allows the spectators to enjoy a feeling of certainty and security often missing in their contemporary reality (Booth, *English melodrama* 14). When Booth argues that the oversimplification and idealisation of life, embodied in this dichotomous view, provides the spectators with “the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams,” he expresses his belief that this is a world audiences yearn for but can actually never reach (*English melodrama* 14).

In the melodramatic dream world “moral and emotional insecurities” suddenly become manageable (Smith *Introduction*). Additionally, also the monopathic construction of the melodramatic characters’ perception of the world contributes to a clearly structured, well-ordered portrayal of the world, providing the audience with a feeling of security: “victory is not tempered with the rigors of cost accounting, nor defeat with the reckoning of spiritual growth” (Heilman 85-86).

As melodrama strictly adheres to the principle of poetic justice, the audience inevitably knows the outcome of any play: the virtuous forces will subdue the vicious ones. The fact that the endings are invariably foreseeable is not to be considered problematic, though. Quite the contrary, drawing on “[...] a world of justice where [...] good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards,” enables the audience to enjoy thrilling horror with the comforting knowledge of a happy ending still to come (Booth, *English melodrama* 14). Similarly, Crampton refers to a “comfort of knowing what to expect” (26):

[Melodrama’s] violent extremes of emotional distress and physical disaster, its threats of instant death by pistol, poison, buzz-saw, rope or steel or railway track, its hostile universe of earthquake, ice-floe, avalanche and mill-race, its terrifying bandits, pirates, gypsies, tyrants, vampires, werewolves, gliding ghosts and flying Dutchmen, its prisons, gallows, chains and racks and wheels, its gloating villains, tortured heroes and defenceless heroines are all no more than a thrilling prelude to the ultimate defeat of guilt and final tableau of triumphant innocence. (Smith, *Introduction*)

In the end, the strict adherence to the moral principles embodied in the idea of poetic justice implies that a melodramatic work can never be depressing (Smith, *Introduction*). Moreover, “[...] clear-cut endings offer an audience emotional pleasures equally clear-cut and extreme” (Smith, *Melodrama* 9). Generally speaking, melodrama’s entertainment potential is designed to help its working class audiences escape from their often poor, unsatisfactory realities (Booth, *English melodrama* 14; Booth, *Hiss* 9; Jackson, *Victorian* 10).



## 2.5.3.2 Means of social criticism

### 2.5.3.2.1 *Socio-political concerns*

Besides its rather obvious attempt to provide its audiences with pleasure and relief from a dreary existence, melodrama assumes more subtle functions as well. To begin with, it seems to be a widely recognised fact among the relevant society of scholars that certain strands of 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama are marked by an interwoven discussion of socio-political concerns. For instance, Ilseman acknowledges the “socially critical content of early-nineteenth-century melodrama” which “[...] addresses contemporary social problems” (191). Furthermore, melodrama not only sought a close connection to contemporary life in terms of thematic material but also questioned and even protested against prevailing conditions (Booth, *Defence* 9-10; Mayer 217). The melodramatic form “[...] increasingly reflected social concerns” (Lennard and Luckhurst 93) and was consequently “heavily laden with ideological messages” (Basuki 5).

In this context the question arises whether melodrama can either be described as *political* theatre in the sense of a form of art that sides with a certain ideological movement or rather tries to present political issues in a neutral way. In the second case, political matters appear as mere concomitants of life and do not stand in the centre of attention. As “[p]olitics proper is surely, however, incompatible with a detached, objective perspective,” this approach denotes a rather accidental reference to political topics (Holderness 2). The former variety, though, reflects much more the true meaning of political interest:

[P]olitics is about making choices, taking sides, getting things done in order to re-shape the world along particular lines of development. If ‘political theatre’ is understood as theatre engaging in a different sort of relationship with politics, that process must entail theatre’s becoming partisan, splitting along the lines of party conflict, lining up with one particular political group, or cause, or ideology, and offering articulate opposition to another group, or cause, or ideology. (Holderness 2)

Yet, at this point it is important to describe in greater detail the thematic concerns melodrama is said to have dealt with before a closer examination of possible underlying messages or ideologies can be undertaken. According to Booth, socio-critical topics might be classified according to the following criteria (*Defence* 10): First of all, the broad concepts of basic political ideologies on a

rather general level, more or less radically presented, formed the thematic framework of a play. Moving on to more specific approaches, concerns also centred on the relationship between the individual and the business world, economic progress and industrialisation. For instance, “[...] fundamental questions of profit-making, working conditions, automation, the morality of the strike, and industrial discontent” were raised (Booth, *Defence* 10). Finally, class conflict made up a highly important aspect in the choice of thematic issues. Typical themes included: “the oppression of the virtuous peasant by the villainous aristocrat or landowner, the seducing squire’s pursuit of the village heroine, the employer’s harsh treatment of his employee, and the antipathy between the owner and the worker” (Booth, *Defence* 10).

The final quote already anticipates the answer to the question whether social criticism expressed in connection with the respective issues was presented from an objective point of view or from a certain ideological perspective. By his choice of adjectives such as “virtuous,” “villainous,” “seducing” or “harsh,” Booth clearly shows the partiality involved. Obviously, there is a tendency towards a well-disposed, favourable representation of the economically less potent or socially less respectable agents at the expense of the characterisation of their more powerful counterparts (Booth, *Defence* 10). Vernon uses similar phrases when she describes the usual characteristics of melodrama in terms of thematic patterns:

The most common melodramatic pattern pits a powerful and cruel oppressor against an unoffending and virtuous victim. [...] [I]t proved to be an effective means of conveying, from the point of view of poor people, the helplessness and frustration they felt in the face of the more complicated and capriciously cruel world around them. (Vernon 119)

Moreover, not only Booth but also Bailey expressively refers to the exploitative relationship between employer on the one hand and employee on the other hand when he identifies “the villainous employer’s oppression of his workmen” (32) as a frequent motif. In addition to the men of business, also aristocrats are often subject to unfavourable representations. Especially the role of the villain is usually taken up by a member of the aristocracy (Lennard and Luckhurst 93), while the melodramatic heroes tend to have a working class background (Booth, *Hiss* 16). As a result, Booth describes “[...] melodrama’s class attitudes, for the greater part of a century, [as] strongly anti-aristocratic” (*Hiss* 16).

Speaking from a more abstract, ideological point of view, these observations fully support the argument that there is a general tendency of equalling political theatre with a left-wing or socialist one. Accordingly, conservative or right-wing ideologies are lacking (Holderness 3).

Summing up, these classifications of dramatic characters and their actions evolve quite naturally, bearing in mind that 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama's popularity was primarily based on the support of the working classes. It seems legitimate they would appreciate a theatrical representation which took up their own point of view: "It was natural that living and working in the same neighbourhood would suggest a demand for a neighbourhood theatre that reflected its concerns as well as the variety in social origins and working patterns of its inhabitants" (Emeljanow 2). Thus, especially melodrama's "[...] humanitarian message had a strong appeal for audiences who understood and felt poverty and injustice" (Bailey 34). It is obvious, then, that melodrama can be classified as political theatre in its proper sense of the word as outlined above.

#### **2.5.3.2.2      *Persuasive communication***

Having identified melodrama as a possibly ideologically driven work of art, it suggests itself to argue for an instrumental function inherent in this form of cultural activity. As it has already been mentioned in the previous chapter 2.5.1, though, drama can be regarded as a form of art drawing on both the expressive and instrumental form of culture. Yet, especially in connection with political convictions, it is likely that theatrical texts are not only designed as mere reflections of reality which passively reproduce what is already known. Quite the contrary, they may be used as a potential means of didacticism. Bearing in mind 19<sup>th</sup> century dramas' status as mass media, it could indeed turn into a "powerful political weapon" (Esslin 95). Similarly, Hunt declares that theatre "[...] must not only reflect an idealized picture of social virtues, but must teach a wholesome lesson to fortify the converted and convert the uneducated" (6). Furthermore, drama might even be identified as a form of propaganda in the sense of the most extreme variety of didacticism. However, one does not necessarily need to go so far as to assume propagandist intentions when dramatic works bear a

certain line of argument, as any piece of art “[...] may be held to teach *something*” (Bentley 110-111). Although Esslin expresses a word of warning as regards the possibly limited effectiveness of drama as a result of the complex mechanism connected to reception and audience involvement in general (95-96), the theatrical art nevertheless remains a “major social force” (Hunt 14). Finally, it should also be noted that it is of great importance for the successful introduction of ideas that the authors follow their true convictions and do not subordinate their beliefs to the prevailing external system (Woodcock 18).

In order for a play to realise its aim of constituting an instrumental form of art and thereby achieve its overall political goal, it first of all needs to create a sufficiently high level of audience involvement. Without which, spectators would dwarf to mere passive recipients lacking any true interest (Morgan 95). This quest is best pursued by speaking to the spectators’ emotions in most intensive ways: “Emotional and imaginative involvement in the dramatic illusion of a play [...] is properly regarded as a form of participation, whereby the work becomes part of our personal experience and can actually change us to some extent” (Morgan 95). Obviously, especially melodrama lends itself for reaching a high degree of audience participation:

[...] [M]elodrama appeals directly to the most elemental feelings of the audience and to their instinctive desires for a better and more exciting world. It has a refreshing lack of pretension about it; there is no messing about with intellectuality. It always goes straight to its emotional and physical point and never deviates from there. (Booth, *English melodrama* 38)

As melodrama typically draws on a clear-cut, schematic characterisation of its figures which then often turn out as mere stereotypes, the spectators do not find great difficulty in deciding which character to meet with which emotional attitude. Given the respective moral views of the audience and those presented in the text were congruent, it is likely that people would find themselves “[...] feeling sorry for the innocent heroine, hating the villain who deceives her, and admiring the brave young hero who comes to rescue her” (Morgan 94). Melodrama makes it easy for its spectators to sympathise with certain characters while others are construed to be despised only.

Feelings such as sympathy and antipathy indeed play a significant role in the attempt to make the audience receptive to messages underlying the overt

design of the play. In fact, in order to be able to experience one of these varieties at all, it is first of all necessary to identify with the characters, ideas or happenings evolving in the course of a play to a certain extent. When the process of identification is understood as “sympathy without the moral implication or the sentimental overtone,” one might also use the term *empathy* in order to refer to the idea of being able “to feel oneself into” (Bentley 161). As soon as a certain level of identification, or empathy, among the audience has been achieved, the desired message can be inspired in them more easily as it is based on the given, probably seemingly, common ground of belief. It only appears natural to follow the recommendations voiced on stage when one can truly identify with the play’s view on the world (Jauss et al. 309).

### **3 The representation of the employer**

#### **3.1 *Luke the Labourer***

As far as the representation of the labour relations in *Luke the Labourer* is concerned, first of all Farmer Wakefield is of particular interest in regard to his role as employer. Once a rich and respectable farmer, he is now discovered to be indebted and, as a result of his inability to pay what he owes, kept imprisoned. Nevertheless, Charles, a former employee and now an aspiring businessman, expresses his honest respect for the unfortunate man: “[A]nd, though I have been so fortunate as to raise myself from a poor farmer’s boy to what I now am, I shall never forget that the first week’s wages I earned, were paid me by Farmer Wakefield” (*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 241). Contrary to the signs of appreciation shown by Charles, Luke provides for a completely different perception of Farmer Wakefield’s personality. In a highly emotional speech, Luke confronts his former employer with severe accusations:

Farmer, do you recollect when you sent me away fra’ your sarvice? Do you recollect when I were starving for want o’ work, and, because I were at times given to drink, you turn’d your back upon me? I ha’ never been a man since that time. [...] You turn’d me away, and I had no character, because you said I were a drunkard. I were out o’ work week after week, till I had not a penny in the world, nor a bit o’ bread to put in mine nor in

my wife's mouth. I then had a wife, but she sicken'd and died – yes, died – all – all along o' you. (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246)

So far, it seems Farmer Wakefield did not care very much for his worker's well-being but let him down cold-heartedly. Thus, Ilsemann might be right when he argues that "scoundrels" such as Luke are in fact "[...] injured creatures, and the injustices that they work on the hero or heroine have previously been inflicted on them" (204).

One might question whether the employer simply did not realise what it meant for Luke to lose his job or whether he acted deliberately and was prepared to leave the labourer to his fate. However, it is probably not justified to accuse Farmer Wakefield of mercilessness or lack of humanity as there might be some truth in the latter's statement that it was actually Luke's own fault he was faced with such serious problems: "Tell me, Luke – did you not bring all your troubles on yourself; did you not drink, and swear, and be idle, for whole days?" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246). As Luke fails to raise credible objections to these allegations, already admitted that he was "at times given to drink" and even considers himself a "drunkard" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246), one might legitimately doubt the worker's view of Wakefield as being an uncaring, pitiless master. Quite the contrary, the following discussion will demonstrate that Luke is the one showing reprehensible character traits.

Since his departure from Wakefield's farm, tables have been turned and it is now Luke who is in a more powerful economic position. Over the course of time he has obviously managed to improve his financial situation and is now even able to lend some of his fortune to others, such as Farmer Wakefield, who incurred debt to the amount of almost twenty pounds in exchange for a stack of wheat. Luke is very proud of his achievements and does not want to put up with the prejudgement of being an incompetent fellow in need:

CHARLES. Luke, I know you to be a needy man – How could Farmer Wakefield become your debtor in that sum?

LUKE. Why – for vally received.

CHARLES. In what?

LUKE. Why, for a stack o' wheat . Ah, you may stare – poor Luke, who never owned an acre, measter of a stack o' wheat – you see some folk can get as well as other folk. [...] I ha' been – ruin'd – goods – body – character – all ruin'd. But now I can hold my head as high as you, Measter Charles [...]. (*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 241)

Moreover, the passage shows that Luke understands a man's respectability and acceptance in society primarily as dependent on his economic success. Luke abuses his fortunate financial position and enjoys submitting others to his power, though. In this context it is important to notice that the determining factor for Farmer Wakefield's incarceration was Luke's insistence on his debt claim against the unfortunate man suffering from profound indebtedness already anyway. More or less unswayable elements such as "bad crops", "distemper among the cattle", "bad debts" or "misfortune" have brought the Farmer in great difficulties and made his financial situation stricken (*Luke the Labourer*, II.i, 250). Luke states that the reason for his decision to demand Wakefield's imprisonment was his belief that the formerly wealthy farmer could still have some hidden treasures he simply did not want to touch. Additionally, Luke seems to have tricked Farmer Wakefield and tempted him to make the deal by pretending an early repayment would not be necessary. While Luke could have used his newly acquired prosperity as an opportunity to turn his life around, he prefers to take revenge for the supposed injustice he has experienced beforehand. For instance, Luke arrogantly looks down on his former employer by calling him a "beggar" whom he should not have allowed a credit (*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 241). Next, when Wakefield's daughter Clara begs Luke for forgiveness for her father's allegedly unjustified harshness in his role as employer, Luke only shows ridicule and mockery to her imploration: "Ha! ha! ha! – this is a great sight – the daughter at my feet" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246).

While Luke's emotional account on the fateful tragedy following his dismissal at Wakefield's indeed offers the opportunity to allow for feelings of pity and understanding, these positive aspects cannot prevent the character finally being perceived as a primarily dislikable one, though. Forfeiting a great deal of credibility when he has to admit that it was mostly his own fault he lost his job and consequently respectability in society, Luke's sneering and condescending attitude towards the Wakefield family suggests the real motive behind his decision to have the Farmer imprisoned for his inability to repay his loan was rather driven by vengeance than the desire to enforce his legal entitlement to collect the outstanding debt.

Although Squire Chase does not overtly appear in the role of a superior in terms of occupational relations, his attitude towards the rural population

should nevertheless be the subject of a brief discussion. At the beginning of the play, he acts as a kind-hearted, benevolent landlord who seems to care vastly about the well-being of the peasants dwelling on his estate. However, it soon becomes apparent that he only “[...] poses as kind-hearted landlord to cover his intention of abducting Clara” (Bailey 239). Similar to Luke, the Squire shamelessly takes advantage of his financially and, in this case, also socially elevated position in order to achieve his aims. He lures his victim into his mansion by pretending his willingness to come to the aid of Farmer Wakefield and his family.

It is noticeable that the play under analysis seems to suggest that wealth and financial advancement promote oppressive and selfish behaviour as their economic potency tempts both the Squire as well as Luke to capitalise on other people’s inferiority for their own benefit. Apart from a few points of justification on the part of Luke, the two of them can basically be identified as the villainous characters typical of the play’s melodramatic quality: The Squire featuring as the stereotypical villain who chases after Clara’s chastity and for this aim “subcontracts” another delinquent, Luke, “for routine dirty work” such as capturing the poor victim (Smith, *Introduction*).

### **3.2 *The Factory Lad***

In *The Factory Lad*, the role of the employer, Squire Westwood, is principally presented in a one-sided fashion, focusing almost only on a discussion of the character’s villainous qualities. The play, which Vernon tellingly labels “anti-employer” (128), begins with the young master’s remarks on the effects of the changing economic circumstances in connection with industrial manufacturing. Allen is quick to give his master’s statement a peculiar meaning by pointing out the workforce’s view on this topic, “A poor man has now less wages for more work” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124). However, the young master is driving at a rather different angle as regards the various problems arising in the context of the introduction of steam-powered machines by his competitors. He is concerned with declining profits as a result of falling demand which logically follows from an excess of supply as a consequence of the increased level of



production at a relatively cheaper rate: “The master having less money, resulting from there being less demand for the commodity manufactured. [...] If not less demand, a greater quantity is thrown into the markets at a cheaper rate” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124). The issue tackled in the preceding lines embodies the core problem of capitalist thinking. More accurately, the play provides a discussion of “[...] Adam Smith and David Ricardo’s principle of supply and demand and idea of maximizing profit” (Ilsemann 194).

From a purely economic point of view, one cannot blame the employer for his decision to take advantage of newly emerging technological advancements either. When observing that steam power is about to replace traditional manual labour at an even lower level of costs he assesses the problem in a perfectly comprehensible: “Steam supersedes manual labour. A ton of coals will do as much work as fifty men, and for less wages than ten will come to, is it not so?” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124-125). Thus, his plans of substituting the majority of human workforce for steam machinery and consequently dismissing a number of most diligent men indeed hit the workers concerned really hard but are in fact economically justifiable in terms of rationality.

The employer tries to make his listeners understand that only with the reduction of costs connected to the reduction of manual labour he would be able to preserve business competitiveness. Again he stresses the necessity of acknowledging the harsh and relentless conditions in the prevalent business environment when he states, “Sentiments in theory sound well, but not in practice” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 125). While it seems comprehensible that only a competitive production process would make economic survival possible, the prominence Westwood gives to his own personal advantages going hand in hand with the reorganisation of his works makes his idea of rationalisation appear in a bad light. For instance, he explicitly mentions that the introduction of steam engines will save him “some three thousand a year” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124). Next, the Squire corrects himself when he first says that he primarily tries to ensure business competitiveness but then makes it clear that he merely does not want to fall behind his competitors’ profit growth. It seems the young entrepreneur has recognised the economic potential of the new technology as well as the increased profit yields connected to it and consequently wants to

jump on the bandwagon, just as the neighbouring company owners have already done, irrespective of the consequences awaiting the workers concerned.

Apart from an individual explicit notion of regret and sympathy: “I can’t help it. I am sorry for it” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124), Westwood does not seem to care very much about or feel responsible for his employees’ well-being. Quite the contrary, he even mocks Hatfield’s attempt to appeal at his consciousness:

‘The day will come, I shall be sorry for what I have done!’ Ha, ha! Sorry! Fool, and fools! What have I to fear or dread? Is England’s proud aristocracy to tremble when brawling fools mouth and question? No; the hangman shall be their answer. (*The Factory Lad*, I.iv, 134)

This argument is further supported by the fact that Westwood is described as leaving for the factory “sneeringly” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 126), which renders his prior words of regret and sympathy actually meaningless. Obviously, the businessman does not seem to care for the misery and distress the workers have to face as a consequence of his decision to dispense with them in favour of steam machinery.

One also needs to pay particular attention to the Squire’s attempt to justify the restructuring of the factory and the dismissal of the workers by referring to his legal entitlement to proceed with the business entity in any imaginable way he wishes. In this context, Vernon imputes to Westwood “a haughty and patronizing style” when he “brutally and possessively” insists on his rights (125):

WESTWOOD. I don’t want you, that’s all. Surely I can say that? What is here is mine, left me by my father to do the best with, and that is now my intention. [...] Don’t you buy where you please, at the cheapest place? Would you have bought that jerkin of one man more than another, if he had charged you twice the sum for it, or even a sixpence more? Don’t you, too, sow your garden as you please, and dig it as you please?

HATFIELD. Why, it’s my own!

WESTWOOD. There it is! Then have I not the same right to do as I please with *my own*? (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 124-125)

According to Ilseman, one might interpret the previous conversation in the light of the so-called “doctrine of natural rights” and, most importantly, Locke’s ideas concerning private property (194). First of all, Locke had an understanding of the natural rights doctrine which assumed that rights of life, liberty and property

were by nature inherent in human beings' relations to each other and thus equally applicable for everybody (Dunning 230). As far as property rights are concerned, the scholar argued that "[...] protection and preservation of property in the broad sense of the word -that is, life, liberty and estate- against dangers both from within and without the community" present the utmost duties of a civil society (Dunning 232). Following this line of argumentation, also the workers in *The Factory Lad* should, as a matter of course, accept the superiority of the factory owner's property rights over their claims of solidarity. Equality being one of the most important factors in Locke's philosophical concept, the Squire obviously knows how to make use of "the principle of equal opportunity" for his own personal benefit (Ilsemann 194-195). As a result, Westwood conveniently manages to absolve himself from any social responsibilities resulting from the fateful decisions taken in his role as powerful employer.

While Westwood might be criticised for drawing on his legal entitlement to an independent and autonomous business management in order to stifle his employee's words of complaint, one must admit that his argumentation immediately gains in importance when it comes to the destruction of the factory building and it is suddenly the formerly rich businessman who must fear for his survival. It seems that the workers actually make a contribution to their employer's claim of legal right of property when they demolish the machinery and connect this crusade against the new technology with a fight against the individual person owning the estate in question. Assuming that it is not acceptable under prevailing moral conventions to intervene with another man's proprietary rights by, for example, damaging or even destroying his belongings, one must acknowledge at the same time that the respective person might not only secure his granted rights but also generally proceed with his property as he likes.

