

# The Victorian Newsletter

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Cover: "Mr. Pickwick in the Pound" *Pickwick Papers*, 1836 – on the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Pickwick*.

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## Disraeli and Carlyle's "Aristocracy of Talent": The Role of Millbank in *Coningsby* Reconsidered

Nils Claussou

A commonplace of Disraeli criticism is that Mr. Millbank, the self-made industrialist in *Coningsby* (1844), is Disraeli's candidate for a new Carlylean aristocracy of talent which is to join with a renovated aristocracy of birth to solve the condition-of-England question which Carlyle and others were writing about in the late 1830s and the 1840s.<sup>1</sup> A corollary of this widely held view is that the marriage between Coningsby and Edith Millbank, which concludes the novel, symbolizes a political alliance between the new aristocracy of talent and the old one of birth.<sup>2</sup>

I wish to challenge these interpretations of Millbank and of his daughter's marriage by arguing that Disraeli is not offering Millbank as a member of a new aristocracy of talent and that he is not recommending a political alliance between the Millbanks and the Coningsbys of Victorian England. Critics have overlooked the fact that Millbank does not ascend to political power at the end of the novel. He does not even enter Parliament; he steps down as the Liberal candidate for Darlford so that Coningsby may run. If Disraeli wanted to portray an alliance between aristocracy and trade, he could easily have arranged the plot so that both Millbank and Coningsby would enter Parliament. But by keeping Millbank out, Disraeli is clearly implying that the country is better off with men like Coningsby and his friend Lord Henry running it. In *Coningsby* Disraeli is no more proposing that the new captains of industry rule as the equal partners of the traditional aristocracy than he is recommending in *Sybil* that the working classes do so.

Millbank is certainly a good factory owner who treats his workers kindly, but his good qualities have blinded critics to his deficiencies as a potential political leader. Disraeli is not nearly as receptive to industrialism as Carlyle is; nor does he share Carlyle's naive view that captains of industry are natural aristocrats. However adequate the system which has produced Millbank is for the narrow purpose of creating material goods, it is, in Disraeli's view, wholly inadequate as a way of life. And its inadequacy is brought out in Disraeli's subtle but unmistakable criticisms of Millbank, which in many ways anticipate Matthew Arnold's criticism of the middle classes in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

Millbank's first limitation is his intense class-consciousness, which is potentially as socially divisive as that of the Chartists in *Sybil*. "All that we want in this country," Millbank tells Coningsby, "is to be masters in our own industry" (IV, iv, 67). But what Millbank here calls being "masters in our own

industry" comes very close to "doing what we want with our own," a view which, when more systematized, went under the name of *laissez-faire*. In twenty-five years Arnold would call it "doing as one likes" and identify it with the forces of anarchy threatening Victorian society. With Millbank's strong class-consciousness goes an equally strong hostility to the aristocracy. He brings up his son to have "a due prejudice against every sentiment or institution of an aristocratic character" (I, ix, 42). He even instructs his son "to avoid the slightest semblance of courting the affection or society of any member of the falsely-held superior class" (I, ix, 42-43). However, the fact that his son develops a natural affection for Coningsby suggests that Millbank's dislike of the aristocracy is a personal prejudice. And this suspicion is later confirmed when we learn that Millbank was a disappointed rival for the hand of Coningsby's mother. Millbank's pride in his own class and his prejudice against the aristocracy lead him to see the gap between the two classes as unbridgeable: "Saxon industry and Norman manners never will agree," he tells Coningsby (IV, iv, 167). Given Millbank's pride and intransigence, it is hard to see him as the model for a new aristocracy of talent.

Other indications of Millbank's limitations – and those of his class – are his naive belief in material progress and his somewhat fatuous middle-class complacency. "I am a Disciple of Progress," he informs Coningsby (IV, iv, 171); but for him progress means, above all, the material progress of his class. In a secular version of Calvinism, he sees the progress which the Industrial Revolution has brought as proof of the superior virtues of self-made men like himself:

'Did you ever hear of the Forest of Rossendale?' said Millbank. 'If you were staying here, you should visit the district. It is an area of twenty-four square miles. It was disforested in the early part of the sixteenth century, possessing at that time eighty inhabitants. Its rental in James the First's time was 120£. When the woollen manufacture was introduced into the north, the shuttle competed with the plough in Rossendale, and about forty years ago we sent them the Jenny. The eighty souls are now increased to upwards of eighty thousand, and the rental of the forest, by the last county assessment, amounts to more than 50,000£, 41,000 per cent. on the value in the reign of James I. Now I call that an instance of Saxon industry competing successfully with Norman manners.' (IV, iv, 167-68)

The use of material standards alone to judge the present state of society, and especially the superior self-satisfaction implied

1. "A popular and democratic age must find its own aristocrats," says John Holloway in his discussion of Disraeli in *The Victorian Sage*. "Of these, Millbank in *Coningsby* is an example" (95). "It is from Millbank," remarks Alice Chandler in *A Dream of Order*, "that Coningsby first hears the Carlylean idea, which Disraeli seems to adopt, of the importance of an aristocracy of talent, as well as one of birth" (173). According to Ivan Melada, with Millbank Disraeli "set out to portray Plugson of Undershot along the novel lines that Carlyle had hoped the captains of industry would

develop" (121). And Raymond Chapman believes that "a Carlylean insistence for great men as leaders" pervades the novel (131).

2. Richard Levine says that the "new aristocracy must acknowledge the Millbanks as members" and that the marriage between Edith and Coningsby symbolizes "the joining of aristocracy and trade" (82, 67). And in the opinion of Sheila Smith, the marriage "symbolizes the alliance between the traditional aristocracy, invigorated by an awareness of their responsibilities, and the new aristocracy, the great industrialists" (203).



by "we sent *them* the Jenny," are the same Philistine traits of mind that Arnold was later to satirize so effectively in John Roebuck and Arthur Lowe. In particular, Millbank's worship of wealth and population is precisely the sort of thing Arnold has in mind when he calls attention to the middle-class worship of "machinery":

Wealth, again, that end to which our prodigious works for material advantage are directed, – the commonest of commonplaces tells us how men are always apt to regard wealth as a precious end in itself; and certainly they have never been so apt thus to regard it as they are in England at the present time.

Population, again, and bodily health and vigour, are things which are nowhere treated in such an unintelligent, misleading, exaggerated way as in England. Both are really machinery; yet how many people all around us do we see rest in them and fail to look beyond them! (40, 41)

And a few pages later Arnold makes an observation about industrialists which applies perfectly to Millbank:

Now, culture admits the necessity of the movement towards fortune-making and exaggerated industrialism, readily allows that the future may derive benefit from it; but insists, at the same time, that the passing generations of industrialists, – forming, for the most part, the stout main body of Philistinism, – are sacrificed to it. (48)

By confusing means with ends, Millbank is sacrificed to the very industrialism which he has helped to create.

With Millbank's self-satisfaction and belief in material progress as ends in themselves there goes a corresponding parochialism and depreciation of the past. As we have seen, his dislike of the past manifests itself in his open hostility to the aristocracy. But it also shows itself in less overt ways which reveal just how deeply it is ingrained in him. For example, Millbank's conventional artistic tastes are exclusively modern and English.

The walls of the dining-room were covered with pictures of great merit, all of the modern English school. Mr. Millbank understood no other, he was wont to say! and he found that many of his friends who did, bought a great many pleasing pictures that were copies, and many originals that were very displeasing. He loved a fine free landscape by Lee, that gave him the broad plains, the green lanes, and running streams of his own land; a group of animals by Landseer, as full of speech and sentiment as if they were designed by Æsop; above all he delighted in the household humour and homely pathos of Wilkie. . . . He possessed some specimens of Etty worthy of Venice when it was alive . . . . (IV, iv, 172)

The fact that the walls are "covered" with pictures suggests an ostentatious display of bought culture, and the exclusive partiality to English painters implies a parochialism that is a further limitation. And of course Millbank's taste is Philistine: it runs to conventional landscapes by Frederick Richard Lee, sentimental pictures of dogs and deer by Sir Edwin Henry Landseer, narrative paintings by Sir David Wilkie, and William Etty's female nudes and saccharine portraits of children. Millbank's artistic taste is that of his class, and it is an index of his narrow political views: he cannot see beyond his class.

Perhaps Millbank's gravest limitation is his inability to conceive of society as a Burkean partnership between the living, the dead and the unborn, together with his concomitant view of society as atmoistic rather than organic. This limitation becomes very clear if we compare Millbank's attitude toward his factory with the attitude which the medieval abbots in *Sybil* show toward their monastery. Millbank's pride in his achievements and those of his class leads him to look upon his factory as "a monument of the skill and power of his order": "The building had been fitted up by a capitalist as anxious to raise a monument of the skill and power of his order, as to obtain a return for the great investment" (IV, iii, 162). There is a remarkably similar description of Marney Abbey in *Sybil*: "The abbots loved to memorise their reigns by some public work, which should add to the beauty of their buildings or the convenience of their subjects" (II, iv, 68). The similarity between these two passages might lead one to conclude that Millbank is only attempting to do in the nineteenth century what the abbots of Marney did in the fourteenth. Richard Levine, for example, calls Millbank's factory town "a secular monastery" (82). But Millbank's motives are not so disinterested as those of the abbots, and his conception of society is not at all like theirs. Millbank wishes to raise a monument to the skill and power of his class. True, the abbots wish to memorialize their reigns, but the reign of an abbot represents something more socially and culturally inclusive than the mere class ("order") which Millbank belongs to. The abbots' monastery as Alice Chandler has pointed out stands for a whole way of life, an entire culture, and not just for a class within society, as Millbank's factory does: "the monastics' generosity created not only a class but a culture, since the monks cared not only for their present tenants but for posterity as well. They created the best part of English civilization with their cathedrals and colleges – buildings for which Disraeli . . . does not think treadmills and workhouses a proper substitute" (179).

By memorializing their reign through some public work that will benefit the whole of society as well as the monastic order, posterity as well as the present generation, the abbots affirmed the ideal most memorably expressed by Edmund Burke, that society is a partnership between generations. Millbank's factory, on the contrary, has no connection with the past. And what his factory lacks, roots in the past, is what Victorian society, of which the factory is the fitting symbol, also lacks. Coningsby has this truth impressed upon him when he visits Manchester; he comes to see the newest city in England – indeed, in the world – only to be told that "Manchester is gone by":

"Why, in the way of machinery, you know," said the stranger, very quietly, "Manchester is a dead letter."

"A dead letter!" said Coningsby.

"Dead and buried," said the stranger . . . . "We have all of us a very great respect for Manchester, of course; look upon her as a sort of mother, and all that sort of thing. But she is behind the times, sir, and that won't do in this age. The long and short of it is, Manchester is gone by . . . . If you want to see life . . . go to Staleybridge or Bolton. There's high pressure." (IV, ii, 157)

The implication is clear: Bolton and Staleybridge (cotton-man-



ufacturing towns near Manchester) will become outdated as quickly as Manchester has. The impression Disraeli creates is that of a present cut off from the past and oriented, with uncritical enthusiasm, to a future that is continuously replacing it. "Industrial society," as J. H. Plumb observes, ". . . does not need the past. Its intellectual and emotional orientation is towards change rather than conservation, towards exploitation and consumption. The new methods, new processes, new forms of living of scientific and industrial society have no sanction in the past and no roots in it" (14). The result is the loss of that ideal of cultural continuity embodied in the abbey in *Sybil*.

Closely related to Millbank's inability to see society as an organic continuum is his Carlylean idea of an aristocracy of talent composed of men like himself, for, in Disraeli's view, the idea of an aristocracy of talent posits an atomistic rather than an organic society. "I am for an aristocracy," Millbank tells Coningsby, "but a real one, a natural one." He continues:

"I do not understand how an aristocracy can exist, unless it be distinguished by some quality which no other class of the community possesses. Distinction is the basis of aristocracy. . . . That, however, is not the characteristic of the English peerage. I have yet to learn they are richer than we are, better informed, wiser, or more distinguished for public or private virtue." (IV, iv, 168)

Critics have for the most part assumed that Disraeli shares Millbank's view. Patrick Brantlinger believes that "Disraeli ridicules the whole concept of the hereditary nobility . . . . A person ought to be judged by his talents and not by his birth – look at Disraeli as an example" (14). And Richard Faber presents a Disraeli "torn between Blood and Brains. Where he could, he combined them. He could be comfortable in the conviction that he combined them in himself" (91). At first glance, Millbank's view seems quite attractive. He seems to want only what all good citizens want – that all positions should be filled by those who are best qualified to carry out the duties of those positions. *Coningsby* and *Sybil* are full of aristocrats in positions of power for which neither their characters nor their intellects qualify them, and aristocrats like these are a strong argument for Millbank's call for an aristocracy of talent. But an aristocracy of talent implies much more than the correction of such abuses. Disraeli's objection to it is similar to the one T. S. Eliot makes to a meritocracy of elites:

The élites . . . will consist solely of individuals whose only common bond will be their professional interest; with no social cohesion, with no social continuity. They will be united only by a part, and that the most conscious part, of the personalities; they will meet like committees. The greater part of their "culture" will be only what they share with all the other individuals composing their nation. (47)

An aristocracy of talent similarly posits an atomistic view of society, whereas Disraeli, like Burke and Eliot, sees society as organic and evolutionary.

Disraeli believed that an hereditary aristocracy was in the best position to see society in this way because it is through membership in an ancient family that one acquires a sense of cultural continuity and social responsibility, that one comes to look upon "the nation as a family, and upon the country as a

landed inheritance" (*Vindication of the English Constitution* 124). Eliot held a similar view of the family:

The primary channel of transmission of culture is the family: no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment . . . . when I speak of the family I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than [one generation]: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote. Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community. Such an interest in the past is different from the vanities and pretensions of genealogy; such a responsibility for the future is different from that of the builder of social programs. (44)

Disraeli, of course, shared Eliot's impatience with "the vanities and pretensions of genealogy"; nevertheless, he believed that an hereditary class is essential if social continuity is to be preserved and if social responsibility is to be a more or less unconscious expression of a whole way of life. "Culture cannot altogether be brought to consciousness," remarks Eliot; "and the culture which we are wholly conscious of is never the whole of culture" (107). In *Coningsby* this idea of the unconscious nature of culture is illustrated by the way the Duke of Beaumanoir's sense of duty is unconsciously "imbibed" by his family from him and from their environment:

The moral influence of residence furnishes some of the most interesting traits of our national manners. The presence of this power was very apparent throughout the district that surrounded Beaumanoir. The ladies of that house were deeply sensible of the responsibility of their position; thoroughly comprehending their duties, they fulfilled them without affectation, with earnestness, and with that effect which springs from a knowledge of the subject . . . . The ancient feudal feeling that lingers in these sequestered haunts, is an instrument which, when skilfully wielded, may be productive of vast social benefit. The duke understood this well; and his family had imbibed all his views and seconded them. Lady Everingham [his daughter], once more in the scene of her past life, resumed the exercise of gentle offices, as if she had never ceased to be a daughter of the house, and as if another domain had not its claims upon her solicitude. (III, v, 147-48)

Lady Everingham has not wholly escaped from the kind of culture which she has acquired from her family and early environment. And because her sense of duty is a manifestation of the unconscious part of her culture, she is able to continue in her old ways even after she marries Lord Everingham, "a Whig, and a clear-headed, cold-blooded man" who believes that the New Poor Law, which he regards as "another Magna Charta," will "elevate the condition of the labouring class" (III, iii, 132, 133).

An aristocracy of talent, then, is not for Disraeli a solution to the problems facing Victorian society. Since these problems include how to maintain continuity between past and present in an age of unprecedented change and how to ensure that institutionalized forms of responsibility are preserved, and since an aristocracy of talent posits an atomistic society which views responsibility as a matter of individual good will (Millbank is kind to his workers), Millbank's response to the crisis of the age would, in Disraeli's view, only add to the problems rather



than help to solve them. But at the same time there must be a way for society to deal with the rise of men like Millbank (Mr. Thornton in Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South* is another example), for if members of the new capitalist class are not integrated into the traditional order represented by Beaumanoir, they would, Disraeli feared, align themselves with Whigs like Lord Everingham, and the result would be ever greater class-conflict and more discontinuity. The way in which new forms of wealth should be integrated into existing society is discussed in theory by Disraeli in *The Spirit of Whiggism* (1836) and illustrated by Millbank's progress in *Coningsby*.

Disraeli believed that throughout English history, when new forms of wealth arose in the nation, they were eventually integrated into traditional, landed society, infusing new life and energy into it. In the eighteenth century it was the commercial interest that challenged landed society, but by the early nineteenth century it had become virtually absorbed. Disraeli predicted that the manufacturing interest emerging in the nineteenth century would follow the same pattern:

When passions have a little subsided [Disraeli is writing just after the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill], the industrious ten-pounder, who has struggled into the privileged order of the Commons, proud of having obtained the first step of aristocracy, will be the last man to assist in destroying the other gradations of the scale which he or his posterity may yet ascend; the new member of a manufacturing district has his eye already upon a neighbouring park, avails himself of his political position to become a county magistrate, meditates upon a baronetcy, and dreams of a coroneted descendant. (*The Spirit of Whiggism* 349)

Now this process of integration is precisely the one which Millbank is destined to follow; and it is his function in the novel to illustrate this pattern. Although Millbank has not yet entered the Commons, he does have his eye on "a neighbouring park," namely Hellingsley. Millbank himself is not destined to rule as the equal of Coningsby, but since his daughter Edith marries into the aristocracy, he can dream of a "coroneted descendant" who will rule jointly with Coningsby's descendants.

Like Coleridge, Disraeli recognized the need for an interest of progress as well as one of permanence.<sup>3</sup> But he was also aware that in the present state of society there was a real danger of the progressive interest, represented by the new industrialists and manufacturers, becoming too powerful too quickly and upsetting the balance Coleridge recommended. Therefore, he believed that the new energies of progress needed to be absorbed into the existing fabric if the balance was to be preserved. This view was, of course, fairly typical of mid-Victorian Britain.

3. In *On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each* (1830) S. T. Coleridge distinguishes between an interest of permanence, based on the land, and one of progress, represented by commerce, trade and industry. The well-being of the state, he believed, depends on the balance between these interests. "Now, in every country of civilized men . . . the two antagonist powers or opposite interests of the state, under which all the other state interests are comprised, are those of PERMANENCE and PROGRESSION." The "permanence of a state," he says, is connected with "the land and the landed property. To found a family, and to convert his wealth into land, are twin thoughts, births of the same moment, in the mind of the opulent merchant, when he thinks of reposing

For example, Anthony Trollope (who despised Disraeli) described himself as "an advanced, but still a conservative Liberal"; he advocated removing social inequalities, but tried to resist the temptation "to travel too quickly" along the road of progress (291, 294). This view is perfectly illustrated in *Doctor Thorne* (1858). The heroine, Mary Thorne, turns out to be the heiress of her uncle, a former stone-mason who has become a great railway contractor and is rewarded with a baronetcy. When Mary marries Frank Gresham, a member of the declining landed gentry, new wealth comes to the support of the old. Similarly in *Coningsby*, the marriage between Edith and the hero does not symbolize a political alliance between aristocracy and trade. Nor is it simply a "compromise between romance and sociology," as Kathleen Tillotson believes (122). It illustrates the idea that society must change, but change without impairing its continuity.

