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Ironic Translation in *Fifine at the Fair*

Dorothy Mermin

EARLY AND LATE, Browning distrusted words, "the vehicle/ Never sufficient"¹ to carry profound or subtle meaning. He never doubted, though, that poetry should be a "vehicle" for Truth: the elaborate and strange forms of his later poems, as well as their frequently inordinate length, are part of the means by which he tried to demonstrate that truth, though difficult to apprehend and express, is itself simple. Frequently in Browning's poems truth is said to be manifested in a single unrepeatable word or vision or image that the poet tries to approximate in many ways with many words. In *Fifine at the Fair* this process appears metaphorically as translation from one art or language to another. The highest vision of truth that Don Juan attains comes in the form of a line from Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*; the sudden collapse of the vision occurs as a cynical misreading of the same Aeschylean passage.

Don Juan is walking and talking with his wife, engaged for more than half the poem in energetically trying to justify his restless inconstancy that is currently being stimulated by the seductions of the gipsy Fifine. His defense is that the world seems "All false, all fleeting" (lxxxiv) and that he is impelled by the fear that his own self is "as false as what surrounds" (lxxxv) into experiences that might prove to him at least his own reality—that he himself is "true" (lxxxv). He is drawn to Fifine's shameless self-display, he says, because she does not pretend to show the truth about herself and therefore cannot be found false: "To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud / 'Know all of me outside, the rest be emptiness / For such as you!'" (xxxii). He concludes the first part of the poem with praise of actors, "the honest cheating" (lxxxvii) that flaunts its falsehood and affirms the existence of truth by pointing to its absence. For his direct verbal argument ends in empty, half-cynical paradoxes: silence speaks, lies tell the truth, and the worst art like the worst woman is the best.

Then he tries to circumvent words by describing an experience that took place without them. He tells Elvire how he had been beset that morning by strong feelings and had played Schumann's music to express them. Thus he had captured "truth that escapes prose,—nay, puts poetry to shame" (xc). The music in turn produced a dream of the Venice carnival and a great crowd of people whom he understood by sight alone, without words. Finally, he says, the diverse images of his dream resolved into the Druid monument that

they have just come to as they walked. The dream image is now present and actual, visible to speaker and auditor alike, a dark text that resists interpretation, baffles commentary, and yet cannot be misunderstood. At the heart of the main stone structure is an image that means death:

a cold dread shape,—shape whereon Learning spends
Labour, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss,
While Ignorance reads right—recoiling from that Cross! (cxxii)

There is also a "huge stone pillar," fallen and "half-lost" in vegetation; the Curé earnestly tries to impose an edifying interpretation on its traditional phallic significance, but the people obstinately go on believing

that, what once a thing
Meant and had right to mean, it still must mean. So cling
Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,
Through rude character, than all the grace it lends,
That lettering of your scribes! who flourish pen apace
And ornament the text, they say—we say, efface. (cxxiii)

Indeed, as all the images of his dream fell into this primaeval monument Don Juan did hear one single "arch-word" that both included and transcended the message of the stones. It whispered of permanence in change, of truth the soul finds when it reaches up and finds "an outer Soul" beyond the senses, and finally of a new, true language that "leaves, in the singer's stead, / The indubitable song," and sets forth instead of "speech, act, time, place" the naked "principle of things" (cxxiv).

Such a word cannot be spoken, only imagined or heard by the inner ear. A poem can be at best an approximation, or translation, of it. And the function of art as Don Juan sets it forth is to provoke the audience to recreate the work of art—to merge his own approximation of the original unspoken word with the artist's. Don Juan prizes, even more than his painting by Raphael, a block of stone that Michelangelo (he thinks) began to carve, for he can imaginatively complete the statue himself. When he wanted to express his feeling, he played Schumann's music. Such cooperative expression by its very nature asserts both the reality and the central unity of the experience, moving toward the reconciliation of partial

1. *Sordello* V, 653-654. Quotations from Browning's poetry are from *The Works of Robert Browning*, ed. F. C. Kenyon (London: Smith Elder, 1912), 10 vols. (Centenary Edition).

points of view in a shared impersonal vision, and thus towards transcending irony.

The verbal equivalent of this recreative process is translation. The poem itself is in a sense an ironic translation of a traditional story. Unlike Browning's usual monologists—imaginary people, obscure foreigners, puzzling and controversial public figures—Don Juan's character and story are known and familiar, brilliantly defined in legend and in art. The epigraph is from Moliere, but for Browning, who was passionately fond of music, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* would have been the more significant, as it would probably have been the more intimately familiar, of the two. Browning's version is a diminution of the earlier ones and his characters are smaller versions of their predecessors. His anxiety-ridden intellectual hero is neither an insouciant sceptic nor even a seducer; Fifine and her pimp-husband are not pretty peasants or robust comic rustics; Elvire has neither grandeur nor passion. The strange title seems to have been chosen as a sort of comic rhyme to Moliere's sub-title as an Englishman might pronounce it: "*Le Festin de Pierre*." The statue of the murdered commendatore that comes to dinner in the climactic episode (to which Moliere's sub-title refers) of the traditional story becomes the shapeless stones of the Druid monument. The monument, like the statue, images forth the connection between sex and violence and death, but whereas the statue speaks and acts with spectacular if comic grandeur, asserting and executing the decree of divine justice, the monument is grimly silent and Don Juan is its interpreter, not its victim.

His interpretation ends by focussing precisely and emphatically on the act of verbal translation. The highest point that Don Juan's imagination reaches, the "outer soul" that produces "the indubitable song," he describes in a phrase from *Prometheus Bound*: "God, man, or both together mixed" (cxxiv). The phrase hints at the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, suggesting that the immortality of love and the soul is the true meaning of the "arch-word" of the Druid monument to the permanence of sexuality and death.² The phrase first turns up in the poem much earlier, in Greek, when Don Juan in a passage of violently mixed allusions and tonal contrasts defined "love's law" as a sort of heavenly hide-and-seek with a giantess:

each soul lives, longs and works
For itself, by itself,—because a lodestar lurks,
An other than itself,—in whatso'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich
May grasp the Gulliver: or it, or he, or she—

Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene,—
(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it
fixed!

So soft it says,—"God, man, or both together mixed"! (lix)

Here it arrives in joking translingual rhyme to relieve the sudden grotesque horror of a heaven that has turned without warning into a Brobdingnag peopled by beings of enormous size and indeterminate gender. The English phrase evokes the Greek, which by the time it has been translated into English has effectively purged the image of both joking and horror. When it reappears it is part of a similar revision of the Druid stones, this time straightforward and serious. Don Juan repeats the phrase in English (cxxiv) and then in Greek (cxxv), as the closest he can come to the arch-word of truth itself.

But then he questions the accuracy of his translation, asking himself whether he is using the words to express what Aeschylus intended:

As I mean, did he mean,
The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear
A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and drear
Brought comfort to the Titan? (cxxv)

And right here, directly in answer to this question, Don Juan's tone suddenly and decisively changes. He remembers Fifine, of whom we have heard nothing for a very long time, and as he does so the vision he had just attained disappears for good. The change occurs as a deliberate misreading of the next lines of *Prometheus Bound*. The "god, man, or mixture" that Prometheus heard coming to bring comfort was a chorus of sea-nymphs; Don Juan translates their words when they arrive, with an interpolated commentary in tones of sneering irony that apply them to his encounter with Fifine.

"God, man, or mixture" proved only to be a nymph:
"From whom the clink on clink of metal" (money, judged
Abundant in my purse) "struck" (bumped at, till it budged)
"The modesty. . ." (cxxv)

He goes on like that through the rest of the speech from Aeschylus, annihilating distinctions of value by aggressive verbal play, levelling what had seemed tender and sublime to the clever and nasty.

As in many of Browning's earlier poems, the speaker's self-conscious mastery of language is the mark of his self-estrangement. "As I mean, did he mean . . .?" The vicious-

2. Its central importance in the poem is suggested by the fact that it is quoted twice at the end of the most important study of Browning's later poetry to sum up his highest belief. See Clyde de L. Ryals,

Browning's Later Poetry 1871-1889 (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1975), pp. 244, 247.

ness of his parody is directed against himself: his scorn is not for Aeschylus' lofty music, but for his own inability to repeat it except to debase it, to "mean" something less by it, to mistranslate it. When Balaustion in her innocence tells the story of Euripides' *Alcestis*, she translates the staged play into a narrative faithfully, she thinks, yet she raises it to a higher spiritual plane: her simplicity makes something greater than the text, whereas Don Juan with his sophisticated intelligence makes something less. Balaustion thinks that, on the whole, Euripides is speaking through her (*Balaustion's Adventure*, l. 343); Don Juan is not so innocent as to imagine that such a thing is possible. And as soon as he asks himself whether his meaning is the same as Aeschylus's, he is bound to become aware of a difference. For a moment he seemed to himself to have shared the wider, higher vision of the Greek poet, but when he recognizes—as he has to—the separateness of his own point of view, the illusion of unitary truth gives way to the conscious duplicity of his irony.

Behind Don Juan's failure of vision and will there seems to lie something of Browning's own self-reproach both as a lover and as a poet who was often (as in "One Word More") uneasy about writing just dramatic monologues, ironic refractions of the pure white light into representations of highly particularized points of view. And since his wife, too, had urged him to drop his masks and express his own vision of truth, so ironic and brutally sexual a poem could itself be seen as a kind of infidelity to her memory.³ *Fifine at the Fair* is a disturbing and rather disagreeable poem: its energy and inventiveness seem constantly to turn against themselves, and there is an excessiveness in the speaker's contempt for himself and others and in the poet's implied contempt for him that neither the ideas he articulates nor the dramatic situation seem fully to account for. The poem appears to reflect Browning's furious bitterness and remorse after he had proposed marriage to Lady Ashburton and been rejected, as well as the state of mind that must have led to that ill-conceived proposal in the first place.⁴ It is sometimes even said that Elvire stands for Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but it seems nearly inconceivable that Browning would represent his wife as the sullen, conventional, and passive object of his own contemptuous bullying. What the poem does reflect is her absence: life without love, the choice between the prison of Elvire's respectability and the anti-social, impersonal lewdness of *Fifine*.⁵

But the fact that the turning-point of the poem comes as a question of translating *Prometheus Bound* is the single most significant allusion to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She had actually published two translations of that play, one in 1833 and another in 1850. When Browning met her in 1845 she was working on the second version; in some of her earliest letters she consulted him on the interpretation of particular passages, and their later letters contain several references to other Aeschylean projects that she had in mind.⁶ In *Fifine*, Browning does not use her renditions of the crucial phrase ("god or man, or half divine / Being" in 1833, "a God, or a mortal, or nature between" in 1850)⁷ or of the chorus Don Juan cynically misinterprets. Part of the point would be the difference in their translations. He had reason, furthermore, to associate that chorus in particular with his wife, for whom it seems to have had some special significance. She drew attention to it in 1833 with a rather pointless note, wondering whether the nymphs were "shoonless" for sorrow or haste and concluding that "it may be more poetical" to think it was both. And then in one of her early letters to Browning she applied the lines to herself.

Yet when you tell me that I ought to know some things, tho' untold, you are wrong, & speak what is impossible. My imagination sits by the roadside . . . like the startled sea nymph in Aeschylus, but never dares to put one unsandalled foot, unbidden, on a certain tract of ground—never takes a step there unled!⁸

She is telling Browning that she will not anticipate his wooing, even in imagination; if he wants to be understood, he must speak out plainly. The behavior of the seductress *Fifine* is precisely the opposite, in Browning's version of the same line: "Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels," slipshod rather than "shoonless" or unsandalled, drawn by the sound of money to seek her prey.

Fifine is the only nymph who comes to Don Juan: at the end of the poem he leaves Elvire on the very doorstep and goes after her. But outside the closed circle of restlessness and fragmentation that the poem describes there is the frame, comprised of the Prologue and the Epilogue, in which Browning speaks in what sounds very much like his own voice and imagines a solution to the problem that Don Juan

3. For her exhortations, see e.g. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1845-1846*, ed. Elvan Kintner (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press for Harvard U., 1969), II, 731-732.

4. William O. Raymond uses the Lady Ashburton episode as a key to the poem in "Browning's Dark Mood: A Study of *Fifine at the Fair*," in *The Infinite Moment . . .*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 115-128.

5. As Philip Drew says, the poem "poses the crucial question 'What sort of terminus is possible to a man who does not find in love an abiding power?'" *The Poetry of Browning* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 307.

Barbara Melchiori sees Elizabeth occasionally behind Elvire, but only when Don Juan seems to be thinking of her as dead; *Browning's Poetry of Reticence* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), pp. 184-186.

6. For their recurring discussions of Aeschylus see in particular *Letters*, ed. Kintner, I, 30ff.

7. *Prometheus Bound . . . and Miscellaneous Poems* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1833), p. 8; *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Cambridge Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), line 130.

8. *Letters . . .*, ed. Kintner, I, 303.

in the poem never solves.⁹ The speaker of the prologue, "Amphibian," cheerfully wonders how the dead woman whom he loved would look, from her inaccessible superiority, on his earthly weakness. In the Epilogue, "The Householder," he has found out. He was tired, angry, and alone—and suddenly she came.

just a knock, call, cry
Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we!—
'What, and is it really you again?' quoth I:
'I again, what else did you expect?' quoth She.

The energies that are thwarted and deflected in the poem itself find relief and release here. Instead of monologue, there is dialogue—and in every stanza the wife gets the last word. Her voice strikes an entirely new note, too: tart, terse, and loving. The speaker's voice is filled with a responsively happy, reckless energy of immense relief. They end the poem together by dismissing the problem of language. They collaborate in composing an announcement of his death: they do it as fast as they can, using the tritest, most comical country-churchyard formulas—words carved by simple folk on tombstones, a more cheerful counterpart to the stones of the Druid monument—which will serve as well as anything.

The Heroine of *Middlemarch*

Gordon S. Haight

IF WE DEFINE "heroine" as "the principal female figure" in a novel, Dorothea Brooke seems to qualify as "the heroine of *Middlemarch*." She is so described in all the standard reference works today and has held the title from the beginning. Henry James, reviewing the book in 1873, regretted that she was forced to share the story with Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth. "Dorothea was altogether too superb a heroine to be wasted; yet she plays a narrower part than the imagination of the reader demands." James longed to rewrite the novel to center on Lydgate and Dorothea, who "suggest a wealth of dramatic possibility between them."¹ One wonders whether by subsidizing Lydgate's scientific

"What i' the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try!
Affliction sore long time he bore, or, what is it to be?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end!" quoth I:
"I end with—Love is all and Death is nought!" quoth
She.

The final words are splendidly sweeping, light-hearted, and absolute: what would be a grandiose and empty conclusion if Don Juan managed to reach and utter it becomes inoffensive and even persuasive by its air of casual exuberance. Nor does the speaker represent himself as saying the words, but only as hearing and reporting them. Without love, the Epilogue seems to be saying, no words will find truth—the speaker had been alternately "tongue-tied" and "blaspheming" just the minute before; with love, any old words (the older, the better) will do. But such an affirmation, pleasing though it may be to the sentimental reader, turns its back on more than Don Juan's endlessly proliferating arguments, speculations, and images. It is like the arch-word that Don Juan heard in his dream but could only try to describe, not repeat; it turns away from readers and from poetry, into privacy and silence.

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research Dorothea might have eliminated from his character those weaknesses that George Eliot took such care to endow him with. Though marriage with Lydgate may not have been beyond Dorothea's scope, it would have been a gross violation of George Eliot's fidelity to social history, ignoring the wide chasm which at that time divided the landed gentry from country surgeons. In 1830, "in the houses of great people, they were, if it was necessary to offer a meal, entertained in the steward's or housekeeper's room."² Dorothea's marriage to Lydgate would have caused a real scandal in *Middlemarch*.

If we enlarge the definition to include intelligence, cour-

9. There is an extreme diversity of critical opinion about the identity of the speaker in the Prologue and Epilogue. Some think he's Browning, some think he's Don Juan, some avoid the question. The authoritative new biography of Browning calls the two characters in the Epilogue "Robert" and "Elizabeth"; William Irvine and Park Honan, *The Book, the Ring, and the Poet* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), pp. 464-466. Roma A. King finds the Epilogue "either unrelated or tangentially related" to the poem as a whole; *The Focusing Artifice* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio U. Press, 1968), p. 187. Clyde de L. Ryals argues that the speaker

is Don Juan throughout, pp. 80-82. But Don Juan and the speaker in the Epilogue have nothing in common except that they inhabit the same poem, use some generally similar imagery, and are married men. And one is a weary and contemptuous husband, the other a widower filled with love, admiration, and regret.

1. Henry James, Jr., "George Eliot's *Middlemarch*," *Galaxy*, 15 (March 1873), 425.
2. G. M. Young, *Early Victorian England*, 2 vols., (London: Oxford U. Press, 1934), I, 96.

age, and self-sacrifice, we can make a good case for the quiet steadfast Mary Garth as the true heroine. In the manuscript of the original Middlemarch story, begun in 1869, almost a year before it was combined with the short story called "Miss Brooke," the Garth family appear under the name of Dove. No one seems to have discussed George Eliot's reason for abandoning the earlier name. Since Noah the connotations of *dove* have related to peace and deliverance. The dove is a gentle, harmless bird, noted for its graceful form and affection for its mate. The latter trait suits Caleb Garth well; his quiet pursuit of the right, his kindness to every one who needs help, and his loving concern for his family suggest that George Eliot may have chosen the name with Caleb chiefly in mind. As the picture of his family rounded out, the name of Garth may have seemed more suitable. *Garth*, signifying a garden, a yard, an enclosed place, comprises many ideas connected with Caleb's trade as a builder and manager of estates. It was also a happy name for his daughter Mary, whose life is centered so closely in the well-knit family group.