As Westwood has already made his decision of dismissing large parts of his human workforce and is not willing to reconsider his pronouncement, the workers finally realise that it is useless to hope for their master's mercy and consequently openly show their feelings of hate and aggression. The worker Hatfield, for instance, doubts that Westwood might show sympathy by stating, "You cannot expect iron to have feelings!" (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 125). The labourer just mentioned then vents his anger by cursing the factory owner's

undertakings and appealing to his bad conscience. By calling the young master a “[h]ard-headed, vain, pampered thing” Hatfield ends his tirade of hate for the moment (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 126). At a later point in the play he calls Westwood “Squire Hard-heart”, a “rascal” who does not deserve to be called a man: “No man, no feeling. Call a man like that a squire!” (*The Factory Lad*, I.v, 135). Next, the worker does not only voice his anger as regards Westwood’s personality per se but also criticises the motivation underlying the latter’s plan to substitute manual labour for cheap steam machinery: “And we are turned beggars on the world, for no reason but to make room for that which has ruined hundreds, to suit the whims and finery of a thing unworthy the name of man!” (*The Factory Lad*, I.v, 138). It is important to notice that the labourer explicitly mentions the motive he thinks lies behind the factory owner’s decision. This statement contributes to a further concretion of the employer’s partial characterisation as a selfish, ruthless man of business. In this context, Ilseemann points out that Westwood is easily relegated to the role of a “scapegoat” which must endure all the criticism for the socially regrettable effects resulting from the socio-economic changes going on in general (196). However, one needs to admit that the text simply does not leave much room for a more positive or at least neutral perception of this character. Quite the contrary:

[A]fter a mere fifty lines of dialogue, the basic constellation of spectator allegiances is firmly established; they are for the discharged factory workers and against the factory owner thanks to the touching and sympathy-generating aspects of the scene and to the stock presentation of a villain with a diabolic laugh. (Ilseemann 197)

The play at hand obviously does not make any attempts to provide a solution to the deadlock situation of clashing interests of the respective actors of industrial relations. Rather, it only generates “[...] an impression of an essentially unjust and unjustifiable relationship between master and man” (Vernon 125). Obviously, drawing on the melodramatic “black-white model,” *The Factory Lad* builds up a world of clear oppositions (Ilseemann 199). In the end, any argument in favour of Westwood’s approach, such as his legal entitlement to proceed with his property as he wishes, is clearly outweighed by the considerable number of instances speaking against the adoption of a sympathetic attitude towards the character in question.

### 3.3 *The Rent-Day*

In *The Rent-Day*, the steward, Crumbs, is primarily presented as an evil, egoistic and merciless man who tries to increase his fortune at the expense of poor tenant farmers. When nobody else is around, he openly admits his secret plan to leave the country as soon as he has managed to scrape together enough money by capitalising on his subordinates' hard farm work:

The farm must come into my hands. Let me reckon. Another twelvemonth, – the landlord still away, and my fortune is complete. I have scraped, and scratched, and wrung! – 'Tis very well. Such another year, and farewell, England. (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 262)

At a later point in the play, when Crumbs is preparing to leave for good, he recapitulates his thoughts and feelings prevailing over the last ten years of beggaring his fellow citizens. He bluntly states that his wealth is not only based on “thrift” but also on “enmity” (*The Rent-Day*, III.iii, 276). More importantly, though, the steward already hints at feelings of “vengeance” and “revenge” as significant motives for his deeds (*The Rent-Day*, III.iii, 276). The exact reasons for these strong emotions are only revealed at the end of the play, though, and will be tackled at a later point in this discussion.

In his role as steward, Crumbs' task is to collect the annual rent owed by the tenant farmers residing on the premises of the landlord Grantley. In the case that a peasant is unable to pay as a result of, for instance, bad crops, the steward is also entitled to seize the personal possessions and, above all, the farm building. Even worse, Crumbs is often not willing to prolong the time limits set or, if he does, makes only minimal allowances. Thus, the farmers vent their anger and confront the steward with criticism for his remarkable readiness to distrain their fellow workers' belongings: “See what it ha' brought Phil Jones to. That seizure, master Crumbs, ha' broken his heart. Warn't you a bit hasty like?” (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 261). Next, the steward is sarcastically asked, “Have you no heart?” when he refuses to extend the respite for two months but only offers another two weeks' time to deliver the due rent (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 262). Obviously, Crumbs pursues a strict style of management which scarcely allows for feelings of sympathy or mercy. Although he argues that he is sorry for the peasants who run into debt, feels “really uneasy” when some of them have to

go to the workhouse and describes the task to be a steward as a “sad” one, the keeping of “a clear book” is still of greater importance to him and, in his opinion, demands sacrifices (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 261-262). Yet, Crumbs seems to forget that it is only the tenant farmers who are really suffering. Thus, it borders ridicule when he considers the situation of a large family, fearing for their means of survival, to be a “marvellous pity” and threatens to “sell every stick” when the farmer in concern fails to pay in due time (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 262).

Crumbs’ credibility is further diminished when it comes to the seizure of the Heywood’s farm building (*The Rent-Day*, II.i, 270). On the one hand, he argues that he considers the process “a disagreeable business” (*The Rent-Day*, II.i, 270), and only demands what is due, namely a year’s rent; on the other hand, he shows considerable lack of empathy as far as the disastrous economic circumstances and the family’s deep attachment to their homestead are concerned. In reaction to Crumbs’ scarce words of sympathy, Farmer Heywood’s brother Toby openly accuses the steward of actually enjoying the business of seizing the family’s possessions.

Another, entirely dismissive view on Crumbs’ character and his way to carry out his business is provided by the landlord when he reveals his real personality and the true reason for his visit. Grantley states that he felt the need to supervise his steward’s deeds as the latter has become known for his “oppression” (*The Rent-Day*, III.iv, 279). As the landlord then blames Crumbs for “iniquity” and “wholesale theft” (*The Rent-Day*, III.iv, 279), the latter’s reputation is further damaged. Finally, Grantley asks the farmers present for forgiveness for his failure to keep his “mercenary agent” under control and acknowledges the farmers’ victimhood as well as the injuries they had to endure (*The Rent-Day*, III.iv, 280). However, in the end Crumbs is forgiven by his master, who at the same time grants the Heywoods the right of freehold to their farm. One might argue that the young landlord thus makes up for the damage incurred by his long and wilful absence. Following his preliminary representation as a “typical wastrel, gambler, and heartless oppressor of the poor,” the Squire finally “[...] turns out to be a kindhearted landlord, who hereafter will live on his estate and deal generously with his tenants” (Bailey 260). In the end it becomes clear that Grantley’s notices on further demands of money should only serve as a means to test the steward’s readiness to pressurise the tenant farmers even

more. Thus, Toby's tirade of anger is actually not justified but shows well the preconceived picture and unpopularity of the absent landlord among his subordinates:

If the landlord lose at gaming, his tenants must suffer for't. The Squire plays a low card – issue a distress warrant! He throws deuce-ace – turn a family into the fields! 'Tis only awkward to lose hundreds on a card; but very rascally to be behind-hand with one's rent! [...] [I]f he must feed the gaming-table, not to let it be with money, wrung, like blood, from the wretched. [...] [W]hilst he shuffles the cards, to remember the aching hearts of his distressed tenants. And when he'd rattle the dice, let him stop and think of the knuckles of the bailiff and tax-gatherer, knocking at the cottage doors of the poor. (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 263)

This portrayal of the landlord perfectly fits the usual representation of the melodramatic villain. Thus, it is rather a “departure from the pattern of melodrama” when the Squire shows “justice and generosity” towards his tenants in the end (Bailey 260).

Taking into account all the different approaches to the representation of the steward Crumbs, ranging from his recollection of his own personal thoughts, to his manner shown in connection with the collection of rent and the seizure of possession, to the accounts on his personality and behaviour provided by other characters, one might come to the conclusion that this character embodies the essentially nasty, ruthless businessman. The text under analysis seems to provide a solely one-sided, basically critical view of the custodian. Yet, one must bear in mind that the man in question thinks of himself to be occupying the moral high ground as he is actually only taking revenge on the landlord's father for the latter ran off with the steward's wife. Crumbs denotes himself as a “wronged and broken-hearted husband” who tries to hurt his rival “in his dearest part, his darling son” by capitalising on the tenant farmers' work in the name of the absent landlord (*The Rent-Day*, III.iv, 279). In this context, Emeljanow somewhat sympathetically labels the steward a “man twisted by a compulsive need for revenge” (38). At the same time, the steward is well aware of the wrongfulness of his deeds and even asks for a fair and appropriate sentence.

To sum up, Crumbs' attempt to provide a justifiable motive for his unfair and suppressive treatment of the tenant farmers must be rendered not substantial enough to alter the picture of the steward evolved so far. Quite the contrary, one might even argue that he actually tries to hide his greed for money

and business recklessness behind an emotional story of love and disappointment. In other words, the steward's villainous character traits may never be successfully relegated in favour of at least pitiful, if not positive ones.

### **3.4 *Lost in London***

In the next play under analysis, *Lost in London*, industrial relations only serve as a framework for and basis of the tragedy happening on an interpersonal level between the main characters, the employer Gilbert Featherstone and one of his employees, the miner Job Armroyd. The power relations operating between the mighty, economically advanced master and the impoverished, hard-working labourer are suddenly annulled and class boundaries abolished as soon as the two of them fight for the love of the same woman, Nelly.

However, at the beginning of the play, Featherstone is still able to take advantage of his economically powerful position and his subsequent ability to provide Nelly with the brightest prospects for their future together in London. As the young woman is tired of the dreary and lonesome existence of a miner's wife and dreams of a more pleasant and exciting life in the big city, talking her into leaving her home poses no challenge to the prosperous businessman: "I take you to a world of brightness and beauty, where, encircled by a myriad of admirers, you will forget that you have ever known this desolate spot" (*Lost in London*, I.ii, 220).

While Nelly is easily impressed by the amenities of Featherstone's luxurious lifestyle, she hardly dares to think of leaving her husband behind and by doing so, break his heart. Many different examples testify to her hesitation, distress and feelings of guilt: "Oh! fool! fool! that I have been to listen to the voice of the tempter, and oh! [...] Leave him! leave him for ever! I cannot! No, I cannot do it!" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 217), "My heart fails me! I *must* return!", "Surely, of all bad women I am the worst!" (*Lost in London*, I.ii, 219) or "Oh! Gilbert! Gilbert! have pity on me! I dare not go" (*Lost in London*, I.ii, 220). Although one must admit that Nelly shows clear signs of refusal and regret while Featherstone enforces his plans by "*seizing her somewhat roughly by the wrist*" and finally "*forces her off*" (*Lost in London*, I.ii, 220), it is nevertheless



noticeable that all the blame is laid exclusively on him, whereas Nelly is merely considered the innocent and pitiful poor victim. For instance, when Job is informed about his wife's absence, he immediately recognises Featherstone as the only guilty one: "He's turned her poor head, the villain! wi's fine talk, an' fine clothes – but her heart ain't bad – she niver had a bad heart, my poor Nell" (*Lost in London*, I.iii, 225). When, some time later, Job confronts his former master in London, he voices similar accusations: "Young loike her'sen, han'som an' soft-spoken, thee dazed the poor child wi' thy promises an' lies – lured her from her home, an' deceived her loike th' villain that ye are" (*Lost in London*, III.i, 267). Not a single thought is given to the question in how far Nelly has to take responsibility for the misery she has brought onto herself and others.

Resulting from the character description given so far, one might be tempted to put Featherstone down as a selfish and egoistic womaniser. Consequently, it would be easy to equal the employer with the melodramatic stereotype of the "villain" whom Smith identifies as "[...] heartless libertine in shiny boots and jet-black whiskers whose whole existence is devoted to encompassing the heroine's chastity, the hero's downfall, or their combined destruction" (*Introduction*). However, one must acknowledge that one possible justification for his behaviour might lie in the fact that he is himself deeply in love with the woman he tries to win over:

Listen, Nelly! From the time I visited Shuttleville with my father last year, and saw you at the *fête*, your face has been engraven on my heart – an instant had riveted chains, which an eternity cannot break. [...] Ever thinking of the English rose I had seen blossoming on the desolate moor, I found you again, Nelly; but this time, to my misery, to my madness, you were – a wife! (*Lost in London*, I.ii, 219-220)

However, the question remains whether it is reasonable and sensible at long sight to put one's own happiness above that of others, Job's in this case. In addition, Featherstone seems to proceed even more ruthlessly and disrespectfully than possibly necessary: He stops by at the Armroyds' frequently, tries to establish contact with Nelly and subsequently disguises his ambitions as enquiries on behalf of business matters. Job clearly misinterprets his master's presence when he states, "He a'na bin here, but he wur here last naight, an' t' naight afore that, a-waitin' for my comin' home. He be main coorious to know 'bout mining matters, be Mester Featherstone" (*Lost in*

*London*, I.i, 213). Featherstone obviously capitalises upon his role as employer in order to pursue his romantic aims. Pretending professional duties, he approaches his subordinate's wife and is consequently marked as an essentially dislikable and despicable character.

As already mentioned beforehand, as soon as the play centres on the personal rivalry between Job and Featherstone as regards Nelly's devotion, any class boundaries or power relations based on the respective occupational positions are abandoned and all the attention is focused on the representation of the characters as individual human beings. Therefore, it should only be mentioned briefly that at the end of the play Featherstone makes up for his formerly ruthless behaviour and indirectly apologises for his deeds. He averts an armed duel by stating, "Job Armroyd! I have deeply – cruelly injured you – I will not add another crime to the catalogue. [...] I will not raise my hand against you" (*Lost in London*, III.i, 267). Featherstone surrenders and wishes he could atone for what he has done so that they would come to a reconciliation. However, Job is convinced they cannot "re-make the past – nor forget it" (*Lost in London*, III.i, 268), and considers the feeling of guilt Featherstone consequently has to endure to be an adequate punishment.

In order to provide for a broader picture of Gilbert Featherstone in his role as employer, it is necessary to shed light on his representation in connection with more minor characters as well. For example, Flounce, one of Featherstone's servants, once mentions that the latter is "[i]n a tantrum, as usual" (*Lost in London*, II.i, 230) and thus hints at her master's moody, probably even choleric nature. Shortly after her remark, Flounce is the object of attack when Featherstone returns home and needs someone on whom he could release his anger:

GILBERT (*who has nearly stumbled over FLOUNCE*). Deuce take the women! they're always in the way!

FLOUNCE. (bridling) Well I'm sure, sir, I –

GILBERT. Pshaw! don't talk, but go. (*FLOUNCE sweeps out indignantly.*) Set a woman's tongue once in motion, and stop it who can. (*Lost in London*, II.i, 231)

This extract shows very well Featherstone's dismissive and disrespectful attitude towards his female servant and, taking his words literally, towards women in general. Moving on to the mine owner's professional skills and habits, the footboy Blinker provides a highly interesting insight when he states that

“Featherstone, now, isn’t all bad, though it’s equally certain he isn’t all good” (*Lost in London*, II.ii, 240). He then elaborates further:

As my ree-spectable and ree-spected huncle used to say, ‘knavery and honesty are both nice things in their way. Like brandy and water, all depends on how you mix ‘em. A quantity of the former with a modifying dash of the latter and you go through the world tri-humphant.’ (*Lost in London*, II.ii, 240)

Clearly, Blinker here awards his employer the ability to tread the fine line between being a clever businessman and a reckless dodger. In any case, it cannot be stated with certainty in how far Featherstone is really involved in shady business as *Lost in London* does not provide much information on the entrepreneur’s professional conduct. One can at least say, though, that Featherstone must be a really strict and stone-hearted master as Blinker says, “Here’s weather! Blessed if I’d send a dog out on a herrand tonight. But Featherstone’s no ‘art – never had” (*Lost in London*, II.iii, 242). His hardheartedness seems to get even worse when it comes to business matters. As Blinker puts it, “To hear him speak when he’s got on his company manners, you’d think butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth” (*Lost in London*, II.iii, 242).

Summing up, the representation of Featherstone’s role as an employer turns out to be marked by predominantly negative features. Taking advantage of his economically superior position in order to pursue his selfish and egoistic aim of capturing Nelly, even the fact that Featherstone seems to be merely driven by his own affection for the woman in question cannot justify his questionable behaviour and thought. Finally, brief but telling aspects of the employer’s relationships with employees such as Flounce or Blinker act as further indicators for his characterisation as a ruthless, hard-hearted man of business.

### **3.5 *The Middleman***

In *The Middleman*, fairly straight-forward portrayals of the respective actors of industrial relations are given. A clear line of distinction is drawn between the basically negative representation of the employers’ side on the one hand and the thoroughly likable one of the employees’ side on the other hand: “Black is

black and white is white and there is no intervening shade of grey” (Northend 454). However, Jones nevertheless manages to keep away from merely stereotypical representations of his characters but bestows multilayered personalities upon them (Booth, *The Lights* xxvi; Wauchope 150).

Every time the topic of Blenkarn’s achievement and his probably insufficient compensation is raised, Chandler seems to have the feeling that he, on the one hand, needs to stress his own contribution to the success of Tatlow Hall and, on the other hand, play down the potter’s. Firstly, he objects to mentioning Blenkarn’s name in a newspaper article on his successful leadership of the Tatlow porcelain works and highlights his personal efforts connected to the rebuilding of the business instead:

Where would his invention have been if it hadn’t been for my capital and business energy in working it? Besides, I paid him for it, two hundred pounds. And look how good I’ve been to him ever since – always advanced him money on his wages to fool away on his crack-brained inventions that never came to anything. No! It’s not necessary to mention Blenkarn. He shares the glory of belonging to the works. That ought to be enough for him. (*The Middleman*, I, 178)

When Blenkarn tries to justify his decision to vest even more time in his experiments by reference to his great success in inventing the glaze, Chandler harshly interrupts the potter and, again, puts forward those elements which were part of the overall business success for which he was especially responsible:

CHANDLER. [...] You’ve been busy these last twenty years, and what have you done?

CYRUS. Well, I invented the glaze. The works were bankrupt when –

CHANDLER. When I bought your patent, and brought my energy and capital to bear on it. (*The Middleman*, II, 195)

As Chandler consistently tries extremely hard to shed light on his fraction of participation in the business success, it suggests itself that he has the feeling he needs to find justifications for his entitlement to the benefits resulting from Blenkarn’s efforts. When not highlighting his own achievements, the factory owner at least plays down the potter’s work. This strategy can already be traced in Chandler’s statement given above: “Where would his invention have been if it hadn’t been for my capital and business energy in working it?” (*The Middleman*, I, 178), but only becomes especially apparent when he aims at arguing Lady Umfraville out of calling Blenkarn a “genius” (*The Middleman*, I, 181). When she

wants to know what his alternative impression of a genius is, he draws an explicit distinction between the one who makes a discovery himself on the one hand, and the other, more admirable one, who manages to profit from the former's invention on the other hand. As the short speech he gives in answer to the lady's question is laced with references to his own achievements, his definition of a genius equals an instance of self-praise. In the end, the work of the creative inventor, Blenkarn, is completely outshone:

My idea of a genius is – a – ah – a – practical man, a man who doesn't invent anything himself, but has the insight, and courage, and shrewdness to see the value of another man's invention, and the energy to secure it and work it: a man who, by sheer force of business enterprise, raises himself to the position of a great public benefactor and provides labour for thousands of his fellow creatures.  
(*The Middleman*, I, 181)

Sometimes Chandler even goes so far to insult Blenkarn on a directly personal level. For example, when the latter asks for money advancements in order to buy material for his latest experiment, the businessman not only refuses to pay the sum demanded, but also shows a dismissive attitude towards Blenkarn's idealism and inventive talent: "How do you expect people to trust you when you are always throwing your money away in useless experiments?" (*The Middleman*, I, 180-181). The employer does not seem to have any feelings of trust in or sympathy for this hard-working potter. He does not provide any form of emotional support but, quite the contrary, even dares to pressure his employee to sell his collection of valuable pottery to him in exchange for further money advancements (*The Middleman*, II, 195). Besides calling him an "old fool" (*The Middleman*, II, 196), Chandler does also not flinch from publicly ridiculing Blenkarn and his habit of signing his best pieces of pottery: "I think that's rather an absurd practice of yours, putting your own private mark on your best pieces. It's not necessary – not necessary – I wouldn't do it again if I were you" (*The Middleman*, I, 182). As the stage directions reveal that Blenkarn shows "*intense disappointment*" in reaction to his master's order (*The Middleman*, I, 182), one can imagine that it must have been very important to the potter to leave behind his personal identification mark and thus immortalise himself in his work pieces. Chandler either simply does not realise the potter's injury or, more likely, deliberately tries to curtail his fame and significance in favour of his own popularity.

In the case that Blenkarn should ever manage to rediscover the traditional, very valuable glaze of the former Tatlow porcelain works, Chandler is convinced to be first in participating in the marketing of this presumably profitable investment. Having already capitalised on Blenkarn's former invention, Chandler unabashedly takes advantage of the potter's tight financial situation and offers him the opportunity to re-enter into the firm under more than questionable conditions: "I'll take you back for a term of six years at four hundred a year on condition that any little improvements you may happen to make in porcelain during that six years belong to me" (*The Middleman*, III, 215). It is important to notice that in this contractual relationship Blenkarn would be denied any independent marketing of his inventions whereas Chandler would be able to eliminate any competition with foreign investors. In the end, the only winning party is the employer, enjoying the highest possible profit gains at minimum cost.

At this point it can already be stated that Chandler's attitude towards the potter Blenkarn makes him appear as a thoroughly dislikable character. Ranging from the exploitation of the worker's invention without the latter having an adequate share in the grand business success to the subsequent downplay of his achievements and the corresponding glorification of the employer's role in the marketing process and the personal affronts in various different forms, Chandler's misconduct in the work relationship with Blenkarn justifies the identification of him as a selfish, money-grabbing master who enriches himself at the expense of his subordinate. This argument is also supported by Northend's summary on Chandler's character qualities reading: "all greed, injustice, cruelty and malice" (454). In addition, the author just mentioned identifies the owner of the factory as a villain featuring as "social menace" to Blenkarn's welfare (454).