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from his labours. . . . On the other hand . . . I may assert, that the progression of a state, in the arts and comforts of life, in the diffusion of the information and knowledge, useful or necessary for all; in short, all advances in civilization, and the rights and privileges of citizens, are especially connected with, and derived from the four classes of the mercantile, the manufacturing, the distributive, and the professional" (II, 16-17). Coleridge's book was popular (it went through three editions in the 1830s) and so even if Disraeli did not read it he is likely to have been exposed to its ideas, if only at second hand. The progress of Coleridge's "opulent merchant" certainly fits Millbank.

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## The Reader As Whoremonger: A Phenomenological Approach To Rossetti's "Jenny"

Michael Cohen

The rhetorical strategy in Rossetti's "Jenny" forces the reader past sympathy with the poem's narrator to identification with him. This is an uneasy and unstable identification which alternates with a distancing of reader from speaker and with the reader's criticism and unfavorable judgment of the speaker. Nevertheless the poem's readers – including female readers – are made to share the guilt of Jenny's sexual exploitation. The reader is engaged and brought into the poem through a number of strategies of which the surface train of thought of the narrator is only the most obvious. The prudent and prudish omission of the overtly salacious and of anything which actually names Jenny's occupation – "what thing she is" – constitutes another strategy. But the most powerful strategy works through a combination of religious and art imagery in the transformation of Jenny from Magdalene to Virgin.

Our initial impression of the narrator, who has forsaken his books for the company of a prostitute, marks him as not much of a scholar and still less a gentleman. But he perceives that something is to be learned from Jenny and comments to the sleeping girl:

You know not what a book you seem  
Half-read by lightning in a dream! (51-52)

The narrator wonders what Jenny is thinking as she sleeps. He imagines that she is thankful for a rest from "envy's voice at virtue's pitch," "the pale girl's dumb rebuke," and the "wise unchildish elf" who points her out, "what thing she is," to his schoolmate. But what she most needs rest from, he thinks, is "the hatefulness of man, Who spares not to end what he began." This is the first point at which the narrator's moral musings are directed inward toward himself as guilty and responsible for Jenny's fate.

The narrator imagines an idyllic rural past for Jenny, when she would dream about the city she knows so well now. He imagines her future too:

When, wealth and health slipped past, you stare  
Along the streets alone, and there,  
Round the long park, across the bridge,  
The cold lamps at the pavement's edge  
Wind on together and apart,  
A fiery serpent for your heart. (149-154)

The speaker's condescending recognition that Jenny sleeps just as any other woman sleeps (177) leads him to think of his cousin Nell (185-202) and to imagine a future in which Nell's children might be in Jenny's situation and need *her* children's charity (210-214). In the next hundred lines, in the middle of the poem, Rossetti, having brought narrator and reader to a wider social and historical view of Jenny's "case," now effects a moral reversal, shifting the burden of shame from Jenny to the speaker and the implied observer. But he effects this change not merely through the speaker's surface thoughts: from the beginning of the poem a series of images has worked to rehabilitate Jenny in the mind's eye, purifying and even sanctifying the picture which the reader creates of her.<sup>1</sup>

When Rossetti rhymes the girl's name with *guinea* in the first couplet of the poem, he suggests that it is the pet form for *Virginia* rather than for Jennifer or Jane or Genevieve.<sup>2</sup> But his purpose is not irony; the name connects with other images which suggest the virgin in Jenny. Jenny is Magdalene not only by profession but iconographically by the emphasis on her long hair (10-11, 47, 174, 340), a traditional sign for this New Testament figure.<sup>3</sup> But she is transformed from Mary Magdalene to Mary Virgin by an early line in the poem which echoes the annunciation:

two lines describing a Jenny who, like Rossetti's, has her bodice open to the waist:

. . . bashful Jenny, even at Morning-Prayer,  
Spreads her Fore-Buttocks to the Navel bare. (33-34)

Pope's source is the Horatian satire, I, ii, concerning adultery.

1. G. I. Hersey recognizes that Rossetti is in fact painting a picture of Jenny as the narrator's thoughts proceed: " 'Jenny' employs a form of ecphrasis. . . the poetic or rhetorical description of real or imagined works of visual art, usually paintings or sculptures" (17).
2. The word *guinea* (in addition to its use as a derogatory term for an Italian – which the lines can accommodate) now refers merely to the amount of twenty-one shillings, but until the last coinage of 1813 went out of circulation it was the name of the gold coin (supposedly minted from gold from the Guinea Coast of Africa) of that amount. Gold coins and other golden or gilt objects figure importantly in the poem's imagery. Jenny cannot be considered as any generic (puns seem unavoidable) name for a prostitute, although there is one precedent in Pope's "Sober Advice from Horace," mostly dealing with whores and whoremongers, which has
3. Anne Hollander points out that "Thick and abundant female hair safely conveyed a vivid sexual message in an atmosphere of extreme prudery" and that the long hair of the Magdalene "constituted a scriptural reference and was thus an identifying attribute" (73). Tradition confuses the Mary Magdalene mentioned in all four evangelists with the woman who washes Christ's feet with tears and dries them with her hair (Luke 7:36-38); hence the significance of her hair.



Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace (18)

It is a reversal of the annunciation in some ways, spoken by a definitely unangelic speaker (though a Gabriel speaks through him) to an unaware, sleeping Jenny rather than a waking, watchful Mary, recording an all-too human rather than divine past and future and a soul state wrought by male sin rather than female purity.<sup>4</sup> The biblical echoes that concern virgins do not end until the end of the poem, when the dawn finds Jenny's lamp still alight, "Like a wise virgin's" (316), and the narrator and reader decamp, leaving Jenny indeed virginal for this encounter at least.

Between these references to virgins, other biblical echoes are scattered through the poem. Jenny's "lazy lily hand" (97) leads to the lilies of the field (100-110) and fled roses to "the naked stem of thorns" (120) which links passion and suffering, loosely connecting Jenny's case with Christ's, sinful with expiatory passion.

The religious references join in the poem's center with art imagery showing Jenny as art object or model and emphasizing the role of the maker. The speaker first seems to suggest that blame is assignable to God for Jenny's case:

— what to say  
Or think, — this awful secret sway,  
The potter's power over the clay!  
Of the same lump (it has been said)  
For honour and dishonour made,  
Two sister vessels. Here is one. (180-184)

The thought shakes him; he says it "makes a goblin of the sun" (206). But when he speaks of the painter placing "Some living woman's simple face" — perhaps Jenny's — in a "gilded aureole," he says that such pictures have the power to show men what God can do in forming nature, but that Jenny's fate has been wrought by man:

What has man done here? How atone,  
Great God, for this which man has done? (241-42)

Jenny's face comes to be seen, as it might be by Raphael or Leonardo, as fit for a picture "For preachings of what God can do" (240). God has modeled the "real" Jenny; man has made her "case" — is the artist of her sin and prostitution. Lust is man's creation, and the narrator sees it when he looks at Jenny with his mind's eye:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,  
The woman almost fades from view.  
A cipher of man's changeless sum  
Of lust, past, present, and to come,  
Is left. A riddle that one shrinks  
To challenge from the scornful sphinx. (276-281)

It is an inward look that gives him that view; Jenny's "stilled features" are the same long throat and "pure wide curve from ear to chin" that might inspire Raphael. Jenny's face is a work of divine art, but her "case" is a human creation which narrator

and reader find first a book, then a picture, and finally a mirror.

So much for the poem's male readers. A serious argument could be made, however, that "Jenny" isn't a poem aimed at male readers at all. For one thing, in this poem with its salacious subject there is a complete absence of salacious detail from the beginning — even from the epigraph. The *Merry Wives of Windsor* scene to which Rossetti alludes in the epigraph contains some fairly explicit bawdry: double entendres and sexual metaphors abound as the Welsh schoolmaster asks his pupil for the "focative" case, and then for the genitive case of *hic*, which is *horum*. Mistress Quickly interrupts: "Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her! Never name her, child, if she be a whore" (IV, i, 53-54). Rossetti quotes only "Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her! Never name her, child." In fact Jenny's case is never explicitly named — "what thing she is." Nor is the milder word *prostitute* used. Aside from a line early in the poem mentioning "Love's exuberant hotbed" (13) there is no language in the poem that overtly images passion. The subject may be racy; the language is not.

Partly what identifies Jenny as whore are the references to money throughout the poem, and these tell us more about the speaker than about Jenny:

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,  
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea (1-2)

Whose person or whose purse may be  
The lodestar of your reverie? (20-21)

The speaker pretends to know Jenny's dreams (364), but these are his own imaginings. In fact, money in the poem is connected to a cluster of images of gold coins (2, 226), golden hair (10-11), golden skin (50), golden sun (224), the "gilded aureole" of a saint (230), and gold coins again, this time a shower of them in Jenny's hair in a self-flattering allusion identifying the speaker with Zeus and Jenny with Danae (374-77). At several points in the poem this golden image cluster becomes a vehicle for the transference of "guilt" — there is the possibility of a pun but the speaker talks more about shame than guilt, though much about guilt. One point, already mentioned, is that at which Jenny's face is seen as suitable model for a saintly image, with a gilded aureole. At another point just before, gold turns into the more precious commodity of time:

How Jenny's clock ticks on the shelf!  
Might not the dial scorn itself  
That has such hours to register?  
Yet as to me, even so to her  
Are golden sun and silver moon,  
In daily largesse of earth's boon,  
Counted for life-coins to one tune.  
And if, as blindfold fates are toss'd,  
Through some one man this life be lost,  
Shall soul not somehow pay for soul? (220-29)

In the passages from line 207 to line 249 the speaker asks several important questions which indicate a transference of

4. The reverse themes of fallen woman/annunciation in Rossetti are commented on by Linda Nochlin (152), Martin Meisel (331-32), David

Sonstroem (3-4).

guilt from the poem's subject to its narrator and readers. The first question asks whether in the future Jenny's and Nell's cases might not be reversed in their offspring (211-213). The second asks whether soul shall "not somehow pay for soul" (229), and the third asks:

How atone,  
Great God, for this which man has done? (241-42)

Immediately after these questions the narrator exclaims:

If but a woman's heart might see  
Such erring heart unerringly  
For once! (250-52)

The narrator concludes that this can never be and that no chaste woman can view Jenny's case with propriety. He says this in a passage which unites the flower images which have characterized Jenny (a fresh flower, lillies, roses) with the book image of learning and recognition, used since the poem's beginning, and with the book as an image of enclosure. The enclosure images of the poem such as the narrator's "captive hours of youth" (25) when he was captive in a different sort of book, the rose shut in a book, and the toad within the stone (282ff.), all point to the fact that the poem's subject is actually an enclosed drama – a psychomachia which begins as the narrator's but ends as the reader's also:

Like a rose shut in a book  
In which pure women may not look,  
For its base pages claim control  
To crush the flower within the soul;  
Where through each dead rose-leaf that clings,  
Pale as transparent psyche-wings,  
To the vile text, are traced such things  
As might make lady's cheek indeed  
More than a living rose to read;  
So nought save foolish foulness may  
Watch with hard eyes the sure decay;  
And so the life-blood of this rose,  
Puddled with shameful knowledge, flows  
Through leaves no chaste hand may unclose:  
Yet still it keeps such faded show  
Of when 'twas gathered long ago,  
That the crushed petals' lovely grain,  
The sweetness of the sanguine stain,  
Seen of a woman's eyes, must make  
Her pitiful heart, so prone to ache,  
Love roses better for its sake: –

Only that this can never be: –  
Even so unto her sex is she. (253-75)

The gentleman, protesting too much, says "this can never be" so often we are likely to forget *what* can never be: a chaste woman's confrontation with Jenny herself, rather than with this chastened image of her in the poem. For in this guise pure women may indeed read the text of Jenny's case, see that she is as other women, see her erring heart unerringly, and more. I am suggesting that the reader's reaction is more than sympathy, pity, compassion, fellow-feeling; it is assumption of guilt for Jenny's case. For the female reader this can only come, not in the recognition that she could easily have been in Jenny's place, but in the recognition of who benefits from the exchanges of prostitution, in gold coins or whatever other "offerings nicely plac'd" which "But hide Priapus to the waist" (368-69). Cousin Nell, reading the poem with an open mind and that "pitiful heart, so prone to ache," will not escape the realization that prostitution is the necessary underground basis for the exaltation of such "pure women" and the reverence in which she is held. The male reader, the female reader, and the narrator – we have all enjoyed Jenny's favors and share the guilt of her sexual exploitation. That Rossetti manages this identification with the narrator even though we begin and end our visit with him thinking he is pompous, priggish, and self-absorbed, is a measure of the poem's complexity. That complexity may be what led Graham Hough to declare Rossetti's dramatic monologues "as good as anything of Browning's of the same kind, with perhaps the evidence of a less commonplace mind behind them" (69).

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## Letters and Novels "One Woman Wrote to Another": George Eliot's Responses to Elizabeth Gaskell

Robyn R. Warhol

Victorian narrators are always talkative. Whether "first person" or "omniscient" (to use the traditional terms), whether "homodiegetic" or "heterodiegetic" (to use Genette's more precise labels),<sup>1</sup> the narrators of Victorian novels embellish their stories with "interventions," commentary, interpretation, justification – what critics under Henry James's influence have called "intrusion." Since narratologists have rehabilitated intervention as one among many conventions of novel-writing, critics can begin to identify specific patterns among "intrusive" narrators, to investigate affinities and connections among authors who borrowed and adapted one another's approaches to the convention. Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot – whose narrators figure among the century's most talkative – shared important affinities in their views on life and art. In this essay I propose to study the correspondences between these two women in the form of letters, and the correspondences among their early novels, in themes, didactic purposes, and narrative technique. Their letters and novels provide biographical and textual evidence that the narrative conventions Gaskell introduced and Eliot refined are essential to their ideas about art.

Critics have long overlooked the parallels between the two women's first full-length novels, perhaps because superficially *Mary Barton* (1848) and *Adam Bede* (1859) are very different kinds of books. In the first place, Gaskell's novel falls, in many respects, near the romance end of the romance-realism spectrum. By her own admission in the "Preface" to *Mary Barton*, Gaskell set out in writing it to depict "how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided" (37). Eliot, on the other hand, in *Adam Bede*'s oddly placed equivalent to a preface, Chapter 17, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," insists that her own primary goal is to write realistically, refusing to romanticize or idealize her characters. *Mary Barton* moves from a relatively realistic depiction of working-class life in Manchester – complete with the details of a family tea party, descriptions of a working man's holiday in the country, and painstaking imitation of the Manchester dialect – to a highly melodramatic tale of murder, false accusations, madness, and the inevitable happy-ending escape to a prelapsarian paradise (in this case, Canada). *Adam Bede*, despite its climactic scene in which Arthur Donnithorne gallops up to deliver Hetty Sorrel's last-minute gallows reprieve, takes place in a relatively mundane world: with its flouting of romantic love, its emphasis on unpleasant responsibilities, and its sympathetic attention to ordinary people, the plot is designed not so much to titillate the reader addicted to the heroics and histrionics of romance as it is to guide readers with Adam through the process of his learning to face facts and to sympathize with characters

less perfect than himself.

Beneath the surface, though, the novels' similarities are more striking than their differences. Gaskell chose to write her romance about "those careworn men" of Manchester instead of carrying out an earlier plan to escape her own depression over the loss of a child by writing "a tale, the period of which was more than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire."<sup>2</sup> Considering Gaskell's choice to turn away from romantic remoteness in the conception of her novel, we can see that Eliot might have been speaking for both of them in Chapter 17:

And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this . . . that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields – on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling. (151)

Their similar aims in writing their first full-length fictions can partially account for similarities between the two novels; much of the resemblance between the works, however, may be viewed as Eliot's response to Gaskell's experiments with narrative conventions. Eliot was reading Gaskell as she worked on both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, and signs of her critical reading surface in both of those novels. After summarizing the evidence in letters and diaries that suggests this influence, I will outline the similarities between *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Cranford* (1851-3), as well as those between *Adam Bede* and *Mary Barton*, to demonstrate the extent to which Gaskell's work contributed to Eliot's.

### I.

Though the two novelists never met in person, because Eliot's unmarried liaison with George Lewes made her unsuitable company for such respectable married ladies as Gaskell, they nevertheless shared a cordial, if only epistolary, friendship, expressing their admiration for each other's early work in letters that hint at the profound influence Gaskell's first two books had on Eliot's first two. The exchange of letters began during the period after the publication of *Adam Bede*, when one of literary London's favorite pastimes was guessing the identity of "George Eliot." Not surprisingly, considering the affinities between *Adam Bede* and Gaskell's work of ten years before, Gaskell's name was among those suggested as the possible author (Haight 286-87).

1. The narrators of *Cranford* and *Scenes of Clerical Life* are "homodiegetic," i.e., present as characters in their stories; the *Mary Barton* and *Adam Bede* narrators are "heterodiegetic." Genette's terms acknowledge that a narrator who is not a character can nevertheless refer to himself as "I." In the present essay I analyze two, more specific types of narrators,

"character-narrators" who are homodiegetic, and "engaging narrators" who are heterodiegetic (244-45).

2. Preface to *Mary Barton* 39. (For an account of the connections between the death of Willie Gaskell and the writing of *Mary Barton*, see Gerin 71-75.)



Gaskell herself had been among the early supporters of the claim of a Mr. Liggins, an obscure opportunist from the neighborhood that had been Eliot's model for the setting of her *Scenes*, to have written George Eliot's first two books. But at the time when her own name was proposed, Gaskell seems to have believed that the Dean of Bristol, Gilbert Elliot, was the actual author (Haight 281, 287). To George Eliot's publisher she sent a letter addressed to "Gilbert Elliot" and signed "Gilbert Elliot," in which she playfully offers to take the credit for having written the novels, since "after all it is a pity so much hearty admiration should go unappropriated through the world." Gaskell did admire Eliot's first two books a great deal: she opens her letter with, "Since I came from Manchester to London I have had the greatest compliment paid me I ever had in my life. I have been suspected of having written 'Adam Bede' . . . [I]t would be very pleasant for me to blush acquiescence." In the same light vein, she continues: "Well! If I had written Amos Barton, Janet's Repentance, and Adam Bede I should neither be to have nor to hold with pride and delight in myself – so I think it is very well I have not" (*Letters* 431).

Gaskell's praise was more specific, but equally warm, when she learned that neither Liggins nor Elliot, but Marian Evans was the author. Rising above her distaste for the author's notorious social position, Gaskell wrote Eliot a letter in 1859, in which she says of *Scenes* and *Adam Bede*, "how earnestly fully, and how humbly I admire them. I never read anything so complete, and beautiful in fiction, in my whole life before." She tempers her enthusiasm with a frank but forgiving allusion to Eliot's personal situation:

I should not be quite true in my ending, if I did not say before I concluded that I wish you were Mrs. Lewes. However, that can't be helped, as far as I can see, and one must not judge others. (*Letters* 449)

Gaskell's letter apparently pleased George Eliot, always sensitive to adverse criticism but usually indifferent to kind words from readers. Eliot's pleasure was well-founded in her high opinion of Gaskell's own first novels. She had written respectfully of Gaskell's status as a serious novelist in her anonymous *Westminster Review* article of 1856, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." In that essay she praises Gaskell – along with Harriet Martineau, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and "Curren Bell" – as a counter-example to silliness, a woman whose realistic novels achieve "excellence" (*Essays* 322). Eliot was therefore fervent in her personal thanks for Gaskell's letter and for the influence that Gaskell's first two novels had held over her while she wrote her own first two books:

I shall always love to think that one woman wrote to another such sweet encouraging words – still more to think that you were the writer and I the receiver.

