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Cover: On the centennial of the death of Wilkie Collins, we have
selected Adriano Cecioni's caricature of Collins from
Vanity Fair 3 February 1872.

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Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Misfortune Is a Woman

Elizabeth Campbell

Chapter 10 of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* opens on one of the most celebrated Saturday nights in British fiction: that fateful September evening when Tess goes to the Chaseborough market as an innocent maiden, but returns to her place on the d'Urberville estate as a fallen woman. One passage in particular from this chapter is worth considering in some detail. Not only does it resonate with meaning for the entire novel by demonstrating Hardy's typical method of escalating the tragedy; it also shows how his tragic portrayal of timing has special significance for twentieth-century readers concerned with gender relationships and human sexuality.

Near the opening of Chapter 10, Hardy offers a frame for the whole Saturday-night episode by commenting on Tess's precarious sexual position, her fragile balance on the axes of space and time. Hardy says that Tess is "standing . . . on the momentary threshold of womanhood," and the following passage graphically illustrates this metaphor. As dusk closes in on the fall evening, Tess searches for the other rural folk so that she can walk the several miles home in the safety of their company. She finds them in a storage shack on the edge of town where their drinking and dancing have "metamorphosed" them into "satyrs clasping nymphs." The dancers appear first as indistinct forms enveloped by a filmy mixture of perspiration and peat dust, forming "a sort of vegeto-human pollen" throughout the room. The spirits they have consumed have turned them into spirits themselves, whose essence is their sexuality.

Tess, standing on the threshold of the shack, refuses to join the dance, but observes the following mating pattern of the rural dancers:

- 1] They did not vary their partners if their inclination were to stick to previous ones. Changing partners simply meant that a satisfactory choice had not yet been arrived at by one or other of the pair, and by this time every couple had been suitably matched. It was then that the ecstasy and the dream began, in which emotion was the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious intrusion likely to hinder you from spinning where you wanted to spin.
- 2] Suddenly there was a dull thump on the ground: a couple had fallen, and lay in a mixed heap. The next couple, unable to check its progress, came toppling over the obstacle. An inner cloud of dust rose around the general one in the room, in which a twitching entanglement of arms and legs was discernible.

These two paragraphs could well serve as a microcosm for the sexual concerns of the novel. For Tess on the threshold of adult sexual relations, they serve as a vision of a possible future for her. The most likely option open to a young woman is just one step up from the peasantry is participation in this rural mating ritual. But Tess's marginal position as she looks, somewhat disapprovingly, on this scene suggests her reluctance to enter fully into this kind of life—her more refined sensibility and her imaginative intelligence suggest possibilities for her other than this more traditional celebration of rural sexuality. The dance there-

fore serves as a glimpse of what might be called a vestigial plot. In Gillian Beer's terms, it is one of many examples of Hardy's "generative" method, one that includes the traces of unformed—or stillborn—events just as it suggests why these events will not in fact materialize (240, 256). Despite Tess's youth and innocence, she already perceives herself as separated from these simpler people and their seemingly effortless pattern of mating. The couples she watches can make sexual contact with each other and then change partners with relative ease, presumably without breaking the rhythm of the country ritual. Their harmonious movement allows them to find a suitable mate.

Symbolically, therefore, this kind of happy coupling—where partners are in harmony with each other and their community—is already closed to Tess. The filmy, dream-like quality of the scene and Tess's position on the edge of it, just outside the activity, underscore Tess's emotional distance and her temporal separation from these people. As Hardy says, "by this time every couple had been suitably matched." Tess, like the novel that bears her name, is on the threshold between two conflicting notions of what constitutes happy sexual relationships, and Hardy defines the conflict as a problem of timing. There is one more or less harmonious rural sexual rhythm that unites all the dancers, but does not synchronize their rhythm with more "modern" views of sex and time that have become manifest in late-Victorian urban culture. These more modern views are already imposing themselves from the outside in the form of agricultural mechanization, which is swiftly making this rural way of life obsolete. The dancers' coupling ritual is a vestige of an earlier era, and corresponds to that disappearing time described by Hardy as one "when one-handed clocks sufficiently subdivided the day" (ch. 3).

But Tess's family circumstances and her striking beauty have thrown her into a different time. On the one hand, she has fallen victim to her parents' desire to think more of their noble lineage, a thing of the past, than their present humble position. On the other, she has developed an intimate connection with the time of the modern world through her association with Alec. She has attracted a would-be lover who measures times using a two-handed clock. Alec d'Urberville, whose family wealth seems to have come from money-lending (ch. 5), is the product of that upwardly mobile, urban capitalism that equates time with money, and uses this wealth to purchase a noble past. And here lies the tragedy inherent in Hardy's sense of timing: the superimposition of an exacting, profit-producing minute hand on this more simplified rural standard time results in sexual double-dealing toward Tess. She is a character "out of time": on the border of two temporalities—the rural past and its future—but a part of neither of them. She therefore has no temporal place in the present.

Everything about this mating scene suggests its function as a vestigial plot of Tess's life. The heady dance that Tess

watches from the periphery reveals what might have been for her if she had found the right mate at the right time: if she could have stayed within this rural temporal sphere. But according to Hardy, such happiness comes only in ephemeral moments, when "the ecstasy and the dream," the present and the desired future, touch each other briefly before moving apart. For Tess as for the novel, "emotion is the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious intrusion"—something alien to Tess's more spiritual nature—destined "to hinder [her] from spinning where [she] wanted to spin." Tess comes to embody slowly moving matter with a more swiftly moving spirit, a physical form out of sync with its own psyche; this is one way that she is wrenched by opposing temporalities as she becomes the personification, the representation of "anachronism." The novel is saturated with this sense of conflict which is everywhere presented as a clash of temporalities. As J. Hillis Miller has argued,

Time in this novel is this failure of fit. The narrative is generated by the division between Tess and her proper mate. This spacing opens up the field of desire through which Tess wanders, driven by her longing for her missing counterpart. This "anachronism," this bad timing, makes possible inharmonious conjunctions like that of Tess and Alec. (*Fiction and Repetition* 137)

In other words, sex and time are inextricably linked for Hardy, and Tess's troubles might be construed as a kind of emotional or sexual jet lag, for sexual equality in this novel is coincident with a couple's harmonious sense of felt time.

The first paragraph of Hardy's mating-dance passage thus visualizes the endangered, but still extant, "good timing" of the rural couples, as juxtaposed with Tess, who is positioned between their world and the modern world of accelerated movement outside. Hardy's narrative shift from the third person to the second ("where *you* wanted to spin," my emphasis) suggests Hardy's total imaginative sympathy with the dancers, despite his sometimes ironic descriptions of them elsewhere in the novel. The scene that Tess watches from the doorway can be understood as representing a past, a rural age that is more like a ghostly presence than any part of the here-and-now of the novel. Hardy's own feelings of nostalgia about this scene are clear: the narrative shift to *you* suggests a slight, momentary adjustment in the novel's temporal frame, a looking backward at something that the future cannot hold. These people, who are younger than Tess in their lack of sophistication, are in fact historically older, yet still capable of sexual happiness. For Tess, sexual happiness is something that always comes too late. In this way, the rural mating ritual represents both a past and a hypothetical future, but more important, it represents Tess's loss.

The dancers, appropriately holed up in the dusty storage shack, are part of a time that is synchronic with Tess's mother, but not with Tess herself. Like them, Joan Durbeyfield has a unified world view that is coincident with a unified temporality: she speaks only the rural dialect and lives by her dog-eared copy of *The Compleat Fortune-Teller*. But Tess, Hardy tells us, "spoke two languages," the local dialect and "ordinary English" (ch. 3). The mother's and the daughter's differences in language and belief dem-

onstrate that these two women, although they live side by side, literally live in two different historical times. As Hardy puts it:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely revised code, there was a gap of two hundred years *as ordinarily understood*. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (ch. 3, my emphasis)

Like Joan, the dancers "in storage" are carry-overs from another age, a species indigenous to an older time: but also like Joan, they are in many ways younger than Tess. Hardy tells us that Joan's "intelligence was that of a happy child, and that not the eldest" (ch. 5). So long as Joan and the dancers can still mate with others of their kind, they can live in sexual harmony within this outdated rural enclave. The tragedy lies in the loss of the possibility for Tess.

The first paragraph recounting the dancers' mating ritual ends with an image of spinning because the motion suggests the rhythmical cyclicity of a rural culture. These people calibrate time by the life cycles of mating, birth, and death—by the circular repetition of time rather than by a notion of its forward advance, or "progress." This rural sense of time's cyclicity derives from—and is reinforced by—the observable cycles of the natural world. The timing of rural labor and pleasure is gauged by reasonably predictable seasonal and diurnal repetitions. The dancers' harmonious movement in this paragraph therefore suggests that they are in step with the pattern of the natural world, which is the ultimate temporal measure of human existence. As Angel Clare says later, as a remonstrance to his mother's condescending remarks about Tess's rural origins, "we are all children of the soil" (ch. 53).

The second paragraph, however, suggests that the intoxicated dancers are out of step with the accelerated movement of modernism that forms the implied historical context of the novel. Next to this larger and temporally later scheme of things, the entire rural community could be construed as marginal. "Suddenly there was a dull thump on the ground: a couple had fallen, and lay in a mixed heap": this transition moves from what is for them an ephemeral present to the future, but also foreshadows the future events of the novel. In the space between the two paragraphs, the narrative shifts from what has been in the past and what might have been for Tess to what will be for her, very shortly. Later that night in the Chase, Tess herself will fall, "in a mixed heap" in Alex's arms, one in which, Hardy tells us, "the coarse"—Alec—"appropriates the finer"—Tess (ch. 11). And this couple, Tess and Alec, will be the obstacle that the next couple, Tess and Angel Clare, will topple over, "unable to check its progress." By the end of the novel, two of these three figures will lie prostrate in the dust, after having been hopelessly entangled in the novel's own "Dance of Desire," as Miller has called it (*Distance and Desire* ch. 5).

The couple's inability "to check its progress" ironically evokes all those other images of thwarted forward movement in the novel. As Tony Tanner has persuasively demonstrated, irregular or accelerated movement in the novel is

inevitably disastrous; for Tess, accelerated movement is linked with speeding "man-made conveyances," modern contraptions that jolt her out of her instinctive placidity (426). The term "progress," then, must be construed as ironic, just as it must be associated with the modernity of the period. In the novel, progress is simply a headlong plunge into a dark future, one stripped of all positive associations with improvement or enlightened advance. In this passage, unchecked progress results in prostrate figures, and the comic-grotesque image of "a twitching entanglement of arms and legs": this is the fate of those—rural folk and Tess alike—out of step with historical time.

The two conflicting temporalities of the novel are implied by the two clouds of dust in this paragraph. The inner cloud, that generated by the fallen dancers, can only implode; it is as if the temporal change from outside, the urban standard with its faster-moving minute hand and its concomitant modernism, causes a destructive centripetal force to be exerted upon all of history, or in this case, on the rural past. We see this temporal circle within a circle again at the end of the novel, when Tess lies on the altar at the center of the ring at Stonehenge, which is itself being surrounded by the sixteen men moving in to arrest her (ch. 58). Or on a smaller scale, we see the same visual emblem of the circle encircled in Tess's father's telltale heart. Jack Durbeyfield slowly dies in the novel because of "fat around his heart," closing in and eventually causing death when it makes "a circle complete" (ch. 3). The heart symbolically represents emotion, blood, and sexuality—those things that characterize Tess. And she, like her father, is eventually arrested because of her heart's symbolically arrhythmic beating: her inability to love Alec, whom she kills, when the man she loves, Clare, presents himself too late. Hardy renders an outer, vicious circle of modernism that intrudes on Tess's inner circle of emotion, hindering it from spinning where it wanted to spin.

The mating dance that Tess watches is important to the novel not just as vestigial plot and a foreshadowing of Tess's fate. It is the *method* of Hardy's foreshadowing that reveals his full awareness of Tess's difficulties as a woman trapped in the interstices between two historical periods. Here and elsewhere, as I have suggested, early episodes and commentary are like embryos containing the genetic material for the full development of this story, as well as the lost possibilities of other stories. And it is both the correspondence and the disjunction between episodic embryo and narrative offspring that make Hardy's novel distinctive. This method reinforces his presentation of Tess as a kind of symbolic Earth-Mother/Goddess, and serves to guide the reader's response into total sympathy and understanding for his heroine. Through such strategies as the juxtaposition of Tess against the rural scene and torn between two temporal worlds, we come to accept Tess as a complex woman pregnant with possibilities but made sterile by her time. These maternal metaphors are appropriate because they underscore both what it is about Tess that makes her believable as a womanly character, and how the narrative might be considered an invocation of "women's time."

Hardy's own double-dealing with time is the sleight-of-hand that produces the novel's tragic momentum. Tess's

consciousness of the world encompasses that of her rural counterparts presented in Chapter 10. In this way, she lives by a faster clock; but she is still a child of a rural world that is at odds with the Modern period into which she is plunged. Tess's underlying sense of the cyclicity of time is apparent when she tells Angel why she does not want to know more about history:

"Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'." (ch. 19)

For Tess, "history" is a "long row," but not an advance—merely a linear chain of endless repetitions. Her view of historical time is therefore presented as more "modern" than her rural counterparts', but this merely results in magnifying her suffering. Not only is her own life a repetition of sadness; all of history is a multiplication of human sorrow. Tess, then, becomes an outcast from rural time, while still embracing its circularity. In her larger view, she has no identity—there have been, and will be, others "just like" Tess. History denies Tess an individual place, and makes her one of the temporally homeless.

More particularly, it is her guilt over her pregnancy, the issue of her sexuality, we might say, that ultimately separates her from her rural past. The late-Victorian period in which she lives offers her no sanctuary, so that Tess is continually seduced and betrayed both by the past as well as by a future for which that past has given her no preparation. The concatenation of misfortunes that cause her suffering and eventually lead to her death finds its source in Tess's sexuality. Hardy presents Tess as the quintessence of womanhood and womanliness (certainly this is one interpretation of the novel's subtitle: "A Pure Woman"); and this womanliness is her fatality. With respect to chance and fate, Hardy's double-dealing with Tess takes the form of deck-stacking. The metaphor of a card game, or fortunetelling, runs through the novel. Everyone in the novel assesses Tess's character as it is revealed in her beautiful face, which Joan Durbeyfield refers to as Tess's "trump card" (ch. 7). Tess wins Alec over the two rural women known as "The Queen of Spades" and the "Queen of Diamonds," and Tess herself might be considered the "Queen of Hearts" in the novel. She constantly wins hearts with this trump suit. But Tess loses at this game of fortune when she plays her highest trump and murders Alec: hence, his blood dripping through the ceiling of the hotel forms "a gigantic ace of hearts" (ch. 56). Tess's fortune, therefore, is foretold as misfortune from the outset of the novel, and it is a function of her sexuality, as all subsequent events reveal. Through Tess, we come to realize that Hardy sees time as predictable in its natural cyclicity. But the accelerated movement demanded by the linear advance of "Modern" time causes his heroine to be crushed, because she is inextricably linked, by her sex and her rural past, to Fortune's wheel. Her fate is to enact and to be destroyed by the rural cycle writ large, so that her mother's "fast-perishing lumber of superstitions" accurately, if clumsily, forecasts the

novel's movement and Tess's history.

Following Hardy's symbolism within the novel, the child that Tess gives birth to, appropriately named "Sorrow," is the ill-fated offspring that necessarily results from abrasive, almost unconscious attitudes toward time. Just as Tess feels "quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers" (ch. 5), so Tess's own offspring is doomed from its conception. Like Jude and Arabella's child in *Jude the Obscure*, Tess's Sorrow is another "Little Father Time," a child meaninglessly sacrificed because his parents were psychologically out of step with each other, were living by different measures of felt time. In an analogy that I think the bitterly ironic Hardy would accept, these temporal differences make the mismatched couples seem almost like different species who propagate sterile hybrids: horse and ass giving birth to mules—mutants so burdened by the vicissitudes of heredity that they refuse to live.

Hardy's story is therefore contained within the pregnant image, the distinctly female and *maternal* character of Tess herself. She is the daughter of a rural past who is seduced into conceiving her own bankrupt future. The Saturday-night episode begins two gestations, both bearing "Sorrow": the birth of Tess's child and the more slowly-developing, but inevitable tragedy that is the story of her life. Together, these two ill-fated gestations have been provoked by a pervasive arrhythmia within and between the novel's central characters. Thus Tess rises to tragic proportions as a heroine because she continues to represent sorrowful motherhood. Throughout the novel, Tess's image remains that of a secular *mater dolorosa*. Her definitively maternal character is emphasized in her last wish, that her husband marry and care for her younger sister. This act, as critics have noted, is replete with suggestions of incest (Boumelha 126; Gordon 133), not the least of which is the idea that Tess sees 'Liza-Lu as her surrogate child.

As Hardy presents it, sorrow, once conceived, will continue to reproduce itself with Tess as its maternal medium. The inexorable natural cycle of birth and death is the temporality that ultimately overrides the nineteenth-century notion of linear progression, the predominating urban and capitalistic idea that history moves steadily forward in an ever-advancing line of profit, progress, and knowledge. Hardy's novel suggests that a capitalistic view of linear progression applies only to the measures of the minute, the deceitful double-dealing of accelerated time whose movements are forward-looking only when they are perceived as discrete and discontinuous. The larger view of the entire historical clock proves, for Hardy, the real movement of time to be circular, an emblem of reproduction rather than simple, linear production.

Tess's untenable position between these clashing temporalities reflects her relationship to the larger symbolic code of late-nineteenth-century culture. To be outside time is already to be an outlaw, so that her act of murder is simply a "Fulfillment" of the role into which she has been cast against her will. Her murder of Alec and her own death in this final "phase" of the novel are the natural culmination of her status as temporal and social outcast. The murder might be described as a kind of temporary insanity: in this

case "temporary" applies to the whole end-of-century period, and "insanity," to the period's challenge to Tess's very identity. According to Kristeva, such a violent response is explicable:

But when a subject is too brutally excluded from this socio-symbolic stratum; when, for example, a woman feels her affective life as a woman or her condition as a social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse or power (from her family or social institutions); she may, by counter-investing the violence she has endured, make of herself a 'possessed' agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration—with arms which may seem disproportional, but which are not so in comparison with the subjective or more precisely narcissistic suffering from which they originate. (46)

By turning Tess into a murderer, Hardy pushes the limit of the reader's sympathy for his heroine. Whatever our moral response to this most extreme act of violence may be, Tess remains the sympathetic character, and Alec the culpable one. Tess is the human sacrifice, and this is her final sacrificial act, as her place on the altar at Stonehenge suggests. This absolutely brutal and primitive response becomes the ultimate assertion of her crushed female identity.

Penny Boumelha has argued that Hardy's inspiration for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* grew out of the "New Fiction" that began in the 1880s and that focused more exclusively than in the past on female sexuality and a female readership (63-97). Certainly, Hardy managed in *Tess* to convey a sense of historical and felt time that is connected with women by ways of its emphasis on reproduction and cyclicity. Just as Tess is victimized by her maternal character, so she is bound to a cyclical model suggesting women's time. She has no place in a linear model of historical time—literally, no place in history. Hardy's later poem, "Tess's Lament," portrays Tess as wishing her life to be erased from the record:

I cannot bear my fate as writ,
I'd have my life unbe;
Would turn my memory to a blot,
Make every relic of me rot,
My doings be as they were not,
And leave no trace of me! (*Poetical Works* 217)

Although this eradicating impulse is found elsewhere in Hardy's works—in Jude Fawley's and Michael Henchard's dying wishes—it underscores Hardy's own reaction against historical time, conceived as a linear, written record. And this reaction finds its most successful artistic expression in *Tess*, the natural woman who partakes of natural cycles. Sue Bridehead, explicitly characterized as the late-nineteenth-century New Woman, is a troubling and less fully realized female personage. Although she also represents woman as "misfortune," she is more the product of an urban Victorian culture: she continually works to deny her own sexuality as she embraces Modernism.

But Tess, the nurturing, "pure" woman, has Hardy's full imaginative sympathy, and with it, she becomes the image of the woman created to turn the century. She is Hardy's most devastating attack on historical time and its association with gender: hers is a circle of *reproduction* as opposed to the capitalistic idea of progress as *production*. Tess, the fieldwoman, dairymaid, and poultry-keeper, as

well as fallen woman, wife, and mother, reminds us that spatial categories, used as a way of defining the sexes, are not definitive when applied to those below the middle class. However, Hardy has applied a sexual-temporal category to Tess, with a vengeance. By the sheer fact of her femaleness, she is tied to the natural cycle of pregnancy and childbirth in a way that Alec, her partner in conception, and Angel, her accuser-husband, are not. The real double standard that Hardy shows us as operative throughout this novel arises in response to Tess's essentially female—because maternal—connection with time. Tess's guilty past and her womanhood amount to the same thing, and Hardy demonstrates how the Victorian age fused these categories, and how Tess can escape neither of them. She lives in a period when gender determinism is simply but fatefully a matter of time. The "ache of modernism" (ch. 19) Tess feels is doubly painful because it is brought on by two kinds of labor—farmwork and childbirth.

Despite Hardy's utterly pessimistic view of the idea of progress couched in linear historical terms, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* opens up a historical space for women, to be found in the twentieth century. Hardy's novel serves as a warning about a historical model that causes members of society to deny their "nature" and ignore their inextricable connection with inherent cyclical patterns. Choosing a woman as the medium for his message suggests, at the least, that new conceptualizations of temporality and philosophical notions of history must accommodate both sexes as they did previously in a rural culture. It is Hardy's advocacy of a natural cyclicity which he successfully links to a woman's misfortunes that turns *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

into a tragedy and saves it from the sense of sordid and grotesque despair everywhere apparent in *Jude the Obscure*. Tess's womanly misfortunes are larger than life, monumental, eternal, and their disproportionate nature allows for her transcendence as a Victorian heroine, just as it gives her life in the imagination of the twentieth century.

