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Cover: On the centennial of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Max Beerbohm's caricature of Oscar Wilde

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Following the Thread: Dickens and the Seamstress

Lynn M. Alexander

Charles Dickens has long been acknowledged as a primary figure in Victorian social-protest fiction, yet many of the discussions of his work are hampered by the narrow approach scholars often feel constrained to use. For example, when dealing with *Hard Times* a critic will often focus on Dickens's sources for his portrayal of the Preston riots or of Stephen Blackpool, rather than the role each plays within the literary context.¹ Similarly, when studying *Little Dorrit*, the Circumlocution Office or Marshalsea Prison often is studied in isolation, not as a part of a larger picture.² When this occurs the worst fears of critics such as Edward Pechter come true: the literary text is put in a secondary position to the social-historical text as the critic focuses his attention on the text's verisimilitude, or lack of it. According to Pechter, this preeminence gives a fixed view of history. He further objects that:

History does not tell us what the text is, because we decide what history is, and then put history into the text, rather than the other way around. Or maybe it is better to say that we "recover" the text and history at the same time, but again in the sense of not finding what was lost out there but of adding our own needs and desires—coating anew, recovering the text in a Barthesian manner of our own. (298)

René Wellek also tried to put literary and historical relationships into perspective when he argued that

Literature is not merely the passive reflection or copy of the political, social, or even intellectual development of mankind. It is, no doubt, in constant interrelation with all the other activities. It is influenced by them profoundly, and (what is frequently forgotten) it influences them. But literature has its own autonomous development irreducible to any other activity or even to a sum of all these activities. (79-80)

Such a perspective necessitates is an historical perspective, but one in which the text as literature dominates the text as social history. The point is that comparisons with history add insight, but the critic must never forget he is reading fiction, with all the freedoms the genre allows the author. By studying Dickens's fiction as fiction we can gain historical, social, and literary insights.

One way to circumvent the tendency to read Dickens as an historical roman à cléf, yet still gain insight into the works within their historical context, is to look for recurrent themes, characters, or images in Dickens's canon, exploring changes and developments within a range of literary works. An exam-

ple of this approach can be made with the figure of the seamstress, an image which occurs in seven of Dickens's fiction works, beginning with *Sketches by Boz* in 1836 and ending with *The Uncommercial Traveller* in 1860, and in numerous journal articles either written or edited by Dickens, thus providing a series of portrayals and opportunities for study. Four of the examples are little more than brief sketches, while three are more fully developed. But as a recurrent figure the seamstress assumes importance because she reflects Dickens's, and society's, interest in the fate of these young women.

Dickens's first seamstress, Miss Martin in "The Mistaken Milliner—A Tale of Ambition" (1836), is a picture of all the prejudices concerning millinery³ shop owners commonly held during the early Victorian era. In this story Dickens creates a character greedy for both monetary and social gain. Miss Martin is a working-class woman who is never content with what she has, and who attempts to gain wealth and status by becoming a singing star. The story is a moral tale about misdirected ambition, but it reflects several beliefs about dressmakers commonly held in the first half of the nineteenth century: that they are well-paid but never satisfied, always looking for a way of moving up socially, usually by taking advantage of someone else. This view of the seamstress was held by other Victorian reformers as well. Over a decade later, long after Dickens had altered his opinion of seamstresses, Thomas Carlyle wrote:

no needlewoman, distressed or other, can be procured in London by any housewife to give, for fair wages, fair help in sewing. Ask any thrifty housemother. No *real* needlewoman, "distressed" or other, has been found attainable in any of the houses I frequent. Imaginary needlewomen, who demand considerable wages, and have a deepish appetite for beef and viands, I hear of everywhere. (qtd. in Mayhew 27-28)

Carlyle's attitude reflects the lack of knowledge typical of middle-class Victorians during the first half of the century; it was an attitude that Dickens, soon perceiving it as false, tried to counter in his fiction.

Thus when Dickens returns to the seamstress with the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*, three years later, his portrayal of needlewomen is somewhat different than in "The Mistaken Milliner." Early in the novel, when economic circumstance forces Nicholas and Kate Nickleby to find employment, their uncle secures Kate a position with a London milliner. When Ralph Nickleby informs Kate's mother that "'Dressmakers in London as I need not remind you, ma'am, who are so well acquainted with all matters in the ordinary routine of life, make large fortunes, keep equipages, and

¹ See, for example, Bloom, Coles, Fabrizio, Jefferson, Spector.

² See, for example, Altick, Cotsell, Zinkhan. Usually a larger discussion of theme or characterization is found only in works presenting an overview of several writers, such as Bodenheimer, Cazamian, or Leavis.

³ Although technically a "dressmaker" made dresses and a "milliner" headgear, most shops made entire outfits encompassing both so that the terms become interchangeable. The shops were usually referred to as millinery establishments.

become persons of great wealth and fortune” (121), he is reflecting Dickens’s earlier attitude, and that of most upper-class Victorians.

Yet despite the assurances given by Kate’s uncle, it is through a conversation the uncle has with Kate that Dickens allowed Victorian readers to glimpse, for the first time, the reality of the dressmaker’s existence: “‘You will live, to all intents and purposes, here [at the dress shop], . . . for here you will take your meals, and here you will be from morning till night—occasionally perhaps till morning again” (124). This initial suggestion of adverse working conditions is reinforced when Kate notes the physical effects of the occupation upon the young women as she walks to work her first morning at the shop:

At this early hour many sickly girls, whose business, like that of poor worms, is to produce, with patient toil, the finery that bedecks the thoughtless and luxurious, traverse our streets, making towards the scene of their daily labour, and catching, as if by stealth, in their hurried walk, the only gasp of the wholesome air and glimpse of sunlight which cheers their monotonous existence during the long train of hours that make a working day. As she drew nigh to the more fashionable quarter of town, Kate marked many of this class as they passed by, hurrying like herself to their painful occupation, and saw, in their unhealthy looks and feeble gait, but too clear evidence that her misgivings were not wholly groundless. (208)

Although Kate observes the effects of dressmaking upon women, she does not experience them herself since the shop where she works soon closes. Dickens provided Victorians, through Kate’s brief encounter, with their first indications of the harsh conditions faced by dressmakers and milliners and contradicted many of the long-standing misconceptions about the occupation and those who practiced it. Within Kate Nickleby’s brief stint as a seamstress Dickens demonstrates that the image of a dressmaker as a person of wealth, and therefore of power, was a false one. In reality the job of seamstress is among the most lowly, like that of a worm albeit a silkworm. Although Dickens’s presentation of the plight of the seamstress was one of the first presented to Victorian readers, his subsequent presentations reflect a growing awareness of and continued concern for these young women.

Dickens’s next seamstress, Martha Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), is also encountered only briefly. As part of the Cratchit family she is shown to be industrious and honorable. As a seamstress she gives a glimpse into the long hours and uncertain holidays—her father is disappointed but not surprised when told she must work on Christmas—faced by “a poor apprentice at a milliner’s” (48). And although the Cratchits are of the working rather than middle class, Martha is a reflection of Dickens’s growing awareness of working-class conditions overall and a personal involvement in its problems. For example, that same year Dickens had begun a

long series of addresses for the working classes, speaking to the Printers’s Pension Society, the Hospital for Consumption and Disease of the Chest, the Charitable Society for the Deaf and Dumb, the Sanatorium, and the Athenaeum⁴ (Oddie 108).

Part of Dickens’s increased interest in the working classes can be attributed to the fact that he, along with other Victorians, was forced to acknowledge the conditions faced by child laborers when *The Second Report of the Children’s Employment Commission* was published in 1843.⁵ Although the harsh conditions of factories and mines were, to a certain extent, already acknowledged, the detailed testimony of child laborers brought to light extremes that few Victorians ever imagined. But even more shocking to many Victorians, because more unexpected, were the testimonies of several young seamstresses. R. D. Grainger’s report on dressmakers and milliners revealed that there were 154,000 women employed in London millinery houses, many of them under age eighteen. The testimony Grainger recorded told of “inordinately long” hours, unsanitary working conditions, insufficient food, and renegeing on contracts. According to Grainger:

The evidence of all parties establishes the fact that there is no class of persons in this country, living by their labour, whose happiness, health and lives, are so unscrupulously sacrificed as those of the young dressmakers. They are, in a particular degree, unprotected and helpless, and I should fail in my duty if I did not distinctly state that, as a body, their employers have hitherto taken no steps to remedy the evils and misery which results from the existing system. . . . there are no occupations (other than exceptionally dangerous ones such as needlegrinding) in which so much disease is produced as in dressmaking, or which present so fearful a catalogue of distressing and frequently fatal maladies. (14: 30-33)

Dickens was moved by the report. It touched his imagination as well as his sense of compassion. On 6 March 1843 he wrote to Thomas Southwood Smith that he was “so perfectly stricken down by the blue book you have sent me” that he thought of bringing out a cheap pamphlet entitled “An Appeal to the People of England, on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child” (*Letters* 459). The pamphlet, however, never appeared. Instead, a year later, Dickens presented his strongest condemnation of the sufferings of the working classes in his Christmas story *The Chimes*.

It is not surprising that Dickens, like many other social protest novelists who followed, chose the seamstress as a representative victim of industrialization. With the seamstress Dickens found a character with whom his middle-class audience could sympathize, at times even empathize. For Dickens’s audience, the dressmaker or milliner was a familiar figure, a person whom they frequently encountered. And because she did not work in a factory, the seamstress escaped

⁴ The Athenaeum was a Manchester adult education society.

⁵ Other works documenting the conditions faced by needlewomen include Bell, Booth, and Milne.

the stigma, both social and moral, associated with factory work. The seamstress was also a good symbol for the working classes because of her universality. In Victorian England all women were taught to sew, regardless of their social class. Thus people reading about a woman sewing could identify with the character, either as women who sewed or as men whose mothers, wives, and sisters sewed. It was also likely that women readers would realize that because of the uncertain economy they could easily be placed in a similar situation. But perhaps most of all, unlike factory workers who were associated with strikes, violence, and fears of revolution, the seamstress was employed in a traditionally domestic occupation and thus associated with home and safety. In *The Chimes* Dickens uses the seamstress as the vehicle for his moral point, presenting her labor and suffering without explanation or support, but in graphic detail: bare rooms with only two chairs, one for each seamstress, long hours, constant fasting, and the seemingly inevitable slide into either prostitution or suicide. But more important to Dickens is the attitude of the middle and upper classes towards the poor. In Alderman Cute, he caricatures those in power who are full of knowledge and advice, who "[put] down" anything they cannot deal with:

"Now, I give you fair warning" [Cute tells Meg,] "that I have made up my mind to Put distressed wives Down. So, don't be brought before me. You'll have children—boys. Those boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict 'em summarily, every one, for I am determined to Put boys without shoes and stockings Down. Perhaps your husband will die young (most likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved to Put all wandering mothers Down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to Put Down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; or babies as an excuse with me; for all sick persons and young children (I hope you know the church-service, but I'm afraid not) I am determined to Put Down. And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt, to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity for you, for I have made up my mind to Put all suicide Down!" (98-99)

Dickens was equally harsh on wealthy patrons of charities who contributed for the power and prestige rather than out of kindness. When Trotty, a poor porter, delivers a message to Sir Joseph Bowley, his reception is a lesson for Dickens's readers—not only does "the Poor Man's Friend and Father"

deliver a sermon on the improvidence of the poor in falling behind in their rent, he then neglects to pay Trotty for his service. Dickens's message is clear: it is not enough for the rich and the powerful to talk about helping the poor, nor are the problems of the poor such that they can be easily fixed through judicial means, a system established by those in power to serve the powerful.

Dickens's skepticism of justice for the poor was increased by the case of Mary Furley, tried and sentenced for infanticide on 16 April 1844.⁶ Dickens's immediate response was the ironical "Threatening Letter to Thomas Hood, from an Ancient Gentleman, by favor of Charles Dickens," published in *Hood's Magazine and Comic Miscellany*:

Ah! governments were governments, and judges were judges, in my day, Mr Hood. There was no nonsense then. Any of your seditious complainings, and we were ready with the military at the shortest notice . . . Then, the judges were full of dignity and firmness, and knew how to administer the law. There is only one judge who knows how to do his duty, now. He tried that revolutionary female the other day, who, though she was in full work (making shirts at three-halfpence a piece), had no pride in her country, but treasonably took it in her head, in the distraction of having been robbed of her easy earnings, to attempt to drown herself and her young child; and the glorious man went out of his way, sir—out of his way—to call her up for instant sentence of Death; and to tell her she had no hope of mercy in this world—as you may see yourself if you look in the papers of Wednesday the 17th of April. He won't be supported, sir, I know he won't; crowds in every political parlour, beer-shop, news-room, and secret or open place of assembly, frequented by the discontented working men; and that no milk-and-water weakness on the part of the executive can ever blot them out. Great things like that, are caught up, and stored up, in these times, and are not forgotten, Mr Hood. The public at large (especially those who wish for peace and conciliation) are universally obliged to him. (409-410)

Dickens's letter helped fan a public outcry and Mary Furley's sentence was eventually commuted to seven years' transportation. But Dickens realized that the case was not an isolated one; the conditions which drove Mary Furley to desperate measures were faced by an increasing number of women. By using her story in *The Chimes*, Dickens reminded his readers of her plight, and the possible sufferings of other working-class women, and kept the lack of understanding and the injustice she experienced an issue after the case had faded from the newspapers. After the publication of *The Chimes*,

⁶ Meg's attempt in *The Chimes* to drown herself and her child in the Thames was derived from this case. Mary Furley and her two sons had been living in a workhouse, where the eldest child became ill and his head shaved by a drunk barber who nicked the child's head in several places, which became severely infected. When the infection on his head cleared up the child's eyes then became sore and "an eruption" appeared over his entire body. Furley blamed the latter on poor food, but was unable to obtain anything better in the workhouse, so she left. First she made shirts, but "as they only allowed 1 3/4 d. for a shirt, and by working hard she could only make three shirts a day" she decided to seek other work. She took what money she had to buy materials

necessary to make dress caps to sell, but when she arrived at the store she found her purse had been lost or stolen. Her aversion to reentering the workhouse was so great that she, while holding her youngest child, jumped off a bridge. A boatman saw her and pulled her out; she was alive, but her infant was dead. In his jury summation, Justice Maule argued that he could see no cause or provocation which could bring the crime under the denomination of manslaughter . . . The crime was not altered at all by the fact of her having attempted her own life at the same time that she destroyed that of her infant." The jury returned a guilty verdict, and the judge sentenced Mary Furley to death (*The Times* 8).

however, the seamstress disappears from Dickens's fiction for almost six years. This gap may be accounted for in various ways. Between 1844 and 1850 no less than a dozen novels and numerous articles and short pieces were published concerning the plight of needlewomen. Perhaps Dickens felt that the issue was being sufficiently publicized; perhaps the character simply did not fit in any of the fiction he was writing during the period; maybe he was waiting until he could offer some kind of solution to the problems besetting dressmakers. The portrayal of Little Em'ly in *David Copperfield*, Dickens's next seamstress, suggests the latter.

In 1848 a movement had begun to encourage impoverished families to emigrate to Australia with money provided through loan societies financed by the upper classes. During 1849 emigration was suggested as the logical solution to the "woman question," particularly for single women such as seamstresses who were viewed as morally wholesome, but under enormous pressure to fall into prostitution. One of the emigration societies founded in 1849, Sidney Herbert's Fund for Promoting Female Emigration, was specifically aimed at financing the emigration of London's distressed needlewomen, and on 25 February 1850, the first shipload of seamstresses left for Australia. That Dickens was aware of the emigration movement can be shown on two points. First, in the first issue of *Household Words*, and in at least five subsequent issues, Dickens published articles concerning the various loan societies, and Caroline Chisholm's Family Colonization Loan Society in particular. Second, he received from Elizabeth Gaskell the following letter dated 8 January 1850:

I am just now very much interested in a young girl, who is in our New Bayley [sic] prison. She is the daughter of an Irish clergyman who died when she was two years old; but even before that her mother had shown most complete indifference to her; . . . and when she was about 14, she was apprenticed to an Irish dress-maker here, of very great reputation for fashion. Last September but one this dress-maker failed, and had to dismiss all her apprentices; she placed this girl with a woman who occasionally worked for her, and she since succeeded to her business; this woman was very profligate and connived at the girl's seduction by a surgeon in the neighborhood who was called in when the poor creature was ill. . . . I want her to go out [to Australia] with as free and unbranded a character as she can; if possible, the very fact of having been in prison &c to be unknown on her landing. I will try and procure her friends when she arrives; . . . She is a good reader [,] writer, and a beautiful needlewoman; and we can pay all her expenses &c. (*Letters* 98-99)

At the time he received Gaskell's letter, Dickens was in the middle of writing *David Copperfield* and the letter apparently led him to a combining of Chisholm's concept of family emigration with the situation Gaskell described. The novel ends with the emigration of two families, the Micawbers and Peggotys. Micawber's rise to the magistracy and Peggoty's success as a sheepfarmer illustrate the wisdom of Chisholm's idea of family emigration, while the saving of Little Em'ly from further moral corruption echoes Gaskell's hopes for the

young girl described in her letter.