I had indulged the idea that if my books turned out to be worth much, you would be among my willing readers; for I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feeling towards Life and Art had some affinity with the feeling

which has inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." That idea was brought the nearer to me, because I had the pleasure of reading Cranford for the first time in 1857, when I was writing the "Scenes of Clerical Life," and going up the Rhine one dim wet day in the spring of the next year, when I was writing "Adam Bede," I satisfied myself for the lack of a prospect by reading over again those earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." (*George Eliot Letters* 3:98-99)

Considering how explicitly Eliot acknowledges having read Gaskell's novels at these crucial moments in the composition of her own, it is surprising that Eliot's critics have not yet pursued the possible connections between the two women's early work. Barbara Hardy, for instance, remarks upon this shared "feeling towards Life and Art," only to observe that what George Eliot "thought about the affinity is a matter for guessing" (182). This observation is certainly true in that we can never determine what anyone "thought" with perfect accuracy; however, the attitudes towards both life and art that the narrators of *Mary Barton* and *Adam Bede* evince provide substantial grounds for such guessing. Eliot's attraction to Gaskell's work was no coincidence: the two shared artistic and moral goals, particularly the desire not only to depict characters – like John Barton and Adam Bede – who learn to sympathize with fellow beings, but also to encourage the reader to imitate that sympathetic attitude.

Though one considered herself a Christian and the other a humanist at the time they wrote their first novels, Gaskell and Eliot had in common a broadly religious purpose in writing fiction. As Eliot explains in an 1869 letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe,

I believe that . . . a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent, must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. (*George Eliot Letters* 5:29-31)

Similar in sentiment to the "Preface" that Gaskell had written for *Mary Barton* in 1848, Eliot's letter stresses the individual's responsibility not merely to feel sympathy with fellow-sufferers, but to "express" it. Gaskell's "Preface" had made explicit her belief that expressions of sympathy with the poor could lighten the emotional load that was pressing the working classes, the models for her John Barton, into desperation and violence. Interestingly, she cites as the most miserable plight of the workers not poverty, and not even loss of loved ones through starvation or disease, but rather "the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy or of erroneously believing that such is the case" (37-38). Gaskell uses direct address in her novel's narrative intrusions, speaking to the reader as "you" in order to remind him or her to identify with the characters' pain, and thus to provoke the reader's sympathy. Her "Preface," however, stresses her desire to inspire the reader not merely to feel, but especially to express that sympathy, thereby improving the lot of the real world's poor.<sup>3</sup>

3. In referring to the reader, I will use "him" as shorthand for "him or her." Since I argue that the narrator or textual "I" in engaging narrative is to be identified with the actual author, I refer to the narrators as "she."

For the sake of convenience and brevity, I refer to the narratee or textual "you" (who is, in these novels, to be identified with the actual reader, whether male or female) as "he."



This process that Gaskell and Eliot expressly hoped to inspire in their readers is analogous to their own emotional activity in writing the novels. Wishing to evoke the reader's sympathy, they use narrators that frequently address the reader as "you," in order to remind him of his own emotional responses to the fiction, or to his own past experience: "Your heart would have ached to have seen [John Barton]," asserts Gaskell's narrator, "however hardly you might have judged his crime" (422); Eliot's narrator comments on the first love scene between Adam and Dinah, "That is a simple scene, reader. But it is almost certain that you, too, have been in love" (411). Their narrative strategy is to call up the reader's self-involved emotions, and to ask the reader to apply those emotions to the characters' situations. Gaskell and Eliot both created those pitiable characters at first from a desire to work out powerful feelings of their own, in response to pain in their lives. They channeled that pain outward, projecting it onto characters whose lives were necessarily more difficult than those of their creators: Gaskell's "Preface" implies that she began writing *Mary Barton* to console herself for the loss of an infant son,<sup>4</sup> but Mary's losses – of her brothers, mother, and finally, horribly, of her father, too – are far more devastating in their circumstances than Gaskell's own. Throughout that novel, though, the narrator insists that these miserable events often happen to real people among the working class. Eliot's emphasis on the turbulent emotion that lies beneath the dull facade of ordinary middle-class people in *Scenes* and *Adam Bede* reflects a similar motive.

When George Eliot began writing fiction, she was suffering the first pangs of her family's rejection and London society's ostracism for her decision to live unmarried with Lewes. Isolated and often depressed, she projected her unhappiness into fictional situations where death, madness, alcoholism, and even infanticide inspire suffering. Amos Barton, Mr. Gilfil, Janet Dempster, and Adam Bede all have reason to be unhappy – far unhappier in the magnitude of their personal tragedies than Marian Evans needed to be. Both Gaskell and Eliot strove to rise above their own ego-centered pain to translate it into convincing pictures of others who had more to suffer.

Part of the success of these exercises in sympathy depended on the authors' conviction that the situations depicted in their fiction were, in some sense, true. For their first books, both novelists drew upon memories of characters and places they had known intimately: Eliot looked back to the Nuneaton neighbors among whom she had grown up, while Gaskell turned her attention to the various classes of people in her more immediate Manchester surroundings. Both thought of the social and moral conditions they portrayed as true-to-life; both felt their characters' emotions to be real and immediate. Their final success, however, depends on the novels' capacity for convincing the reader of their "truth," in order to inspire the reader's real sympathy.

To serve this moral end, both Gaskell and Eliot needed a narrative technique that would convince the reader of the story's "reality," so as to overcome the possibility that the reader might remain emotionally detached, dismissing the situations in the novel as being "only a story." They could have used a character-

narrator, like Jane Eyre, who would have a convincingly realistic point of view. But a single, fallible observer cannot carry authority to convince the reader that the novel's events and reflections are "true," no matter how reliable a narrator that character may seem to be. On the other hand, they could have chosen a Fielding-esque omniscient narrator, who would be sufficiently authoritative; but such narrators also have authority in the negative sense of reminding the reader of the author's all-controlling presence and, hence, of the novel's fictionality. What Gaskell invented, and Eliot improved, is a device which I will call the "engaging narrator," that attempts to cross the boundaries between the fictional and the real world. The engaging narrator's presence reminds the reader that the novel is "only a story," if you will, but the narrator's remarks can nevertheless encourage the reader to feel that the story is "true," in that it has evoked the reader's feelings, even while reminding him of the separation between his own real world and the fictional one. Seen in this light, Gaskell's and Eliot's intrusive narrators' use of direct address is far from being the naive mistake it has often been taken for. It is, on the contrary, a brilliant stroke.

Such, then, are the important affinities that Gaskell and Eliot share. Writing with strong feeling about the painful human condition, they hoped both to pull themselves out of egoistic absorption with their personal problems, and to move the reader to share their sympathetic consciousness of the unhappiness of characters who resemble real people. They needed a narrative approach which would stir the reader's emotions while convincing him that the novels reflect true conditions and which would allow them to speak with authority about those conditions, without distancing the reader or allowing him to become emotionally detached. They hit upon various forms of the engaging narrator, who, through earnest, direct authorial address, might work upon the reader's feelings by drawing him into the fictional world. The narrative device they adopted is simple, but unusual in realistic fiction: by signaling that the narrative "I" is to be identified with the writers themselves, they encourage the actual reader to identify with the "you" in the text.

## II.

The opening paragraph of *Adam Bede* is surely one of the most striking instances of direct address in a British novel:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder, in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord, 1799. (5)

This passage – the entire first paragraph of the novel – sets forth the narrative "I" as an individual at a desk, pen in hand, prepared to create a world like the illusion the sorcerer can create. Like the sorcerer's "visions of the past," the scenes she

4. Gaskell's infant son Willie, like John Barton's son Tom, died of scarlet fever. See Gerin 73.



will create are not fabricated out of nothing, but will become visible in a drop of ink used "for a mirror," to reflect a world that was real. Thus introduced to the reader, this nameless, faceless, but very personal speaker often returns, both openly and subtly, to remind the reader that *Adam Bede* is something written, that it is a reflection, as in a mirror, of reality and not a reality in itself. One could certainly argue that the narrator's recurring presence disturbs the "illusion of reality" within this otherwise realistic novel, especially when she interrupts the fiction for her famous realist manifesto in Chapter 17. But the opening paragraph, like that essay that so suddenly interrupts the flow of the fiction, is a clear statement from the narrator that she consciously wishes the reader to keep her history's illusory nature firmly in mind. The reader's consciousness of the novel's fictionality is essential to the novelist's goal: to encourage the reader to transfer the emotional lesson learned from reading the novel to his feelings about the people in his own real world.

Accordingly, nearly every reference to the reader in *Adam Bede* is a direct authorial address, not to the "madam" or "Mrs. Farthingale" that sometimes crops up in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, but simply to "you." The narrator compliments the reader whenever repeating a bit of information or explaining an obscure motive, by deferring to the reader's memory and perspicacity: "you must remember" (87), "you perceive . . . you remember" (107), "you understand" (109), "as you know" (262), "you know Hetty did not . . ." (333), and again "you perceive" (181) or "you perceive how it was" (441). As if in conversation, the narrator thus gracefully concedes that she is perhaps repeating or even belaboring points, while nodding to her listener's capacity for recognizing this, and trusting in her listener's indulgence.

The *Adam Bede* narrator is sometimes slightly more peremptory, though always gently so, instructing the reader how to receive what she is saying. Examples of these civil directives are "do not suppose" (64), or "do not reason about it, my philosophical reader" (211). Such instructions, which Gerald Prince would call "overjustifications," presume that the reader might be inclined to suppose or to philosophize wrongly, were he without the benefit of the narrator's admonitions. Other overjustifications couched in direct address reveal the response that the narrator expects, and sometimes appears to wish to counteract. "You will perhaps be surprised to hear" (110) and "possibly you think" (297) are instances of this effort to second-guess, and to alter, the reader's developing impressions of the characters. In some cases, the narrator is very direct in this attempt, as when she launches a defense of Adam's ill-advised passion for Hetty:

Before you despise Adam as deficient in penetration, pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman – if you ever *could*, without hard, head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the *one* supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you. No . . . (131)

This repetitive use of "you" in connection with Adam's biggest character flaw is the narrator's surest means of engaging the reader's empathy for "our friend Adam's" mistake. The narrator

is open in admitting her intent to influence the reader, shirking the use of "I" no more than that of "you." "I must remind you again" (140), she says; or "I assure you" (167), or "I beseech you to imagine" (168). The narrative "I" is present, personal, and insistent; she speaks directly to "you."

Not every narrative intrusion in *Adam Bede* presupposes a specific response from the reader, however. Some of the narrator's rhetorical questions seem really to inquire into the reader's feelings or experiences, as if in conversation. "Have you even seen a real English rustic perform a solo dance?" she asks, going on to suggest the reader's answer: "Perhaps you have only seen a ballet rustic, smiling like a merry countryman in crockery, with graceful turns of the haunch and insinuating movements of the head. That is as much like the real thing as the 'Bird Waltz' is like the song of birds" (235). Appealing here to the reader's experience of country dancers, real or bogus, the narrator willingly fills in for the reader's possible ignorance with her amusing analogy. In other cases, where the experience she asks the reader about is less idiosyncratic, the narrator relies on the reader's own emotional memories to fill in the sentiment, as in the scene mentioned above, in which Adam tentatively courts Dinah:

That is a simple scene, reader. But it is almost certain that you, too, have been in love – perhaps, even, more than once, though you may not choose to say so to all your feminine friends. If so, you will no more think the slight words, the timid looks, the tremulous touches, by which two human souls approach each other gradually . . . – you will no more think these things trivial than you will think the first-detected sign of coming spring trivial. . . . I am of the opinion that love is a great and beautiful thing too; and if you agree with me, the smallest signs of it will . . . be like those little words, "light" and "music," stirring the long-winding fibres of your memory and enriching your present with your most precious past. (411-12)

By "your present," of course, the narrator indicates the moment at which the reader is reading that passage, absorbed in this budding love between Adam and Dinah. The "small signs" of their love should stir the reader's memory, bringing his "precious past" into his present response to the fiction. If the narrator can stir that response, evoking complete empathy for the characters from the reader, then she will have succeeded in educating the reader's faculty for sympathy. And to the extent that she can accomplish this, she aligns the reader even more specifically with Adam, whose sympathies are educated through his contact with suffering and with Dinah. To make sure that her point is taken personally, the narrator rather insistently addresses it to "you." The technique finds a parallel in the rhetorical strategy of Dinah's sermon, in which the preacher exhorts Chad's Bess to imagine her own future sufferings, in order to impress upon her a sense of what Christ has suffered for her. Just as Dinah speaks both collectively to the villagers and personally to Bess in her sermon, Eliot's very personal "I" speaks to both a collective and an individual "you."

In *Mary Barton* George Eliot found a precedent for the personal, present narrative "I" that calls attention to herself in the process of writing. Gaskell's narrator often depicts herself as an author both composing and responding to the events she



narrates. For instance, Gaskell's narrator contrasts Mary's Manchester surroundings with her own situation as she writes:

All was so still, so motionless, so hard! Very different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing . . . . The sights and sounds of such a night lull pain and grief to rest. (303)

The narrator describes the soothing effect of the wind in the trees outside her window, thus drawing attention to the distance in time and place between herself, writing comfortably at her desk in the countryside, and the Manchester scenes she describes.

Gaskell intrudes even more personally when she hints at the source of her own unnamed "pain and grief" in a summary of Mary's fears that Jem's mother – asleep after learning that she must testify against her adored son at his murder trial – might be driven mad "in the horrors of her dreams." The prose in this passage is disjointed, interrupted with dashes and parentheses, to mirror Mary's own mental distress. Its one parenthetical interruption, though, speaks with an "I" that, significantly, cannot be Mary's:

What if in dreams (that land into which no sympathy nor love can penetrate with another either to shake its bliss or its agony – that land whose scenes are unspeakable terrors, are hidden mysteries, are priceless treasures to one alone – *that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dead child*) – what if, in the horrors of her dreams, her brain should go still more astray. . . . (327, emphasis added)

Mary Barton has no child, alive or dead: the "I" must be Mrs. Gaskell, thinking of dream visions of her own dead Willie. Not only is this personal pronoun the author's specific reference to herself, it also resembles the "I" of a lyric poem or folksong, a persona with whom most readers could sympathize or identify in a general way. In this second sense the pronoun parallels the "one" that precedes it, when Gaskell's narrator calls dreams "priceless treasures to one alone." The shift from "one" to "I" in the passage is significant, though, in that it represents the narrator's characteristic movement between third-person observation and striking and specific references to the author. The references are there to serve the purposes of the engaging narrator: if "I" is not a fictive persona, but Elizabeth Gaskell, she who writes, then "you" must be simply and really *you* who read the novel.

And "you" appear, time and again, throughout *Mary Barton*. "Do you know 'The Oldham Weaver'?" Gaskell's narrator asks; "Not unless you are Lancashire born and bred, for it is a complete Lancashire ditty. I will copy it for you" (71). Or again: "If you will refer to the preface to Sir J. E. Smith's Life (I have it not by me, or I would copy you the exact passage), you will find that he names a little circumstance corroborative of what I have said" (76). Such direct remarks to the reader make novel-writing resemble a personal correspondence. As in a letter, Gaskell draws her reader into the conversation by frequently using his pronoun-name: "you may be sure" (443), "If you think this account of mine confused" (413), "I must

tell you; I must put into words the dreadful secret" (299); "you remember the reward . . . ." (273); "the facts were as well known to most of the audience as they are to you" (384) – these phrases are only a small sample of the many instances of direct address in *Mary Barton*. Gaskell writes as if confiding in the individual reader's capacity to believe in and sympathize with what she tells him or her.

As critics have often noted, *Mary Barton*, though it begins realistically in what Eliot's letter of thanks calls "the early chapters," plunges rather rapidly into melodramatic romance. In her later fiction, Gaskell eschewed melodrama, avoiding the murder plots and trials of *Mary Barton* to place heroines like Margaret Hale and Molly Gibson in more recognizable surroundings. As her plots become less outlandish, her narrator becomes more detached, as if Gaskell had seen that beseeching narrator's role solely as engaging the reader's belief in incredible circumstances that might otherwise induce him to remain detached from the emotions the fiction is meant to arouse. She tries another narrative experiment in *Cranford*, her second novel, which is also full of direct address, but is not, strictly speaking, an example of engaging narrative. *Cranford*'s narrator is not "engaging" because the narrative persona – unlike those in *Mary Barton* and *Adam Bede* – is not identified with the author herself. In *Cranford* a character-narrator, Mary Smith, relates the events among the old women of Cranford, turning often to the reader with an epistolary tone. "Do you ever see cows dressed in grey flannel in London?" (5) she asks the reader in a typical instance.

Being a character, Mary Smith can address the reader without disturbing the novel's realistic presentation:<sup>5</sup> what she reports is only what she has seen. But Gaskell has invested her with a personality as minimal as her name, the barest sketch of a personal history, and few opinions: Mary Smith is little more than a mildly ironic, sympathetic sense of humor projected onto the scene at Cranford. Although she serves Gaskell well for describing the surface of life in Cranford, and for evoking a certain amount of amusement from the reader through direct address, a narrator like Mary Smith is limited in her usefulness. Her status as an individualized character makes it impossible for Mary to give readers any insight into the minds of other characters, and her handicapped state of utter unselfconsciousness makes her own reflections less illuminating than those of a first-person narrator who is also a fully realized character, such as Jane Eyre or David Copperfield. Like Jane Eyre, though, Mary Smith maintains a strong conversational link with the reader through striking instances of direct address.<sup>6</sup>

Gaskell put aside these narrative innovations for her later novels, replacing character-narrators and engaging narrators with a more conventionally omniscient narrative technique. However, as Eliot's letter to Gaskell indicates, Eliot found Gaskell's experiments useful in her own first fictions. When Eliot was working on "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" in 1857, she and Lewes were taking a working vacation together on the island of Scilly. Her journal confirms that she was reading *Cranford*, among other novels, on that trip, just as she tells Gaskell in that 1859 letter. At this time, Eliot had already

5. I use this term as defined by Watt, 30-34.

6. For an excellent treatment of the use of "you" in first-person narrative, see Monod 496-507.



completed "Amos Barton," and suffered the ego-wrenching process of submitting it for criticism and ultimate approval of her future publisher, John Blackwood (Redinger 309-10). Blackwood was enthusiastic about the pseudonymous author's first effort, but Eliot was defensively sensitive: the narrator she created for "Amos Barton" gives the reader frequent instructions on how to approach the text, many of which Eliot was to repeat in her correspondence with Blackwood.<sup>7</sup> The narrator of *Scenes* leans heavily on direct address for establishing rapport with the reader; the resemblance that this narrator bears to Gaskell's suggests that Eliot may have had her affinities with Gaskell in mind when she picked up *Cranford* during her struggle to complete "Mr. Gilfil."