Mary is first mentioned in Chapter 11 at the Vincy breakfast table. Though Rosamond has refused her uncle Peter Featherstone's invitation to live with him at Stone Court, she is jealous of the opportunity that Mary's presence there gives her to see Mr. Lydgate, the new doctor, who is treating their uncle. She extracts from her brother Fred a promise to take her with him when he calls at Stone Court the next day. There Mary is found administering cough syrup to old Featherstone, who has been agitated by the unwelcome visit of his sister Mrs. Waule. Wanting to talk to Fred alone, he sends Mary and Rosamond out of the room.

Every reader is familiar with George Eliot's method of defining characters by contrast. In *Adam Bede* Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrel are brought to life by parallel scenes like those in "The Two Bed-chambers" (Ch. 15). In *The Mill on the Floss* little Maggie Tulliver with her dark complexion and unruly black hair, made jealous by Tom's attention to their pretty blond cousin Lucy, pushes her into the mud, an impulsive childish action foreshadowing the conflict years later when Maggie drifts down the river with Lucy's all-but-fiancé Stephen Guest. We cannot help feeling surprised that the awkward ugly duckling we knew so well in little Maggie should have grown into the tall, dark-eyed nymph of the last two books, "broad-chested" in the "mould of young womanhood," with arms that recall the Parthenon marbles, a fine throat, lips full and red, brown cheeks firm and rounded under her "coronet" of jet black hair. This miraculous transformation, accomplished offstage, accounts for some dissatisfaction with the latter part of the novel.

It seems far more likely that Maggie would have grown up looking like Mary Garth, who had also been "a little hoyden" in childhood (Ch. 23). Most people in Middlemarch agreed that Mary was "plain"—a "brown patch," she called

herself (40). Standing at the mirror in Stone Court beside that slim blond beauty Rosamond, Mary made the strongest contrast:

she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low. . . . Advancing womanhood had tempered her plainness, which was of a good human sort, such as the mothers of our race have very commonly worn in all latitudes under a more or less becoming headgear. Rembrandt would have painted her with pleasure, and would have made her broad features look out of the canvas with intelligent honesty. (12).

George Eliot never blurs the lines of this initial portrait. Late in the novel at the New Year's Day party, to which Fred Vincy has insisted that his mother invite Mary with the Farebrothers, the same unflattering details occur: "Mrs. Vincy, in her fullest matronly bloom, looked at Mary's little figure, rough wavy hair, and visage quite without lilies and roses, and wondered; trying unsuccessfully to fancy herself caring about Mary's appearance in wedding clothes, or feeling complacency in grandchildren who would 'feature' the Garths" (63). All the while, across the room sat Rosamond, perfectly graceful and still, never looking at Lydgate "any more than if she had been a sculptured Psyche modelled to look another way."

A less obvious contrast between Mary and Rosamond is found in their minds. They had both attended Mrs. Lemon's, the best school for girls in the county. Rosamond was beyond doubt the favorite pupil. She quickly mastered all the finicking refinements that passed for elegance in the provinces, excelling even in "extras such as getting in and out of a carriage. Mrs. Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an example; no pupil, she said, exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional" (11). This "flower" of Mrs. Lemon's School provides one of George Eliot's harshest strictures on the modes of education in the Nineteenth Century which "make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance" (Finale). "Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date" (27). At Mrs. Lemon's Mary Garth had been only an articulated pupil, an apprentice, preparing (like her mother before her) to earn her living as a teacher. With Mrs. Lemon's blessing she might look forward to a life of drudgery at £35 a year, eked out with "extra pay for teaching the smallest strummers at the piano" (40). But the solid core of Mary's education had been acquired at home. Mrs. Garth's grammar and accent, which were above the town standard (24), were doubtless transmitted to her children more effectually than that parroted "propriety of speech" with which Rosamond strove to supplant her mother's hearty, vulgar idiom. Despite their "liv-

ing in such a small way," for which Mrs. Vincy, an inn-keeper's daughter, always pitied them, the Garths lived in a genuinely intellectual atmosphere. While Mrs. Garth cooked the family dinner, her children followed her about the kitchen, book or slate in hand. Thus she instilled in them the fact that one "might possess 'education' and other good things ending in 'tion' and worthy to be pronounced emphatically, without being a useless doll" (24). On one such occasion little Ben and his sister Letty vie with each other in retelling the story of Cincinnatus; on another we see the whole family gathered in the orchard under the great apple tree while Jim reads aloud from *Ivanhoe*, by "that beloved writer who has made a chief part in the happiness of many young lives" (57). Scott was the most popular novelist in 1830, and *Waverley*, *The Pirate*, and *Anne of Geierstein* also figure in *Middlemarch*. But Mary's conversation reveals an easy acquaintance with many other authors which she would not have got at Mrs. Lemon's.³

Another great contrast with Rosamond is found in Mary Garth's lively sense of humor. Her brothers and sisters missed her while she was away and wished that she would come home "to play at forfeits and make fun" (24). A glint of playfulness sparkles through even her most disheartened moments. When the family's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, she received the offer of a post as governess in a school at York. Mary hated both teaching and the prospect of separation from her family it would entail. Having read the letter, she passed it without comment to her mother and picked up her sewing again.

"Oh, don't sew, Mary!" said Ben, pulling her arm down. "Make me a peacock with this bread-crumbs." He had been kneading a small mass for the purpose.

"No, no, Mischief!" said Mary good-humouredly, while she pricked his hand lightly with her needle. "Try and mould it yourself: you have seen me do it often enough. I must get this sewing done. It is for Rosamond Vincy: she is to be married next week, and she can't be married without this handkerchief." Mary ended merrily, amused with the last notion.

"Why can't she, Mary?" said Letty, seriously interested in this mystery, and pushing her head so close to her sister that Mary now turned the threatening needle towards Letty's nose.

"Because this is one of a dozen, and without it there would be only eleven," said Mary with a grave air of explanation so that Letty sank back with a sense of knowledge. (40).

One day when Fred called at Stone Court and found her laughing over Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, she looked up "with the fun still in her face" (25).

Rosamond's lovely face never reflected any fun. She was

clever, George Eliot tells us, "with that sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous. Happily she never attempted to joke, and this perhaps was the most decisive mark of her cleverness" (16). She was a perfect illustration of the principle George Meredith was to expound a few years later: that egoism is incompatible with humor. But in Mary Garth the Comic Spirit is dominant. Besides Mrs. Cadwallader, whose mordantly witty epithets like "our Lowick Cicero" impale and fix their victims, no character in *Middlemarch* has a keener sense of humor than Mary Garth. More than once George Eliot describes her remarks as made "laughingly" (14, 52). When she teased Fred about the lack of common sense in young men who have been to college, "she spoke with a suppressed rippling undercurrent of laughter pleasant to hear" (14), and when she projected his future as a bachelor of forty, "fat and shabby, hoping somebody will invite you to dinner—spending your morning in learning a comic song—oh no! learning a tune on the flute," her lips began to curl with a smile and "her face had its full illumination of fun" (25). Mrs. Garth, observing that Mary always laughed at Fred, was misled to believe it meant that she was not fond of him. As Meredith wrote: "You may estimate your capacity for Comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less: and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes."⁴

Mary Garth has this faculty of seeing her own absurdities as well as those of others. "For honesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue: she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when she was in a good mood she had humour enough in her to laugh at herself" (12). She readily accepted the fact that she was not good looking because, she said, it relieved her of "the nonsensical vanity of fancying everybody who comes near me is in love with me" (14). The most extended analysis of her mind is found at the opening of Chapter 33, where in the small hours of the night she was on duty in the moribund Mr. Featherstone's bedchamber. "Having early had strong reason to believe that things were not likely to be arranged for her peculiar satisfaction, she wasted no time in astonishment and annoyance at that fact." George Eliot concludes that "a vigorous young mind not overbalanced by passion, finds a good in making acquaintance with life, and watches its own powers with interest. Mary had plenty of merriment within" (33).

Truth-telling fairness supplies another contrast between Garths and Vincys in their attitude towards social distinctions. Rosamond lived in a romantic fantasy that Lydgate,

3. Her allusion to George Borrow's reading the New Testament to the gypsies (32) is one of George Eliot's few anachronisms.

4. *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, London, 1877, p. 61.

being "the nephew of a baronet," could secure her admission to that middle-class heaven, "rank." Lydgate himself was not entirely free from such snobbery. One of what George Eliot calls his "spots of commonness" was his feeling "the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons" (15). In marrying Rosamond he "had to confess to himself that he was descending a little in relation to her family" (36). As a leading ribbon manufacturer Mr. Vincy was thought by Middlemarch to have come down a bit in marrying an inn-keeper's daughter. His late brother had been a clergyman and had got preferment—might have been a dean by this time if the stomach fever had not taken him off. So Mr. Vincy was determined to get Fred into the Church, for, he said, " 'It's a good British feeling to try and raise your family a little' . . ." (13). Mrs. Vincy was certain that her handsome young man was "far beyond other people's sons: you may hear it in his speech that he has kept college company" (36), and she thought it would be a pity for him to go down a step in life by marrying that Garth girl, who, besides being so very plain, had "worked for her bread" (40).

With such social snobbery as this Mary Garth would have nothing to do. She knew that if Fred became a clergyman it would be "only for gentility's sake. I think," she said, "there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility" (52). This was an opinion she found difficult to justify to old Mrs. Farebrother, who was both the daughter and mother of clergymen. But married to Mr. Farebrother, as she might easily have been, Mary would have been accepted as an admirable rector's wife and held the respect of every one at Lowick. In St. Botolph's parish he had "used to the full the clergyman's privilege of disregarding the Middlemarch discrimination of ranks, and always told his mother that Mrs. Garth was more of a lady than any matron in the town" (40). But Mary was not tempted by rank; she did not marry Farebrother. She had loved Fred since they were children together and would marry no one else. Her integrity was more seriously tested by the inclination to accept him with all his weaknesses than by a chance to benefit him by letting Featherstone burn the will, which would not in any case have reinstated the earlier one.

The contrasts between Mary and Dorothea must be implied, for as far as we know they never met; if they looked at each other across the aisle of Lowick Church during Mary's long visits to the Farebrothers, we are not told. The physical contrast with Dorothea's tall calm beauty, though radically different from that with Rosamond, is just as extreme. But the greatest contrast lies in the degree of their maturity. For a girl of eighteen Dorothea, in her eagerness to marry the repulsive Casaubon, exhibits a grave deficiency of

natural sexual instinct which the "sweet dignity of her noble unsuspecting inexperience" (22) hardly extenuates. Her tragic self-delusion would set her up as a legitimate target for the Comic Spirit's volley of silvery laughter were it not muted by George Eliot's profound pity. Granting the pathetic earnestness of her zeal to share in the sterile pedantry of the Key to All Mythologies, it is very different from the intelligent honesty that guides Mary Garth's conduct at every step.

On the intellectual side there is an even more significant contrast. Dorothea's Swiss education, for all its exposure to Pascal and Bossuet, to Monsieur Liret's lectures on the Waldenses, to Jeremy Taylor and St. Augustine, proves even less adequate as a preparation for life than the smatterings of elegance that Rosamond gleaned at Mrs. Lemon's. Dorothea has not yet learned to see things as they are. "I am rather short-sighted," she tells Sir James. And if she is liable to step on small dogs, she is equally blind to towering facts. Nor is she ever aware of her own absurdity. Apart from a faint sarcasm stirred by Celia's interest in her mother's jewels Dorothea never betrays a trace of humor. Mary Garth's practical, realistic stoicism is diametrically opposed to Dorothea's childish "soul-hunger," her cloudy yearning for some vague, illimitable good. Caleb Garth's daughter would not have gone from the Midlands to Yorkshire looking for land on which to establish a model village till every farmhouse at Tipton had been properly restored. Yet she would have sympathized with Dorothea's defiance of the family's objections to her marrying Ladislav in spite of the hateful codicil to Casaubon's will. In her own life Mary had faced a similar problem. With George Eliot such parallels are never accidental.

Feminists of the 1870s who hoped that the "divine Dorothea" would turn out to be a champion of woman's rights were disappointed to find her left at the end with only the old-fashioned function of providing an heir for the Tipton estates. According to Sir Leslie Stephen she had to be "content with giving Ladislav 'wifely help'; asking his friends to dinner, one supposes, and copying his ill-written manuscripts." The melancholy truth seemed to be that "a Theresa of our days has to be content with suckling fools and chronicling small beer."⁵ Such melancholy readings of *Middlemarch* spring from concentrating too intensely on Dorothea. Henry James was one of the first to make this mistake. For him even the Lydgate story seemed an unfortunate diversion from the story of Dorothea, which is "not distinctly enough, in fact, the central one," and "the 'love problem' as the author calls it, of Mary Garth, is placed on a rather higher level than the reader willingly grants it."⁶

A self-appointed correspondent of mine, introducing her-

5. *George Eliot*, London: MacMillan, 1902, pp. 179-80.

6. *Galaxy*, 15 (March 1873), 425.

self as a member of the National Organization of Women, took me to task for not seeing that *Middlemarch* "begins and ends with Dorothea and her longings to be different from those around her, that is, specifically, from those women like her sister Celia and Rosamond, who typify women forced into a pattern by a male-dominated society." I should be hard-pressed to cite anything that a male-dominated society had "forced" on the complacent Celia; and even by readers of her own sex Rosamond is usually blamed (not altogether justly) for having destroyed her husband's career and brought him to an early grave. Indeed, T. S. Eliot declared that she frightened him "far more than Goneril or Regan,"⁷ those notorious archetypes of female domination. Like Henry James the modern feminist ignores Mary Garth, the only wife among the "Three Love Problems" with a successful solution.

Mary Garth serves as a control, a standard of life, against which Dorothea and Rosamond must be measured. In the Finale she is the first of the three whose subsequent careers are projected.

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning. . . . It is still the beginning of the home epic—the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common.

Some set out, like Crusaders of old, with a glorious equipment of hope and enthusiasm, and get broken by the way, wanting patience with each other and the world.

All who have cared for Fred Vincy and Mary Garth will like to know that these two made no such failure, but achieved a solid mutual happiness.

In the imperfect society of the Nineteenth Century, "A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial:

the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone." But George Eliot reminds us that Mary and Fred, the new Crusaders, adjusting their aspirations to the inalterable, "made no such failure." Who can say that Dorothea's model village in Yorkshire would have been a greater achievement than Fred's contribution to theoretic and practical farming in the Midlands? His books on green crops and cattle feeding, like Ladislaw's career in Parliament, we must take on faith. Most persons in *Middlemarch* were inclined to believe that they had been written by his wife. But when she "wrote a little book for her boys, called *Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch*, and had it printed and published by Gripp & Co., *Middlemarch*, every one in the town was willing to give the credit of this work to Fred, observing that he had been to the University, 'where the ancients were studied,' and might have been a clergyman if he had chosen."

In putting this last stroke to the finely drawn portrait of Mary Garth, George Eliot could hardly have forgotten the incredulity of her oldest Coventry friends when Marian Evans, the plain looking country girl they had fostered, was revealed as the author of *Adam Bede*. Lydgate, when Mr. Farebrother first spoke to him about Mary Garth, said:

"She is very quiet—I have hardly noticed her."

"She has taken notice of you, though, depend upon it."

"I don't understand," said Lydgate; he could hardly say "Of course."

"Oh, she gauges everybody" [Farebrother replied] (17).

Critics who like to read in Dorothea "an unqualified self-identification" with her author would do well to look more closely at plain, honest Mary Garth, sitting a little apart and observing with amusement the droll pretensions of her neighbors. For like Mary Garth, George Eliot "gauges everybody."

Yale University

How Many Children Had Barry Lyndon?

Winslow Rogers

THACKERAY REMAINS ONE of the most perplexing of Victorian novelists; in particular, we have trouble knowing how to deal with the chaotic surface detail of his novels. Is there imaginative coherence beneath that confusing surface? Is the reader's perplexity that results necessary to Thackeray's pur-

pose, or is it an unfortunate side-effect of his casual writing habits?

The Leavisite answer, that Thackeray's careless craftsmanship vitiates his work, is not much heard today. Readers who feel this way tend not to write articles about Thackeray.

7. *Three Voices of Poetry*, (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1954), p. 18.

It is more common now to find enthusiastic defenses of Thackeray that either ignore the surface discrepancies of the novels, or claim that in the best novels discrepancies are an important part of Thackeray's imaginative purpose.¹ But such extremes may not be helpful in confronting particular Thackerayan perplexities.

Neal B. Houston provides a fascinating example of a confusing discrepancy in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48).² He finds that "if Thackeray has not been mistaken in his chronology," then little Georgy Osborne is not George Osborne's son at all, but the product of an illicit relationship between Amelia, temporarily mad after her husband's death, and Dobbin. The implications of this shocking possibility are even more interesting than the particular reading of the chronology that leads to it. For Houston does not know whether he is being confronted by a simple mistake in chronology, or by an overwhelmingly treacherous puzzle that should alter all our ideas about the novel. Furthermore, there is apparently no way to decide.

Another crux, one that can help us in reconciling surface discontinuity and deeper coherence, occurs in Thackeray's first novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844).³ As with Houston's point about *Vanity Fair*, this is a set of overlooked details that may yield a new and surprising truth, or may mean nothing.