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Family Plot: The Bleak House of Victorian Romance

Monica Feinberg

When Esther Summerson, the heroine of Dickens's novel, first comes to Bleak House, she tells the reader that each room of her home contains two doors, two passageways which the reader comes to understand as emblematic of the two narrative voices which divide this house of fiction. Whether we, as readers, choose the omniscient narrator's door or whether we enter through Esther Summerson's passageway, the room in which we find ourselves nevertheless contains two perspectives, two possible experiences this text and this home may offer. It is Esther, our housekeeping heroine, who recalls and thus celebrates an image of the home as an ideal space where loving family members passionately defend their tightly-knit domestic circles against the threats of a disordered outside world. Thus *Bleak House* demonstrates that a nineteenth-century household functions not merely as an edifice where the family resides but as a meaningful unit representing an ideology, a collection of ideas about the family: a domestic myth. Such a myth establishes the home as a beautiful edenic ideal where, if properly protected and properly organized, one may revisit

the magical wonder of childhood and revel in its imaginative innocence. It is this nineteenth-century domestic ideology which achieves articulation in Esther Summerson's voice. As our little housekeeper fusses and cleans, organizes and delineates, she creates and maintains a house of fiction, an insulated haven to which her readers may escape. Her illusion depreciates into delusion, however, when Dickens's omniscient narrative voice crosses the boundaries dividing the novel, proving that Esther's narrative space is not as insulated as she may think. The dynamic interplay between these two voices illustrates that the fantasy of familial insulation is not only impossible, but undesirable. Like its eccentric rooms, *Bleak House* as a house of fiction contains two separate but inextricable possibilities, one of realizing and one of thwarting the restorative potential of fantasy. In this way, *Bleak House* thus straddles two worlds—the private, insular dream it idealizes and the social shared reality it fictionalizes. As a novel, it both endorses and exposes domesticity as myth by the way in which it linguistically and dramatically represents insularity as a

means, not of recuperating and protecting an eden-like dream, but as a unit of frozen, stagnant and deathly time.

I

Thresholds: On Entering Bleak House

Once upon a time there was a pretty little orphan girl who, after the death of her cruel godmother, finds herself rescued from vagrancy by a gentle man whose benevolence prompts him to bring her to a warm, comfortable house where, amid the love and care of a newly found family, she finds a true happy home. This story—the story that fills Esther Summerson's portion of *Bleak House*—plots out a perfect fairytale wish. Because she reaches her happily-ever-after before the middle of the second installment however, she must devote the remainder of her narrative to a defense of her happy ending. Her capacity to do so rests, in part, on the preconditions which establish her as not only a narrator but a narrator of this particularly precious history.

The success with which she posits "home" as an enchanting conclusion arises from her status as a child without a past. "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages," she claims, "for I know I am not clever" (62). It is clear, however that Esther's difficulty arises *not* from her alleged simplicity but from the fact that her orphanhood presents her as an individual of unknown origins, as one whose recollections culminate in a blank, in an open space which may be filled with whatever she imagines. She cannot, like David Copperfield, begin, "I was born," because her own one-upon-a-time lies outside of the immediate narrative framework. So instead of calling the unknown the unknown, she speciously attributes her difficulty in beginning to her cleverlessness, a contention she undermines a few paragraphs later: "I had never heard my mother spoken of," Esther writes; "I had never heard of my papa. . . . I had never worn a black frock. . . . I had never been shown my mother's grave. I had never been told where it was . . ." (63). In an array of insistent negative phrases, Esther repeats the facts of her geneological ignorance. Painfully cognizant of her original loss, she asks her godmother, "Did my mother die on my birthday? . . . How did I lose her?" (64). And yet it is precisely this gap which, in substituting for her original home, for her domestic birthplace, allows Esther to recover the Home of which her orphaned state had deprived her. When Mr. Jarndyce bids her to, "'Come see your home'" (115), he establishes Bleak House as exactly that—her own *home*, a word whose very origins connote origins. Ironically, however, Bleak House can function in Esther's personal life as a domestic paradise regained only so far as the paradise lost remains an unknown. In other words, Bleak House meets the requirements of a perfect home by the very fact that the real home remains an elusive abstraction in Esther's memory. And Esther Summerson earns her position as its keeper by virtue of her capacity imaginatively to constitute its contents.

Esther communicates Bleak House's status as an ideal locale through descriptions which evoke associations with the edenic. From the moment Esther enters the house, first seen, like the new Jerusalem, in the shape of a "light spar-

ling on the top of a hill" (112), she punctuates her language with edenic allusions: Ada's bedroom "was all flowers," their "sitting room was green," against the lattice windows "pressed green growth," another room looked "down upon a flower garden" (115). Everywhere evidence indicates that there is something mythic about this space called Bleak House. Although Esther ostensibly provides a detailed map of her new domicile, Bleak House nevertheless defies all measurement and all articulation. It was an "irregular" house, she says, in which "you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are," where you find rooms in "unexpected places" and discover roofs with "more corners in them than I ever counted afterwards" and where you lose "yourself in passages," filled with three-cornered tables and a piece of rather versatile furniture which functioned simultaneously as chair, sofa, box and bedstead (115). Thus when I say that Bleak House is "edenic," I mean in the sense that it is both mythic and supreme, a place of possibilities and magic. What is important here is that because Eden stands as an archetype in Western civilization for what is ideal, the edenic allusions within Esther's descriptions of Bleak House posit a home as a Victorian expression of paradise.

Only in a story told by Esther might a house contain a dream; for only *her* narrative moves to circumscribe an intangible ideal within set parameters. Although Dickens scrupulously plots *Bleak House* so that all events tie neatly together in the conclusion, Esther tells one curious anecdote that bears no immediate relevance to the rest of the novel. Before leaving her godmother's house, Esther buries her doll in the "garden earth" beneath her bedroom window. She thus engages in a rather unexpected ceremony developed among primitive men as a means of conceiving the inconceivable. In his lectures on Hebrew poetry, Lowth describes the practice of burying the dead as a metaphysical and symbolic displacement of the body in the grave and thus as a means of concretely representing death, of translating the intangible into the tangible. In a similar way, Esther uses the doll as an instrument for knowing the unknowable. Although specifically connected here to death as the unknown, Esther's doll functions more comprehensively as an imaginative emblem. As a little girl, Esther play-acts with the doll, thus engaging in a fantastical enterprise whose magic releases her from an unhappy reality by providing her with a fantasy of the mother-daughter relationship she had lost. In this way, the doll not only furnishes Esther with a literal means of narrating her beginning (by providing her with a material passport to her past, some object which enables her to overcome her simplicity) but with a figurative means of creating that beginning. Its status as an emblem for the potential creative potency of fiction places such translations as the inevitable objective of the creative impulse—translations which render the comprehensive as comprehensible. Thus the function of the doll's burial in this earlier passage is to identify the nature of Esther's compulsion to tell a story which she swears is not hers. The doll not only emblemizes the imaginative play of a lost childhood but its burial adumbrates Esther's drive to enclose, encase and immure what she wants to hold, preserve and understand.

Although Esther presents Bleak House as a domestic ideal, the language Dickens gives her subtly suggests quite the opposite. At first the deception is imperceptible. To complement Esther's elusive portrayal of the apparently indescribable, labyrinthine house, even her grammatical structure has a convoluted, almost impressionistic quality. While simplicity and brevity generally characterize her narrative style elsewhere, despite her content's gushing sentimentality, the sentence concluding her description of Bleak House syntactically produces a sense of sacred euphoria:

Such, with its illuminated windows, softened here and there by shadows of curtains, shining out upon the starlight night; with its light and warmth and comfort; with its hospitable jingle at a distance, of preparations for dinner; with the face of its generous master brightening everything we saw; and just wind enough without to sound a low accompaniment to everything we heard; were our first impressions of Bleak House. (117)

By methodically delaying the subject of the sentence (their impressions of Bleak House) with a progression of rhythmically layered phrases and intrusive semicolons, Esther temporarily suspends the sentence's semantic content by postponing its disclosure until the very last possible moment. Although Bleak House serves as its subject matter, it nonetheless occupies the ultimate position in a sentence which should, for the sake of immediate accessibility, feature it at the start. As an uncharacteristic syntactical arrangement, this chain of semantically interdependent referents signifies a discrepancy between Esther's perceptions of Bleak House's unusual character and Bleak House's actual function. The portrayal itself straddles both an internal as well as an external perspective: Bleak House's illuminated windows "shine out upon the night" and its jingle is heard "at a distance," but the sound of the wind "without" is heard from within. The combination of such artfully climaxing syntax and such subtly contradictory semantics implicitly casts Bleak House as a house of fiction—fiction in the sense that its magical *potential* contains a basic unreality.

With a house of fiction as her tenor, Esther then locates her description of Bleak House in the realm of the subjunctive, that is in the realm of the possible made real only by a set of contingencies. In this case, the participation of the second person pronoun constitutes the magical contingency which can transform the possible into the actual. Esther's description thus focuses on the reader and suggests the literary quality of the magic she intends. It was one of those houses where *you* go, where *you* have seen . . . where *you* think . . . where *you* come back . . . where *you* lose yourself—in the sense that it drew its identity from its resemblance to other real houses of which a reader might possess knowledge adequate enough to imagine Bleak House. Thus almost every substantive assertion about the house relies on either the reader's or the character's imaginative contribution. Deeply ensconced in the domain of the figurative, even a detail such as "beautiful view" connects to the paranthetical qualifier, "(we saw a great expanse of darkness lying underneath the stars)" to suggest the extent to which statements of fact rely on imaginative projections. The ambiguity as to whether the house occupies the space which is viewed from an external vantage point or the space

which contains the viewers evidences its paradoxical quality. Seeing and seen, its wind blows from within as well as from without. In the words of both Mr. Jarndyce and David Miller, Bleak House has, after all, an exposed sound (Miller).

Bleak House's status as a fictional space of equivocal dimensions finds further support in its perhaps most auspicious occupant, Harold Skimpole, the consummate child. Skimpole, as Mr. Jarndyce happily remarks, is not a literal child but a "perfect" child, an "Amateur who might have been a Professional" (117), and thus the personification of youthful innocence and untapped potential. The frozen inexperience of this character who resembles more "a damaged young man than a well-preserved elderly one" (118) exempts him from human "designs or plans, or knowledge of consequence" (130), that is, from all the "accountabilities of life" (120) to which the others are subject. He in fact admits quite eagerly to two of the world's oldest "infirmities," a fairly revealing assertion in and of itself: one, that he has no idea of time and the other, that he has no idea of money (119). He then paints an ostensibly enchanting picture of what the world would be like if he were to have his way:

"But if I had mine," glancing at the cousins, "there should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with roses; it should lie through bowers where there was no spring, autumn nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never whither it. The base word money should never be breathed near it." (122)

Thus Skimpole uses the image of a garden to image an ideal space where the absence of time and money forever preserves innocence. Because time and money can be spent and thus lost, Skimpole envisions a pre-lapsarian world and plays on the mercantile metaphor for mortality. In his infirmities, Skimpole represents himself as immune from the possibility of any sort of loss, including the loss of time, whose expenditure brings death closer. And yet it is in the portrait of Skimpole that the illusory quality of Bleak House as an ideal space most strikingly crystallizes. Although descriptions of Bleak House as a reconstituted domestic Eden may resonate with the magical language of fabulous possibility, such language nonetheless arises out of a post-lapsarian conception of that lost world. Although Skimpole jubilantly trumpets that the "best of all ways to lengthen our days, was to steal a few hours from Night, my dear!" (128), his "inexperience," as Mr. Jarndyce plainly states, threatens the safety of the other inhabitants (130). His philosophy glides with the ease of a nursery rhyme-like jingle whose sing-song rhymes and short, even cadences camouflage the logical impossibility of its semantics. Although Skimpole may claim impunity, Bleak House cannot be hermetically sealed off from the contingencies of a fallen, mortal universe. Thus the unsettling description of Skimpole as not quite an innocent child but a "youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation" (119) suggests that the attempt to freeze time produces a space resembling more a garden of Persephone than the expected Eden.

Skimpole's presence at Bleak House attests that, as Angus Wilson points out, "to be a child and to be a child again are not in Dickens's fiction quite the same thing" (195). Thus Skimpole helps to establish Bleak House as a place where childhood is worshipped from an adult's standpoint, a childhood represented and recollected as memory. In this way, Dickens uses Esther's voice to re-enact a nostalgic fantasy arising out of both his personal history and his cultural context. According to Wilson, Dickens maintains a belief in cultural myths by subscribing to the then popular cult of childhood. "Having, however, renounced the more conventional primitivisms of the Golden Age and the Noble Savage," Wilson argues, "he [Dickens] fell victim to a large extent to the primitivisms of childhood as a pre-adamite Eden" (214). Wilson here focuses on the Wordsworthian quality of childhood not as it necessarily was but as it is recollected and hence idealized. In such a romantic depiction, Dickens ostensibly denies childhood a reality comprehending a variety of sequential and concurrent events by insisting that it stand as an isolated moment sequestered from life's relentless temporal flow. Thus Dickens uses Esther's surface depiction of Bleak House to reiterate a popular myth.

Such nostalgia derives, however, from Dickens's personal history as well, which accounts for his childhood worship by emphasizing the traumatic "blacking house" experience which marked the end of Dickens's infantile bliss and his initiation into the adult workworld (Johnson 30-31). In Freudian terms one might argue then that Dickens copes with the experience of finding his father arrested for debt, his family incarcerated in The Fleet Prison, and himself unfeelingly excluded from their once happy domestic circle by compulsively fictionalizing his pre-traumatic home. Thus Margaret Lane explains:

The happy home, the fireside myth of love and security which had been snatched away, became enshrined in memory; as time went by, every detail of remembered pleasure was touched with the golden haze of a wishful dream . . . the ideal is not peculiar to Dickens, it is universal. What gives it its hallucinatory intensity in his novels is the depth of Dickens' emotional need to reach back to something he had once possessed and must recreate again and again for his own comfort. (166-170)

Although Lane's analysis rests on a fair amount of supposition, the connection she draws between Dickens's biographical background and the function of his novels as a means of revisiting a lost past helps to emphasize the role Esther's narrative serves; in Esther Dickens releases his impulse to fantasize and idealize. Given Dickens's personal experiences, it is no wonder that Esther repeatedly denies the reality of her godmother's unhappy household, a space which marks the loss of an ideal childhood embedded in her memory gap. After living at Greenleaf, the boarding school where she receives her educational training, she writes, ". . . I seem to have been there [Greenleaf] a great while; and almost to have dreamed rather than lived, my old life at my godmother's" (72). Moreover her recurring dreams unsettlingly reveal the workings of a memory which repeats but alters the past events it seeks to reorganize.

After having heard the old love story of Mr. Boythorn, an older man with a younger name, she tries to "do that very thing, imagine old people young again, and invested with the graces of youth" (172). Her meditation on the imagination's capacity both to conflate and to invent time suggests the extent to which Esther's voice celebrates imagination itself. She cannot, however, make Mr. Boythorn young again:

But I fell asleep before I had succeeded, and dreamed of the days when I lived in my godmother's house. I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period in my life. (72)

Despite Esther's capacity to project imaginatively a happy home into the Bleak House whose name indicates otherwise, she cannot erase the spectre of an unhappy house from her past. If she provides Dickens with a means of revisting and thus reconstituting the happy home of a half-fictitious past, Dickens nevertheless reveals the frailty of that fantasy.

II

The House that Dickens Built: A. A Critical Perspective

It is difficult to determine whether or not Esther's fantasy of the happy home is tenable because talking about Victorian conceptions of the family poses problems for the social historian and the literary critic alike. Thus, when Margaret Lane states that Dickens is, if not the inventor of the Victorian hearth, then most certainly its "prophet" (159-160), her tidy truism critically stresses the abstract level of an ideology while effecting nonetheless an inevitable re-enactment of its irresistible enchantment. In other words, the play between the content and trope of Lane's sentence captures the interplay between truth and illusion within the confines of *Bleak House's* domestic space. Semantically speaking, Dickens does not *invent* the Victorian Hearth in some revolutionary artistic gesture, but merely encodes the ideals of his middle class readers who defined a highly moral, sheltered domestic bliss as a lifetime goal and ultimate panacea:

In those homes [where Dickens's serial installments were devoured], his great, popular, unsophisticated and largely uncritical public passed their lives and his tender, not to say sentimental, presentation of the domestic dream brought about an unlooked for canonization. (154)

Thus Lane traces the myth of domesticity to the quotidian realities of middle class life in the nineteenth century. She focuses, for instances, on the open coal fire which, in providing warmth, light and life functioned as a "domestic numen," a "magnet drawing the family together" and thus an "invaluable implement in the manipulation of situation and dialogue" (161). She accounts for Dickens's obsessive reworking of the desired domestic ideal as not merely a product of the blacking house experience but as a response to an audience of readers whose favor he deliberately sought. From her biographical and socio-historical explanation, Lane then branches into the universal:

All who have any happy memories of childhood, who have still a fleeting nostalgia for that protected state, for the enclosed, secure, nonetheless manageable world which was first made real to us in the age of innocence, must admit that the responses to those images which Dickens so often evokes—the lifegiving fire, the loving comfort, the things we like best to eat—is basic and profound. (167)

And so the critically analytical depreciates into the starry-eyed euphoric, thus positioning Lane as subject to the same spells that enchanted her Victorian predecessors. His was the first generation, G.K. Chesterton writes, that ever asked its children to worship the hearth without the altar (Briggs 240); and John Ruskin describes the home as “the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division” (Briggs 240). Later historians similarly pick up on the euphuistic tone of these earlier depictions. Thus Asa Briggs refers to the “special place of the home”; “Home! Sweet Home! was a continuing theme of the period” (Briggs 240). And Walter Arnstein contends, “It was the home . . . that was felt to be the center of moral virtue and a refuge against the barbarism of the outside world” (87) as “praises of the domestic family ties came to be sung more loudly than ever before in British history” (79), all culminating in an ideology romantically emblemized in the “royal family on the throne” (83). Thus such critics and historians quickly emphasize the status of domesticity as an *ideology*, that is a system of culturally endorsed beliefs which endow the family and the home with moral resonances transcending its basic denotations. The “family” no longer functioned as strictly a loose association of individuals related by blood, the “home” no longer as a building housing such associates.

By *ideology* I not only refer to such social beliefs as Lane, Arnstein and Briggs illustrate, but to the process whereby such beliefs achieve verbal representation. What strikes me perhaps most strongly is the diction in which even analysts of the period express Victorian conceptions of the home. Shorter, for example, cites Robert Robert's depiction of a slum child's conception of the home:

Home, however poor, was the focus of all his love and interests, a sure force against a hostile world. Songs about its beauties were ever on people's lips. ‘Home, sweet home,’ . . . had become almost a second national anthem! Few walls in lower working class houses lacked mottoes—colored strips of paper, about 9" wide and 18" in length, attesting to domestic joys: East West, Home's Best; Bless Our Home; G-d is master in this House; House is the Nest Where All is Best. (234)

Thus Roberts and Shorter, whether describing (as in the case of the former) or dissecting (as in the case of the latter) both contribute to a body of literature which articulates the home in exclusively epigrammatic terms. Roberts's vocabulary and Shorter's repetition of such vocabulary illustrate how easily cultural beliefs, once abstracted to the level of myth, transform into adages. Unable to free themselves from such linguistic structures, writers like Margaret Lane resort to heralding Dickens as the “prophet of the Victorian Hearth.” Though she engages in analytical discussions intended to disclose the domestic themes of Dickens' work as part of a system of beliefs arising from basic Victorian realities, the language she

chooses perpetuates the mythic status of such cultural beliefs. In other words, ideology-as-representation transforms any explication of ideology-as-system into a recapitulation of the myth it seeks to expose; Lane, by expressing her analysis of Victorian domesticity (ideology as systems) uses pithy terms like “prophet of the Victorian Heart” (ideology as representation), a technique which, trite as it sounds, incarcerates the tenor within the vehicle, or the process of de-mythologizing within the confines of re-mythologizing.

What does this mean? That when critics, historians and even novelists talk about Victorian domesticity, they all in one way or another demonstrate the same drive to encapsulate pithily an ideology they either experience or describe. Whether they do so by literally repeating kitchen wall maxims like Shorter or by artfully creating figurative turns of phrase like Lane, their enterprises seek to name, in one concise statement, codes which should really defy such quick reductions. They rely then on what I call the dynamics of the adage, on the deceptive way in which apothegms pretend to make complex ideological structures immediately accessible. The adage names what is problematic, confines moral philosophy to a string of easy terms so as to control and order a collection of ideas which aim at transforming into universal truths.

Dickens's representational strategy in *Bleak House* is similar. He uses the capacity of language to shape an unmanageable reality into tidy, axiomatic bundles of meaning. This tendency is most pronounced in his use of names. When Esther first arrives at the Bleak House she will call home, Mr. Jarndyce confers upon her a host of names, all deriving from children's literature:

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort that my own name soon became lost among them. (148)

Mr. Jarndyce thus delineates the dimensions of Esther's role at Bleak House by drawing from established models of housekeepers. By naming her he apparently clarifies his expectations for her. However much Esther seeks comfort in jingling her household keys, she remains understandably confused since her relationship to Mr. Jarndyce remains ambiguous. The question persists: is she his wife or daughter? “At the word Father,” Esther writes, “I saw his former trouble come into his face . . . it had come so swiftly upon my words that I felt as if they had given him a shock” (291), thus providing only one of numerous examples of how equivocally she fills her role in Bleak House. The process of naming her only serves to hide the fundamental uncertainties and consequent anxieties of her position in Mr. Jarndyce's home. Although she is not his wife, she nevertheless plays mistress to his Bleak House.

