

# The Victorian Newsletter

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Number 58

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Fall 1980

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Cover Illustration: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Black Cape*, from *Salome*

THE VICTORIAN NEWSLETTER is sponsored for the Victorian Group of Modern Language Association by the University of Florida and is published twice annually. Editorial and business communications should be addressed to Ward Hellstrom, English Department, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611. Please use *MLA Stylesheet* for form of typescript. Manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscription rates in the United States are \$5.00 for one year and \$9.00 for two years; foreign rates, including Canada, are \$6.00 per year. Checks should be made payable to *The Victorian Newsletter*.

# A Psychoanalytic Rereading of *David Copperfield*

Gordon D. Hirsch

If conventional, non-psychologically oriented "moralistic" critics of *David Copperfield* have tended to overstate the case for David's growth, learning, and personal development toward a mature, adult state in which "the undisciplined heart" will no longer hold sway, traditional psychoanalytic critics have perhaps also erred in focussing too narrowly on David's Oedipus complex—on the way in which Mr. Murdstone, the sexualized parent, cuts David off from the exclusive love of his mother and sets in motion David's book-long search for an image of the mother that he can possess, a search that finds expression in both his marriage choices, Dora Spenslow and Agnes Wickfield.<sup>1</sup> Undeniably, both of these traditional interpretations contain portions of the truth. There is an Oedipal drama depicted in this novel, a drama which sends David off on a quest for an idealized image of his mother, while other characters, most notably Steerforth and Uriah Heep, have projected onto them all the aggressive and sexual impulses that are split off from David. Surely, too, it is Dickens' conscious intention to depict David learning about the value of the disciplined heart, about the value of mature love in contrast to youthful infatuation—however many doubts we readers may finally have about the attractiveness of discipline (when we contemplate the Murdstones) or about the unattractiveness of immaturity (as it is manifested in, say, the Micawbers). I would suggest, however, that both the exclusive focus on David's Oedipal neuroses and the easy optimism of the didactic, intentionalist critics on the subject of David's growth to maturity are finally inadequate to describe the complexity and psychological verisimilitude of this book. Recent psychoanalytic theories may enable one to chart a course between the Scylla of moralism and the Charybdis of Oedipal reductivism.

A major thrust in the psychoanalytic theory of the past thirty years has been the recognition of the importance of

"the self" or identity—the sense in the individual of continuity, coherence, and integrity. The self as a psychic structure, analysts have found, begins to be formed in the first months of life, starting with the infant's initial attempts to differentiate his own body from otherness, to discover his separateness from the mother.<sup>2</sup> When the mother withdraws her breast from the suckling infant, or later when she leaves the room and the child finds himself temporarily alone, she precipitates a crisis which produces fear and anxiety in the child, while at the same time she initiates a process of development by which the child comes to recognize his separateness, a process that ends in what some analysts call "individuation." Typically, such temporary separations and losses are experienced not only as crises but also as opportunities for making a game of the experience, for mastering one's feelings of grief and rage, for discovering one's inner resources and strength. The self as a principle of psychological integrity has its origin in these early events, then, but this process of identity-formation continues beyond infancy, into childhood, and even through adult life. At times it is progressive, while at other times there may be a reversion to earlier modes of relating to the world. But a life history may be seen as a process with enough consistency that an individual's behavior at any given point can be related in some way, however complexly, to a continuum of behavior that extends back to his early experiences of self-object differentiation.<sup>3</sup>

In light of the emphasis placed by recent psychoanalytic theorists on the experiences of separation and loss, and on their importance to the developmental process, the number of times these two words actually appear in *David Copperfield* is quite striking. The word "loss," for instance, figures prominently in two chapter titles (Chapter 30 is "A Loss" and Chapter 31 is "A Greater Loss," referring respectively to the death of Barkis and to the elopement of Little Emily with

1. Many critics have written on David's emotional and intellectual growth in *David Copperfield*, but the classic study is Gwendolyn B. Needham's "The Undisciplined Heart of *David Copperfield*," *NCF*, 9 (1954), 81-107. Among the others taking this approach are George Ford in his introduction to the Riverside edition of *David Copperfield* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), pp. v-xv; Sylvère Monod in *Dickens the Novelist* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1968), pp. 275-369; and Jerome H. Buckley in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 28-43.

The major psychoanalytic studies of the novel are these: Jack Lindsay, *Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Andres Dakers, 1950), pp. 288-292; Leonard Manheim, "The Personal History of David Copperfield," *AI*, 9 (1952), 21-43; Manheim, "Floras and Doras: The Women in Dickens' Novels," *TSL*, 7 (1965), 181-200; Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963); and E. Pearlman, "David Copperfield Dreams of Drowning," *AI*, 28 (1971), 391-403.

2. Or mothering person of whichever sex. Issues of separation and individuation are developmentally crucial whether or not the mothering

person is actually the child's mother.

3. The psychoanalysts whose ideas are reflected in this discussion are Erik H. Erikson, George S. Klein, Heinz Kohut, and Margaret S. Mahler. Their most relevant works for my argument are: Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963); Klein, *Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976); Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971); Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977); Mahler, *On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation* (New York: International Universities Press, 1970); and Mahler *et al.*, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). Mahler's studies of the process of separation and individuation particularly inform this paragraph, though I have been eclectic here as elsewhere. Freudians of the old school may take some comfort, however, from the fact that a recognition of the importance of the child's mastery of his separation anxiety is clearly already present in Freud's analysis of the *fort-da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920.)

Steerforth). Steerforth's mother touches on the book's recurring motif of "separation" between parent and child when she compares her grief to Mr. Peggotty's: "What compensation can you make to *me* for opening such a pit between me and my son? What is your separation to ours?"<sup>4</sup> David himself expresses Dickens' intuitive recognition of the importance of these psychological themes when he generalizes about the "separations that had marked my life" (830). These two words, "separation" and "loss," in fact appear prominently throughout the novel.

When one stops to consider, though, one should hardly be surprised that these words do figure conspicuously in the book, because the plot is actually based upon recurring experiences of separation and loss. The opening phase of the novel sounds this keynote by recording David's loss of his exclusive intimacy with his mother. As David leaves his old home with Peggotty to stay with her family in Yarmouth, during which absence from home his mother will marry Murdstone, this motif of separation and loss is heard clearly: "It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever" (26). David also muses here about "whether, if Peggotty were employed to lose me like the boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again" (27) — a reference, I presume, to a tale of the Hansel and Gretel type. Indeed, while the separation of David from his mother by Murdstone clearly enacts an Oedipal drama — note the unmistakable symbolism of: "My old dear bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off" (43) — it can also be argued that the father in the Oedipal stage should really be seen as "the principle of separation" who merely reactivates the child's earlier sense of loss at the conclusion of the symbiotic phase of his relationship with his mother, a phase in which the infant behaves as though he and his mother were essentially fused, a single system with a common boundary. In a sense the Oedipus complex is a reenactment of these earlier crises in the process of individuation, and in *David Copperfield* many things point to the earlier, pre-Oedipal phases of human development as offering the best way for understanding the psychological issues in the novel. It is significant, for example, that an important aspect of David's response to the loss of his mother, first through her marriage to Murdstone and later as a result of her death, is to remember her "only as the young mother of my earliest impressions" (133) and to recall "the days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us" (108). At the time of his mother's death, David expresses this same wish for reunion with the mother of his infancy in a rather more grisly fantasy: "The mother who lay in the grave was the mother of my infancy: the little creature in her arms [David's dead

half-brother], was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom" (133).

And it is not just David's loss of his mother that defines the predominant psychological pattern of this novel, but a whole series of experiences involving separation, loss of love, loss of love object, and blows to David's sense of himself and to his self-esteem (which I shall refer to as "narcissistic blows"). Thus David suffers from his neglect by the Murdstones after his mother's death; from being put to work at a menial occupation; from his loss of Little Emily, first to Ham and then to Steerforth; from his loss of Steerforth as a friend and idealized self-object; from the blow to his sense of self accorded by Aunt Betsey's apparent financial setbacks, which force David to set out once again on a new course in life; from the death of his wife Dora; and from the blows to his self-esteem inflicted throughout his life by such figures from the hostile or indifferent world at large as the young man with the donkey-cart who steals his trunk, the tramps and old-clothes dealers who threaten him on the road to Dover, and finally the numerous waiters, public house operators, coach drivers, and inn keepers who always manage to eat his food, assign him to inferior quarters, or cheat and swindle him in one way or another. Nor should one forget David's dealings with such characters as his landlady, Mrs. Cupp, and Steerforth's servant, Littimer, who are always infantilizing David, even as he aspires to manhood and independence. In short, the world of this novel is one in which there is little room to be found even for a modicum of self-esteem, let alone for the acting out of an occasional fantasy of grandiosity or omnipotence.

Nor is this persistent threat of loss or narcissistic blow by any means confined to David in the novel. Mr. Wickfield loses control over his affairs as a result of Uriah Heep's frauds; Aunt Betsey apparently loses the investments from which she lives; Peggotty loses her husband, Barkis, when he "goes out with the tide"; Ham and Mr. Peggotty lose Little Emily to Steerforth; later Mr. Peggotty will lose Ham in a drowning; Steerforth deserts Little Emily after they have lived together abroad for a time; Martha Endell loses her place in the community of Yarmouth and flees to London, where she becomes suicidal; Miss Mills, Dora's friend, is "unhappy in a misplaced affection; and ready to retire from the world as a result of this blow; and so on.

If these "losses" of love, or loved ones, or narcissistic blows generally are a recurrent cause of psychological crisis in the novel, the book also depicts problems derived from the failure of love objects sufficiently to individuate, to separate from one another, to perceive themselves to be separate entities. The classic example of this failure is the relationship between Mr. Wickfield and his daughter Agnes. Wickfield's problem, as Dickens tells us, is that he has made Agnes his "one motive in life" to the exclusion of all else; we are also told, interestingly,

4. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 469. Subsequent references to this edition appear parenthetically in the text.

that the reason for this "fusion" with his daughter is his attempt to counteract his grief, the sense of loss he felt upon the death of his wife, Agnes' mother. Steerforth and his mother also represent an instance of unsuccessful individuation, and so too, probably, do Uriah and his mother, and Dora and Mr. Spenlow. Though Dickens tends to show these problems arising in parent-child relations, he also seems to recognize that they can persist into adult relationships as well. Dora Spenlow's basic problem is, after all, that she has no self-esteem, no independence, no maturity. To reason with her is, from her perspective, as David discovers, to scold her. She insists on being treated in her marriage as a baby, as a "child wife."

Losses, separations, and narcissistic blows are, then, practically universal and inevitable in the world of *David Copperfield*. But to avoid them by failing to individuate, by failing to form a secure and independent identity apart from one's parent or spouse, is clearly an inadequate and even a dangerous response. The central question of this novel becomes, then, how these various blows may be surmounted and overcome, or, to adopt Shakespeare's familiar words, the *uses* of adversity. One of the best, if also one of the strangest, examples of this sort of "working through" is Mrs. Gummidge, who is the widow of a former sea-faring partner of Mr. Peggotty. Throughout the first part of the novel she lives with that gentle man, always brooding about her being "a lorn creature" and always "thinking of the old 'un," her late husband lost at sea. However when a still greater blow strikes the Peggotty household, Little Emily's affair with Steerforth, Mrs. Gummidge undergoes a radical transformation—becoming "devoted, . . . forgetful of herself, and . . . regardful of the sorrow about her" (458). For the first time, she becomes "loving and patient" (740), "the willingest, . . . the honestest-helping woman" (870).

Mrs. Gummidge's eventual ability to overcome her sense of loss and despair, her ability to turn a blow to some use—to learn from it and be changed for the better by it—seems to exemplify, if in a somewhat sentimental fashion, what Dickens shows happening to David Copperfield as well. David transcends his losses in at least four ways—as a child who defines himself by running away, as a mourner who can overcome his grief and even be strengthened by it, as a young man who can accept the "risks" of active courtship, and as a writer able to use his unhappy experiences for the material from which to weave his public, literary fictions.

When David takes his first extended decisive action in the novel—running away from the Murdstone and Grimby wine warehouse to his Aunt Betsey—he justifies himself to his aunt in this way: "I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you" (191). The pronoun "it" here lacks a clearly stated antecedent, and the syntactical gap thus created between the two sentences invites commentary and elaboration. "It" certainly refers to "this kind of treatment by the Murdstones," to supply the implicit antecedent, but the ungrammatical

"it" also suggest that what is really important here is how David feels about that treatment. In other words, the first sentence suggests, upon rereading, that David is being offered a self-image by the Murdstones which he finds simply impossible, and the second sentence expresses David's determination not to accept this definition of himself which has been supplied by his new guardians. David is using his misfortune, using his anger at this attack upon his self-image, and in the best sense he is exploiting his narcissism and indulging his grandiosity to "form [the] great resolution" of running away to "make another beginning," as two chapter headings from this part of the novel put it. By repudiating an unacceptable self-image, in short, he is in fact defining himself. Feeling rejected and lost, he runs away in order that he may discover who he is.

Second, David learns how to mourn. There are hints that he will learn the uses of grief even when his mother dies early in the novel. There is an affecting passage describing David's behavior at school when he is told of his mother's death: he reports that he feels "an orphan in the wide world," but he also recalls that the importance which this distinction gave him among his schoolfellows "was a kind of satisfaction to me" (124). This may sound a bit selfish, but it is also touching and rings oddly true; surely one of the consolations in mourning is the attention, concern, and sympathy of others. A more significant process of mourning, though, is recounted in David's response to the death of Dora. David is greatly shaken at first, but he gradually works through his grief as he follows the customary Romantic prescriptions of travel and communion with Nature in the Swiss Alps. Agnes Wickfield's letter to David abroad makes very clear the uses of such grief and affliction, which the novel dramatizes:

[Agnes] knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial and emotion would exalt and strengthen it. . . . She knew that in me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was. (815)

Third, the love for Agnes Wickfield which David is at last able to recognize and to express upon his return to England after three years' absence should not be underestimated, whatever uneasiness a reader might feel about Agnes' identification with a pre-separation maternal image—a difficulty to which I will return later. Still, it is significant that David can at least broach his love to Agnes, even at the risk of upsetting their long-standing platonic "brother/sister" relationship. In other words, David's decision actively to court Agnes after a period of depression and loneliness should be regarded as important and must not be dismissed as merely a resort to a wishful Oedipal fantasy. David's movement from isolation to interaction once again is presented by the novel in a context where the risks of failure are underscored.

Finally, since I have just been speaking about *Liebe*, love, I should address that other area of human behavior in which Freud thought a good measure of mental health might be taken, *Arbeit*—in this case David's discovery of his life's work as a novelist. It is worth noting that David's first reference to the world of fiction appears early in the novel when he describes his "being daily more and more shut out and alienated from his mother" (55), in compensation for which he turns to reading in his father's library. As David puts it himself: "It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favorite characters in [books]—as I did" (56). Participation in the world of fiction, in other words, begins for David as an attempt to compensate for his feelings of separation and loss. As everyone knows, David gradually discovers his vocation as a novelist, and the repeated tributes in the novel to his growing fame suggest much about the importance of this sort of reinforcement not only for David but also for Dickens. One significant passage, too, describes the way that David, during his period abroad of mourning for Dora, writes a work of fiction "with a purpose growing, not remotely, out of my experience" (816). Once again, the uses of the past, even past griefs, are terribly important: they may provide the impetus for writing and even the material out of which one constructs one's fiction.

Clearly this attitude toward past losses, separations, and narcissistic blows is relevant to Dickens' own perspective on his experience and its relation to his fiction, particularly its relation to *David Copperfield*. This is, after all, Dickens' "autobiographical novel," and it represents his only full, published account in fiction of his feelings associated with being rejected by his parents and sent to work at Warren's Blacking. Even the terrifying early parts of this novel, however, in which David is pretty much a child-victim, are distanced by the temporal shifts which characterize the narrative—particularly the sense that these events are being recalled by an adult novelist who is no longer very threatened by them. And the presentation of these once terrific experiences in the context of the narrator's tone of humor or pathos or wise detachment marks the extent of their transformation into something that is in fact usable by the older David Copperfield, who sets them down in words. In short, the style of the novel itself consistently underscores David's magical transformation of his past.

Yet Dickens also makes it clear that this is not an easy or unequivocal victory. Mr. Dick, whose name of course suggests Dickens', is another author, like David, but he is so fixated on the traumas of the past that he is unable to keep them out of his writing, where they take "the figure" of King Charles's head—a metaphor that again points to Charles Dickens' own obsessions. Mr. Dick, then, is unable to transform or disguise the traumas in his life successfully; he has failed to master them. Psychological

crises may be worked through, as in the examples from David's life discussed above, but Dickens is painfully aware that they may alternatively result in some rather debilitating compulsions or other neuroses, as is the case with Mr. Dick. Another indication, perhaps, of just how seriously Dickens intends this less happy outcome to be taken is suggested by the presence of the "poor lunatic gentleman" who "was always sitting at [David's] little window" in his childhood home (320); Dickens seems to be suggesting that there, but for the grace of God, goes David. Indeed, many of those classic Victorian passages in *David Copperfield* which describe David's commitment to "earnestness" and hard work also glance at such things as his "many talents neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him" (606). In other words, the commitment to work is made in the face of, and in part as a response to, a nearly overwhelming sense of personal neurosis, as seems to be the case also with Thomas Carlyle, from whose anti-selfconsciousness theories of labor this part of Dickens' ideology is derived. David's novel-writing, then, is a largely successful attempt to work through, master, and indeed make use of his past experiences and traumas, but even this achievement is viewed as not so far removed from other, more compulsive, less healthy responses to similar traumata—witness Mr. Dick.

Perhaps this will explain why one must not read this novel as a simple sort of *Bildungsroman*—at least if one associates the term *Bildung* with a notion of the complete and harmonious development of the personality—because the reader is aware that what David achieves at the end is a rather fragile, tenuous, and probably reversible kind of mastery. Still, this potential reversibility of outcome is, after all, part of Dickens' mimetic excellence, part of his fidelity to life. For example, however welcome and "progressive" David's rather late active courtship of Agnes may be, it is also clear that she represents a regressive and wishful answer to his longings; there can be no question but that his dear "sister" embodies an image of the all-good "pre-separation" mother who is unfailingly devoted to David. This maternal identification has of course been frequently remarked upon by critics and comes through in many different ways, but since I have been focussing here on issues of separation and fusion, I would note particularly one description of David and Agnes walking in the fields together after their marriage, "never to be divided more" (863).<sup>5</sup> Agnes is merely a less absurd version of Mrs. Micawber, who will "never desert" her husband and who will constantly have one child or another nursing at "Nature's fountains"; she is an image of the nurturing, faithful, supportive, pre-separation mother. She is David's "good angel" in more senses than one; in a way, David is also marrying an image of his best self. So David's marriage contains within itself elements that are both narcissistic and mature, both regressive and

5. This wish for an end to all separations at the close is a powerful image in Dickens' novels generally. Compare the last words in the revised

ending of *Great Expectations*: "I saw no shadow of another parting from her."

progressive—as is so often the case with marriages in real life as well.