The saving of Little Em'ly is an important aspect of Dickens's fictional support of female emigration, because most societies took the same stand as that of the Sidney Herbert's Female Emigration Fund: "Before they [emigrating women] can receive aid from the Fund, their character must undergo a searching scrutiny. . . . The emigrants are girls, who, through privation and temptation, have opposed an honest and comparatively blameless life against the troubles of the world" (Dickens, "Rainy Day" 409). Dickens's portrait of a fallen woman redeeming herself after emigration can then be read as a suggestion that some leniency be allowed when deciding whom to support for emigration. But it would be a mistake to assume that he was advocating that any woman who wished to emigrate should be funded. In *David Copperfield* Little Em'ly's fall is tempered first by sympathy when she is verbally attacked by Rosa Dartle. For even if Victorian readers felt much the same as Miss Dartle, the venomous attack, combined with Em'ly's remorse, creates sympathy for Em'ly, as does her claim that Steerforth had "used all his power to deceive me, and that I believed him, trusted him, loved him!" (615). And by the close of the novel Em'ly has become a kind of ministering angel to the settlers in Australia—"fond of going any distance fur to teach a child, or fur to tend a sick person, or fur to do some kindness tow'rd's a young girl's wedding . . . patient; liked by young and old; sowl out by all that has any trouble" (744)—showing the benefits of emigration and suggesting that many times it is environment rather than personality which is responsible for a woman's fall into prostitution.

By the time Dickens was writing *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) the image of the seamstress was familiar to almost all readers of fiction, but Victorians also had begun to see her troubled situation as an unsolvable problem; for despite the articles and stories during the early 1850s praising various emigration schemes, reports from Australia soon made it obvious that emigration was not gong to be the salvation for working women that many had hoped. As early as 1851 some journals stopped writing about the emigration of these women and concentrated on what could be done in England to eliminate the hardships faced by needleworkers. "On the Best Means of Relieving the Needlewomen," published on 18 July 1851 in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, is typical of the articles appearing after 1850. First alluding to the number of stories about the seamstress which had been recounted, the article then presented a series of rhetorical questions indicating that conditions had not changed. Two stories of seamstresses with families forced into begging in order to avoid starvation are then recounted. The solution advocated by the *Journal* is that of women helping women, recognizing which houses abuse their workers and making such activity unprofitable:

It remains in the hands of our countrymen to do away with such bitter facts. . . . let them abandon the shops until they pay properly for labour, and seek out the workwomen themselves. By this means the shopkeepers will be compelled to pay their needlewomen and milliners, instead of extorting life with labour and rewarding it with a remuneration they would even themselves blush to own were they called upon to do so (191)

Dickens, however, did not follow this course. He continued to advocate emigration for the working classes, particularly single women. As late as April 1853 he published in *Household Words* a lengthy article praising a "Home for the reclamation and emigration of women," whose residents were predominantly needleworkers. Of the eight case studies presented, three are of seamstresses, and all stress the dire poverty faced by women trying to earn a living sewing ("Home" 169-175). In all the articles concerning emigration published in *Household Words*, only one, "A Digger's Diary," published 3 September 1853, sounded a warning to women considering emigration. The article concludes: "Certainly no respectable or even decent lodgings [abroad are available] for ladies, who want them immediately, and have no resident friends" (11). The fact that the article ends with this warning note only emphasizes its negative connotations. Dickens's reluctant admission that emigration might not be the solution to the problems facing needlewomen is finally made with the publication of "The Iron Seamstress" in *Household Words* on 11 February 1854. Although the article is primarily a description of a sewing machine, it opens with an overview of past and present conditions faced by seamstresses. In looking at the immediate past, the article praises the formation of Needlewomen's Benevolent Societies where "some few poor women were snatched from death . . . and hundreds of seamstresses were helped to shops that would carry them to comfortable homes." But as it continues, the article calls attention to the state of needlewomen remaining in England: "Here, the seamstresses are fewer, and have, of late, commanded higher wages. Still at the present moment, their prospects and experience are not of the brightest. Still the day's hard work brings only the coarsest food and the coldest home" (575). Yet the article is a positive one; it holds out hope that the "Iron Seamstress," the sewing machine, will "drive the seamstresses of (not much) flesh and blood to more remunerative employments" (576), suggesting that the sufferings of needlewomen may soon be a thing of the past.

Thus it is not surprising that in his 1855 novel, Dickens does not make Amy Dorrit's working conditions an issue, as he had made such issues in earlier works, but, instead, uses her as a vehicle to study the impact of financial failure on the middle class. His use of the seamstress in the novel assumes extensive knowledge on the part of the reader, and since the story centers around the family of a gentleman imprisoned for debt, the traditional association of the seamstress with impoverished gentility makes her the perfect vehicle for the female protagonist in his novel. Dickens does not bother to explain conditions, work hours, or wages, relying on such details being common knowledge from previous stories and articles about the occupation and trusting the reader to recall them when given subtle reminders. When telling the reader that Little Dorrit is a seamstress, the narrator reminds the reader of the poor wages with a brief parenthetical phrase: "Little Dorrit let herself out to do needlework. At so much a day—or at so little—from eight to eight" (51). Similarly the discussion between Little Dorrit and a milliner in the prison recalls the physical hardships of the occupation, while reinforcing the poor monetary gains:

She watched and waited months for a seamstress. In the

fullness of time a milliner came in, and to her she repaired on her own behalf. . . . "If you please I want to learn needlework."

"Why should you do that," returned the milliner, "with me before you? It has not done me much good. . . . I am afraid you are so weak, you see," the milliner objected. . . . "And you are so very, very little, you see," the milliner objected. (70)

Dickens also reminds his readers of the seamstress's need to remain respectable. In order to maintain an air of respectability Little Dorrit finds it "necessary to conceal where she lives and to come and go as secretly as she could," for if her life at Marshalsea Prison became known she would be unable to find fine work (75). Little Dorrit's need for secrecy piques the interest of the wealthy gentleman in the story, and his interest in her brings him in contact with her family and thus integrates the two threads of the narrative. Since needlework was one of the few occupations in Victorian England where the working poor could enter the home of the wealthy and have contact with them, the seamstress is an obvious choice when creating a novel intertwining the lives of destitute characters with those of wealthy ones.

Dickens's decision to use a seamstress may also have been influenced by the pressures of serial publication. For although she was the title character, Amy Dorrit did not appear in the first installment of the novel. In fact, there was much speculation as to the significance of the title, as illustrated by the *Athenaeum's* response to Amy Dorrit's belated appearance: "Let us say at once, that 'Little Dorrit' is not a broom, not a village, not a ship,—as has been variously surmised at various tea-tables,—where the book in the green cover is as eagerly expected as the news of the last battle,—but a live flesh and blood little girl." Thus when Little Dorrit did appear, Dickens needed to establish her character very quickly. By placing her in a profession with which his readers were familiar, Dickens could present small pieces of information, such as reminders of wages and hours, as an iconographic shorthand, establishing his character with minimal effort or delay. However, once the character was established, Dickens had no need to dwell on the images associated with needlewomen; hence the lack of detail concerning Little Dorrit's profession after the initial presentation.

Yet Dickens's work with the seamstress was not over. In the 1860s the working classes, including needlewomen, again began to draw attention. And Dickens, with the publication of *The Uncommercial Traveller* in 1860, was one of the first to remind readers of the harsh living and working conditions faced by the working classes. Included in his sketches are those of two needlewomen whose near starvation and dire poverty are more reminiscent of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* than of Dickens's earlier work, with the possible exception of *The Chimes*. The first needlewoman is the wife of an unemployed boilermaker, and it is through her work that they and their four children have survived:

She did slop-work; made pea-jackets. She produced the pea-jacket then in hand, and spread it out upon the bed,—the only piece of furniture in the room on which to

spread it. . . . According to her calculation at the moment, deducting what her trimming cost her, she got for making a pea-jacket tenpence half-penny, and she could make one in something less than two days.

But, you see, it come to her through two hands, and of course it didn't come through the second hand for nothing. Why did it come through the second hand at all? Why, this way. The second hand took the risk of the given-out work, you see. If she had money enough to pay the security deposit,—call it two pound—she could get the work from the first hand, and so the second would not have to be deducted for. But, having no money at all, the second had come in and took its profit, and so the whole worked down to tenpence half-penny. (314)

Dickens's paraphrased presentation of the woman's explanation of why she went through a middle-man for her work combines the voice of the impartial observer, the narrator, with that of the knowledgeable worker lending the explanation a validity which it would lack if explained by either voice independently. And Dickens's insistence on the pride, the lack of "whine and murmur," and the fact that the family was not relying on parish relief creates a strong character, a character his readers might feel stirred to help. But since the family was not using parish relief the help must come through a change in the system rather than charity to one family, creating a change that would benefit all slop workers.

Dickens does not present his other needleworker; she is at work when the Traveller visits her home. Instead the narrator talks with her mother about their inability to meet the rent, sixpence a week, on the daughter's salary. But Dickens has first caught the reader's attention with a detailed inventory of the room where the seamstress, her parents, and her four brothers and sisters lived:

She was boiling the children's clothes in a saucepan on the hearth. There was nothing else into which she could have put them. There was no crockery, or tinware, or tub, or bucket. There was an old gallipot or two, and there was a broken bottle or so, and there were some broken boxes for seats. The last small scraping of coals left was raked together in a corner of the floor. There were some rags in an open cupboard, also on the floor. In a corner of the room was a crazy old French bedstead

As I stood opposite the woman boiling the children's clothes,—she had not even a piece of soap to wash them with,—and apologising for her occupation, I could take in all these things without appearing to notice them, and could even correct my inventory. I had missed, at the first glance, some half a pound of bread in the otherwise empty safe, and old red ragged crinoline hanging on the handle of the door by which I had entered, and certain fragments of rusty iron scattered the floor, which looked like broken tools and a piece of stove-pipe. (315)

Again Dickens's use of an outside observer gives the description verisimilitude, while the crippled father creates sympathy, and the independence of the family—they, too, received no out-of-door relief—gives them dignity.

In September of 1863 Dickens's concern for needle-

women is shown one last time with the publication of "The Point of the Needle" in *All the Year Round*. Three months earlier *The Times* had published a letter from "A Tired Dressmaker" revealing that working conditions for milliners were little changed from twenty years earlier: "We are called in the morning at half-past 6, and in ordinary times we work until 11 at night, but occasionally our hours are much longer; on Friday before the last Drawing Room, we worked all night and did not leave off until 9 o'clock on Saturday morning" (5). The point of the letter was that one of the girls employed at the house, Mary Ann Walkley, died in her sleep following the long night. Walkley's death briefly brought the working conditions of seamstresses to public attention again, and articles such as the one Dickens published created enough concern for Parliament to investigate working conditions in 1864.

"The Point of the Needle" is, basically, a discussion of why the movement to improve working conditions in millinery houses was unsuccessful and what must be done for conditions to change. The article opens with explanations why organizations such as the Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners were dissolved after a few years, accomplishing little other than the abolishing of Sunday work, and why Lord Shaftesbury's bill regulating hours of work in millinery establishments was defeated in 1855. It also includes testimony from several millinery workers and physicians about current working conditions, but the bulk of the article is devoted to why so many middle-class women were still entering the profession, and what could be done to improve conditions. The article calls for the formation of a "Committee of Taste," with the Princess at its head, to "revise the fashions of court dress" and change the pattern of the London Season to allow for more working time and a longer period of support. The article ends by briefly discussing other options of female employment, but concludes that "it will be long before there will be for a self-dependent orphan girl any safe and good refuge from the necessity of living by instruction of the young, domestic service, or the needle" (40-41).

With this last article we have a final example of how Dickens's perceptions of needlewomen varied, and to what extent they remained constant. Through what he emphasized and the amount of detail he used, we see what aspects Dickens considered important and worthy of attention, and through these factors we can thereby also measure the growth of awareness in his readers.

In an essay for *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*, Marilyn Butler called for a critical method where the critic:

acknowledge[s] his own positions as similar to that of all writers, bound in time and place The aim is not to reconstruct the past, which could not be done innocently, even if it were worth doing at all. It is to understand how writing functions in its world, in order to understand writing, the world, and ourselves. (44)

The key to useful criticism would then be in its application, placing a literary text within its historical context not to verify or recreate the context, but to understand better the text and its context. Thus Dickens's mastery as an author would be seen in his ability to anticipate his readers' reactions—knowing that

at times it would be a struggle to convince them of the dire existence workers such as needlewomen faced, knowing then that only the accumulation of detail upon detail (such as is found in *The Chimes* or in *The Uncommercial Traveller*) would suffice, at other times echoing the feeling that the hard life of a seamstress was inevitable, and the issue was not her but something larger such as emigration or financial stability. Dickens's ability to shame the rich and powerful through caricature without alienating them, to create a sense of sympathy for the powerless, and stimulate a movement towards reform in those who feared it most because it might disturb the balance of power, was his genius as a social reformer. His choice of the seamstress demonstrates his understanding that his audience—middle- and upper-class women—could sympathize, perhaps empathize, while men in positions of power would not feel threatened by working-class women employed in a domestic activity and might be moved to effect a change. But the seamstress was more than a means to an end for Dickens; his constant return to the figure of the seamstress indicates that he never accepted the inevitability of the needleworker's hard life, and ending his series of portrayals with an image of horror rather than acceptance suggests that he, like many Victorians, was always haunted by the Ghost in the Looking-glass.

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Fair Margaret of "Maiden-Song": Rossetti's Response to the Romantic Nightingale

Diane D'Amico

Christina Rossetti's response to her Romantic predecessors is briefly noted by her first biographers: Mackenzie Bell mentions Rossetti's youthful appreciation of Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (15), and William Michael Rossetti writes of his sister's admiration for Shelley and Coleridge (lxx). Later critics make brief comparisons between Rossetti's own poetry and that of the Romantics. For example, Maurice Bowra finds a resemblance between Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" and Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (247), and Lionel Stevenson sees similarities between Rossetti's use of sensuous imagery and the poems of Keats (84). More recently, Rossetti scholars, examining individual poems in detail, have found not simply signs of Romantic influence but indications of a reaction to that influence, a reaction based strongly on Rossetti's Christian ideology. In her discussion of "The Thread of Life" and "An Old World Thicket," Catherine Cantalupo concludes that Rossetti's "conversion poems challenge the Romantic love of Nature with Christian faith" (299). Similarly, Antony Harrison, also speaking of "An Old World Thicket," asserts that although Rossetti may echo the Romantics, she "concludes her poem by rejecting the vocabularies and the secular epiphanies of Keats and early Tennyson, as well as the pantheistic revelations of Wordsworth, in favor of a quietly symbolic, traditionally Christian apocalypse" (48).¹

Within this context of Rossetti's revisionist response to Romanticism, I should like to examine "Maiden-Song," one of Rossetti's own "favourite" poems (*Poetical Works* 462).² In "Maiden-Song," Rossetti employs certain Romantic images only to alter their meaning. Beautiful maidens sing and draw men to them, but no one is left "alone and palely loitering." In fact, the poem ends with three marriages. A nightingale sings, but no weary poet seeks to join with the bird to escape the "fever and fret" of earth's sorrows. Instead, a maiden sings in answer to the nightingale's complaint, and her reply exceeds the song of "any bird where Spring's in blow." Such revisions of Romantic theme and image can be explained in two ways. First, as Cantalupo and Harrison lead us to recognize, Rossetti's revisionist response is strongly influenced by her Christian faith. The Romantic ideology of self is answered by the Christian ideology of self-effacement, represented by the fairest sister, Margaret. However, it is also important to

recognize that Rossetti is responding not just as a Christian poet, but as a female Christian poet. "Fair Margaret," who answers the nightingale, can be seen as Rossetti's response to the male voice of Romantic poetry.