Moreover, although Esther's nicknames are intended to allude to the positive influence she is expected to exert on a house darkened by the law's interminable disarray, the negative connotations of such namesakes would have been obvious to her nineteenth-century readers. “Mother Shipton,” for example, refers to a sixteenth-century witch whose

ugliness and Satanic ancestry mark her for posterity. Nor is "Dame Durden" more flattering; this term of endearment refers to a nineteenth-century song ridiculing an old maid who, though passionately desiring a husband, remains unloved amid the lovers she serves:

'Twas on the morn of Valentine,
The birds began to prate.
Dame Durden's serving maids and men
They all began to mate. (Axton)

Although Mr. Jarndyce intends the nickname affectionately, the title evokes unsettling connotations. Moreover the nursery rhyme he quotes to signify Esther's restorative powers only clarifies the problematic dynamics of his naming:

"Little old woman, and whither so high?"
"To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky." (148)

In his couplet, Mr. Jarndyce demonstrates that naming promises more than it yields. Like the nicknames, the nursery rhyme quotation only further disguises that in this house of fiction, Esther Summerson, a young woman no older than her teenaged cousin, Ada, plays the role of an old woman sweeping out cobwebs. Mr. Jarndyce's jingle thus functions in two ways; while the smooth childlike quality of its rhyme claims an easy accessibility to its semantic content, its uneven, forced cadences produce rather uneasy, anxious undertones. The disparity communicates a conception of Bleak House as a place where names are conferred—names designed to make ambiguities graspable and controllable by incarcerating them in verbal representations which mask their true identity. Thus the East Wind, the Growler, the Perfect Child, the Guardian, Dame Durden, and Bleak House itself function as titles by which misfortunes, responsibilities and familial interactions may be organized and understood. While each title translates what is abstract (like misfortune, for example) into what is concrete (the East Wind), the connection serves only as a euphemism for what remains unresolved. Although naming or aphorizing produces irresistibly tight, comprehensible units, such insulated packages sweep over inherent contradictions.

B. A Socio-Historical Perspective

The insistently aphoristic language in which Victorian domesticity inevitably finds articulation suggests that underneath its sentimental, self-assured veneer, fundamental socio-political realities threaten to expose its ideology as artifice. Thus Lawrence Stone locates nineteenth-century familial values as part of a greater "tidal wave of moral regeneration and repression," directly arising from an overriding sense of social and political crisis, a fear that the whole structure of social hierarchy and political order were in danger (677). Not only did memories of 1789 continually threaten a potentially unstable future of social upheaval but rising rates of illegitimacy, prenuptial conceptions, and prostitution during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century indicate to what extent increasing poverty and geographic mobility dislocated more and more of the impoverished from parental and communal restraints (679). Thus from the seventeenth century far into the nine-

endorsed formal and informal means of social control, placing the interests of family, patriarchy, school and religion once again in ascendance. Moreover the key institution, Stone argues, upon which this new moral Puritanism was concentrated was the family. "Home is the first and most important school of character," remarked Samuel Smiles (qtd in Stone 666). Thus enveloped in religious vestments, the ideology of the family imposed a supervision whose intensity derived from the ecclesiastical passion which parented it. The consequence of casting the husband and father as God's representative on earth (Stone 666) was to invest the family with an indispensable, uncontested piety from which any divergence would constitute sacrilege and treason.

The search for a means of social control emerging out of late eighteenth-century upheaval helps to explain the dogmatic terminology in which nineteenth-century domesticity finds expression. In Stone's depiction of nineteenth-century unrest and British fear of social dislocation, we find an image of the family as a hermeneutical unit whereby the middle classes were able to communicate to all other echelons of the social hierarchy a value-system celebrating submission to authority; while the lower classes pasted domestic mottos on their walls, the aristocracy lived "in fear of the middle classes . . . they dared not frame of society of enjoyment the way the French aristocracy once formed" (Arnstein 82). In both cases, fear of social combustion fueled the passion with which all classes celebrated the home as an ideal haven.

Against this background of social anxiety, it is no wonder that Stone describes the real Victorian family as bearing more resemblance to a "stifling fortress of emotional bonding" (266) than to the idealized loving, tender domestic circle. Stone labels this feature of the Middle Class Victorian family as Explosive Intimacy: "the subordination of women," he argues, "and the crushing of the sexual and autonomous drives of children took place in a situation where the total emotional life of all members was almost entirely focused within the boundaries of the nuclear family" (679). Elaine Showalter evidences such explosive intimacy in her account of the rise of the 1860's novels. "Sensation fiction," she writes, ". . . certainly seems to be recording a new kind of family pattern. It portrays an unhappy marriage as a cage rather than a spiritual opportunity" (101). Moreover Showalter argues that the fantasies of familial insurrection of extramarital love, adultery, divorce and bigamy repeated in such novels provides a view of the home as a confining and cramping prison where women endure endless psychological hardships. Thus Showalter demonstrates that despite its ostensibly conservative message, Mrs. Henry Wood's best-selling *Lady Audley's Secret*, a novel envisioning escape, revenge and retribution, articulates a view of home as an unbearably insulated enclosure:

Lady-wife-mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awaken! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, resolve to bear them! (111)

From Showalter and Stone, as well as Shorter, Lane and

teenth century a strong revival of moral reform, paternal authority and sexual repression gained increasing momentum to answer the unrest, real or perceived, that was sweeping across the continent. Despite the eighteenth-century surge of individualism, the nineteenth century frantically Wilson, we may then infer that the dream of domestic bliss refuses to correspond to the reality of familial insularity.

With this in mind, it is not surprising then that Edmund Shorter defines domesticity as "the family's awareness of itself as a precious emotional unit that must be protected with privacy and isolation from outside intrusion" (227). He focuses on the "explosive intimacy" Stone describes, not as that which characterizes the Victorian family, but as that which differentiates the modern family from its traditional precursor. According to Shorter, the "traditional family" had a productive and reproductive rather than an emotional function. Tied to an extended family of cousins, a local community of outsiders, and an awareness of its ancestral past, the traditional family operated as a means of transferring property and titles to future generations. "While lineage was important," Shorter quips, "being around the dinner table was not" (5). Such priorities reverse, however, when stronger ties binding the family together replace attenuated ties to the outside world. The key factor characterizing this change is "sentiment," or, in other words, the primacy of emotional concerns (affection and inclination, love and sympathy) over "instrumental" considerations (organization and regulation). Sentiment, Shorter argues, is, "the willingness to rearrange the objectives in one's life so that emotional ties to other people go to the top of the list, and more traditional objectives get ranked further down" (17). He traces the development of sentiment as an overriding social force to middle class mother-infant relations. Free from the economic necessities of field work, bourgeois mothers had the time to follow the dictates of newly developed health care practices which advised mothers to devote their time in nurturing their children.

Because such time consuming, emotionally demanding activities refocus the family's attention inwardly, the family itself achieves a more emotionally symbolic significance. Domesticity, Shorter contends, entails spinning a "web of sentiment" which dissociates the household from the outside world:

What really distinguishes the nuclear family—father, mother and children—from other patterns of family life in Western Society is a special solidarity that separates the domestic unit from the surrounding community. Its members feel that they have much more in common with one another than they do with anyone else on the outside—that they enjoy a privileged emotional climate they must protect from outside intrusion, through privacy and isolation. (205)

With so much invested in the nuclear family's development, it is no wonder that an ideology aimed at social control should grow up around the home. In labelling the home as a priceless emotional fortress, Shorter thus uses the French expression, *chacun chez soi* (each man has his castle), thereby emphasizing the possessive nature of the domestic ideology he discusses. Similarly, Asa Briggs also focuses on the possessive nature of domesticity:

"The possession of the entire house," the author of the introduction to the 1851 census had remarked, "is strongly desired by every Englishman, for it throws a sharp, well-defined circle round his family and hearth, the shrine of his sorrows, joys and meditations." (240)

This possessive quality is important in two ways: first because it emphasizes the stifling confines that the household erects and secondly because it stresses the solipsistic nature of the domestic microcosm. Thus possession most certainly constitutes nine-tenths of Shorter's argument; for it is only within a capitalist climate that sentiment could succeed in securing each family within its cozy conclave. When Shorter says, "I believe that laissez-faire marketplace organization, capitalist production and the beginning of proletarianization were most important in the spread of sentiment" (255), he equates the demands of individualism with the logic of marketplace economics. Egoism and individualism, the philosophy that looking out for oneself is economically justifiable and thus ethically desirable, not only locates self-gratification as the legitimate objective of every pursuit but glorifies what is personal, internal and insular. Thus the egotism which accounts for the rise of the family of sentiment and for what we have been calling domestic ideology ranks the seen from within as far more substantial than the scene without.

III

Good Housekeeping: Fiction and Fantastic

Esther, in contrast to the domestic pattern Showalter documents, holds insularity and organization as the most salient characteristics constituting an ideal family. Only such seclusion can protect Bleak House from the Chancery case which threatens to poison the happy family that cannot seal itself off from this emblem of disarray and aimlessness, this causeless cause which goes on like the history of Apple Pie, as Mr. Jarndyce says, "constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends" (146). She expresses this standard by depicting flawed domestic spaces, using the Jellyby House of Misrule as a foil for the Jarndyce House of Order. What is precisely wrong in the Jellyby household is that Mrs. Jellyby, as Esther puts it, is "a little unmindful of her home" (113), a phrase suggesting that inadequate housekeeping works as a universally understood euphemism for child neglect and conjugal discord. Certainly Mr. Jarndyce understands it as such for he responds by evoking his own favorite euphemism, the East Wind. Smearing in ink and lost in papers, the Jellybys unhappily occupy literal thresholds: Esther's first task upon her arrival consists of disengaging Peepy from the railings surrounding the house, a position suggesting the house's unkempt, untidy borders (84). Interestingly enough, Esther frees Peepy from his half-inside-half-outside predicament by pushing him inward into the kitchen, probably the most "domestic" of all spaces. Mr. Jellyby joins his son in a similar posture by continually pressing his head against the walls of the house, as if he too finds himself caught between wanting and not wanting to leave (476). Despite Mr. Jellyby's clear despair, the fact that the Jellyby house's borders are actually quite easy to cross constitutes one of

its foremost flaws; for Caddy's grief at finding the jelly-like boundaries of her childhood home quite easy to traverse overshadows much of her wedding's joy. Through such negative exempla, the Jellyby family provides the standards by which we are to discern good, happy families from bad, unhappy ones: tight borders and ordered cleanliness, or in other words, distinct external and internal differentiations, constitute the prerequisites.

Even Dickens's portraits of ideal families, however, reveal that the insularity Esther touts in her criticism of the Jellyby family is, at best, only tenuously maintained. Thus the Bagnet family episodes demonstrate that even if insularity were desirable, it would not be possible. The Bagnets picture the happy family unit which is, Sylvia Manning concludes, rarely depicted dramatically in Dickens's work (146). Caring for her wholesome children and cleaning her sparkling household, Mrs. Bagnet stands as a bulwark of family virtue. Wearing an enclosing wedding ring as her only ornament, she maintains her domestic circle's impermeable unity with the epithet, "Discipline must be maintained" (441). Thus she can go out into the world and dramatically effect a reunion between George and his mother, but arrive nonplussed to the bosom of her family, "falling to washing the greens as if nothing had happened" (810). In this way, the family composes a microcosm comprised of a very particular set of traditions and rituals understandable only to them and evidencing exactly the sort of domestic unit Shorter labelled as the "family of sentiment." Thus Mr. Bagnet engages each of his children on their respective birthdays in a family catechism by which he asks, "What is your name? . . . Who gave you that name? . . . and How do you like that name?" (722). Everyone has a special name and a special significance in the Bagnet household. Everyone shares a special vocabulary of an almost sacred nature. Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet both understand the discipline they wish to maintain as meaning that they must protect the family from financial upsets and evil intrusions.

And yet despite their narrow street and exitless garden yard, the Bagnet domicile is not impervious to uninvited outsiders: in the middle of their celebration of Mrs. Bagnet's birthday, Mr. Bucket suddenly appears. Although Mr. Bucket plays a true family man in this situation, the underlying purpose of his visit is to arrest George. Upon departing from the family circle, Mr. Bucket resumes his professional role:

"Now George," says Mr. Bucket, "Duty is duty and friendship is friendship. I never want the two to clash if I can help it. I have endeavored to make things pleasant tonight, and I put it to you whether I have done it or not. You must consider yourself in custody George."

Although Mr. Bucket respects the walls which distinguish a household as a refuge from professional duties, his seemingly contradictory role as both a private and a public man unsettlingly questions the extent of a family's impermeability. With "the separation of space into work areas and living areas correspond[ing] to the division of life into a private and a public sector," Philippe Aries writes, "the family falls within the private sector" (33). Mrs. Jellyby's master flaw for example, finds expression in her confusing the two

categories: "now if my public duties were not a favorite child to me" (387), she explains, perhaps she would regret losing her daughter to marriage. Opening her doors to the public and mistakenly adopting outsiders as her children ultimately illustrate her poor housekeeping. Interestingly enough, however, it is precisely this dichotomy between the private and the public that Dickens's families resist despite the attempt of their housekeepers to tidy up the boundaries.

Although Esther's narrative uses the Jellyby House to celebrate such insularity, Dickens's more cynical narrator uses the Smallweed House and Chesney Wold to suggest otherwise. In opposition to Esther's narration, Dickens's voice inhabits the realm of caricature, the grotesque and the exaggerated. Through his self-conscious, playful artfulness, his voice discloses and exposes. Its thundering snickers muffle the precious sentimentality of its heroine and thus threaten to explode the tidy world she endeavors to construct.

The stringently confined, however neatly organized, reveals itself nonetheless as pernicious at the Smallweed residence. Here Dickens punctuates his rendition of the Smallweed family with closeting, confining images. Although the villainous Smallweeds live on Mount Pleasant, their very name suggests cramped narrowness and unwholesome growth. Using his usual analytically descriptive technique, Dickens thus situates their house on "a little, narrow street, always solitary, shady, sad, closely bricked in on all sides like a tomb" (341). It is in this house, Dickens points out, where Bartholomew Smallweed "passes that limited portion of his time on which the office and its contingencies have no claim" (341), thus drawing on the popular nineteenth-century notion that Home provides a haven from the jungle of the capitalist, competitive, impersonal world of the workplace (Manning). Moreover the epithet characterizing the House of Smallweed, "always early to go out and late to marry" (342) presents their insular familiar circle as an impairment mistaken as a virtue. Such insularity produces a family which, despite their elfin stature, contains neither children nor amusements; instead of flowers, weeds constitute the progeny of this domestic enclave. With the exception of the infantine graces of the senile grandmother whose "total want of observation, memory, understanding and interest and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it . . . has undoubtedly brightened the family" (341), the Smallweeds have banished childhood from their midst. What they lack, Dickens stresses, is "ideality, reverence and wonder" (341), traits Dickens associates with childhood. In their stead, they substitute in the shape of the grandmother, an almost obscene rendition of childhood revisited. Thus Dickens emphasizes that the Smallweed family legacy, while smothering an "authentic" childhood, passes on a malicious disposition to its offspring. Not only does Dickens mention that they have "discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairytales, fictions and fables and banished all levities whatsoever" (342) but elaborately describes the extent of the Smallweed children's deficiencies:

Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game And her twin brother couldn't wind a

top for his life. He knows no more about Jack the Giant Killer, or Sinbad the Sailor, than he knows of the people in the stars. He could as soon play at leapfrog or at cricket as change into a cricket or a frog himself. (344)

Although it is perhaps unclear whether familial insularity stifles the imagination or whether lack of imagination produces insularity, the Smallweeds link the two together. If Esther found the undifferentiated space of the Jellyby household daunting, Dickens demonstrates that its opposite produces far greater evil.

In a more complex way, Chesney Wold echoes the Smallweed illustration of the suffocating and stifling potential of insulation. If Esther means Bleak House to stand as a refuge from the contagious miasma of Chancery and London, Chesney Wold exposes the idea of refuge as illusory. It is not that good people do not populate this wold-unto-itself, Dickens argues, but that its evil lies in its self-imposed insularity:

... it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them circle around the sun. It is a deadened world and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air. (55)

Although Dickens here personifies Chesney Wold by ascribing to it the faculties of hearing and seeing, he keeps his descriptions of this world of fashion in the passive voice. In its indissoluble encasements, Chesney Wold resembles an "oversleeping Rip Van Winkle" or a "sleeping beauty" (55); frost, ink and rain comprise its landscape; and silence pervades its rooms. In this gelid netherworld even the leaves fall with a "dead lightness that is sombre and slow" as axes silently prune trees too soggy to produce a crackle (56). No children live at Chesney Wold and as a result, the imagination associated with them throughout the novel is also absent. Only the horses demonstrate some imagination in their "mental pictures of fine weather" (132). Although weeds do not grow in the waterlogged Chesney Wold, decay dots its scenery.

And who should serve as the faceless servant in these hollow halls but "Mercury in Powder" (148). Mercury, the Roman equivalent of Hermes, names the servant who impersonally ushers Chesney Wold's visitors to Sir Leicester's reception rooms. Although Mercury functions only as a minor character in Chesney Wold, he suggests the extent to which Chesney Wold has segregated itself from the rest of the world. Mercury thus joins the hermeneutical and the hermetic dimensions of the Chesney Wold. As an allusion to the messenger god, Mercury brings messages from other worlds, operates as a sort of figurative translator, thus confirming Chesney Wold as a cloister requiring envoys. As the god who conducts the dead to the Underworld, Mercury also suggests that Chesney Wold resembles a Hades, another Garden of Persephone. Hence smells and tastes of the dead pervade the atmosphere:

On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out in a cold sweat; and there is a general taste of the ancient Deadlocks in their graves. (58)

Stagnation and paralysis thus style Chesney Wold after an underworld. Personified as a dying person who sweats and

decays, its quarantined space houses a contagious disease whose mortal "taste" pervades the atmosphere.

Chesney Wold lends the depiction of insularity as incarceration a more complex dimension by revealing how insulated space, fortified against outside intrusions, contains its own solipsistically circumscribed world. Chesney Wold therefore changes shape the first time Dickens introduces Mrs. Rouncewell, the aged housekeeper of the estate. Mrs. Rouncewell, who knows that the conclusion of the national elections signals the imminent arrival of visitors, interprets political proceedings exclusively in terms of her household schedule. In this way, she subsumes the political and the national into the domestic, so that extra-domal events achieve meaning only in the language of household chores. Even the weather vies in vain for a significance above the manor house: "The house is there in all weather, and the house, as she expresses it, is what she looks at" (133). The phrase emphasizes to what extent Mrs. Rouncewell's phenomenologically determined reality centers on her household. What she sees subordinates even climatic concerns and what she sees is the house. For Mrs. Rouncewell, the reality of a neatly ordered household overshadows the turgid decay of a reality far removed from her freshly swept doorstep.

The discrepancy between Mrs. Rouncewell's deluded portrayal and Dickens's exposing counter-image adumbrates the disparities between Esther's voice and her third person counterpart. However firmly Mrs. Rouncewell asserts her perspective, Dickens as an omniscient narrator sustains an image of Chesney Wold as a microcosm whose insularity dooms it to a hermetic death. The portrait retains its consistency from beginning to end. The same images of sleet, sleep and stasis which characterize the first descriptions of Chesney Wold repeat in its final depiction. Changeless from season to season, abandoned to "darkness and vacancy," cold and lifeless, Chesney Wold resides in "dull repose" (931). And yet despite this consistent image, Esther, like Mrs. Rouncewell, portrays a quite different wold during her stay with Mr. Boythorn. Mr. Boythorn, whose house and property border that of Sir Leicester so closely so as to warrant a squabble about the "green road" (170), opens his home to Esther as she recovers from her illness. During her stay, she invests the Chesney Wold she sees with a magical ambiance: "If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand and I had been a princess and her favorite godchild," she recalls, "I could not have been much considered in it" (558). In the style characteristic of her ideal descriptions, Esther chooses a rather convoluted syntactical structure by positing a truth in the negative and the subjunctive. The if-I-had-been . . . I-could-not-have-been structure stresses the fabulous proportions of her description and suggests a possible departure from the bleak reality which, according to *Bleak House's* omniscient narrator, characterizes the Dedlock world. Although the content of her sentence elevates Chesney Wold to the status of a fairyland, its structure confirms Dickens's former assertion that Chesney Wold is a "fairyland to visit, but a desert to live in" (58). Such a discrepancy indicates that Esther's perception, like Mrs. Rouncewell's, actually invents truth, or at least manufactures a version of truth

that stands in opposition to the truth of the greater narrative. Both Esther and Mrs. Rouncewell posit such illusions within the protected spaces of solipsistically exclusive worlds. They "transform" Chesney Wold from the depictions Dickens provides by means of what David Miller would call, "the epistemologically suspect tautology of wish fulfillments" (66). Although Miller specifically refers here to the illogic of many of *Bleak House's* deceptively logical stories, his concept helps us to identify the dangers of insularity; only within the confines of such insulated spaces can Esther and Mrs. Rouncewell succeed in positing their perceptions as truths. Thus they will their dreams into material forms, demonstrating Shorter's contention that insularity finds its ultimate manifestation in egocentricity.

Besides standing in opposition to the perspective of Dickens's more omniscient narrator, Esther, Mrs. Rouncewell and even Mrs. Bagnet share vocations. As housekeepers they present the ideal family as inhabiting a scrupulously organized house distinctly differentiated from the outside world. As housekeepers, they work a fairytale magic around their domestic domains. As if endowed with chimerically transformative powers, Esther, as Ada tells her, can make a home even out of the Jellyby house. Without hot water, kettles or boilers, Esther organizes the Jellyby mess of dirt and disarray as she cleans, builds fires and tells stories (90). It is thus with awe-struck adoration that Caddy asks to, "learn housekeeping," to gain knowledge of Esther's mysterious "methods" and "fidgety ways." "You would have supposed," Esther writes, "that I was showing her some wonderful inventions . . ." (474). And yet it is precisely Esther's homey ways that win her the affection of a surrogate family. With her chain of household keys as her scepter, Esther functions both literally and figuratively as the keeper of the *Bleak House* house of fiction. It is she who is expected to give order to the house and to clarify and maintain its boundaries.