Another way of measuring the limits of David's maturation is to note that he is able to turn only certain portions of his life around from passivity to activity. He does run away from Murdstone drudgery, work through his grief for Dora, actively court Agnes, and learn to write from his personal experience. But he stands rather idly by while that pair of unlikely heroes, Wilkins Micawber and Tommy Traddles, undertake the exposure of Uriah Heep. It is significant in this regard that Uriah expresses his conviction that David has organized this "conspiracy" to unmask him (747), whereas in fact David has had little or nothing to do with it. Similarly, it is oddly enough Mr. Dick, not David, who is left to reconcile Dr. Strong and his wife. And David keeps some distance away from Little Emily after her return from the continent; even when Emily suffers from Rosa Dartle's tongue-lashing, David remains passive and concealed, refusing to intervene.

The novel *David Copperfield* is, then, a *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist's personal development is conspicuously mixed, partial, and incomplete. The book is more faithful to psychological reality and to life itself, perhaps, than to any simple thesis about personal growth and development. It shows instead the way that losses and narcissistic blows may produce different

results: the crises they precipitate may on the one hand end in grief, passivity, madness, wishful fantasy, or regression; or they may on the other hand result in a kind of growth, activity, working through, and transcendence. But these different outcomes are related, linked, and always reversible. The close of the novel does not portray a David who is fully mature and free from all neurosis, fantasy, and conflict, but rather a David-author who has grown and changed in some areas of his life, while he has reached an impasse in others. In this way the novel resembles those other favorite mid-nineteenth century literary forms, the dramatic monologue and the Victorian quest poem, as much as it does the *Bildungsroman*. Like the trumpet blast of Browning's Childe Roland as he comes at last to his dark tower, the note that David sounds as he emerges at the end of his journey through what he calls the forest of difficulty seems less an announcement of his completion and fulfillment than a self-progressive statement. Its message is: "I am the sum of my experiences. You have read about them and now know how to understand who I am." Such a conclusion implies that David's psychological development, like that of the author of this book in 1850, is yet in process and unfolding.

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## Midas and The Bell-Jar: Carlyle's Poetics of History

Richard L. Stein

From his earliest reviews of German literature and thought, Carlyle wrote as a cultural historian, analyzing the dominant spiritual modes of both past and present. The titles of the classic essays of 1829 and 1831—"Signs of the Times" and "Characteristics"—indicate the object and method of that analysis. Carlyle focuses upon significant details and representative images, the aspects that illuminate a whole. This material also determines his approach, or style. The search for suggestive instances is conducted through a suggestive and evocative prose, writing that seems less discursive than rhetorical, a collection of "signs" or stunning "characteristics." It is not history in the usual sense, a mere account of events or summary of opinions. Thoroughness and factual precision are not its main components. Carlyle works in a symbolic mode, plumbing surfaces for latent meanings,

physical facts for metaphysical patterns. It is a method clearly poetic, dealing in what Hayden White has recently termed "metahistory."<sup>1</sup> Addressing us from a visionary stance, as "the poor knowing person of this epoch," he transforms each of his subjects into what John Sterling becomes in Carlyle's symbolic biography, "an expressive emblem of his time."<sup>2</sup> "Events are written lessons," Carlyle announces in *Chartism*, "glaring in huge hieroglyphic picture writing, that all may read and know them" (XXIX, 155). Such a description applies to his own historical writing as well.

History that crosses "the boundaries of fiction" (to borrow George Levine's useful phrase)<sup>3</sup>, or crosses them too far or too often, runs the risk of being dismissed as mere entertainment. Carlyle, whose suspicion of fiction runs deep, attacks Sir Walter Scott on these grounds, and

1. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973).

2. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H.D. Traill, 30 volumes (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896-1899; New

York: Scribners, 1903), XI, 6. All subsequent references to volume and page numbers in this edition will be made parenthetically in the text.

3. George Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968).

they underlie Oscar Wilde's characterization of *The French Revolution* as a great historical novel.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Carlyle himself was well aware, even if it were possible to strip history-writing of all fictional or poetic elements the result would be disappointing—not only unreadable but lacking an essential depth and power. A wholly factual prose would be wholly dead. The poetics of Carlyle's history-writing give the past presence. Ornate imagery, the prophetic intonations of the narrative voice, or the general vitality of the narrative itself create the illusion of a living world: the past gains immediacy, a reality that can be experienced as we read. As in the case of a writer as different from Carlyle as Macaulay, dramatizing history intensifies its significance and renders it psychologically convincing. Carlyle's appreciation of the importance of this approach is stressed in one of the laudatory sections of his essay on Scott. The *Waverley Novels*, we are told

taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men. . . (XXIX, 77).

Even more than does Scott, Carlyle extends this sense of vitality into his representations of the modern world. The intensity of his prose—every aspect of his poetics—sustains our sense that the present no less than the past is an appropriate arena for what he calls Prophetic History (XXVIII, 170). The potential remains for all the forms of human vitality Carlyle discovers in the past—visionary revelation, heroic action, apocalyptic occurrence. In Eliot's phrase, "History is now and England."<sup>5</sup>

Bringing history to life in a written form also requires distance. Familiarity, or an excessive immersion in the details of any historical world, deadens our capacity for insight. Carlyle attacks Scott for being too much of his own time; "Signs of the Times" warns of a similar, contemporary complacency, a growing intellectual mechanization (Arnold later adopted the same word to criticize the blunting of modern consciousness in *Culture and Anarchy*). Most successful works of art force us to break down, or at least modify, our habitual responses. Current theory of narrative stresses the importance of

this: fiction must render the familiar unfamiliar to have significance for a reader. Coleridge's account in *Biographia Literaria* of the poetic assumptions of the *Lyrical Ballads* exemplifies the prominence of this view in Romantic aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> Carlyle's poetic treatment of history belongs in the same tradition, following the Romantics for metaphysical as well as aesthetic reasons. Familiarity (from his perspective) is dangerous insofar as the "things" that constitute our surroundings are not simply material; poetic dislocations from ordinary reality force us to question their possible inner or higher significance. Familiarity breeds (or is bred by) contempt—for the spiritual dimension of worldly things and events. Carlyle will have none of this, but it is important to insist that his response isn't simply knee-jerk mysticism. His is a creative attempt to transform the world for his audience, to enable a reader to experience his own radical vision of history. Material reality must be appropriated and recreated. No less than any work of art, his essays create their own world.

There is no need to provide one more critical proof of the fact that Carlyle is what he calls "an artist in history" (in "On History," XXVII, 90), a title that distinguishes an exceptional writer from the more common sort of "artisan." But I do wish to comment at some length on one of the most remarkable examples of his poetic method of distancing the reader from the familiar "realities" of contemporary life. It is taken from *Past and Present*, his most sustained and successful exercise in creating a poetry of modern history. The passage appears in the opening paragraph of that book, setting the tone for what follows and introducing Carlyle's unique historical methods. With the comprehensiveness of myth, that first paragraph reduces the entire world of the "hungry forties" to a verbal *paysage moralisé*, a tableau conceived (as the title of the chapter alerts us) in terms of the story of Midas.

England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows; waving with yellow harvests; thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, cunningest, and the

4. Wilde's remark appears in "The Decay of Lying," *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Richard Ellmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 304.

5. See the fifth section of "Little Gidding" in *Four Quartets*:  
And any action

Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat  
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.  
We die with the dying;  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them.  
The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree  
Are of equal duration. A people without history  
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern  
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails  
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel  
History is now and England. (lines 227-239)

6. Of particular interest are two works by Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974). I have explored some of the shortcomings of this critical perspective for the treatment of nineteenth-century historical fiction in "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser," forthcoming in *Novel*. In the case of Coleridge, I have in mind the well-known discussion in the fourteenth chapter of the *Biographia* on the "objects originally proposed" in composing the *Lyrical Ballads*, particularly his explanation of Wordsworth's attempt "to give the charm of novelty to the things of every day." See J. Shawcross's edition (2 volumes, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1907), II, 5-6.

willingest our Earth ever had; these men are here; the work they have done, the fruit they have realized is here, abundant, exuberant on every hand of us: and behold, some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth, saying, "Touch it not, ye workers, ye master-workers, ye master-idlers; none of you can touch it, no man of you shall be the better for it; this is enchanted fruit!" (X, 1)

Familiarity has been exploded by radical simplification. The complexities of contemporary politics are translated (translated out, some might say) into a set of clear moral absolutes, implied in the story of Midas itself. The very use of a popular myth as a paradigm for modern events forecasts the point made at greater length throughout the book: the fundamental patterns of history repeat themselves, and it is these which constitute the genuine significance of a particular epoch. As Herbert L. Sussman has shown in a fine, recent study, the model for Carlyle's historical method is Biblical typology, according to which the whole of history is viewed in terms of related figural patterns.<sup>7</sup>

The message of the Midas story is one that echoes throughout Carlyle's writings: violate the laws of nature, and retribution will follow. Yet the myth has more subtle implications as well. The king's punishment resulted from the misuse of an extraordinary gift from the gods, a wish; in this sense, the story concerns spiritual freedom and the dangers of its abuse. Midas becomes a figure of individual choice as well as public responsibility (and historically the word "Midas" was used as "a title of all the kings of Phrygia"<sup>8</sup>). But he also represents an atrophy of human faculties that alienates man from nature. In wishing for the golden touch in the first place Midas betrayed his blindness to the inherent richness of the world, a sin that includes both greed and insensitivity. The golden touch punishes him with a reminder of his own failings: his "gift" entails the loss of one of the senses, perpetually reminding Midas of his inability—literally and figuratively—to feel. A large portion of his guilt, then, is a failure of responsiveness, which explains the relation of this well-known story to another—the tale of his unwise preference for the music of Pan to that of Apollo, for which the god bestowed on Midas a set of ass's ears. Richard Altick has pointed out that Carlyle collapses the two stories together in *Past and Present*, alluding to them interchangeably in the opening chapter.<sup>9</sup> Their co-presence reminds us that the freedom

of the hero is bound up in his ability to attune himself to universal harmonies: "See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature *being* everywhere music, if you can only reach it" (V, 84; Carlyle's italics).

The story of Midas, then, is not simply a literary device used to engage us in the issues of *Past and Present*. It contains those issues, suggests a serious analysis of them, and forecasts the conclusions offered in the rest of the book. As an *exemplum* on greed, for instance, it anticipates Carlyle's scathing treatment of modern financial theory and practice. Lust for gold alienates man from the world, petrifying the sources of life for their intended recipient. But this version of England's problem also implies a solution, a reevaluation of wealth of the kind taken up after Carlyle by Ruskin, among others.<sup>10</sup> Arguments of this sort operate at a deliberate remove from ordinary (familiar) politics. Their ideals can be realized only by means of what Mark Schorer has termed (in reference to another radical, Blake) a "politics of vision," conducted at the deeper level of absolute moral choice. This is the politics of the Carlylean hero—a visionary who has been granted the same sort of insight into the nature of things Carlyle possesses. Hence, it is not simply that Carlyle represents the contemporary world poetically: as in the myth of Midas-England he tends to define political or social problems as moral ones, for which the first, indispensable step towards resolution is an act of recognition. In this sense the poetic treatment of history is both the means and the end of *Past and Present*. The basis of Carlyle's politics is perception; what he offers is not a social program but a lesson in discerning the eternal patterns according to which any successful policies, past or present, are formed.<sup>11</sup>

What I am discussing is partly mysticism, partly mystification. It is a strain evident through much of Carlyle's political writing, specially before 1850. The poetic treatment of substantive issues achieves a high level of moral authority, to be sure, but it also remains somewhat elusive, difficult to assess or criticize in specific, practical terms. At the heart of Carlyle's radicalism, it seems to me, is his gift for reducing the complexities of contemporary politics to absolute moral alternatives. But the breadth of this approach also may keep the reader at a distance from its programmatic implications. It is one of the points of resemblance between Carlyle and his self-declared "pupil" Ruskin, and it may help account for some of their appeal as social thinkers. Although both

7. Herbert L. Sussman, *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1979), esp. pp. 3-31. For another excellent survey of Victorian typology see George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979).

8. See *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, compiled and edited by Sir Paul Harvey (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 272.

9. *Past and Present*, edited by Richard D. Altick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 12n.

10. Ruskin's obligation to Carlyle's poetic treatment of social problems is apparent in *The King of the Golden River* (1851) and all his

subsequent theoretical writings on political economy. *Unto This Last* (1860), in defining wealth as that which "avails towards life," simply expands upon the implications of Carlyle's anthropomorphized portrait of England "dying of inanition." *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 volumes (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), XVII, 84.

11. This is an argument extended to all Victorian prose writers by John Holloway in *The Victorian Sage* (New York: Norton, 1965): "What [the sage] has to say is not a matter just of 'content' or narrow paraphrasable meaning, but is transfused by the whole texture of his writing as it constitutes an experience for the reader" (pp. 10-11).



disavowed a readership that cared only for the elegance of their prose, there is a tendency in their political writings to move towards moral generalities and rhetorical flourishes, especially in their earlier work (Ruskin until the mid-1860's, Carlyle until the mid-1840's). The weaknesses of their later political essays seem to me directly proportional to the specificity of their proposals; it is not that their views have changed drastically, but that arguments which may have been appealing in more abstract terms can chill the blood when translated into programs for action. I suspect that it is this later tendency in Carlyle that provoked Arnold's characterization of him as a "moral desperado." An opposite case has been made impressively by Philip Rosenberg in *The Seventh Hero*, which presents Carlyle, especially in his early work, as a philosopher of action. Rosenberg, who dismisses the later works as uncharacteristic, describes Carlyle's failure after 1840 as a failure of development, marked by "dull repetitiousness... even the style becomes a hollow aping to itself."<sup>12</sup> Yet the habit of repetition begins as early as *Sartor Resartus*, or even earlier, and is one of the signs of Carlyle's poetic methodology. Prophets repeat themselves; Carlyle is no exception. But after the 1840 that repetition grows in desperation, as he recognizes that his earlier pleadings have not been heeded. It is not the reappearance of early insights that mars his work after 1840 but the franker reference to their application.

This discussion of Carlyle's failures is intended to point towards the sources of his strength. For the most part, his social pronouncements are firm but generalized, referring to moral alternatives and *modes* of thought and action rather than to specific proposals: "Work thou in well-doing!" "Produce! Produce!" "Choose well your Governor!" "Thou who prophesiest, who believest, begin thou to fulfill" (the first two are from *Sartor*, I, 146 & 157; the third is from *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, XX, 156; the last is from *Past and Present*, X, 296).<sup>13</sup> "Alas," he declares in "The Hero as King," "we know very well that ideals can never be completely embodied in practice. Ideals must ever lie a very great way off; and we will right thankfully content ourselves with any not intolerable approximation thereto!" (V, 197). Carlyle everywhere attacks the "mechanical" adherence to social or ideological formulae, which by their very nature become outmoded and need to be replaced. If they are not abandoned in time, revolutions erupt, for any society governed by such hollow precepts has lost touch with its proper cosmic models. When leaders are found to supply newly articulated ideals, they do so in their own ways, often through impulsive action, adhering "sincerely" to

the dictates of an inner being attuned to the laws of nature. This, in fact, is the primary attribute of all heroes: a visionary self-reliance outside any man-made codes. Carlyle repeatedly calls for the resurgence of such leadership, and in so doing makes it clear that any new "governors" or "captains" will have to determine policy themselves, when the time comes. Specific measures tend not to be predicted, in part because heroes are unpredictable. It is only logical for Carlyle to add that the proper stance for their followers is faith. Carlyle is not alone in this reliance on broad moral categories of analysis. Similar terms emerge in the social writings of Dickens, Ruskin, and Arnold—each of whom shows significant obligations to Carlyle. And each of them follows Carlyle's pattern of moving from penetrating commentaries on specific social problems to generalized, abstract solutions. It is, in fact, a Victorian pattern, related to the pervasive suspicion of extensive governmental interference in social relations. And it is not necessarily a defensive pattern, a confession of practical failure. In Carlyle especially, as I have been suggesting, the poetic representation of modern history implies solutions of its own. The problem announced in all of his writings is essentially the same: the alienation of individuals or societies from cosmic order—the problem of Midas, transposed to assorted historical settings. But the very terms of this analysis define an alternative spiritual condition. Viewing the world in terms of Carlyle's poetic models re-establishes that lost connection with the cosmos—for his readers, at least, who themselves may become the basis of a new order. Vision is the precondition of heroic action, and for that matter it is the precondition of any valid choice: even the acceptance of a leader requires insight. No less than Blake, Carlyle writes to shatter "mind-forged manacles." All solutions begin as individual solutions, and all individual solutions begin within.

It is at this point that Carlyle's historical writing becomes ahistorical, insistently so, an insistence that is perhaps best expressed in "Signs of the Times." That essay contains Carlyle's first major analysis of the nature of modern history: his discussion of the "mechanical" age identifies industrialism as a pervasive force in individual lives. Yet although he acknowledges the reality of historical force, he still insists upon the possibility of freedom; it is a translation into historical terms of a Calvinist notion of free will. The essay, then, locates a "spirit of the age" only to urge readers to transcend it, a transcendence possible to anyone who can recover "the grand secrets of Necessity and Freewill, of the mysterious relations to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe..." (XXVII, 64). In "Characteristics" he writes that for his world "not

12. Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), p. x.

13. One of the earliest signs of the emergence of an authoritarian strain in Carlyle's thought appears in *Chartism* (1839), a book radical enough in its indictment of social conditions to win the admiration of the young Frederick Engels. But it ends recommending two "great things" to the "practical man"—universal education and

general emigration. The second is hardly a solution at all—rather it suggests that no solution for English problems can be found inside England; in effect, Carlyle sentences the working classes to transportation for their sufferings. The sternness of that edict leads one to wonder whether Carlyle's views on education would seem less humane once they were set forth in any detail (as is the case when Ruskin describes *his* formulae for educating the masses).