Chandler's behaviour in his role as employer does not only become apparent in his relationship with Blenkarn, but is also briefly tackled when his daughter and his future daughter-in-law come back from a visit at the porcelain works and, completely upset, report on the terrible working conditions they have just witnessed, obviously, for the very first time. When Maude wants to know if it is really "[...] necessary for the young women and girls to do that terrible work," her father first of all argues that without those people's effort the country's

economic prosperity would be at stake (*The Middleman*, II, 198). Furthermore, Chandler tries to play down the hardship connected to the working processes by claiming that they would “get used to it” anyway (*The Middleman*, II, 198). Finally, he states it is hardly possible that the workers did not approve of the prevailing working conditions as he otherwise would not enjoy such a high degree of popularity among the population concerned. Doubting the validity of her father’s assertions, Maude neither accepts the Major’s praise for Chandler’s “private and public virtues” as credible proof of the people’s true “love and respect” for their employer since she considers the politician’s judgement not to be without bias (*The Middleman*, II, 198). When the young lady assumes that the reason for the Major’s highly positive account might most likely be found in commercial considerations, Chandler seems to be quite injured and vehemently defends his position:

That a child of mine should take such an incredibly low view of human nature as to suppose that a respectable wine and spirit merchant should be influenced in his political views by paltry considerations of trade. [...] I encourage all local enterprise. You must surely see, Maude, that I am a great public benefactor to the town of Tatlow. Look at the entertainments yesterday – the fireworks alone [...]. Really, it does seem cruel that I should be obliged to point out my benevolence to my own daughter.  
(*The Middleman*, II, 198)

The question arises whether Chandler deliberately tries to suppress the arguments running against his view or whether he is simply unable to see them as a result of his firm, but misleading, belief in his popularity and amiableness. It is striking to notice how little the employer knows about the miserable conditions his employees must endure. His ignorance suggests an advancing alienation from the actual working process. Therefore, it is possible that Chandler is truly convinced of the correctness of his misty-eyed, romantic view of the industrial relations prevailing at his production site, and thus does not negate his employees’ suffering on purpose.

However, one could also argue that he is very well aware of the exploitation of labour taking place at his factory and simply tries to avert a discussion on this problem by drawing attention to his numerous achievements. This argument is supported by the fact that Chandler tends to overstate his alleged virtues and prominence. Not only does he present himself as a great philanthropist and significant contributor to England’s economic success, he is

furthermore explicitly enthusiastic about the mentioning of his popularity among his workforce in a future press release: "Paternal care of work people, not a man, woman or child in the Tatlow Porcelain works who wouldn't gladly lay down his life for Joseph Chandler.' That's very good indeed, Todd [...]" (*The Middleman*, I, 178). Following the latter line of argumentation, it is legitimate to regard Chandler as a heartless, oppressive businessman who prospers at the expense of his workers and at the same time even tries to present himself in the most positive light possible.

Even if not to such a great extent as visible in the context of the labourers working in the production process, Chandler also pursues an exploitative strategy in the relationship with his managing assistant, Todd. The latter seems to be a devoted and clever man of business whose knowledge and skills Chandler highly appreciates. Yet, when Todd asks him about the possibility of forming a partnership one day, he nevertheless reacts indignantly and finds it an utmost impudence that his manager dares to ask such a thing:

(*Aghast*) Partnership, Todd? (*Very much upset*) Really, you surprise me – just as I had taken you into my confidence in everything. It's too bad, Todd. It's encroaching on my good nature! You have the honour of belonging to the works. You share in the glory that attaches to the name of Joseph Chandler. I think that ought to be sufficient.  
(*The Middleman*, I, 180)

In order to round off the picture of the businessman presented so far, a brief overview of Joseph Chandler's behaviour towards his own family members and fellow townspeople should be given. Apart from his prosperous porcelain business, Chandler also tries to gain foothold in politics and intends to run for Parliament in the upcoming elections. In order to secure his success, he is ready to use every means at his disposal: In exchange for Sir Seton Umfraville's support of his candidature, Chandler has arranged for the marriage between his son, Julian, and Felicia Umfraville, thereby providing for the latter's financial security. It thus poses a severe threat to Chandler's political plans when Julian admits his love relationship with Blenkarn's daughter, Mary. He desperately tries to prevent a scandal by threatening his son with public disownment and disinheritance if he did not stick to his promise of marrying Felicia. Chandler would even sacrifice his son's happiness to ensure the triumphant launching of his political career. He only thinks of his personal upward mobility and does not



seem to care about the feelings of others, especially his son's: Splitting with the Umfraville's would cost him "hundreds of votes" (*The Middleman*, I, 189), and deprive him of the opportunity to pursue his "hopes" and "honourable ambition" (*The Middleman*, I, 190). He even tries to bribe the unwanted daughter-in-law in order to make sure she would not make any demands but leave the estate. In this context it should be noted especially that Chandler considers a monetary donation a legitimate means of ensuring the achievement of his aims. Naming his attempts to take advantage of his powerful economic position "generosity," Chandler at least does not keep it a secret that the underlying aim of his gratuity is salving his conscience (*The Middleman*, II, 207-208).

At the very end of the play, when Chandler is wallowing in self-pity as a result of his economic downfall, Todd helps to confirm the former's preliminary portrayal by imputing absolute professional incompetence to him. Having had "bad judgement" rather than "bad luck" in business matters, Chandler is said not to be "worth a penny" in Todd's present operation (*The Middleman*, IV, 226-227). While Todd pulled the strings in the management of the Tatlow works, Chandler allegedly only served as "figure-head" who was merely good at drawing money out of the company (*The Middleman*, IV, 227). Bearing in mind that by the end of the play, Chandler is faced with ruin and finds it increasingly difficult to get a job, Todd's recollections seem strikingly credible.

As Todd is not only Chandler's assistant but also accorded great responsibilities as far as his master's business enterprise is concerned, he takes up a similar role to an employer and can thus be considered an object of discussion in terms of the orientation of his representation as well. When having a closer look at the managing director's relationship with Blenkarn, it immediately becomes apparent that Todd also tries to capitalise upon the potter's achievements. In so far, there is no difference between Chandler's and Todd's behaviour at first glance. Calling him a "greenhorn" of whose inventive genius he would have liked to take advantage (*The Middleman*, II, 199), Todd tries to persuade Blenkarn to sign a business contract centring on the acquisition of the latter's future patent for glazing porcelain in exchange for a predefined sum of money. In order to achieve his aims, Todd first of all draws on the dastard strategy of pretending devoted friendship and true interest in the labourer's welfare. As these attempts go awry, he moves on to shamelessly

blackmailing the potter in need. Todd recognises that Blenkarn is desperate for more financial support in order to carry out his experiments and therefore threatens to advance only more money under condition of receiving a greater share in the marketing of the discovery hopefully upcoming. In contrast to Chandler, Todd's representation in regard to his behaviour towards Blenkarn is rather limited to his attempts of convincing the potter to acquiesce to his business proposals and does not include an element of personal malevolence. While Chandler is always anxious to present Blenkarn's efforts as merely constituting a fraction of the overall success achieved in improving porcelain production by playing down the latter's inventive talent in general or insulting him on a personal level, Todd does not care about anybody's public standing, neither his own, nor Blenkarn's, as long as his investment works out. It is thus legitimate to claim that, contrary to Chandler, Todd appears slightly less disagreeable in respect to his exploitative attitude towards the individual economic subordinate, Blenkarn.

However, on a more general level, the assistant manager shows a highly questionable way of dealing with other people's rights and interests. For instance, in the course of Todd's task to manage the public relations in connection with the Tatlow porcelain works, he makes it obvious that he does not see a problem in giving a report on Chandler's achievements an unnaturally positive spin and thus manipulating its audience: "That always goes down with the British public" (*The Middleman*, I, 178). Next, it appears Todd does not mind risking other stakeholders' interests as long as his own aims are secured. He considers the flight into a limited liability company, which allows for only fractional personal liability of the natural persons concerned, to be a favourable idea in order to disclaim any responsibility for one's business-related decisions and at the same time make the most out of a risky undertaking: "And if business gets a little shaky, you can turn the whole concern into a limited company, and clear out" (*The Middleman*, II, 196).

While it has previously been argued that Todd's representation merely centres on his business efforts and therefore makes him indeed appear as a ruthless businessman but at least not as a malicious person behaving cruelly towards his subordinates on a personal level, one could also claim that his viciousness becomes even more visible in his relationship with Chandler. Very

early on in the play it is made clear that Todd and Chandler are actually competitors in the battle for Blenkarn's patent on the rediscovered glaze. For instance, when Chandler worries about the consequences of Blenkarn discovering the secret formula without his participation in marketing the related products, Todd for the first time secretly proclaims his wish to be first in investing in the potter's newest project:

CHANDLER. But suppose this old fool (*indicating Blenkarn's room*) was to find out the secret of the old Tatlow –

TODD. Well?

CHANDLER. It would knock all out present ware out of the market.

TODD. He'll never find it out.

CHANDLER. No, and if he does, I could buy his patent of him for a five pound note.

TODD. Yes, to be sure. (*Aside [...]*) Unless I bought it for ten.  
(*The Middleman*, II, 196)

Behind Chandler's back Todd tries to talk Blenkarn into a contract securing his right to acquisition of the future patent or at least into a collaboration featuring Todd as equal partner. Having said that, it is interesting to notice Todd does not find it very difficult to feign his full support for Chandler's attempts to motivate Blenkarn to accept his job offer:

CHANDLER. I'll take you back for a term of six years at four hundred a year on condition that any little improvements you may happen to make in porcelain during that six years belong to me. I think that's a very generous offer, Todd? (*Turning to Todd*)

TODD. Generous! It's magnificent! It's quixotic!

CHANDLER. Candidly, Todd?

TODD. On my honour – you know I never flatter.  
(*The Middleman*, III, 215)

Consequently, it seems legitimate to assume Todd to be a furtive, perfidious character to whom principles such as honesty and loyalty are not sacred at all. At the very end of the play, Todd openly confronts Chandler with several remarks hinting at his malicious delight in the other's misfortune. Enjoying the triumph over his former master, Todd does not seem to experience any feelings of pity but rather, he is busy praising his own skills and achievements:

While Batty Todd worked you, you were a big man. Now Batty Todd works Cyrus Blenkarn, *he's* the big man. I'll tell you a secret, Chandler! It isn't *you*, it isn't *Blenkarn*, it's Batty Todd that's the big man. Batty Todd pulls the strings and – (*business of illustrating marionettes*).  
(*The Middleman*, IV, 227)

When arguing for Todd's boundless disagreeability not only in terms of business matters but also in his relationship with Chandler, one must not forget that previously to his triumphal ascension he seems to have suffered a lot from his master's oppressive and exploitative ruling. Obviously, Todd is responsible for a considerable number of different tasks ranging from public relations work for both the Tatlow works as well as its owner, to trivial issues such as statistics and finally the general management of the business. Nevertheless, Chandler does not even think of showing gratitude or recognition for his managing man's efforts and immediately nips discussions about the building of a joint partnership in the bud. Todd reacts very humbly and does not dare to elaborate more on this topic. However, already at this point in the play he poses the rhetorical question, "Where would Joseph Chandler have been if Batty Todd hadn't worked him?" (*The Middleman*, I, 180). Bearing in mind Chandler's ungratefulness for his managing man's achievements, one could argue that Todd's ignoble behaviour towards his former master is simply a logical, probably even comprehensible consequence of his permanent subordination.

### **3.6 Strife**

The final play under analysis differs from all the other pieces of drama dealt with so far especially in its movement away from the discussion of issues connected to industrial relations on a merely personal level, where disputes are settled between the individual actors, towards an intervention of trade unions and a collective representation of interests. This is due to Galsworthy's peculiar nature in his approach towards play writing: "[H]e possessed a passionate sympathy for human nature on a certain level; below that level he was more concerned with the condition of society which imposed itself upon the other half, than he was with the unfortunate types themselves" (Moses 538). As regards *Strife*, it is thus not meaningful to focus solely on individual characters such as John Anthony, the director of the company board, in order to examine the representation of his role as employer, but it is also necessary to enlarge the scope of exploration to the latter's colleagues, all men of business as well, in order to generate an overall picture of the power relations at work.

As a result of the destructive strike among the workers at the Tin Plate Works, the current public opinion of the board members involved seems to be characterised by negative remarks. In the local newspaper it reads:

If the Board of worthy gentleman who control the Trenartha Tin Plate Works from their armchairs in London, would condescend to come and see for themselves the conditions prevailing amongst their workpeople during this strike – [...] We cannot believe that even their leg-of-mutton hearts would remain untouched. (*Strife*, I, 102)

This short extract already broaches a variety of important points of criticism the businessmen are confronted with throughout the play. Ranging from the accusation of increasing alienation from the working conditions their labourers have to endure, to simple arrogance and lack of feeling, the board members are exposed to severe attacks on their business manners and personal qualities. Yet, it seems the newspaper editor is quite right when he argues that the business people would not really be aware of the full scope of consequences connected to the present crisis. For instance, although they have just been informed about the “great distress” prevailing among the workers (*Strife*, I, 101), and clearly recognise that the harsh weather conditions aggravate the labourers’ situation even more, Underwood does not feel prevented from asking for lunch, Scantlebury from complaining about the quality of the food he enjoyed the night before at the hotel or Wilder from criticising the enormous heat of the fireplace and worrying about his trip to Spain the following day. The board does not seem to give a single thought to the appropriateness of their actions. Similarly, following the declaration that the striking workers are by now in a “damnable” state (*Strife*, I, 105), the businessmen consider the price of tin, the likelihood of a dividend distribution and the shareholder interests in general rather than thinking about the labourer’s situation. They obviously fail to see the great imbalance between the effects emanating from the deadlock position in the negotiations concerning the strike: While the workers are faced with life-threatening food shortage and starvation, it seems quite presumptuous when Wilder claims that the ongoing of the strike would mean “ruining” themselves (*Strife*, I, 107). The businessmen’s alienation from their employees’ lives is also explicitly tackled by Enid, who accuses her father, Anthony, of being unable to realise fully the suffering of the people concerned as a result of missing personal contact and presence.

Concluding, the question arises whether the members of the board are really to blame for their narrow and self-centred thinking or whether they should rather be viewed as mere victims of their own ignorance, as they are simply unable to see the stark contrasts between the weight of their own interests and the one's of the workingmen. They lack any insight into the latter's lives or sorrows and thus cannot summon up feelings of empathy or compassion. Of course, one could go a step further and claim that the businessmen simply turn a blind eye to their responsibility of working on their self-inflicted ignorance.

What is more, one might even argue that in sum, it is rather a selfish and hard-hearted attitude which is at the centre of their representation anyway. First of all, the majority of the members of the board tend to put the blame for all the negative and destructive consequences of the strike on the workingmen and wash their hands clean of any sort of responsibility. Clear statements such as: "It's their own fault [...]" (*Strife*, I, 101), "We didn't seek the quarrel" (*Strife*, I, 105) or "[...] if they choose to be such a pig-headed lot, it's nothing to do with us" (*Strife*, I, 106-107), illustrate this claim. When it comes to the death of Roberts' wife, Annie, the men's excuses from any potential responsibility become even more emphatic:

SCANTLEBURY. You don't suggest that we could have helped the poor thing?

WILDER. [*Flustered*] The woman was in bad health. Nobody can say there's any responsibility on us. At least – not on me.  
(*Strife*, III, 148)

Next, the board is led by an obstinate chairman who seems to see the employees as enemies whom he has to fight. Anthony is by no means prepared to reach a compromise and thus also refuses any collaboration with the trade union involved in the strike. In a discussion with the leader of the trade union, Harness, he even threatens with the employment of free labour, which he would never successfully achieve, though. Finally, the elderly director openly states his unwillingness to abandon his position: "Remains to be seen which can hold out longest – they without us, or we without them" (*Strife*, I, 108). Anthony is a man of principle and would rather risk the failure of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works than to succumb. Similarly, Wilder muses on the destructive consequences of the ongoing strike and sums up the essence of the overall

outcome in the following manner, “The only comfort is, the men’ll be in a worse!” (*Strife*, I, 105).

However, also other members of the board show quite merciless and uncaring attitudes when it comes to the question about how to proceed further in the handling of the striking workers. When Edgar, Anthony’s son, states that the labourers should be in the centre of attention in their considerations, Scantlebury replies, “We mustn’t think of our private feelings, young man. That’ll never do” (*Strife*, I, 105). According to Wanklin, sentiment is a luxury anyway and should not form the basis for their business policy. At a later point in their conversation, Edgar poses the rhetorical question whether “men of business” would be “excused from decency” and thereby alludes to his colleagues’ prior statement that, carrying on the strike regardless of the fact that the consequences would mean great suffering for the working men’s relatives, “sounds a little sentimental” (*Strife*, I, 106).

Roberts also accuses Anthony of exercising a tyrannical leadership which makes him “[...] an enemy to every man that has come into [his] works” (*Strife*, I, 113). The worker then confronts the director’s daughter with an emotional tirade of rhetorical questions concerning the old man’s way of going about the present strike at the works:

Does Mr. Anthony think it brave to fight against women and children? Mr. Anthony is a rich man, I believe; does he think it brave to fight against those who haven’t a penny? Does he think it brave to set children crying with hunger, an’ women shivering with cold? (*Strife*, II.i, 125)

It is Anthony’s ignorant, uncaring and selfish attitude at which Roberts is hinting. The latter assumes the only thing the businessmen are thinking about is their share in profits. In fact, Roberts’ allegations prove right since the majority of the board members really tend to discard considerations concerning the personal well-being of the workers and first of all, as already touched upon beforehand, elaborate on issues such as the current tin price or the next possible dividend distribution.

It is important to notice that in the course of the play the businessmen begin to see things differently and feel increasingly dismissive of the uncompromising ongoing of the strike. Thus, by the end of the discussion, Anthony is the only one who still does not want to yield but stick to his traditional views on management and leadership. Finally, the elderly man is outvoted and

forced to resign from his position as director. Anthony stands for a thoroughly capitalistic, achievement-oriented approach of business conduct which draws a very clear dividing line between the interests of capital on the one side and labour on the other:

It has been said that masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. It has been said that the Board is only part of a machine. Cant! We *are* the machine; its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear of favour. (*Strife*, III, 151)

His leadership is marked by preference of “the iron hand” over “[s]entiment and softness” and does not allow room for socialist tendencies (*Strife*, III, 151). Anthony is afraid that the decision to satisfy one of the demands voiced by the workers would make them ask for an ever increasing number of further benefits. In the end, such acquiescence would lead to bankruptcy of the overall business project and consequently signify the ruin of all the actors connected to it. Speaking from an abstract, macroeconomic perspective, he is of course right, even though it is a rather pessimistic, one-sided approach the director is putting forward. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that it is in fact not always easy for the businessmen to balance the conflicting interests they are confronted with and should cater for. Ranging from the customers’ as well as the shareholders’ interests over the company’s and their own economic prosperity to the labourers’ demands, the list of diametrically opposed concerns is long and difficult to handle. Resulting from the businessmen’s responsibility to the shareholders, they rather feel as mere “part of a machine” or “Trustees” than “free agents” (*Strife*, III, 147). Their main task, as Wilder argues, is to make sure “[...] the Company earns as much profit as it safely can,” bearing in mind all the various different factors coming into play in generating the overall business success (*Strife*, III, 147). Moreover, Enid adds an additional view on the traditional picture of the typical shareholder when she explains to Mrs. Roberts:

You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they’re not – most of them are really no better off than working men. They have to keep up appearances. [...] You don’t have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. (*Strife*, II.i, 123)



Coming back to the director's role as a hard-headed, conservative man of business, one needs to acknowledge the old man's close emotional connection and genuine commitment to the company he himself founded roughly 30 years ago. Anthony's close family members are well aware what it would mean for him to be beaten in the upcoming voting on the future proceedings in the handling of the strike. Enid is convinced her father would "[...] never get over [...]" but suffer greatly from such an offence (*Strife*, III, 141). The young woman stresses that Anthony, having been chairman ever since the company came into existence, is completely engrossed in his business and now "[...] in danger of losing all he cares about in life" (*Strife*, III, 141). So far, he has performed quite successfully in his role as director and managed to ensure the company's continuation during both good and bad times. Therefore, it seems comprehensible that the aged man cannot easily abandon his traditional views and long-established approaches. Giving up the chosen strategy would amount to a personal disaster, wiping out all his remaining vitality. Notwithstanding, as time will show, it is sometimes unavoidable to adapt to changing circumstances and rules in order to secure one's position in the long run.

Thus, attention should be drawn to Anthony's strikingly negative attitude towards change and development in the business world: "It has been said that times have changed; if they have, I have not changed with them. Neither will I" (*Strife*, III, 151). Calling the new generation of business men a "soft breed," whose more socialist than capitalist conviction he simply does not understand or, rather, does not want to understand, Anthony appears almost childishly defiant when he refuses to adopt any other approach towards the current crisis than his own.

In his final and highly emotional speech in front of all the members of the board, the chairman also broaches a very important aspect in the discussion on the appropriateness of the current strike in general. In his opinion, "[t]he men have been treated justly; they have had fair wages, we have always been ready to listen to complaints" (*Strife*, III, 150). Similarly, Enid argues that the men would not be underpaid in relation to the cost of the successful continuation of the company as a whole. According to Harness, some of the men's demands are really in excess of the rates the Union is usually forcing. This means that the

workers are “[...] paid as much as the furnace men in similar works elsewhere” (*Strife*, II.ii, 131).

To conclude, it is hardly possible to make out a clear, decisive bias in the representation of the group of businessmen in question. Possibly objectionable behaviour and thought is always accompanied by exculpatory factors compensating for previous wrong-doing. While the board members might be blamed for their ignorance or arrogant, hard-hearted and selfish attitude, one at the same time needs to take into account the latter's difficult task of juggling a plethora of opposed interests in their role as shareholder representatives. Similarly, also the individual portrayal of Anthony as a hard-headed, conservative superior must not be left unchallenged. Bearing in mind his long-established position as chairman of the board and his deep personal commitment to the business he founded decades ago, the destructive decisions taken by the elderly man suddenly seem quite justified. Consequently, the play offers “[...] a masterly objective impartiality, with an almost lawyer-like weighing of pro and con” (Schalit 232) as regards the problematic relationship between capital and labour at hand. In contrast to the other plays, most of them melodramatic or at least marked by a melodramatic touch, *Strife* does not aim at a best possible, straight-forward and clear-cut distinction between the virtuous hero and the malicious villain. Quite the contrary, it is an impartial, balanced view the author aims at.