In the Dame Durden personage, Esther finds her role as housekeeper and storyteller; her name signals her acceptance into the *Bleak House* domestic enclave as well as into the *Bleak House* house of fiction. Like a housekeeper, the storyteller cleans up the past, sweeps away loose ends and orders events so that they have readily discernible meanings. Thus it is a housekeeper who functions as a heroine of *Bleak House*. In order to judge the viability of the ideology Esther's story endorses, however, we must examine her role as storyteller. The domestic ideology Esther represents erects a tidy cloistered home as a metaphor for conceptualizing and thus organizing what is measureless and borderless. The way in which Dickens has her tell her story, however, undermines much of its ideological content. We see this first when Esther as narrator casts herself as a fiction of her own narrative. Upon understanding that an unknown benefactor will send her to *Reading*, she writes:

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth telling. What she felt and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate. (69)

In other words, Esther tells by telling what she cannot tell. What does it mean, we might ask, that her narrative is unnarratable? And what conclusions might we draw from

the fact that she nonetheless succeeds in narrating it? Does her nontext perhaps undermine the truths she posits? Esther's self-effacing remarks emphatically deny the reality of her presence. Effusively she disclaims her role in the narrative: "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of my life!" (74). The only terms in which Esther manages to speak directly about herself is in her role as Dame Durden, the ostensibly graspable title for her essentially ambiguous function: "They said," she writes, "there could be no East Wind where somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air" (482). By referring to herself as a third person fictitious construction, Esther weakens the domestic ideology her narrative posits. Thus she periodically includes particular passages which, in emphasizing a subliminal anxiety associated to her role as housekeeper, likewise undermine her role as reliable narrator:

I was in such a flutter about my two bunches of keys that I had been dreaming for an hour before I got up that the more I tried to open a variety of locks with them the more they were determined not to fit any. No dream could have been less prophetic. (142)

Strangely enough, Esther expresses her anticipation of further trouble in the image of impotent household keys. Whether or not we accept the keys as phallic symbols, and therefore symbols of literary potency, the important point is that Esther equates her powerlessness to keep out the East Wind, or adequately to insulate *Bleak House* with her fears of ineffective housekeeping. In this way she articulates a mistrust of both the role of homemaker and of storyteller. If the affectionate nickname conceals a disparaging namesake, Esther's part as keeper of the house and keeper of the text hides an underlying deception. She undermines the insular domestic philosophy she espouses.

IV

Bleak House Revisited

Memory, as the device which structures Esther's narrative, provides us with the connection between Esther's role as housekeeper in *Bleak House* the place and her role as storyteller in *Bleak House* the novel. Memory in Esther's narrative organizes in the sense that it taints past experiences and prior expectations with future understandings. Thus Esther presents her narrative in the first person past tense, that is, as a collection of personal remembrances: her marriage to Mr. Woodcourt, which concludes as a story traversing at least twenty years, precedes her writing by seven years. Esther's voice functions then as the voice of memory and through her complementary role as a housekeeper, she thus arrives at a nostalgic and idealized notion of what it means to recall the past. Recollection thus implies organization and comprehension.

Through her recollections, however, Esther not only fictionalizes her subject matter, but undermines her ideology by exposing it as a fiction. At the pivotal moment of her search for her lost mother, she writes:

I have the most confused impression of that walk . . . I recollect that it was neither night nor day; that morning was

dawning, but the street lamps were not yet put out; that the sleet was still falling and that the ways were deep with it . . . At the same time I remember that the poor girl seemed to be yet telling her story audibly and plainly in my hearing; that I could feel her resting on my arm; that the stained housefronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that the great water gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real. (867)

Esther emphasizes here the dreamlike unreality of her recollections by employing a language of connotation and sensation. The journey she pursues consists of "impressions," not clear visions; things "seemed" not necessarily were. Moreover Esther does not simply remember but collects again, regathers, calls forth events from her past so as to reassemble them in some comprehensible way. And yet instead of straightening and ordering such events, her hallucinations dissolve all boundaries: the real transforms into the unreal; watergates open and close in her head and in the air; it was neither night nor day. Caught in this liminal state, Esther loses her ability to order time: The "poor girl" who had finished telling her story hours ago reappears resting on Esther's arm. This sentence is important in two ways: first because the "poor girl" refers to "Guster," the Snagsby's maid, and second, because it stresses the timelessness of Esther's narrative. Guster, a minor maid among greater housekeepers, parallels Esther: both have inherited parentless childhoods, rhyming polysyllabic names and above all, domestic vocations. Esther's lonely, near hysterical counterpart, however, bears the name Guster, an appellation pregnant in associations with the billowy, chilling wind, a familiar image by now. Although Guster's voice haunts Esther by evoking an original sense of loss and abandonment, it is only by conversing with that voice that Esther can elicit the directions which will lead to her mother, the ostensible objective of this journey. Guster's instructions lead Esther to a gate, a passageway, a point of transition. The gate however opens onto a graveyard, a symbolic encapsulation of the intangible, of death. If we accept Guster as a reflection of Esther's role as housekeeper, the "poor girl's" directions lead to a space which represents mortality as an enclosed capsule—a grave. Esther's connection with Guster suggests that the housekeeping metaphor not only aims at ordering and thereby controlling death, but that because death inevitably resists such a project, the housekeeper herself resembles the East Wind. Thus Jo, the diseased vagabond who contracts his illness from the cemetery where Esther's father lies buried, earns his living as a door sweep.

The second important point of the sentence featuring Guster's voice emphasizes the conflation of time which Esther's recollections effect. Esther's duties as both a housekeeper and a narrator include ordering time, marking its passage with domestic rituals so that it is divided into distinct units. Mr. Snagsby provides us with an illustration of household time keeping:

"Perhaps you'd like to begin without them," is Mrs. Snagsby's reproachful remark.

Mr. Snagsby does look as if he would like to very much, but he says with his cough of mildness, "No my dear, no. I merely named the time."

"What's time," says Mrs. Snagsby, "to eternity?"

"Very true my dear," says Mr. Snagsby. "Only when a person lays victuals for tea, a person does it with a view—perhaps—more to time. And when a time is named for having tea, it's better to come up to it." (316)

By naming the time for tea, Mr. Snagsby somehow gets a handle on eternity. He somehow controls the great ravisher by dividing time into domestic units. Thus when Esther falls ill and leaves her job as housekeeper, she loses all sense of the time she had previously controlled so nicely:

When I was very ill the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another distressed me exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them. (543)

Esther elaborates, "I had never known before how short life really was, and into how small a space the mind could put it" (543), as if to suggest that her endeavors to organize even time, to differentiate between isolated units of experience, function only as fictitious constructions. Thus she reveals that the memory by which she tells her story actually collapses the time it attempts to organize. Because it effects such a conflation of past, present and future, memory as representation inhabits a timeless space—a space which, in lying both beyond time and thus beyond mortality, evokes edenic associations, accessing the whole picture, so to speak, by presenting all tenses. This last point suggests to what extent the space is revisited, recollected from a post-lapsarian viewpoint. Men live, Frank Kermode argues, *in medias res*, die because "they cannot join the beginning and the ends" and so "imagine a significance for themselves in these unremembered but imaginable events" (4). If this is true, romance as memory and as imagination cleans up life's chaos by structuring it around a beginning and an end, a fall and a return, giving it order, consequence and significance. As a romantic recollector, however, Esther dramatizes the illusory nature of the organization which imaginative enterprises impose.

I like to call the whole process of romantic recollection parabolic* because memory, by revisiting the past, recovers beginnings which then serve as ends. In other words, one begins at one point on the graph and ends at another which repeats with a difference the first; although two of its coordinate points differ, two must also repeat. In this way, the end repeats the beginning without sacrificing the idea of progress, the idea that a story must arrive somewhere, must signal some sort of meaning or lesson. Thus, according to Peter Brooks, "the end calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it" (94). The end thus provides the plot with "a structuring power that, by acting retrospectively, gives events order and significance" (94). In this capacity, memory serves Esther the housekeeper as the vehicle by which she will structure her plot in a way that will make her end concordant with her beginning. If the end, however, remains as an imaginative projection, the coherent organiza-

* Although recently I have been made aware that J. Hillis Miller uses the term 'parabolic' in a similar way, I could not find a reference to it in any of his published works.

tion Esther's plot lends her narrative depreciates into a fictitious construct.

With this in mind, the virtual paradise recovered that the second Bleak House figures constitutes a tenuous confirmation of the domestic ideology Esther's narrative has tried to espouse. Idyllic in the true pastoral sense, Esther enters this "cottage of doll's rooms" via a "garden gate in the side wall," admires the bed of flowers neatly arranged just like hers "at home," gazes at the orchard, at the cherries comfortably "nesting among green leaves," and at the apple tree "sporting on the grass" (912). Happily, she breathes in the "rich and smiling country," hears the "humming mill," and sees the "cheerful town" where a tent ripples in a west not an east wind. "I am your guardian and your father now," Mr. Jarndyce comforts her; "Rest confidently here!" (913), thus dissolving her ambivalences concerning his relationship to her by resuming his "old fatherly ways." And so Mr. Jarndyce says to Mr. Woodcourt, Esther's new fiance:

This is Bleak House. This day I give you this house, its little mistress; and before God, it is the brightest day in all my life . . . Take with her the little home she brings you. You know what she will make it, Allan, you know what she has made its namesake. (915)

As if presiding more over the marriage between a couple and a house than between a man and a woman, Mr. Jarndyce emphasizes that the happily ever after of Bleak House does not merely unite two lovers, but reconstitutes the eponymous house. Although Chancery's unlimited, spaceless miasma swallowed up the first Bleak House, we are to understand that its successor is somehow less exposed, more impermeable than its predecessor. Esther's return to this restored Bleak House provides an ending to and thus an ostensible understanding of the events which preceded it. Thus Kermode tells us:

We have our vital interests in the structure of time, in the concords books arrange between beginning, middle and end; . . . our geometries, in James's word, are required to measure change, since it is on change, between remote or imaginary origins and ends, that our interests are fixed. . . . Merely to give order to these perspectives is to provide consolation. (178-9)

And yet despite our desire to believe in the hermeneutics of Esther's hermetic house, the novel as a whole proliferates with illustrations of the way in which an excessively ordered universe produces dangerously insulated units, lessons which teach that to quarantine a house is to cut off its oxygen supply. The discrepancy between what the novel demonstrates and what Esther's voice claims suggests that this narrative is, as Frederic Jameson would describe it, an imaginary construct which pretends to resolve cultural antinomies by casting such contradictions into intelligible narratives (118). If we agree with this definition, to what extent must we dismiss Esther's conclusion as mere "ideology," as an "imaginary resolution" of "real contradictions" and Esther herself as an imaginary solution?

"Romance," as Patricia Parker describes it, "involves a dilation of a threshold" (5), a threshold which somehow connects naming and identity to closure or ending but which nonetheless suspends any arrival at that projected

point. The conclusion of *Bleak House* thus depicts two potential destinies for an insulated space—destinies whose juxtaposition seems to resist the encapsulation a conclusion necessarily imposes, thus demonstrating Parker's contention that romance outlines an interminable plot: whereas Dickens's penultimate chapter depicts the insularity of Chesney Wold as ultimately fatal, Esther's final chapter ostensibly presents insularity as redeeming. Thus Esther attempts to reconstruct the original Bleak House family with an incomplete sentence. When her husband tells her that the pretty looks she had lost during her illness have returned, she responds:

But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen, and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing— (935)

In this way, Esther ends by appealing to the reader's imagination. She asserts facts about her world by reaching beyond that world, thus demanding that an outsider fill in the blank. At one point, Esther refers to Richard's obsession with the Chancery suit's outcome by saying, "Everything postponed to that imaginary time!" (587). And yet, in her very last sentence, she too postpones conclusion to an imaginary time, to a time outside of both of her houses. In this way she attempts to counter the threat of an overinsulated Bleak House by breaking the boundaries of the *Bleak House* narrative. Thus she pretends to avoid the final encapsulation that would ossify her domesticity into an ideology, or a set of beliefs into a system of universal maxims.

Esther's last sentence, however open-ended it may appear, clearly communicates her meaning: even supposing—that she really had regained her looks, we conclude. Although the interstice gestures to the reader, our lines are already written clearly enough so that we perform the final encapsulation, so that we aphoristically articulate the conclusion of Esther's family romance, a plot not as interminable as the incomplete sentence suggests. It is not that Esther has opened her narrative to an outsider, but that she has incorporated the reader into her house of fiction. Thus the Bleak House Esther narrates establishes not only a house, but a novel, as an insulated space requiring protection from an outside world which threatens to invade it. David Miller captures this conception of the novel as an insulated space by describing the way in which "family readings," a popular pastime in nineteenth-century England, produced in the reader a nostalgic desire to get home where the novel could be resumed, alongside a periodic renunciation of home for the world where the novel finds justification and truth. Thus he zeroes in on the paradoxical condition of insularity: although a novel manufactures an entire fictitious world, the outside world ironically constitutes the contingency on which the once-upon-a-time is based. The reader does not participate in Esther's story in the way in which Dickens's omniscient narrative voice intrudes and thus exposes. The reader does not provide an extra-domal frame of reference against which the domestic ideology Esther posits may be judged. Functioning now as part of and not apart from the *Bleak House* world, the reader demonstrates how a hermetic space stagnates. The

reader, like the historian and the critic, buys into Dickens's language so that he *thinks about* domesticity in axiomatic terms—as given, universal truths.

In her article on families in Dickens, Sylvia Manning points out the discrepancy between what so many of Dickens's novels promise and what they actually yield; although his happy ending inevitably envisions a happy family, the bulk of the narrative leading up to that point portrays miserable, unsuccessful families. Thus Manning puzzles over the fictional nineteenth-century formula which, despite elaborate descriptions of unhappy family situations, culminates nonetheless in a happy family as the ideal fulfilled. I think that, in *Bleak House* at least, this discrepancy stems from the problems of insulating a house, both a house of families and a house of fiction. In each case the drive to insulate must stop short of completion or else the space will become as narrow and unimaginative as the Smallweed house or as dead and festering as Chesney Wold. A house sealed off from the outside precludes the possibility of resisting the adages of domestic language. The readers of novels like *Bleak House*, alongside historians and critics of Victorian domesticity, thus lose their critical capacities to break out of encapsulated fiction because, as the incomplete sentence demonstrates, they partake in its creation, they adopt its language, they become inhabitants of the house their presence might have exposed. Although the intrusion of Dickens's narrative into Esther's explodes the ideological constructions which celebrate domesticity, the incorporation of the reader into Esther's story makes any final recognition of the limits of her happy ending ideology almost impossible to discern. Thus the powerful hermeneutics of this hermetic house of fiction sweep over

the disparity between nineteenth-century domestic fact and nineteenth-century domestic fiction.

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The Agnostic's Apology: A New Reading of Oscar Wilde's "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."

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Oscar Wilde's especial fondness for his "story of Shakespeare's sonnets" seems thoroughly justified. "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." illustrates in a particularly exciting way how Wilde drew freely on numerous stimuli to and modes of expression—e.g., story-telling, literary history and criticism, aesthetic theory, textual exegesis, personal experience, fantasy, the drama, reflections on the nature of reality and its bearing on the self—in creating a work that combines dazzling ingenuity with a capacity to transform critical cleverness into an endlessly provocative comment on role-playing and the imaginative life. It is the most overtly and consistently Platonic of all Wilde's works and has something to say quite independent of the homosexual love or "suppressed confession" motif that the author's personal history has inevitably made the focus of much of the commentary on it.

Richard Ellmann supplies the most comprehensive and critically suggestive introduction to "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." (296-99). Like others before him, Ellmann sees Wilde's use of "fiction within fiction"—what John Stokes calls "a series of Chinese boxes" (19)—as anticipatory of Jorge Luis Borges. Wilde "loved confusing further the borders of life and art" and by his subtle mixture of reality and make-believe exhibited "a world poised on a word." The difference between "forgery and genuineness, fiction and fact" is tantalizingly precarious; between them, says Ellmann, "hangs only a hair."

Like "The Decay of Lying," "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." appears to have been generated initially by a spirited conversation between Wilde and Robert Ross, the long-time friend who as a seventeen-year-old youth first seduced Wilde into homosexual activity in 1886. Wilde began to

write the story the following year, and when it was published, he wrote to Ross, "the story is half yours, and but for you would not have been written" (*Letters* 247). Wilde's fascination with the idea and with the manner he had hit upon for developing its imaginative possibilities was as keen and persistent as with anything he ever wrote. After its initial publication in *Blackwood's Magazine* in July 1889, he composed a much longer version emphasizing the Platonic origins of the Elizabethan cult of male friendship with its heightened mode of amatory expression and introducing the subject of the "dark woman" of the sonnets. However, this longer version was not published during his lifetime.¹

As Edward Hubler asserted more than a quarter of a century ago, critical justice demands that "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." be seen as a fiction rather than as an argument (12). The cleverness and the cogency of the textual-interpretive criticism of Shakespeare's sonnets contained in "The Portrait" are undiminished, as is the importance of that criticism to the reader's total literary experience. However, seeing the work as primarily or essentially an imaginative fiction alters one's perspective on the writer's priorities. Thought is subordinated to character or personality, belief to the psychology of belief, criticism to imagination. The theory of Shakespeare's sonnets upon which the story turns has won a degree of acceptance among later readers,² though the emotional intensity required by its plot has, of course, been peculiar to "The Portrait" itself.

The personal need of Cyril Graham, the deep inner secret that became his unconscious motive for developing a theory so intensely held that it made him willing to deceive his best friend or even to die for it, is a primary imaginative consideration to which the theory itself is secondary. He is an enthusiast of limitless intensity, a martyr. Erskine, too, is a type of character with an internal organization different from Cyril Graham's. Lacking a strong internal center, he is too easily convinced, too easily disillusioned; lacking the individualism of an original creator, he is easily deceived and is himself as likely to deceive for what he does not believe in as for what he claims to believe deeply. He even tries to convert his death from consumption into a copycat imitation of Cyril Graham's suicide. The narrator is yet a third distinct type of character in the story. Neither uncentered like Erskine nor over-centered like Graham, he is our most trustworthy guide to the story's significance. Though capable of becoming an enthusiast over a critical theory, he is more critically self-aware than Graham, more conscious

of his impressions and more inclined to discriminate between what they are and what they are not. He offers a constructive interpretive context in which the critical theory's force is to be understood, implicitly rejecting any suggestion of prurience and elevating the theory to the highest, most idealistic plane to which a wholly dedicated artist like Shakespeare might have aspired.³

The narrator rather than Erskine or Graham being our internal guide to the story's unifying theme, attention to the narrator's insistent idealism is crucial. Shakespeare, he says, "realised his own perfection as an artist and his full humanity as a man *on the ideal plane of stage-writing and stage-playing*" (1164, emphasis added). His love for Mr. W. H. was "as the love of a musician for some delicate instrument on which he delights to play, as a sculptor's love for some rare and exquisite material that suggests a new form of plastic beauty, a new mode of plastic expression" (1173). There was in it "the soul, as well as the language, of neo-Platonism" (1174), the "Platonic conception of love [being] nothing if not spiritual" as the Platonic conception of beauty is "a form that finds its immortality within the lover's soul" (1175).

Friendship, indeed, could have desired no better warrant for its permanence or its arduous than the Platonic theory, or creed, as we might better call it, that the true world was the world of ideas, and that these ideas took visible form and became incarnate in man, and *it is only when we realise the influence of neo-Platonism on the Renaissance* that we can understand the true meaning of the amatory phrases and words with which friends were wont, at this time, to address each other. (1175, emphasis added)

It was Cyril Graham's discovery of Mr. W. H.'s profession that was "a revolution in criticism" because it enabled the critic to look through the sonnets at the "dramatic activity" of which they were an "essential part" (1162-1163). The sonnets were not in themselves an important object of Shakespeare's literary ambition and fame; their special value is as the "perfect expression" of the "noble self-reliance" with which Shakespeare cultivated his dramatic genius and his consciousness of "the high artistic value of his plays" (1167, 1177). For Shakespeare, true acting—that is, the "visible presentation on the stage" of roles created by the dramatist and re-created by the player—"add[ed] to the wonder of poetry, giving life to its loveliness, and actual reality to its ideal form" (1163). Thus acting was the ultimate realization of Shakespeare's distinctive way of presenting life imaginatively—that is, "in its

1. According to Rupert Hart-Davis (*Letters* 365-366n.), it had been announced by Elkin Mathews and John Lane, publishers, but ultimately fell victim to the dissolution of their partnership. The manuscript in Wilde's possession is thought to have been lost in the activities surrounding his bankruptcy proceedings, but a copy of it was later found among the effects of Lane's office manager, John Chapman, and was published in America by Mitchell Kennerley in 1921. A regular English edition, edited by Vyvyan Holland, did not appear until 1958.

2. Willie Hughes had been suggested as the name of Mr. W.H. in the first half of the preceding century, but the ingenuity of the exegesis, the imaginative force of the fable, and the masterful prose style are all Wilde's own.