Godhead, but an iron, ignoble circle of Necessity embraces all things" (XXVIII, 30). "Signs of the Times" shows that this imprisonment is illusory. Our subjugation to mechanism is in reality a problem of belief: "Men have grown mechanical in head and heart. . . . They have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force, of any kind" (XXVII, 63).

The subjective basis of the modern predicament requires an equally personal solution. This is announced in the celebrated closing sentence of "Signs of the Times" — a model for the Victorian politics of the heart:

To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on *himself*. (XXVII, 83; Carlyle's italics)

It is important to recognize that this statement cannot stand alone as the "coda" of the essay. Carlyle's subject has been the erosion of will and action by the dominant force of machinery: how, then, is the process of self-perfection to begin? What is needed is to change beliefs, and Carlyle recognizes that this is a function of art. His solution to the problem of freedom is expressed through the most poetic image of the essay:

If Mechanism, like some glass bell, encircles and imprisons us; if the soul looks forth on a fair country which it cannot reach, and pines, and in its scanty atmosphere is ready to perish, — yet the bell is but of glass; 'one bold stroke to break the bell in pieces, and thou art delivered!' (XXVII, 81)

The image presents the problem of freedom in terms of vision and the soul; the "action" it describes is wholly spiritual, an instance of idealism rather than ideopraxis.<sup>14</sup> Thus "Signs of the Times" ends beyond politics. In shattering the glass of his imagined bell-jar determinism, Carlyle steps outside history.

Two generations after this essay, there is a curious echo of Carlyle's pronouncements in a most unlikely text —

Pater's essay on Winckelmann. He too examines the problem of the function of art in a world seemingly bereft of the possibility of freedom:

What modern art has to do in the service of culture is so to rearrange the details of modern life, so to reflect it, that it may satisfy the spirit. And what does the spirit need in the face of modern life? The sense of freedom. That naive, rough sense of freedom, which supposes a man's will to be limited, if at all, only by a will stronger than his, he can never have again. The attempt to represent it in art would have so little verisimilitude that it would be flat and uninteresting. The chief factor in the thoughts of the modern mind concerning itself is the intricacy, the universality of natural law, even in the moral order. For us, necessity is not, as of old, a sort of mythological personage without us, with whom we can do warfare. It is rather a magic web woven through and through us, like that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network, subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world. Can art represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom?<sup>15</sup>

Pater, of course, holds no brief for action of any sort; what he celebrates here is only the *sense* of freedom that can be achieved by great modern art. Carlyle espouses a doctrine of action and change, and yet his exhortation to freedom is an account of the triumph of the contemplative spirit, a triumph of the visionary, who recreates the world mentally by an act of what Pater later termed "the will as vision."<sup>16</sup> The bell-jar of spiritual bondage is shattered by the insight that its walls are "but of glass" — by the very act of naming it. Carlyle here discloses himself as one of the company of Pater's modern artists, who transform history into images to create the sense of freedom, and for whom that freedom is a function of the word.

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14. I am arguing a case opposite to the one made by Rosenberg, who places the "Ideopraxist" at "the apex of Carlyle's hierarchy" (pp. 54-6).

15. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 230-231.

16. "The Will as Vision" is the title of the final chapter in the third book of Pater's novel *Marius the Epicurean*.

# The Uncanny Critic of Brasenose: Walter Pater and Modernisms

Sharon Bassett

This dialectic method, this continuous discourse with one's self, being, for those who prosecute it with thoroughness, coextensive with life itself—a part of the continuous company we keep with ourselves through life—will have its inequalities; its infelicities; above all, its final insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

The “dialectic method”—even experienced as the absence of method—compensates modern aesthetic theory for loss of the certainty that ought to have accrued from the systematic methodologies of Science and Religion. Theorists who describe and account for the “dialectic method” in historical terms are sometimes perceived as advocates of the modernism they describe. Their writings are labeled self-fulfilling prophecies, the very utterance of which produces decadent historicism and radical skepticism. Even Pater, in a passage that follows the one quoted above, admits that “there will always be much of accident in this essentially informal, this un-methodical, method; and, therefore, opportunities for misuse, sometimes consciously.” There is no sense in which Pater would exempt himself from the accidental qualities of his method.

After many years of languorous relegation to the *passé* impressionist-antiquarian scrap heap, devoid of intellectual interest or rigor, Pater has recently been recuperated by the American deconstructionists. In important essays by Harold Bloom and J. Hillis Miller we find Pater triangulated with Emerson and Nietzsche. For Miller, Pater comes out sounding very much like Miller when he was under the influence of Poulet: “Far from being, as is sometimes said, at liberty to make the work mean anything one likes, impressionism is rigorously bound by the work it describes.”<sup>2</sup> For Bloom, on the other hand, Pater contributes to our modernity by “de-idealizing the epiphany,” but like Miller's version of Pater, Bloom's comes to sound curiously like Bloom himself: “He [Pater] makes available to the coming age, when the mind will know neither itself nor the object but only the dumbfounding [*sic*] abyss that comes between.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is truly the test of Pater's modernity: that he can, chameleonlike, be ingested and absorbed by surprisingly alien critical systems. After all, in his characterization of Plato's dialectical method, Pater has bootlegged resonantly alien Arnoldian language into a context that directly subverts it. For Arnold the “mind's dialog with itself” indicates the weakness and sickness of the modern spirit, while in the fictive context Pater creates, the phrase becomes a

challenge to the strength and forbearance.

In 1857 when Arnold delivered his inaugural lecture in the Poetry Chair at Oxford, his argument was to be that the “modern element” in *any* literature was that aspect that most fully satisfied his ideal of “the simultaneous appearance of a great epoch and a great literature.” (497) The single occasion of this simultaneity Arnold finds, is in the literature of Periclean Athens, though the anecdote with which he introduces his talk, as well as the emotional limitations he finds in such later poets as Lucretius and Virgil, indicates that the real criterion for a great epoch and a great literature has been a strong and decisive leader. Arnold tells the story of the Buddha before whom a disciple presents himself “with the desire to be permitted to undertake a mission of peculiar difficulty.”

“Go then, O Purna,” are [Buddha's] words; “having been delivered, deliver; having been consoled, console; being arrived thyself at the farther bank, enable others to arrive there also.”

The image of modernity that we find in Arnold's efforts to deal with his present is always associated, as it often is in later writers, with the sense of having irreplaceably lost the leader or center or principle of order and health that would rescue modernity from its separation from the classic. This rescuing (“deliverance” is Arnold's word) takes place to the extent that one can contemplate “the present age” (a “spectacle of a vast multitude of facts awaiting and inviting . . . comprehension”),

having acquired that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us; when we have lost that impatient irritation of mind which we feel in presence of an immense, moving, confused spectacle which while it perpetually excites our curiosity perpetually baffles our comprehension.

Pater offers a consistently different idea of the modern—even, as we shall see, when Pater is “reading” similar texts. For example, in the 1868 essay-review on William Morris' recent publications offering a speculation on the degree to which the pastness of the past is recapturable, Pater presents a directly—or should one say indirectly?—opposing view from Arnold's. The essay is important because it becomes part of the famous “Conclusion.” Pater's discussion of Morris's *Jason* becomes a subtle

1. Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 185.

2. J. Hillis Miller, “Walter Pater: A Partial Portrait,” *Daedalus*, 105 (1976), 100.

3. Harold Bloom, “Walter Pater: The Intoxication of Belatedness,” *Yale French Studies*, 50 (1974), 172.

answer to Arnold's backward-looking "modernity":

In handling a subject of Greek legend, anything in the way of an actual revival must always be impossible. Such vain anti-quarianism is a waste of the poet's power. The composite experience of all the ages is part of each one of us; to deduct from that experience, to obliterate any part of it, to come face to face with the people of a past age, as if the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the eighteenth century had not been, is as impossible as to become a little child, or enter again into the womb and be born. But though it is not possible to repress a single phase of that humanity, which, because we live and move and have our being in the life of humanity, makes us what we are; it is possible to isolate such a phase, to throw it into relief, to be divided against ourselves in quest for it, as we may hark back to some choice space of our own individual life. We cannot conceive the age; we can conceive the element it has contributed to our culture; we can treat the subjects of the age bringing that into relief. Such an attitude towards Greece, aspiring to but never actually reaching its way of conceiving life, is what is possible for art.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Arnold's statement on the "modern element" defines to a considerable extent his appropriation of Hellenism, Pater with a typical twist uses his notion of the classical to define and characterize the task of "modernism." It may well be that it is the tension between these two views of modernity out of which the "method" of modern criticism emerges.

Pater's version of the "modern" (as well as his version of the "classic") embraces a deep tension within the cultural tradition that, for the sake of discrimination, Arnold shuns. Pater's incorporation of the mingled cultural tensions enables him alternately to subvert Arnold's cultural hierarchy on its own terms by pointing out an historical rationalization and at another time to subvert historicist claims by reverting to an idealist stand. Since *Plato and Platonism* is the most consistent and compelling instance of Pater's idealistic/historicist posture, as well as the place where the analogizes contemporary and "classic" concepts of nature, it displays especially cogent evidence of Pater's kind of "modernity."

*Plato and Platonism*, his university lectures on philosophy, shows Pater as the consummate teacher. In the chapter "The Doctrine of Plato," for example, he argues for the contemporaneity of disputes about "the One and the Many" by couching his analysis in terms that nearly parody Darwin's concluding, "It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank..." of *The Origin of Species*. Pater makes reference in 1893 to this inescapable text of modernism as if it were as remote from his audience as the *Philebus*, the really inaccessible subject of his lecture. The almost four decades since Darwin's text have given it a faintly quaint air: what had seemed in 1859 to be a startling departure from the classic view of

the world is by Pater's time quite dated. The image of the "tangled bank" — an evocative variation of the argument from design — already must be rewritten and reinterpreted.

We can best appreciate Pater's effort by recalling Darwin's sermonic paragraph:

Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.<sup>5</sup>

Darwin affirms here the law-like teleology of his otherwise "disturbing" account of the genesis of life. When the tangled bank image reappears in Pater's lecture, it has gone through a characteristic sea change. What has been presented as a demonstration of permanence within change, of design within the ferocious "war of nature," becomes in Pater's hands a demonstration of the residue of change that lingers within permanence and of the essential disparity of interest between the naturalist's optimism (based on the persistence of the species) and the individual (for whom, in the face of his individual mortality, the species is a remote abstraction). Pater directs the attention of his audience to the coming together and the dialectical interchange of these two points of view:

To that gaudy tangle of what gardens, after all, are meant to produce, in the decay of time, as we may think at first sight, the systematic, logical gardener put his meddlesome hand, and straightway all ran to seed; to *genus* and *species* and *differentia*, into formal classes, under general notions, and with — yes! with written labels fluttering on the stalks, instead of blossoms — a botanic or "physic" garden, as they used to say, instead of our flower-garden and orchard. And yet (it must be confessed on the other hand) what we actually see, see and hear, is more interesting than ever; the nineteenth century as compared with the first, with Plato's days or Homer's, the faces, the persons behind those masks which express so much, the flowers, or whatever it may happen to be they carry or touch. (*P & P*, p. 156)

Pater goes on in this passage to explain that while adherence to generalities and botanical abstractions seem at first to denude experience of its qualitative significance, these are in fact merely a middle state between the naive and unthinking immediacy of childhood and the penetratingly particularized interests of the cultured adult. The example Pater uses is that of the child who

4. "Poems by William Morris," *Westminster Review*, NS 34 (October, 1868), 146-47.

5. *The Origin of Species in Darwin: A Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 199.

must sacrifice his earlier pleasure when as a student he picks up again the sea shell that had once delighted him. Pater explains to his student audience that their giving up of "the concrete, the real and living product of nature, to a mere dry and abstract product of the mind" (*P&P*, p. 158) will only be temporary. When they return to that imaginary sea shore as adults, they will benefit from the dialectical transformation of both childish innocence and learned experience expressed, according to Pater,

By juxtaposition and co-ordination with what is ever more and more not it, [the sea shell] by the contrast of its very imperfection, at this point or that, with its own proper and perfect type, this concrete and particular thing has, in fact, been enriched by the whole colour and expression of the whole circumjacent world, concentrated upon, or as it were at focus in, it. By a kind of short-hand now, and as if in a single moment of vision, all that, which only a long experience, moving patiently from part to part, could exhaust, its manifold alliance with the entire world of nature, is legible upon it, as it lies there in one's hand. (*P&P*, p. 158)

Pater's "juxtaposition and co-ordination" between the antipodes of each perspective represents a subsumption of two inadequate ways (the way of the "particular" vs. the way of the "abstract") into a vastly more adequate way, really the enrichment of one by the memory of the other. Whether this subsumption is a Hegelian synthesis or merely a Wordsworthian "healing," we find it to be a more compelling presence in the method of modern criticism than, say, Arnold's moral hierarchies. Pater's concern for the reconciliation of opposites is one of the idioms by which modernism explains its own multidimensionality. It is a way of justifying and sustaining change by calling attention continually to what of the past persists in what is novel.

While Pater's "Essay on Style" is well and widely known, the extent to which it continues as a viable presence in twentieth-century criticism is not clearly understood. One way to explore this presence is to begin by looking at one use of Pater in Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931), a crucial document in the understanding of Anglo-American modernism. Wilson specifically identifies Pater with what he calls

The scientific instinct in the efforts of modern literature to render the transitory phases of "a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we our selves change!"<sup>6</sup>

The ease with which Pater accommodates "the scientific instinct" reappears, of course, in Eliot, Pound, and Richards but, perhaps most interestingly, in Joseph Frank's "Spatial Form in Modern Literature." Frank seizes Wilson's concept of the modern and identifies it as

"spatiality," that is, the tendency in modern literature to be in quest of a mode of narration suitable for rendering the way in which psychological and mythical "reality" seems to be constructed in a-temporal, even a-logical ways. Frank sets out the problems of the modern poet in clearly Paterian terms:

Such a view of the nature of poetry [Eliot's and Pound's] immediately gave rise to numerous problems. How is more than one image too be included in a poem? If the chief value of an image was its capacity to present an intellectual and emotional complex simultaneously, linking up images in a sequence would clearly destroy most of their efficacy. Or was the poem itself one vast image, whose individual components were to be apprehended as a unity. But then it would be necessary to undermine the inherent consecutiveness of language, frustrating the reader's normal expectation of a sequence and forcing him to perceive the elements of the poem juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time.<sup>7</sup>

When, in 1945, Joseph Frank endeavors to articulate those specific qualities that belong to modern literature he unerringly focuses on features that a half century earlier Pater had associated with what he hoped would be the modern critical intelligence. Just as Pater urges his undergraduate Oxford audience to make use of the "present" as a constant register of the "past" and to explore the past as an undiscovered country rich with "reminders" of the present, so Frank finds in the central artists of modern literature precisely the features of "juxtaposition and coordination" that Pater had told them to have. This is not the place to attend to the profound and abiding impact of Pater on the monumental figures of modernism that Frank acutely singles out. One can say in passing only that the extent of debt owed by such writers as Gide, T. S. Eliot, Pound, Proust, Joyce and Djuna Barnes (this is the list from which Frank works) to the specifically critical formulations of Pater is immense and largely unacknowledged. Even when it was banished from the critical scene, Pater's kind of modernism stayed alive to the extent that it was compatible with the creative needs of *avant-garde* writers. When later critics such as Kenneth Burke and Edmund Wilson began to look for a critical theory that would explain the phenomena of modern literature, it was very natural that their thoughtful and affirmative readings of, say, Gide would return them to Pater's careful and optimistic anticipation of the a-temporal forms that Frank so convincingly describes. Frank, however, does not attribute spatiality to Pater. He prefers to repeat Pater's quarrel with Lessing.

We find Pater in the "Essay on Style" calling into question, as Frank says the modern writer or critic must do, Lessing's antinomy between pictorial art (spatially arranged) and narrative art (temporally arranged).

6. (rpt. London: The Fontana Library, 1959), p. 233.

7. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Sewanee Review*, 53 (1945), 227.

Indeed Pater does not even bother to argue his position: "As the painter in his picture, so the artist in his book, aims at the production by honorable artifice of a peculiar atmosphere."<sup>8</sup> Pater's ultimate resting point seems to be not so much that art aspires to the condition of music but that narrative art aspires to the condition, which is to say to the immediate impact, of visual or spatial art. Pater reaches this conclusion logically enough. Just as the minute observation of movement takes us, in the case of Zeno's arrow, to a minute consideration of stasis, similarly, Pater's acute preoccupation with the minute details of temporality brings him to a consideration of the spatial.

Pater's special link with "spatial form" is apparent as early as his essay on Coleridge. In the course of admonishing Coleridge for a deficiency in the "historical sense," he envisions Coleridge's subject, theology, as "a great house, scored all over with hieroglyphics by perished hands." For him dogmas are "precious as memorials of a class of sincere and beautiful spirits, who in a past age of humanity struggled with many tears, if not for true knowledge, yet a for a noble and elevated happiness."<sup>9</sup> The "historical method" for Pater refers to that perennial sense of the presence of past artifacts and thoughts. Pater, like Pound and Eliot, rejects the ideology of progress, which sees the temporal or linear sequence of art as in some sense a movement from lesser to greater. Pater's subtle transformation of the "tangled bank" which for Darwin (looking essentially backward) produces "endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful," into the "gaudy tangled" garden which (to the extent it is "cultivated") continually turns back upon itself, makes a gentle step toward what Frank defines as the "spatialization" of art.