As the title suggests, central to "Maiden-Song" is the figure of the singing maiden. Two of the singing maidens of Romanticism perhaps familiar to Rossetti are the Abyssinian maid of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the Highland Lass of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper."³ The songs of these maidens function similarly, in that both serve to inspire the male poets. If Coleridge could revive the Abyssinian maid's song, he would become the great poet he desires to be:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice! (42-46)

Similarly, Wordsworth's Highland lass inspires the listening poet:

I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more. (29-32)

The result of his taking her song and bearing it in his heart is, of course, the poem itself, "The Solitary Reaper." Both Coleridge and Wordsworth focus on the male listener's poetic response to the maiden's song, not on the maiden herself or her poetic power. Thus, Highland Lass and Abyssinian maid merely serve as female muse for male poets. In fact, in much of Romantic poetry it is possible to see the female figure as merely a projection of some aspect of the male speaker. Repeatedly, beautiful maidens are, as Talyer and Luria discuss in their article "Gender and Genre: Women in British Romantic Literature," a sort of "mirror image or sister image of the poet" (115). For example, consider Byron's Astarte in *Manfred*, Wordsworth's sister in "Tintern Abbey," Keats's

¹ See also Fass, who offers a reading of Rossetti's "Repining" as a response to Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes." Fass was one of the first critics to analyze Rossetti's response to the Romantics in detail.

² As editor of *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, William Michael Rossetti writes, "This simple light-hearted poem—a kind of cross between the tone of a fairy-tale and that of a nursery-song, each of them sweetened into poetry—was deservedly something of a favourite with its authoress" (461-62). "Maiden-Song" has often been read as simply a sweet fairy tale, "a little-girls' make-believe of grandeur" (Stevenson 110-11). However, as I have argued elsewhere (D'Amico) a close reading of the poem makes clear that the fairy-tale-like sisters can be seen as a complex metaphor of the self in its relationship to its own dark nature, to the larger human com-

munity, and to God. Examining this poem as an example of Rossetti's response to her Romantic forefather's further enhances our understanding of the poem's significance in the Rossetti canon. See also Rosenblum. Rosenblum offers a brief discussion of "Maiden-Song" as a poem that deals with the "Orphic power of singing" (171-72); however, she does not discuss this singing as a response to Romantic poets.

³ Since as William Michael Rossetti notes, Coleridge was held in high esteem by Rossetti, there can be little doubt she was familiar with "Kubla Khan." Although William Michael writes that Rossetti read Wordsworth "scantly," perhaps her scant reading included "The Solitary Reaper" (*Poetical Works* lxx).

Peona in "Endymion," and Shelley's Emily in "Epipsychidion."⁴

Of course, one might argue these poets are simply following a tradition that depicts the muse as female and the poet as male. But as Margaret Homans points out, such a tradition poses particular problems for a female poet: "Where the major literary tradition normatively identifies the figure of the poet as masculine, and voice as a masculine property, women writers cannot see their minds as androgynous, or as sexless, but must take part in a self-definition by contraries (*Women Writers* 3). If Rossetti attempts to pattern herself after her Romantic predecessors, she must imagine herself as the male speaker wooing a female muse. Moreover, she must confront a tradition older than the Romantics, a tradition that tells her as a woman she is to inspire poetry not to create it. Andrew Lang's comment, made several months after Rossetti's death, is especially revealing on this point: "There can be little doubt that we are now deprived of the greatest English poet of her sex, which is made to inspire poetry not to create it" (qtd. in Rosenblum 1). Despite his praise, Lang's comment makes clear that in writing poetry Rossetti was going against the norms of her society. The singing maidens in "Maiden-Song" offer one example of Rossetti's approach to struggling with the tensions she must have felt as a woman of the nineteenth century desiring to be a poet, especially a poet with immediate Romantic forefathers.⁵ In "Maiden-Song" Rossetti takes the image of the singing maiden and makes her power of song the focus of the poem. Neither Meggan, May, nor Margaret serves as muse for a male poet.

The three male figures who do appear in the poem—the herdsman, shepherd and king—appear only after the maidens sing, and when they appear, none expresses any desire to share in the song and somehow capture its power. They do not speak of building "a pleasure dome in air" ("Kubla Khan") or of understanding the maiden's mysterious song: "Will no one tell me what she sings?" ("The Solitary Reaper"). In fact, only two of the men actually speak, the herdsman and the shepherd, and their words do not form poems but rather humble marriage proposals. Meggan's herdsman pleads:

"Scanty goods have I to give,
Scanty skill to woo;
But I have a will to work,
And a heart for you:
Bid me stay or bid me go."⁶ (91-95)

May's shepherd responds similarly:

"See my sheep and see the lambs,
Twin lambs which they bare.
All myself I offer you,
All my flocks and care,
Your sweet song hath moved me so. (137-41)

One effect of the female song is, quite literally, to bring a possible mate to his knees. Unlike their Romantic predecessors, herdsman and shepherd are drawn to these women not as a prelude to poetry but as a prelude to proposing marriage. The male figures are not even the counterpart to the Romantic female muse, for they do not appear in the poem until after the songs have begun. Thus they appear not to inspire the song, but rather to demonstrate its power.

Interestingly, Rossetti's maidens, unlike their Romantic sisters, actually gain something from their songs. The Abyssinian maid is merely a vision; the solitary reaper presumably simply continues to reap and sing after the poet leaves her valley. As Karen Swan points out in her discussion of Keats's "La Belle Dame," the maiden who inspires that poem gains "nothing" from the encounter" (92). Rossetti's maidens, on the other hand, gain something valuable in the fairy-tale world of the poem—husbands. In fact, the more powerful the song, the more influential the husband. Meggan and May win husbands who represent only half the country (Meggan's herdsman comes from the vale, and May's shepherd from the hill), whereas Margaret wins a king of "all that country." This class distinction between the humble husbands of Meggan and May, and Margaret's royal husband is significant, for it underscores Rossetti's use of Margaret as the ideal singer. Meggan and May transform shepherd and herdsman into husbands, but Margaret's song creates a whole community. However, to understand fully Margaret's role in the poem, one must first consider Rossetti's portrayal of Meggan and May, the wandering, rather coy and calculating, sisters.

Meggan and May do resemble the Romantic femme fatale as depicted, for example in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," a favorite poem of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite circle.⁷ The behavior of the herdsman and the shepherd suggests these men are both enthralled. Meggan's "fitful wayward lay" casts a spell over a simple herdsman "All on fire to hear and see, / With floating locks he came" (74-75). He is unable to see anything but Meggan: "Looked neither north nor south, / Neither east nor west" (76-77), as her song "sang the heart out of his breast" (85). Similarly, May sings a lowly shepherd from his flocks, and he also responds to the song as if in a trance:

He hung breathless on her breath;
Speechless, who listened well;
Could not speak or think or wish
Till silence broke the spell. (131-134)

Furthermore, his trance causes him to forget his duties to his flock: he "forgot his flocks, his panting flocks / In parching hill-side drouth" (115-16). Thus, the effects of Meggan's "wayward lay" and May's "labyrinth of throbs" are not entirely positive: they gain husbands, but in doing so they take

⁴ For further discussion of the use of the female figure as representative of some aspect of the male poet, see Thorslev 41-58.

⁵ The fact that Rossetti realized the female image could be used to represent a male artist's dreams is made quite clear in her sonnet "In An Artist's Studio," a sonnet most likely written in response to viewing the work of her own artist brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "One face looks out from all his canvasses . . . Not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (*Poetical Works* 330).

⁶ I have used vol. 1 of the Crump edition of Rossetti's poetry throughout and provided line numbers parenthetically. Quotations from the works of the Romantic poets are taken from *English Romantic Writers* and will be cited in the text by line number.

⁷ Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti was especially drawn to Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." He is known to have drawn two sketches based upon the poem. See Surtees.

those men from their communal duties.

A connection can be made between the sisters' intentions and the results of their songs. Although these two sisters are described as leaving home "with innocent will," neither has innocent thoughts when she accepts the proposal. Once they are away from home, it becomes apparent that envy of Margaret's beauty is their prime motivation for acting:

Then Meggan mused within herself;
"Better be first with him,
Than dwell where fairer Margaret sits,
Who shines my brightness dim." (96-99)

These calculating thoughts do suggest a coldness of heart, and clearly, both Meggan and May marry not for love but for position: "I will be lady of his love, / And he shall worship me" (104-05). In marriage they will find a home where they will reign as first, not second, not dimmed by Margaret's "brightness." Since they sing from a self motivated by envy, they cannot offer visions that would unify a community.⁸ These calculating women, however, are not mirror images of the Romantic fatal woman, for they do not destroy the men they attract. They are not dangerous supernatural seductresses, but merely secondary singers, who sing for self and see the power their songs may have only in terms of self. Moreover, they have a selfless sister whose song will overcome any of their dangerous divisive qualities, and importantly bring them "home."

Margaret, who waits at home for her sisters "with patient heart," is in sharp contrast to the Romantic male poet. As Marlon B. Ross points out, although the Romantics sought to "articulate visions that can speak for the whole," their "poetic identity" is bound to "masculinist metaphors of power" (49). In other words, in their poetry, "poetic identity is constituted by masculine self-questing and visionary conquest" (Ross 49). The Romantic male goes on quests, searching for his ideal. He is a knight who yearns for the beautiful lady or an ancient mariner who overreaches and must wander, telling his cautionary tale. Or like Wordsworth's male speakers, he journeys through a maternal landscape hoping to "see into the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey"). Margaret, on the other hand, goes on no quests; she is clearly associated with home. While her more adventurous sisters wander up and down the hillside, she stays home to "sing and sew." In fact, Meggan's comment to May indicates that Margaret never wanders from home:

"Fair Margaret can bide at home,
But you come with me, May;
Up the hill and down the hill,
Along the winding way
You and I are used to go." (27-31)

Sitting at home patiently sewing, Margaret strongly resembles the Victorian ideal of womanhood, an angel in the house. Indeed, the similes Rossetti uses to describe Margaret

recall the stereotypical feminine:

Margaret like a queen,
Like a flush-rose, like the moon
In her heavenly sheen,
Fragrant-breathed as milky cow
Or field of blossoming bean,
Graceful as an ivy bough
Born to cling and lean;
Thus she sat to sing and sew." (37-44)

However, although Margaret is compared to ivy that clings and leans, thus suggesting the need to lean on something, significantly, she is not waiting for a husband. She is not Keats's Madeline hoping for midnight visions of her future husband. Neither is she a Tennysonian Mariana, weary of waiting for her lover, nor his Lady of Shalott, "sick of shadows." Margaret's traditionally feminine qualities of gentleness and patience, appear fulfilling. She is content to stay home, and the only concern she shows occurs when her sisters do not return at night. It is this sisterly concern that leads her away from her sewing:

"Surely," she thought within herself.
"My sisters loiter late."
She rose, and peered out at the door,
With patient heart to wait. (159-62)

For Rossetti patience was an "advanced grace," necessary for the "pilgrim soul" (*The Face of the Deep* 360): "It preoccupies the soul with a sort of satisfaction which suppresses insatiable craving, vain endeavor, rebellious desire. It keeps the will steadfast, the mind disengaged, the heart quiet. Patience having little or having nothing yet possesses all things; for through faith and patience the elect inherit the promises" (*The Face of the Deep* 117). Patient Margaret is the very opposite of the Romantic wanderer whose rebellious desires lead him, as Marlon Ross points out, on "a quest for self-creation, for self-comprehension, for self-positioning," seeking a state in which he has mastered "his doubts about his power of mastery and the world that seems to obstruct its sway" (26). Rossetti's presentation of the poetic voice in feminine terms can thus be seen as a response to the Romantic poet's celebration of self, so often depicted in masculine terms.

When considering Rossetti's depiction of the poetic voice as feminine, one should take into account her Christian faith, a faith which espoused humility, and self-sacrifice. Unlike her Romantic predecessors, Rossetti saw self as the source of all temptation: "Temptations are what I have to overcome, and at the root of every possible temptation I have to overcome myself" (*The Face of the Deep* 519). Self was the enemy: "I pursuing my own evil from point to point find that it leads me not outwards amid a host of foes laid against me, but inward within myself: it is not mine enemy that doeth me this dishonour, neither is it mine adversary that magnifieth

⁸ In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti writes of envy: "The authoritative voice of Holy Church expounding Holy Scripture certifies evil to be positive, not merely negative. If ever I tend to question this, let me look within and con-

sider envy, perhaps at first sight the most irretrievably dead of the seven deadly sins: its sepulchre is incapable of being whited; it pretends not to be so much as the travesty of any virtue. Envy, surely, is positive evil" (319).

himself against me: it is I, it is not another, not primarily any other; it is I who undo, defile, deface myself" (*The Face of the Deep* 489). Overcoming the self, not empowering the self, was Rossetti's goal. Therefore, if Rossetti was to be a singer, a poet, then her voice must be humble. Furthermore, such a passive stance was elevated by Christ himself. In Rossetti's mind the feminine could easily be associated with Christ:

In many points the feminine lot copies very closely the voluntarily assumed position of our Lord and Pattern. Woman must obey: and Christ "learned obedience" (Gen. iii. 16; Heb. v. 8). She must be fruitful, but in sorrow: and He, symbolised by a corn of wheat, had not brought forth much fruit except He had died (Gen. iii. 16; St. John xxi. 24). She by natural constitution is adapted not to assert herself, but to be subordinate: and He came not to be ministered unto but to minister; He was among His own "as he that serveth": (I St. Peter iii. 7; I Tim. ii. 11, 12; St. Mark x. 45; St. Luke xxii. 27). Her office is to be man's helpmeet: and concerning Christ God saith, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty" (Gen. ii. 18, 21, 22; Ps. lxxxix. 19). And well may she glory, inasmuch as one of the tenderest divine promises takes (so to say) the feminine form: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Is. lxvi. 13). (*Seek and Find* 30-31)

The nineteenth-century feminine ideal of the humble and long-suffering woman was Christ-like and therefore could serve as a more appropriate model for Rossetti's poetic voice than the aggressive Romantic male overreacher whose songs celebrate self. Thus, Rossetti could find in Christian ideology a poetic voice and stance that would allow her to reconcile being a nineteenth-century woman with being a poet. If Rossetti's poetic voice was humble and if her songs celebrated God and not self, then she might make melodies, even if St. Paul had told women to listen and not to speak.

As a careful reader of the Bible, Rossetti of course made note of St. Paul's injunction to women to keep silent. In *The Face of the Deep*, she refers to it directly:

St Paul has written: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach." Yet elsewhere he wrote: "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith . . . which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice."

To expound prophecy lies of course beyond my power, and not within my wish. But the symbolic forms of prophecy being set before all eyes, must be so set for some purpose: to investigate them may not make us wise as serpents; yet ought by promoting faith, fear, hope, love, to aid in making us harmless as doves. (195)

Although Rossetti did not assume the prophetic voice of her Romantic forefathers, she did claim the right to investigate prophecy and to write of what she found. Furthermore if she wished to be among the singers of paradise, she felt she would

have to use her talents while on earth: "May I be one of those master singers! The talents vouchsafed to me I must use and improve thankfully" (*The Face of the Deep* 431). She would sing songs that promoted faith, fear of God, hope and love; and these songs would be her first fruits offered to God: "it seems to ensue that not only words and thoughts compass such a commentary on Revelation as may lawfully be brought by man for his offering of firstfruits; but that painting, sculpture, music, all are sources capable of swelling that store" (*The Face of the Deep* 432). Rossetti's faith led her to the conclusion that poetry was to be an offering to God, not a celebration of self, and as long as a woman chose God as her muse, she would not be defying St. Paul.