### 3.7 Generational differences

Contrasting the former with the present generation of employers in the plays under analysis, the latter usually comes off badly. In *The Factory Lad*, *The Rent-Day* as well as *Strife*, the generational constellation of businessmen makes up a significant portion of the respective character descriptions and will therefore be discussed in the following section in more detail.

In *The Factory Lad* the workers only speak highly of their former employer, the current master's deceased father. Firstly, he is explicitly referred to as a “worthy employer”, “The poor man's friend!”, “a kind man” and “[g]ood as good could be” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 123). Furthermore, the prior factory owner

is described as a loyal, fair and humble man who, as the workers believe, would never have increased his personal gains at the expense of his employees' well-being. The dead man's straightforward manner and honest character forms another point of adoration on the part of the workers. Moreover, the labourers highlight his distinct social consciousness and generous as well as compassionate nature. Allen even shows sentimental, melancholic feelings when praying for the deceased businessman's well-being in heaven. Ilseman identifies the relationship between the former employer and the current workers as one "[...] founded on reciprocal loyalty and responsibility towards the weak of society" (193). Following the author just mentioned, in this context the term "employer paternalism" adequately describes, this time in an entirely positive sense, the labour relations as reflected in connection with the former generation of employers (193-194).

Contrary to this exclusively positive account on the prior factory owner's degree of esteem, young master Westwood is confronted with severe criticism for moving on to new modes of production and business models. The "[...] disintegration of the old, feudal, agricultural-based relationship between master and servant and its replacement with a new, industrial order" leads to a great "social dilemma": Traditional values such as "social obligations implied by his old-fashioned, landowning title of Squire" as demanded by the workers concerned (Hudson 194), are completely negated by the young businessman. It is important to notice that Westwood's disregard for this tradition finally composes the major point in the establishment of his villainy (Hudson 196). In contrast to the workers' praise for times long past, the Squire clearly shows his discontent with the former generation's approaches: "What, because our fathers acted foolishly, shall we also plod on in the same dreary route?" (*The Factory Lad*, I.iv, 134).

However, confronted with a dramatically changing economic situation, it seems legitimate to aim at an adaptation of the traditional production processes in order to ensure the business' sustainability. One might argue in favour of master Westwood that, bearing in mind the entirely positive character description given above, it is unbelievably difficult for him to step into his father's shoes successfully. Yet, as a closer examination has shown that, contrary to former allegations on the part of the factory owner, the introduction of steam

machinery is almost exclusively meant to increase the employer's profit yield instead of securing the continuation of the company, young Westwood is ultimately put down as dislikable, selfish and ruthless, irrespective of his challenging role as successor of his highly lauded parent. Therefore, Ilseman is not to be followed when he states: "[...] Westwood's villainous deeds do not arise exclusively from a human causality [...], although greed certainly plays a role. Instead they are the upshot of an incomprehensible, ungodly, and lifeless system" (204). Laying all the blame on the socio-economic or socio-political system at the same time means opening up the possibility of refusing to take on responsibility at all.

Even though the older generation of employers and masters is not more or less explicitly honoured and lauded, at least the younger one is criticised in a way that points out their faults in relation to their ancestors' virtues. In *The Rent-Day*, the steward describes the current landlord, Grantley, as an absent and "wild youth" who does not care for his own estate (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 263). What is more, after revealing his true personality, Grantley himself admits that he is used to an extravagant lifestyle. Foreseeing his son's faults and problems the former landlord employed the steward Crumbs in order to ensure the proper administration of the premises and, above all, to have the young master's extravagances checked. Speaking from an economic point of view, in sum the young master's poor ruling brings about years of suffering and hardship for the population of the country. Had he reacted faster to his steward's wrong-doings or even decided to reside on his lands and look after his estates earlier, a lot of misery and despair among the tenant farmers such as Miles or Heywood could have been avoided. Although the former landlord is indeed confronted with heavy criticism for unfortunate wilful misconduct on the interpersonal level, he at least managed to run his business affairs smoothly. On the contrary, the young master clearly fails in his duty of care and, by doing so, does considerable harm to his dependents.

Finally, it should be noted that *Strife* offers an exact opposition to the representation of generational differences discussed so far. In an important board meeting concerning the question which socio-political and socio-economic policy the company's leading committee should pursue, the aged entrepreneur and chairman, Anthony, is resoundingly defeated and thus his

traditional way of dealing with the workforce's demands, namely fighting them, rejected. Contrary to all his attempts at putting emphasis on the little value of newly emerging approaches of handling labour relations, the board members decide to take the line advocated by Anthony's son, Edgar. They abandon the old leader's plan of maintaining a strict ruling, standing up to the workers' complaints and starving the striking employees out but try to meet the requests asked for by the Union. Thus, voting the chairman out of office also means a shift in paradigm.

## 4 The representation of the employee

### 4.1 *Luke the Labourer*

Whereas Farmer Wakefield's role as employer is primarily presented in mere retrospection on the part of Luke and Charles, who report on their respective employment situation, his economic downfall and subsequent dependency on other people's benevolence is of greater topicality. As a result of his inability to repay Luke's debt claims, Wakefield can only be released from prison with the help of Charles' financial support. The Farmer wishes to return Charles' generosity but does not have an appropriate reward at his disposal: "Grateful boy, - if ever it be in my power to return thy kindness, - but what are hopes to me - am I not ruin'd? - No farm, no land! Blight, distemper, and misfortune, have swept all away, and I am now a bereft and comfortless old man" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 245). It is further noticeable that the Farmer completely forgoes any attempts to overcome his dreadful situation on his own but rather prefers to wallow in self-pity and abandons himself to despair:

Hope! - don't talk to me of hope! what have I to look forward to? Nothing but a pauper's life; and then I shall break my heart; and, when I be nail'd down, to be carried to my grave, no one will care, no one will know about it; there will be no passing-bell - nothing to let folks now, there goes poor Farmer Wakefield. (*Luke the Labourer*, II.ii, 252)

This quote also illustrates very well that, similar to Luke, Farmer Wakefield obviously values economic success as one of the most significant aspects determining one's respectability in society. More importantly, though, the

question arises why the Farmer accepts his lot so easily and does not at all consider working on a solution a suitable opportunity. The answer most probably lies in the fact that he is still suffering considerably from the abduction of his son years ago, and since then has given up on everything: "I were then a prosperous man, with acres of land, and full barns; but the loss of my boy made me neglect everything: I did not care what came – bad luck followed bad luck – and misfortunes did then begin, which ended in my ruin" (*Luke the Labourer*, II.ii, 254). This stroke of fate changed his life and took away any vitality from him; he bows to any external forces and remains entirely passive.

Moving on to the representation of Luke in his role as an employee, it soon becomes apparent that he is not prepared to accept any responsibility for his dismissal from Wakefields' but lays all the blame entirely on the Farmer, whom he accuses of cold-heartedness and cruelty. In fact, Luke tries to play down the significance of his own behaviour in relation to Farmer Wakefield's decision to dismiss him. What is more, Luke gives a highly emotional account on the tragic death of his wife following his unemployment and subsequent inability to provide properly for her, which makes Farmer Wakefield's failure in his humanitarian duty appear even more despicable and severe:

[...] when a bit hadn't been in my mouth for two days, I sat thinking, wi' my wife in my arms – she were ill, very ill – I saw her look at me wi' such a look as I shall never forget – she laid hold o' this hand, and, putting her long thin fingers all round it, said, "Luke, would na' the farmer give you sixpence if he thought I were dying o' want?" I said I'd try once more – I got up, to put her in a chair, when she fell, stone dead, down at my feet. [...] I were then quite ruin'd. I felt alone in the world.  
(*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246)

However, as already broached previously, Luke's sentimental report cannot be taken seriously as in the end it is revealed that he himself can primarily be blamed for the loss of his job. Luke's attempt to excuse his downfall under the pretext of the unfair distribution of power between the employer and the employee can therefore not be considered successful in terms of credibility.

Although Clara Wakefield does not appear in the role of an employee proper, an analysis of this character as regards her place in the power structures at work nevertheless proves worthwhile. First of all, when Squire Chase offers financial support for Farmer Wakefield's release from prison, Clara is either trustful or naïve and does not dare to reject his invitation to the manor

house. In this context it should be noted that Clara suffers considerably from her father's dishonourable imprisonment and is therefore easily manipulated:

SQUIRE. [...] Your father is in difficulties, I understand.

CLARA. He is, indeed, sir.

SQUIRE. I'm very sorry; but if you will come to the manor house, this evening, I shall be at leisure, and will give you my assistance and advice.

CLARA. Ah, sir! assistance and advice have long been needed.

(*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 242)

By the time Clara finally arrives at the mansion, Charles has already ensured the redemption of Farmer Wakefield in the meantime. The actual reason for Clara's visit therefore is her desire to have Luke punished for his offensive behaviour towards her father. When she says, "If you are inclined to serve the oppressed, sir, you will not let this matter rest; pardon my boldness, sir, but my poor father is a ruined and a broken man, with no one to stand up for him but his daughter" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.iii, 248), she expresses her deep respect for the landlord and at the same time signals the acknowledgment of her family's subordinate position and dependence on the benevolence of the more powerful agent. However, Squire Chase is of course not interested in the punishment of his own assistant. At this point it should again be stressed that the Squire simply takes advantage of his superior economic and societal position.

Yet, Clara does not only meet Squire Chase, but also Charles Maydew with awe and submissiveness. After Clara has learned about Charles' plans to buy her father's estate, she begins addressing him with *Sir* - a highly formal and distant form of salutation - thereby taking into account the likelihood of him becoming a landlord in due course. Clara explains her behaviour with reference to Charles' growing prosperity and superior position in future: "Superiors should have that distinction, Char -- -- Sir. [...] [Y]ou are now growing rich, and, I hear, likely to become our landlord – so I thought – I thought – nothing more, indeed, Sir" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 241).

To conclude, both Farmer Wakefield as well as his daughter appear as humble, oppressed country dwellers who accept their lot of being at the mercy of more powerful people. Especially Clara is a thoroughly likable character who does not do any harm to anybody but might be pitied for her quite naïve and credulous mind. Apart from certain unjustified allegations on the part of Luke, also Farmer Wakefield is not to blame for having done anything wrong. Quite

the contrary, it is Luke who appears as an absolutely untrustworthy coeval of a vicious complexion.

## **4.2 *The Factory Lad***

In contrast to *Luke the Labourer*, in *The Factory Lad* the individual characters fall in clear-cut categories as regards their professional position. Therefore, the discussion of the representation of the employee will subsequently centre on the roles of the workers George Allen, Wilson, Sims, Smith and Hatfield. In the opening scene of the play all of them appear as diligent labourers who are thankful for and also proud of their job at the factory. They describe themselves as “hard-working” and “honest” (*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 123), carry out their duties zealously and by no means want to disappoint their master’s demands on quality. Above all, it is important for them that the relationship between workers and master is based on amicability, solidarity and loyalty. The workers thus stand for “a socialism that envisions cooperation and harmony as the basis for society rather than competition and exploitation” (Ilsemann 194). Besides their professional progression, also their families’ well-being is of great value to them.

As the labourers are economically completely dependent on their employment at the factory and are thus actually at their employer’s mercy, the latter’s decision to have his machines propelled by steam poses a severe threat to their existence. Allen and Hatfield summarise what it means for them in practice to lose their job: Either they would be forced to beg or steal, or they would finally have to starve to death. In desperation, Allen even sinks to his knees in front of the Squire and pleads for his master’s mercy; however, all his attempts are in vain. The labourers display their deep frustration about their weak position in society: “What are working man like us but the tools that make others rich, who, when we become old – [...] We’re kicked from our places, like dogs, to starve, die, and rot, for what they care!” (*The Factory Lad*, I.ii, 127). When George Allen comes home to tell his family about his dismissal, again the unfair distribution of power between the employer on the one hand, and the employee on the other hand is highlighted:



That steam – that curse on mankind, that for the gain of a few, one or two, to ruin hundreds, is going to be at the factory! Instead of five-and-thirty good hands, there won't be ten wanted now, and them half boys and strangers. Yes, steam be now going to do all the work, and poor, hard-working, honest men, who ha' been for years toiling to do all for the good of a master, be now turned out o' doors to do what they can or what they like. (*The Factory Lad*, I.iii, 131)

Jane and the children are represented as remarkably diligent, modest and thrifty human beings who support their hard-working husband and father as well as they can. Jane tries to soothe Allen and make him believe again in hope and the benevolence of fate: "[...] sit down and have some supper, then you'll be better! Remember it is Saturday night. I know it is enough to make you vexed; but think, George – think, and remember there is One who never forsakes the good man, if he will but pray to him" (*The Factory Lad*, I.iii, 133). In contrast to Jane, who aims at a self-determined, active approach towards the challenging situation, George Allen obviously abandons himself to despair and destructive thinking. Facing a bleak future, he wallows in self-pity:

Think I can hear my children cry for food and run barefoot? Think I don't know what 'twill come to? [...] I have read, Jane – I have seen, Jane, the fate of a poor man. And you know we have nothing now, no savings after the long sickness of father and burying, and the little one we lost, too. (*The Factory Lad*, I.iii, 132).

So far, the men embody significant aspects usually assigned to the melodramatic hero such as their commendable work-ethos or laudable social and familial attitude. In their role as poor, down-trodden, humble and hard-working labourers, Allen and his colleagues seem at any rate pitiable and in sum overwhelmingly likable.

However, soon they dispose of their inhibitions, leave their roles as "helpless victims" (Ilsemann 196) behind, and make secret plans how to retaliate upon their former master for his decision to dismiss them. In contrast to the melodramatic picture of the passive, inactive hero, the workers this time play an active role when they appear as arsonists and instigators, inciting the action. Yet, one must bear in mind that the workers actually only react to Squire Westwood's announcement to have his factory propelled by steam. Their behaviour can therefore be classified as merely reactionary and thus fits perfectly well the pattern of the melodramatic hero.

It is noticeable that their hatred is primarily directed towards the new technology per se and only secondarily towards the Squire. For instance, Hatfield states about steam machinery, "Aye, our curse – our ruin!" (*The Factory Lad*, I.v, 136). What is more, the men's slogan is: "Destruction to steam machinery!" (*The Factory Lad*, I.v, 136), and Rushton, the ringleader, opens their attack on the factory with the words: "Now, to the work – to the work! Break, crack, and split into ten thousand pieces these engines of your disgrace, your poverty, and your ruin! Now!" (*The Factory Lad*, I.vii, 140).

Although Rushton is actually not a worker at Squire Westwood's factory, he nevertheless plays a significant role in the plotting against him. Rushton is a poacher and outcast who does not want to bow to the current legal system or any rules beneficial to the upper classes of society. He calls himself "desperate and daring" (*The Factory Lad*, I.ii, 128) and cannot await the moment to take revenge for all the injustice he has experienced in his life before: "No, the time has come when the sky shall be like blood, proclaiming this shall be the reward of the avaricious, the greedy, the flinty-hearted, who, deaf to the poor man's wants, make him what he now is, a ruffian – an incendiary!" (*The Factory Lad*, I.ii, 128). Obviously, Rushton sees himself as the poor and suppressed man's advocate and wants to fight against the authorities' powers.

At various points in the play, Allen remarks on Rushton's tragic history and mentions for instance that the latter was "[i]n the stocks twice, whipped publicly thrice, and in gaol seven times" (*The Factory Lad*, I.v, 137). In a conversation about the possibility of emigration to a "foreign outlandish place" (*The Factory Lad*, I.iii, 132), George Allen draws a comparison between their own future and the tragedy which happened to Rushton's family and says to Jane:

Look at Will Rushton, who was enticed, or rather say ensnared there with his wife and four children. Were not the children slaughtered by the natives, who hate white men and live on human flesh? And was not his wife seized too, your own sister, and borne away and never returned; shared perhaps the same fate as her children, or perhaps worse? And has not poor Will, since he returned, been crazed, heart-broken, a pauper, a poacher, or anything? (*The Factory Lad*, I.iii, 132)

Rushton puts the blame for his pain and suffering exclusively on the rich and powerful, on the authorities and the law. His primary aim is to revenge the alleged injustice he has experienced irrespective of the actual target of his

aggressions. For Rushton, the destruction of Squire Westwood's factory has a merely symbolic meaning of victory over might. Nevertheless, Rushton functions as the instigator of the machine smashing and expresses his agitation in fervent speeches such as the following:

Return their attack – blow for blow, if they will have it; aye, and blood for blood. Give in, and you're lost for ever! You'll have no mercy. Look at me, Will Rushton, honest Will Rushton that was once – hard-working Will Rushton. You know my fate – torture upon torture, the insult of the proud and the pity of the poor have been my lot for years. Trampled on, crushed, and gored to frenzy! My blood boils now I think on't! The pale spectre of my wife, with my slaughtered children now beckons me on! Revenge, revenge! Come, revenge! (*The Factory Lad*, I.vi, 140)

Hudson denotes Rushton as “malcontent in role and disposition; his sense of injustice prompts him to stir the other characters to action and catalyses the plot” (197). Moreover, the frequent references to his troublesome past and wretched life as a deracinated outcast help to make the group of workers aware of the future horrors that could await each of them (Ilseman 198). With this bleak outlook on their fortune in mind, the men are easily influenced and motivated for the attack on the factory. At the same time, Rushton's past experiences also account for his burning desire to take revenge on the prevailing power system and thus make his plans to a certain extent even comprehensible. Therefore, it seems legitimate to follow Vernon, who argues that the play allows for feelings of sympathy for the downcast outlaw (123). “[I]n resolute conflict with the powers of fate, with nothing more to lose, and determined to fight to the bitter end,” Rushton can even be identified as a “melodramatic hero” (Ilseman 199). His desire for revenge is based on the idea to restore justice and could thus be considered justifiable. However, when the deed is carried out and the factory bursts into flames, Rushton shows malicious joy and makes spiteful remarks in the face of the employer's downfall:

Ha, ha! This has been a glorious night, to see the palace of the tyrant levelled to the ground – to hear his engines of gain cracking – to hear him call for help, and see the red flame laugh in triumph! Ah, many a day have I lain upon the cold damp ground, muttering curses – many a night have I called upon the moon, when she has frenzied my brain, to revenge my wrongs; for days and nights I have never slept – misery and want, and the smart of the lash, with visions of bygone days, have been like scorpions, rousing me to revenge, and the time has come. I have had partners, too, in the deed – men who, like myself, glory in the act. (*The Factory Lad*, II.i, 141)

Rushton forfeits a large fraction of his likability when he calls the victory over the powerful Squire a “sweet triumph” (*The Factory Lad*, II.iv, 147) and openly laughs at the misery of the former oppressor. While it seems comprehensible that the men want to achieve an avengement of their suffering, Rushton’s gloating is definitely immoderate and inappropriate. Typical of the melodramatic idea of monopathy, not for a single moment does he think of any negative consequences connected to his deed but enjoys the situation of triumph to the fullest. Still in the courtroom he says, “Think you I regret – think you I fear? No, I glory in the act. There! I have confessed, and as in me you see the avenger of the poor man’s wrongs, on me, and me alone, heap your vengeance” (*The Factory Lad*, II.iv, 148). In the end, Rushton shoots the Squire and thereby signs his own death warrant.

It remains questionable in how far Rushton can be considered a truly likable character who fights for the rights of the poor and oppressed or whether he simply overstrains the idea of justified revenge for the agony he experienced and the others most likely will. Although one might show sympathy for the misery of the unemployed factory workers, their plan to fight against the introduction of steam machinery and to burn down their former workplace can hardly be supported. As their primary means of reaction is brutal violence and aggressiveness, the labourers’ likability diminishes considerably even though their reasons might be basically understandable. In terms of genre specifics, though, it is beyond dispute that the employees and, above all, Rushton, take on the roles of melodramatic heroes and, at least in comparison to the representation of the employer Squire Westwood, allow for feelings of sympathy to a certain extent.

### **4.3 *The Rent-Day***

In *The Rent-Day*, Farmer Heywood and his family are economically subordinate to and dependent on Squire Grantley and his steward, Crumbs, and can therefore be classified as employees in the sense of being the weaker part in industrial power relations. Martin Heywood is one of the poor wretches who

cannot afford the annual rent every farmer has to pay to the landlord. The rent-day is thus not only in the literal sense “a day of reckoning” for him (Emeljanow 37). Right at the beginning of the play, the severe consequences of crop shortfall and the subsequent heavy financial losses are discussed. Farmers were seen being driven away to the workhouse after their homesteads had been seized as a result of their inability to repay their debt. Those marked by fate are completely desperate and plead for more time to master their financial straits:

2<sup>nd</sup> FAR. (*Comes down to Crumbs*) Now, good master steward, you'll give me time, I hope?  
CRUMBS. Time isn't in my gift, if I would.  
2<sup>nd</sup> FAR. I have a wife and eight children.  
CRUMBS. A marvellous pity; but I must make up my book.  
2<sup>nd</sup> FAR. Give me but two months.  
CRUMBS. You shall have two weeks. Don't reckon on an hour more. Two weeks, and then I sell every stick.  
2<sup>nd</sup> FAR. Have you no heart?  
CRUMBS. I must make up my book! – Two weeks.  
(*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 262)

However, all their attempts of making the steward Crumbs give in to their appeals are in vain. As if it were not bad enough that the farmers suffer from the excessive financial pressure, later it is revealed that their agony is in fact based on the steward's selfish greed only. The subordinates are completely at their superior's mercy, unfairly treated and thus thoroughly pitiable.