In the last chapter of *Barry Lyndon* a new character is offhandedly referred to in a parenthesis: "Redmond Quin, our cousin, whom I had taken to live with me" (282). This character's name stirs confusing echoes of Barry Lyndon's own original name, Redmond Barry, and that of his rival for the hand of Nora Brady, Captain Quin. In true Thackerayan fashion, an explanation of who this character is is withheld. Meanwhile Barry's son Bryan dies, and Barry needs a new heir if he is not to lose what is left of the Lyndon estate when Lady Lyndon dies. Barry audaciously asks Lady Lyndon to take one of his bastard children as her own. As for the prospective heir, "if I had him near at hand, and of my own blood too, though with the bar sinister, is not here the question" (286). The plan is unsuccessful. In a few pages more Barry doubles back to tell us about

my before-mentioned relative, godson, and secretary, Mr. Redmond Quin, at present the *worthy* agent of the Castle Lyndon property. This was a son of my old flame Nora, whom I had taken from her in a fit of generosity, promising to care for his education at Trinity College, and provide for him through life. (294)

Barry Lyndon withdrew him from Trinity College in a dis-

pute about the bills, and brought him to Castle Lyndon, "where I made him useful to me in a hundred ways," tutoring his son, handling accounts and lawsuits, even playing duets with Lady Lyndon, since he was "an ingenious lad enough (though of a mean, boorish spirit, as became the son of such a father)" (294-95). Eventually Quin betrays Barry and helps Lady Lyndon trick him into his final exposure.

Is it a mere coincidence that the mention of the "heir near at hand, and of my own blood, too" is surrounded by references to Redmond Quin? Or is it possible that Nora Brady was pregnant by Redmond Barry when she married Captain Quin, and that Redmond Quin is Barry's son? Chronological study of the novel doesn't prove or disprove this possibility, given Thackeray's notorious looseness with such details. If Redmond Quin were Barry's child, he would have been born in 1760, would have been in his teens in the later 1770's when Barry adopted him, and in his twenties in the 1780's when he became "the *worthy* agent of the Castle Lyndon property" (294) and eventually turned against Barry. He was at Castle Lyndon early enough to have been young Bryan's tutor, and Bryan was killed about 1783. A somewhat younger Redmond Quin, Captain Quin's own son, would fit these dates equally well, but no better.

Why should we pursue such an unlikely possibility, a mystery buried beneath so many layers of deceptiveness that it may not be worth pulling out? I'm tempted by the juxtaposition of two details: the new character is introduced under the shadow of the effort to legitimize a bastard, and his name is Redmond. When we think back over the circumstances of the marriage of Nora Brady to Captain Quin, and remember that she was an unattractive woman fast becoming a spinster, of an impoverished family, snaring an English captain worth fifteen hundred pounds a year to restore her family fortunes, it seems that the *last* name they would give their son would be that of her upstart cousin. Redmond Barry had been suspiciously close to Nora, had embarrassed and humiliated Captain Quin, and had not yet attained the success that would make such a gesture a natural piece of flattery. If the young Quin boy had borne any other Christian name, we would not have given him another thought. It is audacious but not uncharacteristic for Thackeray to hint that Quin was a big enough fool to allow the child to be named after his wife's recent lover. In naming him as he did, Thackeray either was hinting at something like this, or was careless in choosing a name that could create an easily avoidable distraction.

Making Redmond Quin Barry's own son would be a typic-

1. For a survey of these critical approaches to Thackeray, see my article "Thackeray's Self-Consciousness," in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 149-63.
2. "A Brief Inquiry into the Morality of Amelia in *Vanity Fair*," *Victorian Newsletter*, no. 30 (Fall 1966), 23-24.

3. *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, n.d. [1908]), vol. 6. Subsequent page references will appear in the text. As far as I can determine, differences between the 1844 and the 1856 versions of *Barry Lyndon* are not relevant to my argument.

ally Thackerayan effect. It is characteristic of him to drop a casual hint that forces us—if we are alert enough to catch it—to redefine and reinterpret a whole earlier section of a novel. Often he will tell a story through the eyes of one of the participants, and then, much later, gradually let us glimpse those events as they would have appeared from a different perspective. There is an example of this technique in the story of the Quin marriage we have been discussing. Captain Quin with his fifteen hundred a year seemed at the time a great catch for the Brady family. But when we meet them again (264) the supposed fortune has disappeared, and later Redmond Quin is referred to as “a tailor’s grandson” (295). It may be that the Brady clan was as much deceived as deceiving in marrying Nora to Quin. The new possibility that Nora was pregnant by Redmond Barry brings up the additional suggestion that Captain Quin was tricked into a shotgun wedding.

In the early chapters of *Barry Lyndon* Barry conveys an attitude of amused cynicism toward his boyish self. He enjoys showing what a fool he was about Nora at fifteen, and how innocent about life, though “I had not read my novels and romantic plays for nothing” (40). This attitude is undercut—to say the least—if it turns out that he had not merely feasted on her glances, but had got her pregnant.

There is evidence against Redmond Quin being Barry’s son, though so maddening is Thackeray’s deceptiveness that it is not conclusive. Many of the relevant details could be interpreted as Thackeray’s devices to show Barry covering his tracks. Against the possibility we have Barry’s own clear assertions that Redmond is Quin’s son (though it is tempting to read the phrase about his “mean, boorish spirit” befitting “the son of such a father” [295] as a Freudian slip). Also, Redmond Quin, born in wedlock, would not technically qualify as the heir with the bar sinister (286), and Barry would apparently have had others to choose from. The italicized comment about Redmond as “the *worthy agent*” (294) may be merely by way of contrasting him to an *unworthy agent*, Lord George Poyning, mentioned in the previous paragraph. There seems no clear reason that Barry should be at such pains to disguise his relationship to Red-

mond Quin. The Quin boy might have taken the name Redmond when Barry adopted him. And finally, if the tracks have been so completely covered, there is a presumption against any such meaning having been intended. To pursue the matter further would be to repeat the fallacy L. C. Knights ridiculed in the essay my title echoes.

We are left, then, with an intriguing possibility that cannot finally be proved or disproved. It is not merely a trivial detail, for if true it would radically alter our understanding of the opening chapters. Do we conclude that Thackeray was nodding, repeating a name he had used before without noticing the discrepancy it would introduce? Or is this sort of tantalizing possibility something for which Thackeray is to be treasured, in that by such means he encompasses in his work some of the indeterminacy of life itself?

It is true that we value Thackeray for the insight conveyed by his deviousness, for the way his self-conscious uncertainty sometimes enhances our sense of life. But there is an important distinction to be drawn between the factual indeterminacy of the parentage of Georgy Osborne and Redmond Quin, and the moral indeterminacy of, say, chapter 53 of *Vanity Fair*. The disturbing questions raised in that exposure scene—“What *had* happened? Was she guilty or not?”—go far beyond the factual question of whether Becky Sharp had actually slept with Lord Steyne. Here a factual question has been transformed through Thackeray’s rhetoric into a powerful moral uncertainty that is part of what the novel conveys to us. By contrast, the questions about whether Amelia slept with Dobbin, Nora with Redmond Barry, are novelistic dead ends. Thackeray is not constructing clever puzzles, not sending disguised messages about illicit sexual relationships to us over the heads of his Victorian readers. When his rhetoric transforms factual discrepancies into moral uncertainties, Thackeray’s instincts are subtle and illuminating; but factual discrepancies that he does not deal with explicitly are likely to be accidental and insignificant.

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Martin Chuzzlewit: The Art of the Critical Imagination

David D. Marcus

IN HIS PREFACE to the cheap edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens announced that his intention in writing the book had been “to show how Selfishness propagates itself; and

to what a grim giant it may grow from small beginnings. . . .”¹ The text of the novel echoes that intention by repeatedly proclaiming its concern with the theme of self and selfish-

1. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London, 1850), p. vii.

ness, words that Dickens seems to use interchangeably. That professed concern has engendered an intense critical disagreement that extends far beyond *Chuzzlewit*, a disagreement that typifies a central problem in dealing with all of Dickens's early and middle novels. In the course of this book, selfishness comes to embrace two meanings: the moral problems engendered by selfishness and the experiential problems engendered by self-consciousness. Yet individual critics have focused almost exclusively on one or the other of these meanings.² There is substantial evidence in the text for both views, but the two interpretations imply radically different views of man's relationship to his society. Does man exist in a world that offers him clear moral guidance or in a world lacking such guidance, where he must make his way on the basis of his own fragmentary experience? Thus *Martin Chuzzlewit* recapitulates a contradiction between public and private value systems that characterizes Dickens's novels of this period. *Pickwick* moves from its early sunny episodes to the prison scenes its comic protagonist cannot tolerate; *Oliver Twist* alternates between the benevolent world of Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow and the predatory existence of Fagin and his band; *Nicholas Nickleby* offers not only a providentially resolved melodrama but, in the episodes that take place in the provincial theatre and in Ralph's skeptical commentary, a parody and critique of melodrama and its values; *Barnaby Rudge* splits into two very different novels; and in *Bleak House*, written nearly a decade after *Chuzzlewit*, the double narration displays an irreconcilable opposition between the narrator's moral vision and Esther's.

Such contradictions are not to be explained away, for they allow us access to Dickens's imaginative method. The constant dualism of his technique means that moral codes and ideas about social and individual relationships exist as statements to be accepted not at face value but in terms of their opposites. For example, though Dickens creates Tom Pinch as a paragon of selflessness, in the course of the novel Tom comes to embody both the ethical value of selflessness and all of the experiential limitations that ethic imposes; as a result, Tom is a double-edged character, one who functions as a critique of himself. As a whole, *Martin Chuzzlewit* moves

not toward final statements but toward this form of critical awareness, a recognition of the limitations that any final statement imposes. Neither England nor the United States provides the authorially accepted model of either human personality or the nature of society; they simply explore opposed sides of human experience that must be seen in terms of each other. Of course, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for all its many strengths, is not a wholly successful novel, and it is not my intention to explain away its faults. Rather my point is to refocus attention on the process through which the novel develops questions, and as a corollary of that process, on the need to rethink our conception of Dickens's novels. We must come to see them not as moral tracts, but as problem novels whose critical reconsideration of their own premises marks Dickens as, in John Holloway's term, the "Victorian sage." His "main task is to quicken his reader's perceptiveness" and his true aim is to make his audience aware of the complexity of their own consciousness.³

This complexity of vision is reflected nowhere more clearly than in the character of Tom Pinch, whose selflessness is supposedly exemplary. The narrator's direct comments on Tom ask us to admire him. Claiming that he has no need of money, Tom gives his entire stock to Martin, and the narrator then praises Tom for this generous subterfuge: "There are some falsehoods, Tom, on which men mount, as on bright wings, towards Heaven."⁴ Tom is willing to deny his own needs in the service of others; self-assertion is totally alien to his nature. But if selflessness will ultimately lead Tom "towards Heaven," it impedes his survival on this earth where the action of *Martin Chuzzlewit* takes place. Tom allows himself to be exploited by Pecksniff, by young Martin, and by Tigg Montague, and he is so paralyzed by his sense of obligation to Martin that he refrains from expressing his love for Mary Graham. In Tom, Dickens portrays both the virtue of selflessness and the cost that must be paid for that virtue.

Critics have justifiably objected to Tom because his passivity is so grotesquely out of place in this novel.⁵ Although I would agree with this objection, I would point out that *Martin Chuzzlewit* recognizes—sometimes implicitly, some-

2. The leading advocate of the self-consciousness reading is J. Hillis Miller, who acknowledges only briefly the purely ethical theme of selfishness: "selfishness exists in the novel not only as the ethical bent of the characters, but also as the state of isolation in which they live. The novel is full of people who are wholly enclosed in themselves, wholly secret, wholly intent on reflexive ends which are altogether mysterious to those around them" (*Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958], p. 104). Steven Marcus, *Dickens From Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), takes a similar though happily less schematic approach. See also Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: The View from Todgers's," *Sewanee Review*, LVIII (1950), 419-38. In *The Moral Art of Dickens* (London: Athlone Press, 1970) Barbara Hardy dismisses such criticism as claiming "a depth and coherence of thought and feeling which makes me wonder whether I have read the same book"; she sees Dickens' central concern as "moral causality"

and the major incidents as "caused by selfishness, unselfishness, or by the desire to test, expose and reform selfishness and unselfishness" (pp. 101, 105). H. M. Daleski, *Dickens and the Art of Analogy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 79-82, shares Mrs. Hardy's doubts.

3. *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 10-11.

4. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), XIII, 213.

5. Michael Steig's very useful analysis of Tom's relationship to Pecksniff as a recapitulation of Oedipal conflict is the only extended study to recognize a complex interplay between the two. Steig also touches on the question of Tom's self-knowledge and peculiarity of perception. See "Martin Chuzzlewit: Pinch and Pecksniff," *Studies in the Novel*, I (1969), 181-88. See also A. E. Dyson, *The Inimitable Dickens* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 85-93.

times explicitly—its own dualism, the schism between morality and experience. In the presence of John Westlock and Martin, Tom makes a spirited defense of Pecksniff, and the narrator contrasts the responses of the two listeners:

The old pupil [Westlock] could not do enough to show Tom how cordially he felt towards him, and his friendly regard seemed of a graver and more thoughtful kind than before. The new one [Martin], on the other hand, had no impulse but to laugh at the recollection of Tom's extreme absurdity; and mingled with his amusement there was something slighting and contemptuous, indicative, as it appeared, of his opinion that Mr. Pinch was much too far gone in simplicity to be admitted as the friend, on serious and equal terms, of any rational man (XII, 203-4).

In moral terms, this passage sets up a neat dichotomy between Martin's scorn and John's concerns for Tom. But almost immediately afterwards, John uses a subterfuge to restore the money that Tigg Montague had "borrowed" from Tom, and that action gives a different meaning to the contrast of John's and Martin's attitudes. For however kind John's intentions may be, his behavior very clearly demonstrates that Tom stands in a dependent relationship to him and thus implicitly supports Martin's judgment: Tom's incapacity makes it impossible for him to be even John's friend "on serious and equal terms." Friendship with Tom means compensating for his inability to act on his own behalf. The dichotomy between John's and Martin's responses to Tom now disappears; their two attitudes imply one another in recognizing both Tom's goodness and the cost of that goodness—his incapacity to make a place for himself in the adult world.

Dickens explores the story of Tom's victimization on both the moral and experiential levels, and experience constantly points out the difficulty of thinking about Tom in purely moral terms. That of course does not mean that Pecksniff and Martin are justified in treating Tom as they do; but it does mean that the novel views these relationships between Tom and his oppressors as symbiotic, as expressive of mutual needs. Dickens explicitly points this out in the description of Tom's amiable relationship with young Martin during the Pecksniff family's absence in London: "for so long as the one party found a pleasure in patronising, and the other in being patronised (which was in the very essence of their respective characters), it was of all possible events among the least probable, that the twin demons, Envy and Pride, would ever arise between them" (VII, 100).

Similarly, Dickens presents the mutuality of Tom's relationship to Pecksniff. Obviously, the novel shows us Pecksniff's exploitation of his pupil; more subtly, the novel shows us Tom's extraordinary willingness to be exploited. His selfless devotion places him apart from ordinary human-

ity and leaves him without the ability for self-protection that ordinary men have. Thus when he defends his master to Mary Graham, Tom unwittingly confesses his failure to see in Pecksniff what everyone else with a similar opportunity to observe that good man has seen readily enough: "every pupil we have had in my time has gone away with the same inveterate hatred of him" (XXXI, 491). Miller quite rightly points out that Pecksniff is the Platonic idea of Tom's world, and Tom excludes all that might tarnish that idea.⁶ As young Martin is being expelled from Pecksniff's house, he calls on Tom to look at Pecksniff ludicrously sprawled on the floor: "Still he *was* Pecksniff; it was impossible to deprive him of that unique and paramount appeal to Tom" (XII, 210). When Tom is forced to recognize Pecksniff's hypocrisy, he also recognizes implicitly the element of self-deception that had been the basis of his former loyalty: "It was not that Pecksniff, Tom's Pecksniff, had ceased to exist, but that he never had existed. In his death Tom would have had the comfort of remembering what he used to be, but in this discovery, he had the anguish of recollecting what he never was" (XXXI, 493). The novel makes a very clear distinction between Pecksniff and Tom's Pecksniff.

In the end, Dickens truncates Tom's development by making him first the recipient of old Martin's disguised charity and then a cozy fireside bachelor in his sister's home; but that resolution should not obscure the significant if brief development of his character that takes place during his interlude of freedom in London. His new knowledge about Pecksniff grows into a more generalized awareness of others, and the tendency toward self-deception falls away. He sees the mistreatment of his sister and "began to think, 'there are more Pecksniffs than one, perhaps'" (XXXVI, 570). He is unsettled by his accidental London encounter with Charity and Mercy: "An uneasy thought entered Tom's head; a shadowy misgiving that the altered relations between himself and Pecksniff were somehow to involve an altered knowledge on his part of other people, and were to give him an insight into much of which he had had no previous suspicion" (XXXVII, 581). Tom's emerging skepticism, his "altered knowledge . . . of other people," is all of a piece with his budding sense of self. As he prepares for his journey to London, Tom experiences a feeling of independence that shows a personality far better formed than the selfless vacuum that had automatically allowed Pecksniff and others to take precedence in all things: "He had his moments of depression and anxiety, and they were, with good reason, pretty numerous; but still, it was wonderfully pleasant to reflect that he was his own master, and could plan and scheme for himself" (XXXVI, 557). Now he must question and doubt as a basic requirement of this freedom.

At first glance, the changes that take place in Tom's

6. Miller, p. 138.

character would seem to illustrate what so many critics have pointed out about Dickens at this relatively early stage of his career, that there is a sharp disjunction between his expanding artistic insight and his very constricted moral universe.⁷ But more than this disjunction is occurring in *Martin Chuzzlewit*: the problems of experience are coming into a critical relationship with the explicit code of morality so that, as in the case of Tom, experience serves as a means of reevaluating what are in the beginning of the novel simple and uncritically offered moral values. Thus Tom, who first appears as an exemplar of selflessness, comes increasingly to illustrate the limitations and even the impossibility of that very virtue. For the reader, he becomes the embodiment of a moral debate rather than a moral category.