3. "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." has had relatively few commentators, not even winning an entry in the index to *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, but such commentators as it has had have equated the narrator with the author and read his remarks as Wilde's own. While there is no conclusive evidence against such an approach, it seems to me to result in some critical loss. The narrator not only adds a third and balancing voice to the story but also supplies the critical and experiential unity of effect so essential to the success of "The Portrait." If it is Wilde's own voice, it is so carefully attuned to the special critical-creative needs of the piece as to justify perceiving it as fabricated imaginatively.

real as in its ideal relations" (*Letters* 445, 508). Shakespeare had in his mind's eye a perfect image, an ideal form, and he put all the energy of his soul into the effort to realize its actual existence—into the desire to express it with the perfection it deserved. Finding in Mr. W. H.'s art—in his ability to play to perfection the roles of, for example, "Viola and Imogen, Juliet and Rosalind, Portia and Desdemona, and Cleopatra herself" (1156)—the ideal complement and extension of his own art, Shakespeare was totally enamored, not of a beautiful young man, but of an imaginative ideal perfectly realized. Shakespeare had not himself created the "essentially male culture of the English Renaissance" (1182) or the English stage convention of having male youths always play the parts of women on the stage or the neo-Platonic concept of male friendship with its "amatory phrases and words" that had become pervasive in the literary works of the time. However, using his age's "own manner," Shakespeare "found" for the "method" of the English Renaissance "its fullest and most perfect expression" (1182).

Having become an enthusiastic convert to a theory of Shakespeare's sonnets that he then greatly deepened and enlarged, the narrator suddenly and completely loses faith in the theory and suffers a total collapse of the constructive enthusiasm that faith had sustained. All at once, he feels that for two months he has been investing himself—his soul, his passions, his capacity for ideal insight and commitment—in a dream, an unreality having no significant beginning and end. He can, of course, speculate on what has happened. By putting all his faith in a letter to a skeptic urging him to keep the faith of a friend and martyr, he has exhausted his own supply of faith. In the process of "rescuing the honour of Shakespeare himself from the tedious memory of a commonplace intrigue," he has used up all his enthusiasm. But he admits he cannot explain it. Mr. W. H. has simply become to him "a mere myth, an idle dream, the boyish fancy of a young man who, like most ardent spirits, was more anxious to convince others than to be himself convinced" (1196).

This does not mean, however, that there is no explanation to be found in the story of this odd development. Like all matters of personality, it must remain something of a mystery to consciousness even while consciousness strives to find some satisfactory way of explaining it. However, art has its own peculiar way, and our best chance of getting an imaginatively satisfying idea of just what it means is to let the work of art reveal its secret in art's way.

What we have is a trinity of comparable characters and the artistic principle that what a character does mirrors

what or who he is, a relative scale of values being established in the work itself by the way of different but comparable characters react to the same stimulus or event. That is the oblique way in which art tells its own special kind of truth; it speaks through the whole piece and, like the portrait of the title, strives to make a single unified impression.

The initial statement of that basic impression or theme is made through the way Cyril Graham, originator of the theory upon which the story turns, is presented. Graham wants above all else to become an actor and is so superb at playing Shakespeare's female roles that one might think they had been written for him, as, according to his theory, they were written for Mr. W. H. He has become fixed on Shakespeare's sonnets because, apparently, they appeal to some basic secret deep inside himself—seem to suggest that some fundamental revelation about himself is hidden in them. Emerging out of this intuition, his theory becomes to him ineradicable and ultimately unprovable, intuitively impregnable and empirically undemonstrable. It is true because it embodies the truth of himself.

The premise of Graham's theory is the conclusion he has reached after a long and ardent study of the sonnets: Mr. W. H. "must have been somebody who was a really vital factor in the development of [Shakespeare's] dramatic art" (1153). He must have been an individual—"a particular young man whose personality for some reasons seems to have filled the soul of Shakespeare with terrible joy and no less terrible despair" (1155); his effect was simply too personal, too tragic-bitter, for him to have been some allegorical subject, distanced and abstract, like "the Ideal Self" or "the Divine Logos" or "the Catholic Church." For similar reasons, Graham rejects a genre explanation of the poems. Seeing himself mirrored in Mr. W. H., Cyril Graham imagines his own life as complete only in the role of one who could assist a great dramatist like Shakespeare to realize his artistic aspirations. Having adopted it as his ideal imaginative identity, he accepts it as the identity he will forge to defend and die to affirm.⁴

Graham is quite definite about the influence of his mysterious Mr. W. H. on Shakespeare: his "physical beauty was such that it became the very corner-stone of Shakespeare's art; the very source of Shakespeare's inspiration; the very incarnation of Shakespeare's dreams" (1156).⁵ However, Shakespeare responded to that influence in a special way, by creating a wonderful roster of female roles designed to challenge Mr. W. H.'s artistic gifts. In short, the youth's beauty and talents led to the perfection of one of the artistic conventions of the theatre of the time. Shakespeare created women whom only this exquisitely gifted youth could trans-

4. This translation of art into life and life into art in so intense a realization of one's impressions is a confirmation of criticism's "most perfect form" endorsed by Gilbert in "The Critic as Artist," and if one is justified in seeing an analogy between it and Plato's "Ideal Forms," as I think one is, then the narrator's argument for a strong Platonic influence on Shakespeare and his literary contemporaries would seem to have a basis in Cyril Graham's intense personal experience. Graham, moreover, uses the sonnets to illustrate "Shakespeare's conception of the true relations between the art of the actor and the art of the dramatist" (1156-1157). In "The Critic as Artist," Gilbert designates the actor as the perfect critic of the drama he acts in.

5. Erskine's description of Graham's looks, conduct, and outlook are eerily like those of the young Alfred Douglas, whom Wilde would not even meet for several years from the date of the writing of the early version of the story. It is as if Wilde had an image—a kind of imaginary "form"—of which Douglas would be the content, as if Douglas were the realization of an imaginative ideal Wilde would actually see years after originally conceiving it. Even Erskine's advice about advice seems prophetic of the Wilde-Douglas future: "It is always a silly thing to give advice, but to give good advice is absolutely fatal. I hope you will never fall into that error. If you do, you will be sorry for it" (1153).

form into the beautiful truths of the contemporary stage. Mr. W. H. was a symbolic Hermaphroditus as chaste as the Hermaphroditus of Plato. Shakespeare, in other words, was in love with an idea, an illusion that bore uniquely in itself an archetypal truth—a perfect realization of an imaginative ideal. One may make it as prurient as one likes, either because of something in himself or because of something in Wilde's personal history, but "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." itself is Platonic rather than prurient. Nor is any prurient suggestion made about Shakespeare; he is the dramatic artist par excellence, the poet ever in search of the perfect means of expression.⁶

Cyril Graham's theory is "fatal" for him in the tragic sense intended by Novalis in his famous statement that "Character is fate." The truth of his theory is the truth of himself, and his suicide for it is his ultimate act of self-affirmation. The contrast between him and Erskine is all to the latter's disadvantage. Erskine is a poor imitation of Graham. In the end, we cannot even be sure he really believes in the theory he has already once endorsed and denounced since he attempts to validate his belief by forging his death. What he enacts is a grotesque *non sequitur* since Graham's forgery had been perpetrated in response to Erskine's demand for external or empirical evidence to prove a theory wholly dependent on internal evidence—on the evidence of the sonnets themselves and of what the theory reveals of Graham's inner personal needs. Graham's suicide was wholly authentic. Erskine makes no contribution to the creation, consolidation, or extension of Graham's theory, and his ambivalence toward it is an expression of his ambivalence toward life. He makes the transfer from Cyril Graham to the narrator when he has himself ceased to believe in the theory, and he is re-converted to it—if he is in fact the convert he claims to be—by the letter in the writing of which the narrator exhausts his own faith in it.

Faced with the collapse of the narrator's belief in the theory for which he still thinks "there is really a great deal to be said" (1201), a reader attempting to discover some satisfactory explanation of what has happened has no need to contradict the narrator's own assertion that he "cannot pretend to explain it" (1196). A significant degree of mystery inheres in personality, and although the narrator is our most trustworthy guide to the story's events, he is himself inside the story and a part of its events rather than a summary metaphor of the overall impression it makes on the reader.

The theory of Shakespeare's sonnets is what brings the characters of the story together, and the depth and intensity of each one's belief in the theory is what distinguishes one from the other. If one accepts the presentation of Cyril Graham as the basic statement of "The Portrait's" theme or impression on which the other two are variations, then their divergences from him would seem to be the appropriate critical focus. Compared with Graham's profound, single-minded, wholly sincere commitment to his theory, Erskine's response to it is discordant, chaotic, and negligible, if not somewhat contemptible. Thus our attention is directed to-

ward the narrator and the illumination his character as a variation on that of Cyril Graham casts on the ultimate meaning of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."

The narrator's interest in Cyril Graham's theory had been fully ignited by the first account he heard of it. "It is the only perfect key to Shakespeare's Sonnets that has ever been made," he had exclaimed to a thoroughly skeptical Erskine. "It is complete in every detail. I believe in Willie Hughes" (1160). For the next two months he had become virtually obsessed with the theory, poring over the poems and seeing "each new form of knowledge" that accrued to him as "a mode of reminiscence." He enlarged and deepened the basic theory and gradually became dominated by the idea, passionately held, that Erskine had a sacred duty "to do justice to the memory of Cyril Graham" by giving "to the world his marvellous interpretation of the Sonnets—the only interpretation that thoroughly explained the problem" (1196). That was the double burden of his final letter to Erskine—the irrefragable cogency of the theory and the compelling nature of Erskine's obligation to Graham's memory. That having been done, he suddenly found himself indifferent—entirely and inexplicably indifferent—to the whole matter.

It must be noted that the issue is now not Graham or Erskine or Graham's theory; it is the narrator himself. Indeed, he has been the issue all along, though that fact has been masked by his enthusiasm for Graham's theory. The words he uses in describing his curious period of belief are important:

Suddenly, I said to myself: "I have been dreaming, and all my life for these two months has been unreal. There was no such person as Willie Hughes." Something like a faint cry of pain came to my lips as I began to realise how I had deceived myself, and I buried my face in my hands, struck with a sorrow greater than any I had felt since boyhood. (1197)

The "strange passage" in his life is not one of disbelief but of belief. Not being a Cyril Graham, he yet became a Graham advocate and stand-in—a Graham disciple and surrogate—for those two months. It is, he suggests indirectly, the kind of enthusiastic self-deception he has not experienced "since boyhood."

The key to this "strange passage"—to its beginning as well as to its end—is, I suggest, a perspective enunciated by the narrator on what art can and cannot show us:

Art, even the art of fullest scope and widest vision, can never really show us the external world. All that it shows us is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance. And the soul itself, the soul of each one of us, is to each one of us a mystery. It hides in the dark and broods, and consciousness cannot tell us of its workings. Consciousness, indeed, is quite inadequate to explain the contents of personality. It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves. (1194)

He then goes on to credit the actor, the musician, the beautiful piece of antique sculpture with giving "form and substance to what was within us," enabling us "to realise our personality" and leaving us "different" from what we were. Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, which he had studied

6. At his trial, Wilde flatly denied the suggestion that his story had accused Shakespeare of "unnatural vice," claiming that the point of

the story was just the opposite.

under the intensely idealistic influence of Graham's theory, had had such an effect on him:

Art, as so often happens, had taken the place of personal experience. I felt as if I had been initiated into the secret of that passionate friendship, that love of beauty and beauty of love, of which Marsilio Ficino tells us, and of which the Sonnets in their noblest and purest significance, may be held to be the perfect expression. (1194)⁷

The sonnets had told him something about "the soul that hid within" him, had explained to him "the whole story of [his] soul's romance" (1195-1196). But they had not become, as they had become for Cyril Graham, his personal equivalent, the complete inner truth of himself. He has now, as he had had in boyhood, ideal longings—pure flights of fancy, noble dreams—and when, through the influence of some dedicated guide or mentor, a work of art incites them, sets them in motion, they take the place of personal experience and seem to be life itself elevated to a higher, more spiritually congenial key. But he is no Cyril Graham and cannot die for an exquisite delusion. Reason will out; the critical self-consciousness will make distinctions between what is and what merely seems temporarily to be, however attractive the seeming. When that happens, the self that art had only seemed to reveal throws off the ardor of its erstwhile guide and regards the extravagance of its discipleship as unreal, a dream having no beginning and end and no adequate explanation. The recovered self may continue to think that "there is really a great deal to be said" for the dream's form and substance, but it knows implicitly that further personal subscription is no longer possible, previous personal subscription no longer intelligible.

The narrator speaks of "a reality of loss" as well as "a sense of loss" (1196). However, his situation is one of recovery as much as of loss. He has had to let the theory go, true, but that has been the condition of recapturing something much more precious, namely, himself. The theory was an expression of Cyril Graham's identity; Graham had seen an image of himself mirrored in Shakespeare's sonnets and had become so enamored of it as a revelation of the ultimate truth of himself that he had been willing to pay for it the ultimate price. The narrator, in turn, had been deeply touched—temporarily hypnotized, if you will—by the romance of the whole affair, by the beautifully idealistic theory of Shakespeare's sonnets in their relation to the plays and by the supremely dramatic gesture by which the originator of the theory had affirmed his personal faith in it. The narrator's devotion to the theory for which this delicate young man had died had had the character of a religious exercise; indeed, it had ended with an epistle to the young man's former friend urging him "with passionate reiteration" to be faithful to his memory and to propagate his gospel to the world. But the narrator is not Cyril Graham. He must think his own thoughts, make his own choices, dream his own dreams, find his own soul rather than the

sympathetic soul of another revealed in art's mirror. Such recoil and need for redirection is often painful, and it is painful in this case, reminding the narrator of one of those poignant moments in his youth when the collapse of an ideal enthusiasm left him with an analogous sense of personal sorrow.

One aspect of the story the commentators seem to have ignored completely is the fact that, according to the title, the forged portrait of Willie Hughes itself supports a considerable share of the work's significance. That portrait is the first and only literal instance of forgery in a fable in which the inevitable use of forgeries or "lies" by artists is the first issue posed. "Art being to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one's own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life," says the narrator, "to censure an artist for a forgery was to confuse an ethical with an aesthetical problem" (1150). The narrator also acknowledges initially that a forgery committed in an effort to prove a critic's "strange theory about a certain work of art" would be "'quite a different matter,'" the ethical demands of life being different from the aesthetic demands of art, but such a neat distinction becomes less and less tenable as a story about self-realization through role-playing progresses. The portrait is passed along in that progression, its basic effect being to keep Cyril Graham's imaginative idea of Willie Hughes alive and to prevent those who come into possession of that idea from being too comfortable with neat distinctions between fact and fiction, life and art, reality and make-believe.

At the center of the issue is the matter of evidence. Graham had had the portrait forged to satisfy Erskine. "'I did it purely for your sake. You would not be convinced in any other way. It does not affect the truth of the theory'" (1160). Graham himself was entirely satisfied with the internal evidence of the sonnets themselves, claiming that "'the true meaning of the poems'" could "'be discerned'" only by "'a kind of spiritual and artistic sense'" (1156). Erskine demanded empirical proof that Willie Hughes actually existed.

They were both right, of course, the kind of evidence required depending on the purpose to be served by it. Graham's interest was impressive only, wholly personal and subjective. It was also creative in that it enabled him to construct from a critical reading of Shakespeare's sonnets a romance of himself that was thoroughly satisfying on aesthetic rather than ethical grounds, a romance of self-realization. Erskine, on the other hand, felt none of the inner necessities that drove Graham. He and Graham were "immense friends," though they had very little in common spiritually, and Erskine's jealousy of Graham's acting, of his need to express himself through multiple magnificent personalities, suggests that he had only a very limited understanding of the way he was put together. Graham's enthusiasm for his theory of the sonnets carried Erskine along, but his demand for empirical evidence points the spiritual

7. The narrator had earlier characterized Marsilio Ficino as "that aged scholar" who "seemed to see in [Pico della Mirandola] the realisation of the Greek ideal, and determined to devote his remaining years to the translation of Plotinus, that new Plato, in whom, as Mr.

Pater reminds us, 'the mystical element in the Platonic philosophy had been worked out to the utmost limit of vision and ecstasy'" (1177). For the reference of Pater, see Pater, 29.

contrast between them, and the confrontation over the forgery was as much a clash of value-systems as of individuals.

The portrait itself was apparently executed under Cyril Graham's direct supervision by an inconspicuous young artist with "'a most delicate and delightful touch'" (1159). It is undoubtedly as much a portrait of Cyril Graham as of Willie Hughes, and its hermaphroditic character—a youth of some seventeen years with "closely cropped hair" in the costume of a boy but having the face of a girl—is unmistakable. Thus the portrait is Graham's visualization of himself as Willie Hughes, the youthful actor who had enabled Shakespeare to "see" and thus to perfect his finest dramatic insights; in addition, it contains a delicate metaphoric suggestion of the kinds of radical combinations such ideal imaginative insights may require. Obviously, no such intuition is susceptible of empirical demonstration, and thus Graham's effort to satisfy Erskine's demand for objective evidence has a deeply ironic result: he presents the evidence in a way that undercuts its own validity.

The narrator inherits the portrait from Erskine after the enormous impression left on him by Cyril Graham's highly imaginative theory of Shakespeare's sonnets in combination with his romantic suicide has ceased to hold him in thrall. He then comes round to Erskine's position that, until it can be corroborated by unassailable objective evidence, Graham's theory must be regarded as "a sort of moonbeam theory, very lovely, very fascinating, but intangible" (1199). In contrast to Erskine, however, the narrator displays the portrait with proof or prejudice, allowing his artistic friends to see it as they will on its own merits. Though he has ceased to be a believer, he remains susceptible in degree to the portrait's imaginative influence. The very fact that he continues to think that "there is really a great deal to be said for the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's Sonnets" (1201) suggests that he understands in a quite precise and empathetic way why his theory was so profoundly important to Cyril Graham.

Finally, there are striking parallels between "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." and "The Truth of Masks," the only substantial critical essay Wilde had written earlier.⁸ Both have Shakespeare as a major subject, and both depend on a close scrutiny of internal evidence to sustain their different critical positions. The particular focus of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." is the sonnets, but the critical interest of the sonnets is seen as fundamentally dependent on the contribution they make to an understanding of the plays. Most fascinating, however, is the speaker's last-minute declaration in "The Truth of Masks" that he does not believe much of what he has said and the narrator's confession at the end of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." that he has suddenly lost faith in the theory of Shakespeare's sonnets of which he had been passionately convinced, even obsessive, for two months. They are different "events," certainly, and much of the difference is that between the explicitness of argument

and the implicitness of story. But in each case they undercut the comfort or security traditionally associated with belief or point of view as a stable, dependable quality of literature. No matter how adroitly one may argue in support of a particular outlook or how intensely one may hold for a period of time a critical belief, the former may at some significant level be relatively unreal or unimportant to one, and to the other one may suddenly become as indifferent as one had previously been intense. In the present stage of our ignorance of how such things work, there is no adequate explanation of what we yet recognize as a truth of experience. It is a question of personality, of how we are organized and how we function internally, and to that the consciousness, even the highly developed critical consciousness, is an unsatisfactory guide.

Thus at the beginning of his most vigorous and productive literary decade, as a critic, a creator, or some combination of the two, as in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," Wilde enunciates a sort of "agnostic's apology," warning his audience that he may argue strenuously for points of view to which he is indifferently committed and that the ardor he may seem to show for some critical belief at one time is no guarantee that he will continue at another time to subscribe to it.

This is more than a rebuttal to charges or potential charges of inconsistency; it is an indirect declaration that so-called inconsistency is inherent in the human psyche, especially in the psyche of anyone who thinks imaginatively. The more seriously one takes such a declaration and the more broadly one applies it to Wilde's works, the less inclined one will be to conclude that the positions he argues for or the beliefs he seems to endorse are anything more than imaginative excursions into what at the moment seem plausible ways of regarding the subject at hand. This in turn suggests that the principle of the drama, which he called "the most objective form known to art,"⁹ applies to all of Wilde's works, especially in the decade 1885-1895, not just to the plays or to the formal dialogues preparatory to the plays. Though his intensely personal "mode of expression" has led many readers to emphasize what appears to be an autobiographical tendency in his works, an emphasis that he himself encouraged by his insistence on the "impressive" character of expression, Wilde opened the most creative period of his life with the warning that his basic principle respecting critical point of view and beliefs was the principle of the drama and that the various positions he seemed—and meant to seem—to take were various species of role-playing, both the personal "mode of expression" and the basic objectivity being defining characteristics of his work. It is all illusion. As "the illusion of truth" rather than actual truth is art's "method" and the "illusion of beauty" rather than beauty per se is art's "result," so the illusion of belief rather than belief itself is all the reader can safely deduce from his writings. There is "much" in what he has written "with which [he] entirely disagree[s]."

8. "The Truth of Masks," originally entitled "Shakespeare and Stage Costume," had appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* in May 1885. According to Ellmann (296), "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." "was being written, as a letter to Wemyss Reid indicates, by October 1887."