Martin Heywood is confronted with a similar fate: His farm has proved highly unprofitable with failing harvests and dying cattle. Thus, he does not manage to service his liabilities in terms of tax or rent. In a conversation with his wife, Rachel, Martin presents himself as a pessimistic and utterly desperate fellow who cannot really follow the advice to hope for better days: “Rachel Heywood, you see me now without a shilling – without a home – my children with not a week's food before them – my wife starving – and yet I'm patient” (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 266). As far as Martin is concerned, patience has gradually given way to despair and hopelessness: “I may sit down, and see my little ones pine day by day; I may feel their wasting limbs, and hear them scream for bread; and I may stare in their white faces, and tell them to be patient. Patient!” (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 266). Moreover, he extensively wallows in self-pity: “There's some spell upon me! Do what I will, it does not thrive! Why, 'tis certain there's

some curse upon me!” (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 266). Martin has actually given up on fighting for a better life and would even find delight in the idea of death enabling him to shake off all strains and responsibilities: “I have wished myself dead! ay, dead! that I might be quit of all” (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 266). As not even a friend of his can offer him financial support, Martin considers leaving the country for the Indies rather than risking a deportation to the workhouse.

One must not forget, though, that Martin’s sorrow concerning the tight financial situation and thus the future life of his family does not only make him a pessimistic, depressive person, but also a caring husband and father. His love for his wife and children becomes especially apparent in the way he talks about his fear of being unable to provide for them in future or in his readiness to defend their well-being with violence. Apart from their economic worries, in general the family seems to enjoy a jovial and endearing home life.

When Martin’s self-dramatisation becomes almost unbearable, Toby feels bound to criticise his brother’s gloomy view on life: “I tell you what, brother; you are one of those people who are so very fond of ill-luck that they run halfway to meet it” (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 267). Toby seems to have a point in his argument as Martin not only laments their current financial situation, but also assumes the worst as regards his wife’s faithfulness. His “hasty and unjust suspicion of his spotless wife” (Bailey 260) is most probably the greatest point of criticism Martin can be confronted with. Without giving her the opportunity to explain herself, Rachel is wrongfully accused of having an affair with an unknown stranger, who turns out to be Squire Grantley in the end, and met with absolute dejection and disdain by her husband. Although they reunite in the end as the situation is clarified, Martin’s inclination to righteousness and self-pity impairs his likability considerably: “Rachel Heywood, I forgive that man! Let him but send a bullet through the heart you’ve broken, and I will thank him with my last breath. [...] Falsehood, where I had hoped for truth. Scorn, where I had looked for love. Shame, where I had built my greatest pride” (*The Rent-Day*, III.iii, 276). The alleged unfaithfulness of his wife gives him the final stroke:

And this, then, is the end! All’s gone! – I cannot carry with me even a hope of better days. Now, indeed, labour will be hard to me; for I shall work with a broken heart. Now, fortune cannot bless me; for she with whom I should have shared all good – But let me think no more of her. Think no more! (*The Rent-Day*, III.iv, 277)

Finally, it should be noted that Martin's overindulgent lamenting of the hardships he has had to endure since the run of bad luck began are closely connected to his self-imposed moral commitment to perpetuate the heritage of his deceased ancestors and thus to ensure the continuity of the farm. According to Toby, their grandfather and father both were dutiful men who always managed to run their business well. Consequently, the steward should take into account that it is now the very first time a member of the Heywood family is unable to meet the demands of the superiors and therefore must not be punished disproportionately hard. As generations of farmers have lived on the farm and passed down the estate, a close emotional link has been established between the tenants and their home over time. Martin describes his sense of duty to avoid the loss of the farm as follows: "But I have crawled a little child upon this floor: the very doorstep is worn with my feet. I have seen my mother, father, die here! – I – I tell you, here I first saw the light, and here I'll close my eyes" (*The Rent-Day*, II.i, 270). It is important for him to keep up traditional values and traditions.

Moving on to the representation of Rachel Heywood, first her unbending belief in an ultimately happy twist of fate springs to mind. In her role as wife and mother she exhibits remarkable strength when it comes to cheering up her desperate husband: "There, look light again. That's well. We shall once more be happy – very happy! Fortune will change, be sure of it" (*The Rent-Day*, I.iii, 267). However, when the seizure of their farm approaches, even Rachel gives in to hopelessness. She admits:

I'm so wretched, I have lost even hope. – My pretty babes, had we been always beggars, then you could have borne cold, nipping winds, rough words, uncertain food; – but now they'll pine, and so they'll die. Even our children will be taken from us. (*The Rent-Day*, III.i, 271)

Nevertheless, generally speaking Rachel seems to advocate a more constructive, positive outlook on life than her husband. She undertakes an active approach towards the handling of challenging situations and does not consider moving to the Indies and thus actually running away from their problems an option. Full of love for her family, Rachel would never have thought of betraying her husband and is thus all the more wrongfully expelled by Martin.

While Rachel appears as the play's virtuous heroine, who does not surrender to ill-luck easily but is full of hope and positive spirit, her husband turns out to be the exact opposite. Martin Heywood is presented as a

pessimistic, depressive man, who, in the face of misfortune, abandons himself to self-pity and despair. Albeit he features as a caring father and husband to a certain extent, Martin's lack of confidence in his actually spotless wife almost spoils the hitherto harmonious family life and thus contributes to the rather negative portrayal of the farmer.

## 4.4 *Lost in London*

As opposed to the employer Gilbert Featherstone, who takes up the role of the melodramatic villain, the depiction of Job Armroyd is the major point of interest as far as the representation of the employee in *Lost in London* is concerned. When Davis notes that both "Job, the working-class hero, and Gilbert, the fashionable mine owner with designs on Job's wife, are recognizable types" (75), she is definitely right as also Job is clearly modelled after the clear-cut, undivided stock character typical of melodrama.

Job is a miner at the Bleakmoor Mine where, just like his colleagues, he has to work under health-threatening working conditions. For instance, there is the "choke damp" which "[...] blots out a man's life afore he can lift an eyelid to see o' which side th' death's comin'," or "the fire damp" which "[...] scorches a stout lad into a cinder" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 210). One should also note that the play includes various songs which further illustrate the working conditions the miners have to endure:

CHORUS OF MINERS (*outside house*).  
Down in the depths o' th' darksome mine,  
We work thro' a changeless night,  
That comfort round English hearts may shine,  
And the coal blaze warm and bright,  
And the coal blaze warm and bright. (*Lost in London*, I.i, 217)

In addition, Nelly describes how she perceives the everyday life of the mining population: "Six o'clock! Job's late this morning. It'll be the first time these four months he's seen the sun rise. There's no change of season for the poor miner. Summer or winter, it's one endless night. It's a dreary life – a miner's!" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 207). What is more, fifteen years ago a terrible accident claimed the lives of several miners, among them also Nelly's father, Isaac Bradley.



Therefore, Job is specifically strict with his colleagues when they are about to violate the general smoking prohibition effective for the pit area. He stresses that the rules have actually only been set up for the workers' benefit in order to prevent such catastrophes as have happened in the past. Job sums up his experiences as follows: "I dinna wish to see foulk ower foolhardy, niver sin' I stood, just fifteen year ago, wi' two hundred white-faced women about this pit's mouth, to see each time that basket coom up, a corpse come wi' it" (*Lost in London*, I.iii, 222).

It is thus by no means self-evident that Job has retained a remarkably positive attitude towards his job and, even though only at the beginning of the play, appears as a good-humoured and cheerful man. For example, the stage directions explicitly include descriptions such as "*He laughs and shakes his head with an expression of broad good humour*" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 208), "*He takes coat from wall, and is putting it on, laughing and chuckling [...]*" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 209) or "*laughing uproariously and smiting his sides*" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 213). Furthermore, Job reacts to his wife's worries and grumbling with gentleness and kind-hearted affection. He seems to be a loving and caring husband who tries to make Nelly see the bright side of life as best as he can: In doing so his manner is "*marked by much homely tenderness*" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 209). Often, he gently kisses his wife and sweetly expresses his love: "Thee'st a face as pleasant to look on as that bit o' heaven I often see shining up o' top o' th' shaft wi' just a glimmer o' stars in it" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 213). His unbending, unconditional love for his wife becomes especially apparent when Job receives the news that his wife has just left him. It is noticeable that Job puts all the blame for Nelly's elopement exclusively on Gilbert Featherstone and does not only not take into account her own fraction of responsibility in that decision, but even presents her as an innocent and pitiful victim. To his colleagues he for instance says, "Eh! lads! dunna pity me! pity her, poor child, pity *her!*" (*Lost in London*, I.iii, 225). Job has sworn to Nelly's father that he would take care of her and is therefore now convinced that it is his utmost duty to rescue the "poor lost creature" (*Lost in London*, I.iii, 226).

Job is also a true and caring friend to the other miners and highly respected by his colleagues not only since he most probably saves them from a fire incident down in the pit, but also because of his promise to care for Isaac

Bradley's daughter, Nelly, who has in the meantime become his wife. Job seems to be a valuable worker who dutifully complies with the safety rules and always tries to arrive punctually at the shaft. He is a "*hale, strong man in his fiftieth year*" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 208), an ambitious labourer and answers Nelly's sorrows concerning "the dangers o' the mine" with the lapidary saying: "But nothin's perfect" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 210). Job is proud of his standing as a diligent miner and careful to preserve this reputation: "I dunna know what's come ower me o' late; I used to be th' first down in th' pit, an' now I'm loike to be th' last. [...] Thee would'st na a' Job Armroyd's name get a cross to't as a lag behind" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 216). One must not forget, though, that it is exactly Job's decision to leave for the mine instead of listening to his wife's worries and pleas, which finally enables Gilbert Featherstone to lure Nelly away from her home.

In addition, though, Job appears strikingly naïve and credulous as regards Featherstone's advances towards Nelly. In this context, one should bear in mind the observation made by both Booth and Smith,<sup>4</sup> who argue that the melodramatic hero often suffers from a lack of intelligence and thus gets caught in the villain's traps easily. In *Lost in London*, Nelly's unhappy departure results to a great extent from Job's inability to see through his employer's vicious plans: "He a'na bin here, but he wur here last naight, an' t' naight afore that, a-waitin' for my comin' home. He be main coorious to know 'bout mining matters, be Mester Featherstone" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 213).

In contrast to Martin Heywood in *The Rent-Day*, Job does not give up on his marriage and wallows in rage or self-pity, but enthusiastically rushes to London in order to fight for his wife and bring her back home. Full of hope to encounter Nelly in the city one day, Job wanders around the streets of London for six months. He suffers greatly from the dreary living conditions he has to endure in the city and, above all, from the loss of his wife. Nevertheless, he bravely continues his search: "I'ull niver gi'e up th' search – niver! till I a' looked on my poor gall's face ag'in" (*Lost in London*, II.ii, 244), until he is finally successful. What is more, he finds surprisingly fierce words in order to express his emotions when he learns about Nelly's elopement with Gilbert Featherstone for the very first time: "I wanna raise hand for *that* man again 'xcept to be to

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2.3.2.

strike 'un dead!!!" (*Lost in London*, I.iii, 225). Job shows a similarly aggressive attitude when he finally appears at Featherstone's house in London and takes his opponent to task:

JOB. [...] For months I ha' battled wi' one idea – I ha' fou't it fro' my pillow by naight – I ha' shrunk fro't as it walked wi' me by day. That idea were to kill ye, Gilbert Featherstone! kill ye, wherever and whenever we met.

GILBERT. A murder!

JOB. Man! man! I fou't wi' it wakin' an' sleepin' – prayed agin it on my knees, till I thou't it were conquered. Yet, ha' a care! ha' a care! Let th' touch o' thy hand fall on me, an' I lay thee dead at my feet! (*Lost in London*, II.iv, 251)

Yet, these thoughts of violence do not last for long but are soon replaced by concern about the well-being of Nelly. Job has come to the conclusion that the rescue of his wife must be the sole centre of attention. As already mentioned beforehand, he puts the blame for Nelly's elopement and thus his unhappiness exclusively on his former employer. He accuses Featherstone of ruthlessness, an uncaring attitude and a lack of respect for the socio-economically less potent members of society:

You, who could lave such a world o' brightness an' beauty as this (*indicates by gesture the luxury around*) to enter a poor man's home an' set your foot on th' bit o' fire you found cheering his lonely hearth? Ah! Mester Featherstone! it be little o' sunshine as comes to th' lot o' men loike me, an' you ha' blotted out mine for iver. (*Lost in London*, II.iv, 251)

Setting the employer's wrongdoing in relation to the miner's personal fate, the former's guilt and detestableness appear even more severe while the latter turns out to be thoroughly pitiable and likable. A similar strategy is pursued at a later point in the plot:

Thee 'rt a man wi' a great estate, on which ivery beast that runs an' bird that flies be claimed by thee. I (*strikes breast*) be a poor mon, yet owner once o' a treasure I would not ha' bartered ag'in thine had ye twenty toimes as much. A treasure you robbed me of. [...] Thee hast robbed me o' that which can niver i' this world be given back agin. It binna in thee to know what she were to me. I be afeared to think o't my'sen and know my loss so great. [...] (*Lost in London*, III.i, 266)

These two extracts illustrate very well the clear differentiation in representation of the mine owner on the one hand and the worker on the other hand. The former is wealthy, powerful but dislikable as he is self-serving only, whereas the latter appears poor and downtrodden and thus pitiable. Correspondingly, class-

consciousness constitutes a highly important theme throughout the play. Members of the upper as well as the lower classes of society both tend to stress the differing concepts or class markers connected to the respective group of people. For instance, when Tiddy visits the Armroyds and presents her new bonnet, Job comments that “[...] none but born’d gentlefolks wear such hots as that” (*Lost in London*, I.i, 212). Tiddy replies, “[...] them sort o’ people can wear anything, but a lonesome lass loike I must’na make herself pecooliar ‘mong strangers” (*Lost in London*, I.i, 212). Later, Blinker, who perceives himself as a “gen’l’mán,” smugly reacts to the miners’ badinage as follows: “‘Appy to contribute to the amusement o’ the lower classes. ‘Tain’t your fault you’re hignorant, how could it be? You can’t dig up politeness with a pick haxe” (*Lost in London*, I.i, 214). Moreover, when Job challenges Featherstone to a duel, he is careful to draw a clear dividing line between the class of people he feels connected to and the group of society he thinks his opponent belongs to. By means of personal pronouns such as *we* and *our* on the one hand, as well as *you* on the other hand, two exclusive and clearly separate groups are established: “We Lancashire lads foight fair, an’ gi’e even our worst enemies a chance. [...] I ha’ heerd it be th’ fashin’ ‘mong you fo’ne gentlemen to tek each other’s lives for a hard word, a’most for a wry look” (*Lost in London*, III.i, 267). Finally, it should be mentioned that the occasional songs also include significant hints at the differing outlooks on life as pursued by the respective class in society. While the workers mostly sing about their hard, laborious but highly valuable work in the mine, the party guests at Featherstone’s instead enjoy their life in abundance. In the end, though, any class differences suddenly lose their significance when it comes to the question of love between individual human beings. Thus, Job does not care at all about the inappropriateness of his appearance at Featherstone’s party and the disturbance his presence brings along.

In order to round off the picture of Job Armroyd, it is important to put the accounts given on his inclination to aggressive behaviour into perspective. Firstly, one has to admit that it is true the miner does not shrink back from a violent solution to the interpersonal problems with his former employer. Although Featherstone already retreats and tries to avert a duel, Job

nevertheless insists on a physical fight as he does not want to forgo his chance of revenge:

GILBERT (*with involuntary respect*). Job Armroyd! I have deeply – cruelly injured you – I will not add another crime to the catalogue.

JOB. Not foight me! (*Crosses, so as to place himself between GILBERT and the door.*) Dunna think to quit this cottage wi'out it! Why th' meanest felon who robs by th' wayside foinds courage, when his toime cooms to stan' th' penalty.

GILBERT (*firmly*). I will not raise my hand against you.

JOB. I say you shalt. (*Seizes GILBERT fiercely by the arm, as the latter endeavours to pass him.*) Thou'st robbed me o' nigh all, but thee shanna cheat me o' my revenge! (*They struggle.*)  
(*Lost in London*, III.i, 267-268)

Finally, Featherstone surrenders and agrees to receive his rightful punishment: “Job Armroyd, my life is in your hands – take it!” (*Lost in London*, III.i, 268). In this situation, though, Job once again shows his noble character and refrains from his plans to take revenge on his opponent. He simply sends Featherstone away as he is convinced that his former master would suffer from his bad conscience enough anyway.

## 4.5 *The Middleman*

The potter Cyrus Blenkarn once discovered a revolutionary glazing process of ceramic goods and consequently brought his invention to market with the help of the owner of the factory he worked at, Joseph Chandler. However, very early on in the play it becomes apparent that a just division of the profits generated by the introduction of the newly created technique has actually never occurred, as Julian calls on his father to bear in mind that they are still deeply indebted to the potter. Later, the young man expresses similar thoughts during a conversation with Blenkarn's daughter Mary: “All our money came from your father's invention. We owe him more than we shall ever pay him!” (*The Middleman*, I, 187). He even goes further when stating that instead of being employed at the factory, the exceptionally gifted potter should have become the “head of the firm” (*The Middleman*, I, 188). In a highly emotional speech also Jesse Peggs, Blenkarn's assistant, voices his concern about the imbalance of Blenkarn's

personal situation on the one hand and the profit generated by means of his invention on the other hand:

Years ago you invented the glaze which put the Tatlow porcelain works, figuratively speaking, on their legs, put the town of Tatlow, figuratively speaking, on its legs, and put Joseph Chandler Esquire, figuratively speaking, on his legs, and made him, as the Mayor said yesterday, an ornament, a glory and a bulwark to the British nation. [...] And what are you today? Are *you* a glory, an ornament and a bulwark to the British nation? No! Are *you* putting up for Parliament? No! Are *you* owner of Tatlow Hall? No! Are *you* President of the Young Men's and Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association? No! Have you got a banking account? [...] No! Have you got a high hat? No! Or a brass knocker? Or a decent coat to your back, or a decent pair of shoes to your feet, or a sixpence to bless yourself with? No! No!! No!!! No!!!!  
(*The Middleman*, II, 201)

This extract sums up very well all the benefits Blenkarn's discovery has created. As the Tatlow porcelain works were bankrupt at the time of Blenkarn's idea, the invention of the glaze was of tremendous value. Nevertheless, the potter was reimbursed with a mere two hundred pounds and a few special allowances. Booth thus adequately sums up *The Middleman* as the story of a "brilliant potter" being "exploited by his profiteering master" (*The Lights* xxv).

One could also argue, though, that Blenkarn at first glance appears as a primarily stupid character who, as a result of his ignorance regarding the negotiating of more favourable terms in his working contract, missed out on a perfect chance of making a great fortune. When the news are spread that Julian Chandler had impregnated Mary but walked out on her by going abroad, Jesse reproaches Blenkarn with his inability to stand up to others or to enforce his rights: "You've made the father rich, and the son robs you of your own flesh and blood!" (*The Middleman*, II, 209). Jesse indeed has a point in arguing that Blenkarn should become more conscious of his own importance since his dedication to the rediscovery of the traditional Tatlow glazing forces the potter to live in complete dependence on investors such as Chandler or Todd. There are several instances which show Blenkarn asking or even begging for more advance money in order to be able to finance his experiments. Every time he does so, he is met with criticism and humiliation on the part of both Chandler and Todd. For instance, Chandler once replies, "How do you expect people to trust you when you are always throwing your money away in useless experiments?" (*The Middleman*, I, 180-181). Moreover, Chandler assumes

Blenkarn would “squander” his money (*The Middleman*, I, 182) and worries that the potter would never manage to rediscover the formula behind the traditional glaze of Tatlow anyway.

However, Blenkarn seems to feel comfortable with accepting his subordination to the businessmen and their humiliation as long as he can continue his experiments. Thus, Blenkarn appears as a thoroughgoing idealist who is exclusively committed to the reproduction of the traditional porcelain glaze. Following Griffin, the potter is “a man of principle endeavouring to maintain his integrity in the face of almost insuperable odds” (31). Having quit work after Chandler has expressed his unwillingness to ensure his son Julian would provide for the restoration of Mary’s respectability, When Mary is finally, albeit wrongly, reported dead, Blenkarn does not care much about anything else anymore except the obstinate pursuit of his quest. Over the course of time he seems increasingly embittered and thoroughly self-centred. Lacking financial support by his former employer, his obsession has led to him and Nancy living in desolate conditions and in bitter poverty. He is obviously prepared to risk the well-being of his family and shows signs of madness already: When Nancy asks Blenkarn what he would do if the latest batch of specimen went all wrong, he replies that he would simply make another one. It thus suggests itself he has finally lost touch with reality. Blenkarn’s situation is actually hopeless since the villagers consider him mad and do not want to give him loans anymore. With his reputation damaged and his life an utterly dreary drudgery, he nevertheless does not abandon his dream of finding the formula of the traditional glaze. The continuation of his experiments is his sole reason for living. “While they burn, my hope and life burn too,” (*The Middleman*, III, 218) Blenkarn says to his loyal helper, Jesse, when he wants him to keep the fires going which should burn the latest load of pottery.

Yet, one must bear in mind that Blenkarn does not only appear as a brilliant but frenetic inventor; he is also a staunch idealist to whom material wealth matters least. The primary reason why he approves of becoming rich is the fact that financial independence would enable him to carry on his experiments more freely. When Mary states that she would be glad Blenkarn did not consider money of great importance, he replies, “Oh, but I do like it! I’m very fond of it! I should like to be very rich; then I could carry on all my

experiments: but I'm afraid I shall always be poor" (*The Middleman*, I, 186-187). In his opinion, earning great sums of money "[...] isn't a very clever trick after all" (*The Middleman*, II, 201), as obviously many people manage to do so. In contrast, only few people have inventive talent. Even when the potter has finally achieved his goal, he retains an entirely modest nature and rejects the Umfravilles' questionable advances:

LADY UMFRAVILLE. My dear Mr Blenkarn, I'm heartily glad we shall have you for a neighbour. You know I have always considered you a man of the greatest genius. And I adore genius!

CYRUS. Thank you, Lady Umfraville, I'm not a genius, and I don't like being adored.

SIR SETON. If there's anything I can do for you in the country, Mr Blenkarn – you may have some idea of going into Parliament.

CYRUS. No. (*Absorbed*)

LADY UMFRAVILLE. You must come and dine with us on Wednesday at the Court. We expect Lord William Vipond and the Strangeways and old Lady Devenish ---

CYRUS. I'm not used to meeting such people, my lady, and I shouldn't know what to say to them. [...]

SIR SETON. But we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the Court some day?