This critical process takes place on a social as well as an individual level. In the course of the novel, Dickens juxtaposes alternative models of human relationships and personality that taken together contradict one another. We encounter the first of these models at the opening of the novel and through much of the narrative that deals with Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp. In these episodes, *Martin Chuzzlewit* presents a society where accurate moral judgment seems easy, where behavior offers visible evidence about the inner man. Dickens achieves this sense of accessibility by offering observers within the novel whose judgments correspond to the narrator's and reader's. We are made aware that the action is taking place in the context of a watchful community, and the observations of the members of that community are norms of perception that function as reasonably accurate moral guides.

For example, when the narrator brands Pecksniff a hypocrite, he offers that judgment in terms that point out that he does not stand alone in his opinion but is acting as a spokesman for others within the novel: "He was a most exemplary man: fuller of virtuous precept than a copybook. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there: but these were his enemies; the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all" (II, 12-13). From the moment of Pecksniff's introduction, we are aware that he has enemies, that there are those within the novel who see through him, and Dickens uses these unspecified enemies as satiric commentators: "The best of architects and land surveyors kept a horse, in whom the enemies already mentioned more than once in these pages pretended to detect a fanciful resemblance to his master" (V, 63). When Pecksniff declares that his conscience is his bank and that he has invested a trifle in it, his enemies once again appear: "The good man's enemies would have divided upon this question into two parties" (XX, 328).

The action of the novel emphasizes the transparency of Pecksniff's wiles: For if he is trying to deceive others with

his pieties, then it is remarkable how few he actually fools. John Westlock informs young Martin that Pecksniff is "the most consummate scoundrel on the face of the earth" (XII, 200), and as Tom later informs us, John's opinion has been shared by every one of his fellow students and Mark Tapley as well (XXXI, 490-91). Only Mrs. Lupin and, more ambiguously, old Martin seem to accept Pecksniff's moral pretensions at face value. At the Chuzzlewit family conference, Anthony warns Pecksniff, "don't you be a hypocrite" (IV, 58). Even the gullible Jonas, as he plots to swindle his father-in-law by drawing him into the Anglo-Bengalee venture, fully understands the nature of his intended victim: "There's some fun in catching that old hypocrite" (XLI, 638). Mary Graham accuses Pecksniff of hypocrisy to his face (XXX, 483). For any reasonably observant man, to know Pecksniff is to see through him, and indeed, Pecksniff's one apparent success—his seeming domination of old Martin—is at its height coupled with the strong suggestion that old age has dulled his victim's faculties (XLIII, 672).

In such episodes, perception functions normatively; it penetrates the moral facades that characters attempt to present to those around them. Much of the comic complexity of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp arises out of their inability to succeed at any serious wrongdoing in a society that so readily understands their nature; their selfish amoral vitality is enjoyable largely because it affirms the moral strength of their culture. Thus Sairey Gamp informs Pecksniff that she had managed to bear up at the death of her husband; but her neighbors, who form a body of commentators analogous to Pecksniff's enemies, have had the opportunity to see the real meaning of her words: "If certain whispers current in the Kingsgate Street circles had any truth in them, she had indeed borne up surprisingly; and had exerted such uncommon fortitude as to dispose of Mr. Gamp's remains for the benefit of science" (XIX, 313-14). These same neighbors point out the fictional nature of Mrs. Gamp's alter ego, Mrs. Harris (XXV, 404). Her drunkenness, a fault for which old Martin reproves her at the end of the novel, also appears as a quality that others are able to see. She leaves Mr. Mould's house after having some liquid refreshment and is obliged to pause and steady herself: "she walked so unsteadily as to attract the compassionate regards of divers kind-hearted boys, who took the liveliest interest in her disorder; and in their simple language, bade her be of good cheer, for she was 'only a little screwed'" (XXV, 408).

Because vice is so readily apparent to any observant man, it has only very limited possibilities for success. The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company deceives some people, but they are susceptible only when they abandon the skepticism and common sense that would be their natural defense. Dickens's description of the com-

7. Marcus, p. 267.

pany's advertising technique recognizes its appeal to the greedy imprudent side of human nature and yet renders that appeal in terms that convey the totally unreasonable implications of its rhetoric:

David Crimple, Esquire, Secretary and Resident Director fully proves to you that any connexion on your part with that establishment must result in a perpetual Christmas Box and constantly increasing Bonus to yourself, and that nobody can run any risk by the transaction except the office, which, in its great liberality, is pretty sure to lose. And this, David Crimple, Esquire, submits to you (and the odds are heavy you believe him), is the best guarantee that can reasonably be suggested by the Board of Management for its permanence and stability. (XXVII, 432)

Dickens does give the Anglo-Bengalee a satiric dimension whose implications are far more threatening. As Steven Marcus points out, the description of the company's offices parodies "the Victorian faith in the appearance of substantiality."⁸ Moreover, hindsight allows us to view the Anglo-Bengalee as a forerunner of Mr. Merdle's empire whose rise and fall in *Little Dorrit* portray a widespread epidemic of speculation affecting a broad range of characters. But in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the satiric portrait is only briefly developed and quickly dropped. After the company's initial appearance in chapter XXVII, Dickens concentrates on the struggle that takes place among the swindlers as they scheme not against unwary victims but against one another. In the end, the rogues themselves are the victims of the Anglo-Bengalee: Tigg Montague is dead by Jonas' hand, Jonas loses his beloved money and is dead by his own hand, and Pecksniff is ruined. Dickens gives us no innocent victims, no Arthur Clennam, no sense that there are social consequences to such fraud. On the contrary, there are at least two points at which Dickens suggests that the practices of the Anglo-Bengalee are not to be generalized as norms of the insurance business: Jonas initially approaches the company to insure his wife's life without any of the questions that an established company would ask (XXVII, 442-43), and the first clue in Jonas' undoing turns out to have been the suspicion of the insurance company that had issued a policy on Anthony's life (LI, 789).

Martin's journey to America shows us a society with antithetical values. In England, the individual exists within the context of norms that, as James Kincaid points out, allow a "civility founded on restraint."⁹ These norms arise directly from experience, and the presence within so many of the British episodes of numerous observers whose interpretations of experience accord with ours, with one another's, and with

the narrator's, gives such a knowledge the force of moral consensus—a broad agreement on the relatedness of perception and judgment. But in the United States, people simply do not perceive the same connections between the visible and the moral. Mark Tapley makes a comic remark implying some doubts about the integrity of Zephaniah Scadder, agent for the Eden Land Company:

"Feel of my hands, young man," he said.

"What for?" asked Mark, declining.

"Air they dirty, or air they clean, sir?" said Scadder holding them out.

In a physical point of view they were decidedly dirty. But it being obvious that Mr. Scadder offered them for examination in a figurative sense, as emblems of his moral character, Martin hastened to pronounce them pure as the driven snow. (XXI, 356)

The true emblems of Scadder's moral character are evident, but only to the narrator, the reader, and Mark. Martin's response typifies the perverse American attitude toward reality, a consensus to reinforce one another's moral posturings.¹⁰

The polar opposition of America and Britain functions on two different levels. As satire, the weight is all on the side of the English. Dickens undercuts any myth of human redemption through atavism and extols the moderation and civility that characterize British life. As novelistic material, the juxtaposition of the two nations is complex and beyond simple judgments: America introduces dimensions of personality that have been largely excluded in England. Thus, the opposition of nations is analogous to Martin's and John's seemingly opposed views of Tom Pinch: neither by itself represents the whole of human nature, each must be seen in the light of the other. The perverse moral judgments so consistently made in America force us to recognize that the basis of moral perception lies in tradition and culture rather than in any faculty inherent in the mind. In the light of the American episodes, the consensus of moral judgment that Dickens has shown us in England appears as the product of highly developed social norms that have made the community and its values a vital civilizing force within each of its members. Lacking those traditions, the Americans are released from all the restraints that the context of English life imposes on individual thought and action.

America is thus much more than a nation of Pecksniffs, Jonas Chuzzlewits, and Tigg Montagues: vice no longer requires concealment but can function with no limitations and with a savagery that would be impossible in England. The Anglo-Bengalee swindles money from its customers, but the Eden Land Company regularly sends its customers to their

8. Marcus, pp. 229-30.

9. *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 144-45.

10. As Sylvia Manning notes, Martin in these satiric episodes is a direct

descendant of Swift's Gulliver in being both commentator and participant. (*Dickens as Satirist*, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 176 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971], p. 82).

death. As Captain Kedgick informs Mark, "nobody as goes to Eden ever comes back a-live!" (XXII, 373). And unlike the truncated portrait of the Anglo-Bengalee's operations, Dickens shows us the victims of the Eden fraud dying in the swamps. Even Jonas does nothing on the scale of Hannibal Chollop, who wanders from town to town on the frontier, founds a newspaper in each, and then sells it "for the most part closing the bargain by challenging, stabbing, pistolling, or gouging the new editor, before he had quite taken possession of the property" (XXXIII, 520). Hannibal Chollop is a bit extreme even for America, but only a bit. Insofar as Dickens' Americans possess any moral consensus, it is by English standards perverse, a socially legitimized dishonesty that pervades national life.

This same lack of restraint characterizes mental as well as moral life in the United States. As Steven Marcus notes, the lack of authority among the Americans allows each man to believe whatever his self-interest dictates;¹¹ it also allows each man to see and think in whatever idiosyncratic fashion he wishes. Hannibal Chollop and a fellow American simply deny that Eden is a swamp (XXXIII, 519-23). Lafayette Kettle solemnly informs Martin, Mark, and a company of travelers that on the basis of his reading, the principal residence of Queen Victoria must be the tower of London, and he will not suffer contradiction (XXI, 347-48). Intellectual discourse takes the form of incomprehensible solipsism, as in the ramblings of the transcendental lady (XXXIV, 542-43) and in the strangely convoluted hydraulic philosophy of Miss Norris, "who was distinguished by a talent for metaphysics, the laws of hydraulic pressure, and the rights of human kind . . . bringing them to bear on any subject from Millinery to the Millennium, both inclusive, which was at once improving and remarkable; so much so, in short, that it was usually observed to reduce foreigners to a state of temporary insanity in five minutes" (XVII, 288).

Martin's journey through the new world at once modifies and is modified by the novel's English episodes for, taken together, the two nations portray a culturally relativistic view of the mind, its perceptions and values. Two equally valid conclusions emerge: man need not be as uncivilized as he is in America, and he is less civilized than initial appearances in England suggest. In particular, Dickens's development of Jonas Chuzzlewit recognizes in Englishmen a potential for the solipsistic, predatory ways of the Americans.

Early in the novel, Dickens hints that Jonas has some hidden dimension, that we do not know him as completely as we do the other characters: his anxiety to have Pecksniff stay with him throughout his father's last illness; his uncharacteristic desire to make Anthony's funeral an elaborate and expensive display; his revulsion at hearing mention of his

father after the funeral. Toward the middle of the novel, the significance of these clues becomes clearer through Mrs. Gamp's sudden change of heart toward Jonas. She praises him to Mr. Mould (XXV, 406), spends the night listening to the delirious ravings of Lewsome, and then replies evasively to Poll Sweedlepipe's mention of Jonas: "But we never knows wot's hidden in each other's hearts; and if we had glass winders there, we'd need keep the shettters up, some on us, I do assure you!" (XXIX, 464). Mrs. Gamp is proposing an idea of personality that contradicts all that we have seen in England—a dichotomy of the public and private man—and the private man is simply a minimally restrained version of the creature that we have seen in America, a wolf (XLII, 646), an "obscene and filthy animal" (LI, 786).

More importantly, Jonas' kinship to the Americans emerges through the rendering of his mental state after the murder of Tigg Montague. His extreme violation of his culture's values divorces him not only from its moral and legal standards but from its community of perceptions as well. Like the Americans, he has only his self-interest as a source of belief, and the guilt of that self transforms all that he sees. As he flees, he pauses briefly in an ale house; a casual noise makes him think fearfully of someone knocking on the door of his locked bedroom and discovering his absence (XLVII, 726). Like Sikes after the murder of Nancy, Jonas is haunted by the thought of his victim's body, fearing that it may await him in the closed room of his house (XLVII, 728). Jonas' vision becomes solipsistic, totally unable to see people, objects, or events in any terms other than this single obsessive concern. His fascination with the discovery of the body distorts his perception of others by turning them into extensions of his own inner life:

And the more his thoughts were set upon the discovery, the stronger was the fascination which attracted them to the thing itself: lying alone in the wood. He was for ever showing and presenting it, as it were, to every creature whom he saw. "Look here! Do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect *me*?" If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him. (LI, 774)

Jonas has almost completely lost the ability to distinguish between himself and the external world. The description of his exposure at first seems to involve hundreds of people converging in a carnival-like atmosphere, but as Dickens tells us parenthetically, that involvement is only Jonas' perception of the event: "Hawkers burst into the street, crying it up and down; windows were thrown open that the inhabitants might hear it; people stopped to listen in the road and on the pavement; the bells, the same bells began to ring:

11. Marcus, p. 248.

tumbling over one another in a dance of boisterous joy at the discovery (that was the sound they had in his distempered thoughts), and making their airy playground rock" (LI, 787).

Jonas' criminality, his inner isolation, bring back to England the point that the American episodes develop: that morality is no more than a communal way of seeing and judging, a socially perpetuated state of mind. As in its treatment of Tom Pinch, *Martin Chuzzlewit* sets up moral premises only to explore their limitations. In the varieties of social experience, Dickens confronts a potential to bring out either the civilized or the savage in human beings, although ulti-

mately a capacity for savagery remains that no civilizing influence can totally eradicate. In the largest sense, the strength of this novel lies in its multidimensional view of man and society. Its own effort to pass final judgments—old Martin's facile distribution of poetic justice—ends the book but does not resolve its tensions; *Martin Chuzzlewit* conveys an awareness of how very limited the basis of any final judgment must be.

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A New Carlyle Manuscript

Rodger L. Tarr

IN HIS GENERAL ACCOUNTING of Carlyle's literary papers, Hill Shine ("Thomas Carlyle," *Victorian Newsletter*, no. 13 [Spring, 1958], 22) stresses the importance of locating manuscripts, whether of unpublished or published material. On the same subject G. B. Tennyson ("Thomas Carlyle," *Victorian Prose: A Guide to Research* [New York: MLA, 1973], p. 38) was led to conclude, ". . . the Carlyle scholar will continue to yearn for missing manuscripts and perhaps that yearning will one day be satisfied by the emergence of manuscripts still preserved but unknown to scholarship." Since Professor Tennyson's remarks two substantial unpublished manuscripts of Carlyle's have been located: one by K. J. Fielding, Saintsbury Professor of English Literature, University of Edinburgh, from the Cromwellian period (see the notice of it in *Carlyle Past and Present*, ed. K. J. Fielding and Rodger L. Tarr [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976] Introduction), and the other by me entitled *The Guises*, which I am presently editing.

What makes *The Guises* manuscript unique, even among the comparatively few complete manuscripts of Carlyle's published works, is that it is a first draft in toto, which in turn allows us to see not only the workings of his historical conscience but of his historiographic method as well. For example, much of the syntactical framework is numbered to set forth what became his characteristic triads; many thoughts are interrupted by personal epiphanies and excretions (at one point in apparent good humor he exclaims, "Eliau, Eliau," and yet at another he interpolates in obvious disgust, "It is becoming urgent that I get done with this rubbish!"); the margins and the text are blocked with secondary notes and reminders, which indicate both his research methods and his opinions of his sources; and, the whole is punctuated with a wit and urbanity not characteristic of the post-*Latter-Day Pamphlet* period. Yet what is perhaps most note-

worthy is the tintured history of the French House of Guise from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century and its relationship to England, but especially to the Renaissance and Mary Queen of Scots. Like most of his stories, *The Guises* is at once interpretive and eclectic, and gives us a much needed account of Carlyle's literary endeavor between *John Sterling* (1851) and *Frederick the Great* (1858-65). For whom the manuscript was intended and why it was not published remain a mystery, a mystery heightened by the fact that no reference to it in Carlyle's papers has yet been found. Professor C. Richard Sanders reports that he can find no allusion to it in the archive of unpublished letters that he has collected for the on-going Duke-Edinburgh Edition of the *Carlyle Letters*. We do know that Carlyle had the distressing habit late in life of giving manuscripts or portions thereof away, but *The Guises* seems deliberately preserved although obviously unknown to Carlyle's literary executors.

The fact that the manuscript was probably bought in Scotland (in itself unusual) leads to the rather interesting history of its ownership which provides its own fascinating intrigue. My discovery of its sale at auction in Philadelphia by Stan V. Henkels in 1915, as part of the "Valuable Library of a well-known Virginia Gentleman," was the prelude to a search that finally led me to the American Antiquarian Society and to Henkels' annotated sale catalogue, which confirmed the newspaper account that the manuscript was bought by Charles Scribner for \$1225.00, and which identified the "Virginia Gentleman" as Peter Wright (1864-1952). Wright's descendants were in turn located with the help of the Virginia Historical Society and the Norfolk Public Library. As fortune would have it, one of Wright's daughters, Esther C. Cawthorne, remembers the manuscript from her childhood and has recounted many interesting anecdotes about it, most notable of which is its once attempted

theft from her father's library. Mrs. Cawthorne surmises that her father bought the manuscript during one of his many visits back to his homeland Scotland and that he had to dispose of it when the family fell on hard times. All seems rather simple, then. Peter Wright had the manuscript sold at auction by the firm of Stan Henkels in 1915 at which time it was bought by Charles Scribner, or so the record indicates. Here the plot thickens—Scribner's has no record in their archives of this rather substantial purchase. However, this dead end was averted by a stroke of fortune. While writing the *Bibliothèque Nationale* on another matter, I asked parenthetically if they might own any Carlyle manuscripts. Back came the shattering response: "Le manuscrit de Carlyle intitulé *The Guises* (Anglais 144) est entré à la Biblio-

thèque nationale en 1928. Il faisait, en effet, partie de la très belle collection constituée par Mrs. George T. Dwight Bliss sur Marie Stuart et son temps et, léguée par elle à la Bibliothèque nationale." How the manuscript became the property of Mrs. Bliss remains at this moment the final mystery in the ownership of *The Guises*, for if there is a connection between her and Scribner's on this matter it has yet to surface.