"Maiden-Song" is in keeping with Rossetti's poetic goal of selfless song. It is not a poem telling of a Romantic quest for self-creation or understanding; nor does the poem-within-the-poem, Margaret's song, tell of such a quest. Rather Rossetti's poem can be seen as a response to her questing Romantic forefathers. This becomes most apparent in the answer Margaret gives to the nightingale and nature's response to that answer. While waiting for her sisters, Margaret hears "a distant nightingale / Complaining of its mate" (163-64). The nightingale's song is, perhaps, the most obvious Romantic echo in the poem. Rossetti was an early admirer of Keats's poetry. At twelve or thirteen, she read Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" in William Hone's *Everyday Book*, and when she was eighteen she wrote a sonnet in praise of Keats. Clearly, it is safe to assume she realized that her nightingale might recall to the reader's mind "Ode to a Nightingale."⁹

When one contrasts Keats's nightingale and Rossetti's, the differences are striking. When Keats first hears the nightingale singing, he associates the bird's song with "happiness":

But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
(11. 6-10)

Rossetti's nightingale does not symbolize happiness, nor does it evolve in the course of the poem to become symbolic of poetic creativity or immortality, as Keats's singer does. Rather the nightingale's song represents a longing and loneliness which Margaret answers with a love song. Importantly, her song exceeds any song in Nature.

Unlike so many Romantic poems in which the poet is drawn towards Nature's singers, desiring their power (for example, as in Wordsworth's "To a Skylark" and Shelley's "To a Skylark"), the birds of "Maiden-Song" are drawn to Margaret: "Every beast and bird and fish / Came mustering to the sound [of her song]" (199-200). In fact, even before Margaret responds to the nightingale, Nature is attracted to her:

⁹ Unlike her Romantic predecessors, Rossetti tends to portray the nightingale's song as one of sorrow, not joy. See "For Advent" (*Poetical*

Works 118), "Song" beginning "When I am dead, my dearest" (*Crump* 1: 58), "Dream Land" (*Crump* 1: 27), and "How One Chose" (*Poetical Works* 295).

When she raised her lustrous eyes
 A beast peeped at the door;
 When she downward cast her eyes
 A fish gasped on the floor;
 When she turned away her eyes
 A bird perched on the sill,
 Warbling out its heart of love,
 Warbling warbling still,
 With pathetic pleadings low. (45-53)

Margaret is not a Wordsworthian poet, seeking communion with Nature; rather Nature—in the form of these small animals, representing earth, sea and sky—comes to her. Furthermore, also unlike Wordsworth, Rossetti does not personify Nature as female.¹⁰ Neither beast, fish nor bird has any particularly feminine qualities. (In fact, the bird appears somewhat as a masculine lover in that it appears to be wooing Margaret with its “pathetic pleadings low.”) Nor is Margaret herself an earth-mother figure. As “fairest of them all,” she more closely resembles the fairy-tale heroines, such as Cinderella and Snow White, whose innocent, pure and loving human nature is recognized by the uncorrupted natural world. Therefore, one might see Margaret as representative of the spiritual force of selfless love to which all creation is drawn, but not as Mother Nature.

As recent feminist scholarship has made clear, especially the work of Margaret Homans, the Romantic depiction of Nature as maternal poses a particular dilemma for the female poet: “Whether as a cultural or political memory, or as personal myth transmitted into poetry, Mother Nature is not a helpful model for women aspiring to be poets. She is prolific biologically, not linguistically, and she is as destructive as she is creative” (*Women Writers* 13). When writing of Elizabeth Gaskell’s response to Wordsworth, Homans suggests that the nineteenth-century woman writer was apt to feel some discomfort in trying to be both the object, mother nature, and the subject, the writer: “While she [Gaskell] celebrates the literal, Baby’s and her own merging with nature, this participation is very difficult to sustain while writing at the same time She can either write or be in nature, but not both, with any degree of comfort” (*Bearing the Word* 35).

Rossetti’s Christian faith offered a way to overcome this feeling of discomfort by offering an alternate female model—the Bride of Christ. Rossetti simply did not accept the Romantic rewriting of the holy marriage. Romantics such as Wordsworth and Coleridge offer poetic visions in which “the Lamb and the New Jerusalem are seen replaced by man’s mind as the bridegroom and nature as the bride,” and this “consummation” will suffice to create the restored paradise predicted in the Apocalypse” (Abrams 56). For Rossetti, the “consummation” was still the moment of “union with the Son, the Spouse of souls” (*The Face of the Deep* 363). “If I desire the consummation, it is in my power to practise its antecedents and to rehearse it day by day” (*The Face of the Deep* 495).

Where the Romantic metaphors would keep the female a

silent object to be desired or a muse to be conquered, the Christian metaphors offer her a more active role that is nonetheless in keeping with Victorian ideals of womanhood. When discussing how the soul should prepare for this holy marriage, Rossetti writes, “Adorn thyself meanwhile with flower-like graces: humility the violet, innocence the snow-drop, purity the lily; with sweetness for a honeysuckle, with penitence for a fruitful thorn. To-day put on garments of salvation prepared for thee, that to-morrow thou mayest be promoted to wear the garments of paradise” (*The Face of the Deep* 481-82). In her “flower-like” graces, a bride of Christ resembles the Victorian feminine ideal. However Rossetti’s bride does vary in one very significant way from the Victorian ideal woman. As discussed above, a Rossettian woman need not keep silent, for a bride can also be a poet if she sings of God’s message: “let us praise Him in musical yearnings and ecstasies. Or if not thou at least I” (*The Face of the Deep* 432). He “bids me sing / A sweet new song of His redeemed set free” (“The Thread of Life” 2:123).¹¹

Significantly, the effects of Margaret’s song, a song that begins as a response to the lonely nightingale and becomes a love song to the king, are apocalyptic in that the millennium appears to have come. Margaret’s song draws everyone to her into a community of harmony and peace:

Every man and every maid
 From miles of country round:
 Meggan on her herdsman’s arm,
 With her shepherd May,
 Flocks and herds trooped at their heels
 Along the hill-side way;
 No foot too feeble for the ascent,
 Not any head too grey;
 Some were swift and none were slow.

So Margaret sang her sisters home
 In their marriage mirth;

.
 Sang from far and sang from near
 To her lovely love;
 Sang together friend and foe.

(199-211, 216-18)

After Margaret finishes her song, the King, who has been kneeling to her “highness bending low,” stands and claims her “for his bride.” Since earthly marriage is to Rossetti “emblematic” of the heavenly marriage of the soul and God, one can see the marriage of Margaret and the king as such an emblem. Margaret is the soul, the bride of Christ, being given by Christ the King, “dignity and complement” (*The Face of the Deep* 197).

In their study of the nineteenth-century woman writer’s response to their literary fathers, *Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that they hear in Rossetti’s poetry a voice that fails. When comparing her to Keats, they write:

of obedience . . . to a Muse who calls forth the woman artist’s kingly self and bids her sing.” The focus of Flowers’s essay is Rossetti’s religious poetry; therefore she does not discuss “Maiden-Song.”

¹⁰ For a discussion of Wordsworth’s depiction of nature as female, see Mellor 142-46.

¹¹ See Flowers 159-74 for a detailed discussion of Rossetti’s poetry as “an act

"Although Keats can imagine asserting himself from beyond the grave, Rossetti, banqueting on bitterness, must bury herself alive in a coffin of renunciation" (575). They argue that after an early struggle to reconcile the role of the poet with the Victorian role as woman, the "self-assertive poet" in Rossetti died (552), and she then spent a "lifetime writing 'Amen for us all'" (554). The implication is that a non-assertive poet is a lesser poet and the promises of heaven an inferior subject when compared to the subject of self. In "Maiden-Song," we find, in a sense, Rossetti's response to such views. A poetic voice that is humble and tells of heaven does have power: "So Margaret sang her sisters home / In their marriage mirth . . . / Sang together friend and foe." Although Margaret, who sits at home to sing and sew, does not undertake the self-assertive Romantic quest, she is nonetheless powerful.¹² Rather than fault Rossetti for failing to follow her Romantic forefathers, one should recognize that Rossetti's acceptance of Christian ideology actually enabled her to free herself from the restrictive roles her Romantic forefathers prescribed. She did not have to imagine herself a male poet's muse or the voice of mother nature; she could be a heavenly singer, answering the earthly nightingale's "old complaining tale."

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¹² Interestingly, when Rossetti first published "Maiden-Song," she placed it immediately after "The Prince's Progress," a narrative poem that depicts the male quest as a failure. The prince loiters so long and is so easily distracted

that when he arrives, he is "too late for love, too late for joy." The sleeping beauty is truly dead and no earthly prince can wake her.

A Tale of Two Cities: Dickens, Revolution, and the "Other"

C _____ D _____ *

Franklin E. Court

I

Dickens uses two major synecdochic image paradigms in *Tale of Two Cities* that recur either as drumming footsteps echoing ubiquitously in the background or as frenzied, scuffling footsteps that, when foregrounded, ominously foreshadow the immediacy of revolutionary terror.¹ The broken wine cask of Book I, chapter 5, introduces the patterns. The scene takes place in the streets of Saint Antoine in 1775, fourteen years before the outbreak of the Revolution. When the cask breaks, people suspend their business to run to the spot: "The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb . . . where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes."

The wine-stained shoes and feet introduced here function as coded fragments that come to represent the whole that is the frenzied mob of partisans that will be responsible for the raging anarchy and slaughter that occur fourteen years later in 1789. As if to make certain that the associations are clear to his readers, Dickens, in his concern for narrative accountability, emphasizes in chapter 21 of Book II that those same wine-stained feet "are not easily purified when once stained red." When the novel ends in chapter 15 of Book III and only then, as the heading of the last chapter records, does Dickens let the "Footsteps Die Out For Ever."

The purpose of this paper is to examine more closely the use of the image pattern and its link to Dickens's thoughts on rebellion during the years 1858-59, the time of the writing and publication of the novel. It was a crucial period of his life. He had recently separated from his wife, Catherine, a decision that suggests a personal revolution, of sorts, that may have inspired his treatment of the theme of an exhausted or stagnated past being replaced by a newer, more promising future. I also hope to show how *Tale of Two Cities*, especially in the characterization of Charles Darnay, anticipates, or necessitates—more to the point—the creation of Pip in *Great Expectations*, the novel that Dickens commenced in 1859 while drafting the final pages of *Tale of Two Cities*.

To say that the fateful footsteps in *Tale of Two Cities* simply portend the deterministic historical destiny of the mob as an anticipated force for destruction is not satisfactory. True, Dickens associates the footsteps with oppression. Madame Defarge places her foot upon the neck of the governor of the Bastille in order to steady his head when she cuts it off in Book II, chapter 21. The traveler who burns the Chateau in Book II, chapter 23 is identified as "foot-sore . . . his ankles chafed . . . ; his great shoes, stuffed with leaves and grass." The frenetic mob in Book II, chapter 5 steps wildly to

the exaggerated rhythm of the grim Carmagnole. In chapter 7, Darnay, twice arrested, is taken by "rough men" represented by "a rude clattering of feet over the floor."

Oppression in this novel, however, is not only the province of the citizens of the republic. Part of the novel's thematic tension is created by the realization that political power in the hands of an unaccountable proletariat is no different from political power in the hands of a callous and degenerate aristocracy. Any likelihood of Dickens championing the cause of the disaffected populace here is impossible; for in his treatment of the partisans, he uncovers the self-aggrandizement and self-righteous license to persecute that underlies their motives.

The historically predictable victimizing force in this novel is, of course, the old monarchical ruling class, represented by the St. Evrémonde family. The image paradigm that controls the oppression-persecution conflation between the stereotypical victims and their equally stereotypical victimizers is structurally consistent, however. Dickens's readers would have anticipated it. Dr. Manette's letter read to the jury in the third book draws attention to the footsteps of the brothers. Manette records that the Marquis, the elder brother, came "booted into the room from his horse" to ask if the young peasant girl were finally dead. The query into her health at the time, charged with such serious implications, is totally irrelevant to Dickens's insistence on describing in detail the Marquis's riding attire. The association is elusive at first, but Dickens dwells on it. The Marquis laughed and then frowned; "he moved a chair with his foot near to mine, ordered the woman away." And later, shortly before the girl dies, Manette writes of the brothers "waiting in a room downstairs, impatient to ride away. I had heard them, alone at the bedside, striking their boots with their riding-whips, and loitering up and down" (Book III, chapter 10). The synecdochic association is clear. The brothers have become synonymous with their boots—either while striking them or arrogantly pacing the floor in them, the boots are compressed pointers of meaning. The effect on the jury listening to Manette's letter in that crucial scene and the letter's emotional impact on Darnay's fate are predictable, perhaps too predictable, for the boot, as Dickens well knew, is a metaphor, a metonym, that traditionally identifies victimizers. The phrases "under the boot" or "to put the boot to," for instance, come to mind and date from the nineteenth century. But what we need to remember is that the metaphoric significance of the boot as a commentary on the brothers is consistent, within the internal historical and political framework of *Tale of Two Cities*, with

*This paper was read before the Dickens Fellowship, Madison, Wisconsin, April, 1990.

¹ For an earlier discussion of the image patterns alone, see my essay on "Boots, Barbarism, and the New Order in Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*."

the same type of oppression, ruthlessness, and propensity to victimize that Dickens associates with the wooden shoes of the people; historically, the victims. The result strains the reader's sense of poetic proportions of justice and produces what appears to be an irresolvable thematic and political conflict.

One of the qualities that make Dickens a great novelist and storyteller is his ability to negate complacency. The politics of oppression represented by both the aristocracy and the revolutionary mob in the novel turn inward, neutralizing and canceling out both brutalizing forces. The result is a narrative without a discernible, stabilizing thematic center. This negation is a major reason why some critics see *Tale of Two Cities* as one of Dickens's less successful works.

But Dickens was always aware of the need to turn his narratives outward toward some regenerative structural frame when they began to close in on themselves. That is why he introduced the murder of Tulkinghorn in *Bleak House* and set Inspector Bucket, one of his most memorable characters, hot on the trail of the murderer. If the choice of pounding footsteps to suggest oppression were the only use to which Dickens employed the image in *Tale of Two Cities* then we might agree with those who see no comprehensive ideological vision emerging at the end of the novel that reaffirms a stabilizing center and provides the narrative with closure. Carton about to have his head cut off saying "it is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done . . ." is dramatically effective but the episode does not resolve the cataclysmic and cosmically ideological historic forces that are unleashed in this work. We are talking about nothing less than the French Revolution here—the single most important event coloring political, educational, and philosophical thinking throughout the nineteenth century, both on the European continent and in Dickens's England.

II

In order to lift the narrative and to offer his readers an alternative to the self-canceling fissure into which the tension between the raging proletariat on one hand and the indifferent aristocracy on the other collapses, Dickens incorporates a third, very important treatment of the image pattern.

The fact that he associated simple, kind-hearted Dr. Manette directly with the pattern—he is, after all, a shoe maker—suggests that Dickens intended some consistency between Manette's trade and the footsteps rhythmically drumming in the background. Manette learns his trade while in prison. There are other trades available to him, but shoe cobbling is the one he embraces. Why that one in particular? Consider also that in his periods of dementia, when he loses his grip on reality—usually a reality he wishes to avoid—Manette returns to his shoe maker's bench where he repressively fixates on a singularly important pair of shoes that he insists must be finished directly. In Book III, when all hope for Charles Darnay seems lost, Manette becomes obsessed with the need to finish that very special pair of shoes. "Where is my bench?" he asks. "Time presses: I must finish those shoes." Receiving no answer, he tears at his hair and beats his feet upon the ground. "Don't torture a poor forlorn wretch," he implored . . . , 'but give me my work! What

is to become of us, if those shoes are not done to-night?' Lost, utterly lost." The shoes on which he works so frantically do not at all signify—like the blood stained wooden shoes of the rebelling citizenry or the crushing boots of the aristocracy—insensitivity, callous destruction, and hopelessness. Like most classic instances of psychic repression, Manette's fixation is the result of an inability or refusal to think about something else, in this case, the threat to the future that Manette associates directly with the death of Darnay.