CYRUS. No, Sir Seton, I've had to work all my life, and I can't begin to play now. [...] (*The Middleman*, IV, 231)

When he finally manages to find the secret formula of the traditional pottery glaze, to market his latest invention and make some fortune out of it, Blenkarn nevertheless neither considers himself as an adorable person, nor wants to change his lifestyle to such an extent as suggested by the Umfravilles. He remains true to himself and does not adopt arrogant or extravagant manners.

Blenkarn clearly distances himself from the moneyed class of society whom he despised previously and obviously still dislikes. From his point of view, investors and businessmen such as Chandler, who provide promising talents with capital and subsequently profit from their investment disproportionally more than the person they support, are in fact parasites on their fellow human beings: "I haven't fattened myself on another man's labour and tears. I must be mad! God made this world for parasites. I must be mad! A leech's mouth to fasten on your neighbour and suck all his blood from his heart!" (*The Middleman*, III, 222). Mary supports her father's point when she says, "[...] God can't think much of money. Look at the people he gives a lot to!" (*The Middleman*, I, 187). While Blenkarn has experienced subordination to economically more potent agents all



his life, Chandler, in contrast, finds it difficult to accept his professional downfall. By stating "It's hard to come down in the world after having been up in it all your life," Chandler only makes himself appear even more snobbish and not pitiable at all, though. At the same time Blenkarn addresses the problem of limited social mobility of the lower classes and in doing so points to the injustice prevalent in contemporary society: "It's hard to be kept down in it all your life without having a chance to get up" (*The Middleman*, IV, 233).

Moving on to Blenkarn in his role as a father, it soon becomes apparent that he maintains a strikingly affectionate relationship with his daughter Mary and, albeit to a considerably lesser extent, with his daughter Nancy. For instance, the stage directions reveal that already at mentioning of Mary's name "[...] Cyrus' face lights up with great animation and joy" (*The Middleman*, I, 183). It is of great importance to him that Mary is provided for, leads a happy life and possibly climbs the social ladder. As he is a humble person and only interested in his innovative activities anyway, Blenkarn claims that he would spend all future riches on his daughters only. Especially Mary he would grant "[e]verything that's beautiful" (*The Middleman*, II, 205). In return, Mary, in contrast to Nancy, enthusiastically encourages her father to continue his efforts and reassures him when he is temporarily dispirited: "Never mind. Every failure brings you nearer to success" (*The Middleman*, I, 185). However, also Nancy and Jesse feature as loyal supporters, each in their own particular way.

In spite of Blenkarn's deep love for Mary, he nevertheless does not manage to work out the true reason for her troubled appearance when she visits her father for the very last time before her elopement. When he is finally informed about his daughter's pregnancy, he, completely desperate, loses all inhibitions, forgets about feelings of pride or honour and begs on his knees for Julian's return in order to have Mary's respectability restored. He tries to convince Chandler to send for his son: "I'll work for you! I'll slave night and day! I'll wear my fingers to the bone! Every hour of the rest of my life shall be yours, only save – (*falls on his knees to Chandler, looks up for a moment or two, dumb with entreaty*) my child, save her!" (*The Middleman*, II, 210). Finally, Blenkarn delivers a highly emotional speech in which the potter voices his desire for eventual revenge for the injustice experienced so far:

Thou that holdest the scales! Judge between this man and me! A balance! A balance! Give justice here! I've made him rich and proud – let me now make him poor and despised. He mocks at my grief. Let me some day mock at his! Let me hold his flesh and blood as cheap as he holds mine! Show me some way to bring him to the dust! Give him and his dearest into my keeping! Make them clay in my hands that I may shape and mould them as I choose, and melt them like wax in the fire of my revenge! (*The Middleman*, II, 211)

While Blenkarn does not care about his self-esteem when it comes to his daughter's potential disgrace, he retains his pride in respect of his future business relationship with Chandler. Although he suffers from bitter poverty, he is not prepared to work for his former employer ever again. When Chandler states, "I hear you've got into very low water, and just to show you that I don't bear you any malice for leaving my employ, I've come to offer to take you back," Cyrus simply answers, "I'm not so low as that!" (*The Middleman*, III, 214-215). Blenkarn has learnt from his former mistakes and has obviously negotiated more favourable terms in his arrangement with Todd than he did beforehand in his negotiations about his contract with Chandler.

When Blenkarn finally discovers the secret formula, one might expect that he would want to enjoy his triumph to the fullest. Yet, in the end he nevertheless values forgiveness higher than savouring his revenge. In spite of his newly acquired economic independence Blenkarn decides to offer his former employer a post as under-manager at the porcelain works and thereby saves Chandler from ruin. In the light of all the humiliation and suffering the potter was subjected to beforehand, his decision is indeed a great act of kindness and nobleness. However, Blenkarn stresses that it was mainly due to his thoughts about Mary that he refrained from the opportunity to take revenge on a material, physical level by depriving the Chandlers of any financial assistance. He had come to the conclusion that punishing them and his power to "humble them to the dust" or "strike them down" would not satisfy him (*The Middleman*, IV, 234). Quite the contrary, having mercy and showing forgiveness seems the more appropriate form of revenge. Thus, Northend sums up the role of the employee in *The Middleman* very well when she describes Blenkarn as "all self-sacrifice, long-suffering, artistic zeal and nobility of thought" (454).

## 4.6 *Strife*

As it has already been mentioned in the discussion on the representation of the employer, *Strife* shows a tendency of objectively assessing the opposing views of capital and labour rather than forcing a clear-cut, stereotypical character description based on subjectivity. In contrast to the discussions of the other plays under investigation, in this chapter it does not prove meaningful to look for traces of melodramatic features in the character descriptions due to the fact that *Strife* by no means belongs to the genre of melodrama. Rather, the focus should lie on the remarkably balanced portrayal of the representatives of labour.

Similar to *The Middleman* discussed before, also in *Strife* the moneyed investors and business owners seem to have capitalised unfairly upon the efforts of an inventive talent: Once, Roberts made a discovery relevant for the production at the Trenartha Tin Plate factory. As it appears, he was not adequately remunerated for his efforts, though:

EDGAR. [*Resentfully*] We didn't pay him enough for his discovery. I always said that at the time.

WILDER. We paid him five hundred and a bonus of two hundred three years later. If that's not enough! What does he want for goodness' sake?

TENCH. [*Complainingly.*] Company made a hundred thousand out of his brains, and paid him seven hundred – that's the way he goes on, sir. (*Strife*, I, 107)

Giving a speech on the abomination of the ruling of capital over labour, Roberts accuses the investors of having taken advantage of his discovery without letting him have the appropriate share in the overall business success. Thus, the worker regards capital as “[a] thing that buys the sweat o’ men’s brows, and the tortures o’ their brains, at its own price. [...] It is a thing that will take as much and give you as little as it can” (*Strife*, II.ii, 136). Capital is seen as an exploitative “blood-sucker,” prospering at the expense of the working men (*Strife*, II.ii, 136). In this context, a detailed account is given on the appearance of Scantlebury, whom Roberts met previously to his talk:

Mr. Scantlebury, a mass of flesh nourished on us: sittin’ there for all the world like the shareholders in this Company, that sit not moving tongue nor finger, takin’ dividends – a great dumb ox that can only be roused when its food is threatened. (*Strife*, II.ii, 136)

Roberts has a point when he argues that the shareholders would not be ready to yield at least a small fraction of their income to the population in need, as one of the board members explicitly states that he believes “[...] not to pay more than was necessary was the A B C of commerce” (*Strife*, I, 109). Bearing in mind this capitalist thinking, Roberts’ choice of wording appears quite comprehensible when he talks about the impossibility to “squeeze” the working men any more as they are “well-nigh starving” already (*Strife*, I, 112).

The condition of the workers is indeed disastrous. Already at the beginning of the play the board members recognise the “great distress” prevailing among the strikers (*Strife*, I, 101), whom they refer to as “poor devils” (*Strife*, I, 101; 103). In stark contrast to the businessmen, who demand shields to protect them from the heat of the fireplace, the workers’ families suffer from the cold and a lack of elementary supplies. Roberts sums up the situation as follows: “Every man of us is going short. We can’t be no worse off than we’ve been these weeks past” (*Strife*, I, 112). Especially the women and children are severely affected by the shortage of food. One of the workers’ wives for instance says, “[...] it’s bad enough with the children. I keep ‘em in bed, they don’t get so hungry when they’re not running about” (*Strife*, II.i, 120). The women try to contribute to the family’s income but can hardly find jobs. Thus, they are left with a diet of “bread and tea” only (*Strife*, II.i, 120). Finally, the distress culminates in the death of Annie Roberts, who has been reported starving as well as suffering from a weak heart.

The discussion so far should have made it clear that the workers and their families are primarily characterised as wretched and pitiable. As Edgar at the end of the play correctly notices, the working men, facing death from starvation, are considerably more affected by the ongoing of the strike than the businessmen or shareholders. Yet, striking is the workers’ only weapon. Therefore, Edgar is to be followed when he states that in the end it is not appropriate to talk about a “fair fight” (*Strife*, III, 152) between capital and labour.

However, the question remains whether the workers are actually entitled to call on a strike at all. As the Union decided to no longer support the workers because the latter’s demands seem to exceed the usual rates, one might concede a point to Scantlebury who considers the men’s decision to continue

the strike sheer “madness” and does not expect them to be successful (*Strife*, I, 104). They most probably demand more than what is due to them and are thus “[...] going too far for the moment” (*Strife*, II.ii, 130). Similar to the board members, also the workers tend to see only their own point of view and fail to take into account their opponents’ interests. As already mentioned before, especially Roberts is quick to identify the businessmen involved exclusively as exploiters who are trying to generate as much profit as possible at the expense of the working class. What he does not realise, though, are the manifold obligations they have to cater for in their role as shareholder representatives. Enid tries to give Roberts’ wife an understanding of the shareholders situation:

ENID. [*Earnestly*] But, Annie, that’s why the Union won’t help them. My husband’s very sympathetic with the men, but he says they’re not underpaid.

MRS. ROBERTS. No, M’m?

ENID. They never think how the Company could go on if we paid the wages they want.

MRS. ROBERTS. [*With an effort*] But the dividends having been so big, M’m.

ENID. [*Taken aback*] You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they’re not – most of them are really no better off than working men. [MRS. ROBERTS *smiles*.] They have to keep up appearances.

MRS. ROBERTS. Yes, M’m?

ENID. You don’t have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. [...] (*Strife*, II.i, 123)

However, taking into account that the continuation of the strike entails disproportionately greater losses on the part of the workers than on the part of the shareholders, Enid’s assertions concerning the shareholders’ obligations appear rather naïve if not even absurd (MacDonald 129). Additionally, Enid accuses the workers of spending their money on alcohol and gambling instead of investing it wisely. Such “low pleasure” (*Strife*, II.i, 123) is the only entertainment the workers can afford, though.

Yet, one needs to bear in mind that not all of the men are actually willing to support the strike without hesitation. Soon, an internal quarrel develops and the labourers split up in two separate groups: The workers are torn between acceding to the terms of the Union or rather following Roberts, who advances the view that “[s]urrendering’s the work of cowards and traitors” (*Strife*, II.ii, 136). For some of the men an eventual agreement to the Union’s terms would

mean being marked out as blacklegs who prefer to “save their own skins” (*Strife*, II.ii, 130) over taking on their social responsibility connected to fighting for improved working conditions. In reaction to the news that Roberts’ wife has died, Rous claims that Roberts brought this misery onto himself as a result of his “own black obstinacy,” while Evans sees the latest fatality as “all the more reason for sticking by ‘im” (*Strife*, II.ii, 138). In turn, other men accuse Roberts of having too extremist views. They intend to work towards a compromise and are thus inclined to accept the conditions stated by the Union. The latter is represented by Harness, whom Wilder describes as “one of those cold-blooded, cool-headed chaps” (*Strife*, I, 103). Harness intends to work on a solution efficiently and hopes to find a compromise soon: “Can’t we have done with this old-fashioned tug-of-war business?” (*Strife*, I, 108). In his conversations with the board members he tries to make them find common ground and feel empathy with the workers. At the same time, though, he cannot refrain from hinting at the diverging lifestyles of the two different classes of society: “Why don’t you recognize once for all that these people are men like yourselves, and want what’s good for them just as you want what’s good for you – [*Bitterly.*] Your motor-cars, and champagne, and eight-course dinners” (*Strife*, I, 108). Finally, Harness is careful not to leave the impression of pleading for the businessmen’s pity as the only thing the workers demand is justice.

Contrary to Harness’ compromising attitude, Roberts pursues a significantly more aggressive and hard-line strategy. For instance, at the first meeting between the board members and the strikers, Roberts stresses that the workers are firmly determined to carry on the strike and convinced of the appropriateness of their demands. He uses dramatic words to illustrate his proclamation: “The men will send their wives and families where the country will have to keep them; an’ they will starve sooner than give way. I advise ye, Mr. Anthony, to prepare yourself for the worst that can happen to your Company” (*Strife*, I, 113). It turns out that Roberts functions as the primary instigator of the strike from whom the other men do not dare to break away for a long time. Frost describes him as “[...] not one of these ‘ere ordinary ‘armless Socialists. ‘E’s violent; got a fire inside ‘im” (*Strife*, III, 143). In addition, the servant assumes that Roberts belongs to “[...] a kind o’ man that never forgives the world, because ‘e wasn’t born a gentleman” (*Strife*, III, 144). Roberts’ unconditional

commitment to the current class struggle is indeed noticeable. He is concerned with the ongoing of the strike to such an extent that he simply disavows the suffering of the women involved and, most of all, does not realise his own wife's critical health condition.

However, one could also argue that his anti-capitalist attitude in the end boils down to pride and a question of principle. The stage directions reveal that his reply, "I have not the time to listen," in reaction to Enid's plea to speak to her is made "[w]ith sudden venom" (*Strife*, II.i, 124), which supports the claim that he cannot come off the high horse. Roberts is too proud to let go his quest of enforcing his demands and at the same time teach Anthony a lesson. In addition, the problematic personal relationship between Anthony and Roberts aggravates the already difficult situation. While it is a well-known fact that the two men have differing opinions on the question of how to distribute economic benefits among capital and labour, furthermore their personal relationship is marked by hatred and misunderstanding. Roberts quotes the chairman as follows: "What did the Chairman tell me up in London? That I didn't know what I was talking about. I was a foolish, uneducated man, that knew nothing of the wants of the men I spoke for" (*Strife*, I, 111). In Roberts' opinion, the board and especially Anthony do not take the workers' concerns seriously. What is more, the accusations the chairman directs towards Roberts also constitute a severe personal insult and make the businessman appear as an arrogant and snobbish man looking down on and suppressing the member of the lower class. In return, Roberts characterises Anthony as a tyrant and sums up his opinion of the chairman in the following way: "If I saw Mr. Anthony going to die, and I could save him by lifting my hand, I would not lift the little finger of it" (*Strife*, II.i, 125). This statement stands in stark contrast to Roberts' generally great social conscience. Basically he is a loyal worker who does not want to enjoy his personal fortune while his colleagues find their situation wanting: "He says he's no right to a farthing when the others are suffering" (*Strife*, II.i, 124), Annie Roberts affirms her husband's loyalty to his co-workers. Even after Annie's death Roberts adheres to his principles and wants to continue the strike. He states in front of the board: "Ye may break the body, but ye cannot break the spirit" (*Strife*, III, 154). However, irrespective of this personal tragedy, it is

Roberts who, also in financial terms, sacrifices most for the perpetuation of the strike.

Besides Roberts, his wife as well as Madge display feelings of pride and class consciousness, too. For instance, it is noticeable that Annie rejects Enid's help in the form of food donations, although it is obvious that she lacks even elementary provisions. Similarly, in front of Enid, Madge is too proud to admit her fellow people's tremendous suffering. She adds that she does not want to have members of the upper class, such as Enid, intruding and thus prefers to keep the classes of society strictly separated:

MADGE. [*Suddenly*] What suffering?

ENID. [*Surprised*] I beg your pardon!

MADGE. Who said there was suffering?

MRS. ROBERTS. Madge!

MADGE. [*Throwing her shawl over her head*] Please to let us keep ourselves to ourselves. We don't want you coming here and spying on us. (*Strife*, II.i, 121)

Following this confrontation, Enid concludes that she does not "feel half so sympathetic with them" as she did before her visit (*Strife*, III, 140). She finds it terribly difficult to put her feelings of sympathy successfully into effect. Consequently, one might accuse the members of the working class of being obstinate and showing feelings of pride in an inappropriate manner as it seems not reasonable to refuse categorically any help coming from caring individuals such as Enid only because of class reasons. One should bear in mind, though, that as soon as her own father's well-being is at risk due to the board's undecidedness about the ongoing of the strike, Enid quickly "abandons her former championing of the strikers and pleads with her brother on purely personal grounds" (Nethercot 855) to save the old man. Nethercot therefore aptly describes her as merely "halfway humanitarian" (855). It suggests itself that Enid's "[...] apparent egalitarianism was never any more than sentimental phrase-making" (MacDonald 129).

As it has already been mentioned in the context of the discussion on the representation of the employer, in *Strife* it is not possible to identify a purely negative or positive portrayal of either side involved in the strike. For instance, pitying the workers for the great distress they have to endure following the strike could be considered out of place when bearing in mind their obstinacy regarding the excessive changes of the terms in their working contracts or their wives'



inappropriate pride. Of course one has to admit that “[...] the author pities the sorely suffering workmen, in particular their wives and children, more than the well-fed shareholders who pocket their dividends; but he shows ‘Labour’ as hardly less in the wrong than ‘Capital’” (Schalit 232). Similarly, also the individual representation of Roberts does not allow for a clear-cut classification in terms of likability. His pride, his personal conflict with the chairman Anthony and his stubborn and uncompromising pursuit of aims based on socialist ideas are perfectly countervailed by his loyalty to his colleagues, his self-sacrificing and his outstanding social conscience.

## 5 Text and genre: purposes and effects

### 5.1 The entertainment potential

#### 5.1.1 Sensation, suspense and sentiment

Following the idea that one of the major purposes assigned to the melodramatic genre is its power to entertain huge and at the same time diverse masses of people,<sup>5</sup> the texts chosen for this thesis will first of all be scrutinised for their entertainment potential. Thus, the further discussion of the plays will centre on tendencies of exaggerated emotionality, sentiment and pathos, sensational happenings as well as thrilling suspense.

To begin with, *Luke the Labourer*, explicitly labelled *domestic melodrama*, provides simple but extensive emotionalism. Despite the crude conception of the play, “[i]ts power to draw tears can still be sensed” (Rowell 47). For instance, Luke’s accusation that Farmer Wakefield’s decision to dismiss him was the major reason why he could not save his wife from poverty and subsequent death of starvation, is supposed to tug at one’s heartstrings and makes Clara cry out, “Oh, Luke! Luke! – for mercy’s sake, no more – forgive him” (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 246). Similarly, words of despair and hopelessness on the part of Farmer Wakefield or his wife address the

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2.5.1.

audiences' emotions. The latter, for example, voices her thoughts on the misfortune and troubles her family had to endure by stating: "[T]his is a sad world for the helpless and unfriended" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.ii, 245). Finally, though, their spirits are restored when Clara's rescuer turns out to be their long lost son and the family is happily reunited. Wakefield's final phrase reads: "My boy! My boy! Your old Father's arms are open to receive you" (*Luke the Labourer*, II.vi, 257). In addition, music and songs are used in order to make the respective emotional situation even more explicit: In the stage direction it says for instance: "A clap of thunder – music – Luke rushes forward [...]" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.iv, 249) in the context of Luke's unsuccessful chase after Clara and the subsequent fight between Luke and Philip, or "The villagers go off, singing the burden of the chorus [...]" (*Luke the Labourer*, I.i, 240) in connection with the cheerful get-together of villagers.

Contrary to *Luke the Labourer*, where music and songs, jokes or comic relief and, above all, a happy ending constitute significant factors, *The Factory Lad* ends with Rushton "[...] laughing at a world brought to chaos and violence through insurrection" (James 156). Any aspects of light entertainment are "[...] sacrificed to make this savage propaganda play a grim tract for grim times" (Smith, *Introduction*). Similarly, also Vernon identifies the play as a "grim and stark vision of factory life" (121). The author further argues that the frequent instances of violence in the play can be seen as "a natural expression of frustration" (126). The workers' violent revenge on their former employer is indeed based on desperation and hopelessness resulting from their sudden unemployment. At least, the smashing of the machinery, the subsequent persecution of the arsonists and the outburst of violence in the court room provide sensational effects and thrilling suspense.

Although the play's classification as melodrama is challenged by the "[...] sad ending and absence of comic relief" (Hudson 195), it is nevertheless important to note its richness of "[...] misery and laments typical of the melodramatic form" (Ilseman 195). For instance, Jane Allen produces highly emotional speeches when she begs Squire Westwood for mercy on behalf of her husband, George:

Oh, George, is this the end of all our former bliss? Torn from me, and for ever? My husband, he whom I have pressed to my breast – my heart's blood – the father of my children – oh horror, horror, exposed like a

common felon to the gaze of thousands on a gibbet! Hung? Oh, my heart sickens! [...] Mercy – mercy, to you I kneel! Pity my poor husband, and I will pray for thee, work for thee; my children, all – all, shall be your slaves for ever – ever, but spare him! (*The Factory Lad*, II.iv, 149)

However, also Hatfield, one of the workers, draws on pathos and exaggerated language in his reaction to the Squire's decision to dispose of the workers. The labourer describes his feelings of hatred and desire for revenge as follows:

Then, if ye will not hear a poor man's prayer, hear his curses! May thy endeavours be as sterile land, which the lightning has scath'd, bearing nor fruit, nor flower, nor blade, but never-dying thorns to pierce thee on thy pillow! Hard-hearted, vain, pampered thing as thou art, remember, the day will come thou'lt be sorry for this night's work!  
(*The Factory Lad*, I.i, 126)

In this context it should be mentioned that Hudson identifies "[t]his sort of apparent overreaction" as "the essence of melodrama" (196). Finally, sentimental outbursts can also be found on the part of Rushton, the instigator of the attack on the factory. In response to the question what to do if Westwood's men struck back, he says:

Return their attack – blow for blow, if they will have it; aye, and blood for blood. Give in, and you're lost for ever! [...] You know my fate – torture upon torture, the insult of the proud and the pity of the poor have been my lot for years. Trampled on, crushed, and gored to frenzy! My blood boils now I think on't! The pale spectre of my wife, with my slaughtered children now beckons me on! Revenge, revenge!  
(*The Factory Lad*, I.vi, 140)

While the extracts just mentioned surely give an idea of the play's abundance of emotionality and pathos, *The Factory Lad* nevertheless cannot be regarded as a fully-fledged specimen of the melodramatic genre. Ilsemann sums up the complexity of the dramatic construct at work as follows:

[...] the melodramatic elements of the play function within a field of tension, one extreme of which is provided by illusionistic, sensational, and alienating features that are in total accord with the traditional melodrama while the other is constituted by disillusioning effects, everyday objects, and circumstances from real life. (Ilsemann 196)

*The Rent-Day* gains its entertainment potential not only from strong emotionality but also from thrilling, diversified action as it consists of "[...] a complex of manipulated plots, absurd incidents, incredible villainies, and nick-of-time rescues [...]" (Bailey 260). For example, the accidental discovery of the Heywoods' inheritance, Crumbs' excuse for his vicious deeds, Silver Jack's and

Hyssop's attempts of blackmail, robbery and murder, Martin Heywood's steadfast suspicion of Rachel and the unmasking of the Squire in disguise appear indeed more than surprising and contrived but at the same time provide for suspense and diversion.