But Pater's link with modern critical methodology extends beyond his special understanding of "the historical," which for him stressed the imaginative simultaneity of past, present and future. "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" in Pater's posthumous *Greek Studies*, provides a particularly valuable vantage from which to discern the development of his Coleridgean "historical method" from history to myth and finally to a kind of transhistorical psychology. Reading the following passage, we are well on our way to the special and uniquely modern world of Northrop Frye:

Modern science explains the changes of the natural world by the hypothesis of certain unconscious forces; and the sum of these forces, in their combined action, constitutes the scientific conception of nature. But, side by side with the growth of this more mechanical conception, an older and more spiritual, Platonic, philosophy has always maintained itself, a philosophy more of instinct than of the understanding, the mental starting-point of which is not an observed sequence of

outward phenomena, but some such feeling as most of us have on the first warmer days of spring, when we seem to feel the genial processes of nature actually at work; as if just below the mould, and in the hard wood of the trees, there were really circulating some spirit of life, akin to that which makes its energies felt within ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

Frye's methodology, of course, aims at far more by way of "rigor" than might be suggested by a "philosophy of mere instinct." By the time—1957—that *Anatomy of Criticism* is published, Frye must claim more of the scientific terrain than Pater needed overtly to occupy:

The social dialectics applied externally to criticism, then, are within criticism, pseudo-dialectics, or false rhetoric. It remains to try to define the true dialectic of criticism. On this level the biographical critic becomes the historical critic. He develops from hero-worship towards total and indiscriminate acceptance: there is nothing "in his field" that he is not prepared to read with interest. From a purely historical point of view, however, cultural phenomena are to be read in their own context without contemporary application. We study them as we do the stars, seeing their interrelationships but not approaching them. Hence historical criticism needs to be complemented by a corresponding activity growing out of tropical criticism.<sup>11</sup>

But we find that Frye proposes a singularly Paterian alternative to what he describes as "pseudo-dialectics":

Ethical criticism, then, deals with art as a communication from the past to the present, and is based on the conception of the total and simultaneous possession of past culture....As a counterweight to historical criticism, it is designed to express the contemporary impact of all art, without selecting a tradition....On the ethical level we can see that every increase of appreciation has been right, and every decrease wrong; that criticism has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance toward indiscriminating catholicity. (pp. 24-25)

In accord with Frank's perception of the "modern," Frye's ethical criticism aims at breaking down the sequential or linear forms, associated with traditional narrative and dramatic modes. Frye's "steady advance towards indiscriminating catholicity" returns us fittingly to Pater's "dialectical method," which is for him "coextensive with life itself." But to understand how Pater's most unmethodical method aids us in interpreting modern criticism, we need to look briefly at Pater's specific relationship with the source of our current fascination with the "uncanny."

The "uncanny" is associated with the impulse, frequently described in Freud's case studies, when the

8. *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p. 15.

9. Walter Pater, "Coleridge's Writings," *The Westminster Review*, NS 29 (1866), 129.

10. *Greek Studies*, (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. 96.

11. *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 24.

world that had seemed reliable and stable suddenly appears under a new and threatening aspect. What had seemed *heimlich* or "homelike" appears foreign, strange, and very *unheimlich* indeed. This sudden and persisting experience of dread and apprehension can be found in many Victorian texts. Perhaps Arnold's characterization in "Dover Beach" is most familiar:

...The world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain....

But Pater's sense of the uncanny, associated like Arnold's with the fact that he cannot hope to be sheltered or at home in history, is also associated like Freud's (and like the modern writers Frank singles out) with an alternative to the finality of dread.

Freud's portrayal of the unconscious mind is permeated with the same rehabilitating rejection of historical postivism that permeates Pater's theory of art and that comes to be a part of our definition of modernity. The following passage from *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* is one of many citable from Freud's work:

There is nothing in the id which can be compared to negation, and we are astonished to find in it an exception to the philosopher's assertion that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. In the id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and (a

thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time.

Freud's realization that, in the context of the id and perhaps of the unconscious itself, what had seemed to Kant to be inherent categories of the mind without which "perception" could not take place were, in fact, the shifting, maleable, and contingent features of one part of the "mind."

If it seems an excessive claim that Pater's writing anticipates the most subtle and demanding interpretational procedures of modern criticism, it does not exceed Kenneth Burke's observation in 1931 that Pater,

treated ideas not for their value as statements, but as horizons, situations, developments of plot, in short as any other element of fiction.<sup>12</sup>

Now that the methods of modern criticism have enabled us to appreciate and stop apologizing for the concern of literary studies with "fictions," now that even psychoanalytic theorists like Roy Schafer are discovering in Frye's topology an alternative to the biological deadend in which that discipline had found itself, now perhaps even Paterians can assist in disarming the "ignorant armies."

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## The Path to True Civilization: *Celt and Saxon* and Meredith's View of Anglo-Irish Relations

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Like many of his contemporaries, George Meredith was interested in the question of racial and national differences, particularly in the contrast of "Celt" and "Saxon." This interest, growing out of a family tradition of descent from Welsh princes<sup>1</sup> and reinforced by Matthew Arnold's 1865 lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, had an important effect on his novels. One of Meredith's favorite theories about racial differences and major theme of the novels after *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871), was the idea that truly civilized people are highly imaginative. Believing that Celts had a great

capacity for the life of the imagination, Meredith agreed with Arnold that the Irish could contribute significantly to the quality of English intellectual life, especially if hostilities between the two countries ceased and the English allowed themselves to appreciate their Celtic cousins' special attributes. This similarity between Meredith's views and the ideas expressed in Arnold's various Irish essays thus suggests that Meredith's conception of the differences between the Celts and Saxons was not merely idiosyncratic but that he was in touch with contemporary thought on these important

12. *CounterStatement* (1931; rpt. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), pp. 14-15.

1. Lionel Stevenson, *The Ordeal of George Meredith* (New York: Scribner's, 1953), p. 2.

issues. Though only a fragment, *Celt and Saxon* makes the clearest statement of Meredith's ideas about the two races and therefore merits close examination because it sheds light on Meredith's other works, indicates his awareness of the social and political problems of his age, and shows the fascinating connection between his literary and political views.

The book opens with an account of the visit of Patrick O'Donnell to the English country home of Adiante Adister's father. Patrick has come to see if he can heal the rift between Adiante (another version of the beautiful but dangerous enchantress like Renée de Croisnel of *Beauchamp's Career*) and his brother Philip but learns that she has already married an "aged Danubian adventurer." He meets Mr. Adister's unimaginative niece Caroline and his lawyer Mr. Camminy. Next Patrick visits his cousin Captain Con O'Donnell, who has married a quintessential Saxon heiress, Mr. Adister's spinster sister, Jane Mattock. A dinner party at the O'Donnells allows Meredith to contrast Celt and Saxon, and in the John Bull chapter he pursues the contrast. In the last three chapters, Con has decided to stand for Parliament from Ireland without telling his wife (who vehemently objects to politics). Philip has been injured in a campaign in India and is being nursed by Jane, and Jane is beginning to fall in love unwittingly with this "Mars convalescent." This brief synopsis does full justice to the story; the main interest of the book is not in the story but in the insights into Meredith's ideas which it provides. As the reviewer of *The Times Literary Supplement* said in 1910, when *Celt and Saxon* was first published: "The interest of the book, so far as it goes, is all talk, the author's as well as the characters."<sup>2</sup>

One of the difficulties in relating this fragment to Meredith's other works is dating it. Writing in 1910, Ward Clark said, "A report has gained circulation that this unfinished novel was not the work of Meredith's old age, but a piece begun years ago and abandoned as

unsatisfactory,"<sup>3</sup> and Siegfried Sassoon says it was written between *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871) and *Beauchamp's Career* (1875).<sup>4</sup> The "Dramatic Dialogue" portfolio of manuscripts at Yale includes "Adiante," obviously the germ of *Celt and Saxon*, in a list of projects. As Gillian Beer points out, the list had to be drawn up before 1870, because one item is "Autobiography (with Contrivance Tom)," which had become *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* by 1870.<sup>5</sup> While he was acting editor of *The Fortnightly Review*, replacing John Morley, Meredith wrote to Henry Morley (December 13, 1867) requesting him to write an article for the magazine: "might I suggest a *poetical* comparison of the chief works of Cymric and Saxon bards—say, the 'Gododin' and 'Beowulf' as indicative also incidentally of characteristics of race. M. Arnold has only touched the ground: 'Irish and British Ballads' etc."<sup>6</sup> At this time Meredith was still mainly interested in the "Cymric" or Welsh Celts, as he had been since *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. In earlier books, a Feverel ancestor married a Welsh princess, and Evan Harrington was descended from Welsh princes. In *Sandra Belloni* (1864) and *Vittoria* (1867) two of the most admirable characters, Merthyr Powys and his half-sister Georgianna Ford, are Welsh. Although in "The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper" (1877) Lady Camper's sharp intuition is explained by the fact that she is Welsh, throughout the 1870's Meredith began to show interest in Irish Celts, starting with Timothy Turbot, the Irish professional pamphleteer in *Beauchamp's Career*, and culminating in Horace De Craye in *The Egoist* (1879).<sup>7</sup>

Meredith showed increasing interest in Irish Celts in the 1880's; in a letter to his son Arthur on July 27, 1881, he mentioned the Irish and Cambrian element in the English race but added:

As far as I observe them, the heart of the nation is Teuton and moral, and therewith intellectually obtuse, next to speechless.

2. 28 July 1910, p. 268.

3. *The Bookman*, 32 (1910), 81-82. Critical discussion of *Celt and Saxon* has been very limited. The contemporary reviews tended either to praise the brilliance of the style, particularly in the John Bull Chapter, or to deplore its artificiality. See Maurice Buxton Forman, *Meredithiana* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Press, 1922) for a complete list. R. E. Sencourt, *The Life of George Meredith* (New York: Scribner's, 1929), p. 281, discusses the book in relation to Meredith's Irish sympathies and support of Home Rule. S. M. Ellis, *George Meredith* (London: Grant Richards, 1920), p. 304; Siegfried Sassoon, *Meredith* (New York: Viking, 1948), pp. 352-353; and Gillian Beer, *Meredith: A Change of Masks* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), p. 149, all attack the style of the John Bull chapter. William Chislett, *George Meredith: A Study and an Appraisal* (Boston: R. G. Badger, 1925), pp. 40-47, discussing Meredith's ideas about Celts, devotes several paragraphs to *Celt and Saxon*. He links Meredith with Thomas Love Peacock, George Borrow, Matthew Arnold, and Grant Allen as forerunners of the Celtic Movement.

4. Sassoon, pp. 252-253.

5. Beer, p. 148.

6. *Letters of George Meredith*, ed. C. L. Cline (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), I, 364-365. In "Three Old Yorkshire Poems," *The Fortnightly Review*, 9 (1868), 121-130, Morley says that Arnold's comparison of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon poetry was unfair: "When this fidelity of representation is joined to a real poetic insight, an

Anglo-Saxon poet may be capable of greater things than are within the power of the Celt. In the expression of a single sentiment with grace, vivacity, depth of feeling, he cannot approach the Celt." He ends with a plea for the union of Celt and Saxon, those "two halves join to make a perfect Englishman," as Arnold had done in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* and as Meredith was to do in *Celt and Saxon*.

7. Clara Middleton has Irish cousins, and this may explain her ease with Colonel De Craye, which he unfortunately interprets as budding intimacy. As in *Celt and Saxon*, Meredith turns a searching light on his Irish Celts, revealing their faults as well as their virtues. Both DeCraye and Dr. Corney use their Celtic gift of intuition to divine Crossjay's secret (the overheard proposal of Willoughby to Laetitia, constituting a breach of promise), but they use their information rather differently. De Craye, an irrepressible Lothario, tries to use it to personal advantage, hoping to supplant Willoughby in Clara's affections. Corney, a "deadly gossip" in Lady Busshe's hypocritical words, spreads the story about the county and thereby brings matters to such a crisis that Clara is released. Corney perceives from the start that Vernon is Clara's true mate, and he is Willoughby's foil in attitudes toward poetry, especially in his appreciation of Clara: "Poetry's wanted to speak of her. I'm Irish and inflammable. I suppose, but I never looked on a girl to make a man comprehend the entire meaning of the word rapturous, like that one."



It has, however, a shifty element; and a poetic: and this tells again for you, that the poetic, seeming to come from the Celtic blood, flies at once to the well-springs of the tongue whenever it is in need of vital imagery.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps he was working on *Celt and Saxon* and *Diana of the Crossways* six days earlier when he wrote to Frederick Maxse that he had two novels in hand, one a prospect for *The Cornhill*.<sup>9</sup> Because there are many thematic and stylistic similarities between the two books, it seems reasonable that Meredith could have worked on them at the same time. Both emphasized racial contrast and symbolic marriages between Irish and English characters; and the style of the essay-like Chapter XVI, "Of the Great Mr. Bull and the Celtic and Saxon View of Him: And Something of Richard Rockney," in *Celt and Saxon* is very similar in degree of difficulty and Celtic "playfulness" to the first chapter of *Diana of the Crossways*. The rest of the book, it is true, is written in a much plainer style; but the manuscript is unrevised and would undoubtedly, like Meredith's other works, have become more consistently difficult if it had been subjected to his customary practice of revision.<sup>10</sup> Since there are these stylistic parallels and since the idea of contrast between the two races, based on the possession of imaginative qualities, plays a more important part in *Celt and Saxon* and *Diana of the Crossways* than in other works by Meredith, it seems likely that they were written in the same period (early 1881—early 1885) or that Meredith abandoned *Celt and Saxon* sometime before 1883, when he began *Diana of the Crossways*, and then used many of the same themes in the completed book.<sup>11</sup>

The frequently attacked John Bull chapter in *Celt and Saxon* is a witty and well-reasoned statement of Meredith's analysis of the widening rift between Celt and Saxon in the nineteenth century. Meredith's solution to the problem is essentially literary: "You attach small importance to images and symbols; yet if they seem representative, and they sicken numbers of us, they are important....Symbolical decorations will stimulate the

vacant-minded to act up to them, they encircle and solidify the mass: they are a sword of division between Celts and Saxons if they are abhorrent to one section."<sup>12</sup> Meredith's message, that England is spiritually deprived in the midst of great material prosperity, is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's plea with Englishman, "to remove the main quarrel of the Celts' alienation from the Englishman, in the place of that type of Englishman with whom alone the Celt has too long been familiar, a new type, more intelligent, more gracious, and more humane."<sup>13</sup> The lengthy discussion at the O'Donnell dinner party of the British national standard with its symbolic lion and unicorn, started by Mr. Rumford and Mrs. Marbury Dyke, is a comic version of what Meredith thinks ought to be a serious concern with adopting a national symbol which commands respect. In a way that suggests Carlyle's exhortation to throw off the outmoded clothes (symbols) of the past, Meredith believes that Englishmen should create for themselves an image which will reflect what they want to be. Earlier in the book Patrick speaks to his host, Mr. Adister, of England's need to kindle the enthusiasm of her Celtic allies, personifying the Saxon country as a fat, rich, sensuous old woman who cares only about her possessions and her personal comfort (obviously a jibe at Victoria). He dismisses the land question and the potato crop as second in importance to the image England presents: "if only she wore the right sort of face to look at, with a bit of brightness about it, to show and idea striking a light from the day that's not yet nodding at us....We want a rousing in the heart of us....We'd see the policy of an honourable union, and be joined to you by more than a telegraphic cable" (18). It is interesting that, shortly before Meredith wrote to Arthur about Celtic qualities in the English, Matthew Arnold made two contributions to *The Nineteenth Century* (April and June, 1881) in which he stressed that settling the land question would not solve Anglo-Irish difficulties unless the English could somehow make themselves attractive to the Irish.<sup>14</sup> Patrick is Meredith's spokesman for a similar view, that differences between the two

8. Meredith, *Letters*, II, 632.

9. 21 July 881, *Letters*, II, 632. Cline says (*Letters*, II, 630, note 1) that the two novels may have been *Diana of the Crossways* and *The Amazing Marriage*, but Michael Collie, *George Meredith: A Bibliography* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 78, says it is likely "for internal reasons" that *Celt and Saxon* was written between the completion of *The Tragic Comedians* and the beginning of *Diana of the Crossways* in 1883. Jack Lindsay, *George Meredith: His Life and Work* (London: The Bodley Head, 1956), pp. 304-305, says that Meredith worked on *Celt and Saxon* "at the time of Gladstone's Irish Coercion Bill," which was passed on February 1, 1881. Meredith had finished writing *The Tragic Comedians* by the end of 1880 and so could have started on *Celt and Saxon* in early 1881.

10. Sassoon, p. 252.

11. In a letter to his son Will in 1902 Meredith said, "I am now on a new work that absorbs me," and C. L. Cline speculates that this was *Celt and Saxon*, since no new work of consequence appeared after this date during Meredith's lifetime (*Letters*, III, 1459). Since we know, however, that Meredith destroyed at least one manuscript of a novel (*The Journalist*; see Stevenson, pp. 283-284), it is not impossible that this new work, which he does not mention again in subsequent

letters, was also destroyed or lost. Besides, thematically and stylistically, the book is closely related to the novels written before 1885 and, most importantly, the manuscript is in the "firm and beautiful" handwriting Meredith used before his ataxia debilitated him and not the shaky almost illegible handwriting he was using by 1902 (See Cline, *Letters*, I, xxxii).

12. George Meredith, *Celt and Saxon* Memorial Edition (London: Constable and Co., 1910), pp. 171-172. All subsequent references are to this edition.

13. *On the Study of Celtic Literature in Lectures and Essays in Criticism, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, with the assistance of Sister Thomas Marion Hoxter, V. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962), 390. In "Irish Catholicism an British Liberalism," in *The Fortnightly Review* for July 1878, Arnold said that Ireland was repulsed by the imperfect civilization of England's middle class (*Essays Religious and Mixed; The Complete Prose Works*, VIII [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1972], 338). See also "Preface to *Irish Essays*," in *English Literature and Irish Politics: Complete Prose Works*, IX (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1973), 312-317.

14. "The Incompatibles," *Complete Prose Works*, IX, 238-285.

countries are fundamentally spiritual and not economic. Given Meredith's interest in Arnold's ideas about Celts and given the strong similarities between *Celt and Saxon* and these essays by Arnold, it seems likely that Meredith read them before or during the writing of *Celt and Saxon*.

In the Prelude to *The Egoist* Meredith says that art, not science, is the specific for social ills.<sup>15</sup> Art can improve the souls of dull and insensitive Englishmen like Mr. Adister, but the Saxons must acquire a true understanding of art before their taste will be affected. In *Celt and Saxon* John Bull is repeatedly ridiculed for his stupid views of poetry: "He well-nigh loves his poets, can almost understand what poetry means. If it does not pay, it brings him fame, respectfulness in times of reverse" (170). English poets, gifted with imagination, have the same problem in accepting their country's "image before the world" as all Celts do: "They are in the Celtic dilemma of standing at variance with Bull; they return him his hearty antipathy, are unable to be epical or lyrical of him, are condemned to expend their genius upon the abstract, the quaint, the picturesque" (182). To celebrate their country, they must have countrymen worthy of being celebrated, men who possess imagination and sensitivity.