The *Scenes* narrator is, like Mary Smith, a demi-character: he is faceless and without a history, except for those small details of his experience that overlap with the people and events of his narrative. Taking this narrator's lack of discernible character a step further than Gaskell had, Eliot gives him no name. He is better endowed than Mary Smith, though, in that he has many opinions and does not hesitate to regale the reader with them for moralistic and humorous purposes. As much as he is present in the fiction, however, this narrator does not depict himself as the writer. Rather, he holds a Shandean "conversation" with the reader, even addressing a recalcitrant member of his imaginary audience as "madam," in Sterne's own style.<sup>8</sup> As Gaskell had in *Cranford*, Eliot takes advantage of this narrator's individuality, limited though it is, by using his voice to speak directly to the reader.

To quote all the instances of direct address in *Scenes* would be to reproduce most of the narrative passages; hence I will only mention the three forms of the technique that appear most frequently in the novel. The word "you," applied to the reader, takes on three specific roles: first, "you" the actual reader, addressed candidly and directly by the narrator (e.g., "You and I, too, reader, have our weaknesses, have we not?", [69]); second, "you" as a hypothetical presence, the subject of the narrator's subjunctively phrased speculations about "your" probable reactions (e.g., "Looking at Sir Christopher, you would at once have been inclined to hope that he had a full-grown son and heir," [135]); and third, "you" as an imaginary figure within the fiction.<sup>9</sup>

This last incarnation of the reader tends to subvert the novel's realism, since the narrator requires the reader to imagine himself as physically present at Shepperton, rather than acknowledging, as Gaskell's narrators do, that the reader is nowhere but where he sits, reading. The narrator of *Scenes* uses the conceit of the reader's presence frequently in the first of the scenes, "Amos

Barton," as, for instance, in the tea-party scene that opens the action: "And now that we are snug and warm with this little tea-party . . . we will listen to what they are talking about" (46). Significantly, although Eliot's narrator uses this conceit often in "Amos Barton," he uses it only twice in "Mr. Gilfil," and not at all in "Janet's Repentance," showing, perhaps, the influence of Eliot's having internalized the method of *Cranford* after reading it.<sup>10</sup>

But the narrator of *Scenes* also shares Mary Smith's most severe limitation as a narrator of realistic fiction: as an individual he cannot report reliably on the other characters' thoughts. For this reason, "Janet's Repentance," in which most of the action occurs within Janet's own mind, is necessarily shaky in its realism of presentation.

Realism was, after all, George Eliot's primary goal as she set out to write fiction; her essay on "Silly Novels," written less than two weeks before she began writing "Amos Barton," makes this clear. She was not, however, particularly concerned about adopting a point of view that mirrors a central consciousness in a novel, since she was interested in reflecting a more complete reality made up of many subjective viewpoints in the "drop of ink for a mirror" that is her fiction. As Henry James remarks of Eliot, "if impressionism, before she laid down her pen, had already begun to be talked about, it would have made no difference with her — she would have had no desire to pass for an impressionist" (60). And Eliot was candid with herself about her disregard for theoretical restrictions on novelistic form: in a late journal entry, written after the publication of *Middlemarch*, she mulls only a little defensively over the question of narrative intrusions:

Why should a story not be told in the most irregular fashion that an author's idiosyncrasy may prompt, provided that he gives us what we can enjoy? The objections to Sterne's wild way of telling "Tristram Shandy" lie more solidly in the quality of the interrupting matter than in the fact of interruption. ("Leaves from a Notebook: Story-Telling," *Essays* 265)

Apparently dissatisfied with the capabilities of the narrators of *Scenes* or *Cranford* for providing the substantial narrative intrusions, Eliot abandoned the limited point of view of the character-narrator for all her later fiction, and turned instead to the narrative model of Gaskell's *Mary Barton* — the novel she chose to re-read while working in Germany on *Adam Bede*.

### III.

To be sure, Eliot's narrative "intrusions" have usually elicited

7. See Redinger's account of the correspondence between Eliot and Blackwood on "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," 319-330; see also the comparison of these letters to remarks made by the narrators of *Scenes* and *Adam Bede*, in Warhol 151-56.

8. The narrator chides "a lady reader . . . — Mrs. Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction," for not taking sufficient interest in Eliot's unremarkable characters. "But, my dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this insignificant stamp" *Scenes* 80-81.

9. This figurative placing of an omniscient narrator and reader at the scene of a narrative, is, of course, conventional and by no means unique to Eliot. Among English novelists it originated with Fielding's self-consciously artificial narratives, which do not share Eliot's techniques for

enlisting the reader's emotional belief in the fictional events. The "you" of Fielding's narratives is directed not at the actual reader but at what Gerald Prince calls the "narratee." As Prince puts it, "Sometimes, in *Tom Jones*, the narrator supplies so much information about his narratee, takes him aside so often, lavishes his advice upon him so frequently, that the latter becomes as clearly defined as any character." An engaging narrator would avoid delineating a narratee so closely, because, to borrow Prince's terms, "If it should occur that the reader bears an astonishing resemblance to the narratee [of *Le Père Goriot*], this is an exception and not the rule" (18, 9).

10. The two scenes in "Mr. Gilfil" occur on p. 165, where the narrator refers to "the parting scene you have witnessed," and on p. 206, where he directs the reader to "look at [Caterina] stooping down."



more embarrassed apology than praise from her most enthusiastic critics; Gaskell, on the other hand, is traditionally commended for reducing the amount of intervention in her later works. I would argue, though, that Eliot's maintaining and refining the engaging narrator in her later novels is a sign of her widely acknowledged personal and artistic triumph, rather than a flaw in the pattern of her success.

Gaskell did drop the personal conversation between narrator and reader, perhaps out of the increased awareness of her own emotional vulnerability to the audience's rejection that she felt so painfully after the public outcry over *Ruth*. Winifred Gerin writes that Gaskell was "deeply bruised" by the public's condemnation of that novel, a sympathetic account of an idealized unwed mother, which came out in 1853 (139). By 1858 Gaskell had a horror of her audience, which she expressed in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton:

I can not (it is not will not) write at all if I ever think of my readers, and what impression I am making on them. "If they don't like me, they must lump me," to use a Lancashire proverb. It is from no despising my readers. I am sure I don't do that, but if I ever let the thought or consciousness of them come between me and my subject I could not write at all. (*Letters* 503)

"From no despising" her readers, perhaps, but rather from fearing their lack of sympathy, she eliminated that personal, confidential technique of direct address from her later novels, giving up any further experiments in the technique's potential for expanding the narrative models available to realistic fiction.

George Eliot's experience was very different. The conversation between the narrator and reader became almost therapeutic for her, and though she uses direct address more sparingly in the novels written between *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*, she returns to the technique in her last, most ambitious novels. Eliot, like Gaskell, was subject to fears about writing which, in Eliot's case, often paralyzed her early in the novelist's career. Redinger has highlighted a passage in Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography* describing the young George Eliot's doubts about her own authorial talents. Spencer reports that Eliot

complained of being troubled by double consciousness – a current of self criticism being an habitual accompaniment of anything she was saying or doing; and this naturally tended toward self-depreciation and self-distrust. (in Redinger 223, 334)

Redinger suggests that while this critical inner voice may have blocked the young writer at first, it also contributed later to that running commentary that always characterized her novels once Eliot became emotionally free to write. Redinger surmises that Eliot was able to remove herself from the negative scrutiny of that critical second-self, substituting her characters and an internalized vision of her audience as the subject of that "current of criticism." By this transferral, Eliot made it possible for herself to externalize that critical voice, writing it down in passages that expose more about the characters than the characters themselves could know, similarly exposing to the attentive reader his or her own mental habits of intolerance or literary prejudice.

Once that critical voice could be directed outward, I would suggest, the "self-depreciation and self distrust" could relent, so that the process of writing could – circularly and marvelously – make it possible for Eliot to continue writing. Surely the influence of Gaskell's narrative technique – the continuing conversation between narrator and reader – provided Eliot with a model for directing that inner voice outward. Redinger does not single out direct address as a significant contributor to this process; but in the context of the present discussion, it seems clear that Eliot's pointed comments to the audience are part of the therapy that Redinger describes. Eliot's earliest fiction unstintingly directs the critical voice at the characters and at "you"; after a decade of novel-writing, she was finally strong enough in *Middlemarch* to let her narrative persona re-direct some of the criticism at herself, as in the famous passage where the narrator challenges the focus of her own attention: "But why always Dorothea?" In this sense, then, George Eliot's use of direct address served an even more important purpose than that of engaging the reader's sympathy and belief. Her conversation with the reader may have helped make it possible for her to write at all. From Elizabeth Gaskell, then, George Eliot learned one of the most essential elements of her craft.

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## J. E. Millais' *Bubbles*: A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

William Sharpe

In 1886 Sir John Everett Millais' *Bubbles*, a slightly sentimental painting of a little boy blowing bubbles, was bought by Pears Soap Company, and went on to make history as the first and most famous instance of so-called "high art" being adopted for mass advertising. As such it provides a test case for Walter Benjamin's contention that mechanical reproduction results in the destruction of the "aura" or authority of the art object. According to Benjamin, once its uniqueness has been violated and its traditional meaning is lost, the reproduced object becomes a commodity that may be employed for any purpose. Demystified, it moves from the domain of aesthetics into that of politics. After sketching the history of *Bubbles*, I will return to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to examine Benjamin's concept of the aura in more detail, and apply it specifically to Millais' painting.<sup>1</sup>

In retrospect it seems almost inevitable that art and advertising should have come together in Millais' career. Over a period of fifty years Millais became the best-known and certainly the best remunerated artist in Victorian England. At his peak in the 1870s and 1880s he earned between 30,000 and 40,000 pounds per year, and some of his works were chromolithographed in editions of up to 60,000 (Bennett 12; Gaunt 185, 187). His fame was genuinely worldwide: John Gaunt writes that

Millais' recipe was universally acceptable. *Cherry Ripe* found its way to a Tartar's hut and *Cinderella* to the house of a Samoan chief. John Guille Millais discovered a German oleograph of *The Northwest Passage* in the shelter of a Hottentot shepherd on the Great Karoo. (187)

But Millais' reputation has suffered subsequently because his later, incredibly popular works did not live up to his early promise as a Pre-Raphaelite. The most damning evidence usually cited is that he painted a picture which became an advertising legend.<sup>2</sup>

What had happened was that in 1885 Millais had seen his four-year-old grandson William James at play and decided to paint him, "bubbles and all" (Bennett 59). The *Illustrated London News* purchased the completed picture with the copyright in 1886 and published it as a color supplement to the Christmas number in 1887. Millais often sold pictures for this purpose, which was very profitable, since the editions were usually in the hundreds of thousands. But even before *Bubbles* appeared it had been resold, with the copyright, to Thomas Barratt of



Pears Soap.

There are conflicting stories of how Millais reacted. Millais' son, John Guille Millais, said that Millais was furious when he heard about it: "He protested strongly against this utilization of his art" (Hindley 43; John G. Millais 2: 186). Pears' version of the story was very different. According to Barratt, who had masterminded the scheme, Millais

was full of praise. Encouraged by his generous word I spoke of the advantage which it was possible for the large advertiser to lend to Art — he could give a very much greater publicity to a good picture than it could receive by being hung on the walls of the Royal Academy. (Hindley 43)

1. A version of this paper was presented at the 1984 Modern Language Association convention in Washington, D.C. Terry Eagleton's is perhaps the most extensive and convincing treatment of Benjamin's essay ("Aura and Commodity" 25-42), but see also Jameson 76-77 and Norris 110-115 for suggestive analyses. For discussions of *Bubbles*, and particularly Millais' reaction to its purchase by Pears, see J. G. Millais 2: 186, 187, 189, 483; Geoffroy Millais 21-22; Bennett 59; Hindley 43-44; and Wilson 17. Hindley, de Vries, and *The Illustrated London News* of the 1890s are very useful for setting *Bubbles* in the context of contemporary Victorian advertising. *Bubbles* is the property of the proprietors of Pears Soap and

reproduced here with their permission; the reproduction appended is taken from Geoffroy Millais 18.

2. Arthur Symons' remarks on the occasion of Millais' death indicate what had happened to his reputation during his later years: "The burial of Millais in St. Paul's should have been an honour done to a great painter, who died at the age of thirty-five, the painter of 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' of 'Ophelia,' of 'The Vale of Rest;' it was but an honour done to a popular painter, the painter of 'Bubbles,' and other coloured supplements to Christmas numbers, who died at the age of sixty-seven" (321).



Other evidence tends to support Barratt (Hindley 44). If Millais felt that his painting was diminished by becoming commercial art, there is no proof of it.

When the ad appeared patrons of the arts and admirers of Millais were duly shocked. The popular novelist Marie Corelli had a character of hers remark:

I am one of those who think that the fame of Millais as an artist was marred when he degraded himself to the level of painting the little green boy blowing bubbles of Pears soap. *That was an advertisement*, and that very incident in his career, trifling as it seems, will prevent his ever standing on the dignified height of distinction with such masters in Art as Romney, Sir Peter Lely, Gainsborough, and Reynolds. (*The Sorrows of Satan*, 1895, quoted in Gaunt 198)

After Millais set her straight about how *Bubbles* had come into the hands of Pears, she apologized, saying that it was only because she thought Millais "king of English painters" that she was so angry at seeing *Bubbles* as an advertisement. When Millais suggested to her that "thousands of poor people" would be introduced to real art through the promotion (using Barratt's line!), she responded that "*Bubbles* ought to hang in the National Gallery, where the poor people could go and see it with a proper veneration" (Gaunt 198).<sup>3</sup>

Yet while many felt that Pears's use of *Bubbles* was degrading art, others saw it as ennobling advertising. In the 1880s the typical Pears ads offered a combination of crude racism, snob appeal, and trite humor. Advertisements in *The Illustrated London News* showed a little black boy before and after taking a bath with Pears' soap – he comes out of the tub white from the neck down. The familiar picture of Lillie Langtry which bore the testimonial "For years I have used your soap and no other" was the subject of a famous *Punch* take-off in which an unkempt old bum awkwardly pens a letter: "Two years ago I used your soap, since when I have used no other." Pears had also used paintings in their ads before Millais', though they were without the quality or subtlety of *Bubbles*. *You Dirty Boy* (1889) and *Sunday Morning* (1887) "from the original painting by Short" were typical. In both, a mother vigorously scrubs the face of her protesting son with Pears soap (see *ILN* 88: passim [Black boy]; 93:729 [Langtry]; 94:836 [*You Dirty Boy*]; 91:777 [*Sunday Morning*]).

In many ways, then, *Bubbles* was a big improvement. It suggested youth, delicacy, and lightness. The bubbles were transparent like the soap itself, and the ultimate purpose of the soap as a cleanser was repressed. Everybody knew the artist and the picture – the *Illustrated London News* had taken care of that – so the picture seemed a tacit endorsement from the greatest living painter. The implication was that if you bought Pears soap, art and culture, youth and beauty, would be yours.

Curiously, the advertisement does not seem to have finished off *Bubbles* as art. In the same way that the *Mona Lisa* or *American Gothic* can be used to sell anything from hand-cream

to corn-flakes and still command respect in reproductions and museums, *Bubbles* as a painting, *as art*, seems to have co-existed successfully with its ad-image. The fact that several hundred thousand copies of *Bubbles* were distributed by the *Illustrated London News* before it was used by Pears must have helped *Bubbles* in keeping its identity as art. Nonetheless, *Bubbles*' multiple life as painting, chromolithograph, poster, magazine insert, gift card and even jigsaw puzzle (Hindley 44) indicates not only its versatility, but also its lasting appeal. Indeed, it may be said that Millais' reputation suffered more than the painting did by its advertising career.

Now, the question is, can Benjamin's theory that the work of art loses authority when reproduced help us to understand the nature of *Bubbles*' transformation as it moves from art into advertising? Benjamin argues that an art-object's identity or "aura" gradually "withers" away in an age of mechanical reproduction because "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence." In short, "what is really jeopardized is the authority of the object" (221). Removed from its original and traditional context, an art-object can be put to any use: *Bubbles*, for example, can be made to say "buy soap." While Benjamin at times seems wistful about this state of affairs, he ultimately suggests that the destruction of the aura is beneficial. It demystifies the art-object, shifting it from the realm of cultic worship and aesthetics (where it is being put to covert fascist use) to that of politics, thereby opening it up to a new analysis that recognizes the historical and political pressures to which it is subject (223-224).

Brilliant as Benjamin's analysis is, his notion of the aura may nevertheless be open to criticism on two points: the nature of the authority that it posits, and the vulnerability of the aura that it assumes. One might first ask whether the "unique value of the 'authentic work' of art" (224) was ever unified or unalienated to begin with. In searching for the object's uniqueness, or seeking to fill its vacancy with politically shrewd guesses as to the reasons for its demise, don't we inscribe our own nostalgia and sense of self-alienation upon the object? Like ourselves, it too is supposed to be showing signs of self-division, a fall from primal unity into a weakened multiplicity of being. But doesn't reproduction bring more prominently into view the arbitrary and contradictory nature of the "original" object itself, exposing the polysemousness and inherent lack of authority that were there all along?<sup>4</sup> In other words, authority, like paradise, was always already lost; its demise is not the exclusive result of capitalism. The aura was always "other," and the object never really "one." Re-viewed, re-read, re-written, the mass reproduced object only multiples the interpretive and emotional investment that composes both its collective "ego" and its aura.<sup>5</sup>

As we consider the dubious integrity of the art-original,

3. This is a good example of what Benjamin calls the "cultic" nature of art – the idea that the museum is like a place of worship where, as Corelli says, the work of art will be "venerated." See Benjamin 223-225.

4. Cf. Eagleton 28-29: "the commodity, which flaunts itself as a unique, heteroclitic slice of matter, is in truth part of the very mechanism by which history becomes homogenized. . . . Since the significance of the commod-

ity is always elsewhere, in the social relations of production whose traces it has obliterated, it is freed . . . into polyvalence."

5. For an analysis of how Marx himself "deconstructs" historicized notions of alienation such as Lukacs', see Jay 36-41: "there is no unalienated origin before, outside, or beyond the technologies of inscriptive production."



Millais' title seems appropriately plural: there are the bubbles his grandson blew that suggested the picture, in the spontaneous moment that the painting purports to capture; then there are the bubbles blown in the studio, which Millais had difficulty painting; then those in a photograph which he used to freeze the image; then a glass sphere, blown like a bubble and made expressly for the purpose of aiding the artist in drawing the bubbles (*which bubbles?*); and finally the painting of *Bubbles* itself, then reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies even before emerging as the soap ad that became the most popular image in the Empire (Bennett 59).

The evasive unity of the original object does not, however, invalidate many of the insights Benjamin has into the nature of the *reproduced* object. For example, the commercial success of Millais' art had raised the problem of authority in respect to reproduction even before *Bubbles*. *The Illustrated London News* reported in 1886 that Millais' painting *Little Miss Muffet* (which the paper was engraving and distributing as a Christmas color supplement) was first bought by a Mr. McLaren "who, after disposing of the original work . . . retained the copyright — it [the reproduced work] at once took with the public and the demand for *Little Miss Muffet* has in this form equalled that for some of Reynold's favorite works" (Dec. 25, 1886, p. 23; my italics). Clearly, for some types of art, such as those Millais regularly produced during this period, the original was already less valuable than the rights to its reproduction.