The manuscript itself, including notes, is approximately 22,000 words in length, is written on thirty-six folio pages, and carries Carlyle's characteristic end-signature dated "October, 1855."

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Disraeli's *Sybil* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*

Lois E. Bueler

BENJAMIN DISRAELI'S NOVEL of social exposure, *Sybil; or, The Two Nations* (1845), centers some of its shocking description of economic conditions, much of its comic caricature, and the bulk of its violent climax on the degenerate "Bishop" Hatton of Wodgate and his Hell-cats. All plot threads meet in the carefully limited cataclysm that burns Mowbray Castle, kills Lord Marney and Walter Gerard, unites Sybil and Egremont, returns a patrimony to its legitimate heirs, and purges revolutionary humors. Disraeli's use of Parliamentary blue books for his creation of Wodgate, based on the town of Willenhall in Staffordshire, has been carefully documented.¹ Neither Parliamentary reports nor Disraeli's own trip to the manufacturing districts accounts, however, for the novelistic uses of Hatton and his men in the denouement. I suggest that the handling of popular insurrection in *Sybil* is generally indebted to Tudor chronicle sources, and probably to the Jack Cade episodes of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part II* as well. In particular, Disraeli may owe the gruesome death of Simon Hatton to a striking episode in Holinshed's account of the Wat Tyler rebellion.

Broadly acquainted with the English classics, Disraeli was especially familiar with Tudor and Stuart history and literature. He finished his formal education by private reading

in his father's immense library, stuffed with the products of Isaac Disraeli's life-long passion for the English Renaissance. This reading helped fuel the pre-Revolution nostalgia of Disraeli's Young England movement. It was reinforced by the publication in 1841 of Isaac's *Amenities of Literature*, a learned, judicious, and spritely survey of English historical and literary themes through the early 17th century to which Benjamin had looked forward from its inception.² *Sybil* itself bears everywhere the signs of this education, from the disquisitions on monastic history to the "good reprints of our chronicles" in its heroine's remarkable library.³

In the late 1830's, amid social discontent and the rise of the Chartist movement, Disraeli seems to have paid particular attention to historical accounts of popular rebellion in England. His early political polemics draw repeated parallels with the revolt of the commons under Jack Straw, Wat Tyler, and John Ball in 1381, and the Jack Cade rebellion of 1450-51.⁴ This knowledge of the reigns of Richard II and Henry VI would have come from the chronicles. Imaginative recreation of insurrection, however, seems to have been enriched by the Jack Cade sections of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part II*. Disraeli's literary work, political commentary, and correspondence all demonstrate his thorough familiarity

1. Disraeli's indebtedness is exhaustively laid out in Sheila M. Smith's "Willenhall and Wodgate: Disraeli's Use of Blue Book Evidence," *RES*, XIII (1962), 368-84. Corroborative evidence of Disraeli's intentions and accuracy, such as a letter from the vicar of Willenhall, is available in Miss Smith's monograph *Mr. Disraeli's Readers* (Nottingham University Miscellany, 1966), a collection of letters in response to *Sybil*.

2. See his letter to Lady Blessington of 5 August 1834, quoted in W. F. Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, I

(N. Y.: Macmillan, 1916), p. 257. In *Amenities* Disraeli père devotes a chapter to English chronicler Robert Fabyan. In the work as a whole he cites Higden, Speed, Stowe, Hall, Holinshed, and Grafton, as well as Fabyan.

3. *Sybil*, p. 171. Page citations throughout are to the World's Classics edition (London: Oxford U. P., 1926).

4. Monypenny, II, pp. 87-8; Benjamin Disraeli, *Whigs and Whiggism: Political Writings*, ed. William Hutcheon (London: John Murray, 1913; rpt. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), pp. 237, 358.

with Shakespeare.⁵ Such familiarity is typical of educated Victorians. In Disraeli's case it was enhanced by the kind of family expertise demonstrated in *Amenities of Literature*, the Shakespearean chapter of which discusses the literary and historical antecedents of *Henry VI, Parts II and III*. Not surprisingly, a political sketch in *Fraser's Magazine* (1835) that appears to be Disraeli's⁶ shows a detailed knowledge of Shakespeare's Jack Cade scenes.

The importance to *Sybil* of chronicle history and Shakespearean dramatization lies primarily in the novel's treatment of anarchy and its agents. Spurred in each case by outside agitators (Field the Chartist operative, Richard Duke of York), Disraeli's mob like Shakespeare's is drawn into the larger concerns of the work by the charismatic energy of an hypnotic leader. In intelligence, initiative, and political sophistication, Hatton and Cade hardly resemble each other. The actual prosecution of rebellion, however, centers in both works on identical motifs—the lust for strong drink, the power of oratory, and the dreadful authority of the written word. The wholesale slaughter by Cade's men of the learned and literate, the “false caterpillars,” becomes in *Sybil* the assault on the tommybook, the company store ledger that, as Cade says of documents, makes those entered in it never their own men since. Oratory, with which Clifford ravishes Cade's followers, is Walter Gerard's weapon against the anarchic fervor of Hatton. As Cade's men are promised cheap bread and free claret, Hatton's are temporarily placated with fitches of bacon and kegs of ale.

Disraeli, however, disposes of his agents of anarchy quite differently from Shakespeare, whose Cade, deserted and desperate, famished for a “sallet,” ends his career on a Kentish dunghill minus his head. Disraeli, expanding the motif of drunkenness and surfeit (rather than ironically reversing it as does Shakespeare), lures Hatton into origastic self-entrapment. The setting is the attack on Mowbray Castle, which runs its predicted course from drunkenness in the “plundered cellars” to fire in the “golden saloons” (p. 349). Attracted to Lord de Mowbray's estate as much by class hatred as by greed, the Hell-cats are side-tracked by wine. Disraeli details their choices:

Tummas was swallowing Burgundy; Master Nixon had got hold of a batch of Tokay; while the Bishop himself, seated on the ground and leaning against an arch, the long perspective of the cellars full of rapacious figures brandishing bottles and torches, alternately quaffed some very old Port and some Madeira of many voyages, and was making up his mind as to their respective and relative merits. (p. 419)

The upshot is horrific. “Whether from heedlessness or from insane intention,” the Hell-cats set fire to the castle, and the Bishop and his crew, lying like “torpid flies” in the cellar, are incinerated (p. 425).

Although Shakespeare's rebels come to no such end, Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) contains a passage that seems to lie behind Hatton's death. We know that the Jack Cade scenes of *Henry VI, Part II* were quarried from the Tudor chronicles. Shakespeare used Hall, Holinshed, and Grafton for material from not only the events of 1450–1 and following, but also those of 1381.⁷ Whether or not Disraeli realized what Shakespeare owed to accounts of 1381, he evidently knew Holinshed's description of the spoiling of London by the followers of Wat Tyler. Having a special hatred of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, they attacked his house called the Savoy. This much is in Shakespeare (IV.vii.1). What Shakespeare does not include is Holinshed's account of how it was done.

[The] rebels fell in talke with the Londoners of manie lewd devises, as of the apprehending of traitors, and speciallie concerning such misliking as they had of the duke of Lancaster, whom they hated above all other persons. And hereupon agreeing in one mind, after diverse other of their outrageous dooings, they ran the same day to the said dukes house of the Savoie, to the which in beautie and statinesse of building, with all maner of princelie furniture, there was not any other in the realme comparable, which in despite of the duke, whom they called traitor, they set on fire, and by all waies and means indevoured utterlie to destroie it. . . .

There were 32 of them, that being gotten into the celler of the Savoie, where the dukes wine laie, dranke so much of such sweete wine as they found there, that they were not able to come forth, but with stones & wood that fell downe as the house burned, they were closed in, so that out they could not get. They laei there showting & creing seven daies together, and were heard of manie, but none came to helpe them, and so finallie they perished.⁸

Disraeli chooses not to torment his rebels for a week before killing them off. And Mowbray Castle, though it rivals the Savoy in ostentation, cannot rival it in taste or authenticity. Otherwise the death of the Hell-cats, with their other outrageous doings, their adoption of local hatreds, their descent to the cellars, their fondness for the stupefying effects of sweet wine, and especially their self-engendered entrapment, may be lifted from Holinshed's description.

This possibility suggests the degree to which Disraeli puts history to novelistic as well as immediately polemical use. It emphasizes how much, in both shape and substance, *Sybil* owes to its author's literary as distinct from his political ex-

5. Monypenny, I, 334-5; II, 41-2, 55; *Whigs and Whiggism*, 45, 61. Raymond Maître, *Disraëli, homme de lettres* (Paris: Didier, 1963), details Dizzy's Shakespearean allusions.

6. See Hutcheon's chapter in *Whigs and Whiggism*, pp. 386-96, entitled “Disraeli or Maginn?”

7. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, III (N. Y.: Columbia U. P., 1966).

8. Bullough, pp. 131-2.

perience. Disraeli's version of revolutionary terror cannot be understood solely by means of Victorian memories of Nottingham and Lancashire, nor even of the Bastille and the Place de la Revolution. It is a distinctively mutated addition

to the centuries-old British attempt to comprehend, contain, and exorcise, through art, the forces of anarchy.

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Thackeray in Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*: Some Manuscript Evidence

Angus Easson

ELIZABETH GASKELL was well aware of Charlotte Brontë's admiration for Thackeray. When she heard of Charlotte's death, as she recalled some years after, she wrote to Thackeray "a note telling him of Miss Brontë's death . . . asking him if he would write a line to Mr Brontë, who, I knew had so overbalancing a measure of pride in his daughter's fame, that a letter of sympathy from T— wd do much to comfort his grief."¹ The remembrance of Thackeray's lack of response to this request could as obviously sting after four years, as it had been a matter of astonishment to her at the time (*Letters*, p. 344). This silence may have led her, when writing *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, to casually include details or allusions which she would not have thought of including if another person had been involved. The *Life* clearly records Charlotte's shifting evaluation of Thackeray: no reader then or now need be in doubt that for her he was a writer for whose work she had enormous admiration, but a man whose faults became increasingly clear to her. The evidence of the manuscript of the *Life*² is that Gaskell or one of her advisers (probably George Smith of Smith, Elder, or possibly William Gaskell, who generally oversaw the manuscript, touched it up stylistically, and read some of the proofs) decided that certain references and allusions should be omitted from the printed text. None of these need be thought of as a startling revelation; they show however that Gaskell had a good eye for the telling detail and also, perhaps, that her intention was originally to emphasize more than appears Charlotte's increasing doubts about her literary hero. The two principal omissions recoverable from the manuscript (both from Charlotte's letters) have interest since they are not easily available in printed sources.³

Gaskell's first reference to Thackeray, as we have it, is veiled, since he appears only as "the great writer of fiction for whom Miss Brontë felt so strong an admiration."⁴ Subsequent mentions of Thackeray make the identification fairly clear to the reader, who understands that it was the idolized author of *Vanity Fair* who had "immediately appreciated, and, in a characteristic note to the publishers, acknowledged its [*Jane Eyre's*] extraordinary merits" (II, 29/xvi, 226). Yet Gaskell's manuscript openly names him and gives a direct quotation from Thackeray's letter, to W. S. Williams of Smith, Elder, dated 23 October 1847.⁵ The "great writer" had, we learn, written "a characteristic note, ending with the words 'It made me cry—to the astonishment of John, who came in with the coals.'"⁶ This quotation, in its immediacy, is just the kind of thing Gaskell looked for in gathering materials for the *Life*. On a sheet in the manuscript bound up amongst the corrections for the third edition she copied out a series of quotations from two articles in the *Quarterly Review*, "British Family Histories" and "Southey's Letters" (vol. 98, no. cxcvi (1856) pp. 289-321, 456-501), where they stand before a quotation from a letter by Mrs. Anna Jameson on the "truth of that wonderful infinite life—in which there seems to have been so little of external fact or circumstance, and such a boundless sphere of feeling and intellect crammed into a silent existence."⁷ These jottings seem to have been made at a fairly early date, as though supplying leading ideas (the watermark of the paper, dated 1854, separates the sheet from the later date found on paper used for corrections to the third edition), general comments that might be borne in mind. The first of them begins: "Get as many anecdotes as possible, if you love your reader and want to be read, get

1. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Letters*, eds. J. A. V. Chapple & Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester U. Press, 1966), p. 576, to George Smith, [?1 October 1859]. Hereafter cited in the text as *Letters*.

2. The manuscript is now in the John Rylands University of Manchester Library. I would like to thank the Librarian for permission to quote from the manuscript.

3. Clement Shorter, *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, 2 vols., (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), gives only the letter of May 1853 from the printed text of the *Life*; T. J. Wise & J. A. Symington (eds.), *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, 4 vols., 1932, give full texts (with some variants), III, 259 & IV, 67, but this edition is not easily available.

4. *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 2 vols., (London: Smith Elder, 1857), II, 29; to facilitate reference, I also give chapter and page reference to the current Everyman reprint (1971): xvi, 226. Other references are given in parentheses immediately after the quotation in the text.

5. Gordon N. Ray (ed.), *Letters and Private Papers of W. M. Thackeray*, 4 vols., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1945-46), II, 18-19.

6. MS f.347 (2); this is one of 13 sheets which follow f.347, numbered through 1 to 13.

7. Possibly from the letter to which EG replies, 8 Sept. 1856 (*Letters*, pp. 407-8).

anecdotes! Character manifests itself in little things, just as a sunbeam finds its way through a chink" (*Quarterly Review*, p. 297). There, in Thackeray's note, she had found an anecdote, a "little thing," with John bringing in the coals as the sunbeam to illuminate the writer as someone moved to tears amidst the ordinary round of the household. She seized eagerly on it, and wrote to her communicant (almost certainly W. S. Williams, the original recipient of the letter and someone who gave much help during composition of the *Life*): "I suppose I may put in Mr Thackeray's little sentence about crying, it is far too good to be lost" (*Letters*, p. 419). Yet lost it was to her generation, the detail being depressed into a generality. The problem here presumably was that the letter was addressed by Thackeray to Williams and therefore not in the public domain unless Thackeray cared to have it published. Tact demanded (though there is no knowing who pressed the point), that though a letter communicated by Williams to Gaskell might be drawn upon in building up a general picture, it could not be quoted from directly. The anecdote, telling though we may find it, could be regarded as an intrusion into Thackeray's private life.

Another suppression of detail, curious to us now perhaps, concerns Charlotte Brontë's first reading of *Henry Esmond*. Gaskell prefaces Charlotte's letter of 14 February 1852 to George Smith by the information that it "was a great interest to her to be allowed an early reading of 'Esmond'"; (II, 242/xxiv, 352) and Charlotte begins by declaring that it "has been a great delight to me to read Mr. Thackeray's work." We know from Thackeray's letter of 26 February 1852, during the writing of *Esmond*, that "Miss Brontë has seen the first volume and pronounces it admirable and odious."⁸ What Charlotte saw was the manuscript of a work still in progress—a very real token of Thackeray's admiration—yet Gaskell gives no suggestion of this in the printed text. The manuscript of the *Life*, though, is quite explicit: Charlotte was "allowed to read part of the manuscript of 'Esmond,'" and in writing to Smith actually said not that she had "read Mr. Thackeray's work" but "Mr. Thackeray's manuscript" (MS f. 572). There are other slight alterations to cover up this track; Charlotte is made to talk of "the former half of the present volume" (II, 244/xxiv, 353), a clearer suggestion that it was a printed copy she saw rather than the original "present work"; and later, reviewing the whole novel, she is made to speak of the "third volume" and "the first and second" volumes, both references being above-the-line additions, the original words being crossed out and illegible (II, 263/xxv, 364). With the removal of reference to the manuscript of *Esmond*, it also became necessary to remove a prospective hope for the completion of the novel. Charlotte speaks of her mixed feelings, of exasperation, "but then,

again, came passages so true, so deeply thought, so tenderly felt, one could not help forgiving and admiring" (II, 243/xxiv, 352). A gap is indicated in the printed text at this point, but in the manuscript of the *Life* Charlotte continues: "I wish there was any one whose word he cared for, to bid him good speed—to tell him to go on courageously with the book; he may yet make it the best thing he has written" (MS f. 574)—the printed text then running on continuously as we have it. One might feel there is a hint of criticism in this last statement, justifying its omission, yet overtly adverse criticism appears at the end of the same letter ("Mr. Thackeray is easy and indolent, and seldom cares to do his best"), so it seems rather that the suppression is deliberately aimed at concealing Charlotte's privileged reading of *Esmond* in manuscript. Why should this be so? I can suggest two possibilities, though I have no evidence for either. Firstly, there may have been the wish to avoid being over-personal where Thackeray was concerned. What he had done as a personal favor was his own business (however telling as an anecdote) and it might lead to him being pestered by people who felt they had an equal right to see his work at an early stage of composition. Secondly, the whole area of the intimate relationship of the pair was extremely delicate ground; the "governess" scandal of *Jane Eyre* could not be far from Gaskell's mind; and to show Charlotte receiving special marks of favor might only revive the idea that there was something more in their relationship than merely the admiration of literary geniuses. However, the early dispatch of a printed work (the impression eventually given by Gaskell) would simply be a courtesy on the part of a publisher already noted as sending books to a highly valuable author and would remove the author's personal role in the transactions.