Throughout his works Meredith represents lack of imagination as a serious flaw of character, particularly in Englishmen, very much as Matthew Arnold attacked English provincialism and anti-intellectualism in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and *Culture and Anarchy*. In *Celt and Saxon* John Bull "has no actual life save in power of imagination. He has to learn this fact, the great lesson of all men" (173). In "The House on the Beach," written in 1876, Meredith ridiculed the vanity of Martin Tinman, who often parades in front of a mirror in his court suit; but he offers an excuse for this folly: "he must have obtained from the contemplation of himself in his suit that which would be the saving of all men, in especial of his countrymen—imagination, namely."<sup>16</sup> Lack of imagination is also a theme of another story written at about the same time, "The Tale of Chloe." In *Beauchamp's Career* Nevil Beauchamp is seriously limited by his lack of imagination, and Sir Willoughby Patterne's insipid taste in literature and failure to appreciate the true poetry of Clara Middleton indicate a similar inadequacy. It is a recognition of the importance of the imagination that the Celt has to offer his Saxon cousin.<sup>17</sup>

Imagination gives some of Meredith's characters considerable powers of insight. Patrick, who exhibits the most attractive qualities of any Celtic character in the book, sees Adister accurately: "He saw too, for he was clear-eyed when his feelings were not over-active, the

narrow pedestal whereon the stiff figure of a man of iron pride must accommodate itself to stand in despite of tempests without and within" (61). His tact, a weaker quality in his cousin Captain O'Donnell, enables Patrick to surmise the right topics of conversation with Mr. Adister (with the one important exception of his speech about the union of England and Ireland) and to perceive that Caroline wants to get away from the breakfast table so that her uncle and Mr. Camminy can discuss the letter from Adiante.

Mr. Adister's reaction to Patrick's inspired speech on the necessity of a spiritual union of England and Ireland is predictable: "Stick to horses!" (19). As Meredith explains, "The language of metaphor was to Mr. Adister fool's froth. He conceded the use of it to the Irish and the Welsh as a right that stamped them for what they were by adopting it" (19). Other members of the Adister family also show insensitivity to imaginative language. Caroline reacts to Patrick's volubility: "A superior position was offered her by her being silent and critical" (34). At her husband's suggestion, Mrs. Adister O'Donnell has Patrick write the difficult letter to her brother, informing him of the birth of Adiante's son, because she "was unable, unaided, to conceive an idea disconnected with the main theme of her communication, and regarded, as an art of conjuring, the use of words independent of ideas" (106) by which she apparently means the use of language as mere embellishment.

Meredith does not intend, however, to depict the Saxon race as completely devoid of imagination. Mrs. O'Donnell admired the "promptitude of Irish blood to deliver the war-cry," even though she was a "peaceful woman abhorring sanguinary contention; but it was in her own blood to love such a disposition against her principles" (106). This glimmer of imagination is undoubtedly the secret of her happiness with Captain O'Donnell. In order to explain Adister's violent reaction to Adiante's marriage to an aged Eastern European prince, Meredith says, "Adiante had been to him something beyond a creature beloved; she had with her glorious beauty and great-heartedness been the sole object which had ever inspired his imagination" (47). Jane Mattock, who says, "I am myself naturally blunt, and prefer the straightforward method" (138), nevertheless reads poetry and sings with ardor. Her taste for poetry is similar to Cecilia Halkett's in *Beauchamp's Career*, but Meredith is kinder toward Jane's sentimentalism: "She had reared herself on our poets. If much brooding on them will sometimes create a sentimentalism of the sentiment they inspire, that also, after our manner of developing, leads to finer

15. *The Egoist*, I, Memorial Edition (London: Constable and Co., 1910), 3.

16. *Short Stories*, Memorial Edition (London: Constable and Co., 1910), p. 97.

17. The Englishman's limited capacity for imagination is also mentioned in *Up to Midnight* (Boston: John W. Luce and Co., 1913), p. 75, Meredith's five dialogues that appeared in *The Graphic*

between December 21, 1872, and January 28, 1873. Sir John Saxon is stimulated by the death of Napoleon III: "This was an event to warm him through and through by filliping imagination—a spirit generally too insignificant in our country to obtain release, except when famous persons suffer such reverses as to stumble, to fall, or to die."

civilization; and as her very delicate feelings were not always tryants over her clear and accurate judgement, they rather tended to stamp her character than lead her into foolishness." (207)

While these Saxons show some slight potential for imaginative development, the English journalist Mr. Colesworth actually ventures into poetry after an invigorating walk with Patrick's and Philip's sister Kathleen (200). His case is similar to that of Beau Beamish in "The Tale of Chloe," who was led by the suicide of Chloe to express himself quite uncharacteristically in verses, even though "They are of a character to cool emotion."<sup>18</sup> In both cases the attempt is valued more than the finished product because it indicates the awakening of a sensibility that was merely latent before.

Just as the Saxon's in *Celt and Saxon* show some potential for imagination, the Celts have their mental limitations. Captain Con O'Donnell's failure to understand contemporary poetry indicates a limited mind, even if he is a "bard by nature...without the right theme for his harp" (35) and a colorful talker. To the captain, his nephew Philip O'Donnell "was a perfect riddle, hard to read as the zebra lines on the skin of a wild jackass—if Providence intended any meaning when she traced them! and it's a moot point: as it is whether some of our poets have meaning and are not composers of zebra" (140). When he breaks the explicit treaty with his wife and campaigns for Parliament in Ireland, Con's Celtic impulsiveness in doing so reveals further inadequacies, a deep vein of insensitivity and a failure to consider the moral ramifications of his actions.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of Celts is their tendency to let passion, aided by their rich imaginations, overrule intelligence. Patrick, one of Meredith's most likable young men, uses his fertile imagination to form a mental picture of Adiante Adister, drawing on details of the landscape around her father's house to visualize her and changing his image of her several times during his visit to Mr. Adister. Passionately defending her against his own rational tendency to censure her conduct, he makes the mistake of guessing that her offense against her family is that she has become a Catholic (not a serious offense to Patrick, and Irish Catholic), only to find later that she is actually a member of the Greek Orthodox Church. Undue pride in his "arrowy sagacity" and a desire to see Adiante in the best possible light have caused these mistakes in perception, as he has the intelligence to realize later (31). His reaction to the news of Adiante's unattractive marriage is violent because he had fought to maintain a high image of her: "But I never dreamed of such a thing as this—not the hard, bare, lump-of-earth-fact" (33). He thus reveals one aspect of Matthew Arnold's ideal that Celts are always ready to resist the despotism of fact, finding imaginative speculation more

attractive than facing unpleasant reality.<sup>19</sup> Although Meredith recognized the dangers of an over-active imagination, he still saw the imagination as a highly desirable human quality.

Facing unpleasant facts is not a duty shirked by the journalist Rockney, whose blunt manner and keen analytical mind reflect dominant Saxon qualities. Although Con sees him as an inveterate enemy of the Irish, Meredith says that the "strenuous original vigour" of Rockney's daily column spurring Parliament to fitly represent the people may set "the teeth of the Celt gnashing at him" but "goes a step nearer to the bourne of pacification than Press and Parliament reflecting the popular opinion that law must be passed to temper Ireland's eruptiveness" because such a journalist as Rockney "can be admired, and the Celt, in combating him, will like an able and gallant enemy better than a grudgingly just, lumbering, dull, political fellow" (180-181). Rockney's determination to see things as they really are also causes him to castigate his countrymen, but Meredith makes it clear that the severity of the criticism is motivated by intense patriotic love and disappointment over the shortcomings of the English: "his vision was of the great of old, the possibly great in the graver strife ahead, respecters of life, despisers of death, the real English..." (179). One of the strongest personalities in the book, Rockney, with his Saxon intelligence, honesty, and courage, is proof that Meredith did not intend to give all the admirable qualities to his charming Celts.

Like Arnold, Meredith wanted to show that Celts and Saxons are complementary opposites, with characteristic weaknesses and strengths on both sides. The union of Captain Con and Mrs. Adister O'Donnell is a fusion of opposites; Con's wild imagination is checked by his wife's common sense and attention to formalities. One of his principal domestic duties is "warming" her each night, bringing some much needed vitality into her Saxon life. The "secret of his happiness" is simply pleasing her on the relatively minor points of decorum. Although her relatives consider the captain an adventurer, the union is in fact an intelligent marriage of convenience with mutual benefits. The marriage of Jane Mattock and Philip O'Donnell, which Meredith probably intended to portray, would have been a more satisfactory union of the best qualities of England and Ireland. In this symbolic marriage Meredith implied that the political union of the two countries must be based on equality and trust.

There is also a symbolic marriage of Celt and Saxon in George Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* in the business partnership of Larry Doyle and Tom Broadbent. The union, founded on a tempering of qualities, is like the marriage of Nora and Tom in the play; in both cases, the partners admire each other but remain essentially

18. *Short Stories*, p. 266.

19. *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 344. The source of this idea, which Arnold also used in "The Incompatibles," was Henri Martin,

*Historie de France*. Arnold goes on to say that Celts lack steadiness, patience, balance, and measure.

English or Irish, as do Captain Con and Mrs. Adister O'Donnell. Shaw's concept of the union of Celt and Saxon is similar, then, to the free and equal alliance, more spiritual than political, which Meredith advocated. Since *John Bull's Other Island* premiered in 1904, Shaw could not have read Meredith's novel (published in 1910) before he wrote the play; however, the parallels between the two works, noted by the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1910,<sup>20</sup> reveal a remarkable similarity of views. Both Meredith and Shaw, believing in freedom for Ireland, supported Home Rule but felt, like Arnold, the Celts "are inextricably bound up with us" and that a marriage of the two peoples was therefore virtually inevitable.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps thinking of his own ancestry, Meredith believed that the "large admixture of Celtic blood in the English race" accounted for many of the best qualities in the English character, creating a stronger bond between the two peoples and making marriage even more reasonable.<sup>22</sup>

The symbolic marriage of the Celt Diana and the Saxon Redworth is Meredith's solution to a difficult artistic problem. Since he originally considered ending *Diana of the Crossways* with the heroine's death,<sup>23</sup> he may simply have transferred the marriage of Jane and Philip, which he apparently never wrote about, to the completed book. This would seem likely if he abandoned *Celt and Saxon* while writing *Diana of the Crossways* or just before. Diana's Celtic wit and passion for poetry force their way into her novels against her will, giving her books the same reputation for obscurity as Meredith's. Her conversational brilliance inspires only fear and loathing in that redoubtable Saxon, Mrs. Crambourne Wathin. Fiercely proud, she is a "tigress" when her friend Emma's husband makes sexual advances. This Celtic passion all but precipitates Diana into a disastrous elopement with Percy Dacier, causes her to betray Percy's secret to the press, and finally forces Meredith to marry her off to save himself from the inevitability of depicting a "fallen" woman.

Meredith's celebration of Celtic wit, passion, and sensitivity echoes some of Arnold's ideas. Like Meredith, Arnold found in Celts "an organization quick to feel impressions, feeling them very strongly; a lively personality therefore, keenly sensitive to joy and sorrow."<sup>24</sup> Arnold's observation that Celts have a great sensibility, the "power of quick and strong perception and emotions...one of the very prime constituents of genius, perhaps its most positive constituent,"<sup>25</sup> must have reinforced Meredith's feeling that his own creative powers were connected with his reputed Celtic origins. Many of Meredith's Celtic characters illustrate Arnold's view that the Celt's sensibility makes him more sensitive

to nature and contributes a feminine element to his personality. In Meredith's *The Amazing Marriage*, for instance, Gower Woodseer, whose father was Welsh, has a keen appreciation of nature and an active imagination. Perhaps because Lord Fleetwood's mother was Welsh, he is sympathetic to Gower's love of nature and devotion to "image-making." Meredith often characterizes Lord Fleetwood's behavior as feminine, a quality that makes him sensitive but also somewhat unstable. His healthiest Celtic characters like Merthyr Powys, however, show deep understanding of women because there is a feminine element in them; and it is significant that it is a woman, Diana Merion, who is Meredith's most complete portrayal of what he identified as his own creative powers.

Meredith also found more sober qualities in Celts. Philip O'Donnell in *Celt and Saxon* is clearly capable of deep emotion, but his reserve and tact contrast with the impulsiveness of his brother and his cousin and put him in touch with the Celtic grasp of true reality Shaw identified when he said, "England cannot do without its Irish and its Scots today, because it cannot do without at least a little sanity."<sup>26</sup> At his dinner party Captain Con is vexed by Philip's refusal to help him goad Rockney and the others into a pitched battle between Englishmen and Irishmen, and in a later passage Jane admires the brevity and reserve of Philip's military style. Philip's steadiness is like that of the Celtic characters Merthyr Powys of *Sandra Belloni* and *Vittoria* and Owain Wythan of *The Amazing Marriage*. The contrast between Philip and Patrick, symbolized by a sword and a book, is similar to that drawn between the flashy, chivalrous Celt Sullivan Smith and the more reserved but loyal Saxon Redworth in *Diana of the Crossways*. Sullivan Smith causes an unpleasant scene at the Dublin ball and is ready to fight a duel with someone he believes has insulted Diana, but at the same ball Redworth quietly devotes himself to Diana and is eventually rewarded by her hand in marriage. Gower Woodseer, another unassuming Celt, has a squire-like devotion to Carinthia. Meredith agreed with Arnold that Celtic passion often needed the constraining influence of Saxon prudence, but he found this prudence in several of his Celtic characters.

*Celt and Saxon* is a fragment of what might have been a rather unsatisfactory, schematic story if it had been completed, but it is extremely valuable for the insights it provides into Meredith's ideas. In most of his novels Meredith set up his Celtic characters as superior to their English counterparts, but in this book he seemed to attempt a fairer, more balanced view of the two races. He saw the symbolic marriage of Ireland and England, of Celt and Saxon, as a marriage of equality, with

20. 28 July 1910, 268.

21. *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 390.

22. Meredith, *Letters*, II, 632. In a letter on August 5, Meredith referred Arthur to an article by Grant Allen in *The Fortnightly Review* which argues that Celtic blood preponderates in England. Meredith disagreed, "though I see it flooding" (*Letters*, II, 634).

23. Stevenson, p. 256.

24. *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 343.

25. *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 346.

26. *George Bernard Shaw, John Bull's Other Island, The Collected Works of Bernard Shaw*, Ayot St. Lawrence Edition, XI, (New York: W. H. Wise, 1930), 16.

advantages that were more intellectual and spiritual than political or economic. He seemed to say that the path to mutual understanding and benefit would be opened if only the English could stretch their minds enough to appreciate their Celtic cousins' poetic or imaginative

qualities, qualities which Meredith presented in his novels as the touchstone of civilization.

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## Becky Sharp and the Three Per Cent Solution

Ira Bruce Nadel

Temporarily lamenting her lack of good fortune and inadequate social position during her visit to Queen's Crawley caused by the death of Sir Pitt Crawley in Chapter 41 of *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp considers an alternate life: "I wish I could exchange my position in society, and all my relations for a snug sum in the Three per Cent. Consols." Disturbed by the tedious yet idyllic routine of Queen's Crawley, where nine years earlier she had been governess, Becky recognizes, at the conclusion of the chapter, that the essential comfort of the estate results from "a long course of Three per Cents." Ironically, the narrator adds she "was right very likely."<sup>1</sup> No past or present edition of *Vanity Fair* explains the puzzling phrase "the Three per Cent. Consols" or "The Three per Cents." which Thackeray vaguely identifies in the text as "securities" (p. 410).<sup>2</sup> Neglect of these important and, for the Victorians, common terms has prevented readers of the novel from fully understanding the double irony of Becky's thought and the historical significance of Thackeray's reference. Moreover, as the center of critical controversy regarding the character of Becky, the passage gains a new meaning from the clarification of the expressions.<sup>3</sup>

For Victorian, especially middle-class readers of *Vanity Fair*, "a long course of Three per Cents." was a program they themselves enrolled in. Primarily, it was the common practice of investing in the government

sponsored Consolidated Funds, known as "the Consols," which paid an annual interest of three per cent. From their institution in 1752 when four separate funds were amalgamated, first at four per cent, then reduced to three per cent in 1757, the Consolidated Funds became the most secure and conservative investment in the country. Managed by the Directors of the Bank of England, "the Consols" were an investment in England itself. This government issued, single stock with its interest secured by Parliament became a mainstay against unregulated investment speculations and bubble companies. The guaranteed fixed rate of interest insured absolute security. The popularity of "the Consols" was so great, in fact, that they were institutionalized in a separate office building at the Bank of England designed by Sir John Soane.

Private or joint stock banks paid interest on deposits but the Bank of England did not. Its "Consols," however, provided an annuity. If the Bank of England needed quick capital, it could sell more "Consols." For over one hundred years the three per cent interest rate remained until the debt conversion of 1888 forced a reduction of the rate to two and three quarters per cent in 1889 and two and a half per cent in 1903.<sup>4</sup> The abbreviation, "the Consols," appeared in the daily stock quotations while the phrase "3 per cent Consols" was listed separately in the stock prices. Thackeray simply borrowed the

1. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), pp. 410-411. All further references are to this edition of the novel.

2. Editions of *Vanity Fair* I have examined include the following: *Vanity Fair* (NY: Harper Brothers, 1848), *Vanity Fair* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1866), *Vanity Fair*, ed. George Saintsbury (Oxford Univ. Press, 1908), *Vanity Fair*, ed. Tillotson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), *Vanity Fair*, ed. J. I. M. Stewart (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) and *Vanity Fair*, ed. F. E. L. Priestley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969).

On the problems of creating an ideal text of the novel, and difficulties with the Tillotson edition in particular, see K. L. Goodwin, "Towards an Ideal Edition of *Vanity Fair*," *N & Q*, 23: 45-55, and G. Thomas Tanselle, "Problems and Accomplishments in the Editing of the Novel," *Studies in the Novel*, 7 (1975): 352.

Overlooking an annotation for "the Three per Cents." did not prevent the Tillotsons from identifying the meaning of three stars next to Miss Rhoda Swartz's name in "the East India stockholders list" as owning "at least six thousand pounds' worth of stock" (p. 193).

3. For a discussion of this passage and the character of Becky see, for example, G. H. Lewes, *Morning Chronicle*, 6 March 1848, in *Thackeray, The Critical Heritage*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. 47-48; John Hagan, "Vanity Fair: Becky Brought to Book Again," *Studies in the Novel*, 7 (1975), 487-488; and John Carey, *Thackeray, Prodigal Genius* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 178-179.