Benjamin recognizes this situation as being politically expedient to the extent that it reveals the underlying values of capitalism; and the reproduction of a work like *Bubbles* for advertising purposes does give the whole story away: art as capitalist commodity. But if the reproduction that highlights the lost authority of the original also indicates the sloughing off of its historically determinative tradition, then the expected reification of a work like *Bubbles* can never be complete, for, as Benjamin comments, "reproduction reactivates the object reproduced" (221). The decay of the aura may indeed open the way for a politically informed estimate of the object's social function, but only because the de-contextualization of the object has also signaled the formation of new, more clearly arbitrary chains of signification around it. No art work can fully sell itself, because its meanings, however arbitrary they are shown to be, will also be revealed to be multiple as each new function is assigned to it.

This formulation suggests a second point upon which Benjamin may be critiqued, the vulnerability of the aura. For the aura, if it ever existed outside of the viewer's self-projection, was never an authoritative, univocal cultic mystery; and thus its "fall" into reproduction and commodification will be less climactic and revelatory than Benjamin predicts. Even assuming that the uniqueness once there is now gone, the demystified work of art can never be seen fully naked and free of all signifying relations, including those of the tradition only recently discarded. Our ideas of what art is depend upon conventions and an intertext which are already telling us how to read it. Consequently, an ungrounded and historically indeterminate reading may lead as much "back" to aesthetics as "forward"

to politics.<sup>6</sup> In short, the aura, even in the process of decay, remystifies itself.

It is important to note, as Benjamin does, that the footloose object of reproduction is available for almost any purpose, but our understanding of its diminished cultic value must be accompanied by the realization that its meanings can never be totalized, either, whether by tradition or the state, Marxist theorists or multinational conglomerates. Ultimately, Benjamin's notion of the aura is at once too mystified — that is, too tied to an imagined authority and a questionable periodization of alienation — and too fragile. Since art was always unauthoritative and open to violation, it is not really now so naked as it seems. Freed from tradition, art responds to potential victimization through a dissemination that counteracts the decay of the aura.

With *Bubbles*, for example, new systems of meaning open up around the work as a result of ad campaigns, marketing devices, new groups of consumers, and new situations for consumption. As Barratt had promised Millais, his art *was* able to reach an audience and undergo a scrutiny impossible otherwise. *Bubbles* passed from being a well-known painting to becoming truly popular art, and from advertisement to an unforgettable emblem of the Empire. Aesthetic, social, economic, hygienic: as a cultural matrix *Bubbles* spoke of the soap trade no less than of childhood, and of the fancies of its admirers no less than the ephemerality of the youth it presented. One cannot forget, moreover, the additional levels of meaning the painting inherits from artistic tradition: Millais was surely aware of the iconographical custom of using bubbles as signs of *vanitas* and the transitory, as well as the Victorian convention employed by Holman Hunt, G. F. Watts, and Edward Burne-Jones of encasing allegorical or otherworldly figures in bubbles. Scrutinized by consumers and connoisseurs, tacked up for decoration by housemaids and Hottentots, the image develops a range of signification that continues to expand with the unimagined new contexts in which it comes to be seen.

This ceaseless layering process, which is most stimulated even as, or even because, the aura is most exposed, suggests how art remystifies itself. This activity is anticipated by the contradictions inherent in Benjamin's definition of the aura, which as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (222), is nonetheless said to "decay" due to "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer'" (223). How resistant to closeness is the distance which Benjamin claims constitutes the aura?

The aura would at first seem to be like a fragile protective "bubble," delicately shielding the art-work from the violence of improper and untraditional employment. One gets too close and one can pop it; nearness violates it. But, I would argue, the aura also has its own resilience, reasserting itself most strongly at the moment of its greatest vulnerability. Art, as commodity, offers itself to all, yet the more the image is multiplied, the more it reasserts itself as untouchable, distant. Pop art, whose history is the reverse of *Bubbles*, illustrates this perfectly. Instead of advertising bringing art closer, art reproduces advertisement into auratic distance. The more they are

new freedom from which fresh 'iconic' correspondence may be constructed."

6. Cf. Eagleton 41: "if the sign has been rendered arbitrary, torn from its mimetic intimacy with the thing, it has nevertheless been released into a



reproduced, the further even the most banal objects – soup cans and lipsticks, for instance – seem from us. Bubbles are thus an apt image for the aura of art; they promise depth but are all surface, and what we see in them is our own reflection. They can't be directed or captured, any more than we can control the disseminative resilience of the image.

And so we recognize the bubble of the aura for what it is, the sign of our own desire, never fully met by the work of art as it is experienced, however satisfying it seemed in anticipation or in memory. In making the object of our unfulfilled desire available to all, mechanical reproduction seems to cheapen it, to prostitute the sacred body of art by offering it to all comers. But this in turn calls our attention to the truly magical reassertion of the aura, its quality of offering itself to each individual as if his or her meaning were authoritative, as if he or she were the only one it was meant for. Thus Terry Eagleton writes that in capitalist society "social relations are stripped of an aura everywhere reinstated by the commodities they generate" (27). We can never completely destroy the aura, just as we can never fully possess it; amid a thousand copies it still beckons to us from the reproduction we single out. It is, as Benjamin notes, art's very nature not to satisfy the need it creates:

the painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill. What it contains that fulfills the original desire would be the very same stuff on which the desire continuously feeds. (187)

What Benjamin seems to be implying in these sentences is that, in spite of his analysis, the decay of the aura is not its death, and that while reproduction of a painting like *Bubbles* may alter the relation of art and audience, enabling a new critical and political analysis, this is not the end of the story. Art may, in a sense, refuse to remain politicized. What at first appeared to be a revelation of the shameless omnivorousness of the capitalist process may be finally an indication of its ultimate strength – its basis in an economy of apparently personal desire. The work of art and its (now altered) aura survive to undergo future, further rounds of desire, commodification, frustration, and longing.

## The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: *Bildungsroman* or anti-*Bildungsroman*?

Nikki Lee Manos

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is one of George Meredith's most enduring works, typically admired for characteristics which, as Meredith himself noted, his contemporaries in 1859 condemned (*Letters* 2: 39-40, 145, 234, 478). The candid display of human sexuality and the experimental format have become in the twentieth century the very means of establishing the novel's merit. What is more, current interest in the *Bildungsroman* has enhanced the novel's popularity. Susanne Howe, in her pioneering study, *Wilhelm Meister and his English*

For as Benjamin foresaw, every attempt to totalize meaning by commercial cooption in fact only opens new meanings. The art-work, pried loose from its shell, shifts its subject from bubbles of childhood to those of soap, which in turn promise renewed youth if we buy Pears', itself a wonderfully transparent emblem like the bubbles. No longer ungraspable, Millais' bubbles and all they stand for momentarily seem the prospective property of all consumers – as youth may be, by means of a simple purchase, in the same way that Pears was able to purchase Millais' painting. But Pears could not buy the whole meaning of *Bubbles* then, any more than we can finally determine it now. Possessed by all, the image refuses to be possessed. It keeps on promising something more, as the aura emerges irresistibly from the ad.

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*Kinsmen*, assured Richard Feverel's place in modern comparative studies of the genre. She declared that Meredith's *Bildungsroman* "on the whole . . . point forward to the modern world" and enticed critics further by assessing *Richard Feverel* as "the negative of the apprenticeship idea" (268-69). The result of this literary history is that the novel has been judged not only one of the finest examples of the genre in British fiction but also an anti-*Bildungsroman*. To quote Jerome Buckley, in *Season of Youth: The "Bildungsroman" from Dickens*



to Golding, "the education" in *Richard Feverel* "proves in the end far from exemplary" (72). Richard is left "without an apprenticeship, without a career" – a young man who "has fallen in tragic defeat" (78, 77).

I believe that Meredith was counteracting an apprenticeship ideal in *Richard Feverel*, but it was not *Bildung*, the philosophical concept that inspired eighteenth-century German intellectuals. Literally translated as harmonious cultivation of the total personality, *Bildung* is a richly symbolic term. It represents a philosophy in which the notion of the individual ranks supreme. The "self" is the individual's means of attaining moral regeneration. It is also the means of perfecting society, for the cultivated individual contributes to advances in art, law, and religion. Basically, *Bildung* celebrates a humanistic vision of life. As an educational tenet, it stresses the development and refinement of a youth's varied interests – secular, social, religious, spiritual – to produce an adult who, although fairly self-content and productive, finds even greater satisfaction in seeking further self-improvement. Importantly, the concept profoundly influenced Goethe and underlies the structure of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, the prototypical German *Bildungsroman*.<sup>1</sup> What Meredith was rejecting in *Richard Feverel* was the epistemological restraints that Carlyle had shackled to the term in translating *Wilhelm Meister* and composing his own *Bildungsroman*, Book II of *Sartor Resartus*.<sup>2</sup> The Calvinism which inspired the Scotsman and underlies the structure of *Sartor* contrasts sharply with the humanism which guided Goethe. The "Everlasting Yea" Teufelsdröckh shouts at the end of his apprenticeship, "Love not Pleasure: love God" (192), rejects what, perhaps, Meredith found most dear in Goethean *Bildung*. Throughout his career, he produced novels and poetry which serve as testimonies to Goethe's abiding appreciation for man's role in the procreative processes of earth.<sup>3</sup> Simply, there was no need for Meredith to write an anti-*Bildungsroman*. Carlyle had already accomplished that task. What Meredith intended to write in *Richard Feverel*, I feel, was a *Bildungsroman* counteracting the anti-*Bildung* tenets found in *Sartor Resartus*.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, for Meredith, Carlyle had firmly established himself in England as the spokesperson for German letters. Calling for an end to the self-destructive, self-indulgent tendencies of the Romantic Era, he had found in the intellectual fervor of Germany justification for proclaiming an age of renewal. England by 1832 was ready for such a proclamation. Thus, when Carlyle announced in *Sartor Resartus*, "'Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe'" (192), Englishmen promptly altered the command into personal creeds.<sup>5</sup> It would have been senseless for the young Meredith, unknown and unproven, to advocate Goethe's ideal in an era swayed by Carlyle's version.

Instead, he chose in *Richard Feverel*, I believe, an empirical approach. He fashioned the novel as an experiment (although a controlled one) in which readers would be enlightened about the concept of *Bildung* through their practical experience with the text. Firsthand, they would observe two versions of self-cultivation and learn to discern the humanism underlying Goethe's ideal from the stern moral code ordering Carlyle's. To devise such a reading, Meredith gave his apprentice Richard a temperament similar to Teufelsdröckh's yet placed him in a narrative structure characterized by the spirit and sentiments of *Wilhelm Meister*.<sup>6</sup> In other words, in *Richard Feverel* character and plot are in conflict. Richard insists on making decisions which could readily be classified under Teufelsdröckh's motto, "Love not Pleasure; love God." However, the educational process he is undergoing calls for him to seek pleasure, even sensual satisfaction, and to discover that such secular and social interests lead to healthy self-cultivation. Meredith resolved the novel's conflict, notably, by destroying not only his apprentice's cultivation but also his humanity. Such a resolution suggests how powerfully, even deadly, Meredith perceived the anti-*Bildung* forces in nineteenth-century England.

To prove that this design orders *Richard Feverel*, I will establish that, despite the apprentice's tragic demise, a positive educational ideal underlies the novel, an ideal similar in principle to the one underlying *Wilhelm Meister*. At the same time, I will show that Richard, being driven by a notion of self-denial as categorical as Teufelsdröckh's, cannot sustain the positive steps in Goethean *Bildung* he undergoes. First, it is necessary to distinguish Goethe and Carlyle's approaches to *Bildung*, especially to the crucial tenet of *Entsagen* or self-denial.

By the time *Wilhelm Meister* has finally completed his apprenticeship, he apparently has lost much. He has given up a life-long passion for an acting career, curbed a fairly successful philandering habit, and sacrificed hard-won independence for a regimented communal life style. However, such self-denial has not been at the cost of personal happiness. Despite the losses, he concludes his apprenticeship favorably situated. A burgher's son, he is engaged to an aristocrat, Natalie, the woman of his dreams, and honored by membership in an elite society of humanists. Moreover, he is thrilled that the boy he has been caring for, Felix, is his natural son and that, together, they will embark on exciting travels to the new world. *Entsagen*, for Wilhelm, has been the process of selecting, from a multitude of choices, the things that really matter personally in his life. He has given up the lonely, flirtatious existence of a second-rate troupe actor for a loving family, camaraderie, and international philanthropic pursuits. Indeed, Wilhelm has denied himself very little. In contrast, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh learns to practice *Entsagen* not as a means to an end but as an

1. For citations, I have selected the most recent translation of *Wilhelm Meister* by H. M. Waidson. I have also consulted Carlyle's 1839 translation. For informative discussions on the notion of *Bildung* in eighteenth-century Germany, consult Bruford; Borcherdt; Dilthey 393-412; Jost 97-115; Pascal 14-28; and Swales 1-18.

2. Many critics have explored the relationship between Goethe and Carlyle. See, for instance, Ashton 16-18; Barrett; Behnken 40-71; Brantlinger 108-18; Carr; Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought*, 207-29; Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus*, 71-75.

3. I gratefully acknowledge the help of Stone 157-66 and Betts 104-06 in

comparing the poetry and philosophical ideas of Goethe and Meredith.

4. For a contrasting view, consult Spänberg, *Tradition of Realism*, 61-74, who believes that Meredith in *Richard Feverel* was rejecting Goethe's "bland optimism."

5. Many critics have discussed Carlyle's influence on his age. For insightful remarks, see Beebe 79-80; Harrold, "Introduction," *Sartor Resartus*, xxvii-lviii; and Levine 68-69.

6. Critics have noted the similarities in the plots of *Wilhelm Meister* and *Richard Feverel*. Consult, for instance, Betts 107; Howe 272; Krusemayer 27-33.



end in itself. His apprenticeship presents quite a drastic example of the notion, for Teufelsdröckh never actually appears in *Sartor Resartus*. In Book II, an English editor, relying on six bags of assorted bits of information recorded in scraps of paper, sketches a biographical narrative of the mysterious German professor. Importantly, the editor records Teufelsdröckh dramatically rejecting secular life. He gives up, besides a lucrative career in law, the love of the peerless Blumine and friendship with the Englishman Herr Towgood. What is more, in the later stages of his apprenticeship, Teufelsdröckh does not discover, as Wilhelm does, that participating in the affairs of men can be a satisfying and worthwhile experience. Teufelsdröckh continues to equate secular life with romantic illusions and materialistic creeds, temptations to be avoided at any price. Whatever success he achieves is spiritual, for his apprenticeship is a redemptive process preoccupied with man's salvation.<sup>7</sup> The English editor concludes his sketch with the German professor, not surrounded by family and friends, but engrossed in an abstraction – a philosophy of clothes.

Teufelsdröckh's experience with *Entsagen* differs sharply from Wilhelm's. Practicing self-denial for Teufelsdröckh means spiritually transcending all earthly concerns. To assure his success, he isolates himself totally from the cares and pleasures of daily life. On the other hand, self-denial for Wilhelm is a matter of conducting secular affairs with proportion and balance. He succeeds when he allows the vague, conflicting desires of his youth to crystallize into the collective responsibilities of a husband and civic leader. As the role of *Entsagen* in Wilhelm's apprenticeship suggests, the ideal of *Bildung* celebrated in *Wilhelm Meister* places great trust in human nature. A similar educational ideal orders *Richard Feverel*.

Like Wilhelm, Richard advances as a candidate in *Bildung* when he attempts to fulfill naturally the desires and urges of his youth. Indeed, the first time Richard is stirred by strong feeling, he responds with breathtaking results. The attraction he feels when he first encounters Lucy, "a daughter of Earth" (119), is immediate and powerful. Importantly, the narrator quickly declares that the lush setting is as much an enticement as the beauty of the young woman: "Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wildflowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting – a terrible attraction" (120). He adds tellingly that Lucy has "soft rose" cheeks, clear eyes, and a thoughtful brow (121) – the signs of health and intelligence. The narrator's tone is clear: Richard will be foolish, if not unjust, if he ignores such a clear directive from nature. He does not disappoint us. After saving Lucy from slipping on the "crumbling wet sides of the bank" and "touching her finger's tip" (120), he follows her. The narrator continues to defend this "meeting of two electric clouds" (120). Employing metaphoric language, he hints that these youths are being blessed for their honesty: "Perhaps Love played his tune so well because their natures had unblunted edges and were keen for bliss, confiding in it as natural food" (156). Love, personified as a "happy sheepboy" (156), pipes encouragingly

because these innocent children welcome their feelings as naturally as a hungry person welcomes food. As Richard and Lucy continue to meet, she assumes the duties initially performed by Love, drawing music from all the nerves of his body, making him feel as if without her he has no blood. Through the power of love, she symbolically becomes Richard's source of life. Significantly, Love stops piping. As the narrator explains, with their first kiss, the couple expresses a note only St. Cecilia can interpret. Acting in harmony with nature, Richard has attained heavenly as well as earthly bliss. Once more, the narrator's metaphoric language has confirmed the Goethean ideal of *Bildung* underlying the novel. Like Wilhelm, Richard is discovering that the pleasures of daily life are giving him insight into his spiritual needs.

It is important to note that in the preceding chapters Meredith has shown his apprentice moving naturally toward such self-cultivation. Months earlier, just as he is beginning to swim a race, Richard spies a bonnet on the opposite shore and realizes that a woman, Lady Blandish, is secretly watching him. Even though he is competing against his arch rival, the Eton boy Ralph, Richard is beaten by several lengths and must forfeit his prized river-yacht. At first, he angrily feels himself victimized; nevertheless, he is soon interpreting his world "through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires" (103). The narrator reassures us that Richard's new romantic mood is healthy, for his passions "are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain" (103). Next, we are given an example of that harmony: Richard has begun to write love poetry. Although his father, Sir Austin, quickly puts an end to such "scribblings" (105), Richard's growing sexual awareness cannot be checked. He soon stumbles upon the "key" to the mysterious urges the bonnet has provoked. He spies his father kissing Lady Blandish's hand and becomes "intoxicated by anticipation" (115). Richard now has only one goal in life: "to kiss a woman's hand, and die!" (115). Within hours, he encounters Lucy wearing a lovely bonnet, a "broad straw-hat" (119), and feels bold enough to touch her finger's tip, if not kiss her hand. As these prior scenes have carefully established, "Nature has made" Richard "ripe for Love" (119). Consequently, when he disobeys his father and elopes with Lucy, we applaud his action as the natural culmination of the slowly awakened desires of a promising youth. We even judge the elopement as morally just when the union produces a fine, strapping boy.

But Richard soon fails to act in harmony with nature. As a result, he loses, besides nature's blessing, his instinct for making sound moral decisions. Honeymooning with Lucy on the Isle of Wight, Richard joins a coterie of worldly-wise aristocrats. Quickly becoming "the centre of a brilliant company," he is launched, the narrator ominously adds, "in deep waters" (322). The metaphor is especially suggestive. Richard is no longer rowing in a quiet stream near his father's protective estates. It is not surprising that Richard, literally and figuratively at sea, turns foolishly from Lucy, his source of life, to outdated knight-errantry. As the narrator comments, "Vague shapeless ambition had replaced Love in yonder skies" (332).