Sidney Carton is also associated with this image paradigm. During his last interview with Darnay in the Bastille, he gives Darnay his boots, boots that Darnay will wear out of the prison and through France on his journey to England and to a future that Carton actually is making possible—boots, incidentally, that have undergone a mythic ritual of purification. In chapter 9 of the third Book, Carton, talking with Mr. Lorry, asks about Lucie's health. He is told that she is "anxious and unhappy." Carton sighs:

it was a long, grieving sound . . . he lifted his foot to put back one of the little flaming logs, which was tumbling forward. He wore the white riding-coat and top-boots then in vogue, and the light of the fire touching their light surfaces made him look very pale . . . His indifference to fire was sufficiently remarkable to elicit a word of remonstrance from Mr. Lorry; his boot was still upon the hot embers of the flaming log, when it had broken under the weight of his foot.

One might argue that the stress that Dickens places on the boot left rather conspicuously in the fire simply emphasizes Carton's conscious preoccupation with Lucie's future; but his indifference to the fire (Dickens calls it "sufficiently remarkable") also points to Carton's developing role in the internal structure of the narrative as an agent of purification, a catalyst for change, whose sacrifice will renew the Darnay family and Dr. Manette.

The transfer of the boots from Carton to Darnay is an important thematic signal. It tells us that within the third image paradigm, the boots and shoes and drumming footsteps signify something other than the persecution-oppression nexus that we associate with both the rebellious citizenry and the fallen aristocracy. They signify the historical necessity, one that both Dickens and Carlyle recognized, for recosting or redressing a stained and corrupted society. The idea is very closely linked to one of the dominant themes of the novel—the theme of resurrection. The defiled and ineffectual social exterior, conceived as old, worn out clothes by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, must either be cast off for new garments or, according to Carlyle, restored by tailors with new visions for the future and, one might add, shoemakers with similar regenerative visions.

In chapter 9 of the third Book, Carton walks through Paris. It is the night before he changes clothes and places with Darnay. As he walks, he recites to himself. "I am the resurrection and the life." And in fact, he is just that—Darnay's deliverer. The words, a memory from his father's funeral, Dickens notes, "were in the echoes of his feet." The next day when he encounters Darnay in the cell, he says, "draw on

those boots of mine. Put your hands to them," he adds, "put your will to them." The request is an urgent admonition, a caution not only for Darnay to wear the boots and the clothes but to put his will to what they now represent—resurrection, rebirth, an opportunity to live and to revitalize a contaminated historical past.

The vision of regeneration makes understanding Carton's self-sacrifice easier. He is an agent of change, a catalyst—a redeemer, but in the coded structure of the novel's image patterns, he is not a maker. The future belongs not to the Cartons, Dickens is suggesting, but to those who will shape the future—the Darnays, purveyors of the new mythus, the restored or, borrowing Carlyle's metaphor, retailored order. Remember in this context that Darnay is also a refashioned / retailored aristocrat, reformed, in a sense, according to the principles of a new bourgeois order of political dominance. That is why, consistent with the image pattern, the shoes that Manette makes must be *new* shoes. He creates on the basis of a projected mythic formation that he must first "see" that is, imagine in his mind's eye. The transcendental nature of his involvement with his craft is emphasized in his response, early in the narrative, to Defarge's request for a description of the shoes he is making. To the question, Manette responds, "It is a young lady's walking-shoe. It is in the present mode. I never saw the mode. I have . . . a pattern in my hand" (Book I, chapter 6).

Manette's vision is linked directly with Darnay's freedom. In the first Book, Defarge asks him if he plans to finish the shoes; Manette responds "I can't say that I mean to. I suppose so. I don't know." Later in Book III, however, after Darnay's second imprisonment and his sentence of death, Manette insists decisively that now the shoes must be finished. "What is to become of us," he warns, "if these shoes are not done to-night?" His urgency is directly related to Darnay's fate. The new shoes, like Carton's boots, signify renewal. Their completion signals the beginning of an anticipated historical process of restoration.

III

Dickens did not approve of violent revolution. *Tale of Two Cities*, read on one level, is a warning of the folly of militant rebellion. Nevertheless, he does reveal a sympathy in this novel with a belief in the imminent necessity of change as a constant in the historical process. The theory is reminiscent of Carlyle. Though primitive, it depends squarely on the idea that inherent in the destructive force of revolution are the seeds for the birth of the new mythus. Carlyle argued that societies must be viewed organically. If reforms and changes are to happen, however, they must come logically from within the living, organic power structure of existing societies and not from outside forces. The idea was restated recently by Gerald Graff in a commentary on "New Historicists" of the political "right" who argue that there is no *outside* to lasting political power; that lasting power always stems from forces already *inside* the culture (175-80). Darnay is the exponent insider, the only one who is tailored to fit the new conservative political power structure. Carton is a rebellious catalyst in this extended drama; like Madame Defarge, he is tailored for oblivion. Out of chaos and upheaval, according to Carlyle,

come regeneration and rebirth. But not for Carton, who signifies aimlessness and stagnation. Like the Defarges, particularly Madame Defarge, Carton radiates charged but misdirected energy. He may also signify a lack of direction, a decentering, that at the time, Dickens associated with his own disrupted life. Like most agents of change, Carton lives strictly within the historical present; he has no past and neither he nor the Defarges have any likelihood of a future. His self-sacrifice is the logical outcome of a scenario in which he has nothing left to live for. He dies according to an organic law of natural selection that posits the unpleasant theorem that the perpetuity of one object (i.e. Darnay) often entails the oblivion of another (i.e. Carton).

Dickens was a conservative gentleman who lived totally inside his culture. He was supportive, throughout his career, of the ideals of moderation and respectability. Though dedicated to improving the social order, he, like most Victorian intellectuals, did not approve of political violence. The lessons of the French Revolution and the terror it unleashed were still prevalent, even by 1859, the year of the publication of *Tale of Two Cities*. And lest anyone forget, the continuing popularity and availability of Edmund Burke's startling account of the Revolution, his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, was there, in 1859, and afterwards throughout the century, as a reminder. Charles Darnay, Lucie, good Dr., Manette, and Mr. Lorry are also insiders, standing for a concept of respectability and propriety epitomized by the overshadowing protective solvency of Tellson's Bank. Dickens calls Tellson's "an old fashioned place" and though worried that the young men who go to work for Tellson's are kept like cheeses in dark places until they attain the full Tellson's flavor and emerge covered by blue mold, Dickens, nevertheless, associates with the bank a vision firmly rooted in a bourgeois conception of respectability. Dr. Manette, in his delirium, recognizes the need for a new shaping political force, but it is Carton's prophecy that posits the vision of the future. Staring up at the guillotine, Carton sees "long ranks of oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument." He sees "a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come," he sees "the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out" (Book III, chapter 15).

Now the problem with this ending is that it is unconvincing. It leaves us wondering not of the inevitable realization of the "beautiful city" and the "brilliant people" rising from the abyss, but how the dream is going to be realized.

The responsibility for retailoring the framework of the culture must rest with Darnay. He is the refashioned aristocrat made over as an amalgam of bourgeois respectability and industry. Though never at the center of *Tale of Two Cities*, he is nevertheless burdened with carrying the validity and credibility of the dream of "the beautiful city" inhabited by "brilliant people" into the future. His "new life" is envisioned by Manette and secured by Carton, who willingly accepts death, distinctly for the purpose of enabling Darnay to walk away from confinement and into the future. Yet we are never told what happens to Darnay, an indeterminacy that obscures the novel's conclusion. Carton, at the foot of the guillotine,

has a clear vision for the future of Lucie and Dr. Manette but not for Darnay.

I propose that the absence of any clear-cut social or political direction for the future produced by the ending of *Tale of Two Cities* anticipates the title of Dickens's next novel—i.e., *Great Expectations*. He completed *Tale of Two Cities* in mid-October 1859; just a few weeks prior to its completion, he announced his decision to undertake *Great Expectations* (Johnson 488). The narrative of *Great Expectations* resolves the indeterminate ending of *Tale of Two Cities*. It promotes the theme that a pecuniary society built on a leisure class ideal must be retailored, as Pip himself is retailored from a false posture of gentlemanliness living according to the satisfaction of his self-centered pleasures to a true gentlemanliness (reminiscent of Darnay) committed to the ideals of humility, respectability, and charity. Pip's renewed expectations are the "great expectations" that Dickens thought necessary to the creation of a context of renewal for Victorian society and, as I argue below, for himself, as well (Johnson 489).

The dream of the "beautiful city" and of the "brilliant people" who inhabit it is built on the political and economic future realized in the character of Pip, Dickens's emblematic gentleman. At the end of *Great Expectations*, Pip leaves England to join Herbert Pocket, who works for Clarriker and Co., the counterpart to Tellson's Bank. Once safe himself inside the economic solidity of Clarriker and Co., Pip realizes the bourgeois dream of success. Within four months he raises himself from the position of clerk to manager of the Eastern Branch in Herbert's absence. "Many a year went round," he adds, "before I was a partner in the House, but I lived happily . . . and . . . frugally, and paid my debts." Eventually, he becomes third in the firm. And then, Pip's final word: "I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great House . . . We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well." Much of the success, he concludes, was due to the "ever cheerful industry and readiness" exemplified by Herbert Pocket and, as Dickens intends for us to understand, by the same conservative formulation of hard work, respectability, cheerful industry, and readiness that are also implicitly associated with the retailored Pip and with the dream of a social order retailored in an ideological frame characterized in both Dickens's and Carlyle's eyes by the virtues of the new rising commercial class. The heroes in this bright vision of the future are the middle class "captains of industry" that Carlyle lionized in *Past and Present*, represented metonymically in *Great Expectations* by the steady strength and tenacious resolve of Clarriker and Co., the duplicate of Tellson's Bank.

Pip's skillfully manipulated contribution to the future in *Great Expectations* is the unfulfilled contribution of Charles Darnay to the political future of England elevated to the level of metafiction. The unwritten sequel to *Tale of Two Cities* would have placed Darnay in the inside of the new rising, politically influential bourgeoisie—exactly where another conservative insider, Charles Dickens, positioned himself.

What I am suggesting here is that the closure to *Tale of Two Cities* comes in *Great Expectations* and that *Great Expectations*, not surprisingly, since it was the next novel Dickens wrote, is the logical thematized extension of *Tale of*

Two Cities. In fact, they should be read as Dickens wrote them—in sequence. It follows from this premise that Pip is also the logical, though more fully developed, extension into *Great Expectations* of the character of Charles Darnay. In *Tale of Two Cities*, Darnay is experienced by the reader as a subject constituted largely by what is missing in him. His passivity and phlegmatic consciousness are responsible for bringing the opposite side, the repressed unconsciousness, to life in the character of Pip, who in Lacanian terms, can be interpreted as Darnay's "signifying other," the "double" who fulfills him in a way Carton cannot. The diplopic vision that Dickens cultivated at this point in his life should include the Darnay-Pip duality as well as the Darnay-Carton duality. In fact, without it, Darnay is doomed to remain one of the most opaque and unsatisfactory figures in Dickens's long gallery of characters.

IV

What turns out to be most revealing in this interpretation, however, is the clarity of meaning generated by Pip in the publication sequence and what it suggests about Dickens himself during this most anxious time in his life. He was formally separated from Catherine in 1858; *Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* were the novels that carried him through the three years immediately following the separation. The lack of determinacy in the character of Charles Darnay was something that Dickens continued to recall and to identify with. In 1865, five years before his death and six years after the publication of *Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens, ill and exhausted from five months of readings, was confronted with the choice of giving a series of readings in America with a lucrative guarantee of ten thousand pounds in advance. It was a decision he had a very difficult time making. He wrote to Georgina and Mary at the time, "I am in a tempest-tossed condition, and . . . stand at bay at last on the American question. The difficulty of determining . . . is enormous . . . you have no idea how heavily the anxiety of it sits upon my soul. I begin to feel myself drawn to America . . . as Darnay . . . was attracted to the Loadstone Rock, Paris" (Johnson 525).

The obliqueness of Charles Darnay, C_____ D_____, was the result of Dickens's distress and insecurity in the years 1858-59. He was no surer of the future of his fictional creation at the time than he was of his own future. He was certain, however, that Sidney Carton, the rogue, who signified a stagnant past, had to be destroyed. The indeterminacy that marks Darnay is the projection of a wished for future but one that for Dickens was uncertain, particularly in terms of his relationship with Ellen Ternan. The thing he wanted most was to walk away from the past.

Jaques Lacan writes of a condition, a neurosis, that produces in a subject, unsure of his virility and the specificity of his social function, a vision of a fictional figure, an "other," with whom he engages in a narcissistic relation that can be fatal if not resolved. To this "signifying other," the subject "delegates the responsibility of representing him in the world and of living in his place. It is not really himself; he feels excluded, outside of his own experience, . . . he feels discordant with his existence, and the impasse recurs" (417). C_____ D_____, Charles Darnay, was the creature of Dick-

ens's insecurities, perhaps, of a threatening neurosis that, at the least, would have debilitated his career. The resolution of the insecurities in the character of Pip, at a time when Dickens had consciously decided to retaylor his own life, suggests that he overcame the potentially fatal impasse. As Edgar Johnson reports, by the time *Great Expectations* was concluded in 1861, Dickens was restored, a much more stable figure than he was during the *Tale of Two Cities* years of 1858-59. In 1861, at forty-nine, he surrounded himself with younger companions; he subjected himself to increased labors and accelerated his swift-paced walks around London and Gad's Hill; he dressed as gaily as ever and, in all respects, acted like a much younger man. And in Amphyll Square, there was Ellen, "Nelly," as he now called her, "glamorous in all her fair young beauty" (492-93). Within the remaining nine years of his life, he wrote *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), survived a train wreck in Paris in 1865, resolved his dilemma over the American tour, revisiting the U. S. in 1867-68, rescued his magazine *All the Year Round* from financial ruin, and, from all accounts, lived as gaily and as productively as his failing health permitted.

Like *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, *Tale of*

Two Cities may be read autobiographically, as the novel in which the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty congruent with Dickens's life in 1858 were initially purged, enabling him to remain confident and, in spite of failing health, marginally productive as he entered what was to be the last decade of his life.

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Dickens and Eliot in Dialogue: Empty Space, Angels and Maggie Tulliver

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Throughout the *Letters of George Eliot* we find nearly one hundred references to Charles Dickens, references to his life and career, to his novels, and to his friendship with George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. In some of her letters, Eliot quotes directly from Dickens's novels. Clearly, she had read many if not all of them. In referring to Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss*, Bulwer-Lytton remarks, "[N]ow and then there is a little unconscious imitation of Dickens" (*GE Letters* 3: 315n). Likewise, Dickens read Eliot's fiction, and according to Edgar Johnson, "Dickens was among the first to recognize the genius of George Eliot" (713). When Dickens visited Eliot and Lewes, Eliot wrote, "Yesterday, Mr. Dickens dined with us. . . . That was a great pleasure to me: he is a man one can thoroughly enjoy talking to—there is a strain of real seriousness along with his keenness and humour" (*GE Letters* 3: 200).

As their lives mingled and crossed, so did their fiction. Although Dickens published *The Pickwick Papers* twenty years before Eliot's first fictional work appeared, the Victorian reading public assimilated both imaginative world views in a relatively short period of time. One aspect of the tandem assimilation especially relevant to gender studies is the contrasting ways in which Dickens and Eliot constructed female character. Two novels—*Dombey and Son*, published in 1847-48, and *The Mill on the Floss*, published in 1860—are particularly revealing in contrasting this female characterization.

At several points these two novels intersect structurally and thematically. In both the daughters are central figures. Florence Dombey and Maggie Tulliver are small children, six and nine, when we first meet them, and their maturation accompanies the development of the plots. At the end of *The Mill*, Maggie is nineteen, and Florence is very near that age at the conclusion of *Dombey and Son*. Because they are daughters, Florence and Maggie are not given any formal education. But Florence sends Susan Nipper to buy books secretly so she can help Paul with his studies, and "being possessed of a naturally quick and sound capacity, and taught by that most wonderful of masters, love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught and passed him" (231). Maggie secretly meets Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps to borrow and discuss books. Early in the novel Mr. Tulliver states that Maggie is much brighter than her brother Tom: "[S]he's twice as 'cute [clever] as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid" (12). Both Dickens and Eliot satirize the type of education the sons receive, for the Latin taught to Tom at the Reverend Stelling's is no more relevant than the Latin grammar taught to Paul at Blimber's.