4. For a somewhat incomplete history of "Consols" see A. Andreades, *History of the Bank of England, 1640-1903*, tr. Christabel Meredith, 4th ed. (1909; London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), passim; Sir John Clapham, *The Bank of England, A History* (1944; Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966); and John Giuseppe, *The Bank of England* (London: Evans Brothers, 1966). Walter Bagehot's *Lombard Street, A Description of the Money Market* (1873; New York: Scribners, 1895), contains several brief comments on "Consols" (pp. 60, 64).

everyday designation for the Consolidated Funds for Becky's use in Chapter 41. The term would have an immediate and representative meaning for readers of the novel.

But Victorian readers would have had another reason to react to "the Three per Cents.": the money crisis of 1847. Precipitated by the enormous expansion of railway enterprises that saw Parliament allow expenditures of 225 million pounds and the 1845-46 famine in Ireland, the English economy faced a serious demand upon its monetary reserves from foreign imports. Requirements on the reserves of the Bank of England increased as the amount of grain imported to the country increased seven times between 1845 and 1847. Speculation occurred as wheat prices rapidly escalated.

In the Spring of 1847 bank failures, mostly in the North and West of England, increased as wheat prices fell because of the excessive imports and anticipated good harvest. To maintain credit and confidence, the Bank of England by August had to raise its lending rate to five and a half per cent as holders of "Consols" were unable to borrow on them at face value; they were forced to sell at the best price offered. Panic soon hit the Stock Exchange and "Consols" plummeted in value. On 6 July 1847 "the Three per Cents." were priced at 89; by 6 August 1847 they were 86 7/8. They continued to drop, listing at 79 1/4 on 19 October 1847, the center of the crisis.<sup>5</sup> Failures spread from commercial houses to banks, both private and joint stock, with the largest failure the Royal Bank of Liverpool.

Repeated requests by merchants, bankers and traders from London and elsewhere to the government to suspend the Bank Charter Act, renewed three years earlier, and allow the issue of additional money in the form of notes initially failed. A petition of 13 July 1847 asked for the suspension of restrictive measures such as preventing the discounting of commercial bills of first credit or the decision not to buy or lend money on silver received by merchants for exported goods. Citing the increasing lack of public confidence in the Bank and the pressure on the pound, the petitioners urged an amendment to the Bank Act.<sup>6</sup> Sir Charles Wood,

Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord John Russell, Prime Minister, did not believe circulating more money would improve the economy and opposed the requests of the petitioners.

The shortage of legal tender accelerated the declining stock prices and a crisis was reached during the week of 16-23 October 1847 as reserves at the Bank of England fell to record lows. Forced to act, the Government wrote to the Bank on 25 October stating that Parliament could increase the amount of the Bank's discounts and advances if it would raise interest to eight per cent and issue a Bill of Indemnity should the Bank circulate notes beyond its statutory limit.<sup>7</sup> This move to eliminate "the prevailing Distrust" in the economy caused the panic to subside as more money began to circulate and hoarding decreased while reserves increased. Additional notes, prepared by the Bank, were never issued. By November, the Bank rate fell from eight to seven per cent.<sup>8</sup>

Against this background of intense financial activity and public worry, measured by a drop of almost ten points in the "Consols," Thackeray was publishing *Vanity Fair* in monthly parts beginning in January 1847. By the time the twelfth number appeared in December 1847 containing Chapter 41, the monetary crisis had recently passed. But Becky's reference to a "snug sum in the Three per cent. Consols" would have had the immediate irony to their recent decline and loss of stability. By December, however, the "Consols" regained their strong position in the market and were listed at 85 3/4 on 1 December and 86 on 2 December 1847. In the novel, however, Chapter 41 is set in September 1822, dated by Thackeray's reference to the death of Sir Pitt Crawley; the "Consols" for the week of 22-27 September 1822 remained solidly at 81.<sup>9</sup> But the reader of the novel who is unaware of the banking crisis of 1847 or of the history of the Consolidated Funds overlooks the historical irony of Becky's desire to participate in the economic stability of the country. During the appearance of *Vanity Fair* that very stability was being threatened.

By playing off the market value of the "Three per Cents" in 1847 against their historical value in 1822, Thackeray extends his ironic attitude towards Becky's

5. *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 28 (1847): 224, 336, 560; *Economist* V. 27 (1847), 1229. The weekly *Economist* provided a listing of the "Consols" in "The Banker's Gazette" section headed "The Banker's Price Current." Summarizing the week of 3 July 1847, the *Economist* noted the decrease of reserves in the Bank of England and the "rapid contraction" in the circulation of money. It predicted a quick decrease of "the reserve of notes equal to the better part of one million" because of the need to pay dividends on various notes. *Economist*, V. 27 (10 July 1847), 794. By October, the *Economist* reported that at no time since 1825 had there been such pressure on the Bank of England (V. 215:1171).

6. "The Petition of the Merchants, Bankers and Traders of London, Against the Bank Charter Act, 13 July 1847," *Select Statutes, Documents and Reports Relating to British Banking, 1832-1928*, vol. 2 1847-1928, ed. T. E. Gregory (1929; London: Frank Cass & Co., 1964), 3-7.

7. During the crucial weekend of 23-24 October 1847, just before the letter from Russell and Wood of 25 October, the *Economist*, which argued against the Bank Act of 1844, stood firmly behind it now, rejecting the argument for suspension in order to allow greater

circulation of currency. Nonetheless, the Stock Exchange, wrote the paper, "has been a scene of continued alarm and excitement under which the value of all kinds of Stock have suffered considerably. The sale of Consols for money has been extensive during the whole week.... It is stated at the Bank of England upwards of nine hundred new accounts of stockholders have recently been opened. There have also been some orders from Paris, where capitalists are selling *rentes*, in order to purchase *consols*, the latter being relatively much cheaper than the former." (V. 217: 1213, 1229)

8. The "letter of relaxation," the phrase used by Mr. James Morris, Governor of the Bank of England, before a Secret Committee of the House of Commons on the Commercial Distress 7 March 1848, "by allaying the panic, brought notes out into circulation, and the consequence was that they returned to the Bank," "Petition," *Select Statutes*, p. 7; "Evidence Before Secret Committee of the Commons," *Select Statutes*, p. 34.

9. *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 29:1 (January 1848), 112; *ibid.*, 92: Pt. III (September 1822), 288.

Thackeray also set his earlier story of investment and speculation, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, in 1822.

middle-class aspirations. Her desire for, and resentment against, the "Three per Cent. Consols" ironically expresses her determination to become part of the solid, irreproachable center of English society. Her goal, as Thackeray summarizes, is "to be, and to be thought, a respectable woman" (p. 460). More significantly, however, Becky's wish displays her upper-middle class belief that money determines respectability. The same passage on "the Three per Cents." contains this comment: "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year. I could dawdle about in the nursery, and count the apricots on the wall....I could pay everybody, if I had but the money" (pp. 409-410). Unable to resist, the narrator adds "and who knows but Rebecca was right in her speculations—and that it was only a question of money and fortune which made the difference between her and an honest woman?" (p. 410). The ambiguity of "speculations" in this context is appreciated by the reader who is aware of the financial background and economic ironies Thackeray has created.

Curiously, this very paragraph on money and respectability became a source of controversy involving one of the more sympathetic reviewers of Thackeray's who singled it out for censure in an 1848 essay on his writing. G. H. Lewes' *Morning Chronicle* article began as a review of *The Book of Snobs*, generally praising the author. He did object, however, to Thackeray's vision of a corrupted world made up of "scamps, scoundrels, or humbugs." He then took exception to "a detestable passage" where Thackeray allowed Becky to believe that "only her poverty makes her vicious." When Thackeray then interrupts the narrative to make his comments on money and fortune, Lewes rhetorically asked if it was "carelessness or deep misanthropy" that distorted an otherwise clear judgment. He strongly berated the author for suggesting in his imagery that honesty is only "the virtue of abundance."<sup>10</sup>

Thackeray was offended by the article and wrote to Lewes at once. He explained that he did not mean that "man deprived of turtle would as a consequence steal bread" but that he should be aware of the temporality of his good fortune. On Becky and her possible respectability, Thackeray was more specific:

If Becky had had 5000 a year I have no doubt in my mind that she would have been respectable; increased her fortune advanced her family in the world: laid up treasures for herself in the shape of 3 per cents, social position, reputation & c— ...

like many a person highly & comfortably placed in the world not guilty of many wrongs of commission, satisfied with himself, never doubting of his merit, and decorously angry at the errors of less lucky men. What satire is so awful as Lead us not into temptation?...My object [in *Vanity Fair*] is to make everybody engaged...in the pursuit of Vanity and I must carry my story through this dreary minor key, with only occasional hints here & there of better things—of better things wh. it does not become me to preach.<sup>14</sup>

Thackeray's letter to Lewes is one of the few occasions on which he responded to a critic, although he clearly explained that he did so prompted by the "sincere goodwill" of the author. The letter is also a gloss on the notion that money can bring long-sought for respectability as well as pleasure.

Lewes' comments and Thackeray's reaction, however, indicate the sensitive and significant nature of the ending of Chapter 41. Not only does it promote an interpretation of Becky that Lewes and others found objectionable—that virtue exists in direct proportion to wealth—but is also reflects the strongly felt ideas about money that so troubled Thackeray.<sup>12</sup> Earlier, in 1839, for example, Thackeray wrote to his mother the following, which closely parallels Becky's attitude. Commenting on the receipt of a brace of pheasants from the brother-in-law of Edward Fitzgerald, Thackeray notes that he is "another virtuous man—so good, sober and religious such a fine English squire—if I had 3000 a year I think I'd be so too."<sup>13</sup> Money is indisputably the source of respectability. Nine years earlier, Thackeray experimented with this artificial means of gaining status when he announced to Weimar society that he had 15,000 pounds a year; the response was instantaneous respect. In his letters, Thackeray frequently tells how relieved he is to have an income of substance and, inversely, how he is compelled to write when he is insolvent. Mixing cynicism with sentiment, Thackeray as narrator and author reveals his personal reaction to the effect of money upon social relations and personal character in this passage from Chapter 41 of the novel. Like Becky, as his early letters corroborate, Thackeray linked security and status to "a snug sum in the Three per Cents."<sup>14</sup>

The reference to "Consols" in Chapter 41 also has a thematic function, linking the action of Becky at Queen's Crawley to that of Mr. Osborne at Russell Square in the following chapter. Becky's romantic notion of happiness created by money is contrasted to Osborne's unhappiness

10. G. H. Lewes, *Morning Chronicle* 6 March 1848, in *Thackeray, The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. Tillotson and D. Hawes (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. 46-47; also in *Thackeray, The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), II:354. All further references are to this edition.

11. *Letters*, II:353-54.

12. His letters are, of course, suffused with his money problems. An 1835 comment to William Ritchie is perhaps an ironic watchword for Thackeray and his difficulties: "Keep yrself out of DEBT," (I:296).

13. *Letters*, I:399.

14. See *Letters*, I:267, 325. Chapter 61 of *Pendennis* (1850) extends the satire of the "Three per Cents." as the narrator comments on the connection between respectability and wealth. In semi-allegorical terms, he writes "men come and bask in the halo of consols and acres that beams round about him [the new heir]: the reverence is transferred with the estate." *Pendennis*, ed. Donald Hawes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 639.

For other references to "the Three per Cents" in Victorian writing see Disraeli, *Vivian Grey*, Ch. 1, Book 1, Ch. XVI, book V; Stanza XIII of *Dis Aliter Visum* by Browning; and Ch. 80 of Bulter's *The Way of All Flesh*.

caused by money. Thackeray introduces this conflict directly: "I doubt if Rebecca, whom we have seen piously praying for Consols, would have exchanged her poverty and the dare-devil excitement and chances of her life, for Osborne's money and the humdrum gloom which enveloped him" (p. 412). Thackeray then goes on to itemize the various causes of Mr. Osborne's melancholy, all of them associated with money and its major amusement, marriage.

The irony of Becky's desire for "Three per Cents," however, is as much social as it is financial. No stronger sign of her attachment to England's middle-class exists in the novel; the phrase highlights what the narrator identifies as "a comfortable career of prosperity" (p. 410). The "Consols" are Becky's solution to a life of instability and flux, although Thackeray, of course, does not permit such security for her. He hesitates to let her money corrupt society through investment in "the Three per Cents." She corrupts, rather, those who join her in her own form of investment, gambling. Speculation, not a fixed annuity, is Becky's sport. She may act as though "this kind of life [at Queen's Crawley] was to continue with her until she should sink to the grave in a polite old age, leaving regrets and a great quantity of consols behind her," but she knows too well that beyond the park it is a world of "cares and duns, schemes, shifts, and poverty" (p. 409). This knowledge frustrates her search for a world of ideal comfort represented by the "calm pursuits and amusement" of Queen's Crawley because she knows it is artificial and cannot survive in a world made up of greed and avarice (p. 409). Becky is at home with Bohemians, "pedlars, punters, tumblers, students and all. She was of a wild roving nature inherited from her father and mother..." (p. 631). "Inherited" as a verb significantly and ironically undermines her idealized financial status; her inheritance consists only of a

bohemian spirit. Respectability becomes tedious for Becky as she realizes that "Consols" cannot console her.

The fate of Becky in the novel is one in which the pursuit of success and financial well-being is curbed by her realistic sense of the world. At the conclusion of the work, Becky, who changes "her habits with her situation in life" (p. 653), has squandered all of Jos Sedley's money in speculation and bubble companies (p. 664). Her only dividend is what she forcefully collects from Jos' insurance policy. The extent of her financial beneficence consists of participating in "Fancy Fairs" for the poor, an ironic deflation of her earlier understanding that paying everyone is the measure of middle, or upper middle-class success (p. 410).

In the well-known letter of 1 May 1848 to the Duke of Devonshire, written, in fact, before the last eleven chapters of *Vanity Fair* were completed, Thackeray continued Becky's adventures after he planned ending the novel. He described her income as the interest from "two lakhs of rupees" left to her by Jos. She now lived, he noted, in a "small but very pretty little house in Belgravia" (II:376, 375). Humorously, he added that in spite of her loss of good looks, "for a pious woman" she was "the best crinolined lady in Knightsbridge district" (II:376). But in the postscript Thackeray satirically wrote that the "Union Bank of Calcutta, in which all Mrs. Crawley's money was" had just collapsed. With sharp irony he asked, "will Fate never cease to persecute that suffering Saint?" (II:377).<sup>15</sup> The security of the "Three per Cents." eludes Becky throughout the novel and after, but her longing for such financial stability, symbolized by that mightiest of solid investments, never leaves her.

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15. Thackeray's remark echoes his own experience. In 1833 he lost most of his fortune because of the failure of several Indian banks where his father had invested. Chapters 63, 64 and 69-70 of *The Newcomes* (1855) deal with the failure of an Indian bank and the loss of private capital. In 1845 Thackeray lost an additional 500 pounds in speculations generated by the railroad mania.



## Structure in Kipling's *Kim*

David H. Stewart

The standard claim about *Kim*'s structure divides its fifteen chapters into three parts, with breaks occurring after chapters 5 and 10.<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Meyers elaborated these divisions of plot by linking them to the development of Kim's character as it evolved through three roles—discipline, student, and spy. "Kim is an Indian in the first section, English (with Indian holidays) in the second, and English disguised as Indian in the third."<sup>2</sup>

This three-fold division of *Kim* is no doubt a good starting point because Kipling intended readers to recognize it. He signals this not only by shifts in setting and action but by putting Kim to sleep at the end of the chapters 5, 10 and 15, a sleep with incremental significance. At the end of chapter 5, a Maverick regimental sergeant tells him, "You're a consolin' little imp. Lie down between the drums an' go bye-bye. Those two bhoys beside you will watch your slumbers." After this, Kim will waken to the discipline of Anglo-Indian life and Western school.

In chapter 10, blind Huneefa drugs him to sleep, dyes his body, and chants an exorcism; so that he is initiated back into the East, and "about third cockcrow, Kim awoke after a sleep of thousands of years." In chapter 15, when Kim recovers from illness, he "came up from those deep wells" of sleep, called forth by the lama: "Wake, O fortunate above all born of women. Wake! It is found!" And Kim imagined he had slept a century.

Meyers simplifies the three-fold division by assuring us that Kim "is oblivious to English life in part one, rebellious in part two, and acquiescent and most obviously English in part three."<sup>3</sup> Such a conclusion, however, cannot be reconciled with the complexities of the novel's structure.

*Kim* must be divided into two parts as well as three. It is curious, for example, that in a novel with fifteen chapters, there is a break in the middle of the seventh chapter, exactly halfway through; and this is the first such break in the novel. Breaks also occur in chapters 8-10 and 15, that is throughout the narrative of Kim's

dual life as English student and Indian traveler/adventurer and finally at the moment when he and the lama emerge from the mountains and set foot on the Gangetic plain. "Our Search is sure."

Most striking, however, is chapter 8, which must be viewed as the novel's fulcrum. We can measure its importance in several ways. First there is the epigraph which praises Allah for giving Kim (and Kipling?) "two separate sides to my head." In the serialization of the novel, the epigraph says simply:

The lids of the flesh-pots chattered high,  
The knives were whetted, and then came I  
To Mahbub Ali the muleteer.<sup>4</sup>

This alludes to the central event in chapter 8, the cozening of Mahbub's assassins beside the rail siding. Kipling's substitution of a new epigraph shifts the emphasis to Kim's dual nature and calls attention to the role of the English in India. At the heart of the chapter stands a key passage in which Mahbub enjoins Kim: "Among Sahibs, never forgetting thou art a Sahib; among the folk of Hind, always remembering thou art \_\_\_\_." And Kim asks, "What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard knot."

The central position of this dialogue in the novel helps clear up a question that has vexed many critics, namely whether Kim will turn East or West. The answer comes from Mahbub's parable about horses with which he answers Kim's question: a Kattivar mare will founder in Bengal, "nor is even a Balkh stallion...of any account in the great Northern deserts beside the snow-camels. Therefore I say in my heart the Faiths are like horses. Each has merit in its own country." Kim can be both a Sahib and an Indian—of several faiths, if he wishes to retain a multiple allegiance.<sup>5</sup> It is critics who demand an either/or resolution to the quest for identity, whereas the novel provided examples of people whose lives bridge various cultures in India, for example Lurgan and the

1. J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Meuthen, 1959), p. 22. In his teacher's manual for *Kim*, Kenneth Hardacre divides the book into units of three chapters each, but this seems to be for the students' convenience. *Rudyard Kipling: Kim* (London: J. Brodie, 1956). Kipling's undated draft entitled *Kim O' the Rishti* consists of "103 unnumbered folio pages that read as though demon-composed, the text [without chapters 6 and 7] running continuously in a tiny, crabbed scrawl without any chapter breaks." (Margaret P. Feeley, "Kipling's *Kim*: Introduction and Annotations," Diss. City Univ. of New York, 1976, p. 97.) Kipling introduced the chapter divisions after much of the novel was written.