7. For the religious focus of *Sartor Resartus*, note the interesting comments of Tennyson, "Bildungsroman," 140-43 as well as the full analysis of



He journeys alone to London to win his father's approval of his marriage, compounding this error in judgment by delaying his return to Lucy: " 'But I've work to do now. I dare not, I cannot, leave it. Lucy would be the last to ask me' " (366). Within weeks, he labels his marriage an act of folly, insignificant compared to his new role as a professional "moral-scavenger" (355), to cite the observing Adrian's phrase. By day, Richard divides his time, plotting the rescue of his mother from a common-law marriage and protesting the arranged, loveless match of his cousin Clare to a man twenty years her senior. By night, Richard prowls London for prostitutes to redeem. In spare moments he ponders his father's rumored marriage to Lady Blandish. Now, Richard is not so sure he wants to share his father's love, the love he has fought so hard to escape. Morally, Richard is so amiss that he decides to save the beautiful demimondaine Bella Mount. The pun's foreshadowing is obvious. Momentarily frustrated with his knight-errantry, Richard considers returning to Lucy: "His great ambition must be covered by a house-top; he and the cat must warm themselves on the domestic hearth! The Hero was not aware that his heart moved him to this. His heart was not now in open communion with his mind" (389-90). Thus, when Bella sweetly requests one last evening together, the unsuspecting Richard, convinced he is a failure, readily agrees. Before the night is over, he has assumed another role besides those of son, husband, and moral scavenger – adulterer. Despite Richard's pathetic state, the narrator concludes the scene between these lovers with a stinging remark: "Not a word of Love between them!" (399). No longer in touch with his feelings, Richard is following a path of self-destruction, not self-cultivation.

What has led Richard, who began such a promising candidate in *Bildung*, to this low point? Practicing Teufelsdröckh's "Everlasting No" with a passion.<sup>8</sup> Like Carlyle's apprentice, Richard discovers that his education, the most advanced of the day, stifles individuality. His father, in fact, has devised quite an elaborate educational system for guaranteeing that his son develop into the "perfect Man" (9). Naturally, Richard must rebel against such a controlled, overly protective upbringing. Thus, when Sir Austin insists that his son, at age seven, undergo a physical examination, "Little Ricky" stamps his foot and cries, " 'I won't! Damned if I do!' " (20). When he is asked at age fourteen to undergo a similar examination, Richard responds with far more than a childish tantrum. He runs away from his birthday guests and poaches on a neighboring farm. After he is discovered by the farmer and thrashed, Richard arranges for the man's rick to be burned and then plots a prison breakout to free the yeoman he hired to set the fire. Richard is conveniently rescued by his father and an older cousin Austin Wentworth. Still, his anti-social behavior defines his predicament: he must literally reject his father's world and become an outcast if he is to follow his natural inclinations. Unfortunately, Richard does not find practicing total rejection as liberat-

ing an experience as Teufelsdröckh does. What is counterfeit in his society is not just institutionalized humbug. It is also men and women who blame their failures on the easiest scapegoat, often institutionalized humbug itself, rather than admit their inadequacies.<sup>9</sup> Shouting a resounding "No" to his father's possessiveness is not enough to insure Richard's success at *Bildung*. He must say "No" to the humbug within himself – to Feveler pride.

And there is no finer example of humbug than Richard's father. Sir Austin takes pride in the self-denial he has undergone for his son. As a young man, Sir Austin removed himself from the petty confusions and jealousies that plague mankind so that he could create a system, a unique blend of scientific and humanistic principles, to educate his son. But such self-denial is a defensive ploy, concealing an extremely self-indulgent personality. Sir Austin has isolated himself because he has been humiliated by his wife's betrayal. He cannot forgive her because she had "sinned every way" and "blackened the world's fair aspect for him" (15). As the narrator's remarks make clear, Sir Austin is "a soured Adam whom not even an uncorrupted Eve might tempt" (3). To maintain his pride, he continues to blame his wife as well as the rest of humanity. To plan his revenge, he devises a system.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, he has the "gift" peculiar to "monomaniacs," the ability to talk nonsense "in a tone of profound sincerity" (104). Sir Austin's brand of humbug works well – until things do not go his way. As a result, instead of accepting his son's marriage as evidence that his system is a success, he condemns the union. In addition, he uses it as evidence to blame his son, as he has blamed his wife, for not being worthy of his wisdom: Richard is "no longer the Richard of his creation, his pride and joy, but simply a human being with the rest. The bright star had sunk among the mass" (312). To soothe his wounded pride, Sir Austin plots to punish Richard and eventually regain control of him. Naturally, he uses his system for his revenge. He devises an additional educational stage for his son, this time a punitive "Period of Probation" (317), and escapes to Wales. The narrator, importantly, exposes the humbug in Sir Austin's behavior: "The wild beast in him was not the less deadly because it did not roar, and the Devil in him not the less active because he resolved to do nothing" (315).

Richard is very much his father's son.<sup>11</sup> As the tantrum at the age of seven confirms, Richard learns to practice very early an extremely indulgent form of self-denial. Unfortunately, in the process, he avoids learning the selfless behavior required of a son, husband and father. Consequently, Richard feels betrayed when his father refuses to accept his marriage. Like Sir Austin in his pain, Richard divorces himself from humanity – symbolized by Lucy – and devises his own system of revenge.<sup>12</sup> He will save fallen women, starting with his mother. Granted, Richard's system, medieval chivalry, takes a very different form from his father's. Richard is fascinated with the seamier side of life; Sir Austin is determined to avoid it. Despite

8. Edwards 30 also uses Carlyle's categories – "Everlasting No," "Centre of Indifference," and "Everlasting Yea" – to label Richard's development. Edwards, however, reaches different conclusions in his analysis than I do in this essay.

9. Consult Beer 17-18 and Halperin 195-213.

10. Buckley 73 and Wright 147-61 note that Sir Austin's System was devised

to revenge himself against his wife.

11. Buckley 61; Edwards 27-28; and Spänberg, "Theme of Sexuality," 219-20, point out that Richard is an extension of his father.

12. There are several interesting critical discussions on how Sir Austin and Richard transfer their betrayed feelings into ideals. Consult Bartlett 332-35; Knoepfelmacher 103-26; Wilt 85.



such differences, both systems expose their originators as men with overly sensitive prides. A knight-errant in Germany waiting to liberate Italy by horse is a stance as self-indulgent as a scientific humanist in Wales waiting to forgive his son. Richard's adultery with a prostitute, like Sir Austin's "Period of Probation," reveals the all too human motives behind his altruism. Briefly, from a precocious, appealing child, Richard has grown into a cold, self-righteous man, a perfect replica of his father. In the process, Richard has transformed *Bildung* into humbug.

But nature does not give up on Richard. While in Germany, wallowing in self-pity and refusing his father's pleas to return home, Richard learns for the first time that he is a father. The narrator insists that Richard is transformed by the news: "Where are the dreams of the Hero when he learns that he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently. . . . A father? Richard fixed his eyes as if he were trying to make out the lineaments of his child" (444). He stumbles dazed into a lush Rhineland forest and is thrilled by the sight of a majestic rainstorm and the smell of fresh meadow-sweet. Then nature, as promised, speaks to him through a tiny leveret licking his hand: "The gentle scraping continued without intermission as on he walked. What did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much just then" (447). Richard is once more illuminated with "the Spirit of Life" (447). He finds himself cleansed of the guilt of adultery and turns away from the misguided notion of repentance that has kept him from Lucy. He imagines his son's cry, remembers Lucy's touch, and is led, "from the depths . . . a blind and tottering man" (447). Richard is going home. Once more, he is an apprentice in Goethean *Bildung*, instinctively "striking the keynotes of Nature," feeling "a singular harmony . . . burst over his whole being" (444). Like Wilhelm, Richard is participating in the procreative processes of earth, selecting, from a multitude of choices, the things that really matter personally in his life. Again, he is imbued with spiritual insight: "When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped; warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills" (447).

Granted, there is no rainstorm, meadow-sweet, or leveret in *Wilhelm Meister*. Goethe's apprentice does not experience such a dramatic revelation from nature. Wilhelm is merely led to a secret shrine and told that Felix is his natural son: "'Receive the dear child from our hand, turn around, and dare to be happy'" (3: 67). Still, the understanding Wilhelm and Richard gain from these startling discoveries of fatherhood is similar. As the Abbé tells Wilhelm, "'Whoever only has a taste of his error husbands it carefully, he takes pleasure in it as a rare happiness, but he who consumes error to the full must get to know it for what it is, unless he is mad'" (3: 65). In other words, the errors these young men have fully committed have saved them, giving them self-knowledge and making their self-cultivation possible. Richard is entitled to hear the same remark the Abbé addresses to Wilhelm: "'May you be blessed, young man! Your years of apprenticeship are over; nature has absolved you'" (67).

Unfortunately, Richard's successful venture into German

self-cultivation is once again short-lived. He is soon back in England where an outdated letter from Bella Mount, explaining that she was paid to seduce him, is too much error for him to consume. He tastes "hard, earthy misery" (459), proudly retreats to the "cloud-work" (441) of knight-errantry, and demands an utterly senseless duel with a rake. When he momentarily visits Lucy and views his son, Richard has resumed the stance of a bitter, self-indulgent Feverel: "The blame was here, the blame was there; it was everywhere and nowhere, and the young man cast it on the Fates, and looked angrily at Heaven, and grew reckless" (462). A forgiving wife and an angelic son do not produce in Richard enough happiness for him to forget his injured pride. He survives his wound from the duel, but Lucy, the strain too much, dies from brain fever. As Lady Blandish's comment that ends the novel suggests, Richard has lost far more than an apprenticeship in Goethean *Bildung*: "'Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed - striving to image her on his brain'" (474). Richard, overwhelmed by remorse and grief, has lost the greatest gift of all - his humanity. He cannot image Lucy because he has failed to learn one of the key lessons in *Wilhelm Meister*: "unselfish beneficence brings in interest of the highest and finest kind" (3: 146).

In a sense, the careful phrase, *striving to image*, suggests the task Meredith undertook in *Richard Feverel*. *Striving* echoes the Carlylean approach to self-cultivation, the combative effort that allows an apprentice like Teufelsdröckh to shout an "Everlasting No." On the other hand, the word *image* is a direct translation of the German term *Bild*. In effect, Richard strives in Carlylean fashion to fulfill the German ideal of self-cultivation. He fails because the act of striving has no place in the process of harmoniously cultivating the total personality. Goethe expressed this point best when he explained the meaning of his *Bildungsroman* by citing the final lines of the text.<sup>13</sup> As Friedrich, one of Wilhelm's friends, explains, "'You seem to me to be like Saul, the son of Kish, who went out to look for his father's asses and found a kingdom'" (3:158). Unfortunately, Richard, made inflexible by a rigid upbringing, is not open to life's unexpected joys. Rather than discover a kingdom of *Bildung*, he relives as Teufelsdröckh does, Job's woeful tale.

In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle paraphrased Goethe's concept of *Bildung*: "To each is given a certain inward Talent, a certain outward Environment of Fortune; to each, by wisest combination of the two, a certain maximum of Capability" (119). The rigidly balanced phrases, passive construction, and fixed repetition of the qualifier *certain* imply stylistically a view of *Bildung* quite different from the one celebrated in *Wilhelm Meister*.<sup>14</sup> Goethe's ideal was far more than a "wise" combination of talent and fortune, far more than a "maximum of Capability." It celebrated the richness and variety of life, placing no limits on man's potential. Indeed, Carlyle's paraphrasing more accurately describes Sir Austin's despotic system. I believe that Sir Austin was Meredith's fictionalized portrait of Carlyle. Both men were labelers who foolishly attempted to order reality into submission by devising ideal states such as

13. Eckermann records Goethe's comment in *Conversations* 84.

14. Harrold, "Introduction," xlv-xlvii, and Howe 88-90 point out Carlyle's narrow view of *Bildung*.



a "Paradise" or an "Everlasting Yea." When humanity naturally failed to live up to their ideals, Sir Austin and Carlyle became bitterly disillusioned, turning into reactionaries who could conceive such punitive measures as a "Period of Probation" or the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. Goethe was not a labeler. When pressed by associates, he came the closest to defining *Bildung* by vaguely associating it with the story of Saul. It was Goethe, not Carlyle, that Meredith cited as the greatest example of modern man, "the pattern," he wrote in a letter, "for all who would have a directing hold of themselves."<sup>15</sup> And it was in *Wilhelm Meister*, not *Sartor Resartus*, that he found that pattern.

Why, then, do we have such difficulty discerning a positive notion of *Bildung* underlying *Richard Feverel*? Without question, the difficulty lies in the novel's experimental structure. Meredith himself was frustrated when his contemporaries so badly misjudged his intentions. His later extensive revisions of the text, however, did little to clarify the novel's themes. Meredith, I feel, never fully controlled *Richard Feverel*'s tone. He created a colorful narrator to order our reading experience. Indeed, we feel the narrator's anger, appreciate his evaluations, and even sense his philosophical biases. He is the novel's lens, controlling how we focus on the written material before us. In a sense, he is Meredith's version of Carlyle's editor in *Sartor Resartus*, persuading us to accept a foreign educational ideal without alienating our current loyalties. But the task Meredith's narrator confronts is more difficult than trying to order six bags of assorted bits of information. He must shape an entire fictional world, not merely outline a biographical sketch. He must describe settings, characters, and events. Exposing Sir Austin's psychological disguises is a difficult task in itself, let alone celebrating Goethean *Bildung* indirectly through plot and metaphoric language. Simply, Meredith depended too much on the all too human narrator he had created. In an experiment, conclusions should be reached primarily through observations. A human lens is needed, but not one so obviously colored by preconceived notions as *Richard Feverel*'s narrator. Still, fighting anti-*Bildung* forces in nineteenth-century England would remain, for Meredith, a lifelong commitment despite the difficulties of *Richard Feverel*. He would continue to write *Bildungsromane* which celebrated Goethean self-cultivation. And in *Harry Richmond*, *Diana of the Crossways*, and *Beauchamp's Career*, he created possibly the finest celebrations of *Bildung* in English literature. In each novel the narrator is a colorful character who is carefully – and successfully – controlled by a writer at the height of his artistic powers.

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15. Meredith made several revealing remarks about Goethe in his correspondence (*Letters* 2: 715; 3: 1351, 1356, 1369, 1410, 1550).



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## Christianity, Spiritualism, and the Fourth Dimension in Late Victorian England\*

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The concept of a fourth spacial dimension, one product of the development of non-Euclidean geometry in the nineteenth century, opened up new possibilities for scientists seeking explanations for "action at a distance," in gravitation and the ether, for instance. At the same time, it appeared to offer believers in a supernatural reality a way to overleap the narrow confines of materialism without violating the mathematical and physical laws that governed the natural world.<sup>1</sup> An examination of some of the more notable Christian and spiritualist forays into the fourth dimension demonstrates the persistence of that Victorian longing for one reality, one order embracing the scientific and the spiritual in the face of materialist attempts to exile the supernatural from the province of the real. Like evolution before it, the fourth dimension also provided a theoretical battleground on which rival definitions of that one reality struggled for authority.

The privileged philosophical position of Euclidean geometry in nineteenth-century English thought made it inevitable that alternative models would have far-reaching implications for definitions of truth, as Joan L. Richards has demonstrated (143-66).<sup>2</sup> Since the seventeenth century, idealists seeking weapons against empiricism had turned to geometry for proof that certain knowledge of the real world was possible independent of experience. Nineteenth-century idealists like the philosopher of science William Whewell also used geometry to underpin his more general position that the conceptions of the physical world we arrived at through scientific investigation gave us access to a higher reality lying beyond mere appearances. For the opposing empiricist view, such conceptions were simply convenient mental constructs, agreed upon conventions for labeling physical reality, with no claim to describe a fixed truth beyond appearances.<sup>3</sup> Whewell treated Euclidean geometry as a literal description of the space we lived in; its truths were necessary and universal, reflecting the real order of things beyond sense perception. Far from viewing it as an abstract and arbitrary logical system, Whewell assigned to geometrical knowledge a status higher than that to be gained from experience alone. Euclidean geometry thus played a leading role in the idealists' claim that man could achieve knowl-

edge of the real. Empiricists seeking to limit human knowledge to sense perception argued for the purely contingent and descriptive nature of our scientific theories about the physical world – it was at least possible, for instance, that the sun might not rise tomorrow, no matter how unlikely. In geometrical terms, however, such violations of law had no relevance. A triangle whose angles totalled more than 180 degrees was both impossible and inconceivable. Without being able to explain how such a triangle might exist, the empiricists seemed to leave Euclidean axioms in a privileged position as necessary truths and to leave intact idealists' claims about human access to an ultimate reality beyond experience.

In developing non-Euclidean geometries, Germans like George Riemann and Herman von Helmholtz intended to challenge the apodictic status of Euclidean axioms by demonstrating that Euclidean space was only one of several possible ways of conceiving or explaining the behavior of the external world. By thus assigning to geometrical truth a merely empirical certainty, such theories could bolster the position of those who wished to insist on the purely descriptive status of scientific conceptions and to rule out access to absolute truths. In actual practice, Richards argues, many British mathematicians managed to incorporate non-Euclidean geometries in such a way as to leave unchallenged Euclid's privileged position in defining reality (156-62). And as the following discussion will demonstrate, far from reinforcing empiricist limits on the knowable, the concept of a fourth and higher dimensions furnished many believers with new ways of urging the reality of the supernatural.

Although time had been suggested as a fourth dimension before the early twentieth century – H.G. Wells' *Time Machine* (1895) being a popular case in point – the idea of a fourth dimension of space was far more influential in the closing decades of the century. Its most direct links to physical science were established by way of Lord Kelvin's theory of vortex atoms.<sup>4</sup> Helmholtz had argued that in a frictionless fluid, vortex rings (that is, circular movements of fluid that duplicated the rotational motion of smoke rings) could exist indefinitely, immune to dissipation and invariable in strength. The mathematician and physicist Peter Guthrie Tait had demonstrated several

\*A shorter version of this paper was delivered at the Northeast Victorian Studies Association Convention Providence, RI, April 1985.

1. Other discussions of nineteenth-century uses of the fourth dimension can be found in Bork 326-338, Henderson and Rucker.  
2. My discussion of the role of geometry in nineteenth-century thought is

indebted to the first half of her essay.

3. For a discussion of the wider debate between idealist and empiricist philosophies of science in this period see Hull, pt. I, Strong, 209-31, and Ellégard.

4. For a discussion of Kelvin's theory of vortex atoms see Silliman, 461-74; Sharlin, 212-14; Whittaker, 94-96.



of the properties of vortex motion using real smoke rings. He thus suggested to Kelvin the idea that the different atoms of our material universe might actually be vortex rings with various numbers and configurations of knots in them, set rotating in the ether by the creative act of the Supreme Being. Although Kelvin did not mention the fourth dimension explicitly in connection with vortex motion, other thinkers prominent in attempts to spiritualize higher space did. Charles Howard Hinton, for instance, speculated that particles of ether in 4-D movement would produce a vortex with properties similar to those demonstrated by an electrical current (17-18). Tait tried unsuccessfully to establish mathematically the relations between different types and numbers of knots in vortex rings and the properties of different chemical elements ("On Knots" [Pts. I-III] in *Scientific Papers* 1:273 ft.). For him the symbol of the vortex atom was a trefoil knot – a closed curve with three crossings that demonstrated a three-fold and amphicheiral symmetry (that is, it could be reversed into its own mirror image). As the German mathematician Christian Felix Klein had demonstrated, such a knot could be untied only in the fourth dimension.