Another structural link between *Dombey and Son* and *The Mill* is the portrayal and use of secondary characters. Toots and Philip befriend Florence and Maggie, giving them sympathy and support. And surely, Bob Jakins must be a long lost nephew of Captain Cuttles. Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox

might well find themselves at the weekly luncheon of the ladies of St. Ogg's along with Mrs. Glegg, Mrs. Pullet, and Mrs. Deane in spite of the differences in social class.

Mr. Tulliver, like Mr. Dombey, goes bankrupt; the firm of Dombey and Son collapses, and in the end the flood destroys the wharves of St. Ogg's. In both novels we learn something of the historical period—the rise of the middle class, the coming of the railroads, the power of patriarchal institutions and the effects of materialism and industrialization.

These parallels in narrative structure and theme and the frequent references to social conditions in *Dombey and Son* and *The Mill on the Floss* serve to spotlight all the more intensely the different ways Dickens and Eliot construct the female character. Nancy K. Miller, in discussing a poetics of women's fiction, locates such difference in the "insistence of a certain thematic structuration in the form of the content" (37). This "insistence" emerges through what Miller calls "demaximization" and "italicization." She states:

[T]he plots of women's literature are not about "life" and solutions in any therapeutic sense, nor should they be. They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction. Mme de Lafayette quietly, George Eliot, less silently, both italicize by the demaximization of their heroines' texts the difficulty of curing plot of life, and life of certain plots. (46)

Dickens perpetuates traditional maxims by saturating the ending of *Dombey and Son* with solutions, solutions which constrain rather than enliven women readers. About Florence Dombey, Kathleen Tillotson writes: "[O]n the whole the effect is still of a space where Florence's character ought to be, with our attention drawn from the vacuum by the ring of admirers" (172). In contrast, Eliot fills the space inhabited by Maggie with a rich inner life of needs, motivation and contradiction. And, ultimately, character and setting in *The Mill* must refuse the happy ending.

Dickens himself recognized this keen difference when he first read Eliot's fiction. In a letter to the author of the *Scenes from Clerical Life*, Dickens remarked upon the true identity of the author:

In addressing these few words of thankfulness to the creator of the sad fortunes of Mr. Amos Barton, and the sad love-story of Mr. Gilfil, I am (I presume) bound to adopt the name [George Eliot] that it pleases that excellent writer to assume. I can suggest no better one; but I should have been strongly disposed, if I had been left to my own devices, to address the sad writer as a woman. I have observed what seems to me to be such womanly touches, in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me, even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself, mentally, so like a woman, since the world began. (*GE Letters* 2: 423-24)

Other readers accepted, with certainty, the male authorship of

Eliot's early fiction. George Henry Lewes wrote, "The fun is that except Dickens and those who believe his word everybody believes the author to be a *man*, and mostly a clergyman. 'University man' say all the Oxford and Cambridge gents" (*GE Letters* 3: 65). It was uncanny insight on Dickens's part to recognize the gender contradiction in this situation. What was he seeing in the fiction that was absent or different from his own?

In part, he answered this question in another letter to Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood:

The selfish young fellow with the heart disease, in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story," is plainly taken from a woman's point of view. Indeed I observe all the women in the book are more alive than the men, and more informed from within. . . . If I be wrong in this, then I protest that a woman's mind has got into some man's body by a mistake that ought immediately to be corrected. (*GE Letters* 2: 427-28)

In referring to *Adam Bede*, Dickens wrote: "Adam Bede has taken its place among the actual experiences and endurances of my life. . . . The conception of Hetty's character is so extraordinarily subtle and true, that I laid the book down fifty times, to shut my eyes and think about it. I know nothing so skilful, determined, and uncompromising" (*GE Letters* 3: 114-15).

Dickens does compromise his female characters. Instead of presenting the whole woman, he splits the female psyche into parts, and what we have in annoying excess in one character, we sorely miss in another. In *Dombey and Son*, Florence, Edith and Susan Nipper are incomplete female characters, but taken together they constitute a more complete and thus realistic picture of womanhood. Eliot, in contrast, combines Florence's need to give and receive love, Edith's anger and rebellion and Susan's sauciness into one character—Maggie Tulliver.

In order to further investigate this contrasting female construction, three comparable scenes from each novel will be analyzed: Gypsies, The Dance and The Striking Scene. This juxtaposition of Florence and Maggie creates a mutually illuminating dialogue which foregrounds social forces working to determine and constrain.

GYPSIES

Florence, after visiting Stagg's Gardens with Polly, Susan and Paul, is lost and terrorized in the City. An old woman approaches her immediately and says, "Why did you run away from 'em?" (128). Good Mrs. Brown—ugly, miserably dressed, with a shrivelled and yellow face and throat—is a gypsy of the City. The walls and ceiling of her house are black, and in place of furniture she has heaps of rags, bones and cinders on the floor. Florence almost swoons at the sight. Dickens describes their relationship:

The old woman's threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this

bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs. Brown listened attentively, until she had finished. (129-30)

Florence's clothes are taken from her and she almost loses her hair. In rags, she again finds herself alone in the City. Meeting Walter Gay, she identifies herself by saying "[M]y name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister—and, oh, dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!" (134). Two aspects of Florence's self-conception are implicit in these words: she sees her identity as residing in her relationship to her brother, and, as passive female, she must be taken care of. Walter and Solomon do take care—Walter is the prince who replaces the shoe on her "little foot," and Solomon kisses her "like her grandfather" (140). These men will again come to her rescue later in the narrative when Florence runs away from her father.

The preceding events take place in Chapter Six of *Dombey and Son*, a chapter which begins on page seventy-one of the novel. Although this chapter is about Florence being lost in the City, it is entitled "Paul's Second Deprivation." Even the chapter heading works to silence Florence's story. On page fifty of *The Mill* we find Maggie cutting her own hair. Surely, Florence would never think of performing such a rebellious act, and Florence, next to this strong-willed and energetic spitfire, seems but a selfless shadow.

After cutting the front of her hair, Maggie asks Tom to help by cutting the back. He hesitates, but Maggie tells him to make haste, "giving a little stamp of her foot. Her cheeks were quite flushed" (58). The narrator enters to say, "The black locks were so thick—nothing could be more tempting. . . and Maggie stood cropped in a jagged, uneven manner, but with a sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain" (58). Her sense of "clearness and freedom" is short-lived, however. Tom says, "[Y]ou look like the idiot we throw out nutshells to at school" (58); and Aunt Pullet says, "She's more like a gypsy nor ever" (61).

The next day, after pushing "poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow-trodden mud," Maggie runs away to the gypsies (94). She naively thinks the gypsies will be glad to see her and "pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge" (94). After arriving, Maggie feels that "[E]verything would be quite charming when she had taught the gypsies to use a washing-basin and to feel an interest in books" (97). Like Good Mrs. Brown, the gypsies ask Maggie about herself and show much interest in her bonnet, frock and the contents of her pockets. Maggie's attitude toward them changes quickly as she begins to see them as thieves and perhaps even murderers who will kill and cook her. But no prince appears to rescue Maggie, and she returns home on a donkey.

Throughout these scenes we see the force of Maggie's unhappiness take shape in action—she cuts, she pushes and she runs. Florence's passive nature allows her to be lost, to be undressed and to be rescued. Dickens packs the outer space around Florence with incredible description and detail, but little of her thought and even less of her words are given. Eliot does just the opposite by filling Maggie's inner space with motivation, thoughts and passion. Maggie is full of herself whereas Florence is selfless. Gilbert and Gubar state, "To be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that

has no story . . . is really a life of death, a death-in-life. The ideal of 'contemplative purity' evokes, finally, both heaven and the grave" (25).

THE DANCE

In both *Dombey and Son* and *The Mill on the Floss* the heroines attend a dance, Florence a holiday dance at the Blimbers' and Maggie a dance at Park House given by Stephen Guest's sisters. Maggie "at first refused to dance" (485), and "Florence would have sat by him [Paul] all night, and would not have danced at all of her own accord, but Paul made her, by telling her how much it pleased him" (269). Florence dances to please Paul. Maggie dances to please herself, for "at length the music wrought in her young limbs, and the longing came; . . . Maggie quite forgot her troublous life in a childlike enjoyment of that half-rustic rhythm" (385).

At these dances both young women look lovely—Florence "looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her flowers in her hand" (267), "the beautiful little rosebud of the room" (269); and Maggie's "eyes and cheeks had that fire of young joy in them which will flame out if it can find the least breath to fan it; and her simple black dress, with its bit of black lace, seemed like the dim setting of a jewel" (385). Florence is a rosebud and Maggie a jewel. The rosebud metaphor speaks of youth and fleeting beauty, whereas the jewel metaphor speaks of permanence and a loveliness inside as well as out.

Florence has all eyes on her: "They all loved Florence" (272); "admiration of the self-possessed and modest little beauty was on every lip: reports of her intelligence and accomplishments floated past him [Paul], constantly" (272), and "they all, to a boy, doted on Florence" (273). Once more, Florence does not act, but is acted upon. The others look at her, speak to her, dote on her.

Maggie, rather than being a rosebud, attempts to pick a rose when she and Stephen leave the dance and walk into the conservatory. She says, "I think I am quite wicked with roses—I like to gather them and smell them till they have no scent left" (387). While Florence tends to her brother's happiness, Maggie momentarily tends to her own confused feelings, caught in the magic of a strong sexual attraction to Stephen and pleased with the warmth of his attraction to her. But Eliot, in the midst of this passionate attraction and in the space of only two pages, uses "childlike" twice to describe Maggie (385, 386). Along with this childlikeness, we feel the richness of Maggie's character, the fullness of her womanhood, and the credibility of Stephen and Maggie being caught up with one another. Because Eliot describes this attraction from the inside out, we sense its possibility. Stephen's eyes "devour" Maggie; the desire to dance with her possesses him "like a thirst" (385), and he is seized by a "mad impulse" and showers her arm with kisses (387). Dickens is incapable of using such diction in relation to Florence—she must be kept clean and abstract, the shadow of a woman, an empty space. We keep gazing at Florence; she is "so young, and good, and beautiful to him [Paul]; . . . her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet, and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness" (271). The dissimilar diction in the two dance scenes is revealing—words like "devour," "thirst," "rapture" simply

do not belong to Florence's world. An invisible shield surrounds her, preventing any man from touching her in a sexual way. Florence is protected by Dickens. Maggie seems quite alone and vulnerable.

THE STRIKING SCENE

When Dombey discovers Edith's betrayal, he "tore out of the house, with a frantic idea of finding her yet, at the place to which she had been taken, and beating all trace of beauty out of the triumphant face with his bare hand" (756). Edith is not to be found, but Florence with outstretched arms, runs to her father crying, "Oh dear, dear Papa!" Dombey strikes Florence, and "as he dealt the blow, he told her what Edith was, and bade her follow her, since they had always been in league" (757). Florence receives the violent assault in place of Edith.

Edith Granger, a radical female character in Victorian fiction, understands too well that society has made a commodity of her physical beauty. She says, "There is no slave in a market; there is no horse in a fair; so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years" (473). Robert Clark comments:

It should also be borne in mind that the apparently sympathetic representation of Edith Granger's plight as a commodity available to the highest bidder in the marriage market was made possible by Dickens's intention to ruin her in the end. To know one's place as lucidly as Edith does is to ensure that your husband, or your author, will put you away. It is women such as Florence who make ideal mothers and wives. (72)

Only once does Florence step out of her passive and submissive role. When Edith runs away and Dombey strikes Florence, at this moment of chaos, of complete loss of control, Florence leaves her father's house. Tillotson sees this event as "the sole occasion on which she is to act as well as suffer. But in the Dombey-Carker-Edith situation she is chiefly a pawn in the game; and the idiom in which it is conducted makes her less and not more alive" (174).

In the streets Florence remembers an earlier time when she was lost and found; and this second time Dickens leaves her alone for less than two pages. On the bottom of the second page the little Midshipman is again in sight. Imagine, if you will, a Florence with no place to go, with no second patriarchal home in which to seek refuge. No positive space exists for single women; women cannot function apart from father, husband or brother, and we will see this problematic situation again at the end of *The Mill*.

Maggie is a combination of both Edith and Florence without reaching either extreme. Like Edith, Maggie rebels, cutting her hair, running off to be a gypsy, meeting Philip in the Red Deeps. Dickens says of Florence, "It was not difficult to perceive that Florence was at a great disadvantage in her father's presence. It was not only a constraint upon the child's mind, but even upon the natural grace and freedom of her actions" (86). Like Florence, Maggie learns to repress herself under the self-denial, obedience and dependency prescribed by the patriarchal society in which she lives. We see this con-

striction enforced by her mother and aunts, by her brother and by the ladies of St. Ogg's. This constriction is further validated by her reading of Thomas à Kempis. Like Edith and Florence, Maggie spends much of her time and energy struggling to position herself in a world of men—her father, her brother, Philip Wakem, and her lover, Stephen Guest. According to Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Maggie eventually "believes the lie, that she is inferior, or wrong, or not to be taken seriously. She learned to collaborate in her own defeat" (594).

In running from Mr. Dombey, Edith betrays and shames him. He is dishonored. Honor is most important to Dombey and it is most important to Maggie's brother Tom. When Maggie floats down the river with Stephen Guest, she shames and dishonors her brother. When she refuses to marry Stephen at Mudport the next morning and returns to St. Ogg's, she does so because she does not wish to shame and hurt her family further. She repents. It is difficult to imagine Florence being swept down the river with Walter Gay, but it is not hard to see her returning, as Maggie does, to ask forgiveness.

Immediately upon returning, Maggie, with "an expression of physical pain still about her brow and eyes, and her whole appearance, with her dress so long unchanged, . . . worn and distressed" (423), visits her brother at the mill. Tom, "trembling and white with disgust and indignation" (423), says, "You have disgraced us all. You have disgraced my father's name. You have been a curse to your best friends. You have been base—deceitful; no motives are strong enough to restrain you. I wash my hands of you forever. You don't belong to me" (423). Maggie pleads, "I want to make amends. I will endure anything. I want to be kept from doing wrong again" (424). But Tom's cruelty is relentless, and he says, "What will keep you? . . . Not religion; not your natural feelings of gratitude and honour. . . . I loath your character and your conduct. . . . [Y]ou shall not come under my roof. It is enough that I have to bear the thought of your disgrace; the sight of you is hateful to me" (424). Such words strike Maggie every bit as hard as Dombey struck Florence. And we can well imagine Dombey speaking in this way to Edith had she returned.

Maggie has no Midshipman to run to. Tom's brutal rejection is followed by that of the ladies of the community, and Eliot pointedly describes the implications of Maggie's decision to return to St. Ogg's alone:

If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest with a post-marital *trousseau* and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St. Ogg's, as elsewhere, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results. . . .

But . . . Maggie had returned without a *trousseau*, without a husband—in that degraded and outcast condition. . . . Could anything be more detestable? . . . There was always something questionable about her. . . . [T]here had always been something in Miss Tulliver's very physique that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic of harm. . . . Why, her own brother had turned her from his door. . . . It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighbourhood—to

America, or anywhere—so as to purify the air of St. Ogg's from the taint of her presence, extremely dangerous to daughters there! (429-30)

The concluding events in *Dombey and Son* and *The Mill on the Floss* substantiate and solidify the differences in female representation established in the preceding analysis. At the close of *Dombey and Son* there is reunion and marriage: Solomon returns; Toots and Susan Nippers are united; Harriet cares for Alice and her mother; Miss Tox takes in the Grinder; Bunsby and Mrs. MacStinger join in holy matrimony. Even Edith finds companionship as she and her Cousin Feenix plan to live together in Italy. Feenix says, "[S]he put herself under my protection" (966).