9. *De Profundis*, in *Letters* 466. It is relevant to note that Wilde at the same time claimed to have taken the drama and "made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet."

he says, and in the end it may be impossible to distinguish between that "much" and other things. "The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks," he concludes, suggesting that metaphor is our only genuine access to knowledge, which comes to us obliquely in the manner of art or does not come to us at all.¹⁰

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Sexual Politics and Narrative Method in Tennyson's "Guinevere"

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"Liest thou here so low, the child of one
 I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame?
 Well is it that no child is born of thee.
 The children born of thee are sword and fire,
 Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
 The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
 Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea."¹

("Guinevere" 419-425)

Especially in his later years, the years of *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson was fascinated with narrative and experimented with the relationship between personality and event, or, as he put it, the relationship between "the tale, / The told-of, and the teller" ("Balin and Balan" 503-4). Tennyson's storytellings are events themselves—"social transactions" to use Barbara Herrnstein Smith's term for the relationship—which are restricted by the conditions and circumstances of each individual telling. In the process of telling, a storyteller inevitably discloses his or her own values, interests, and motives, and, as in many of Tennyson's later poems, the storytelling is an action at once central and peripheral to the reader's experience of the poem. To come to terms with a Tennyson story, a reader must judge the teller, and in judging the teller, finally judge himself, a critical dynamic implicit in the dictum Tennyson offered in conversation with Frederick Locker-Lampson in 1869, the year of the second installment of *Idylls*: "'Every man imputes himself,' meaning that a man, unless he is very sane indeed, in judging others, imputes motives" and with them his own moral limitations (*Memoir 2*: 76).²

This way of looking at storytellers complicates the work of reading narrative poems, especially poems with multiple tellings. In a poem such as the "Guinevere" idyll, which includes four versions of the Queen's role in the fall of Camelot—the narrator's, the novice's, the Queen's, and the King's—the reader must consider not only the events that each teller relates, but also the motives for their selection, the circumstances of each teller's delivery, and the relationship of one telling to another. In doing so, moreover, the reader reclaims the "Guinevere" idyll from the negative responses of the critics, who have reacted strongly to the King's denunciation of the Queen. Though Arthur's version of Guinevere's "sin" is the climactic storytelling event of the idyll, consideration of the storytellings that precede it temper the reader's reception of the King's abusive speech and the Queen's low demeanor as she grovels at his feet. In other words, the response to "Guinevere"—and to *Idylls* generally—should be governed by the indeterminacy that results from multiple tellings, not by the simple—and terrible—authoritarianism of the King.

Readers have always objected to Arthur's (and Tennyson's) patriarchal attitudes but have rarely gone beyond these objections to note the attitudes of the other tellers and the effect that the idyll's indeterminate method has on our assessment of the poet.³ The King's speech—his longest in *Idylls*—devastates Guinevere. He tells her how he drew the knights to him, established order in the land and a "model for the mighty world" (462); of how, in turn, Guinevere's sin with Lancelot led others to sin: "'till the loathsome opposite / Of all my heart had destined did obtain, / And all through thee'" (488-90). As early as 1859, J. M. Ludlow accused Arthur of "neglecting to

10. "The Truth of Masks," in *Complete Works* 1078. It is in this context that Wilde endorses Plato's "theory of ideas" and Hegel's "system of contraries" as the proper guides to critical thought and says that "A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true." The literary artist whose example seems to be monitoring Wilde's thought here is Robert Browning.

1. I have used the Ricks edition of Tennyson's poems throughout and provide line numbers parenthetically.

2. The imputation of motives is central to the "Merlin and Vivien" idyll. Merlin is appalled by Vivien's vile tales of the Round Table knights. See lines 798-836.

3. Donald Hair's discussion of the "serious moral drama" (216) of regeneration and repentance played out before the reader is an exception, but he claims that the sexist aspect of the King's speech is a superficial problem, and he thereby avoids the political issue. Elliot Gilbert argues that *Idylls* is about sexual role reversal, but the King's speech in "Guinevere" does not seem to support this claim.

understand her [Guinevere's] feelings and her character" (qtd. in Gossman 447), and of course Swinburne thought the idyll a "sordid domestic quarrel" (qtd. in Gilbert 864) when it was published as part of the first installment of *Idylls*. Modern responses have been no less severe. Tennyson's latest biographer, Robert Martin, suggests that, because of its "priggishness," "much of [the King's] speech is lost today" (423), and John Rosenberg complains that Arthur's charge—" 'And all through thee!' "—is "under the particular circumstances . . . cruel; under any circumstances . . . simplistic" (131).

But perhaps most vehement have been feminist critics, offended by the bald display of Arthur's patriarchal power, Guinevere's humiliation, and the use of sexual difference to enforce social hierarchies. Nina Auerbach, for example, claims that "Guinevere is little more than a sinister, suffering shadow in the background of the action" (157) and calls *Idylls* generally Tennyson's "laudable and forgettable attempt to create a king worthy of our belief" (11). From this perspective, even the tender avowal of love with which Arthur ends his speech is manipulative—another manifestation, that is, of the one-sided power struggle between husband and wife. As Phyllis Rose asks of some other noteworthy Victorian marriages, "who can resist the thought that love is the ideological bone thrown to women to distract their attention from the powerlessness of their lives" (8)? But though Arthur's denunciation epitomizes the pure/debased sexual dichotomy used to control Victorian women, the speech does not represent the broader attitudes about marriage and culture implicit in the idyll as a whole.⁴

These objections to Arthur's speech are even more forbidding when one considers the importance of "Guinevere" in relation to the whole epic. "Guinevere" was one of the first written of the idylls, which suggests that Tennyson considered the scene between Arthur and Guinevere essential to his account of the rise and fall of civilisation.⁵ When he organized the idylls for the first time 1869, Tennyson made "Guinevere" the penultimate idyll, the last of the Round Table idylls, preceding the "The Passing of Arthur." In the final movement of *Idylls* as a whole, which begins near the middle of "Pelleas and Ettarre" (the eighth idyll of twelve in the series), "Guinevere" is an interlude, a suspension of the action moving Arthur toward his mysterious passing. In fact, Arthur's ultimate failure is determined by the time the idyll opens; as Ward Hellstrom puts it, Arthur's "kingdom . . . is irredeemably lost by the time of 'Guinevere'" (132). Yet the scene of Guinevere's humiliation has a significant effect on Arthur himself; the King associates the somber world in "The Passing of Arthur" with the low position of the Queen as he denounced her in "Guinevere": "let us hence, and find or feel a way / Through this blind haze," he says to Bedivere, "which ever since I saw / One lying in the dust at Almesbury, / Hath folded in the passes of the world" (75-78).

The "Guinevere" idyll, the "dramatic climax," as William Buckler suggests, of the whole *Idylls* sequence (133), is the last significant pause in the inevitable winding down of Arthurian order. The stories of the idyll are told in this larger context. Before Arthur's version, three storytellers give accounts of the fall of Camelot. Each relies on the tension of opposing forces to represent the "truth," but no other storyteller presents the pure/debased dichotomy that the King presents. The overall narrator clearly sympathizes with the Queen, whom he or she represents as victim of both external and internal forces; the little novice misguidedly tries to comfort her mysterious companion—the Queen—by comparing a glorious fairy-tale past to the troubled present; Guinevere returns in memory to her first meeting with Lancelot and contemplates the world with and without love; and the King finally berates the queen, his virgin whore, locked now behind nunnery walls. All the storytellers attempt to define the Queen's role in the collapse of the Round Table Order, and all reach different conclusions.

Tennyson knew that simple stories tend to prevail over complicated ones and that the "patriarchal paradigm," as a culturally sanctioned story or myth, "has long enforced men's power within marriage" and society (Rose 9). The earlier versions of Guinevere's role in the fall of Camelot not only undercut the King's authority but also move the reader's attention to issues larger than the domestic quarrel played out before us. As in all of Tennyson's storytellings, the subject of "Guinevere" is in part how storytellers create meaning and impose their preferences and values on stories received and retold. Though the storytellers of the "Guinevere" idyll do not really break out of the patriarchal structure so clearly evident in Arthur's speech, that structure itself becomes a subject. Indeed, the narrative method of the idyll suggests that Tennyson recognized the extent to which marriage, and culture, are narrative constructs—determined, that is, by the quality of our storytellers' imaginative vision.

The narrator's opening remarks indicate that as the Queen sits weeping at Almesbury the world itself rests in a strange inbetween or interlunar state:

Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burned
Blurred by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still. (1-8)

The narrator does not describe the common interlunar period between the old and new moon but rather a period when the influence of the moon is at its greatest—"at full"—and yet shrouded from sight by the mists of impending doom. Moreover, the repeated reference to the moon as the ruling, but hidden, heavenly sphere suggests the narrator's

4. For a recent discussion of the way this splitting of the female was used to exploit Victorian women, see Leonore Davidoff's "Class and Gender in Victorian England."

5. Literary precedent did not force Tennyson into this final meeting. As Jerome Buckley has noted, the "Guinevere" idyll "owes less than any of the others to Tennyson's printed sources" (189). The scene

between the King and Queen is the poet's own creation, though Tennyson did base the idyll on a brief passage in Malory (xxx, 7) that describes the Queen's retreat to Almesbury. In Malory, however, the King dies before the Queen flees Camelot, and "the only interview at Almesbury is between Lancelot and Guinevere" (Ricks 3: 530).

abiding faith in Guinevere's feminine powers. Indeed, the narrator—the first of the four storytellers in the idyll—is more sympathetic to the Queen than are the other speakers in the idyll, more sympathetic than the King, than the novice, than, indeed, the Queen herself. But sympathy hardly empowers Guinevere in this case; this opening storytelling also portrays the Queen as abject victim. The narrator's flashback account of Guinevere's last days at Camelot, which follows the brief opening description quoted above, portrays Guinevere as an Artemis figure, the unsuspecting victim of Modred's evil intrusion, but an Artemis figure powerless to avenge herself. The Queen cannot defend herself against either Modred's intrusion from outside—from his will to expose her guilt—or from the work of her own conscience.

Though the narrator does not attempt to excuse Guinevere's sin with Lancelot, he or she does make it clear that Modred is more responsible than the Queen for the dissolution of Arthur's order. Modred, "like a subtle beast / Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne / Ready to spring, waiting a chance" (10-12). The evil Modred, whom the narrator repeatedly describes in subhuman terms, makes a pact with the heathen Lords of the White Horse to disrupt and overrun Camelot, a pact "sharpened by [Modred's] strong hate for Lancelot" (20).

Modred also precipitates Guinevere's personal breakdown. Indeed, the flashback account focuses primarily on Guinevere's psychological condition as victim of Modred. When Lancelot informs Guinevere of Modred's intrusion—of Modred's attempt, that is, to "spy some secret scandal" (26) by hiding in the garden wall surrounding the Queen's private bower—she at first laughs lightly to think of Modred's dusty fall, then shudders, and finally laughs again, "but faintlier, for indeed / She half-foresaw, that he, the subtle beast, / Would track her guilt" (57-9). From that moment on, according to the narrator, Guinevere cannot bear "Modred's narrow foxy face, / Heart-hiding smile, and grey persistent eye" (62-3). Moreover, knowledge of Modred's intrusion infects Guinevere's sense of self, so that "the Powers that tend the soul, / To help it from the death that cannot die, / And save it even in extremes, began / To vex and plague her" (64-7). As her faith in herself weakens, Guinevere is overcome by a "spiritual fear" (70) that returns repeatedly in "an awful dream" (75), a dream in which

she seemed to stand

On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it, till it touched her, and she turned—
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt . . . (75-82)

By the narrator's report, Guinevere's revulsion from Modred suggests a neurotic reaction to both her victimization and her sexuality. The beast triggers her own capacity for self-loathing, and, indeed, when she can bear the pressure no longer, all she can do is send her lover away: "'O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land'" (87)—"Again she said, 'O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence'" (94).

But Guinevere's victimization does not end with her decision to flee. At the lovers' leave-taking, at "their last hour" (101) when they sit together "hands in hands, and eye to eye" (99), Modred again invades the Queen's bower, breaking in on the pair during their most private moment and broadcasting their love for the world to acknowledge and condemn. "'Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself'" (117), Guinevere cries to Lancelot, recalling incidentally Lancelot's final cry in "Lancelot and Elaine." And so, according to the narrator, the lovers part, Lancelot

Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
Fled all night long by the glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan,
And in herself she moaned "Too late, too late." (126-30)

Guinevere's trouble is intensely personal; according to the narrator, her psyche is invaded, shattered, exposed. Her potential for regenerative action is, like the moon, only a glimmer of what it might be. Like Camelot itself, she has been poisoned by Modred's venom. Yet the narrator claims that she maintains her dignity, that her remaining "beauty, grace, and power" (142) "wrought as a charm upon" (143) the nuns of Almesbury, who take her in and agree to protect her anonymity. And at Almesbury, Guinevere finds momentarily, through the "babbling heedlessness" of the novice, "who often lured [the Queen] from herself" (150), what she longs for—escape from the world and from her own fear and guilt.

At this point in his account, the narrator returns to the present of the opening scene, Guinevere and the novice sitting together, one "low light betwixt them," in much the way Percivale and Ambrosius sit together in "The Holy Grail." Narrative structure as well as narrative time changes radically; now dialogue, as so often happens in *Idylls*, produces stories. But the second storyteller of the idyll who, like the King, speaks in her own voice, does not tell a Guinevere-centered tale; although the maid/novice begins her version of the Arthurian story with a song, "'Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill'" (166), which of course recalls the Queen's moan as she fled the court after Modred's final intrusion, her story is King-centered—or more exactly—father-centered. In the first place, the novice does not know that it is Guinevere to whom she speaks and therefore does not recognize the appropriateness of her conversation this night, many weeks after Guinevere has fled the court, when Modred is rumored finally to have usurped the throne. In fact, the novice is "right sure" that the tears of her graceful companion "do not flow / From evil done" (186-7); yet she also violates Guinevere's privacy, as did Modred, though she does so unintentionally.

The novice's naivete is the most significant aspect of her tale-telling in the "Guinevere" idyll. She prattles to the Queen about the responsibilities of the "great" (177), saying "'That howsoever much [the great] may desire / Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud'" (204-5), but of course she does not realize that with those very words she reminds Guinevere of her former stature. Not knowing her for the Queen, the novice "comforts" Guinevere by noting how small their grief at Almesbury must seem compared to the "good" King's, who has been damned with a "wicked

Queen" (207), locked now, she thinks, in Lancelot's strong castle. The novice platitudinizes: "this is all woman's grief," she says,

"That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen." (216-21)

This remark is, as Guinevere thinks, "foolish prate" (223), yet the maid's version of Camelot's fall corresponds more closely with the King's version than do the other tellers' versions. Her representation of Guinevere as the scourge of her gender clearly anticipates Arthur's opening words to Guinevere—the words quoted at the beginning of this essay:

"The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea."

Moreover, the novice has inherited her judgment of the Queen from her father. "Yea, but I know," she answers Guinevere, "the land was full of signs / And wonders ere the coming of the Queen. / So said my father" (230-2). Guinevere, for the moment tolerant of the maid's ignorance, asks what she can really know of "Kings and Tables Round, / Or what of signs and wonders" (225-7). The novice's answer indicates that she knows very little of the world outside the nunnery walls—that she merely repeats culturally sanctioned, patriarchally determined attitudes toward women and the Queen. Father has told his young daughter of a past fairyland replete with mermen, mermaids, elves, airy dancers, and merry bloated things "before the coming of the sinful Queen" (268), none of which have any place in Tennyson's Arthurian world. Guinevere, of course, knows better and replies sardonically to the novice's depiction:

"ill prophets were they all
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs
And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?" (270-3)

In response the novice refers to the mystery of Arthur's coming and passing. Of the many versions of Arthur's birth and death provided in *Idylls*, she tells the most wonderful, fanciful version—that is, of the babe miraculously washed onto the sands of Tintagil, whose grave would be a secret to all men. And indeed, even the mysterious bard who faltered in his telling of this future King's achievements, faltered, according to the novice, because he specifically foresaw "this evil work of Lancelot and the Queen" (305).

The maid's fairyland version of Arthurianism suggests that her real motive is the imaginative protection and propagation of her father, who died in battle five years before, and who represents an ideal past she has not herself experienced: when the Queen's responses become harsher, the novice asks Guinevere to stop her storytelling, if the very "tales / Which my good father told me . . . / Shame my father's memory" (314-6). The young girl's story is an attempt to maintain her childish comforts and security. As Guinevere asks her,

"O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?" (340-2)

The maid's story also suggests the power of authority in shaping our attitudes. The values implicit in her father's tales condemn not only Guinevere but her gender. Moreover, the nature of the novice's storytelling tends to sharpen the reader's understanding of the other storytellings in the idyll, especially the King's. The novice unknowingly exposes her inherited cultural bias, and by including her version of the past, Tennyson significantly enlarged the context within which the reader measures all the storytellers in the idyll.

The maid is not manipulative, having no idea of the power she has to affect her audience. But when her story insults Lancelot, Guinevere forgets the little novice's innocence. Indeed, "like many another babbler" (352), the maid finally hurts "whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal" (353); Guinevere, disturbed as she has not been before, curses her and throws her out—"Such as thou art be never maiden more / Forever!" (356-7)—"Get thee hence" (364). This is the only time in the idyll that Guinevere responds forthrightly to those who impose on her. She recognizes the danger of the maid's inherited attitudes, more ominous by contrast with the innocent voice that speaks them, and her own inability to counteract their implicit judgment. As the scene between the two ends, the Queen regrets her harsh words, wasted as they are on a child.

The novice's prattle does move Guinevere, however, into her own storytelling. Left to herself, Guinevere soon recalls her own warm memories of "the golden days" (377) when she rode with Lancelot "under groves that looked a paradise / Of blossom" (386-7). Her reflections, as reported by the narrator, constitute her own version of the events that led to her disloyalty and ultimate dishonor. Once she, too, was open and innocent, and it "was maytime, and as yet no sin was dreamed" (385). The narrator tells us that Guinevere moves "through the past unconsciously" (399), until jolted by her memory of the "cold, / High, self-contained, and passionless" King (402-3); "not like him, / 'Not like my Lancelot'" (403-4), the Queen broods.

Ironically, Guinevere's version of the past is the briefest in her idyll, and clearly the most poignant. She does not complain about her victimization or about unexamined judgments. Ruled by the heart, she simply fell in love with Lancelot before she ever saw the King. (In "The Coming of Arthur," Guinevere is unable to identify Arthur among his company since at that time he rode "a simple knight among his knights" [51]. She knowingly sees Arthur for the first time only after he has been crowned King.) And except for the words "'Not like my Lancelot,'" which she speaks out loud, her version of the past is completely internal, her solitary remembrance, reported by the narrator, who is now the Queen's direct spokesperson. But even as she speaks the simple truth as she recalls, it, "'Not like my Lancelot,'" her quiet mood and her storytelling are broken by a sudden cry from without—"The King" (408)—and Arthur's voice takes over, "monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's / De-

nouncing judgment" (417). Authority silences the female voice.

And so I return to my starting point—the King's devastating attack on the wretched Queen. Do I judge Arthur's version of Guinevere's sin differently after considering the storytellers who precede him in the idyll? Arthur's condemnation represents the public attack from which Guinevere fled, the open wrath she feared. His is the ultimate intrusion, as he lambasts her with accounts of Modred's revolt and the battle with Lancelot—both, he claims, the consequences of "the sin which thou hast sinned" (452). The terror of his overstatement shocks, especially in light of the narrator's sympathetic picture of Guinevere's breakdown during her last days at Camelot. Yet Tennyson's narratives always challenge the reader to respond to the indeterminate, not the obvious, to recognize in this case that the King is locked into attitudes he may only partially understand—that as storyteller, he, too, is "closed in by narrowing nunnery-walls," as both the product and producer of his culture's values and attitudes.

Arthur's explanation, in somewhat softer tones, of the nature of his ideals in the old days—his hopes for "a glorious company" (461)—recalls the novice's fairyland past. The King himself has been influenced by childish dreams. Was he as realistic as he ought to have been in binding his subjects "by vows . . . the which no man can keep" (see Gilbert 874)? What of Guinevere's initial reaction to Arthur? How passionless he seemed to her. The questions raised by the storytellings that precede Arthur's denunciation of Guinevere suggest that Arthur is not blameless, for he has failed to understand both his subjects and his Queen.

Arthur's admission that he still loves Guinevere—"Let no man dream but that I love thee still" (557)—recalls ironically the Queen's persistent love for Lancelot. Indeed Arthur's last words to his wife—"But hither shall I never come again, / Never lie by thy side; see thee no more—/ Farewell"—echo the very oath Guinevere swore "never to see [Lancelot] more, / To see him more" (373-4). Arthur's final words to Guinevere were coincidentally, the first two lines of the "Guinevere" idyll that Tennyson wrote, though he did not proceed with the idyll until six months later. And these lines seem a particularly apt starting point for "Guinevere" since apart from the rest of the idyll, they represent so very tenderly the disunity of husband and wife. All the major characters of *Idylls* fail—Merlin, Lancelot, Percivale, Guinevere, Arthur; their failures are marked by separation from the community and entrapment. Except for Merlin, who is imprisoned in his own sense of futility, they all retire to religious life and attempt to regain connection with community. Given the opportunity, Guinevere regains spiritual power over herself with her "good deeds and her pure life" (687) at Almesbury, but these last years constitute but a "sombre close" (682) to her life. Her idyll also suggests that the world—the voices which cry her shame—will never allow her control of her own destiny. The best she can do is "not scorn" herself (667). Similarly, the answers to the questions raised by "Guinevere" must come from within, as each reader judges the storytellers of the idyll and finally his or her own values and beliefs, recog-

nizing that no one truly escapes the many voices of the world—escapes, that is, his or her culture's sanctioned attitudes.

From this point of view, the scene between Arthur and Guinevere is painful not because the Queen succumbs to the King's abuse, but because Tennyson never lets husband and wife speak *with* each other. Their dialogue is suspended: the Queen is so completely enclosed that she cannot even bring herself to look at Arthur as he speaks, and the King, enfolded in the "moony vapours" (597) "till himself became as mist" (600), has left to fight his last battle when Guinevere answers: "Then she stretched out her arms and cried aloud / 'O Arthur!'" (602-3).

Guinevere cannot escape her destiny—both the consequences of her love for Lancelot and the world in which she lives—and at the close she, too, sadly espouses her culture's values:

"Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest:
It surely was my profit had I known:
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Not Lancelot, nor another." (649-56)

She says this knowing that regardless of her duty, she will always love Lancelot. But as the Queen continues, she indicates the possibility of a new way, based on her willingness to accept a ruined past and to start afresh:

"Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.
.
.
I must not scorn myself: he loves me still
.
.
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you." (663-70)

At this point, the narrator returns for the last time in the "Guinevere" idyll to say that Guinevere came to lead the nuns at Almesbury, until, like Arthur, she "past / To where beyond these voices there is peace" (691-2).