According to Bailey, "Jerrold intended the play to exhibit 'strong human ... emotion of that universal kind which the untaught pauper understands'" (260). This aim is, for example, achieved by Toby Heywood's rhetorically sophisticated speech against the injustice of the present tenant system. One of the metaphorical phrases used reads as follows: "if [the Squire] must feed the gaming-table, not to let it be with money, wrung, like blood, from the wretched" (*The Rent-Day*, I.i, 263). Also his brother, Martin, draws on extremely stilted formulations in order to convey his injury and horror about his wife's alleged unfaithfulness: "Rachel Heywood, I forgive that man! Let him but send a bullet through the heart you've broken, and I will thank him with my last breath. [...] Falsehood, where I had hoped for truth. Scorn, where I had looked for love. Shame, where I had built my greatest pride" (*The Rent-Day*, III.iii, 276).

When in the end the mysteries are solved and the misdeeds forgiven, all the tensions are loosened and the way is cleared for a happy ending. Although the Squire's benevolence spares the steward Crumbs any severe consequences, generally speaking the ideal of poetic justice, punishing vice and rewarding virtue, is perfectly fulfilled: Silver Jack and Hyssop are caught and await their execution while the Squire has realised his failure and promises to better himself. Furthermore, the Heywoods can enjoy their newly acquired fortune and the freeholder's right to their farm.

As a "remarkably pure domestic melodrama" (Booth, *Hiss* 28), *Lost in London* is rife with exaggerated emotionality and pathos. First and foremost, Nelly Armroyd delivers powerful speeches wrung with emotion: "Oh! fool! fool! that I have been to listen to the voice of the tempter, and oh! accursed vanity of woman that gave to that voice such power!" (*Lost in London*, I.i, 217), "Oh! I cannot bear this splendid misery. This bitter, bitter burthen of an ever-present past. It kills me; yes, it is killing me, I am sure. Wealth undreamt of – luxury unbounded – yet not a friend in this wide world! Not *one*!" (*Lost in London*, II.i, 234), "Oh think, Tiddy, it is my last request! In memory of the old bright days, that never, never can return, give me your promise! Nay, you shall not stir! On

my knees I ask it! Forget me! and oh! let *him* forget!" (*Lost in London*, II.i, 239). It is noticeable that the play hardly provides spectacular events or sensational happenings, apart from scenes of rapid physical action such as Nelly's and Featherstone's flight or the final fight between Job and his rival. Yet, as regards comic relief and light entertainment, one must not forget the numerous farcical elements found in the subplot, centring on the coltish interaction of Blinker and Polly.

Finally, it should be mentioned that *Lost in London* in so far deviates from the typical melodramatic pattern as indeed the vicious mine owner acknowledges his guilt, Nelly, however, dies of a broken heart resulting from her unfaithfulness. Therefore, although in theory poetic justice is accomplished, a happy ending is missing.

While with *The Middleman*, compared to his former works, Jones "[...] opened up a new range of emotions, a new scope for dramatic villainy" (Northend 454), centring on the struggle between capital and labour, the play is nevertheless, similar to conventional melodrama, designed to create among the audience feelings of "indignation, pity, satisfaction at the downfall of villainy and the triumph of virtue" (Northend 454). Again, the entertainment potential rests primarily on excessive emotionality and sentiment. Especially the potter Blenkarn delivers a rhetorically elaborate, strongly emotional speech when railing against Chandler's reluctance to accept the relationship between Julian and Mary:

Thou that holdest the scales! Judge between this man and me! A balance! A balance! Give justice here! I've made him rich and proud – let me now make him poor and despised. He mocks at my grief. Let me some day mock at his! Let me hold his flesh and blood as cheap as he holds mine! Show me some way to bring him to the dust! Give him and his dearest into my keeping! Make them clay in my hands that I may shape and mould them as I choose, and melt them like wax in the fire of my revenge! (*The Middleman*, II, 211)

Similarly, Blenkarn's daughter Mary offers intensely sentimental insights into her belief in true love when she, for example, advises Nancy to appreciate Jesse's adoration appropriately:

Handsomeness very soon wears off. Kindness and goodness don't. [...] And thank God, yes, dear, thank Him with all your heart for giving you a man that can so reverence and worship a woman that he becomes like a fool in her presence. Thank Him that though your lover seems common

to you, he loves you so much that you can never become common to him. (*The Middleman*, II, 203)

With Blenkarn discovering the secret formula of the traditional porcelain glaze, the play can finally terminate with a happy ending. Poetic justice is perfectly applied and makes virtue and forgiveness on the part of Blenkarn win over Chandler's greed and egoism. It is beyond dispute that *The Middleman* clearly forgoes any attempts of staging sensational events, surprising action or physical thrill. Emeljanow argues that the play "[...] shows Jones moving away [...] from a drama based on plot, to a drama based on a combination of character and social criticism" (137).

*Strife* has been identified as the "culminating masterpiece" of "[...] a long line of nineteenth-century plays, stretching back to John Walker's powerful *The Factory Lad* [...], that are concerned with problems of labour and capital, of work and wages, of strikes and unemployment, of machine-smashing and victimization" (Booth, *The Lights* xxv). Yet, unlike all the other plays preceding it, *Strife* has abandoned all traces of a melodramatic conception. Thus, it is not surprising that exaggerated emotionality, sentiment or sensational action are basically missing. For instance, Sternlicht argues that Galsworthy "[...] presents a near-balanced view of the play's problem or thesis through a highly dramatic situation supported by extremely realistic dialogue, seemingly uncontrived and nonpoetic [...]" (101-102). Furthermore, Schalit points out that "[p]assion [...] is [...] restrained, it seethes under the surface, misery is vented in gasps, not in piercing screams" (233). To sum up, the play indeed provides the opportunity to indulge in feelings of sympathy, pity and admiration, but it does so in a more natural and realistic manner than the other plays under investigation.

Apart from *Strife*, all the plays under investigation follow the basic principle of melodramatic conception: The world presented constitutes a simplified, idealistic and at the same time enormously exciting portrayal of reality where emotionality is maximised and feelings experienced in a wholehearted and uncompromising fashion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2.5.3.1.

### 5.1.2 Absolutist classification of character

The chapters 3 and 4 already offered a detailed analysis of the representation of the plays' major characters in their respective role as employer or employee. The following survey is now aimed at reviewing the question of in how far the absolutist classification of the melodramatic world finds expression in the characterisation of the individual protagonists and at clarifying which types of characters turn out as likable or rather dislikable. In this context, considerable overlaps between the melodramatic villain and the person obtaining the economically more powerful position as well as between the melodramatic hero and the correspondent subordinate character are noticeable. Owing to the melodramatic mode of painting the world in either black or white, the stereotypical characters can easily be recognised as either good or bad.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, the more one departs from the traditional conventions of melodrama, the more complex the individual characters become. The analysis of the character representation in *The Middleman* or in *Strife* thus needs to take into account the now multilayered personalities of employers or employees. In the following, the characterisation of the individual agents of industrial relations will be reviewed and summarised.

In *Luke the Labourer*, the characters still constitute what Smith calls "a set of walking clichés" (*Introduction*): Luke indeed must be given credit for the great distress and probably also injustice he has experienced beforehand, but in the end, taking advantage of his newly acquired wealth and power, appears as a primarily villainous and selfish fellow who does not shy away from obviously criminal acts. As far as Squire Chase is concerned, not even a single argument in his favour can be found. The villainous landlord thus falls under the category of characters featuring as "symbols of virtue and vice, personified moral qualities rather than complex people" (Bailey 31). The analysis of Farmer Wakefield's behaviour in his role as an employer has shown that in spite of his wealth and great influence, he seems to be quite popular with the local population and does not, in contrast to Luke or the Squire, take advantage of his economic might. When he experiences a tremendous financial downfall,

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2.2.

though, the farmer assumes the role of a subordinate, powerless victim. Already severely marked by the painful abduction of his son years ago, Farmer Wakefield eventually abandons himself to despair and self-pity. Apart from that, Farmer Wakefield hardly gives reason for criticism and thus appears as an overwhelmingly likable character. The representation of his daughter Clara is even more positive. Not featuring as an employee proper, she nevertheless contributes decisively to the clarification of the power structures at work. When confronted with the powers of socially or financially superior figures such as Squire Chase or even Charles, she reacts with remarkable submissiveness. Rather pitied than criticised for her naivety and credulousness, Clara can be identified as a thoroughly likable character.

In *The Factory Lad* very soon the villainous personality of Squire Westwood is firmly determined. While it is important to acknowledge the Squire's true legal entitlement to operate his business in line with the principle of rationality, in the end he only considers his own potential economic disadvantages brought along with the maintenance of the traditional modes of production and turns a blind eye to the existence-threatening situation the labourers are confronted with.

At the beginning of the play, the characterisation of the employees still follows clearly the pattern elaborated on in the context of the melodramatic hero. The labourers thus might be admired for their commitment to work, and at the same time pitied for the injustice they experience as a result of Squire Westwood's greed. Especially George Allen is sympathetically portrayed in his role as a caring family man. However, it soon turns out that the workers will not accept their tragic fate but plan to take revenge on their former employer. "[T]he melodramatic heroes [...] begin to react, to use force and to manifest a need for revenge that puts them in the position [actually] assigned to the antagonist" (Ilseman 204-205) in the usual melodramatic pattern. Their aggressive and violent fight against the implementation of steam machinery at their workplace or their reckless desire for revenge makes them assume character traits untypical of their conception as melodramatic heroes. The development of the play, and especially the tragic ending, in fact promote considerably more "reality-oriented psychological modes of understanding and dealing with experience" (Ilseman 205) than the traditional melodramatic variants. Yet, at



least when compared to the thoroughly villainous Squire, the workers can still be identified as predominantly likable characters. Rushton needs to be treated separately, though. While the poacher might be pitied for the stresses and strains experienced in the past, it remains unclear if the cruelties he has had to endure should really constitute a justification for his decision to instigate the smashing of the factory.

In *The Rent-Day*, the examination of the steward's motives causing his villainous deeds proves difficult. Severely hurt by the present landlord's predecessor, he excuses his suppressive behaviour towards the tenant farmers by reference to the previously sustained injustice. However, as it actually does not seem comprehensible why Crumbs should feel entitled to take revenge at the expense of the subordinates' financial survival, the steward's personality will be remembered as marked by egoism and mercilessness.

The character of Squire Grantley is constructed from two completely different angles. At first, Grantley is portrayed as the stereotypical melodramatic villain, only to be celebrated as the benevolent landlord in the end. This strategy stands in stark contrast to the rigid, unchallengeable character qualifications employed in the genre of melodrama.

The additional chapter 3.7 focusing exclusively on the portrayal of the employer in a generational context was meant to discuss the further concretion of the businessman currently in charge by means of reference to his predecessor. Concerning both *The Factory Lad* as well as *The Rent-Day*, the dislikable quality of the present generation of employers is further strengthened by the comparison with the former. Westwood's renunciation of traditional modes of production in favour of the introduction of steam-driven machines expresses his strife for ever more increasing profit yields, a capitalist motive his deceased father would never have considered as a legitimate excuse for exposing faithful workers to the severe distress and suffering connected to their coercive unemployment. In *The Rent-Day*, Squire Grantley's father seems to have foreseen his son's development towards a gambling wastrel who enjoys a life full of luxuries at the expense of impoverished tenant farmers: It was his decision to have a steward control the young Squire's expenditures and look after the estate while the latter was absent. As only due to Grantley's continual absence from his own premises it is possible that Crumb's monkey business

goes unnoticed, one could argue the young Squire has to resume a certain degree of responsibility for the steward's crimes.

Economically subordinate and completely dependent on the benevolence of the Squire and his steward, Farmer Heywood and his family suffer considerably from the superiors' unfair exercise of their powers. Rachel can be considered *The Rent-Day's* heroine of striking virtue and strong faith. She is in fact spotless and, as Bailey argues, especially her "[...] scorn for the would-be seducer exhibits the domestic ideal" (260). Although Martin Heywood might score with his caring attitude for his children and wife or his commitment to family traditions and will most likely be pitied for the ill-luck he has to endure, he nevertheless evolves as a "[...] rather unlikable character who is easily persuaded to be a victim of circumstance" (Emeljanow 39). His inclination to self-pity, passiveness and pessimism does not earn the self-dramatiser much sympathy.

*Lost in London* shows strong melodramatic traces and, owing to Featherstone's appearance as a reckless womaniser, clearly puts the employer in the role of the villain. Similar to the Squire in *Luke the Labourer*, Featherstone tries to win the love of a feeble victim, Nelly, with more or less ungrounded promises. What is more, the mine owner takes advantage of his professional position in order to hide his objectionable plans. One should bear in mind that Featherstone's own deep affection for Nelly does not compensate for the pain and suffering endured by Job as a consequence of his great loss. Finally, Featherstone's behaviour towards his servants and the latter's descriptions of their master round off the picture of the cold-hearted, ruthless man of business.

Following the melodramatic conventions, the villain Gilbert Featherstone is confronted with an opponent, Job Armroyd, the clearly recognisable hero of the play. Job, the poor, hard-working but nevertheless cheerful and diligent miner, full of love for his wife and affection for his friends, features as an antipole to the villainous employer. When Job is informed about the elopement of his wife, he only wants to see her as the innocent victim and immediately leaves for London in order to free his beloved Nelly from the clutches of her alleged seducer. Putting his wife's well-being on top of his own hurt feelings, Job demonstrates remarkable unselfishness and true, unconditional love for Nelly. Job thus perfectly fulfils the requirements of the hero as an undivided

stock character typical of melodrama. The heroic status of the miner is also supported by the strict class consciousness noticeable throughout the play. The unfair and disrespectful treatment of the lower classes on the part of the master make the employee's wish for a violent revenge appear even more justifiable. In the end, though, Job abandons his chance of revenge and thereby displays his noble nature all the more. Although Job can be accused of naivety and credulousness as far as the employer's advances towards Nelly are concerned, he nevertheless retains an overwhelmingly virtuous and likable personality.

As far as the characterisation of individual figures in *The Middleman* is concerned, "[...] Jones does not go in for melodramatic effect; his characters are not stereotypes; and situation, character, and dialogue are socially credible and convincing" (Booth, *The Lights* xxvi). To begin with, Chandler's exploitative and dismissive behaviour towards his employees - be it Blenkarn, other workers employed at Tatlow porcelain works, his managing man Todd or even his family - and his corresponding conceitedness unavoidably make him a dislikable, narcissistic businessman who enjoys prospering at the expense of others.

To a slightly lesser extent, also Todd is to be confronted with criticism for his plans to capitalise upon Blenkarn's efforts. However, he only focuses on his monetary advancement and forgoes any offences on the interpersonal level. While one might excuse Todd's mischievous behaviour towards Chandler with reference to the former's continual subordination and suppression, he nevertheless remains an egoistic, thus disagreeable, businessman.

While he might be pitied for his dreary existence or the humiliation and suppression inflicted upon him by Chandler and Todd, Cyrus Blenkarn deserves recognition for his unbending will to pursue his dream and his renunciation of the quest for money. When he finally succeeds, the hard-working potter remains true to himself and does not take advantage of his elevated position in order to take revenge on his former employer. Quite the contrary, Blenkarn prefers forgiveness over revenge, which makes him an even more admirable character. At the same time one must not forget that he could also be considered a self-centred, frantic maniac who jeopardises the well-being of his family for his idealist dreams. Nevertheless, in sum it is clear that the representation of the employee is meant to turn out primarily positive as opposed to the starkly negative picture drawn of the employer.

Ranking far away from melodramatic oversimplification, *Strife* offers an objective assessment of the controversy between capital on the one hand and labour on the other hand. “The perfectly balanced, impartial presentation of the conflict [...]” (Northend 455) does not allow for taking sides. In this context one should bear in mind that it is a highly disputed question whether the individual characters only function as representatives of their respective class, rendering *Strife* a “labor play of mass action” (Lovett 7), or whether the play is rather built around “[...] the opposition of two powerful personalities to whose clash the labor struggle furnished the motive and circumstances” (Lovett 6).<sup>8</sup> Following the former argumentation, the individual characters cannot be held liable for any harm done: “As the conflict is between classes rather than individuals, there is no individual guilt involved” (Cast 538). On the other hand, though, Galsworthy himself asserted that he was primarily concerned with the observation of two different types of men, both strong-willed characters with powerful personalities, whereas the power struggle between capital and labour just formed the framework of the combat between Roberts and Anthony (Galsworthy qtd. in Moses 543; Lovett 7). Based on the assumption that a discussion of the two opponents just mentioned can or even should be conducted independently from the socio-economic question dominating the play, Roberts in his role as employee as well as Anthony in his role as employer both receive equally wavering extents of sympathy and antipathy. According to Schalit, “at the end, we feel profound pity for both of them” (232).

Where the characters’ degree of likability is easily identifiable or where they even mutate into mere types, it suggests itself to assume the respective play to follow the melodramatic convention of providing entertainment by drawing on an absolutist classification of the fictitious world. Owing to the simplified view on morality and the uncomplicated idealised world, the audience experiences a feeling of security and comfort since they know already at the beginning what to expect and which characters to appreciate or despise.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 5.2.1 for more detailed information.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 2.2.

## 5.2 Social criticism and political motivation

### 5.2.1 Themes and messages

Taking into consideration the information provided on the workings of the melodramatic pattern as well as the fictional account of the relationship between the employer, on the one hand, and the employee, on the other hand, it suggests itself to dedicate some thoughts to the possible effects created among the respective audiences. The question will be answered whether certain ideological convictions can be identified and in how far the audience is meant to be guided by the relevant political ideas transmitted. It appears appropriate to focus exclusively on an exemplary discussion of *The Factory Lad*, *The Middleman* as well as *Strife*.

Smith identifies *The Factory Lad* as a typical representative of the so-called *protest theatre* which usually tries “[...] to stimulate political awareness, question established values, expose injustice, champion reform, fuel arguments on ways and means and sometimes to incite direct support for bloody revolution” (*Melodrama* 72). It is undisputable that *The Factory Lad* incorporates distinct instances of social criticism and therefore “[...] addresses contemporary social problems” (Ilseman 191). For instance, there is an exchange of information on the troublesome life of the poor, dependent on poaching, and references to the strains connected to emigration or a deportation to the workhouse. Moreover, the play deals with the ticklish issue of the distribution of power between the employer and the employee, with the functioning of the judicial system and with machine-smashing as a means of taking revenge on a possibly unfair factory owner as well as a means of impeding or at least protracting the successful introduction of steam production.

Bearing in mind the diametrically opposed interests of the employer on the one hand and those of the employees on the other hand, it follows logically that also the question of class is of great significance. *The Factory Lad*’s “militant class consciousness” (Smith, *Introduction*) manifests itself clearly in a more favourable representation of the lower classes since the problem of social injustice is depicted from the workers’ point of view only. According to Booth,

“[s]uch manifestations are a part of the class bitterness of much nineteenth-century melodrama” (*Hiss* 29).

Due to the overwhelmingly sympathetic portrayal of the workers affected by the staff lay-off, it suggests itself to impute to *The Factory Lad* an inclination to support the latter’s interests and beliefs rather than to take on the view of the employer. This argument is not only supported by Vernon, who identifies the play as “strongly anti-employer” (128), but also by Hudson, who states that the play tries to elicit “audience sympathy for the plight of the unemployed factory workers” (195). Similarly, Booth sees *The Factory Lad* as a typical example of melodrama “[...] coming down more often on the side of man than of master” (*Defence* 10). Furthermore, Ilsemann points out that the working-class is basically put in a position of helplessness and victimhood suffering from the despicable behaviour of the ruling economic agent (196). The play at hand is thus a perfect example of the melodramatic pattern which “[...] proved to be an effective means of conveying, from the point of view of poor people, the helplessness and frustration they felt in the face of the more complicated and capriciously cruel world around them” (Vernon 119). In the course of the play it becomes apparent that capitalist thinking and, above all, market economy and its consequences for the individual human being are criticised and in the end disapproved of. For instance, Vernon identifies Walker’s “[...] distaste for any very complacent acceptance of the market economy [...] and for harsh and uncertain solutions – such as emigration – to the problems which the economy itself created” (125). Consequently, *The Factory Lad* seems to promote convictions commonly connected with socialism (Ilsemann 194; James 156); more accurately, “a socialism that envisions cooperation and harmony as the basis for society rather than competition and exploitation” (Ilsemann 194).

To sum up, *The Factory Lad* in its manifestation as “savage protest drama” (Smith, *Melodrama* 74) is clearly designed to transmit a primarily critical message: The prevailing socio-economic conditions, namely the unfair treatment and oppression of the workforce by a ruthless capital-owning elite, are not only questioned but openly protested against. The play at hand can thus be understood as advocating social reform to the benefit of the downtrodden masses of the lower classes (Ilsemann 206).