The last two alterations between manuscript and text involving Thackeray seem more directly to involve examples of criticism of character. Again, I have no evidence who was ultimately responsible for the omission, though Gaskell had been pleased by the original letters when she saw them: "(very clever) criticism on Thackeray, man and writings" was her comment to Ellen Nussey on receiving them from Smith (*Letters*, p. 874). Still, we know she accepted advice from others: all references to the publisher Newby by name and to identifying marks like his address were omitted at the instance of Smith, despite Gaskell's original wish to libel Newby (*Letters*, p. 418) along with Lady Scott and Lady Eastlake and her regret at the restraint put on her:

indeed I only intend to quote the criticisms . . . about the "Stones of Venice," unless you will give me leave to put in that piece about Mr Newby. It is so extremely amusing & characteristic, that I shall hardly be able to resist copying it into the Memoir; but still I shall,

8. *Letters and Private Papers*, III, 15.

as in regard to the other passages on the same subject, be guided by your opinion as to the desirability of omitting it.⁹

In fact, a number of references to Newby by name do appear in the manuscript *Life*, though they are all omitted in the printed version. Perhaps Smith felt that publishers should hang together, whether good or bad, since the evidence against Newby was more tangible than any evidence (whatever the truth) that could be produced against Lady Scott, on whom Smith allowed Gaskell her head.

The two changes occur in discussions of Thackeray's lectures on the English Humorists, which Charlotte had attended in 1851 in London (except the last, on Sterne and Goldsmith). Gaskell devoted space elsewhere to Charlotte's opinions of the lectures, emphasizing particularly the reaction of distress to that on Fielding, distress linked by both Charlotte and Gaskell to Branwell's unhappy career. Since so much is printed about the lectures it might suggest that the omissions are merely to avoid repetition—certainly, no reader of the *Life* need be in doubt that aspects of Charlotte's hero caused her great pain and that she felt he had faults. But in both instances we may notice that there is a move from the content of the lectures to the character of Thackeray himself. The first is in a letter to George Smith, dated 8 July 1851 (II, 219/xxiii, 338-339). Charlotte comments on Smith's report of Thackeray's final lecture, saying: "His observations on literary men, and their social obligations and individual duties, seem to me also true and full of mental and moral vigour. . . ." The manuscript, however, gives a semi-colon instead of the omission marks, and continues:

but I regret that a lecture, in other respects so worthy of his best self, should not take a more masterly, a juster view of the old question of authors and booksellers. Why did he not speak, as I know he thinks, on this subject? Why, in treating it, did he take up the worn-out cant now grown stale and commonplace? I feel sure M: Thackeray does not quite respect himself where he runs on in that trite vein of abuse. He does not think all he says. He knows better than, from his inmost heart and genuine convictions, sweepingly to condemn a whole class. There may be radical evils in the system, meriting and inviting attack, but it is time to have done with indefinite clamour against the *men*, and to cease indiscriminate aspersions, which sound outrageous but mean little. Ere long Mess:^s Bungay and Bacon will be converted into real martyrs, and very interesting characters, so innocent and so wronged,

that, in spite of oneself, one will feel obliged to pity and vindicate them.¹⁰

The printed text (p. 220) continues without a break.

When Charlotte read the lectures as printed, she spoke of them again in a letter of May 1853.¹¹ The printed text gives the impression that she is concerned largely with the lectures themselves, and the one on Fielding in particular. "Not that by any means I always agree with Mr. Thackeray's opinions, but his force, his penetration, his pithy simplicity, his eloquence,—his manly sonorous eloquence—command entire admiration. . . . Against his errors I protest, were it treason to do so" (II, 292/xxvi, 381). The errors seem only those of opinions expressed in the lectures, but the fuller text involves the errors of the man: "*command entire admiration. I deny, and must deny that M: Thackeray is very good or amiable, but the man is great. Great, but mistaken, full of errors; against his errors*" (MS f.628; my italics).

The alterations recorded in this note are interesting, since they were made apparently at a late stage (only the references to the manuscript of *Esmond* are excised in Gaskell's manuscript, which would point to the excisions being at proof stage) and apart from the lesser case of Newby, Thackeray is the only figure treated in this way (some references to George Smith and his family are omitted, but this is modesty on Smith's part). One wonders what Thackeray's feelings would have been if he could have seen all Gaskell's original allusions to him, since his reaction to the published result (in common with that of so many other people mentioned in the work) was one of displeasure—though a displeasure not voiced so powerfully as by some. Gordon N. Ray notes that

Thackeray was not pleased at the freedom with which Charlotte Brontë's biographer used his name. Sir Frederick Pollock (*Personal Reminiscences*, 2 vols., London, 1887, II, 57) relates that when he dined with Thackeray on April 23, 1857, "He spoke in some disgust of Mrs. Gaskell's recent *Life of Miss Brontë*, not without personal reason."¹²

Personal reason he had, yet, though he might not have appreciated the fact even if he could have known it, modification of his role in that *Life* had taken place during its production.

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9. *Letters*, p. 437; and cf. p. 428, where she insists to Smith that though references to Newby appear in the MS, "I think you said that when this part was formally submitted to you, you would see that I steered clear within the law. This, however was to have been altered either by you, or by me."

10. MS ff. 548-9; cf. *Letters*, pp. 436-37, to Smith, referring to CB's letter of 9 Jan. 1851, the beginning being a "rather far-fetched and satirical picture of two altars raised in a church by Mr Thackeray to St Bacon

& St Bungay, &c &c." The references by CB concern particularly *Pendennis*, with its rival publishers Bacon and Bungay of Paternoster Row, and the question of the Dignity of Literature; see G. N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Age of Wisdom*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), pp. 136-9, 150-3, and *Pendennis*, ch. 31.

11. To W. S. Williams, 17 May (Wise & Symington, IV, 67); Shorter, *Life and Letters*, II, 325, says (incorrectly) to Elizabeth Gaskell.

12. Gordon N. Ray (ed.), *Letters and Private Papers*, I, xciv.

Dickens with a Voice like Burke's?

Louie Crew

QUANTIFIED STYLISTIC analysis of short selections is too often used to make broad generalizations about the style of a writer or even the style of a century. Such analysis comes close to equating literary study with cryptology.

A clever case in point is Richard Ohmann's "Methods in the Study of Victorian Style," *The Victorian Newsletter*, #27 (Spring, 1965), 1-4. Professor Ohmann uses transformational analysis to rewrite a Burke sentence to make it sound very like one by Matthew Arnold. Then he argues that the differences in syntax describe not only the differences between Arnold and Burke but also the differences between the nineteenth and the eighteenth centuries.

The problems come when one expects Ohmann's generalizations about the style of centuries to predict the prose style of other writers in those centuries. Consider Dickens in this sentence from *David Copperfield*:

That I suffered much in these contentions, that they filled me with unhappiness and remorse, and yet that I had a sustaining sense that it was required of me, in right and honour, to keep away from myself, with shame, the thought of turning to the dear girl in the withering of my hopes, from whom I had frivolously turned when they were bright and fresh—which consideration was at the root of every thought I had concerning her—is all equally true.¹

According to Ohmann's generalization, Dickens is writing like Burke here. Only a strained analysis can make this comparison meaningful, however. Indeed Dickens is not writing like Arnold, and his sentence fits very closely the essential syntactic requirements of what Ohmann calls "the core of Burke's style" (p. 1). Like the Burke sentence, Dickens' has "thickness and weight"; "the periodic opening with the long" series of noun clauses indefinite in case until the delayed copula (cf. Burke's "infinitive positioned before rather than after the verb it modifies"); "the neat marshaling of parallel forms," *That I suffered . . . that they filled . . . and yet that I had . . .*; "the duration of the single syntactic flight" (84 words as compared with Burke's mere 77); "the general-

ity, and the dependence on abstract nouns like "contentions and unhappiness.

Nor is David's sentence merely atypical of Dickens, as if a verbal atavism. In a recent study of random samples of Dickens' protest literature, it was revealed that approximately one in every four of Dickens' sentences has a strong measure of periodicity with complex material before and between the subject and verb of the first independent clause.² Parallelism is also pervasive, with approximately one word in every twenty a coordinator. Abstract nouns abound (eighty per thousand words). Sentences average thirty-five words, and many are far longer. In short, superficial measures of "eighteenth-century style" abound in Dickens' language of protest.

Centuries are too unwieldy for cogent stylistic generalizations about quantified syntax. These generalizations do not adequately predict personal or period styles. What seems more important is the relationship between syntax and all of the other features of individual sentences (notably features such as subject, kind of discourse, author's stance, etc.). For example, in *David Copperfield*'s sentence cited earlier, David is about to come round to his true love, Agnes, whom until now he has treated as a big sister. In this narrative context Dickens' contorted syntax dramatically communicates the stress that David feels before making his positive decision. His syntax is more important for what it reveals about David's emotions than for what it reveals about Dickens or Burke. The quantification of the syntax serves best as an index of the form (instead of the period) of the discourse undertaken. In Dickens and in Burke, for example, the prose is discursive.

Only elementary work has been done to demonstrate the correspondence between the forms of discourse and syntax frequencies. The computer is not the boon that it promises to be, for one cannot program a computer to weigh judiciously the subtle balance of all of the variables it can quantify.

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1. The Modern Library Edition (1950), p. 862.

2. Louie Crew, "Dickens' Use of Language for Protest," unpubl. diss. (Ala., 1971). Cf. *DAI*, vol. 32 (1971), 913A.

In Defense of Margaret: Another Look at Arnold's "The Forsaken Merman"*

Frank R. Giordano, Jr.

MATTHEW ARNOLD's best modern critics agree that "The Forsaken Merman" is one of his finest works, but they disagree significantly over the meaning of the poem's landscapes and the morality of Margaret's abandonment of her family to the sea world. Traditionally the landscapes have been interpreted to support critical theses about Arnold's relationship with Marguerite and his ideas about Victorian Puritanism, Philistinism, and modern progress. As for Margaret's return to the shore, the critics differ over the nature of her failure and the degree of her culpability; but nearly every commentator has expressed a deep sympathy for the merman, as though he were an unjustly abandoned lover and parent. We have, then, readings which focus on the poem's moral and religious issues, impose aesthetic values upon the landscapes and then draw moral conclusions, and discuss the poem in relation to Arnold's mythic use of landscapes.¹ None of these interpretations seems fully satisfactory in elucidating Arnold's ambiguous poem; and even those of Johnson and Roper, which seem to me the most effective, ignore or misconstrue the symbolical significance of much of Arnold's language.

Arnold's essential ambivalence in creating "The Forsaken Merman" renders any single approach to the poem only partially enlightening. His own feelings about the merman and Margaret, which control our sympathy to a great extent, are strongly divided and probably impervious to fully definitive judgments. Nevertheless, some new insights about the poem's elusive symbolism and thematic obscurity can perhaps be developed by focusing attention on the sources and the formal structure of "The Forsaken Merman." I shall examine, first, Arnold's incursions into folklore, especially the folk symbolism he employs in his creation of the merman and the landscapes; and secondly, his choice of poetic forms, the dramatic monologue and the "greater Romantic lyric." In discussing the complex form of "The Forsaken Merman," I shall try to indicate the subversive rhetoric of the merman's monologue and identify in it some typical Romantic motifs and will associate it with earlier Romantic poems which, like Arnold's, question the value of quests to ideal

realms. A study of the poetic influences from folklore and Romantic quest poetry can perhaps contribute to a more sympathetic judgment of Margaret and a more balanced understanding of the ambiguities in "The Forsaken Merman."

We have long known of Arnold's reliance upon George Eorow's version of the Danish folk ballad "Agnete og Havmanden" ("Agnes and the Merman") for the primary source of his poem;² and this knowledge has been beneficial in developing previous readings of "The Forsaken Merman." We stand to learn more about the poem, I believe, when we realize that the poem's basis in folk art requires that we at least consider its theme in relation to the essential theme of all folk legends: the centrality of the human's encounter with the supernatural, and *his* or *her* reaction to the situation; in fact, the ultimate test of a fable or legendary hero is the confrontation with the supernatural. Moreover, the poem's folk context suggests that the symbolical meaning of the characters and settings be sought in folk terms.

Let us examine, then, the poem's situation and language in relation to their sources in European folklore. For many readers, the poem's chief interest naturally attaches to the forsaken merman himself. To Johnson, the merman represents "all that is attractive in non-human nature" (p. 84); while Fulweiler sees the merman as having achieved serenity by an inner relation to a creative buried life (pp. 46-7).³ For neither of these critics is Margaret's involvement with the supernatural the chief issue, as it would traditionally be for the folk audience. These very positive judgments of the merman notwithstanding, we must assume that Arnold's close adherence to his folk source, wherein the merman is decidedly unattractive and unsympathetic, implies his general acceptance of the merman's symbolic serviceability for his own poetic needs; this principle seems true even where Arnold significantly departs from his sources, which departures I shall consider below. For clearly, the merman must be understood as a symbolic figure; "natural" and literally "realistic" readings alone are inappropriate for this poem's patently fabulous situation. Humans do not marry

*I want to thank my friends David DeLaura, Jack Farrell, and Sandy Stahl for their generosity and most valuable advice when they read my manuscript.

1. The best modern treatments of "The Forsaken Merman" are those by W. S. Johnson, *The Voices of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 84-9; Howard W. Fulweiler, *Letters From the Darkling Plain* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1972), pp. 45-9; A. Dwight Culler, *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven, Connecticut:

Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 21-3; and Alan Roper, *Arnold's Poetic Landscapes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 124-7. Later references to these works will be cited in my text in parentheses.

2. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 129-31.

3. Fulweiler's treatment of the merman ignores his frantic anxiety, dislocation, and anger, consequent to Margaret's return to the shore.

mermen and breed with them; yet mermen and mermaids have traditionally symbolized to the folk of many countries the ambivalent attractions of an ideal existence, free from the constraints of time and place. Once we locate the poem within its folk context, the symbolical implications of Margaret's union with and eventual separation from the merman reflect a more broadly cultural, as opposed to a primarily personal meaning.

Typically a merman is the male counterpart to the mermaid, an immortal creature with the torso of a human and the lower body of a fish. One of the principal monsters known to tradition and perpetuated in folk art, the merman symbolizes "cosmic forces at a stage one step removed from chaos—from the 'non-formal potentialities.' On the psychological plane, they allude to the base powers which constitute the deepest strata of spiritual geology, seething as in a volcano until they erupt in the shape of some monstrous apparition or activity. Diel suggests that they symbolize an unbalanced psychic function: the affective whipping up of desire, paroxysms of the indulged imagination, or improper intentions. . . . in a less negative sense, the monster may be equated with the libido."⁴ In general, the merman is, like the mermaid, attractive, siren-like, and dangerous to humans, luring them to destruction and caging their souls in the underwater domain.

In view of the nearly universal sympathy accorded the merman, we must ask whether Arnold's merman is the traditional monster of folklore. His Danish source would suggest he is: in both forms of the legend Arnold is supposed to have known, the merman decoyed the woman by his speeches, she allowing herself to be prevailed upon. In the ballad itself, the merman is described: "A fairer demon was never seen." Even the offspring of his union with Grethe are described as "ugly little children."⁵ The sympathy in the folk legend is clearly with Grethe, who leaves the merman to return to her social and religious duties.

In Arnold's poem, likewise, though the merman makes large and legitimate claims on our sympathies, there are indications of his insidious character, even though the poem itself does not include an account of his seduction of Margaret.⁶ The merman is clearly associated with his Danish prototype in his reliance on affective language; he exploits her feelings for their children and attempts to subvert her spiritual regeneration by inveigling Margaret to return to the

sea.⁷ The inefficacy of his language and the ultimate failure of his efforts represent and account for the traditional dissolution of the divine-human marriages of folklore, a universal folk motif in which the partners are destined for an early separation. I shall consider this motif more fully later. The merman's failure to restrain Margaret also indicates, I believe, the authenticity of Margaret's conversion and Arnold's poetic rejection of the beguilement of the primitive and chaotic impulses the merman represents.

Margaret's return from the sea is both the climax of her union with a non-human and the resolution of the typical folk contest in which a human is pitted against a monster. Traditionally in myth and folklore, the hero's deliverance corresponds to the triumph of consciousness or the spirit over the affective strata of the unconscious or libido.⁸ In the Danish legend, Margaret is surely heroic in responding to the bells, reawakening to her spiritual duty, and returning to her family on the shore. In so closely following his source, Arnold does not seem to deviate from its traditional meaning. In fact, at least two of his variations from the source serve to intensify the positive value of Margaret's return to the shore.

First, where the Danish legend refers merely to "one festival morning" as the time of Margaret's decision to return, Arnold specifies Easter, the most essential Christian festival, the day of Christ's resurrection and fulfillment of His promise to man for individual renewal. There is no irony in Arnold's use of Easter, as Fulweiler suggests (p. 49); simply because the merman does not acknowledge the validity of the feast does not invalidate it for Margaret, who is, after all, a Christian and a human. And though one may argue that there is something selfish and excessively legalistic about her response to the call to church at Easter, even these arguments do not vitiate that response. In fact, the Christian's first duty is to save his or her own soul; this duty cannot be neglected, certainly not because of sorrow for a monster who threatens to jeopardize one's own soul. Moreover, religious experience in community, because it leads to spiritual salvation, was encouraged by Christ in His establishment of a temporal Church. Most importantly, the merman himself acknowledges that Margaret experiences joy as a result of her return to the church on the shore; we simply cannot ignore the fact that "joy," even in the days of the decline of Romanticism, reveals the harmoniousness of personal

4. See J. E. Circlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 203. While Fulweiler is correct in speaking of the merman as representing freedom, he is not convincing about the psychic qualities symbolized by that freedom (see his pp. 45-6). See also Maria Leach, ed., *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), p. 710, on the merman.