According to Florence Boos, William Morris recognized that "female passion and sexuality" have little defence against the "social hierarchies and emotional suffocation they depict" (181). Though Tennyson's Guinevere is clearly less outspoken than Morris', the narrative method of the idyll as a whole suggests that Tennyson also was aware of his culture's limitations, of how those limitations are propagated in the stories we tell each other, and of how each of us must shape, as best we can, an inner discourse in an attempt to transcend those limitations. Despite the many responses to the contrary, these issues, rather than the King's terrible condemnation, are the subject of "Guinevere."

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The Lure of Biography: Who Was Marguerite and to Whom Does It Matter?

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Seldom has an intriguing biographical revelation been so curiously presented as in Park Honan's description of what didn't happen in the hotel at Thun, the key event of the seventh chapter of his deservedly praised Arnold biography.

Born in Berlin, Mary Claude still read enough of the Germans to be called "a good German." Anne Clough, her friend, had lately visited the town of Thun, known for its folklore and Minnesinger legends. Mary was now collecting German folktales, and she probably meant to reach the Hôtel Bellevue, Thun, for a meeting with Arnold. If Arnold's heart raced as he reached the hotel he had time to admire the lobby, even to feel vexed, outraged, jilted, and stoical and half-relieved, too. Mary had returned home earlier than planned, and Arnold simply cooled his heels on the Hôtel's Hofstettenstrasse. Later, he made his way down the scenic Aar Valley to the Rhine, and sailed towards England by "slow stages." (151)

One may wonder if Honan intended a bit of imitative form here, intentionally echoing the anti-climax Arnold would have felt. But as one looks more closely at the way Honan handles the episode and marshalls the arguments identifying Mary Claude as the Marguerite of Arnold's *Switzerland* poems, the whole becomes curiously and curiously. Mary is kept pretty much off stage until the key scene, receiving only three brief mentions before Chapter Seven. Only after Honan has reported the failed meeting in Switzerland is her life sketched, retrospectively mingled with evidences of the relationships between the Claude and Arnold families. Her enthusiasm for sentimental German writers is then presented as a source of affinity with and influence on Arnold, followed by Honan's comments on the *Switzerland* series of poems as read in the light of the relationship between Arnold and Mary as he has described it.

A good many readers coming to the biography without prior knowledge of Mary Claude must have wondered if

they had not missed something when they came to Honan's sentence, "But now Arnold was 'all alone' in a frigid isolated hotel, and his mind certainly was free to focus on a romantic meeting arranged for the next day"—a sentence occurring six pages before the revelatory paragraph with which I began (145). Arnold scholars knew that Honan had identified Marguerite as Mary as early as 1971, but many must have been puzzled that not more evidence of the anticipated tryst with Mary appears in the biography.¹ Not merely is there no new evidence, but no mention is made of the letter by Mary's mother cited in Honan's 1978 *Victorian Poetry* article that seemed to support the possibility that Mary was in Switzerland at the time. Nor is there mention of the suggestion initiated by James Bertram in 1975 and subsequently developed by Eugene August that Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (in which the protagonists are named Mary and Claude) was "in part a portrait of Matthew Arnold in love" (15).

Now this odd chapter in Honan's biography has already produced an odd chapter in Arnold studies consisting of Miriam Allott's strong denial that Mary was Marguerite and Honan's equally sturdy defense ("Fox How"), the two paired in the same issue of *Victorian Poetry*. After summarizing what is known of Mary Claude, Miriam Allott argues against the possibility that "Arnold's fleeting attachment to a pious and rather literary, though appealing, young holiday friend prompted the composition of verses whose fantastic transmogrifications of geographical location and personal detail accord with their being no more than a series of 'exercices in passion réfléchiante.'" "There is no doubt at all that they [the nine *Switzerland* poems] come into being as the expression of emotional experiences and anxieties connected with a real love affair. . . ." Her other major argument relies on the differences between what we know of Mary Claude and what the poems seem to tell us of Marguerite: "Is it at all possible, then, to fuse into a

1. A helpful summary of the history of the identification of Marguerite with Mary Claude is given in a key footnote in Allott (note 5).

single identity the 'slight' volatile girl from Thun and the 'tall' pious girl from Ambleside? Dr. Honan's answer is to make one of the girls disappear altogether" (126, 141).

Honan's reply takes unexpected ground. He is less concerned to make a case for Mary as Marguerite than to scout biographical use of the poems in general. "An imaginary person in the Alps is now treated as though argument could make her real. . . . arguments that the fictive poems with their incidents unfolding at Thun are in themselves good historical evidence of Arnold's dalliance 'with a French girl living in Switzerland' require some response." Arguing against taking lyrics as "biographical evidence of real events in their named locales in a poet's life," Honan insists that the lyrics "are as much about Arnold's ideas and his outlook on life as they are about a mainly stereotyped, simplified Marguerite who is the occasion of his reflections" (145, 148).

Honan sets out another sort of argument at some length; he is at pains to argue that the poems could not have been "reports about his [Arnold's] sexual dalliance with anyone living at Thun. It would be amazing that he would treat his mother, his sisters, his father's surviving friends, and the British public to a diarylike record in verse of his own immoral dallying with a chambermaid or language teacher."² To believe that Arnold would have written about such an affair is to assume him lacking not only in prudence but creative imagination, "unable to invent details about a love affair, unable even to give a geographical locale to Marguerite that was not the geographical locale of a love affair of his own" (148, 149). One can hardly help noticing that Honan seems here to be defending a certain conception of Arnold's morality as much as his prudence and creativity; implied at least is the suggestion that Arnold would never have dallied with a chambermaid though he might have made love to the respectable Mary Claude in a Swiss hotel had she arrived there unchaperoned.

Now there is nothing unusual about scholars disagreeing over biographical (or any other) evidence. The intriguing aspects of the confrontation lie in the nature of the arguments each makes and what they reveal about the role of biography in literary studies—a perennial question which current shifts in literary theory are once again making exigent.

One curious aspect of Allott's critique is her apparent assumption not only that the woman depicted in Arnold's *Switzerland* poems must faithfully reproduce an original, but that the success of a poem is a warrant for its biographical reality. The more effective the poem, presumably the closer it should correspond to the poet's experience—not that I think Mrs. Allott would care to argue that as a general proposition, but it seems her major premise here. She thus becomes especially vulnerable to Honan's strictures about confusing poetic texts and biographical events.

On the other hand, while many of us are happy to agree with Honan that lyrics are not to be read as biographical excerpts, his line of argument raises two questions. Has he not himself woven part of Arnold's life out of strands taken

from *Switzerland* poems? He as well as Allott explains aspects of the poems biographically. After all it was a no less acute reviewer than Richard Altick who remarked that "In his effort to pierce to the heart of Arnold's sensibility and thought during those first years of his maturity, Honan adopts the method he favored in his biography . . . of Browning, that of treating the poems as literal autobiography, co-equal in authority with intimate letters" (213).

Honan and Allott simply conjecture different textual/biographical links. The poem "To my Friends, who ridiculed a tender Leave-taking" (later "A Memory Picture") serves as a face-saving gesture set in England for Honan while it is the first of the series depicting an actual love affair occurring in Switzerland for Allott. "To Marguerite—Continued" is seen by Honan as "a triumphant integration of . . . Arnold's memories of his reading, his Balliol and Oriel concerns, his reactions to the revolutions of 1848, with his genuine experience of romantic love" with Mary Claude (157). For Allott the "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" is in the first instance the English channel lying between the poet and a girl actually living in Switzerland—however powerful it may be as a metaphor for a universal condition. The final poem of the *Switzerland* series, "The Terrace at Berne," is quickly passed over by Honan, who finds it awkward; for Allott its evident purpose in laying a persistent ghost serves as evidence of the depth of the emotional experience and its reference to Marguerite as a "Daughter of France" as evidence that the *Switzerland* poems cannot refer to Mary Claude.

Then again, if poems are not to be read as autobiography, why has Honan worked so hard to prove that Mary Claude was the "blue-eyed" woman Arnold hoped to meet at Thun? Miriam Allott seems correct in writing that Mary Claude's visit to Switzerland is "purely conjectural" and that no evidence exists that she "ever stayed in Thun (or intended to)" (141, 142)—why trouble oneself with constructing a possible scenario as framework for considering the poems if the poems are not reliable biographical evidence?

The fact is that both Honan and Allott betray a nervous ambivalence about the uses of literary biography, an ambivalence endemic to literary studies. Biographical information may be fascinating, but what is it good for? Having made an interesting discovery about an author, is not one almost required to demonstrate its literary relevance? Both Honan and Allott not only draw on Arnold's poems for biographical evidence, but inevitably interpret the poems partially biographically—"inevitably" because to the extent *A* can be taken as the cause of *B*, the result *B* can be read back to imply the existence of *A*. Of course, the easiest maneuver for a literary critic dubious about the role of biography is to rule biographical matters unequivocally out. Attempts to insulate texts from their authors' lives go back long before the New Critics. In 1869, fifty years before the open debates between biographical/historical scholars and explicative critics and about a hundred before the structuralist and post-structuralist exiling of the author, Alexander

2. Allott cites other critics' conjectures that the fair one might have been one of these vocations; she does not herself so suggest.

Bain complained in *The Fortnightly Review*:

But when a man gets into literary criticism at large, the temptation to deviate into matters that have no value for the predominating end of a teacher of English, is far beyond the lure of alcohol, tobacco, or any sensual stimulation. He runs into digressions on the life, the character, the likings and dislikings, the quarrels and friendships of his authors. . . . (213-14)

Later in the nineteenth century, when the propriety of establishing a School of English Literature was being debated at Oxford, the fatal ease with which discussion of literature degenerates into gossip about authors was similarly urged by its opponents. But a comment like Bain's cuts both ways. Though our interest in author's lives may well warp our understanding of their works, there is no denying the lure of biography: one wants to know as much as possible about any author in whom one is interested. The true relationship between a work's success and the author's life is that the more effectively the author places human experiences before us, the more we speculate on biographical sources.

The hobby-horse I want to ride in this venerable critical tournament is borrowed from the hermeneutic stables of E. D. Hirsch: it is the distinction between interpretation of meaning and critical significance. Let me, however, sharpen those terms: by "interpretation of meaning" I designate the understanding of those intentions the author could have reasonably expected the anticipated audience to recognize on the basis of what that author assumed the intended audience knew, believed, and felt. For those whom the concept of intention makes uneasy, let me underline that it is the author's intentions as suggested by the text's relation to publicly available contexts at the time it was written that are sought. One might in fact prefer to speak of the text's "extensions" or even the author's "textentions." By "criticism of significance" I mean everything we can draw out of a text by bringing to the text knowledge, beliefs, and feelings that it is reasonable to assume the author did not expect the audience to draw upon. The distinction serves as an excellent talisman against biographical enchantments.

The interpreter of poetic meaning neither excludes nor promiscuously welcomes biographical knowledge about the author; rather, the interpreter assumes that texts are constructed to convey meanings in a given set of contexts. That is the principle of "communicative presumption." Included in that set of contexts is what anticipated readers would or could have known about the author. All information antecedently gathered from letters, diaries and reported reminiscences of friends and family is of course of value to the biographical project of reconstructing the events in Arnold's life and his reaction to them. Not a bit of this, however, is relevant to the meaning—the propositions about life and the emotional attitude with which these are conveyed—of the poems themselves. The readers for whom the volumes of his poems were published knew nothing of Arnold's affairs of the heart and/or bedchamber. One can always read a given poem as intended primarily for a specific group of intimate friends and relatives—as Honan reads "To my Friends, who ridiculed a tender Leave-tak-

ing." The title invites a reader to imagine friends, actual or fictional, mocking an emotional parting—but if the special knowledge only such friends would have were necessary to grasp the poem's meaning, presumably Arnold would not have troubled to publish it.

On the purely biographical question, the contest between Honan and Allott is a draw. Honan has hardly proved that Arnold hoped to meet Mary in Switzerland, whatever he may have demonstrated about Arnold's interest in her or their temperamental affinities. On the other hand, Allott has hardly proved that Marguerite must have been an actual French or Swiss girl—that the poems are effective in evoking a set of emotions naturally associated with the course of an uncertain and finally unfulfilled romantic involvement hardly proves that they tell an actual story.

Both of their conjectures are fascinating, and in the absence of further evidence, one is perhaps entitled to make a personal choice between them. But one ought to keep in mind that even if irrefutable proof came to light either that Mary had promised to meet Arnold in Thun or that he had dallied with a tall blue-eyed chambermaid who habitually wore Marguerites in her hair, the meaning of the poems would not be changed. There would be no need to intrude such information in the footnotes to ordinary reprinting of his poems. I would go further and suggest indeed that to include comment on the possible original of Marguerite in a classroom text is an impertinence. If we want students to move actively from understanding the meaning of literary texts to assessing their significance by comparison with their own experience and general knowledge, we only short-circuit that process by suggesting that the real significance, the major relevance, of the poems is to Mary Claude or a shadowy French girl to whom Arnold was attracted.

Let me return to Miriam Allott's essay. After wittily commenting that the Marguerite has aroused speculation because, like Shakespeare's Dark Lady, she is "vividly present in the poems and conspicuously absent elsewhere," Allott goes on to say that after all, "the poems are what they are whoever 'Marguerite' may have been, if indeed she was 'real' at all." "But," she answers, "to make Mary Claude fit the bill the poems have to be read in a particular way" (125). And there's the rub, or at least one of them. Do we not, in fact, necessarily read texts somewhat tendentiously when the object is to fit them to a particular biographical explanation? Can such a reading of a text avoid short-changing the propositional, rhetorical, emotional amalgam which is the author's meaning?

Evidently, once one has read Honan, one cannot not know that Mary Claude may in some sense be the begetter of the Marguerite poems and that there is a possibility that their final source is a non-tryst. Nevertheless, part of what used to be called, without irony, the "discipline of English" lies in not confusing the appropriate uses of the various kinds of knowledge. As examples of all too rare interpretations of the *Switzerland* poems that maintain the distinction between what is relevant to meaning and what to significance, let me instance those of Dwight Culler's 1966 *Imaginative Reason* and William Buckler in his 1982 essays *On the Poetry of Matthew Arnold*. Culler, writing five years before Honan's first article on the importance of Mary

Claude in Arnold's life, accepts the existence of a real Marguerite. However, he is satisfied to read the *Switzerland* poems as essentially fictional variations on what is as much a theme as a story. "Briefly, it is the story of a man who for one delicious moment enjoys a fresh and rapturous love, is then plunged into a sea of passions, suffering, and loss, and finally, through deepened self-understanding moves into the solitude and calms that are properly his" (122). Though Culler does not avoid possible links between individual poems and events in Arnold's life, his interpretation of the poems as a process of self-discovery in no way depends on biographical fact. What remains biographically oriented in Culler's approach is the tacit assumption that, general as the experience of coming to terms with one's own personality may be, it is Arnold's own self-definition that the poems associated with Marguerite record. Further, he relies generally on a pattern of thought extracted from Arnold's poetry as a whole: the movement from forest glade to burning plain to wide glimmering sea. Buckler, though writing after Honan's articles of 1971 and 1978, adopts a position that insulates his interpretation from biographical pressures, challenging the "myth that Arnold's poetry, in its general outline as well as in its details, can be adequately apprehended as autobiographically replicative." "Marguerite" need not be "a real person who precipitated a real identity crisis in the real Matthew Arnold" (2). Buckler is equally dismissive of two other "myths" about Arnold's poetry: first, that his is a poetry of statement rather than of dramatic and metaphoric textures; and second, that he lacks true poetic imagination. This allows him to read the *Switzerland* poems essentially as dramatic monologues, inviting us to see the speaker as a persona interesting because of a "strange consciousness," not as the man Arnold winning control over his personal emotional experience. More even than Culler's, Buckler's interpretation wrings a story out of the poems themselves without reference to Arnold's comings and goings, or to the letters and diaries of Arnold, his family, and his circle. Understood this way, the *Switzerland* poems "constitute a monodrama that moves the consciousness along a series of lyric voicings that gradually yield to the lyric the character of an intensely registered dramatic piece" (68).

Now to argue either that Arnold's creation of varied persona whose self-revealed oddities are of more impor-

tance than their statements about life, as does Buckler, or that that poetry is best interpreted against the background of a triptych of mental landscapes, in the manner of Culler, is hardly to limit comment to the poems themselves. But given that no reader interested in a poet is ever content to stop with interpretation of each separate poem, it is much more salutary to seek to erect such larger patterns out of the works themselves than to try to mediate between worlds of discourse created within literary texts and the physical, intellectual, and emotional events we are able to reconstruct in the life of the author.

The interpreter constructs worlds of discourse out of bounded materials—texts meant to be read and understood as wholes together with the public context these could evoke for readers of the time. The biographer, however, must rely heavily on chance-preserved correspondence and diaries, the necessary interpretive context of which can only be fragmentarily known since it was not a public one. Having achieved an interpretation of the meaning of a text, we may well move on to significance (biographical or other), but the pursuit of information not part of the interpretive context assumed by the author cannot illuminate textual meaning.

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The Dover Glitch: Soul à la Sole

Nathan Cervo

In "*The Dover Bitch: Victorian Duck or Modernist Duck/Rabbit?*" (VN 73 [Spring 1988]: 8-10), Gerhard Joseph argues in favor of "the Heraclitian flux of all texts" (10) and "some version or other of a reader-response ethos" (10). According to him, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" represents "Victorianism," which he equates with univocal meaning, whereas Anthony Hecht's "The Dover Bitch" signifies "Modernist and Post-Modernist indeterminacy"

(10). He uses a rather ambiguous (to my mind the same thing as ill-executed) drawing, which may be interpreted as either a duck or a rabbit, as the touchstone by which we are to judge in these important matters. For him, the drawing is "equivocal" or "open," just as, presumably, Modernism and Postmodernism are. According to Joseph, one's reading of Hecht's poem depends on the values that the reader ascribes to Hecht. Since these values are ultimately unfa-

thomable within the context of the poem, the reader should leave the matter open and fill the void with his or her own discernment of duck or rabbit lineaments in the poem itself. Joseph goes still further. Like Kincaid, he wants "to keep the carnivalesque play of textual beasts alive" (10), and this is well, given his penchant for the ambiguous, since the drawing may be interpreted to be that of a kangaroo and sea gull as well. And even with these there is no end.

In effect, Joseph wishes us to treat the poetic text as some sort of Rorschach test, with the author's "intentionalism" (10) giving way to the reader's self-indulgence. What Joseph calls "hermeneuticism" somebody else might call literary onanism.

To my mind, a reader of Victorian poetry who pursues Joseph's rather strange ideas concerning the Heraclitian flux, the hermeneutics of radical ambiguity, "reader-response ethos," and Modernism and Postmodernism will find himself or herself pretty much in the same hungry state as Buridan's donkey, who starved to death between two equally appetizing bales of hay.

In what follows, I shall consider each of the key ideas mentioned above. I shall do so briefly but, I hope, in a way sufficient to my purpose, which is to argue that the only legitimate ethical response to a given piece of Victorian poetry is to try to understand the author's intention within the historical context of the materials available to him or her.

First of all, I should like to point to a certain irony in Joseph's duck and duck/rabbit ruse, because if duck there must be in the harebrained (mercurial) realms of Philonian hermeneutics it is the imprinted hermeneut himself. And upon what is he imprinted? Well, quite obviously upon a system of personal identification and response from which he finds it impossible to withdraw himself. Instead he prefers to assimilate the really and truly alien, the threatening other, within the domain of what I can only call obdurate prejudice. But, be this as it may, the figure of a duck seems to me singularly inappropriate to Joseph's argument, which relies on parody for its major point. Might I suggest a chimpanzee or other low mimetic beast (of the "text") as really closer to the center of Joseph's meaning. Indeed, it is pretty much as a chimpanzee that the poet of "The Dover Bitch" presents himself to our attention, in his Sweeney Erect (T. S. Eliot) role of mauling not only Arnold's poem but Arnold himself by making himself contemporary to Arnold and bragging that he has enjoyed the poet's muse (figured as a tawdry tart). If Joseph sees ambiguity here, well then perhaps his values are not Arnold's, nor Hecht's, nor indeed those of the Western ethical tradition. To be quite frank, one is left wondering whether Joseph is prepared to admit that psychopaths do not make the best readers.

When Joseph speaks of "the carnivalesque play of textual beasts," one is thrown upon one's normative resources to determine his meaning. Does he mean to allude to Carnival in "carnivalesque"? Does he wish the idea to retain its traditional pre-Lenten religious meaning? Does he wish to dismiss all literary texts to the status of dionysian masqueraders? If so, what does he intend by the Dionysus-figure? Are the texts ultimately a masquerade for one en-

tity? These are among the many ideas that suggest themselves when one encounters Joseph's case for the Heraclitian flux. Does this flux have any significant content? Does it resolve itself finally to a species of Alexandrian solipsism posing as the Theosophic Sublime? If the flux lacks content, is one supposed to infer that Joseph's real subject is not hermeneutics but archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, which transcends all mundane attempts at meaning?

In *The Christian Archetype*, Edward F. Edinger writes something that may be to the point here, if the analogous identity of meaning and Christ may be allowed, simply as a maieutic device:

With the arrest of Christ not only does the fickle crowd betray him, which is to be expected, but also one of his disciples. Betrayal is a theme of individuation because it pertains to the phenomenology of opposites. It is another word for enantiodromia. In a situation of conflict between opposing values an individual reverses allegiance and opens the gates to the enemy. The traitor has always been despised by both sides because he violates a "sacred" value of collective psychology, namely, fidelity to identity with the group. (82-83)

In a footnote, Edinger adds: "Enantiodromia means a 'running counter to.' In the philosophy of Heraclitus it is used to designate the play of opposites in the course of events—the view that everything that exists turns into its opposite." (Jung, "Definitions," *Psychological Types*. CW 6, par. 708). In effect, what I am suggesting is that Joseph refuses to identify with the group (i.e. traditional normative Victorian scholars) and resorts to the "carnivalesque" aspect of the "Heraclitian flux" to suggest that meaning is self-cancelling, since it is the fate of all things, or idols, to turn into their opposites. Thus Arnold's "Dover Beach" turns into Hecht's "The Dover Bitch." However, I myself remain unconvinced that this is true; and Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit notwithstanding, I believe that Hecht complements Arnold's meaning. He does not invert it.