2. "The Quest for Identity in *Kim*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* XII (Spring, 1970), 105.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *McClure's Magazine*, XVII (May, 1901), 60. The serialized version in *Cassell's Magazine* printed the first and third stanzas of the "Ballad of the King's Jest," while chapter 13 began with a native proverb: "His own greediness killed the tiger; but the hunter got the Government reward just the same." *The Reader's Guide to Rudyard Kipling's Work*, ed. R. L. Green and A. Mason (Canterbury: Gibbs and Sons, 1961), I, 196. An edition of *Kim* published in 1901 by Doubleday contains epigraphs for chapters 8 and 13 only, both of which became standard. James McG. Stewart, *Rudyard Kipling: A Bibliographical Catalogue* (Toronto: Dalhousie Univ. Press and Univ. of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 212.

5. Nelson C. Sager ("The Crisis of Identity in the Anglo-Indian Fiction of Rudyard Kipling," Diss. Univ. of California Press, 1974) devotes an entire chapter to Kim's "identity crisis" and the various interpretations of it by critics. He notes Kim's question in chapter 8 but ignores Mahbub Ali's answer (pp. 190-191).

Babu, perhaps even Creighton. India, after all, is described as the most democratic land in the world, a place where individuals can fulfill their potential rather than be limited by some pre-arranged design.

But now Kipling has challenged his readers to an interesting game: how do we retain our equilibrium in the presence of a book divided both in half and into thirds? Perhaps we are to observe it as we would the face of a Gothic cathedral or a Greco-Buddhist temple with three spires or turrets placed so that the entire facade can be divided into symmetrical halves, or perhaps we are to envision the Wheel of Life divisible into thirds or halves with equal ease? To explain the "architecture" of *Kim*, we must perform a mechanical exercise, one that different readers may wish to augment.

Assuming a three-part division, an inventory of patterns discloses several interesting things. First, there are various resemblances between the first and final thirds of the novel. Consider, for example, the novel's predominant image, the Wheel of Life (The Wheel of Things). Evidently the first third of the novel exemplifies the three sins (Ignorance/Stupidity, Anger/Hate, and Lust/Greed) that are represented on the wheel's hub by the Hog, Snake, and Dove. The treatment of them reminds one of the conventions governing painted Wheels that are "crowded with hundreds of little figures whose every line carries a meaning." In an apparently random way, two prostitutes (chapters 1 and 2) and a lusty widow (chapter 4) turn up as Doves. An Arain-caste farmer and an old veteran Rissaldar, whose son whips people, flank a cobra in chapter 3 and signify Anger. Chapter 3, of course, is the "middle" of part one, and the lama reminds us of its mood when he says, "And they likewise, bound upon the Wheel, go forth from life to life—from despair to despair, hot, uneasy, snatching." Finally, in chapter 5 the chaplains of the Maverick regiment ignorantly play the Hog.

The randomness of the appearance of these and other characters in the first third of the novel seems less casual or accidental when we look at the final third. Like pictures on opposed segments of the Wheel, they are different yet harmonious. The axis of the novel is a north-south line running from Lahore to Benares, up and down a segment of the Grand Trunk Road. Of course, both Kim and the lama range far and wide, especially during Kim's school years. But the point is that chapter 1 begins in Lahore, and the action moves south; chapter 11 begins in Benares, and the action moves north. The Wheel of Life is mentioned in chapter 1 and partly explicated in chapter 11. It turns up in chapter 2 in the form of a horoscope and is further explicated in chapter 12. (Curiously, Kim's zodiacal sign is the Bull, which corresponds to the sign of Desire [a subdivision of the Dove-sign] on the wheel.) Moreover, in chapter 1, conspirators ransack Mahbub Ali's lodging; and in chapter 11, they maim and trail the Mahratta, another

British agent. On both occasions, Kim observes and takes appropriate action—more constructive in the latter adventure because he is older and has become a participant in the Great Game itself. This violent commencement of the novel's third part suggests the Snake, and this is appropriate because unlucky chapter 13 (the middle chapter of part three, perfectly balancing chapter 3) presents the villains of the novel who attack the lama and elicit from him a like expression of Anger which precipitates a spiritual crisis in a man who has repudiated all anger. Ignorance abounds in the form of mountain coolies, the Russian and Frenchman, perhaps even in the Babu disguised as a *hakim* (doctor). As Lust/Greed turned up in the first third associated with women, in the last third we again have the rich Kulu widow and also Lisbeth, the Woman of Shamlegh who tempts Kim. An even subtler kind of balancing may be found between chapters 4 and 12, the latter occupying a position fourth from the end, while the former is fourth from the beginning. In both, the lama yearns for the hills and is misled by Kim. In chapter 4, they meet the woman of Kulu; in 12 they reside with her.

Finally, we note that the lama, Mahbub Ali, and the Babu exit from the novel in reverse order from their entrance, an interesting symmetrical touch but one that upsets the parallel between the first and third parts because the Babu is not introduced in the first part at all.

Here the three-fold and two-fold divisions blend. Kipling designs a striking modulation in the middle third of the novel. The lama, who dominates the first and third parts, retires in part two; so that Mahbub (and to a lesser degree Creighton) gain prominence. But two new characters join them and in a way replace the lama, namely Lurgan Sahib and Babu Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, both of whom appear first in chapter 9, that is, at the beginning of the second half of the novel.

There is nothing surprising about introducing new characters midway through a novel. Their introduction in *Kim* has a certain Kiplingesque audacity because of the way they seem to disrupt yet complement the three-fold division. To use a musical analogy, Kipling adds to the counterpointing a dramatic key-shift.

The symmetry of the middle third of the novel is perfect. Chapters 6-7 bring Kim securely under Western control at the Umballa barracks and St. Xavier's. Here education amends ignorance (the Hog). Chapters 8-9 return him to the East by way of chastening Lust/Greed (the Dove) in the home of homosexual Lurgan and Huneefa's whorehouse, called The Bird-cage. And chapter 8 doubles as the proper middle-chapter both of the section and of the novel. Like chapters 3 and 13, it emphasizes the sign of the Snake (Anger) with its concern for violence. Here truly "begins the Great Game," which is the final phrase of chapter 8—a loud signal of the novel's change at mid-point.

There are, then, subtleties in the design and structure of *Kim* that reveal themselves if we look and listen carefully. The novel's "machinery" or "skeleton" stand firmly, albeit without obtruding. This helps explain why readers sense unity in what Kipling himself called a

"naked picaresque and plotless" novel<sup>6</sup> and what critics usually call incredibly "rich," "variegated," and "sprawling."

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## Imposture and Absence in Wilde's "Portrait of Mr. W.H."

Linda Dowling

Soon after the publication of "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." in the July 1889 number of *Blackwood's*, Oscar Wilde wrote his friend and silent collaborator in the story, Robert Ross, "Now that Willie Hughes has been revealed to the world, we must have another secret."<sup>1</sup> Secrets, whether guilty secrets like Dorian Gray's hideously decaying portrait, innocent secrets like Algernon's friend Bunbury, or melodramatically undisclosed secrets like Mrs. Erlynne's motherhood of Lady Windermere, are central to Wilde's narrative and dramatic fictions. Biographical or psychological explanations of his work normally trace Wilde's penchant for secrets to the psychopathology of his sexual identity—to the secret, so imperfectly kept and disastrously revealed, of his homosexual life. Yet Wilde's fictional secrets have a purely literary significance. Wilde, as he enfolds secrets into the center of his fictions, is at the same time celebrating and ironically subverting the fin de siècle ideal of autonomous art.

In "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," Wilde, or more precisely, Wilde's unnamed narrator, is specifically concerned with that autonomous world embodied in literary art, the world made out of language. As Michel Foucault, the self-described "archaeologist" of the nineteenth-century intellectual history has shown, writers began to perceive literary language as an autonomous, self-reflexive and sufficient reality at about the same time as philology was emerging as a science of

language. Just as language emerged into visibility as an object of knowledge, argues Foucault, it was simultaneously "reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing"; in short, it was becoming, in Foucault's wry terms, "literature."<sup>2</sup> For Foucault, as for most readers of nineteenth-century writing, the movement toward involution and self-consciousness is most obviously represented in the enigmatic and difficult later work of Mallarmé. Yet the idea of autonomous language—the belief that literary language enclosed a pure realm of vital and coherent beauty or the conviction that words and texts exerted independent, shaping powers upon non-linguistic reality—pervades late nineteenth-century literary experimentation in Britain as well, influencing, for instance, Yeats's quest for "impossible purities" and his belief in the occult power of special words, Ernest Dowson's severe poetic economies of roses, lilies, wine and despair, G.M. Hopkins's extraordinary deviations from mimetic language, and Henry James's paradoxically dense yet diffuse atmospheres of conversations and reflection.<sup>3</sup>

"The Portrait of Mr. W.H." obviously finds a place in this processional line. Wilde's narrator, entranced by the compelling force of words—"Words have their mystical power over the soul. . . and in the case of those rare

6. *Something of Myself* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1937), p. 245.

1. *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 247. After publication in *Blackwood's*, Wilde substantially expanded "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," adding most of the speculative historical and critical material of the central section. Though the work had been earlier accepted for publication by the firm of Mathews and Lane, by 1893 his publishers were in the midst of dissolving their partnership and both refused to undertake publication of the expanded (and morally rather more equivocal) manuscript, much to Wilde's chagrin (see *Letters*, pp. 365, 368). Recent critical commentary, although taking as its text the expanded version of 1893, has largely concerned itself with the events of the frame-story. See, for example, Lewis J. Poteet, "Romantic Aesthetics in Oscar Wilde's 'Mr. W.H.,'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 7 (1970), 458-464; Herbert Sussman, "Criticism as Art: Form in Oscar Wilde's Critical Writings," *Studies in Philology*,

70 (1973), 108-122; and Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde: Art and Egoism* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 83-94.

2. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 300. For an illuminating discussion of the idea of autonomous or "hermetic" language in twentieth-century literature and criticism, see Gerald Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language: a Critical and Historical Study* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974).

3. Recent discussions of the meaning of language in the work of late nineteenth-century writers include Richard Benvenuto, "The Function of Language in the Poetry of Ernest Dowson," *English Language in Transition*, 21 (1978), 158-167; Jacob Korg, "Hopkins' Linguistic Deviations," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 92 (1977), 977-986; and Ruth Bernard Yeazel, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976).

temperaments that are exquisitely susceptible to the influences of language, the use of certain phrases and modes of expression can stir the very pulse of passion"<sup>4</sup>—begins and ends his tale in a library, spends most of his time bent over books, and studs and thickens the texture of his own text with the words and phrases and lines of text he continually introduces into his own. The narrator's belief in autonomous language, on the other hand, is not unlimited: Wilde's tale, after all, concludes with the narrator apparently confirmed in a final, charmingly negligent scepticism about the existence of Willie Hughes, and thus about the existence of what he earlier perceived as "the perfect unity and completeness of the whole" (205), the microcosmic "drama" of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Once the narrator fails in his belief in Willie Hughes, he tells us, the Sonnets give him back "nothing of the feeling that I had brought to them; they [reveal] to me nothing of what I had found hidden in their lines" (214).

Throughout "The Portrait of W.H.," the narrator uses words like "hidden" when speaking about words or texts. Almost from the beginning, as the narrator gazes upon the curious painted miniature of Mr. W.H., gradually becoming convinced by the Willie Hughes theory and fascinated by "the greatest mystery of modern literature" (167), the rhetoric of secrecy—"secret," "key," "lock," "reveal" and above all, "strange"—controls the text. Nor do Shakespeare's Sonnets alone possess their secret: the narrator's researches widen to reveal that Shakespeare's "Lover's Complaint" and his "Venus and Adonis" conceal "none other than the Mr. W.H. of the Sonnets" (181). Similarly, Michaelangelo's poems, "[s]trange as these sonnets may seem to us now" (185), if rightly interpreted reveal another meaning, much as Marsilio Ficino's translation of Plato's "Syposium" catches the "inner meaning" of Hellenism and "divin[es] its secret" (183).

Yet the narrator's obsessive pursuit of the "secrets" within texts, even as it seems to testify to the mysterious power of autonomous literary language to construct its own world, testifies also to something else. For secrets must be invented for these texts; without their factitious mysteries texts are somehow inadequate, less interesting. Shakespeare's text, in particular, is unsatisfactory—incoherent and empty—unless it is filled with Willie Hughes. The secret of Willie Hughes, in fact, finally displaces Shakespeare's original text, for it demands that the initiated editor reorder the sonnet sequence, inserting the "Dark Lady" poems between Sonnets XXXIII and XL, a change which the narrator hopes "will be adopted by all future editors" (197). Similarly, we find the editor-narrator glossing words, italicizing lines, adducing sources and analogues and, in a mood of ecstatic historicism, recreating the wider context of the Sonnets and revealing their furthest influence. In short, after all the narrator's interpolations,

quotations and suppressions, Shakespeare's text has been breached and recomposed upon the pages of the narrator's own text.

Within that text, the presiding symbol for secrets is the little portrait of Mr. W.H. Carefully preserved within enclosing structures—within the narrator's library, before that within a locked cabinet in Erskine's library, and before that within a dark interior of Cyril's ancient Elizabethan chest—except, of course, it was not. We know that the portrait is a forgery (Lat. *fabrica*, workshop), a false Clouet commissioned by Cyril and fabricated in the modern London studio of an impecunious artist; Cyril's deceitful account of finding the portrait inside the chest is simply his second forgery. Our real clue to the secret of Willie Hughes and to the "secret" of the narrator's own text is the picture that is not inside the chest, an image of absence.

Like the empty chest, the hollow text can be filled only by imposture (Lat. *imponere*, to put in), by putting presence in place of absence. When Cyril attempts to satisfy Erskine's doubts, he thus tries to make visible the evidence that is not there by imposing upon his friend with a portrait—the painter's art itself being a form of imposture—of a professional impostor, the boy-actor who impersonated women. The troubling absence behind the initials of "W." and "H.," the fragmentary hints in the Sonnets of a beloved young man, have thus been filled and fleshed out with the presence of Willie Hughes. The narrator, indeed, implicitly sanctions Cyril's impostures for, working a familiar line of Wildean argument, he celebrates the impostures of art: all so-called forgeries, he declares, are "merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation" and all art is "to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one's own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling and limitations of real life" (152). The impostures of art can realize art's claim to objectivity, he insists, only because this is so (192).

The imposture of the narrator's own text, however, is most significantly revealed in the argument, originating with Cyril but taken over by the narrator, that absence is presence—specifically, that it is precisely the absence of Willie Hughes's name from the list of Shakespeare's players that confirms his existence (162, 215). Erskine refines this argument still further when, in his suddenly renewed belief in Willie Hughes, he argues that absence itself is imposture, that Willie Hughes is indeed there in the list of players—but disguised under another name. Significantly, the narrator, even in his final alienation from the Willie Hughes theory, never ceases to be persuaded by this point.

Yet none of this ultimately reveals the "imposture" of the narrator's own text. To be sure, at certain points the narrator puts himself in Shakespeare's place first by paraphrasing his lines (172-175) and later by projecting

4. All textual quotations are from the expanded version of 1893 as printed in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed.

Richard Ellman (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 152-220. Parenthetical numbers refer to the pages of Ellman's text.

himself into the playwright's consciousness (210-211). Such "imposture" represents little more than a thematic attitude, however, a dramatization of the narrator's earlier remarks about the imaginative scope and objectivity granted by an art of imposture. What is the absence that the narrator's text makes present? It is within the enclosing structure of the frame-story treating Cyril and Erskine and the narrator that we find the apologia for passionate friendship, the "something beyond" towards which the narrator, through his opening and recomposing of Shakespeare's Sonnets, has been reaching: "There was something beyond. There was the soul, as well as the language, of neo-Platonism" (183).

In the central section of "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," in the imaginative space that has been cleared by his recomposition of other texts, the narrator presents the soul of neo-Platonism, an absence which is not a void but instead the distancing and perfecting of the disturbing presences of physical love: "There was a kind of mystic transference of the expressions of the physical sphere to a sphere that was spiritual, that was removed from gross bodily appetite, and in which the soul was Lord" (185). In the neo-Platonic friendships of the Renaissance, the narrator believes, love is at once there and not there, at once ardently incarnate and ideally intellectual: "Love had, indeed, entered the olive garden of the new Academe, but he wore the same flame-coloured raiment and had the same words of passion on his lips" (185). Hence the subtle fascination exerted upon Renaissance artists by "the ambiguity of the sexes" (191), the hermaphroditic blending of male and female by which both sexes are at once present and absent. And hence the narrator's awakened sense of his own soul as the absent friend, "never seen. . . but with me for many years. . . a presence beside my always," quickening within him both "spiritual ecstasies of contemplation" and "ardours of fiery-coloured love" (211).

The soul of Renaissance neo-Platonism, the perfect absence that has been redeemed from emptiness, is thus able to transform the channels of pederastic lust into the ideal forms of art. Reversing the emphasis of the frame-story on an absence that is presence, that narrator in the central section of "Mr. W.H." refines the importunities of sexual presence into ideal absence; so Michaelangelo "addressed himself to the worship of intellectual beauty, and . . . pierced the veil of flesh and sought the divine idea it imprisoned" (185), and so Elizabethan boy-actors become "the delicate reeds through which our poets had sounded their sweetest strains, the gracious vessels of honour into which they had poured the purple wine of their song" (189).

At the last, of course, the narrator withdraws from this synthetic vision of presence in absence. He has perfected all that has seemed to him inconclusive or fragmentary or empty in Shakespeare's text by recomposing the Sonnets and enfolding them in his own text. Only then does he withdraw, returning to the mundane present of the frame-story and reporting that he has ceased to believe in

the secret of Willie Hughes. Finally the narrator will withdraw entirely, dying out of his text simply by ceasing to speak. Even this unavoidable "death," however, reminds us that the narrator, like Cyril and Erskine before him, leaves behind a forgery of belief, an "imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling and limitations of real life." The forged miniature of Mr. W.H. became such a plane for Cyril's imagination, releasing it from the trammelling inadequacies of historical evidence. Erskine gave free rein to his imagination in the deceitful letter which disguised as suicide death from consumption. The narrator's "imaginative plane" is his letter to Erskine, "sheets of paper with passionate reiteration of the arguments and proofs that my study had suggested to me" (212). If this letter is absent from the narrator's text, it is only because it has been before us all along in the passionate reiteration of arguments and proofs presented in the central section of "Mr. W.H." The narrator, even as he leaves off believing in his text, nonetheless leaves his text.