However, before reuniting Florence and her father, Dickens describes Dombey's last days and nights in the old house when his depression and isolation bring him to the brink of suicide:

A special, haggard, wasted likeness of himself, brooded and brooded over the empty fireplace. Now it lifted up its head, examining the lines and hollows in its face; now hung it down again, and brooded afresh. Now it rose and walked about; now passed into the next room, and came back with something from the dressing-table in its breast. . . .

Now it was thinking again! What was it thinking?

Whether they would tread in the blood when it crept so far, and carry it about the house among those many prints of feet, or even into the street. (938-39)

At this critical moment Florence arrives with a "wild, loud, piercing, loving, rapturous cry" to ask *his* forgiveness: "I have come back to ask forgiveness on my knees" (939). As so often the case with Florence, we must speculate as to how her attitude has changed toward her father. And we wonder what thoughts and feelings have brought her to the point of saying, "I am penitent. I know my fault. I know my duty better now. Papa, don't cast me off, or I shall die!" (939). Where is her sense of personal dignity? Must even a hearth angel be so servile? The humility seems excessive. Nevertheless, Dombey's life and his pride are saved, and he spends his final days surrounded by the warmth and love of a new little Paul and a new little Florence.

In the last pages of *The Mill on the Floss*, where Maggie suffers a loneliness and despair not unlike Mr. Dombey's, Eliot gives us no such harmony. Pressure from the ladies of St. Ogg's forces the parish clergyman, Dr. Kenn, to dismiss Maggie from her job as governess. After hearing this news, she "walked back to her lodgings through the driving rain with a new sense of desolation. . . . [S]he was unspeakably, sickeningly weary!" (449). Confusing her even more, a letter arrives from Stephen saying, "I can never care for life without you. Write me one word—say 'Come!'" (449). As much as she longs to write, she cannot.

Maggie is alone in the world, alone in her room. It is her last night:

"I will bear it, and bear it till death. . . . But how long it will be before death comes! I am so young, so healthy. How

shall I have patience and strength? Am I to struggle and fall and repent again?—has life other trials for me still?"

With that cry of self-despair, Maggie fell on her knees against the table, and buried her sorrow-stricken face. (451)

Dickens could not put one of his idealized females in such a situation—so totally disconnected from the rest of humanity. Maggie's depression and isolation echo back to Dombey's.

When the flood comes, Maggie returns to the mill to save her brother; he does not come to her, and this movement back parallels Florence's return to her father. But what a twist of irony awaits the reader of *The Mill* who reads on expecting a happy ending. While attempting to save her brother, Maggie and Tom both drown. In Eliot's vision, brother and sister and the subject positions they signify cannot be joined upon this earth. Only in submersion and death can they wed: "In their death they were not divided" (457).

Even if we quibble over the purpose and meaning of one of the events or one of the scenes discussed here, we are left, overall, with a disturbing difference in the construction of the female character in Dickens and Eliot, a difference first expressed by Dickens himself. Maggie Tulliver is "more alive," "more informed from within" than Florence Dombey, but Maggie is dead at nineteen. Florence—hearth angel, the shadow of womanhood, the empty space—is alive, surrounded by father, husband, son and daughter. In order to achieve such social connection, however, Florence pays a dear price, forfeiting her dignity, agency, and sexuality. Such sacrifice seems perverse, and we must question the probability and the consequences of such fictional idealization. Florence's abstract character is not constructed with the stuff humans are made of; rather it is a product of the hopes and desires of her creator and of the Victorian reading public, a filling of empty space with angels. In this way she can serve as the center of the fairy tale ending of *Dombey and Son*.

Florence Dombey is not unique in Dickens's novels in her subject position as hearth angel. Amy Dorrit, Agnes Wickfield, Esther Summerson and Jesse Hexam, among others, join with her as variations on the theme of "good girl" in their passive submission to patriarchal containment. Dickens retains an old world view of an essentialist femininity, and to do so he must transform womanhood into a lifeless "ideal." Miller sates:

The blind spot here is both political (or philosophical) and literary. It does not see, nor does it want to, that the fictions of desire behind the desiderata of fiction are masculine and not universal constructs. It does not see that the maxims that pass for truth of human experience, and the encoding of that experience in literature, are organizations, when they are not fantasies, of the dominant culture. To read women's literature is to see and hear repeatedly a chafing against the "unsatisfactory reality" contained in the maxim. (46-47)

Eliot disrupts the maxim of the ideal woman, refusing to play the game of hope and desire. The flood which ends *The Mill* underscores the novel's pervasive social critique in several ways. When the flood comes, Maggie goes to the mill

to save her brother, but, ironically, they both drown. Why does Eliot choose to drown Tom? What does his death accomplish? Because Tom functions as a symbol of patriarchal authority, power and order in the novel, Eliot is able to condemn and negate this patriarchy through his death. The flood also serves as a condemnation of a culture that cripples Maggie, punishing her for her lively spirit, dark skin and unruly hair, and, at the same time, creating within her needs and dependencies which she cannot outgrow. Maggie is physically isolated in a community which has rejected her; she is entombed within a small world of metaphysical essentialism. The reader is left to redefine the values of family, community and tradition according to the instructions signified in the ending. If such a patriarchal community can be so destructive, how might it be different? What should Maggie's upbringing have been? What could Maggie's life have done? We are left to imagine other possibilities through the absence of anything but the void of the text, the void of the flood. The life and death of Maggie Tulliver may be read as a response to the lifeless maxim embodied in Florence Dombey. Maggie reveals both rich possibilities and the difficulty of their realization in the world of duty, self-denial, patriarchal authority and marriage prescribed by Dickens for his favorite female characters.

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University of Iowa

Hopkins's Panic in "Spring"

Joseph H. Gardner

In a fascinating article on "The Sexual Underthought in Hopkins' 'The Windhover,'" John B. Gleason cites a celebrated passage in Hopkins's 14 January 1883 letter to Alexander Baillie in which the poet identifies two modes of poetical meaning:

In any lyric passage of the tragic poets . . . there are—usually . . .—two strains of thought running together and like counterpointed; the overthought that which everybody, editors, see . . . and which might for instance be abridged or paraphrased in square marginal blocks . . . the other, the underthought, conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc used and often only half realised by the poet himself, not necessarily having any connection with the subject in hand but usually having a connection and suggested by some circumstance of the scene or of the story. (201)

The underthought Gleason discovers in "The Windhover" hinges upon a common dialect name given to the bird whose flight the poem describes: *windfucker*. Hence Gleason suggests both that the word *buckle*, which has so tortured interpreters, points to a sexual joining and that the capitalized *AND*, which follows it, is a copulative in more senses than one.

The sexual underthought in "The Windhover," Gleason argues, is a benign one. Sexual references in the poem are, he says, to be associated with the quickening that results from the

infusion of spirit into matter (as in "God's Grandeur"), with "the Incarnation, the union of the divine and the human, of God with his creation." It is also associated with the "great sacrament" of Ephesians 5:32, with the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage of Christ with his Church, with allegorical readings of the Song of Songs, and with the mystic marriages of Christ with various female saints (205-06).

The present essay argues for the existence of a sexual underthought in another sonnet, "Spring," written in the same month (May 1877) as "The Windhover" and closely aligned to it in theme and structure. However, unlike the underthought Gleason describes in "The Windhover," that in "Spring" depicts sexuality as disruptive and destructive, as a profound psychological and moral threat which must be challenged and eradicated, even by violence, if necessary.

Hopkins's letter to Baillie humorously suggests that even "editors" are capable of discerning the overthoughts of the classical poets. If we substitute for Hopkins's editors their modern day equivalents, English professors, they too appear to have no difficulty in deducing the meaning of "Spring." Indeed, the poem evokes an unanimity of response rare in Hopkins criticism (Gardner 2: 238-40; Pick 68; McChesney 59-60; Cotter 174-75; Bergonzi 180-82; Robinson 94-95; MacKenzie 69-71). The octave rapturously describes a spring landscape in a series of striking images presented in almost

Pre-Raphaelite detail. The thrush's song, we're told, for example, "does so rinse and wring / the ear, it strikes like lightning to hear him sing," while the phrase "Thrush's eggs look little low heavens" could easily be appended to one of W. H. Hunt's watercolors (*Poems* 67).

The sestet begins with a question, "What is all this juice and all this joy?," which is quickly answered: "A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning / In Eden garden." The poem then ends with a prayer, addressed to Christ himself:

... Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Hopkins draws here on a tradition, which could have come to him from a variety of sources—Vaughan, Milton, and Wordsworth come first to mind—that sees the history of the race as being recapitulated in both the rhythm of the seasons and the lives of individuals. Hence both spring and childhood are equated with man's Edenic beginnings. The concluding prayer enjoins Christ to capture and possess the innocence and freshness of children before they fall into the sinfulness of the adult world, a sentiment also expressed in "Morning, Midday, and Evening Sacrifice" and "The Bugler's First Communion."¹

The springtime heralded in the overthought is characterized by a freshness and innocence that suggests a divine lustration. But one notes it is also characterized by active fecundity and fertility. Weeds "shoot long and lovely and lush"; the thrush's song is a mating call; its nest is full of eggs. The peartree is covered with blooms and "glassy" with pollen; the "racing lambs too have fair their fling." The latter image echoes a passage in the *Journal* describing lambs: "They toss and toss; it is as if it were the earth that flung them, not themselves" (206). It also suggests a favorite game of lambs, their mounting each other in comic imitation of adult sexual behavior.

The octave, then, depicts a world not only charged with the grandeur of God but also crackling with sexual energy. This underthought requires that we provide a second answer to the question "What is all this juice and all this joy?" Among other things, Hopkins was far too familiar with Whitman not to be aware of the sexual connotations of the word "juice." Indeed, the emphasis on sexual energy in the octave recalls Whitman's description of the sunrise as a vast cosmic ejaculation: "Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven" (43).

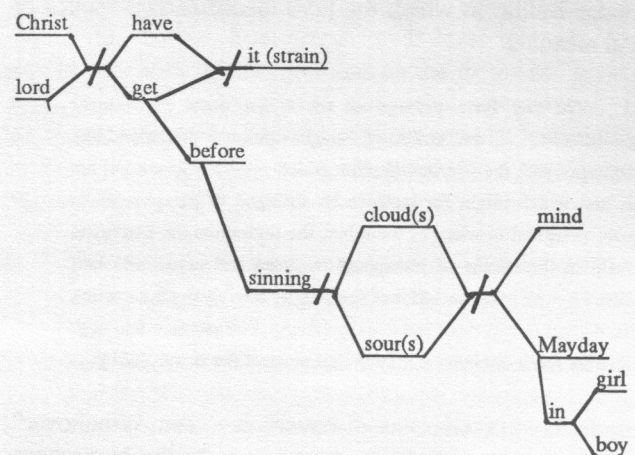
Far from celebrating the sexual force he sees being manifest all around him, the speaker fears it. It is a "strain" that threatens to destroy the Edenic innocence depicted in the overthought. If both spring and childhood recapitulate mankind's pre-lapsarian bliss, then the built-in logic of the trope suggests that the Fall be associated with puberty, an association the Victorians in general and Hopkins in particular

were quick to make. The Fall is the fall into sexuality. Hence the underthought's concluding prayer, an enjoining of Christ to drain the world of sexual energy before it, sexuality, clouds and cloy Christ himself in the, as yet, innocent minds of pre-pubescent boys and girls.

(The penultimate line suggests that the adjective "innocent" governs girl's and boy's "Mayday" as well as "mind," presenting the reader with a puzzling oxymoron. An "innocent Mayday"? Even Herrick, while insisting that Mayday's "follie" is "harmless," hardly dares characterize it as innocent, as his references to "green-gown[s] given" and "jest[s] told of the Keyes betraying / This night, and Locks pickt" attest (72). The puzzle is resolved in the underthought by its assumption that the child's mind is "innocent" of the sexual meaning of Mayday as fertility rite and occasion for sexual license. Hence again the injunction to Christ, who is specifically identified as a "maid's child" untainted by sexual procreation, to annihilate sexuality before it clouds innocent minds.)

The existence of a sexual underthought in "Spring" hinges on the ambiguous word order of the sonnet's final sentence. The double imperative verbs, "have," "get," are placed first, while the subject, "Christ, lord," is inserted into the middle of the temporal phrase, immediately following the verb "cloud" and preceding the verb "sour." This unusual word order suggests, especially in an oral reading, the possibility that "Christ, lord" is the object of "cloud" and "sour," just as the verb "cloy" suggests sexual satiety. The radical difference between overthought and underthought can, therefore, best be demonstrated by reverting to the schoolroom practice of diagramming.

In the overthought, Christ is the subject and "it," whose antecedent is "strain," is the object. The verb "get" means to come into possession of, while "strain" simultaneously means both musical motif (spring is like a song out of Eden) and lineage (spring descends from Eden,

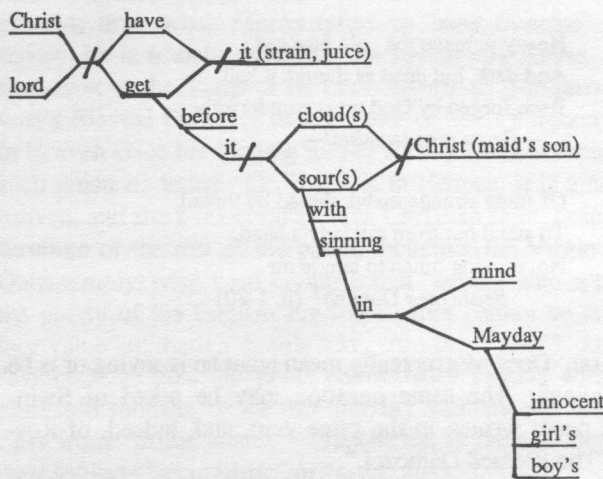


In the underthought, Christ is both subject of the verbs "have" and "get" and object of "cloud" and "sour." "Get" now means to overpower or destroy. "Strain" remains as the antecedent of

¹ In a sermon delivered 31 August 1879 Hopkins told his audience "... the boy and girl, that in their bloom and heyday, in their strength and health give themselves to God and with the fresh body and joyously beating blood give

him glory, how near he will be to them in age and sickness and wall their weakness round in the hour of death!" (*Sermons* 19).

"it," but refers not to Edenic innocence but sexual "juice" and energy, and takes on its other meaning, a threatening tension or pressure. Sexuality puts a strain on Christ's hold over boy and girl, and must, therefore, be stamped out, by divine violence if necessary:



One is reminded not only of "The Bugler's First Communion," but also of Hopkins's celebrated, even notorious, comment on it to Bridges: "I am half inclined to hope the Hero of it may be killed in Afghanistan" (*Letters* 92).

An awareness of the ambiguity of sexual energy is deeply embedded in Western culture. Sexuality is both the "alma Venus" of Lucretius, "hominum divomque voluptas," without whom "quicquam dias in luminis oras / exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam," and also the terrifying "magna mater ferarum," whose followers mutilate themselves and each other, "armis / ludent in numerumque exultant sanguine laeti." Or, as a student, responding to *The Bacchae*, put it in more modern terms, "Dionysus promises Woodstock, but delivers Altamont." The Victorians may well have found this ambiguity particularly disturbing, being the heirs of the romantic tradition on the one hand and prey to their own well-documented sexual anxieties on the other. In "A Nympholept," a poem strikingly close to "Spring" in its concerns, Swinburne's speaker comes to recognize that only by acknowledging and facing up to the destructive element of sexuality can one overcome the "Pan-ic" it engenders. Hopkins's solution to the same dilemma is to want to crush sexuality out altogether before its potentially devastating energies can be released.

If the underthought of "Spring" lacks the moral courage of "A Nympholept's" overthought, it does make the poem itself possible. Many readers find the relationship between the sonnet's octave and sestet unsatisfactory. Seamus Heaney, for example, calls the poem "a delightful piece of inscaping," but sees it as "nevertheless structurally a broken arch, with an octave of description aspiring toward a conjunction with a sestet of doctrine" (MacKenzie 70). Barbara Hardy similarly regrets the poem's reduction to dogma and "message" at the end (5). Yet the sestet is intimately tied to the octave, but not simply—or even primarily—in the ways usually adumbrated. (E. g. that wheels are traditional symbols of the divine; that the thrush's eggs are turned into microcosmic heavens; that

lightning is the Old Testament's favored instrument of divine cleansing, and so forth.) The sestet *allows* the octave to be written. By counterposing the fear and hostility toward sexuality contained in the underthought against the celebration of freshness, rebirth and paradoxical innocence in the overthought, the poet makes that celebration possible. Positing underthought as antidote to overthought, the speaker attains a tense but nonetheless empowering psychic equilibrium. It is only after sexuality has, like Venus, been disarmed, that Hopkins can exult in the exuberance of spring.