It seems clear to me that Joseph's "hermeneutics of radical ambiguity" is calculated to pillage "Victorianism" of its meaning. Since meaning, as Joseph intends the concept, is a communal enterprise, what is being undermined is a traditional sense of belongingness. Whether Joseph is ideally suited to bore from within is unknown to me. Whether, indeed, he wishes to do so is likewise unknown. But what is known to me is that, in effect, this is precisely what he intends to do by reducing communality of reading to a "reader-response ethos." The word "ethos" is very revealing. Why, of the several defined and discussed by Aristotle, is *ethos* (character) given such solitary privilege? What of *mythos* (narration), *lexis* (diction), and *dianoia* (discursive thought)? Is, in Joseph's view, as Novalis said, character fate? If so, does not a curious fatalism emanate from Joseph's mind here to unremittingly invest his real subject?

As I said, I mean to be brief; but what Joseph has to say about "Modernist and Post-Modernist indeterminacy" requires me to be both daring and a bit longwinded. Joseph writes:

It is not merely that we today "see" indeterminacy everywhere, but that the mark of the "modern" and the "post-modern" is the

cultivation of "open" as opposed to "closed" meaning, whether the source of that meaning is said to be in the reader, writer, or depersonalized "text." (10)

I am aware that Joseph is working from within the cultus of the writers whom he specifically names in his essay; but that cultus is not my cultus, and I would hardly use "Modern" and "Post-Modern" in similar ways. To my mind, Modernism cannot be separated from its definition by Pope Pius X in the papal encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which is pretty much the same definition given by the so-called Modernist James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I translate Joyce's Latin formulation of the idea thus: "The times, they are achanging, and we are being changed in them." In other words, human nature is viewed to be no more than a cultural or environmental outcome. Indeed, as Existentialists like Heidegger were to infer from such premises, there is no such thing as human nature; only individual centers of consciousness and adaptive energy. Modernism stresses that each "human" individual is an accretion and modification of the times. Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness approach to literature equaled her approach to life. The two were not essentially different. Indeed, "essence" was perceived by Modernism to be just another Medieval aberration. In Joseph's argument, "meaning" is "open" because it is a construct of a certain flow of experience in its activity on the psyche qua kaleidoscopic buildup. All "meanings" are *de facto* "open" in the sense that they are individual mandates of estuarylike incursions of mechanistic consciousness. The inevitable epistemological concomitant is *quot homines, tot sententiae* ("There are as many opinions as there are men"). Basically, this is what Joseph means by "reader-response ethos."

However, it seems to me that Joseph is uncomfortable with such a completely materialistic, or Marxist, epistemological charade. This is why he lumps Modernism with Post-Modernism and describes them both as "open," as opposed to the "closed" (univocal) meaning of Victorianism. But, to my mind, Modernism and Post-Modernism are not "open" in the same way. Indeed, Post-Modernism is "open" to non-Modernistic avenues of knowledge. Among these avenues is the most radical kind of religious obscurantism which holds that gnosis (special knowledge) is a given of the soul and abides within it, immune to the influence of assorted idols—among which may be included literary constructs of every kind. To deconstruct literary texts is thus perceived to be a pious act. Another non-Modernistic avenue to the object of authentically human knowledge is the tradition, the best that was thought, felt, and expressed by our fellow man. To my mind, Joseph opts for the former avenue, for he seems to hold that the content of Western tradition, or "Victorianism," is itself the construct of presumptuous people. He thus illustrates in his own concerns and person Marshall McLuhan's axiom, "When change itself becomes the staple or *ground* of our lives, the central *figure* will be an antique." (104)

Joseph's "antique" may well have much in common with the Ineffable God of the Alexandrian School of the Gnostics which, inspired by Philo Judaeus, included certain not altogether Gnostic sympathizers like Origen, Clement, and

Augustine. Jung sought the "antique" in pretty much the same place, and his idea of the archetypes postulates a kind of spiritual imprinting that remains a sanctuary within the "Heraclitian flux" of the times.

I deeply sympathize with Joseph's anxieties about "Victorianism," but I do not believe that "Victorianism" is a system of "closed" meaning, like an Old Boy Club. I do not believe that "Victorian" poetry is univocal in the ways that it can reach and affect the whole person. Like all poetry, Victorian poetry is a complex of many discourses; among them, the narrative (mythic), the philosophical (dianoetic), and yes, the archetypal (akin in my mind to Aristotle's *odos* ("song")). There is even room for biographical background in its study.

I can appreciate Joseph's malaise concerning the fact that "we today 'see' indeterminacy everywhere" (10). We are a visual society. As McLuhan has pointed out, we have farmed out our senses, and little do we see that is ours (to allude to Wordsworth here). We are golems constructed by the mass media; but this recognition does not call for despair. It does not call for an infinite deferral of assent. What it calls for, it seems to me, is more *literae humaniores*, more education (instead of training), more culture (instead of acculturation), more "Victorianism" (instead of detribalized, fragmented, point-of-view, alienated Modernism), more consensus (instead of demoralized and intimidated insight). To be sure, the content of our individual knowledge is increasingly taking on the ethos of an electrified tic or glitch, but that is no reason why we should give up on the soul, our own or the souls of others; no reason why we should give up and admit that the soul is only the psyche, and the psyche no more than a bit of chewing gum picking up debris as we step through life and affixing it in a lump to our sole.

More light, therefore! More "Victorianism"! More Dover soul!

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Franklin Pierce College

Response to Nathan Cervo

Gerhard Joseph

It is difficult to know what tone to take in responding to an essay that accuses one of practicing “literary onanism,” of being at home in the readerly company of Christ’s betrayers and of psychopaths more generally (if not actually having the morals of one of the latter), and of not being able properly to draw a duck or rabbit. Surely such vehemence intimates a larger agenda about which I won’t speculate. At any rate, intemperance to one side, Nathan Cervo’s argument strikes me as highly elliptical in some of its local effects and as a slightly garbled redaction of what I thought I wrote, replete with misquotation (I would hope myself incapable of using such a word as “hermeneuticism” or of referring to an author’s—as distinct from a theorist’s—“intentionalism”).

Still, whatever his excesses and errors, Cervo comes from a principled position that deserves to be taken seriously. His major thrust is clear enough: he thinks that reader-response theory, and particularly my version of it reliant upon the Wittgenstein duck/rabbit oscillation, is not merely intellectually flawed but downright immoral in its self-indulgence and solipsism—a throwback, ultimately, to some early Gnostic heresies. For him, “the only legitimate ethical response to a given piece of Victorian poetry is to try to understand the author’s intention within the historical context of the materials available to him or her.” It’s an old argument by now, of course, for both sides—to accept the binary opposition implicit in Cervo’s “only” for the sake of this exchange; it seems rather late in the day to rehearse once again the vexed question of whether one can get at literary “intention” in a relatively unmediated way (not to mention the clouds that for some envelop the very idea of “author” and “historical context” these days). Certainly, the intentions Cervo attributes specifically to me—a pillaging of “Victorianism” of its meaning, the denial of the operation of an interpretive community—are not ones I recognize or would acknowledge. With respect to the latter issue, I find perfectly convincing Stanley Fish’s notion of an ever-evolving interpretive community for whom literary meaning develops out of the changing consensus of individual persuasive readers. To be consistent, of course, I don’t privilege my “intention”: “Nathan Cervo” is as free to tease his inferences out of his perception/construction of “Gerhard Joseph” as “I,” interpreting my earlier words in light of his charges, hereby deny such implications in the semiosis of this textual exchange. (And I would want those quotation marks to stand for the discursive nature of all proper names and their pronouns throughout such an exchange.) Not that a sophisticated theoretical defense of authorial intention and agency cannot be and has not been made even in these pan-textualist times by the likes of E. D. Hirsch Jr., Walter Benn Michaels, Stephen Knapp,—as

well as the Christopher Ricks, whose admirably nuanced univocal reading of “The Dover Bitch” I specifically detailed. Those who find a centered Cartesian consciousness (or, for that matter, Cervo’s theological “soul”) a necessary, available, and epistemologically inevitable bottom line must and will take their stand on such ground, which they conceive of as firm. As for me, I career endlessly in un-Sophoclean imbalance between the primacy of non-agential discursiveness and the primacy of intending human agent, another synchronic duck/rabbit—or is it diachronic chicken-and-egg?—question if ever there was one: writer, reader, and text separately and as a group seem an uncohering “bundle of fragments,” as Arnold described himself and the world in a letter to his sister Jane. And if principled antagonists of *rezeptionaesthetik* insist, as Cervo does, upon reaching for the cudgel of ethical superiority, the trouble with the categorical intentionalist position is the intolerant assurance that it sometimes generates within its adherents that they can read and judge with privileged certainty other people’s univocal, coherent intention and value set: i.e., “If Joseph sees ambiguity [in “The Dover Bitch”], well then perhaps his values are not Arnold’s, nor Hecht’s, nor indeed those of the Western ethical tradition. [Cervo’s, I take it, are.] To be quite frank, one is left wondering whether Joseph is prepared to admit that psychopaths do not make the best readers.” Well, no, they perhaps as a group do not, though the proof is in the reading not someone’s prejudging characterization of the reader: readings (and thus readers) I find to be “sane” are always more persuasive than ones that strike me as insane, which suggests the circularity of the matter. But then, to be as frank as Cervo, there are various forms of critical pathology, if one must sink to such usage. And if an opening of the interpretive floodgates to the anarchic play of the signifier may arguably be one of them, another is surely the self-righteous moralism that claims, among its other certitudes, the knowledge of a single undifferentiated “Western ethical tradition” to which some readers of a given poem do and others do not adhere.

But one shouldn’t be ungrateful to Cervo. For what this exchange best demonstrates is the bracing certainty that Wittgenstein’s duck/rabbit/seagull/kangaroo/chimpanzee ... (not to mention “Dover Beach”) keeps right on abreeding in its protean and wayward fashion. That’s of course my unrepentant “low mimetic” way, if Cervo wishes, of describing what Arnold in a more elevated frame of mind saw as one of the functions of criticism at the continuously present time—the encouragement of a communal “free play of the mind.” The italics, to be sure, are mine.

Lehman College and the Graduate School, CUNY

“Why Can’t A Duck Be More Like A Rabbit?”

Tom Hayes

I would like to add the following comments to the controversy concerning the indeterminacy of texts as represented by Arnold's *Dover Beach* and Hecht's *Dover Bitch*. It seems to me that what is left out of *both* poems, as well as Gerhard Joseph's essay, Nathan Cervo's critique, and Joseph's response is a recognition of the absence of *the voice of the woman*. In his essay Joseph called attention to the compelling monovocality of Arnold's poem, but he neglected to point out that it is a decidedly *patriarchal* voice, one with which we white men are all too familiar. It is smug, but at the same time self-doubting, pouting, even whining, one that revels in its neediness, its helplessness before that public thing called “fate” that Victorian men loved to hate, much in the same way they hated to love that private thing, the body of the woman. Arnold's poem may in fact be read as an exemplary voicing of the bourgeois society's consignment of women to the role of subordinate (m)other.

Hecht's speaker updates this voice and stresses the other side of the oxymoronic madonna/whore view of women. Here the woman is an objectified sexual object for which the speaker has an easy tolerance so long as she is subordinate, more to be pitied than chastised. By adopting a modernist tone of liberated sexuality Hecht's speaker places the genteel voice of liberal patriarchy in question. The speaker—still a decidedly masculine voice—strives to move beyond bourgeois morality, the morality of repressive “coupledom.” But he has not yet had a chance to read Foucault. In his sixties-generation mode of discourse he *reports* what “the girl” said, but she still does not—is not allowed—to speak for herself. And we are left to wonder—to “make up”—what she would say. (Curiously enough, the editors of the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature* state in a footnote to Arnold's poem that Hecht's poem rewrites Arnold's “from the young lady's point of view.” When I teach these poems I ask students to do what neither poem does—write out what the woman might say. The answers, especially those from women, are often *more* critical of Hecht's speaker than Arnold's, possibly for the same reason that Derrida attracts more fire from feminists than, say, Wayne Booth.)

My point is that in *both* poems the story is told entirely from a man's point of view—from a masculinist point of view. One might be said to see woman as a duck and the

other sees her as a rabbit, but in *both* cases the woman is an objectified Other. What this means in terms of the Joseph/Cervo debate is that it is not useful to try to treat a poem as a Rorschach test because an ink blot is not made of words and is not “authored” in the way a poem is in the Western literary tradition. (However, as Gombrich has noted, even Rorschach ink blots are not free of metaphysical assumptions. Their symmetry, for example, has a particular “value” in western aesthetics.) But Cervo is correct when he says that Hecht's poem complements the dominant readings of Arnold's poem instead of inverting them. I would go even further and argue that Hecht's poem appropriates the feminine voice more insidiously than Arnold's does. The speaker in Arnold's poem is transparently vulnerable. He presents a facade of masculinist bravura, but he is weak and dependent and we can now hear this in the poem. In Hecht's poem the speaker *pretends* to be beyond all that, but his voice is as misogynistic as Arnold's. In other words in his libertine sophistication the speaker of Hecht's poem hears the voice in Arnold's poem as that of a fatuous ass, but what he ignores are the masculinist implications of the fact that he himself *enjoys* thinking he is a son of a bitch. (He pridefully points out that “the girl” “always treats me right” and he always gives her a good time.)

We, as bourgeois white male academics, are still, to a greater or lesser degree, inside that discourse and therefore we have trouble “hearing” it. But if we listen to what feminists tell us about the way they hear it we can learn how *not* to echo it. We can learn that one of the goals of postmodernism, of “theory,” is to hear feminine as well as “other” voices. Cervo seems to want to silence these voices. Joseph wants to open the way for a plurality of voices. I would trace the genealogy of that pluralism and locate it historically, thereby demystifying its politics and point out that those politics serve the interests of the dominant (masculinist) culture. It does not make a difference whether one sees a duck or a rabbit (or a seagull or any other animal) so long as those differences are framed in the discourses of patriarchy. The task of literary criticism should be to find ways to recognize those discourses and move beyond them.

Baruch College and The Graduate Center, CUNY

Books Received

- Chittick, Kathryn. *The Critical Reception of Charles Dickens 1833-1841*. New York and London: Garland, 1989. Pp. xvi + 277. \$35.00. "The bibliography is divided into three parts. The first . . . is a chronological listing of the periodical criticism [in approximately 120 periodicals], which begins with an overview of such criticism from 1814 to 1841, and then, concentrates on those reviews, excerpts, and essays that deal directly with Dickens for the years 1833 to 1841. The next . . . gives the reviews of Dickens according to the titles of his works. The third . . . detailed information about the volumes and issues canvassed and any specifically pertinent facts about the nature of each periodical and its reviewing" (x).
- Chitty, Susan. *That Singular Person Called Lear: A Biography of Edward Lear, Artist, Traveller, and Prince of Nonsense*. New York: Atheneum, 1989. Pp. xiv + 305. \$18.95. "My justification for producing a third biography is as follows. Much more is now known of Lear's immensely complicated personality, and in particular of his homosexuality. . . . Lear spent the greater part of his life travelling, and any book about him is in danger of degenerating into a travelogue. My policy has therefore been to enter into the details of a journey only occasionally, and to write fully about one journey in particular. This journey Lear made to Arcadia with Franklin Lushington the year he met him, 1849" (xi).
- Clubbe, John and Jerome Meckier, eds. *Victorian Perspectives: Six Essays*. Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 1989. Pp. xiii + 156. \$32.00. Essays by Richard Altick, Jerome Buckley, David DeLaura, George Landow, Hillis Miller, and Donald Stone: "The Comedy of *Culture and Anarchy*"; "The View from John Street: Richard Whiteing's Social Realism"; "Ruskin, Arnold and Browning's Grammarian: 'Crowded with Culture'"; "Elegant Jeremiahs: The Genre of the Victorian Sage"; "'Hieroglyphical Truth' in *Sartor Resartus*: Carlyle and the Language of Parable"; "Prodigals and Prodigies: Trollope's Notes as a Son and Father" respectively.
- Helmling, Steven. *The Esoteric Comedies of Carlyle, Newman, and Yeats*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp. xi + 273. \$34.50. Includes an Introduction and Conclusion and chapters on *Sartor Resartus*, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, and *A Vision*. "I am interested in those moments when sagely poses are parodied or inverted or laid aside, and we hear instead the accents of the mock sage, the mock fool, or even the mock 'common man' talking of esoteric matters that the common reader will regard as foolish, in tones mock pompous, mock silly, or mock sensible" (4).
- Holt, Lee E. *Samuel Butler, Revised Edition*. Twayne's English Author's Series. Boston: Twayne, 1989. Pp. [vi] + 154. \$18.95. "I have based my study on certain psychological deductions regarding the genesis of [Butler's] originality. . . . Since this study first appeared in 1964 much important work has been done on Butler. In this revision I have used as much of the recent work as I could . . ." ([iii]).
- Mitchell, Sally, ed. *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*. Pp. xxi + 986. \$125.00. "The signed articles, which cover persons, events, institutions, topics, groups, and artifacts in Great Britain between 1837 and 1901, have been written by authorities in the field and contain bibliographies to provide guidance for further research. . . . Articles on concepts or institutions cover only the significant Victorian changes, developments, and influence. The entries focus on Britain, including Ireland, with attention to the colonies and empire as significant aspects of Victorian experience at home" (ix). "Cross-references are provided. . . . The index includes mentions too minor for cross-references. . . . The bibliography for each entry includes the secondary sources that are considered standard, the most authoritative recent work, and (where they exist) those books or articles that contain extensive bibliographies" (x). Includes an 11 pp. chronology and 41 illustrations. A fine piece of work; indispensable.
- Perlis, Alan D. *A Return to the Primal Self: Identity in the Fiction of George Eliot*. American University Studies Series IV, English Language and Literature, v. 71. New York: Peter Lang, 1989. Pp. 215. \$35.50. Argues "that Eliot juxtaposes characters whose egos, and whose deeds originating in short-sighted egoistic demands, ultimately destroy them, with those who sense a primal sympathy with their own past, thus creating an unbroken personal history and subsequently finding considerable happiness" (1-2).
- Platzky, Roger S. *A Blueprint of His Dissent: Madness and Method in Tennyson's Poetry*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP; London and Toronto: Associated UPs, 1989. Pp. 137. \$25.00. ". . . I have explored the variety of methods Tennyson uses to make the language of his poetry on madness psychologically dynamic, and on whether his characterizations of madness indicate a view that is conservative (i.e., culturally normative) or more subversive (i.e., critical of cultural norms) than is generally thought. To illustrate this study, I have focused on five poems—'St. Simeon Stylites' (1833), *Maud* (1855), 'Lucretius' (1868), 'Rizpah' (1880), and 'Romney's Remorse' (1889)" (12).
- Raby, Peter. *Oscar Wilde*. British and Irish Authors Series. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp. ix + 164. \$34.50 (cloth), \$12.95 (paper). "This introduction to Wilde's writing is based on a conviction that dramatic form, and the dramatic mode, are the unifying factors in his work" (vii).
- Shelley, Mary and P. B. Shelley. *History of a Six Weeks' Tour 1817*. A Woodstock Facsimile. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989. Pp. 183. \$40.00.
- Stetz, Margaret D. and Mark Samuels Lasner. *England in the 1880s: Old Guard and Avant-Garde*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989. Pp. xii + 139. \$28.50 (paper). Includes chapters on The Old Guard, The Aesthetes, The New Fiction, Romance Writers, The Impact of Empire, Zealots and Eccentrics, Irish Voices, Women and the Woman Question, and The Theater.

Victorian Group News

Announcements

THE NORTHEAST VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION will hold its Sixteenth Annual Conference at Princeton University on April 20-22, 1990. The topic is DISGUISES, DREAMS, and DECEPTIONS. Ten copies of the 2-3 pp. ABSTRACT of the proposed paper should be sent to Dr. L. M. Shires, English Department, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13210, by Oct. 11, 1989.

The Arnoldian has changed its name to *Nineteenth-Century Prose* and is moving from the U. S. Naval Academy to Mesa State College. The journal publishes articles and notes on non-fiction writers. Though the focus has been on British authors, the editors welcome manuscripts on American and Continental figures as well. Rates for two semi-annual numbers are \$9/individual, \$22/institution. A special three-year rate is also available: \$25/individual, \$60/institution. Business correspondence and submissions should be sent to The Editors, *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Department of Literature and Languages, Mesa State College, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

The Conference on British Studies Biography Series, which was published by the Archon Division of Shoestring Press, has been moved to Indiana University Press. Professors Paul Scherer and Roy Schreiber of Indiana University at South Bend are the editors.

Anyone who has a suitable biography should keep in mind the following:

1. The printed book should be approximately 250 pp.
2. Any area of British history will be considered, but the subject should be of some eminence for the period.
3. Figures that have importance beyond British history alone are of particular interest. These areas could include empire, colonies, or the continent. Those figures that played roles in the history of women, science, music, art, or literature also will be considered.
4. The style of the writing as well as the quality of the scholarship will be considered.

Those who have a manuscript for consideration should send an outline of the proposed work and an introduction or sample chapter to:

Professors Scherer and Schreiber
Department of History
Indiana University
1700 Mishawaka Avenue
South Bend, IN 46615

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