The obvious appeal of vortex motion for Tait was its positing of an essential continuity between the phenomena of this world and an unseen realm beyond it. That continuity formed the basis of two of the most ambitiously scientific attempts to use physical law to justify Christianity in the late nineteenth century: *The Unseen Universe* (1875) and its sequel, *Paradoxical Philosophy* (1878), the joint work of Tait and Balfour Stewart, professor of natural philosophy at Owens College, Manchester. As devout Christians, Tait and Stewart had been angered by the materialist challenge flung down by the strict empiricist John Tyndall in his 1874 Belfast Address ("we [scientists] claim, and we shall wrest from theology, the entire domain of cosmological theory") (2: 197). They set out to refute the position that any necessary contradiction existed between physical law and the possibility of immortality and a personal God. At the center of their arguments was the principle of continuity: that all natural phenomena behaved according to consistent laws or, as the authors more tendentiously put it, that the Creator would never put men to permanent confusion by allowing inexplicable violations of law (Tait and Stewart, *The Unseen Universe* 88). In *The Unseen Universe*, they paraded an impressive array of scientific theory before the reader: experimental transformations of energy by Carnot, Kelvin, and Clerk Maxwell, conceptions of atomic and ethereal structure by Bosovich, Kelvin, and LeSage, various speculations about cosmology and evolution. Their ultimate purpose in doing so, however, was to turn the arguments of the materialists against them. In their eyes, phenomena like the beginning and end of the cosmos in time, the gradual loss of energy from our universe, or the origin of biological life on our planet would constitute violations of continuity unless it could be posited that energy and matter had emanated from an unseen universe beyond and continuous with this visible one. Once having established this unseen universe for the purposes of scientific explanation, it became an easy step for them to explain New

Testament miracles as transmutations of energy from it, and to locate an enduring heaven and hell within it (247-48, 258f). Although this unseen universe is never literally equated with the fourth dimension, its implicit affinities with higher space are suggested by the symbol of the vortex atom, which the authors placed on the title page of their work.

Their friend and scientific colleague James Clerk Maxwell made such affinities more explicit in a poem inspired by *Paradoxical Philosophy*, Tait and Stewart's next book, in which the German materialist Dr. Stoffkraft ("strength of matter") is converted to the positions articulated in *The Unseen Universe*. In his poem Clerk Maxwell envisioned his soul as a trefoil knot wrought upon a "liquid vortex. . . /By intellect in the Unseen residing," and the fourth dimension as an escape from the finite bounds of materialist reality (quoted in Knott 240-41). Other contemporaries like W.K. Clifford were less impressed by the force of Tait and Stewart's logic, however. Clifford had been the first to translate Riemann's work into English and to make explicit the conclusions he drew from it where scientific laws were concerned: such laws marked the limits of human knowledge and could claim no necessary and absolute status. Clifford's own speculations on the fourth dimension had led him to startling anticipations of twentieth-century theory, for instance in his argument that the motion of matter might be explained by variations in the curvature of space. Although Clifford confessed that he personally found relief from what he called "the dreary infinities of homaloidal [i.e., flat] space"<sup>5</sup> in the idea that space might be curved, he remained completely hostile to the kind of metaphysical assumptions Tait and Stewart smuggled into higher space speculation. Clifford vigorously attacked *The Unseen Universe* in the *Fortnightly Review*, offering alternative explanations for the dissipation of energy from the universe and dismissing as unjustified in any case the extension of continuity into a supernatural realm of which we could gain no material evidence. A confirmed atheist, he condemned as pernicious any theory that would deliver men up once again to the humiliating superstitions of Christianity or the modern witchcraft of spiritualism (776, 781).

In point of fact, Tait and Stewart had jealously guarded their unseen universe against appropriation by spiritualists, arguing somewhat feebly that Christian miracles occurred in full daylight and had a constructive purpose that spiritualist manifestations lacked (*Paradoxical Philosophy* 197-98). Their Dr. Stoffkraft, having thrown off his materialist scepticism, rebounds to the opposite extreme, first falling into the clutches of spiritualist charlatans and then almost converting to Roman Catholicism before recovering himself and settling down to scholarly projects similar to Tait's own: investigations of the fourth dimension, "beknottedness," and the relations between religion and science (229). Through the example of Stoffkraft, Tait and Stewart imply that the extremes of scepticism and complete credulity are equally unbalanced: their unseen universe was meant to offer a middle way by making it possible to accept both scientific and supernatural truths. Despite their elaborate scientific maneuvering, however, they did not so

5. *Lectures and Essays* 1: 323. For his speculations on curved space see *Mathematical Papers* 21-22.



much prove the existence of the Creator and His unseen universe, as posit a new natural theology to justify religious assumptions they never really questioned. Judging from the comments of other reviewers, their arguments simply confirmed most readers in their original prejudices – ritualists condemned them as infidel, materialists dismissed them as Christian apologists.<sup>6</sup>

Edwin A. Abbott, theologian and headmaster of the City of London School, was similarly concerned to provide an argument for the reality of the supernatural that would satisfy the intellect by acknowledging the claims of the scientific. As a member of the Association for the Improvement of Geometrical Teaching, Abbott joined forces with other mathematicians intent upon dislodging Euclid as the sole model for geometrical instruction in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> But for him non-Euclidean geometry helped to refute rather than to bolster a strict empiricist view of reality. Believing that fundamentalist interpretations of Christianity were more likely to strain than to strengthen belief, as a theologian Abbott employed the historical and textual methods of the Higher Criticism of the Bible to dispel literalist interpretations of miracles and other religious phenomena. At the same time, he also attempted to combat the materialist position by arguing that religious and scientific ways of thinking were fundamentally analogous and therefore had equivalent claims to truth. Abbott's *Flatland* (1884), a geometrical fantasy in which a Square living in a two dimensional plane is converted to belief in a third and higher dimensions, offered in a more amusing form arguments Abbott made in his theological works, particularly *Through Nature to Christ* (1875) and *The Kernel and the Husk* (1886).<sup>8</sup> The Square's difficulties in accepting the existence of dimensions beyond his physical grasp are clearly meant to parallel our own. Abbott argues that the process by which the Square is drawn beyond illusory appearances to affirm a higher reality was in fact the pattern of all human knowledge. Our belief in the continuing uniformity of nature rested on a similar leap of the imagination, tested against experience; imagination was in this sense "the mother of working hypotheses." We could confirm the functioning of concepts like "force" or "cause," but could prove neither to be real entities. We accepted them because they "worked," just as we accepted religious laws because they "worked" to make us better and happier people, even if we had no literal proof of their truth, either (*The Kernel and the Husk* 28). Abbott's apparent nominalism where scientific concepts were concerned actually worked to protect the spiritual against the claims of the material. By arguing that the faith and imagination essential to religious truth were equally necessary to the discovery of physical and mathematical truth, he actually endowed all three with equal validity.

In Abbott's interpretation of human history, man's struggle to explain the workings of a nature he could never more than partially understand had providentially prepared him to accept a divine reality independent of material proof. Although *Flatland* gestures toward the possibility of using the fourth dimension as an explanation for miracles, the main point of Abbott's

message was that his contemporaries should free themselves from the "yoke of materialism" and be satisfied with the spiritual truths of Christianity; like the fourth dimension, these were no less real for being impalpable (*Through Nature to Christ* 11). He considered spiritualists as wrong-headed as Christian fundamentalists for insisting on too literal a manifestation of the supernatural. For him the reality of spirit was a matter of moral, not intellectual or physical proof (*The Kernel and the Husk* 259). He satirizes the arrogance of the materialistic position, on the other hand, in several of *Flatland's* characters, all of whom take for granted, as does the Square before his conversion to belief in higher dimensions, that what they can perceive constitutes the whole of reality. Abbott sought to find his middle ground between a dogmatic fundamentalism and an equally dogmatic empiricism by basing both the spiritual and the theoretical in the imagination and thus blurring the distinction between the two. Abbott's imagination proved a good servant, for it was informed by an unquestioned faith in the unity and divinity of all phenomena. For others without that faith, however, the imagined could too easily turn into the imaginary.

Other treatments of the fourth dimension suggest that Abbott reflected many ideas that were in the air around the turn of the century. The Reverend Alfred Taylor Schofield used higher space as a quite literal explanation for Christian miracles in his derivative *Another World, or the 4th Dimension* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1888). Like Abbott, Stewart, and Tait, Schofield also went out of his way to attack spiritualism as a pseudo-religion. He was particularly alarmed at the defection of such scientists as William Crookes, A.W. Wallace, and Frederic Myers to its ranks (219). C.H. Hinton used the fourth dimension as did Abbott to stress the arbitrariness of the limits humanity placed on reality. In his *Scientific Romances* and *A New Era of Thought* he advocated exercises in 4-D thinking to eliminate "self elements" in our perception and thus allow us to comprehend that higher (although not necessarily Christian) reality in which all men were one. In his 1904 *The Fourth Dimension*, he speculated that we might possess 4-D souls despite being limited to 3-D sense experience. This 4-D soul manifested itself in the physical symmetry supposedly characteristic of organic beings – a symmetry Hinton attributed to the rotation of matter through the fourth dimension into its mirror image (19, 22). In a similar vein, William F. Tyler's *The Dimensional Idea as an Aid to Religion* (1907) pictured physical growth as the emergence of 4-D entities into our 3-D reality, and hypothesized that we might all be 3-D manifestations of a higher dimensional God (35-36, 57). In the same period, the theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater was busy trying to locate the astral plane in the 4th dimension. Far more cautious was Karl Pearson's treatment of the fourth dimension, as might be expected from the strict empiricist limits to knowledge maintained throughout his 1892 *Grammar of Science*. In this text Pearson speculated that matter might result from ether squirting into our world from a higher dimensional space. Although he allowed that such a theory might nourish hopes for a supernatural reality, he ultimately dismissed such hopes as

6. Reviews cited in Knott 239.

7. For a complete discussion of the issues involved in the agitations of the A.I.G.T., see Brock 21-35.

8. The first edition of *Flatland* was published anonymously by Seeley and Company. A full discussion of Abbott and his work can be found in Jann.



"cobwebs" that would eventually be swept away by the broom of science, revealing that the way to the supersensuous could only be through the doorway of matter (318ff).

Perhaps the best example of the kind of metaphysical excesses feared by Pearson and other scientists can be found in the theorizing of the German astronomer Friedrich Zöllner. The third volume of Zöllner's scientific papers, entitled *Transcendental Physics* recorded his spiritualist experiences with the American medium Henry Slade, who had earlier been charged with fraud in England. Zöllner was completely convinced by the phenomena he experienced with Slade: knots appearing in a closed cord, messages written on a slate in a sealed box. He attributed these events to the work of 4-D beings and asserted that such experiments proved Kant's and Gauss' claims that space could contain more than three dimensions, even though Slade failed to produce any phenomena specifically confirming the fourth dimension – such as turning objects into their mirror images. Unlike Tait and Stewart, Zöllner moved eclectically between spiritualism and Christianity, arguing that Christian miracles were simply a type of spiritualist phenomenon and locating in the fourth dimension that incomprehensible region to which the resurrected Christ was gathered. Zöllner's pluralism about the supernatural would have been a sufficient irritant to P.G. Tait, even if the German had not elsewhere ridiculed as naive and unscientific several of the concepts used in *The Unseen Universe*. Tait counterattacked in a review of Zöllner's *Scientific Papers* (420-21), denouncing his use of the fourth dimension as scientifically uninformed and branding Zöllner too much a metaphysician and too little a scientist – ironically, of course, the same kind of criticism Clifford and others had leveled at Tait. The German mathematician Herbert Schubert represents less ambiguously what was at stake for many scientific thinkers in such attempts to synthesize the scientific and the spiritual. He attacked Zöllner as the most prominent example of a wider tendency to use the fourth dimension to legitimize spiritualism. For Schubert, Zöllner undercut the bases of all serious science by allowing the possibility of supernatural interference with the natural world. The progress of human knowledge depended upon the discovery of natural explanations for phenomena originally deemed occult. Schubert called upon men of science to oppose spiritualist explanations as "dangerous obstacles to the progress of real research, to which we owe the beautiful temple of modern knowledge" (111).

Surely the religious metaphor here is not inadvertent. Scientific knowledge did for many represent an alternative authority to the transcendental, and it was precisely such claims about ultimate reality that were at stake in much of the debate about the fourth dimension around the turn of the century. Like so many rival empires, Christians, spiritualists, and scientists each wished to colonize higher space for their own exclusive use. Some Christians could simply salvage the miraculous element in their religion by locating it in the fourth dimension. Others more uneasy about the challenges of scientific empiricism used higher space to argue for the compatibility of scientific and spiritual ways of perceiving reality. It was an obvious source of irritation to both types of believer that spiritualists could just as easily adopt the same kind of arguments to justify a

completely nondoctrinal "faith." For all three groups, the 4th dimension provided a convenient justification for a reality whose authority included (and thus subordinated) that of the visible world. Many scientists rightly perceived that such theorizing vitiated the premises upon which scientific reality was based, and they moved to reassert the final authority of the natural, or at least to insist on materialistic limits to the knowable. The advantage of the fourth dimension for all involved in this debate lay in the continuum it posited between the physically measurable data of sense perception and a higher and (for now) supersensuous reality. Believers, quick to endow the supersensuous with spiritual properties, could argue that what we called matter was simply a reflection of an ineffable ideal. Materialists, anxious to maintain the hegemony of matter against the encroachment of the occult, claimed the fourth dimension as subject to discernible physical and mathematical laws. Somewhat ironically, it is precisely the advance in our understanding of such laws in the twentieth century, particularly in relativity theory and quantum mechanics, that has most damaged the claims of the materialists by redrawing or perhaps even dissolving the boundaries of reality itself and creating a haven for the transcendental once more.

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## Great Burke and Poor Boswell: Carlyle and the Historian's Task

Elizabeth Wheeler

Like many of his contemporaries in the 1830s, Carlyle tried to dismiss the eighteenth century, to see it as a collection of dupes and quacks who were not only defeated but destroyed, consumed in the flames of the French Revolution, a vision splendid, "even illuminating" ("Count Cagliostro" 274). Since the events of the eighteenth century were his immediate historical past and its writers his immediate literary tradition, he was forced to reconsider its lessons, historical and literary. Important in that reconsideration were the two eighteenth-century writers he could not ignore: the Irishman, Edmund Burke, with his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and James Boswell, the Scot, with his *Life of Johnson*. Carlyle, biographer, historian of the French Revolution, and himself an outsider in London's literary circles, having like Boswell come from Scotland to make his fortune with his pen, had reason to understand and need to explain this unlikely pair and their quite different literary achievements.

In Carlyle's view, Burke's subject, the French Revolution, was the natural, albeit violent, culmination of the eighteenth century's quackery and dupism, and Boswell's subject, Samuel Johnson, was that century's great exception and anomaly. But even more important than the difference between the two writers' subjects was the difference between their visions, and, by looking at both men and both books, Carlyle came to his own understanding of the historian's task. Burke was the mistaken historian, as defined by Carlyle in his essay "On History," whose failure to approach the past in all its human complexity and to find within it a larger truth made his entire project worthless. Burke brought a fixed idea, here a political theory, to the French Revolution. In so doing, he gave its events an order they lacked, a false perspective that could not but result in a false account. Though he lacked Burke's great faculty for reasoning, Boswell had an open mind and heart. Possessing the ability to see things as they were and eager to report what he saw, he was able to create a masterpiece of truth. This juxtaposition – the confident politician and the self-deprecatory hero-worshipper, Great Burke and Poor Boswell – shaped and clarified Carlyle's definition of history and the historian's task. And that definition informed his approach to history in his books most equivalent to their great works, *The French Revolution* and *Life of John Sterling*.

Carlyle, who came to regard Boswell's *Johnson* as the finest

product of the eighteenth century, first addressed the subject of Boswell and biography because of John Wilson Croker's 1831 edition and Thomas Macaulay's review of it. Writing in the *Edinburgh Review* (September 1831), Macaulay called Boswell the best of biographers. "We are not sure," he wrote,

that there is in the whole history of the human intellect so strange a phaenomenon as this book. Many of the greatest men that ever lived have written biography. Boswell was one of the smallest men that ever lived, and he has beaten them all. (88)

Johnson himself, Macaulay reported, had remarked that Boswell missed immortality only because he had not been alive when the *Dunciad* was composed. Boswell's toadeating servility inspired him to follow Johnson, faithfully recording every word he spoke; Boswell's lack of shame, aided by his lack of wit and discretion, allowed him to publish those words without consideration for the impressions they would create. Though his vices were many, his talents were few:

He had, indeed, a quick observation and a retentive memory. These qualities, if he had been a man of sense and virtue, would scarcely of themselves have sufficed to make him conspicuous; but, because he was a dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb, they have made him immortal. (Macaulay 90)

The frankness of the *Life*, Macaulay insisted, would have been impossible if Boswell had been a man even of average sensibilities.

Six months after Macaulay's review appeared, Carlyle wrote a two-part review of the edition for *Fraser's*; he discussed Boswell's literary abilities in "Biography," and in "Boswell's *Life of Johnson*" he answered Macaulay's criticisms of Boswell's character. Granting that Boswell had been much commented upon, usually negatively, Carlyle explained:

Boswell was a person whose mean or bad qualities lay open to the general eye; visible, palpable to the dullest. His good qualities again, belonged not to the Time he lived in. ("Boswell" 73)

Without mentioning Macaulay by name, Carlyle made his target clear by repeating key words such as coxcomb and sycophant from Macaulay's essay. Carlyle, then, accepted Macaulay's facts in order to use them to build his own argument, which



repudiated Macaulay's conclusion, a strategy he would also use in his refutation of Burke in *The French Revolution*.

Even Macaulay agreed that Boswell was the greatest of biographers, and, Carlyle insisted, it was impossible for his strengths as a writer to grow out of his weaknesses as a man. "Falsar hypothesis," he wrote, "we may venture to say, never rose in human soul" ("Boswell" 76). So, though anyone – his contemporaries, Johnson, Macaulay, the dullest – could recognize his faults, Carlyle saw that Boswell was a man out of, and superior to, his times:

The man, once for all, had an "open sense," an open loving heart, which so few have: where Excellence existed he was compelled to acknowledge it; was drawn towards it, and (let the old sulphur-brand of a Laird say what he liked) *could not but walk* with it – if not as a superior, if not as an equal, then as inferior and lacking; better so than not at all. (72)

Carlyle's Boswell, then, was not an Enlightenment toadeater; he was, through his gift for friendship and hero-worship, a well-intentioned precursor of Carlyle's own time and, because of his commitment to write about what he actually saw and to describe Johnson as he actually was, an important exemplar for Carlyle's own literary task. What Macaulay had mistaken for toadeating was, in fact, hero-worship. Rather than a failing, personal or literary, it was the man's and the book's best attribute. "Towards Johnson," Carlyle explained, "however, his feeling was not Sycophancy, which is the lowest, but Reverence, which is the highest of human feelings" (77).