In *The Middleman* the struggle between capital and labour also plays a significant role as regards the thematic conception of the play. With *The Middleman*, Jones finally managed to introduce “a new scope of dramatic villainy” (Northend 454) in his theatrical work: Instead of having the villain chase after the innocence of a young maiden, suddenly economic interests, greed and social responsibility stand in the centre of attention. Similarly, Jackson notes that “[...] conflict and tension now arise ostensibly from the social and economic situation of the characters” (*Plays* 9). Although Jackson argues that “[...] Jones’ analysis of economic and social life seems timid and lacking in penetration” (*Plays* 9), the fact that the newly arrived capitalist spirit, personified by businessmen such as Chandler or Todd, poses a threat to the economically subordinate individual’s existence, is indeed not far from the everyday experience of contemporary society. Jones obviously tried to incorporate worries and ideas which would come close to the personal concerns of his audiences (Jackson, *Plays* 9; Northend 454). The playwright seems to have aimed at “[...] employ[ing] the drama as a medium for the discussion of social problems of serious importance” (Hamilton, *Introduction* xlii).

Similar to *The Factory Lad*, also in *The Middleman* the economically less fortunate party, in this case the potter Blenkarn and his family, is portrayed more favourably than the representatives of capital. When Jones tries to arouse “indignation, pity, satisfaction at the downfall of villainy and the triumph of virtue [...]” (Northend 454) among the audience, he also wants them to take over the viewpoint of the more likable group of economic agents. At any rate, the play cannot be denied the avowed goal of sparking “social awareness” (Northend 454) among the recipients.

Yet, one must admit that *The Middleman* ranges far from an in-depth analysis of the prevailing socio-economic conditions and does not even attempt to provide a solution to the ideological problems (Booth, *The Lights* xxv). Any recommendations as regards a possibly desirable behaviour of either party are limited to a mere interpersonal level: As Booth maintains, “Jones seems to suggest that kindness, fairness, and good treatment are the best means of developing harmonious and fruitful relations between capital and labour; he who does not practice these industrial decencies is, literally, the loser” (*The Lights* xxv). While this message might be criticised for its superficiality, one must bear

in mind that Jones depicted the fictitious world from the position of a playwright, not an economist (Booth, *The Lights* xxv).

As it has already been pointed out previously,<sup>10</sup> *Strife* cannot only be understood as a play engaging with ideological questions concerning the class struggle between capital and labour, but also, if not even primarily, as a discussion of the clash between the interests of two distinctive characters. The latter interpretation is for instance supported by Sternlicht's statement claiming the play is indeed "[...] ostensibly concerned with the cruelties and hardships caused by industrial conflict [...]" (104), but in fact puts the focus on feelings of "pride and power" (104) prevailing among the two leading figures. Similarly, Schalit argues that *Strife* "[...] is a drama of irreconcilable extremisms embodied in the figures of the two chief characters" (233). Additionally, also MacDonald (120) and Farris (218) recognise the overwhelming significance of the interpersonal conflict between Anthony and Roberts whereas the question of the eligibility of the strike is said to play a minor role. Above all, Galsworthy's own thoughts are reported as follows:

It has always been the fashion to suppose that it is a play on the subject of capital and labour. But the strike, which forms the staple material of the play, was chosen only as a convenient vehicle to carry the play's real theme, which is that of the Greek *uβis* or violence. *Strife* is, indeed, a play on extremism or fanaticism [...]. (Galsworthy qtd. in MacDonald 122)

As Galsworthy is said to have viewed "[...] a play, like life itself, more prone to questions than to answers" (Sternlicht 102), it does not seem surprising that the problems posed in the course of the play remain basically unsolved. However, one must bear in mind that it was not the author's intention to promote a certain political conviction after all; quite the contrary, MacDonald reports that "[...] Galsworthy took pride in the apolitical nature of the piece [...]" (122). Accordingly, *Strife* is marked by an essentially impartial representation of interests and ideas. The play offers a perfectly balanced distribution of positive and negative aspects among the two camps of the strike as well as the two leading characters. Both parties and both leaders might be met with equally intense feelings of sympathy and antipathy. Especially Anthony and Roberts are subjects to admiration and sympathy to the same extent (MacDonald 127; Schalit 232; Sternlicht 104; Weiss, *John Galsworthy's* 14).

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 5.1.2.



At the same time, though, it is possible to deduce several points of criticism which hold equally true for either protagonist just mentioned. Both Anthony and Roberts experience a tremendous downfall as a result of their inability to anticipate the defection of their respective followers. They outdistance their supporters by their recourse to violence and recklessness (Schalit 233; Sternlicht 104). The leaders - strong-willed, but incapable of disavowing their convictions - end up as victims of their own obstinacy and pride (Sternlicht 104). In addition to the difficult and basically unsolved question of a fair conflict resolution as concerns the interests of the respective industrial agents, the audience is also confronted with severe criticism on both leading protagonists and is thus denied any form of clear reference as to which leader or conviction to follow (Weiss, *Der Januskopf* 141). Consequently, it seems questionable whether *Strife* should really suggest that “[o]nly through mutual toleration, mutual concession and agreement can human society progress” (Schalit 238). Much rather, the idea of compromise featuring as the only meaningful means to ensure societal well-being must be reconsidered in favour of the insight that *Strife* does not convey a particular recommendation for action at all (Weiss, *Der Januskopf* 141).

In spite of the undisputable importance of the interpersonal conflict between Anthony and Roberts as regards the primary point of interest of the play, *Strife* owes much of its “historic and philosophic significance” (Farris 218) to the ideological considerations also forming part of the dramatic work. One must not forget that the uncompromising attitude of both Anthony and Roberts leads to tremendous suffering and even one death among the workers affected by the strike. Therefore, the fate of the victims of the personal conflict between the two leaders must not be neglected in favour of the highlighting of the latter’s individual cases (Sternlicht 104). Additionally, Sternlicht assumes that Galsworthy intends to foreground “[...] that great disputes are more often due to the intransigence of leaders than the beliefs or desires of followers [...]” (104). Similarly, also Schalit notes that in the end, “[a]ll the suffering comes from the implacability of the two extremists [...]” (238).

## 5.2.2 Persuasive communication?

Having identified the primary messages the plays under investigation most likely try to convey, the question arises whether the information is actually successfully and effectively communicated. Based on the idea that audience involvement is a highly crucial factor in the transmittance of ideas,<sup>11</sup> first of all it should be mentioned that there are two different but non-exclusive strands of argumentation suggesting contemporary spectators' assured engagement with the performance on stage: Taking into account Morgan's assumption that "[e]motional and imaginative involvement in the dramatic illusion of a play [...] is properly regarded as a form of participation [...]" (95), it follows logically that all the plays offer the opportunity to engage easily with the material presented, as they clearly speak to the spectators' emotions, albeit to a varying degree of exaggeration in terms of presentation. At least, the overwhelming number of plays bears a considerable entertainment potential based not only on spectacle, thrilling suspense, but also on sentiment, emotionality and pathos.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the one-sided, easily recognisable representation of characters according to the melodramatic pattern of a black or white morality,<sup>13</sup> and the absolutist classification of the fictional world in general not only add to the entertainment function of a text by means of drawing on a desired but simplified view on life in order to provide for feelings of certainty and security,<sup>14</sup> but also support the identification process of the audience tremendously, as it is clear quite early on in a play whom the audience is meant to despise or cheer at.<sup>15</sup> As it has been shown in chapter 5.1.2, only in *Luke the Labourer*, *The Factory Lad*, *The Rent-Day* and *Lost in London* the characters function along the lines of the melodramatic concept of classification, whereas in *The Middleman* the characterisations already appear considerably more complex. Finally, in *Strife*, the characters cannot be identified according to the melodramatic scheme at all.

On the other hand, audience involvement is generated due to the plays' inclination to explore social problems, socio-economic or socio-political issues

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 2.5.3.2.2.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 5.1.1.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2.3.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 2.5.3.1.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2.3.

and, most importantly in the context of this thesis, questions concerning the organisation of industrial relations, all of which also affected contemporary society.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Ilseman points out that certain aspects of *The Factory Lad* can be regarded as a “[...] reproduction of socio-historical reality. The arguments reconstitute the known positions espoused by factory owners and workers of the era” (196). Especially at the minor theatres such as the Surrey, which were geared towards the tastes of the lower classes of society and therefore offered melodramatic pieces such as *The Factory Lad* frequently, “[...] the plight of the factory workers could be expected to excite strong empathy” among the spectators (Vernon 123). To sum up, as soon as the socio-economic situation presented in the play bears great similarity to the spectators’ own everyday reality, it is legitimate to assume that they will find it easy to identify with and thus experience feelings of empathy for the characters on stage (Ilseman 196). Bearing in mind the genre-specific peculiarities usually assigned to melodramas like *The Factory Lad*, the following strategy can be traced: “[T]o pinpoint a contemporary evil they set up a blameless hero as the victim of the system, and then subject him to such inhuman persecution that the audience explodes with indignation and demands the immediate repeal of laws which perpetrate such cruelties” (Smith, *Melodrama* 74). *The Factory Lad* might therefore be identified as a very good example of the interplay between the discussion of current social issues and the melodramatic style (Ilseman 192).

However, even if major parts of the respective audience can be considered susceptible to the content of the play as a result of the identification process outlined above, it still remains questionable whether the ideological messages would contribute to increased awareness among or even promote change in contemporary society as a whole. Most importantly, one must not forget that *The Factory Lad* was addressed to and also only attended by those theatre goers usually stemming from the lower strata of society. As the latter were well informed about the prevailing conditions from personal experience anyway, they would have formed an opinion on the subject matter tackled on stage very similar to the message conveyed by the theatrical work (Smith, *Melodrama* 74). To conclude, protest melodramas such as *The Factory Lad*

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2.4 and 5.2.1.

[...] may focus discontent, fire public feeling and congratulate their audience on siding with the angels, but they are too vehemently partisan, too shrill and facile in denunciation, to persuade the uncommitted man of even moderate intelligence that their black and white world is the grey one that he knows. (Smith, *Melodrama* 74)

Bearing in mind the limited run of only six performances at the Surrey when *The Factory Lad* was first performed (Ilseman 206; Vernon 128), it seems even more justifiable to deny the play considerable achievements in its function as a means of transmitting social criticism.

As already mentioned in chapter 5.2.1, also the thematic conception of *The Middleman* is designed to question the prevalent distribution of power among the agents of industrial relations in contemporary society. Thus, the play did not only cater to the needs of the “amusement-seeking crowd,” but also aimed at “the small circle of the judicious” (Wauchope 150). However, it is not an overtly propagandistic tract Jones planned to create. Quite the contrary, according to Jenkins, for Jones “[...] the theatre was neither a debating chamber nor a lecture hall. Drama should not preach, but it could teach by indirection through a story which captured the emotions” (143).

As far as *Strife* is concerned, potential social criticism is even more cautiously and ingeniously employed: While contemporary society would be “[...] used to an overtly political propagandist theatre” (MacDonald 122), Galsworthy was careful not to design the play with a political undertone at all. Consequently, his plays, including *Strife*, do without “preaching and propaganda” (Sternlicht 101). *Strife* is rather marked by a tremendously well-balanced, unbiased representation of the problematic situation as regards industrial relations. According to MacDonald, the play “[...] presents an incident that exposes, rather than attacks, some of the causes of industrial unrest and of personal tragedy” (131). Instead of identifying with one of the given ideological convictions or the personal tragedy of either of the two leaders, the audience is encouraged to reconsider and revise their preconceptions (Weiss, *John Galsworthy's* 14).

Although a sufficiently high level of audience involvement makes it usually legitimate to assume an enhanced transmittance of particular messages inherent in the respective dramatic work, one is well-advised to take into account possible obstacles to the latter's potential function as an instrumental

form of art: Be it the play's orientation towards an improper choice of audience or a conscious eschewal of a didactic influence.

## 6 Conclusion

The majority of the plays show a clear tendency of a more favourable representation of the employee, be it the miner, farmer, or factory worker, in comparison to the employer, be it the owner of a production site, of a mine or the landlord. Those in a position of economic power such as Squire Chase together with his henchman Luke in *Luke the Labourer*, Squire Westwood in *The Factory Lad*, the steward Crumbs in *The Rent-Day*, Master Featherstone in *Lost in London* or Chandler and Todd in *The Middleman*, can be criticised for taking advantage of their elevated position at the expense of their subordinates. On the contrary, the representation of the farming families in *Luke the Labourer* and *The Rent-Day*, the workers in *The Factory Lad*, the miner Job Armroyd in *Lost in London* as well as the potter Blenkarn and his family in *The Middleman*, is designed to arouse pity and sympathy, if not even admiration within the audience.

Certainly, individual character descriptions nevertheless require differentiation in terms of the figures' degree of likability. As regards Job Armroyd in *Lost in London* and the workers in *The Factory Lad*, the desired or, in the second case, actual recourse to violence could be held objectionable. Moreover, the employees' likability might be severely challenged by their inclination to self-pity and destructive lamenting as is prevalent in *Luke the Labourer* on the part of Farmer Wakefield, who mourns his economic downfall and the loss of his son, at the beginning of *The Factory Lad* on the part of the dismissed workers and in *Lost in London* on the part of Job Armroyd after the elopement of his wife. In *The Rent-Day*, Martin Heywood even exceeds the usual rate of self-pity and is consequently left with a rather negative characterisation based on his self-dramatisation and self-righteousness.

Similarly, one could also argue that some of the employers do not present entirely negative character traits only. Quite the contrary, apart from the rather marginal character Squire Chase, the factory and mine owners and the

Squires all try to justify their deeds by manifold arguments, be it personal injustice experienced in the past, feelings for a woman or economic considerations. It is important to note, though, that they nevertheless hardly succeed with their argumentation and thus cannot abandon their roles as basically villainous characters.

Finally, there are individual figures such as Squire Grantley in *The Rent-Day* or the poacher Rushton in *The Factory Lad* who appear to behave contrary to the scheme predetermined by their affiliation with the group of employers on the one hand and the group of employees on the other hand. As it is only revealed by the end of the play, Squire Grantley is in fact a kind-hearted and benevolent landlord whose bad reputation is primarily based on false information presented by the steward Crumbs. Similarly, Rushton, who sides with the workers unfairly dismissed, seems difficult to place in terms of likability: Although he stands up for the suppressed people's rights, it still remains questionable whether his deeds are ethically justifiable. From an overall perspective, however, the positive representation of the employee as opposed to the rather critical representation of the employer is secured.

Partly, the agents of industrial relations are presented according to the melodramatic convention of drawing on stereotypical stock-characters. Squire Chase and his henchman Luke in *Luke the Labourer*, Squire Westwood in *The Factory Lad*, the steward Crumbs in *The Rent-Day* and Master Featherstone in *Lost in London* are modelled on the role of the villain typical of melodrama. By contrast, Chandler as well as Todd in *The Middleman* can be identified as considerably more complex characters. As to the role of the employee, the workers including Rushton in *The Factory Lad* and Job Armroyd in *Lost in London* clearly appear as melodramatic heroes. Similar to the role of the employer, also Cyrus Blenkarn in *The Middleman* cannot be considered a melodramatic stock character as a result of his complex personality. In *Luke the Labourer* as well as *The Rent-Day*, though, the respective farmers do not show a tremendous complexity in terms of character but simply do not feature as an antipole to the villainous superior; other, albeit partly minor, characters take over this part.

Taking into account the overwhelmingly negative representation of the economically more powerful party, it seems hardly surprising that both *The*

*Factory Lad* and *The Middleman*, featuring in an exemplary discussion of the possible themes and messages inherent in the respective play, promote the interests and ideals of the subordinate agents of industrial relations. By contrast, in *Strife* the struggle between capital and labour is presented from a thoroughly unbiased point of view. Positive and negative aspects of the differing political ideologies advocated in the play cancel each other out.

As a result of their conspicuous melodramatic orientation, all the plays, except *Strife*, draw on an entertainment potential based on the provision of exaggerated emotionality, sensation and suspense. In addition, the absolutist classification of the characters as either likable or dislikable allows for a facilitated, pre-determined and at the same time also highly enjoyable identification process on the part of the audience. These forms of emotional involvement function as the foundation for a sufficiently high level of audience participation. Moreover, the latter is also achieved by recourse to a discussion of contemporary socio-political or socio-economic issues most likely personally affecting the relevant audience. Yet, as far as the example texts are concerned, it has become apparent that although certainly points of social criticism are voiced, *The Factory Lad* does not succeed in, whereas *The Middleman* and *Strife* simply do not aim at, conveying the respective messages concerning contemporary problems in such a way as to inspire action or a willingness to reform among the audience. Much rather, the effects created are limited to an increased level of awareness.

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## German Summary / Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit der Darstellung der Arbeitgeber-/Arbeitnehmerbeziehung in ausgewählten englischsprachigen Theaterstücken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Da zu dieser Zeit das Melodrama immense Popularität erfuhr, von großen Publikumsmassen wahrgenommen wurde und somit - unbestreitbar - gesellschaftliche Bedeutung erlangte, konzentriert sich die Textauswahl hauptsächlich auf dieses Genre. Folgende Theaterstücke werden in der Analyse genauer beleuchtet: *Luke the Labourer* (1826) von John Baldwin Buckstone, *The Factory Lad* (1832) von John Walker, *The Rent-Day* (1832) von Douglas William Jerrold, *Lost in London* (1867) von Watts Phillips, *The Middleman* (1889) von Henry Arthur Jones und schließlich *Strife* (1909) von John Galsworthy. Das letztgenannte Werk fällt sowohl in seiner zeitlichen Einordnung als auch hinsichtlich der Genrezugehörigkeit aus der Reihe. Als einziges Stück ohne nennenswerte melodramatische Elemente bietet es sich aber hervorragend als Vergleichsobjekt zu den restlichen Werken an, um durch Gegenüberstellungen die jeweiligen Diskussionspunkte noch stärker zu kontrastieren und folglich besser verständlich zu machen.

Da, mit Ausnahme von *Strife*, die ausgewählten Texte stark von melodramatischen Konventionen getragen werden, gilt es die wichtigsten Eigenheiten und Besonderheiten dieses Genres zuerst auf abstrakter, allgemeiner Ebene darzustellen, bevor auf die konkreten Ausprägungen in den einzelnen Werken eingegangen werden kann.

Bei der eingehenden Betrachtung der jeweiligen Arbeitgeber- und Arbeitnehmerrollen in den verschiedenen Werken fällt auf, dass die Charakterisierung des abhängigen und somit schwächeren Wirtschaftsteilnehmers durchgehend positiv ausfällt. Im Gegensatz zu der nach Publikumssympathien strebenden Darstellung der Bauern, Minen- oder Fabriksarbeiter, erscheint jene der Charaktere mit Arbeitbereitschaft vielfach kritisch und abwertend. Der Einfluss der für das Melodrama bezeichnenden, typenhaften Einteilung von Rollenbildern ist besonders im Hinblick auf die Konzeption der einzelnen Figuren deutlich zu sehen: Während die Arbeitgeber überwiegend die Rolle des melodramatischen Bösewichtes



annehmen, finden sich die Arbeitnehmer oftmals in der Position des melodramatischen Helden wieder. Diese vorgefertigten, klar definierten Schemata erleichtern seitens des Publikums auch den Identifizierungsprozess ungemein, da von Anfang an feststeht, welche Charaktere als „gut“ oder „böse“ konzeptioniert sind. Gänzlich anders ist die Figurencharakterisierung in *Strife* ausgestaltet. Hier wird eine absolut ausgeglichene, unvoreingenommene Darstellung der Hauptakteure im Zusammenhang mit ihren jeweiligen wirtschafts- bzw. sozialpolitischen und persönlichen Interessen forciert.

Dass die einseitige, nämlich mit der Arbeitnehmerseite sympathisierende, Betrachtungsweise in einer den Stücken anhaftenden, mehr oder weniger publikumswirksamen, Botschaft ihren Niederschlag findet, zeigt sich schließlich anhand der Diskussion der beispielhaft herausgegriffenen Stücke *The Factory Lad* und *The Middleman*. Insbesondere das als Protest-Drama ausgestaltete *The Factory Lad* ergreift ganz offensiv Partei für die unterdrückte, vom Wohlwollen des Industriepatriarchats abhängige, Arbeiterschaft. In *Strife*, das dritte Werk, das einer näheren Untersuchung auf etwaige didaktische Absichten zugeführt wird, lässt sich konsequenterweise keine klare Empfehlung für eine bestimmte ideologische Ausrichtung feststellen.

Auch wenn in *The Factory Lad* oder *The Middleman* eine sozialkritische Botschaft vorzufinden ist, bedeutet dies noch nicht, dass das Publikum tatsächlich zum Umdenken oder zu Reformaktionen bewegt werden soll oder sogar wird. Es bleibt wohl eher bei einem Versuch der Bewusstseins-schaffung.

Abgesehen von seiner Funktion als Träger von Sozialkritik erweist sich das Melodrama als eines der bedeutsamsten Unterhaltungsmedien des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Mit übertriebener Emotionalität, viel Pathos, Spektakel und Spannung reißen die meisten der für diese Diplomarbeit ausgewählten Beispieltex-te das Publikum in seinen Bann. Lediglich *Strife* kommt mit weniger übersteigerter Theatralisierung aus. Schließlich stellt auch das Konzept der ausgleichenden Gerechtigkeit einen wichtigen Teil des melodramatischen Unterhaltungspotentials dar: Insbesondere dem Publikum von *Luke The Labourer*, *The Rent-Day* und *The Middleman* ermöglicht das beruhigende Wissen um ein unumstößlich glückliches Ende ein Gefühl der Sicherheit und Entspannung.

# Curriculum Vitae

## PERSÖNLICHE DATEN

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Geburtsdatum: 26.01.1989

Geburtsort: Melk

Staatsangehörigkeit: Österreich

## AUSBILDUNG

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SS 2008 - SS 2011	Bachelorstudium Wirtschaftsrecht (LL.B.), Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien
seit WS 2011	Masterstudium Wirtschaftsrecht, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien
seit WS 2007	Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Wien
1999 - 2007	Öffentliches Stiftsgymnasium der Benediktiner zu Melk, Neusprachlicher Zweig (AHS)
1995 - 1999	Volksschule Ruprechtshofen

## SPRACHEN

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Deutsch	Muttersprache
Englisch	Fließend
Französisch	Grundkenntnisse
Latein	