5. See Tinker and Lowry, pp. 129-31.

6. This omission from the legend notwithstanding, there must be some motive for her being in the undersea world, wed to a merman; and there is no warrant for discounting her traditional accession to the

merman's seduction as the explanation for Margaret's situation in the poem. Thus, we cannot assume, simply because Arnold's poem begins at a critical moment in the lives of the merman and Margaret, i.e., *in medias res*, that the original and traditional early stages of the relationship can be ignored; or that *this* merman is a morally neutral agent without a prior history and nature.

7. See lines 10-16 in Kenneth Allott, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965), p. 96. All subsequent references to Arnold's poem are from this edition.

8. See Circlot, *ibid.*

unity. In terms of the stages of spiritual development that Culler identifies in the major Arnoldian texts, Margaret's return to the shore may be read as the recovery of Joy in responsible social activities.⁹

A second modification and intensification of the spiritual meaning of his source is Arnold's use of a "silver bell" to recall Margaret to the land. The bells in Arnold's source are church bells, which typically function to frighten monsters in Scandinavian folklore¹⁰; but Arnold's silver bell seems a providential "weapon," wielded for miraculous purposes by Christ, as it were, in His conflict with the merman over Margaret's soul. Not only does the silver metal produce a finer tone than the metal in ordinary bells (acknowledged even by the merman, lines 30-1: "'Children dear, was it yesterday/We heard the sweet bells over the bay?'"); though he is unaware of its efficacy against him); it is also the magical metal (alchemists associated silver with birth, an association which reinforces the religious meaning of Arnold's Easter bell) traditionally used to kill ghosts, witches, and giants, as well as to ward off evil spirits.¹¹ The silver bell, finally, combines with Margaret's strict attention to the Holy Book, leading to her spiritual rebirth and exorcising, as it were, the demonic monster in whose company Margaret felt threatened with the loss of her soul (lines 58-9: "'Twill be Easter-time in the world—ah me!/And I lose my poor soul, Merman! here with thee'").

Now, if we consider Arnold's merman as a monster of folklore, does it not follow that his environment should reflect his nature? Previous critics, though, have not found the sea-world particularly unattractive or threatening. On the contrary, for Johnson the water-world symbolizes the natural world of freedom and flux (p. 84). Fulweiler says that the cool dark caverns assume the "profoundly revelatory functions of the underground or undersea experience characteristic of myths and dreams" (pp. 46-7). The potential richness of this reading is left undeveloped, with no indication of specific myths and underworld experience; thus, because he fails to see that such undersea experience often symbolizes chaos, destruction, damnation and death, Fulweiler's sense of what is revealed and of Margaret's responses to the revelation seems less than satisfactory. Culler considers the sea-caverns as analogous to the "forest glade" in his treatment of Arnold's landscapes (p. 23). All of these readings emphasize directly or indirectly what are considered attractive elements of the undersea world: the coolness, the

peacefulness and serenity, the red gold throne and green lights, the ceiling of amber and pavement of pearl. Only Roper sees a baleful side of the underwater caves, calling them another version of the New Sirens' palace, although without its explicit moral values (p. 126). Let us look more closely at the merman's world; while it has its obvious attractions, attention to the folk symbolism associated with it can perhaps reveal the ambiguous nature of the underwater environment and its appropriateness as an abode for the monstrous merman.

Monsters, we have seen, symbolize cosmic forces one stage removed from chaos. Arnold's representation of the undersea-world abounds with suggestions and symbols of its chaotic "non-formal potentialities." While on the shore the great winds are blowing, in the surf "the wild white horses play,/Champ and chafe and toss in the spray" (11. 6-7). A few lines later (1. 21), these same wild horses "foam and fret," warning the merman and children to return to the sea. The symbolism of the horse is extremely complex, but frequently, as when Neptune with his trident lashes horses up out of the waves, they represent the blind cosmic forces of a primitive chaos. On the biopsychological plane, the horse stands for intense desires and instincts; Jung has recognized the horse as a symbol pertaining to man's baser forces.¹²

Nor are the wild white horses the only indications of the threateningly chaotic nature of the undersea world. In lines 35-45, the caverns are "Sand-strewn," lights "quiver and gleam," and sea-snakes "coil and twine." Winds, usually symbolic of creative breath and, at the height of their activity, of fecundation and regeneration,¹³ "are all asleep"; and the quivering lights are "spent." Sea-snakes and great whales are other monstrous inhabitants of the merman's realm. Though the snake may symbolize the wisdom of the deeps and the great mysteries, as Fulweiler suggests (p. 47), it more usually symbolizes the principle of evil inherent in worldly things and the primordial, the most primitive strata of life. The sea-snake emphasizes the integration of the symbolism of the unconscious with that of the abyss. That Arnold seems to have intended these darker implications is suggested by the monstrous inhabitants of the undersea world in general and by the image of the coiling sea-snakes. In its coiled position, the snake is most threatening, as it attacks and destroys by coiling itself around its victims.¹⁴ Finally, the awesome image of the great whales sailing by, with un-

9. Culler's introduction to the Riverside edition of *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. x, presents an earlier, less elaborate discussion of the process than does his book.

10. See Leach, pp. 133-4, who points out that the souls of the dead rise to heaven on the sound of bells. Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology Folklore and Symbols*, I (N.Y.: Scarecrow Press, 1961), 198, reiterating the efficacy of bells as a talisman to terrify demons, adds that they represent the call of Christ in cases when the faith is in jeopardy.

For example, in such cases a bell supposedly rang in the temple of the Sangraal.

11. See Leach, p. 1012.

12. See Cirlot, pp. 144-45, for a full discussion of the horse as symbol. See also Leach, p. 504, and Jobes, 1:791, on the symbolism of the horse.

13. See Cirlot, pp. 353-4; Jobes, 2:1682.

14. See Cirlot, pp. 272-6, for his treatment of snake symbolism.

shut eye, reminds us that the whale, the evil deity of the underworld, is often a symbol of the grave.¹⁵ It is most significant that these symbols of the chaotic, the primordial the unconscious, and death, are all contained in "caverns, cool and deep." Not only are caverns frequently symbolic of the unconscious in nineteenth-century poetry, they are also an objective image of the gloomy, dark, and barren region of Hades. The coolness may be interpreted by Bachelard, who finds that cold "corresponds symbolically to being in the situation of, or longing for, solitude or exaltation."¹⁶

By now we can perhaps infer why Margaret was attracted to the undersea world and appreciate the spiritual worth of her return, for the folk and mythic elements in her tale are quite coherent. Originally the merman offered her the lure of the primitive, the free play of her unconscious and baser instincts, the liberation of her sexual and, at the same time, anti-social impulses. In submitting to the merman and following him under the sea, Margaret rejected her spiritual nature and descended to the undersea world; the descent, a universal folk motif, usually symbolizes the human wish to overcome death and attain an ideal immortality.

The fruits of this symbolic death and union with the merman are her non-human offspring, a parody of a natural human family. While the beauty of the children (11. 52-53) and their pathetic plight have always evoked sympathy, Arnold is clearly ambivalent in portraying the youngest as the typical mermaid, her bright hair being combed, and in suggesting that their siren-like seductiveness might serve the interests of the merman in wooing Margaret back from the shore. The poem gives no evidence, however, that the offspring sincerely miss Margaret; in fact, we cannot be sure they ever called for her, though they are intensively pressured by the merman (11. 10-19), told exactly what to say and with what tone of voice to say it, and repeatedly asked to "Call her *once*" and "Call yet *once*" (My italics). At any rate, Arnold's attention to Margaret's offspring should caution us to be aware that they are ambiguous creatures, associated with both beauty and human calamity, generation and seduction; and they symbolize the fatal non-human lover and worldly enticements.¹⁷

But Margaret's immersion in the water, whether seen as symbol of the collective or personal unconscious, is just one phase of a total process that expresses the vital potential of the psyche; for when she leaves the water, her struggle with the psychic depths issues in a conscious and spiritual resurrection. The silver bell at Easter is the call for her re-

turn to moral and social, that is, human, consciousness; and it is one of the weapons which enable her to ward off her enchanting unconscious. Once on shore, her community with her kinsfolk (i.e., her own kind) and priests, her attention to prayer and her holy book, and her resumption of human labors secure her from the enticements of the merman and the children. Though from the merman's viewpoint Margaret's white-walled town, little gray church, narrow paved streets, long prayers, and whizzing wheel may seem confining and pointlessly dull, that viewpoint is only partially relevant in the world of conscious, civilized humankind. The life of Christian action is often not very attractive, aesthetically and amorally considered; and it can be argued that Arnold's neutral-tinted community is an honest recognition of the arena in which humans struggle for salvation. Moreover, Margaret's environment is intended as a realistically rendered alternative to, perhaps even a judgment of, the undersea world of colorful irresponsibility and immorality. Be this as it may, such a life does provide, for many like Margaret, the names for the limited earthly joys available. The drabness and difficulty of Margaret's chosen life highlights the paradox of Christian salvation; there is little wonder the merman cannot comprehend her finding joy in such a world.

Nor is the shore so entirely unattractive as the merman and Arnold's critics suppose. The "little grey church on the windy hill" initially threatens and irritates the merman, accustomed as he is to the cool caverns where "the winds are all asleep." But it is that very wind, symbolic of life and, more importantly, spirit, that makes the little grey church Margaret's inevitable refuge from the sea. And the narrow paved streets represent a necessary kind of human order and constraint, as opposed to the nearly chaotic liberty of movement in the sea caves. The graves in the church yard are not necessarily repellent; death is a part of life for humans and must be accepted both in itself and as an admonition about the governance of one's moral self. Too much has been made of the shut church door; the only ones excluded from the ceremony are the merman and his children, who simply do not belong, as they represent the seductive and monstrous allurements that jeopardize the human soul. Similarly, Margaret's spinning has been too much deprecated; spinning is a universal symbol for bringing forth and fostering life. The spindle itself represents the sacrifice which renews the generative force in the world.¹⁸ Surely her spinning is morally superior to her unconscious existence in the spiritless and sterile sea caves. Finally, there is, in-

15. See Cirliot, p. 350, and Jobes, 2:1675. The merman, too, described as the king of the sea, is a typical deity of the underworld, often "a foreboding personage, a prince of darkness or a prince of evil" (Leach, p. 1150).

16. Quoted in Cirliot, p. 49. The cool caverns, we can assume, objectify Margaret's desire to quit the natural world and its society.

17. See Jobes, 2:1459.

18. See Cirliot, p. 290. Jobes, 2:1483, sees spinning as a symbol of universal harmony and of being in accord with nature. Surely Margaret, returned from the non-human world, has resumed her natural existence. Allott, p. 98, quotes from one of Arnold's letters to Clough about the "great poetical interest" in spinning and weaving.

disputably, Margaret's experience of joy upon her return to the land:

... 'O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its toy!
For the priest, and the bell, and the holy well;
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun!' (11. 89-93)

It is very hard to reconcile this passage with earlier interpretations which insist on finding Margaret's life on the shore inferior to her underwater existence. For having exchanged the spent lights that quiver and gleam for the blessed light of the sun, and the merman with his monstrous children for the priest, the natural child and its toy, the bell, and holy well (symbol of the soul and salvation and associated with the concept of life as a pilgrimage), Margaret seems to have won her struggle against the lure of the unconscious and unnatural, armed herself against the beguiling monsters, and prepared herself to serve the higher aims of the spirit and of her human species.

* * * * *

My reading of the poem's symbols and interpretation of Margaret's spiritual triumph over her unconscious impulses can be supported, I believe, by an analysis of the poem's formal structure and traditional motifs. "The Forsaken Merman" is a dramatic monologue, addressed by the merman to his children. Margaret's return to the shore is the poem's central event; it elicits the monologue and reveals much about both Margaret and the merman. The narrative follows the pattern of what M. H. Abrams has called "the greater Romantic lyric," the earliest Romantic formal invention, a type of poem in which the speaker begins by describing a landscape and proceeds to a feelingful meditation upon one of the great issues of life, death, love, joy, dejection, or God, which meditation turns out to be the *raison d'être* of the poem.¹⁹ Now, the merman's meditation recounts the process of Margaret's return to the shore, a critical moment in her life, culminating as it does her essentially Romantic quest for an imagined ideal existence. Having been courted and wed by the merman, Margaret underwent the typical pattern of experience in a divine-human marriage. The lovers in this universal folk motif usually become separated when the mortal tires of her immortal mate and environment and prefers to seek death on earth rather than an immortality in an eternal paradisaic realm. In such tales, which contrast the evanescent existence of mankind and the endless duration of an "ideal" life, the mortal who seeks a divine union symbolizes the dreamy idealist who is unwilling to make a

strenuous effort or submit to training to achieve what he desires.²⁰ Like her literary prototypes in earlier Romantic poetry, such as Keats's narrators in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale," Tennyson's "Tithonus," the mariners in the land of the lotos-eaters, and the soul in "The Palace of Art," Margaret has had immortal longings and desired to exchange her human duties for a world of pleasant inactivity and sensual indulgence. In her search for splendid isolation from the crowds of groaning mankind, she fled to the amber and pearl, red and gold of the cave, with the king of the undersea world. But Margaret learns that ideal and permanent states of being, however attractive to the human imagination, are not only unendurable when attained, but are pursued at too great a price and seriously imperil one's humanity.

It has been noted that "The Forsaken Merman" is told from the point of view of the merman. Fulweiler suggests that Arnold transfers sympathy from Margaret to the alien creature in order to highlight his hopeless plight and to increase our sense of Margaret's faithlessness (p. 45). One might argue that the merman is made so attractive, his plight so sympathetic in order to highlight the moral courage Margaret demonstrates in facing up to her jeopardy and leaving him; after all, there would be no virtue in her leaving him if he were ugly and insensitive, if his world were oppressive. But while it is true that many readers rightly sympathize with the plight of the attractive merman, that sympathy is not unqualified; nor is Margaret's behavior so unambiguously irresponsible. As a symbol of the monstrous and the chaotic, the merman is Arnold's vehicle for exploring the essentially dubious attractions of one's capitulation to both one's sexual nature and the excesses of the imagination. Margaret, at the critical moment in her spiritual life, is faithless only to him and his world, a sub-human, unending, unconstrained existence. To herself as a Christian and to her human kind, she is ultimately fully faithful as a moral and social being. In creating so appealing a merman ("A fairer demon was never seen" according to Arnold's source), Arnold, like Milton in characterizing Satan, demonstrates the apparent beauty of evil, its seductiveness, and man's willing submission to it. But only because the evils of man's abandonment to the primitive and the unconscious desires, and the difficulties of accepting human duties, are so powerfully rendered, does Arnold's poem attain its moral seriousness and sophistication.

Let us look at the merman as narrator. Modern readers of the dramatic monologue have been sensitized to the centrality of irony in revealing character traits and motives of which the speaker is either ignorant or which he is intent upon concealing. It is surprising therefore that such an es-

19. "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Romanticism and Consciousness* (New York: W. W. Nor-

ton & Co., 1970), pp. 201-3. Abrams describes the genre fully on p. 201.
20. See Jobes, 1:452-3.

sential element of this poetic genre has never been discerned in the merman's monologue. Have we not overlooked the essential selfishness of the merman's appeal, his lack of sympathy for Margaret's values and feelings?

Throughout the narrative the merman registers feelings and values that are important to him. From the beginning of the poem he is concerned about his family: his departed wife, his children, and his brothers in the bay. Though he journeys to the shore, the merman is a sea creature; and he harkens to the warnings of the wild white horses to return to his natural habitat. It is these feelings, to a great extent, that engage our sympathy and account for the kindly treatment the merman receives from critics. Our ambivalence toward him, however, also results from his own inherent values. For the merman is bewildered and angry because Margaret shares his same needs for kinship and her natural home. In his desire for her to return, the merman makes no allowance for Margaret's own spiritual needs: he would have her jeopardize her soul for eternity in order to assuage his eternal loneliness. For all his pride as the king of the sea, moreover, the merman would exploit his children by making them try to entice Margaret back from the shore. A skillful enchanter (the rhythmical and rhetorical resources of the monologue fully reveal this; also, both versions of Arnold's source emphasize the merman's way with words), the merman nevertheless realizes by line 85 that his efforts are doomed. If this complexly ambiguous poem can be said to make a final judgment of the merman, Arnold's values seem signified by Margaret's remaining steadfast by the pillar in church.

The poem's formal relationship to the "greater Romantic lyric" reinforces my interpretation of the central meaning of the merman's monologue. He begins speaking because of Margaret's departure from the sea. The rhythms of his narrative reflect his feelings of dislocation and anxiety as he describes the tumult in the landscape. The typical modulation in this lyric form, from description to meditation, carries the merman to his chief insight about his condition. Though he says at line 28, "She will not come though you call all day," this truth is not fully realized until after line 85; that is, not until after he recounts in memory Margaret's reason for retreating from the depths. Thereafter, his in-

jured pride and consoling imaginings notwithstanding, the merman accepts the finality of Margaret's choice; she has found joy on the shore and, in spite of occasional backward glances at her days in the sea caves, shall remain there. Significantly, while Margaret only looks back at the sea, the merman actually ventures upon the shore. He concludes his narrative, which returns to the outer landscape, by suggesting that he perhaps will follow Margaret since she will not return to him. This development, a major revelation about the merman himself, has implications about the final moral standing of the sea-creature *vis-à-vis* Margaret that previous critics have never considered. The subject of his journey ashore informs Arnold's other merman poem, "The Neckan," where the sea-monster seeks the Christian salvation Margaret has attained, the joy she has recovered.