The reversing interplay of presence and absence in the central section of the text, like the alternations of doubt and belief presented in the frame-story, reflects the ambiguities of the narrator's experience of autonomous language: texts without secrets are empty, texts with secrets are filled, but with another kind of emptiness, imposture. The symbol of imposture, the little portrait of Mr. W.H., is an image of the ambiguities of texts—indeed, it is itself a little text, originating from the pen (as a silverpoint drawing) and returning to the pen (etched by one of the narrator's friends) and, even as a work of the painter's brush, transformed by the narrator's detailed account of it into a linear sequence of words.

As the little portrait looks like a Clouet to some and an Ouvry to others, the texts of autonomous language seem both closed and open, ambiguously inviting and repelling intervention from without. As both the frame-story and the central section of "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." make clear, one intervenes in such texts only at one's peril; like the little portrait itself, they exert a powerful fascination. They are somehow "fatal." Both Cyril and Erskine in some sense choose to become the mortal victims of Shakespeare's Sonnets, while in the central section of his text the narrator insists upon the "strange influence over men" of Ficino's translation of Plato, the books whose "subtle suggestions of sex in soul" and whose "curious analogies" between intellectual enthusiasm and the physical passion of love had so fascinated Renaissance artists, "colour[ing] their words and thoughts, and manner of living" (184).

In the very notion of a "fatal" book, of course, we confront one of the essential *topoi* of fin de siècle Decadence. As a mode of critical or even self-parodic reflexivity in the fin de siècle writing, Decadence ceaselessly explored those ambiguities of literary experience encountered by the narrator of Wilde's "Portrait of Mr. W.H." by deepening and disrupting the premises of autonomous language, and undermining

avant-gardist assumptions about the "purity," the self-enclosure, the independence from discourse and representation which could be achieved by literary language. As the *topos* of the "fatal" book itself suggests, Decadent consciousness was sustained by a sense that the autonomous world of words had shaped itself out of linguistic energies powerful enough to decompose or destroy that world. Decadence, as it extended and exaggerated the claims of language to autonomy, finally undermined those claims by exposing the dependence of autonomous language upon the rules of language. This is why, for instance, the literature we call Decadent so persistently tried to liberate its own linguistic elements: "the word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, and the page comes to life at the expense of the whole—the whole is no longer a whole."<sup>5</sup>

Literary Decadence and the authors who wrote in its mode, fascinated by the experience of its own end, the end of language, searched in the history of texts for the

line of their own descent, their decline. Through the imposture of Willie Hughes, Wilde's unnamed narrator traces "the Romantic Movement of English Literature" (187) back through the German Aufklärung, the Elizabethan and Italian Renaissances to its source in the Platonic Hellenism of the ancient Greeks. If the narrator's emotion of ecstatic discovery in the central section of "Mr. W.H." seems to contrast sharply with the mood of pessimistic ennui we expect in literary Decadence, we need only to recall that this central section has been qualified and enclosed by a frame-story emphasizing the delusive emptiness of literary language. Wilde, in such apocalyptic fictions as "The Sphinx" and "Salomé," more fully explored the ambiguities of literary experience and the disruptive energies within the autonomous world of language that, in its reversals of doubt and belief, absence and presence, we first hear as faint reverberations in "The Portrait of Mr. W.H."

## Teaching Long Victorian Novels in Parts

Michael Lund

A few years ago I was concerned that, in a standard survey course on the British novel, I would never be able to teach a long Victorian novel. For most of the students at a small, state-supported college, the time required to read an 800-page novel in the middle of a semester was just too great. I would have to cancel some classes before discussion of the long novel, to give the students time to prepare, and/or reduce the total reading the course drastically to make room for one large novel. I lamented that I might never in my career teach *Middlemarch*, and that today's television-oriented students could not be given the opportunity to read such great works in our regular curriculum simply because of their length. (Although I even imagined a course entitled "Novels Too Long For Any Other Course," I still could not figure out how my students could get the reading done.) Then I remembered that George Eliot's classic was originally published in parts: eight half-volumes appearing bi-monthly (with the last three issues coming out at monthly intervals) from December, 1871 through December, 1872; and I decided to schedule the reading and discussion of *Middlemarch* serially. This decision—attempting to recreate the original reading

experience of a specific historical audience—has not only inspired an effective technique for the teaching of long nineteenth-century fiction, but it has also provided a new direction for my research.

As a regular feature of this course, "The British Novel to 1900," I now schedule the reading of one novel in sections—Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, all originally published in installments. In addition to classes in which we consider a number of other British novels from Defoe to Conrad in historical sequence, I plan about eight individual classes on portions of our featured long work. Since each assignment in the large novel runs about 100-150 pages, students have little difficulty with preparation throughout the semester. But the more important advantages in this method are the ways in which the students and I have come to understand and appreciate more fully the properties of long novels.

In their exploration of the Victorian audience's reading format, my students are moving into territory that professional scholars have often ignored. Many critics have documented the effects of serial publication on the shape of Victorian fiction, but not on the installment

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner* (1888), translated and quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 73. Nietzsche here paraphrases the definition of literary Decadence given by Paul Bourget in *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883). Walter Kaufmann insists that Nietzsche is less dependent

upon Bourget than might first appear, for Bourget "merely strengthens a previously present motif" in Nietzsche's thought (p. 73). Bourget's definition was nonetheless highly influential during the period, especially among those writers who were interested in literary as opposed to historical or psychological Decadence.

reader. Novelists like Dickens and Thackeray were able to shape the material of their fiction into short installments of weekly or monthly issue that could be read separately as they appeared in London bookstalls, yet in the end fit together into a whole when published in book form. The classic study of nineteenth-century novel composition, for instance, is John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson's *Dickens at Work* (London: Meuthen, 1957), which has been followed by similarly effective studies of the creative talents of Thackeray, Eliot, James, and others. Edgar F. Harden's recent work, *Emergence of Thackeray's Serial Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), provides a standard justification for this kind of scholarship: studying the development of a serial novel, he says, "should profoundly revise our understanding of . . . the creator by leading towards a new awareness of the dynamic relationship involving him, the special demands of the individual installment, and the final total forms of the novels themselves. In no other way can we come so close to the mysterious edge ultimately dividing us from the 'otherness' that created these works" (p. 2). I have been interested, on the other hand, in the effect on the reader of those carefully constructed parts, the "self" which is called into being by the text as well as the "other" which created it.

Serial novel reading and its relation to the Victorian frame of mind are phenomena little analyzed by modern scholars in part because of post-Henry James assumptions about the structure of fiction. Most of these modern critical constructs are primarily spatial in nature and do not favor the kind of temporal framework most helpful in explaining the literary experiences of long, mid-century novels. In fact, when James himself referred to Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (and by implication much long Victorian fiction) as "great loose baggy monsters," his very terms established the framework within which such novels were to be found lacking. Innovative directions in literary scholarship inspired by recent reader-oriented criticism, however, provide some helpful new tools for understanding the serial novel experience in nineteenth-century England. Walter Slatoff, for example, in his *With Respect to Readers: Dimensions of Literary Response* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), has noted limitations in traditional approaches to the temporal nature of literature: "Reading even a relatively short and simple poem or story is first of all an action. As one begins to read it, the work is not an object, flat on the table, ready for examination, but rather a territory, sometimes a world, one is about to journey into and explore. As one reads one has the feeling one is moving into and through something and that there is movement within oneself—a succession of varied, complex, and rich mental and emotional states. . ." (p. 6). Focusing on the temporal nature of the reading experience, conveniently underscored by the serial format of Victorian fiction, my own research, and my students' response to reading in parts, have, I believe, opened up new facets of the long Victorian novel. (See,

for instance, "Reading Serially Published Novels: Old Stories in Thackeray's *The Newcomes*," forthcoming in *Philological Quarterly*.)

In support of this assertion—that teaching long novels in installments enlightens us about that form and the literary period in which it flourished—I would like to offer one brief observation about George Eliot's *Middlemarch* derived from having taught it in parts, and then present portions of two analyses of Dickens' *David Copperfield* written by students in my British novel course. Our joint efforts have led us to new understandings not only of the original nineteenth-century reader but also of ourselves as twentieth-century readers. Single-volume publication, the dominant mode of our time, has clearly conditioned our evaluation of fiction. Again it was James who sounded the keynote of modern novel theory when he called for "a deep-breathing economy and an organic form" instead of "great loose baggy monsters," setting up standards more congenial to single volume than to parts publication. His emphasis on a single, focused "illusion of life" as a goal of fiction has caused us to underestimate the importance of some Victorian novels and, more importantly perhaps, to idealize the relationship of art to life. Where the modern age has insisted on the autonomy of art, the nineteenth-century reader's interrupted relationship with a serial text reminds us that the reader is never a completely autonomous entity, even if we hope the novel is. While the post-James reader has tended to insist that the novel provide a formally organized, enclosed world of art, the Victorian act of reading necessarily blended in with other day-to-day activities because it was broken up in its serial appearance. Now that many of the fundamental tenets of Jamesian modern criticism are being challenged by a variety of critical methods, the benefits of the installment publication process are ready for us to re-discover.

In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for instance, Dorothea Brooke's disillusionment with her husband Casaubon is entered into more fully by the installment reader than by the modern, single-volume reader. Cassaubon's courtship of Dorothea is the main subject of the novel's first ten chapters. The next ten chapters are primarily about different sets of characters—the aspiring young doctor, Lydgate; the beautiful and ambitious Rosamond Vincy; the powerful banker, Bulstrode. The novel does not turn to Dorothea after she is married until Chapter 20; Mrs. Casaubon is in an inner room of an apartment in Rome, where, the narrator comments, "I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly" (Chapter 20). George Eliot suggests that it is the slow passage of meaningless time which has depressed Dorothea: "that new real feature which was replacing the imaginary drew its material from the endless minutiae by which her view of Mr. Casaubon and her wifely relation, now that she was married to him, gradually changed with the secret motion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden dream" (Chapter 20). The structure of the novel encourages us to draw out the process of Dorothea's

discovery of her husband's true character by allowing it to occur off-stage, while the narrative concentrates on other important events in the village of Middlemarch. The reader later realizes that, as he has been following with interest the blossoming romance between Lydgate and Rosamond, Dorothea has been doing nothing, except waiting at home for her husband who pursues his solitary study in the ancient libraries of Rome. George Eliot conveys to us the sense of emptiness in Dorothea's married life by contrasting it forcefully with fullness in the lives of other characters.

In its original format, however, Dorothea's uneventful married life is given additional emphasis in the mind of the installment reader. Dorothea's (ten-chapter) courtship is presented in Book I of *Middlemarch*, entitled "Miss Brooke," and published in December, 1871. Her married life is not shown until Book II, entitled "Old and Young," and not published until February, 1872. The original reader not only did not see Dorothea for about ten chapters of text, then, but also for 60 days of his own life. During that two months he had time to imagine in advance Dorothea's long stretches of time alone in her apartment in Rome, "sobbing bitterly."

To get a sense of how different this experience is from the modern one, consider how long one might take reading *Middlemarch* in single-volume form, the way most of us would now. Suppose we allowed ourselves a week to read it, taking in about a book (or a half-volume) a day. We could see Dorothea about to marry Casaubon on Day 1. We would have only that evening to speculate about the nature of her marriage and the true character of her husband. At Day 2 we begin Book II and discover Dorothea weeping in Rome. We have had one day to identify with our heroine's situation (a primary goal of Eliot's art, of course) where the original reader had several months; students in my British novel course have about two weeks.

One early critic of *Middlemarch*, writing in *The Daily Telegraph* at about the time the third installment was coming out (18 June 1872), reinforces the fact that he and his fellow readers had the events of the novel in mind even when they were not reading:

When, month by month, with wonderful punctuality, Charles Dickens 'put forth his green leaves,' as he used to phrase it [referring, of course, to the green cover of the monthly number], his current story was really a topic of the day; it seemed something almost akin to politics and news— as if it belonged not so much to literature but to events. Of 'Middlemarch,' now coming out less regularly from George Eliot's great pen, the same may be said. 'Have you read the last Book?' is an almost inevitable question in the haunts of men. (included in *George Eliot and Her Readers*, ed. Lawrence Lerner & John Holstrom [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966], p. 83).

Speculation about the future of Dorothea after her marriage became one of the dominant themes in early reviews of the novel like this one, as readers involved themselves in the on-going fictional world of the

installment novel. When I taught the novel in half-volume units, I found the entire class's sympathy for the characters of the novel clearly intensified as we awaited future installments. (I have explored a similar process of reader sympathy and speculation in "Beyond the Text of *Vanity Fair*," *Studies in the Novel*, 11 [1979], 147-161.)

Recently, I offered Dickens' *David Copperfield* in parts, and there too I found my own and student involvement adding significantly to our understanding of the Victorians' response to long novels. At this time I also added one more feature to my British novel course that allowed more students to read works they probably would not otherwise take time for: I allowed students to enroll in only the long novel portion of the course for one hour of credit in "Independent Study." These "*Copperfield* only" students attended the eight classes in that one novel and wrote one paper on Dickens for their course requirements. Several veterans of my regular British novel course, who had read *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend* serially in earlier semesters, signed up for one more long novel. Their studies of *Copperfield* provide strong support, I think, for the idea of teaching Victorian novels in parts.

Julie Weaver, a senior English major, wrote an essay on "*David Copperfield* and the Victorian Woman," which describes the restrictive roles of Victorian society dictated for women. She focuses particularly on the submissive characters, Clara Copperfield and Dora Spenslow, who seem to just fade out of existence in the novel as the demands of the men in their world overwhelm them. In the case of David Copperfield's young wife, argues Ms. Weaver, Dickens uses the serial form of his novel to spread out the process of Dora's "withering away," perhaps lessening its impact: "Dickens artfully erases Dora from the novel. From the beginning of chapter forty-nine to the beginning of chapter fifty-two, there is no allusion to Dora at all. When she does reappear, the 'Little Blossom' has withered dreadfully. Finally Dora withers away completely." For the original reader, Dora's lingering sickness continues through Numbers 16 and 17, appearing in August and September, 1850. Students like Ms. Weaver, who also watched Dora's slow collapse over an extended length of time, can more readily understand the Victorians' ready sympathy for their sentimental heroines.

Another senior English major, Cindy Cumins, suggests in her essay, "*David Copperfield*: Fictional Realities," that the original audience's experience of reading parallels David Copperfield's reliving his life in the composition of his autobiography: "Like David, the reader too encounters 'the ghosts of half-formed hopes' and 'the broken shadows of disappointment' [*Copperfield*, Chapter 46] as Dickens leads him to harbor false hopes concerning David and other characters within the novel, which often lead to later disappointments." Ms. Cumins goes on to insist that the cycle of hope and disappointment, which she terms "one of the major movements of the novel," would have been more intense



for the installment reader: "in the context of installments, Dickens was able to influence the daily lives of his reader more effectively with the feelings, thoughts, and emotions which formed an integral part of the novel's content. As the reader waited and pondered over the fate of David, and other characters in the novel, during the intervals between installments, they too became part of the reader's lives, almost transported from the world of the novel into the readers' own."

As my students in English 221 and I came into class to discuss *Copperfield* every other Wednesday, we too realized how blurred the line between fiction and reality often becomes for installment readers. Our sense of commitment to *Copperfield* and company went on for a longer time, and therefore seemed to matter more to us. Novel readers, novel characters, and the novel's author

had, in that favorite metaphor of the genre, journeyed down a long road together. In a similar sense, the twenty-some members of that British novel class had travelled through the semester together as well. Reading one long novel in parts for 14 weeks seemed to knit us together as a group with shared experiences, shared memories, shared hopes for the future. We had not only found a way for a new generation of students to handle long Victorian novels within a traditional academic calendar, but discovered as well a means of entering more fully into the world of nineteenth-century fiction and fact. On such journeys I invite you to join.

Longwood College

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# Victorian Group News

## A. THE HOUSTON MEETING

28 December 1980, 10:15-11:30 a.m., Imperial 2, Hyatt  
Presiding: Jerome H. Buckley, Harvard University

- I. Business
- II. Papers and Discussion: Reading Victorian Fiction and Poetry
  1. "Hopkins' Paradigms of Language," Jerome Bump, University of Texas, Austin
  2. "Clocking the Reader in the Long Victorian Novel," Michael Lund, Longwood College
  3. "Why Novels End, and Where," Edward Mendelson, Columbia University
  4. "*Daniel Deronda*: Energeia and Effective Language," Peter A. Dale, University of California, Davis

## B. THE VICTORIAN LUNCHEON

The annual Victorian Division Luncheon will be held 28 December at Arbor 5, Hyatt, 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. For reservations please send a check for \$10.00 by December 15 to Robert Patten, English Department, Rice University, Houston, TX 77001.

## C. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Southeastern Nineteenth-Century Studies Association Conference, May 1981. Call for papers: Nineteenth-century heroism; reading time 15 minutes. Papers by March 1, 1981 to Sara Putzell, English Department, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332 or Linda Zatlín, English Department, Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA 30214.

Midwest Victorian Studies Association spring meeting—Newberry Library, Chicago, 1-2 May 1981. Conference Theme—Law, Rule, and Resistance in Victorian England. Inquiries to Frederick Kirchoff, English Department, Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, IN 46805.

Northeast Victorian Association Conference, 24-26 April 1981 at University of Hartford. Theme—"England in the 1880's." Inquiries to Catherine Stevenson, English Department, University of Hartford, West Hartford, CT 06117. *Univ. of Hartford Studies in Literature* will publish special issue of interdisciplinary essays on England in the 1880's: papers (about 15 pp.) to Leonard Manheim, Ed. *Univ. of Hartford Studies in Literature*, University of Hartford, West Hartford, CT 06117.

The Sixth Brontë Conference, University of Leeds, 3-8 August 1981. Theme—Novels and poetry of Emily and Ann Brontë. Titles and summaries of papers (maximum length 200 words) by 31 December 1981 to Director of Special courses, Department of Adult Education and Extramural Studies, the University of Leeds, L82 9JT, U.K.

## D. PROJECTS: REQUESTS FOR AID

Locations of letters of Edward Burne-Jones privately owned are sought for edition. Write Michael Case, English Department, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85281.