Though Carlyle took most of his evidence for his resurrection of Boswell's reputation from the *Life* itself, he also used the biography's subject in his argument:

The man was, by nature and habit, vain, a sycophant-coxcomb, be it granted: but had there been nothing more than vanity in him, was Samuel Johnson the man of men to whom he must attach himself? (72)

For there were men more wealthy and more influential than Johnson in mid-eighteenth-century London to whom a toadeater devoid of higher sensibilities would have attached himself. Indeed, Carlyle wrote,

To be envied, is the grand and sole aim of vulgar vanity; to be filled with good things is that of sensuality: for Johnson perhaps no man living *envied* poor Bozzy; and of good things (except himself paid for them) there was no vestige in that acquaintanceship. Had nothing other or better than vanity and sensuality been there, Johnson and Boswell had never come together, or had soon and finally separated again. (73)

That Boswell sought out Johnson and remained so long in his affections, then, suggested that either Johnson or Macaulay was mistaken about Boswell's character. From the evidence of the *Life*, and his own knowledge of the human heart, Carlyle saw no reason to assume the error lay with Johnson.

No such redemption of character was necessary to make Burke useful to Carlyle, and certainly no Victorian historian of the French Revolution could have avoided him. He was, after all, the man who had attempted to explain the revolution

to their generation. Nonetheless, though *The French Revolution* is filled with quotations, passages from the *Reflections* are conspicuously absent. Indeed, Carlyle limited his direct use of the book – in contrast to two brief references to Burke and Toryism – to a discussion of what was, and perhaps still is, Burke's most famous passage. In fact, it seems, Carlyle expected his readers to remember both Burke's description of the French queen, Marie Antoinette, and its context:

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, – glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. (Burke 89)

"Oh, what a revolution!" (89) Burke added, suggesting, it would seem, two meanings of the word, for Marie Antoinette had, indeed, experienced a revolution. An imprisoned queen as Burke wrote in 1790, she had changed much from the early 1770s when she was admired as the beautiful daughter of Austria's Empress Maria Theresa and wife of the heir to the French throne. "[W]hat a heart must I have," Burke wrote, "to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall!" (89) dramatizing Marie Antoinette both as a woman and as a symbol of the lost social order. Burke continued:

But the age of chivalry is gone. – That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. . . . The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! (89)

"Great Burke has raised his great voice long ago," Carlyle wrote almost forty years later in *The French Revolution*, "eloquently demonstrating that the end of an Epoch is come, to all appearances the end of Civilized Time" (344). Praising the strength of Burke's argument, Carlyle responded to it much as he did to Macaulay's; though it was irrefutable, it was dangerously incomplete:

Him many answer: Camille Desmoulins, Cloutz Speaker of Mankind, Paine the rebellious Needleman, and honorable Gaelic Vindicators in that country and in this; but the great Burke remains unanswerable; "the Age of Chivalry *is* gone" and could not but go, having now produced the still more indomitable Age of Hunger. (344)

Though Burke's Marie Antoinette and his Age of Chivalry were, for Carlyle, true and sympathetic symbols of the old civilization, they needed to be balanced by an equally sympathetic awareness of the terrible inequities that had caused the Revolution.

Carlyle's use of his material, like his use of Macaulay's description of Boswell, is representative of his use of Burke's entire text. Assuming that the *Reflections* possessed power and credibility for his audience, he elected to use its strengths for his own purposes. Carlyle's view of Rousseau, for example, parallels Burke's, rejecting the idea that government could be explained, adequately and completely, as a social contract.



Carlyle also stressed Burke's position that the Revolution, once begun, had to run its course. Carlyle's description of Marie Antoinette, too, seems to have been written from Burke's eyewitness account, a picture of a woman in motion on a plane elevated both physically and socially from the observer:

Meanwhile the fair young Queen, in her halls of state, walks like a goddess of Beauty, the cynosure of all eyes; as yet mingles not with affairs; heeds not the future; least of all dreads it. . . . Like Earth's brightest Appearance, she moves gracefully, environed with the grandeur of Earth: a reality, and yet a magic vision; for, behold, shall not utter Darkness swallow it! (*French Revolution* 24)

Indeed, Burke's vivid characterization of Marie Antoinette, "glittering like the morning star," contrasts dramatically with his presentation of Louis XVI, who first as a representation of an hereditary dynasty and then of political chaos seems always to be a symbol rather than a man. "A state of contempt is not a state for a prince," Burke wrote, adding: "Better get rid of him at once" (219). Such an observation, clearly, is acceptable only as political theory; it cannot be associated directly with a man of flesh, blood, and feelings, still alive and perhaps eager to remain so, at the time Burke was writing. In fact, probably the most important element in Carlyle's use of Burke is Carlyle's acceptance of this Marie Antoinette and his partial rejection of this bloodless Louis XVI. "Poor King; for French Kings also are men." (149), Carlyle wrote, here and elsewhere, showing more compassion for the dead Louis than Burke showed for the living one.

French kings also are men, and the values of the age of chivalry must perish in the age of hunger. Burke, in constructing his argument, denied these facts. The book's great flaw is thus exposed: Burke's concern was to present his ideas, rather than to present the truth. However logical the *Reflections* might be, then, the book is not true and, if it is not true, it cannot be good. How different is Poor Boswell who "wrote a good Book because he had a heart and an eye to discern Wisdom, and an utterance to render it forth; because of his free insight, his lively talent, above all, of his Love and childlike Open-mindedness" ("Boswell" 76).

Boswell, then, achieved something that Burke could not. In the writing of his *Johnson*, Boswell gave to his friend and to himself a rare gift – a small victory over life and death. "Now this Book of Boswell's," Carlyle wrote, "this is precisely a revocation of the edict of Destiny; so that Time shall not utterly, not so soon by several centuries, have dominion over us" (80). The value of the *Reflections*, then, was limited to its own time, while *Johnson* was timeless and, hence, valuable to all, just like the timeless account he used for *Past and Present*, the chronicles of the monk he called, admiringly, Bozzy Jocelyn.

Carlyle applied the lessons he learned from Burke and Boswell in both explicit and implicit fashion. In his *French Revolution*, for example, he avoided both of Burke's specific errors. Carlyle's French king is always a man and, though he saw the tragedy of the end of the age of chivalry, he kept that tragedy in proportion. "Unhappy family!" Carlyle wrote of the French royalty. "Who would not weep for it, were there not a whole world to weep for?" (*French Revolution* 366). More important, Carlyle learned from Burke's errors that no theory can explain

these or, for that matter, any events in all their human complexity, a point he argued in his dismissal of Rousseau's theoretical social contract:

Meanwhile, what theory is so certain as this, That all theories, were they never so earnest, painfully elaborated, are, and by the very condition of them, must be incomplete, questionable, and even false? (*French Revolution* 39)

Instead, in the *French Revolution*, Carlyle followed Boswell, presenting the facts, confident that, through them, the truth would emerge.

Apart from the *French Revolution*, and the way he used Boswell's relationship to Johnson as a model in *On Heroes*, Carlyle applied what he learned from Boswell most specifically and consistently in *The Life of John Sterling*, written nearly two decades after his early essays on Johnson, Boswell, and biography. In his *Johnson*, Boswell described himself as compelled to write of his friend because previous biographies had been inaccurate. Carlyle, too, insisted that he had to write about Sterling because the impression created by the one previous biography, Archdeacon Hare's, was misleading. Committed to the same task as Boswell, Carlyle endeavored to duplicate his accomplishment, to give an accurate picture of his time:

Monitions and moralities enough may lie in this small Work, if honestly written and honestly read; and, in particular, if any image of John Sterling and his Pilgrimage through our poor Nineteenth Century be one day wanted by the world, and they can find some shadow of a true image here, my swift scribbling (which shall be very swift and immediate) may prove useful by and by. (*Sterling* 7)

Even his decision to write quickly, not Carlyle's usual mode of composition, seems part of his effort to learn from Boswell. Though the Boswell papers now show that the *Life of Johnson* was a carefully crafted literary work, Carlyle considered its virtues to be those that came from spontaneity.

In his *Johnson*, Boswell did not try to explain his subject or to put him in an historical context. Though he recognized Johnson to be flawed – slovenly, combative, and fearfully preoccupied with death – his flaws paled beside his virtues. Indeed, Boswell's admiration of Johnson seemed to have grown with his knowledge of him, and he expected his readers' to do likewise. His book described what it was like to know such a man; it required others to consider what such a man might teach about men and his age.

So, just as the *French Revolution* was both an application of what Carlyle learned about the historian's task from Burke and Boswell and a work of genius in its own right, so does *Sterling* take much of its power from Carlyle's calculated departures from Boswell's model. Carlyle spent no time on Sterling's literary accomplishments and little on his fabled table-talk. The talents of his Sterling were moral and ethical; though professionally and intellectually he never found his place, he was a man to be respected for what he was, not for what he did. Carlyle explained:

Like other such lives, like all lives, this is a tragedy; high hopes, noble efforts; under thickening difficulties and impediments, ever-



new nobleness of valiant effort; – and the result death, with conquests by no means corresponding. A life which cannot challenge the world's attention; yet which does modestly solicit it, and perhaps on clear study will be found to reward it. (267)

Insofar as Sterling's tragedy is every man's tragedy and every man's is our own, readers cannot but empathize. Insofar as Sterling's tragedy is made more profound because of his moral superiority, it can only be the more painful, reinforcing the impression that this is a world in which only the good die young. Carlyle, then, used Boswell to write a biography that is not Boswellian in either its moral or scope, transcending Boswell, despite his admiration for him, just as Carlyle transcended Burke.

The ironies implicit for Carlyle, as a man and as a writer, in his use and understanding of Burke and Boswell are many. Had he been aware, as he almost certainly was not, of Boswell's sexual exploits, he might not have been willing, or able, to find the virtues in his character; had he been more aware of Burke as a conservative philosopher, he might have been more willing, or able, to find virtues in him. Certainly, at first glance, there would seem to be more for Carlyle to find congenial in the temperament of Great Burke, intellectually so much more his equal, than in that of Poor Boswell.

But Carlyle always seemed to be more comfortable with those who were intellectually less able than he, with John

Sterling than John Stuart Mill, with Boswell than Burke – more comfortable with them and also better able to learn from them. Just as in *Sterling* he applied the lessons of Boswell, in the roughly contemporaneous *Latter Day Pamphlets*, certainly an example of the error of using a fixed idea to order information, of presenting a theory rather than recording facts, he ignored the lessons of Burke. Indeed, it might be suggested that nothing hurt his reputation so much as this last work in which he ignored the definition of the historian's task which he had learned from Burke and Boswell.

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Columbia University

Coming in

## *The Victorian Newsletter*

Patricia Vernon, "The Poor Fictionist's Conscience: Point of View in the Palliser Novels"

Clay Daniel, "The Religion of Culture: Arnold's Priest and Pater's Mystic"

Judith Mitchell, "A New Perspective: Naturalism in George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife*"

Barbara McGovern, "Pier Glasses and Sympathy in Eliot's *Middlemarch*"

M.K. Louis, "Swinburne, Clough, and the Speechless Christ: "Before a Crucifix" and "Easter Day"



## Books Received

- The Bröntes: Selected Poems.* Ed. with Intro and notes by Juliet V. R. Narker. Everyman's Library. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1985. Pp. xxvi + 163. \$3.95 paper. 15 poems by Charlotte, 11 by Branwell, 43 by Emily, 18 by Anne.
- Buckler, William E. *Poetry and Truth in Robert Browning's "The Ring and the Book."* New York and London: New York UP, 1985. Pp. x + 293. \$42.50. Buckler argues that "The Ring and the Book, like the epic tradition to which it gives a dramatic turning on the principle of working 'from within outwards,' is an enormously problematic poem, as problematic as its subject, the inward-outward life of man in this world. . . . Its essential focus throughout is on how we think, not on what we think, on consciousness rather than conscience, on imagination rather than morality" (21). A revisionist reading written with energy and grace.
- The Collected Poems of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle.* Ed. Rodger L. Tarr and Fleming McClelland. Foreword G.B. Tennyson. Greenwood, FL: Penkevill, 1986. Pp. liv + 232. \$30.00. The editors were not permitted to see and approve corrected proofs and have found numerous errors in the printed text. For a list of errata, write Rodger L. Tarr, English Department, Illinois State University, Stevenson Hall, Normal, IL 61761-6901.
- Culler, A. Dwight. *The Victorian Mirror of History.* New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985. Pp. [xiii] + 320. \$25.00. "By the Victorian mirror of history [Culler means] the habit, which seems to have been pervasive among Victorian writers, of drawing analogies between their own age and various historical periods in the past and attempting to understand their problems, and their place in history, in terms of those analogies" (vii). Chapters are devoted to "England's Augustan Age," Scott and Macaulay, Mill and Carlyle, Thomas Arnold, Matthew Arnold, Newman, Ruskin, Browning, Rossetti and Morris, and Pater.
- DeLacy, Margaret. *Prison Reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850: A Study in Local Administration.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. Pp. viii + 272. \$34.00. DeLacy studies "a single county prison system over a long period in order to determine what the system was like before it was reformed; what led local administrators to embark on reform; just what reforms were in fact made; the political, economic, and social context that defined the reforms; and what sort of prison system they created" (11).
- Fitch, Raymond E. *The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin.* Athens, OH and London: Ohio UP, 1986. Pp. x + 721. \$18.95 paper. A paper edition of the 1982 hard cover edition. See VN, No. 63, Spring 1983, p. 31.
- The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy.* Ed. Lennart A. Björk. 2 vols. New York: New York UP, 1985. Pp. xlv + 428, xlv + 591. \$95.00 2 vol. set. "This consolidated edition of all Hardy's 'Literary Notes' has made possible a considerable number of improvements in entries 1-1339, published separately in 1974" (1:ix). There are in this 2 vol. edition 2641 entries plus appendices.
- Matthew Arnold: Between Two Worlds.* Ed. Robert Giddings. Critical Studies Series. London: Vision Press; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986. Pp. 207. \$28.50. Includes 6 essays on Arnold in Coketown, Arnold and Ruskin, Arnold and Colenso, Arnold and the Sublime of Suffering, Arnold and William Kaufman, and Arnold and Ireland.
- Paroissien, David. *"Oliver Twist": An Annotated Bibliography.* New York & London: Garland, 1986. Pp. xxxi + 313. \$53.00. The work is divided into 3 parts: Text, Studies, and Background and Related Studies, which are then subdivided into 16 sections.
- The Poems of Charlotte Brönte: A New Text and Commentary.* Ed. Victor A. Neufeldt. Garland English Texts, No. 9. New York & London: Garland, 1985. Pp. xvii + 497. \$65.00 The first edition to bring together all known verse, some 220 poems.
- Reed, John R. *Victorian Conventions.* [Athens, OH]: Ohio UP, 1985. Pp. xiii + 561. \$15.95 paper. A paper edition of the 1975 cloth edition.
- Rosenberg, John D. *Carlyle and the Burden of History.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985. Pp. viii + 209. \$20.00. "The French Revolution is [Rosenberg's] principal concern, but Carlyle's historical imagination figures importantly in almost all that he wrote. . . ." ([vii]); Rosenberg therefore deals with much of Carlyle's work.
- Swindells, Julia. *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985. Pp. x + 236. \$35.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper. "To bring these matters - women now, women in history, women in the division of labour - together, [Swindells has] written about gender, class and labour relations in the nineteenth-century novel, with particular reference to the writings of Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell and Thackeray, and [she has] written about a number of autobiographies by working women" (1).
- Wotton, George. *Thomas Hardy: Towards a Materialist Criticism.* Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985. Pp. [vii] + 233. \$28.75. An "exploration of the relations between the production of Thomas Hardy's writing and the social production of 'Thomas Hardy.'" Divided into three parts, "the first deals with the conditions of production of Hardy's writing and involves a consideration both of the historical and social as well as the aesthetic and ideological factors involved in that production. The second part is concerned with the relations between ideology and writing elaborated in the concept of the structure of perceptions which informs Hardy's novels. The third. . . concerns the relation between Hardy's writing and aesthetic ideology, the ways in which 'Thomas Hardy' has been produced as 'Literature' and the social and ideological function of that production" (9).
- The Yearbook of English Studies: Literary Periodicals Special Number.* Ed. C.J. Rawson and Jenny Meziems. Vol. 16. Leeds: Modern Humanities Research Assoc., 1986. Pp. ix + 366. \$48.00 paper. Includes 14 essays and 100 reviews.



# Victorian Group News

## Announcements

The Robert B. Partlow, Jr. Prize, presented by the Dickens Society in honor of its founder, is an annual award of \$250 for the year's best, first article-length publication on Dickens (that is, more than five printed pages in length). At its meeting in December, 1986, the Society will make an award for the period June, 1985, to June, 1986.

Entries (three copies or offprints) should be sent as soon as possible but no later than 31 August 1986 to Susan R. Horton, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dickens Society, Department of English, The University of Massachusetts at Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, 02125.

VICTORIAN SCANDALS: DECORUM AND ITS ENEMIES will be the topic of the Meeting of the Midwest Victorian Studies Association in Chicago, April 24-25, 1987. The Assoc. welcomes proposals examining challenges to accepted standards – social, moral, aesthetic, or intellectual – in Victorian Britain.

Eight-to ten-page papers or two-page abstracts should be sent no later than Nov. 10, 1986 to Kristine Ottesen Garrigan, MVSA Executive Secretary, Department of English and Communication, DePaul University, 2323 North Seminary Ave., Chicago, IL 60614-3298.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION will be the topic of the Meeting of the Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association in Birmingham, April 9-11, 1987. Proposals for individual papers or sessions on any aspect of the theme are invited. Sessions usually include two or three papers, a chair and a commentator. Papers should run about 20 minutes. Interdisciplinary sessions are particularly encouraged. A brief abstract for each paper proposed and a vita for each person involved should be submitted by Nov. 1, 1986 to Barbara Schnorrenberg, 3824 11th Ave. South, Birmingham, AL 35222 (205-595-1683).

NORTHEAST VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION: VICTORIAN PLEASURES: Food, Fun, and Games 1-3 May 1987, Wheaton College, Norton MA 02766. Address all papers to Prof. Judith Wilt, Dept. of English, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. 02167.

EXPLORATIONS, A JOURNAL IN THE HUMANITIES announces the inauguration of EXPLORATIONS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, a new issue in 1987. The editors seek articles on literature, history, philosophy, art and music in the nineteenth century. We are soliciting graceful, clearly written articles that show a willingness to break new ground in an effort to achieve a richer understanding of the past. Articles will be referred anonymously. All submissions must be mailed by December 1, 1986, to Professor Ann B. Dobie, Editor, EXPLORATIONS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, Box 40022, Lafayette, Louisiana 70504.

"NEWMAN AND THE CHURCH TODAY: A SECOND SPRING," a conference on the life, thought, spirituality, and influence of Cardinal John Henry Newman, will take place at the University of Notre Dame, June 12-15, 1987. Papers of approximately 45 minutes reading length, focusing on Newman's work in theology, philosophy, history, literature, educational theory or related subjects should be submitted by February 1, 1987 to Prof. M. Katherine Tillman, Program of Liberal Studies, University of Notre Dame, IN 46556. For registration information, contact Dr. Peter Lombardo, Center for Continuing Education, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556.

Back issues of *VN*, at a cost of \$4.00 per copy, are available in limited quantities for the following numbers: 8, 20, 23, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69.