My reading of Margaret's character is most directly opposed to Fulweiler's and Culler's (about Margaret's departure he says, "she was clearly wrong—," p. 21). I view her as caught up in the perennial conflict between duty and desire, a conflict that in the nineteenth century was given splendid poetic treatment by at least two poets who deeply influenced Arnold, even though their influence led him vigorously to oppose their ideas and practices. I am referring again to Keats and the early Tennyson, especially in those poems of questing where the protagonists have sought to flee the bondage of Time and Place and Change.²¹ In those motives and choices which I assume made her susceptible to the merman's enchantment, Margaret is a spiritual sister to a large family of Romantic questers. But just as, in Romantic poem after poem, the social and moral values of natural humanity are asserted, however powerfully the poems represent the allurements of imaginary ideal realms, so too do these values obtain in "The Forsaken Merman." Like Keats' narrator in the nightingale ode, who will not be cheated by the deceiving elf, fancy, Margaret is tolled back from the sea to her spiritual and natural human self by a silver bell at Easter that warns of her forlornness unless she be re-born in spirit.²²

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21. The earliest reviewers noted the similarities between Arnold's language and Tennyson's in his youthful poems, "The Merman" and "The Mermaid"; and Tennyson, no doubt flattered by Arnold's imitation, seems to have appreciated "The Forsaken Merman."
22. In discussing "The Forsaken Merman" in the context of these famous poems of Romantic questing, I am conscious of ignoring the usual

context in which they are treated, namely, the Marguerite poems. I believe such speculations to be unwarranted because of the highly problematical state of our knowledge about Marguerite, and distracting insofar as they divert attention from the poem's actual sources in folklore and contemporary poetry.

Yeats, Tennyson, and "Innisfree"

Gary Sloan

A POET MAY BE HIGHLY PRAISED and yet soar with wings not his own. A case in point is William Butler Yeats and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Yeats offered three different explanations of how the poem came to be. In a letter to Katherine Tynan, dated January 13, 1889, Yeats enclosed an early version of the poem and gave the following account of its genesis: "There is a beautiful island with a legended past. In my story I make one of the characters whenever he is in trouble long to go away and live alone on that island—an old daydream of my own. Thinking over his feelings I made these verses about them."¹ But in "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth," published in 1916, Yeats hints that it was Thoreau who inspired the poem: "My father had read to me some passage out of *Walden* and I planned to live someday in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree."² In "The Trembling of the Veil," written in 1922, Yeats proposed yet another account of the poem's origin: "When walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem 'Innisfree.'"³

Surveying the three accounts, one might think Yeats either illy recollective or wondrously indecisive. As though to circumvent such a judgment, the critic and the anthologist alike are prone to act as if Yeats left but one description of the poem's origin. To point up the inspirational force behind the poem, they cull whichever account best suits their fancy and keep mum about the two others.

Most likely, the three diverse accounts reflect neither authorial imperfection of memory nor inadequacy of resolve. The three aren't necessarily contradictory. Poems often represent an intersection of diverse experiences and feelings. But the "island with the legended past," *Walden*, and the shop window fountain were not in themselves sufficient to bring "Innisfree" to its present form. For that was needed Alfred Lord Tennyson. For Tennyson's poetry, especially his "Claribel" and "The Lotos-Eaters," casts an immense thematic and phraseological shadow over Yeats's first well-known poem.

The formative concept of "Innisfree"—the compulsion to escape the rigorous demands of society by fleeing to an isolated, watery abode—reverberates throughout the poems

of Tennyson, particularly his early ones. "The Sea Fairies," "The Lady of Shalott," "The Merman," "The Mermaid," "The Palace of Art," "Mariana in the South," "Edwin Morris," "Locksley Hall," "The Lotos-Eaters"—in one form or another the theme crops up in each of these poems. On the same theme, Yeats was almost equally prolific. For in addition to "Innisfree," the Irish poet recounts the sundry delights of remote isles and lakes in such early poems as "The Indian to his Love," "The Stolen Child," "To an Isle in the Water," "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman," "The White Birds," and "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland."

Yet, aside from thematic overtones, the immediate influence of Tennyson isn't discernible in the opening two lines of "Innisfree": "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,/And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made." The initial phrase is from Song of Solomon, 3:2—"I will rise now and go about the city"—but, if you ignore the fact that the Concord sage didn't live on or near an island, the second line is sufficiently Thoreau-like to suggest that *Walden* is, as Yeats implied, one of the steering forces behind the poem. And the first portion of line 3—"Nine⁴ beanrows will I have there"—serves to reinforce the impression, for it is well known that one of the chapters of *Walden* is called "The Bean-Field." The rest of the third line, along with line 4—"a hive for the honeybee,/And live alone in the bee-loud glade"—sounds like vintage Thoreau, yet isn't. Thoreau makes no mention of hives and bees.

But Tennyson does so frequently. In "Claribel," "the wild bee hummeth"; in "Eleanor," there are "yellow-banded bees" that feed "a child, lying alone/With whitest honey"; in "The Holy Grail," there are the "hives of those wild bees that made such honey" (ll. 214-215). Even the seemingly innovative neologism "bee-loud," a hyphenated condensation of a phrase, has numerous analogues in Tennyson. "The Lotos-Eaters" alone contains "sunset-flushed," "sun-steeped," "pilot-stars," and "foam-fountains."

Tennyson's specter looms even more formidably in stanza two of "Innisfree." Lines 5-6—"And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,/Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings"—echo line 11 of "The Lotos-Eaters": "Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go." And in their emphasis on the three periods of the day, lines 7-8—"There midnight's all a glimmer, and

1. Allan Wade, ed., *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 99-100. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent letters cited in the text are from this edition.

2. In *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

4. Yeats probably intends the number to have a religious significance. In the letter to Tynan that houses the first version of "Innisfree," he mentions the traditional "hierarchy of the angels," and in his "Symbolism of Poetry," he again refers to the "Nine Hierarchies."

noon a purple glow,/And even full of the linnet's wings"—parallel lines 9-14 of "Claribel": "At eve the beetle boometh/Athwart the thickest lone;/At noon the wild bee hummeth/About the moss'd headstone;/At midnight the moon cometh,/And looketh down alone."

To certain colors, Yeats felt an inexplicable attraction. Purple, as he indicates in his well-known essay "The Symbolism of Poetry," was one such color. To his friend John O'Leary, Yeats even went so far as to write a letter in purple (p. 217). Purple was also one of Tennyson's favorite colors; he uses the word better than fifty times in his poetry, including once in "The Lotos-Eaters." Too, the "purple night" mentioned in "The Lady of Shalott" bears a suspicious resemblance to the "midnight be a purple glow" of the first version of "Innisfree." Also in that early version of the poem, Yeats describes the bee's hive as yellow, another color that Tennyson frequently uses. In "The Lotos-Eaters" the word occurs four times.

In the final stanza of "Innisfree," Tennyson's shadow begins to recede, but isn't erased entirely. The third stanza doesn't appear in the original version of the poem, but was tacked on sometime before the poem's publication a few years later. The fact is worth noting, for it suggests that in the interval between the writing of stanzas two and three Yeats was beginning to be less influenced by Tennyson.

But the process was yet incomplete. For the "pavements grey" of the final stanza has its prototype in the "rounding grey" of Tennyson's "Mariana" (l. 44). Later, Yeats regretted the "inversion in the last stanza" of "Innisfree"⁵—a lament that might signify a belated recognition that not even conscious intent could wholly unshackle him from the old Poet Laureate.

That Yeats was familiar with the works of Tennyson prior to the composition of "Innisfree," we know both from his own testimony and that of others. In his autobiography, Yeats mentions that when he was attending the Dublin Arts school, it was he who introduced the other students to a number of English poets, among them Tennyson (p. 49). Then, in an 1887 letter to Tynan, the young Irish poet delineated the virtues of Tennyson's female characters (pp. 46-47). And, according to a revealing bit of information in Joseph Hone's biography of Yeats, not long after moving to London in 1887, he discussed with John Todhunter the dramatic effectiveness of "The Lotos-Eaters."⁶

Still, considering the renown of Tennyson, the references Yeats throughout his lifetime made to the Victorian poet are unexpectedly sparse. The *Autobiography* and the letters are studded with allusions to poets not more illustrious and often less so. This relatively infrequent mentioning of Tennyson may explain why his considerable influence on the early Yeats has been virtually ignored. The only detailed treatment of the kinship between the early Yeats and Tennyson is Marvin Glasser's unpublished dissertation (New York University, 1962): *The Early Poetry of Tennyson and Yeats: A Comparative Study*, which focuses on thematic rather than phraseological similarities between the two young poets.⁷ Then, in a 1966 study, William Tindall notes that Yeats's "The Indian to His Love" is a "vision of an island of tranquillity, with peahens dancing on smooth lawns, and the cooing of Tennyson's 'burnished dove' to remind the poet and his dream girl how far away are the unquiet lands."⁸ Yet the bulk of Yeats studies—including such book-length treatments as those of Albright, Bloom, Eddins, Ellman, Harris, Levine, and Marcus—are curiously neglectful of the massive Tennyson influence. Most of the critical fanfare has centered on the influence of the Romantics. Donald Stauffer expresses the general sentiment when he says that Yeats is "of the tribe of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Blake and Shelley."⁹ Yeats laid the groundwork for the attitude when he remarked in his autobiography that he spent four years delving into Blake and when he praised Shelley and Keats as "pure artists" (pp. 99, 298). Such comments served to direct the attention of Yeats commentators to the pages of the Romantics and, at the same time, to deflect interest from the leaves of Tennyson.

Why did Yeats have so precious little to say about the bard to whom he owed so much? There are a couple of possible answers to this. One is that Yeats's father, an exalted figure in the eyes of the son, often and at length castigated the Poet Laureate.¹⁰ This deprecation of Tennyson dovetailed with the general decline of his reputation in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The strictures from the two fronts—paternal and societal—militated against Yeats's making any open avowal of affection¹¹ for the poet whose escapist fancies coincided so winsomely with his own. Perhaps the boy Yeats was even compelled to read Tennyson on the sly, clandestinely poring over the dog-eared pages of the taboo poet. And if merely reading Tennyson were a mildly

5. *Autobiography*, p. 94. Incidentally, the "roadway" of the concluding stanza is the only word in the poem not listed in the Tennyson concordance. Yeats likely remembered the "broad ways" of Solomon, 3:2: "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways."

6. W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 67.

7. See *Dissertation Abstracts*, XXIV (April, 1964), 4174.

8. W. B. Yeats (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 10. The work is part of the Columbia Essays on Modern Writers.

9. *The Golden Nightingale* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 28.

10. See, for example, Hone, pp. 38, 290.

11. Yeats's sole noteworthy tribute to Tennyson occurs in the December, 1892, issue of *Bookman*. In reviewing *The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and other Poems*, Yeats speaks of the Laureate's "marvelous picturesque power" and "exalted reason and inspired temperance." Since Tennyson had died only two months before, Yeats's praise seems chiefly the offspring of propriety. The review is reprinted in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, collected and edited by John P. Frayne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

indecorous enterprise, actually writing in the vein of the maligned poet constituted a flagrant violation of the canons of both literary and filial propriety.

Was Yeats aware of how much "Innisfree" owed to Tennyson? That is a question probably insusceptible to a definitive answer. Yeats says in his autobiography that "Innisfree" was the first lyric that had any of his "own music" in it (p. 94), but the phrase is too cryptic to be of much help. In a letter to the writer, dated June 30, 1976, William E. Buckler suggests quite plausibly that "Yeats' memory retained a sort of residual language learned from Tennyson but not consciously thought of by the poet as such." Such a hypothesis is both conformable to what we know of the creative process and conducive to the maintenance of Yeats's professional integrity. While not necessarily rejecting the view, I should like to adopt, in a spirit of adventure, the alternative thesis—namely, that Yeats was conscious of his debt to Tennyson. Though more radical, this hypothesis helps to explain Yeats's rather peculiar attitude toward his first successful poem.

Throughout his life, Yeats sought to play down the poem. Hone relates that in a letter to Yeats, Robert Louis Stevenson described the poem as "quaint and airy, simple artful, and eloquent to the heart" (p. 81). Despite the panegyric, Yeats would never allow his publishers to quote from the letter. The biographer also notes that when a lady told Yeats "Innisfree" was the best poem in his 1895 collection, *Poems*, Yeats answered: "Please don't think the 'Lake Isle of Innisfree' is better than all the rest, for I don't" (p. 438). Then, in a 1901 letter to Robert Bridges, Yeats further complained: "I confess I grow not a little jealous of 'The Lake Isle' which has put the noses of all my other children out of joint" (p. 353). In her *Letters on Poetry*, Yeats' long-time friend Dorothy Wellesly has indicated, too, that the poet never liked to read his celebrated poem and that in fact "he hated all his early poems, and 'Innisfree' most of all."¹²

Now, if Yeats were in fact aware of his extensive borrowings from Tennyson, his attitude toward "Innisfree" could be explained the following way. It would have required a more-than-human self-effacement for the young poet not to have swelled at the almost illimitable praise heaped on his little poem. But, at the same time, it must have been a constant irritant to know that of all his early poems the one most extolled was the very one to which his own phraseological contribution was scantiest. And the tumultuous acclaim heightened the possibility that some perceptive reader would detect the telltale evidence that the fledgling poet

had cribbed from Tennyson, not only in "Innisfree" but also in other early poems.

For to read the early Tennyson—i.e., *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, 1830 and *Poems*, 1832—and immediately afterwards the Yeats of *Crossways* and *The Rose* is to undergo a *déjà vu* experience. Besides the phraseological affinities, the poems of all four collections are hallmarked by an unexplained weariness—it isn't exactly Weltschmerz—and by idle musings that partially assuage the young poets' too restless hearts. Sensitive to the Romantic-spawned censure of imitation—believing that the "imitator dooms himself to mediocrity"—Yeats might have felt deep down that his own early verse didn't match up to that of his towering predecessor. If anyone should realize he had modeled his poetry after Tennyson's, comparisons would begin. And those comparisons might bode ill for the Celtic mimic. Salvation lay in the avoidance of comparisons. To avert these, Yeats maintained virtual silence about Tennyson and, at the same time, trumpeted those poets—e.g., Blake, Shelley, Keats—whose influence on him was less.

Yeats probably found in the early works of Tennyson the kind of poetry that he and his Rhymer's Club friends wished to write. As Yeats notes in his autobiography, these young men were opposed to "all ideas, all generalisations that can be explained and debated"; they wanted to "create once more the pure work" (p. 102). Yeats might have been describing the poetry of the early Tennyson. In Arthur Hallam's essay-review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, the young Hallam described his bosom friend as possessed of a luxuriant imagination, capable of fine lyrical measures, and "unconnected with any political party or peculiar system of opinions."¹³ When Yeats read the review, as he is known to have done,¹⁴ he perhaps realized the aptness of the description, and in it recognized the poet he had so long admired. And when Hallam further remarked that those who had once felt the ineluctable charm of Tennyson's "impassioned song" could never escape it, Yeats may have marveled at the piercing accuracy of the observation.

When Yeats was an old man, he was asked: "Whom did you venerate as a young man, Mr. Yeats?" The poet's response was immediate: "Tennyson."¹⁵ The response may have amounted to more than a statement of fact; it may have been a confession.

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12. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 192.

13. "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry . . ." *The Englishman's Magazine* (August 1831), rpt. in *Remains in Verse* (Boston: Tickner and Fields, 1863), pp. 439-40.

14. See, for example, W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Dennis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 179.

15. The account is given in Hone, p. 36.

Victorian Group News

A. THE NEW YORK MEETING

28 December 1978, 10:15-11:30 AM, New York Hilton
Presiding: Richard Tobias, University of Pittsburgh
Program arranged by Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Harvard University,
for the Division on the Victorian Period

I. Business

II. Papers and Discussion: Victorian Literature and Religion

1. "Bruising the Serpent's Head: Typological Symbolism in Victorian Poetry," George P. Landow, Brown University
2. "Rights, Reason, and Redemption: Charlotte Bronte's Neo-Platonism," Sara Moore Putzell, Georgia Institute of Technology
3. "Tractarian Aesthetics: Analogy and Reserve in Keble and Newman," G. B. Tennyson, University of California (Los Angeles)
4. "High Tea and Matzo Balls: Religion in the Victorian Jewish Novel," Linda Gertner Zatlín, Morehouse College

B. THE VICTORIAN LUNCHEON

The Annual Victorian Division Luncheon will be held 28 December at l'Escargot, 47 West 55th Street, with cocktails at 11:45 and luncheon at 1:00 p.m. For reservations please send a check for \$12.00 by 15 December to Donald Stone, 60 West 66th Street, Apartment 26F, New York, N.Y. 10023.

C. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Northeast Victorian Studies Association Conference: "Victorian Mythologies," 20-22 April 1979, University of Rhode Island. For program information address Catherine Stevenson, Dept. of English, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Conn. 06117. For arrangements information address Wilfred Dvorak, Dept. of English, University of Rhode Island, Providence, R.I. 02908.

D. PROJECTS: REQUESTS FOR AID

DINAH MULLOCK CRAIK—Barry M. Maid needs manuscript material, contemporary references and reviews, and original place of publication of any periodical work. English Department, Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003.

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