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University of Kentucky

Mary, Narcissus, and Quasimodo: Three Touchstones for Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism

Nathan Cervo

Signaled by the appearance of the first issue of *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* in 1977, the battle over the question "What is Pre-Raphaelitism?" has been joined as never before in literary history. Previous to that year, it was customary to characterize the Pre-Raphaelites as drawing their subjects from literature, particularly Shakespeare, Dante, Keats, and the Arthurian cycle, and utilizing both the "bounding line" extolled by Blake in his *Marginal Notes* and primary colors liberally decorated with gold. Fra Angelico was considered the Pre-Raphaelite artist par excellence, and Gabriel Dante Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" was supposed to have given Pre-Raphaelitism its first and most memorable enshrinement in English letters:

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn. (ll. 1-12)

Here other traits were displayed that eventually became symptomatic of English Pre-Raphaelite poetry—its pictorial aspect, archaic diction, and eye-rhymes, as well as unexpected feminine rhymes (somewhat Hudibrastic at times. Swinburne turned his hand to the composition of such a poem, which, like much of his poetry, suffers from uncertain tone and seems to be little more than parody or glib execution for the sake of execution. So did Morris: "Praise of My Lady":

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully.

Beata mea Domina!

Her forehead, overshadow'd much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.

Beata mea Domina!

Nor greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
But thick and crisped wonderfully:

Beata mea Domina!

Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead as though it had
Been forged by God most wonderfully
—*Beata mea Domina!*—

Of some strange metal, thread by thread,
To stand out from my lady's head,
Not moving much to tangle me.
Beata mea Domina! (ll. 1-20)

And so on. Does Morris really mean what he is saying or is he just playing? The same question may be asked of Swinburne's poem written in the same vein, and, indeed, of Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel."

The question seems inconsequential enough, but its import is quite serious, for these poems represent a literary tradition at least as old as Boethius's described vision of Lady Philosophy. Dante made extensive use of it in *La Vita Nuova*, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti translated while still in his teens, his version of the first stanza of one of the canzoni of which follows:

Ladies that have intelligence in love,
Of mine own lady I would speak with you;
Not that I hope to count her praises through,
But telling what I may, to ease my mind.
And I declare that when I speak thereof,
Love sheds such perfect sweetness over me
That if my courage failed not, certainly
To him my listeners must be all resign'd.
Wherefore I will not speak in such large kind
That mine own speech should foil me, which were base;
But only will discourse of her high grace
In these poor words, the best that I can find,
With you alone, dear dames and damozels:
'T were ill to speak thereof with any else. (Rossetti 62)

This seems straightforward enough, but only to those who are unacquainted with the Arabian sources from which the School of the Sweet New Style, of which Dante in his poetry of the kind cited above was a member in good standing, drew its inspiration and techniques.¹ Indeed, Rossetti's father, Gabriele Rossetti, was much concerned with the deeper, or nuclear, meaning of such poetry, and he deals with it in his monograph on Dante's Beatrice and in his *Il mistero dell' amor platonico del medio evo*. This is not the place to elaborate the intricacies of such thought, which relies heavily, if not exclusively, on the hermeneutical method, but it is worth mentioning in passing that Elizabeth Siddal played the same role in Rossetti's poetry as Beatrice did in Dante's. The ques-

¹ A good book on the subject is Robert Briffault's *The Troubadours*.

tion is, Where did reality leave off and "Arabian" symbolism begin?

With respect to the "lady" poems, mentioned above, by Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris, it is important to recognize that they represent what may be called the Poetry of the Secular Madonna. The Italian *donna* derives from the etymon *domina*; thus, when Morris refers to "*mea Domina*" in his refrain, he is actually returning the Italian *mia donna*, that is *madonna*, to the status of its Latin etymons. Similarly, Rossetti's Blessed Damozel seems rather to be in Purgatory than in Heaven since her longing for her earthly lover is depicted in such sensuous terms. Or, if she is in Heaven, it is a Muslim heaven, and she a *hourī* rather than Christian saint, despite the furniture of the rest of the poem, including the Virgin Mary. Quite simply, what I am saying is that "ladies" who appear in the poetry of the English Pre-Raphaelites cannot be taken at face value but merit a double take. Are they "real"? Are they "symbolic"? Are the poets comfortably serious with their professed subjects, or are they playing sophisticated and basically ironic parlor games?² Succinctly, is their treatment of their subjects "naturalistic" or "symbolistic"?

George Santayana, I think, can help us answer these questions adequately. In his essay on Lucretius, Santayana writes: "The naturalistic poet abandons fairy land, because he has discovered nature, history, the actual passions of man. His imagination has reached maturity; its pleasure is to dominate, not play." And again, "It is noticeable, accordingly, that poets who are fascinated by pure sense and seek to write poems about it are called not impressionists, but symbolists For they play with things luxuriously, making them symbols for their thoughts, instead of mending their thoughts intelligently, to render symbols for things." By "pure sense" Santayana means sheer sensation. This puts us in contact at once with the Aestheticism of Walter Pater, and it is worth noting that Pater himself wrote an essay, "Aesthetic Poetry," in which he praised Wordsworth solely for his naturalistic touches. On the other hand, in "The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Pater pointed out the poet's drift away from nature, as the senses report it to us, into the "misty" intellectual demimonde of "mythopoeia." This is to say that Rossetti's natural details are never only themselves. They come trailing clouds of mythopoeia. In other words, Rossetti causes nature to abdicate in favor of "fairy land" (Santayana). He is, in Santayana's way of putting the matter, not a "naturalistic poet" but a "symbolist"; and, indeed, the octave of Rossetti's "Saint Luke the Painter" bears this out:

Give honour unto Luke Evangelist;
 For he it was (the aged legends say)
 Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.
 Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist
 Of devious symbols: but soon having wist
 How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day
 Are symbols also in some deeper way,
 She looked through these to God and was God's priest.

According to legend, St. Luke painted a portrait of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Rossetti, who was baptized an Anglican, wanted to die a Roman Catholic, like his father, who, despite his hostility to the Pope and his apparently antirealistic epistemology, kept on insisting that he was "*un buon cattolico*." He said on his death bed that he could make neither head nor tail of Roman Catholicism but nonetheless wanted to confess his sins to a priest and receive the Eucharist. This desire came to nothing. The point I am making is that Roman Catholicism exercised a persistent influence over him from his early "Art Catholic" days to the time of his death. This fact is important to our discussion here, because central to Roman Catholic orthodoxy are the two doctrines of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, the Mother of God ("*Mater Dei*"), and the Hypostatic Union of God and Man in the single personhood of Jesus: two natures, but one person. Religion aside, the aesthetic problem is further complicated by the unfortunate fact that our English word "person" is derived from Latin *persona*, meaning "a mask." Are persons no more than masks of a God-Devil? May not such an idea of "mask" be extended to include the lower animals, as in the case of Ahab's obsession with Moby Dick, and, indeed, all things? Is this the import of Rossetti's octave? Is all nature—Mother Nature—*Mater Dei*? Is the subject of art always the ultimately virginal aspect of such motherhood? Is Rossetti more Protestant than Catholic in "Saint Luke the Painter"? I know that I am distressing some of my readers, but I am trying to be as objective as possible. At any rate, I agree with Cardinal Newman when he writes:

. . . few Protestants have any real perception of the doctrine of God and man in one Person. They speak in a dreamy, shadowy way of Christ's divinity; but, when their meaning is sifted, you will find them very slow to commit themselves to any statement sufficient to express the Catholic dogma Then when they comment on the Gospels, they will speak of Christ, not simply and consistently as God, but as a being made up of God and man, partly one and partly the other, or between both, or as a man inhabited by a special divine presence and they are shocked, and think it a mark both of reverence and good sense to be shocked, when they hear the Man spoken of simply and plainly as God. They cannot bear to have it said, except as a figure or mode of speaking, that God had a human body, or that God suffered; they think that the "*Atonement*," and "*Sanctification through the Spirit*," as they speak, is the sum and substance of the Gospel, and they are shy of any dogmatic expression which goes beyond them

Now, if you would witness against these unchristian opinions, if you would bring out, distinctly and beyond mistake and evasion, the simple idea of the Catholic Church that God is man, could you do it better than by laying down in St. John's words that "*God became*" man? and could you express this again more emphatically and unambiguously than by declaring that He was *born* a man, or that He had a *Mother*? (402-403)

² Cf. the review of Gabriele Rossetti's Commentary on the *Divine Comedy*, in *Revue Britannique* (1828), in which the reviewer complains that Rossetti has

reduced the grandeur of Dante's poem "aux étroites proportions du logogriphe."

The trouble with Rossetti's sonnet, when it is considered from Newman's point of view, is that it diffuses Mary, in effect, to Mother Nature and the Christian Logos into the Manichaean *Anthropos*, a generalized idea of man which serves the initiated seer as an autoreflexive spirit of what it means to be a man—namely, nothing; for like a poem *Anthropos* does not mean but is. The ego, in Fichtean fashion, posits itself in "reality."

The above ideas are perforce but briefly sketched, yet they are worth taking the time to learn more about, since, whether one is conscious of them or not, they constitute the real basis, along with an obscurantist notion of the Abyss, of much current critical thought brought to bear on literature. As Santayana put it, "they play with things luxuriously." They are Symbolistic. Thus, Swinburne, in his "Preface" to *Poems and Ballads*, accurately describes his poems as "so distinctly symbolic and fanciful that" they "cannot justly be amenable to judgment as" studies "in the school of realism." However, there is play and there is play, and Swinburne is playing with what he considers to be the psyche of the Victorian bourgeoisie like a cat with a mouse. What he gives them is libidinous pastiche instead of Pre-Raphaelite icon. Since they know nothing of orthodox Incarnation and the pivotal role of Mary, let them view the alternative, which Swinburne presents to them as their spiritual portrait. The fruit of their "womb" is, at best, the anti-Incarnational "verbal icon" of the New Critics in our own century.

That there was such a phenomenon as Early Italian Art, or that art which preceded the empty formalizations of Raphaelites (the imitators of Raphael), there can be no doubt. That this art was largely iconic in nature cannot be gainsaid. And here, I think, is where we pass from authentic Pre-Raphaelitism to its morbid, *gonfiato* English imitation; for what the Victorians lacked precisely was not only the icon but any sense of what the icon means. The icon is theology in visible form, and this may have been Rossetti's ill-expressed meaning in "Saint Luke the Painter." The icon always represents a holy person, whether that Person be God the Father or that person be Mary or other saint. In representing a saint the icon shares in the sanctity and glory of its prototype. It is a vessel of the grace that the saint has acquired during his life. This grace is present and active in his image, as well as in his relics. The iconographer stands between man and God as visual intermediary. But what happens when there are no saints, just sensibilities? The icon disappears and sensation "incarnates" itself as the manifestation of the highest power we have available to us; that is, as exquisite nervous system. Narcissus is enraptured by his own nerve endings. This is what Aestheticism means: a neurological mandate: "*Fiat voluptas!*" Let there be pleasure. Sooner or later, the jaded organism is unable to distinguish between pleasure and pain. A sort of sensate contemplation ensues, the effect of which is as paralytic of the personality as was the transformation of Narcissus recorded by Ovid. For the Aesthete, the Pre-Raphaelite icon is interesting, perhaps, but only as texture and color; and the ultimate sensate ecstasy available to him is that of Tantalus trying in vain to feed on the image of Narcissus cast on the water.

Once Mary has been generalized into Mother Nature and

Jesus has been etherealized into *Anthropos* or illusory "Logos" (i. e. the Word or Principle which wears people and things as "masks" indiscriminately), there are two possible ways of approaching life: Romanticism, which particularly in Germany is always only a hair's breadth away from apocalyptic nihilism, and naturalism. One is all air; the other is all clod. However, there is a third way, which is not an approach to life but a grotesque unconscious travesty of it. Rossetti figured this third way in the grungy angel munching an apple in his drawing of St. Cecilia. Victor Hugo figured it in Quasimodo, the ringer of the bells of Notre Dame. For Quasimodo, Our Lady is not a person but an edifice, a sort of spacious flophouse. To my mind, Quasimodo symbolizes modern man, for whom the Pre-Raphaelite icon is merely a curio; for whom the content of Aestheticism, as Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, has shortcircuited to the mere formalization of information. Like a rat on a grid in a maze, twitching in response to velleities he cannot fathom or give a name to, Quasimodo, hopelessly in love with Esmeralda, his phantasmagoria haunted by a vision of the crystal of Atlantis, slumps in a dusty nook, munches on the rotten apple of Aestheticism gone haywire, and, with rheumy filmy eyes catches sight of but has no vision of the empty places that console him in lieu of icons.

Then, to comfort himself, he turns on the mirror of his telly.

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"A cool observer of her own sex like me": Girl-Watching in *Jane Eyre*

Annette Federico

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter explains that the influence of *Jane Eyre* on the Victorian heroine was no less than "revolutionary," and it is certainly true that the "post-Jane heroine" was often a creature distinctly different from the "sweet and submissive heroines favored by Bulwer-Lytton, Thackeray, and Dickens" (122-24). A passage in Gaskell's biography of Brontë suggests that this was not accidental. Brontë's commitment to her second novel involved a critical decision to create a new kind of heroine, one whose struggle for self-reliance and freedom from the conventional trappings of femininity reflects her own coming of age as a writer and as a feminist:

She once told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, "I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours." Hence, "*Jane Eyre*," said she in telling the anecdote: "but she is not myself any further than that." (324)

It is entirely possible to read this excerpt as Charlotte Brontë's struggle to resolve her own conflicting feelings of personal worth. We know from the biography that Brontë was convinced that she failed to fit her society's ideal of female beauty (she called herself stunted), and was often painfully shy and anxious in public, which Mrs. Gaskell ascribes "to the idea of her personal ugliness, which had been strongly impressed on her imagination early in life and which she exaggerated to herself in a remarkable manner" (621-22). But if we leave aside for now what levels of subconscious autobiography emerge in *Jane Eyre*, there is still Brontë's insistence that it is "morally wrong" to create a memorable heroine solely on the basis of physical beauty. As a novelist and as a woman she felt it her responsibility to alert readers to the arbitrary standards of beauty in her society, and to dominant attitudes—political attitudes, based as much upon class as upon sex—that either limit or privilege women's potential for self-actualization. Brontë's intention, as she stated it, was to set a new artistic standard,

one that portrays heroines on the basis of interiority, not physical attractiveness. In an important sense, *Jane Eyre* directly addresses the aesthetics of the popular novel, as well as Victorian society's estimations of feminine virtue or accomplishment. It is a novel about a woman's suppressed anger and latent sexual energy, as many critics have pointed out, but it is equally concerned with the ways in which a woman's body limits, inhibits, or subverts her ability to create herself fully.

Unlike many other Victorian heroines, who are given beauty which they must learn either to protect from male desire or to "use" responsibly,¹ Jane's growth and development depend very much on her status as an outsider who watches other beautiful, potential "heroines," both in order to recognize her own type of beauty, and also to adjust reader expectations as to what kind of woman is heroic in this novel. It would be appropriate to apply Simone de Beauvoir's claim that the "body is not a thing; it is a situation," (38) to *Jane Eyre*, since the heroine's story is largely one of realizing and coming to terms with the sociopolitical situation of the female body, an object of non-reciprocal study, "an object that require[s] improvement" (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 17). The force of this theme comes across as each female character in the novel is described, importantly, from Jane's point of view, in terms relating specifically to her body-size and her dress. To "a cool observer of her own sex like me," (324) such details help not only to define the heroine's own body-image, but they make up a significant aspect of Brontë's *bildungsroman*. Jane's effort to resist a compromised sexual autonomy based upon molding herself into an object of male desire parallels Brontë's commitment to create a plain heroine without compromising her own moral aesthetic.

Though *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847, it is important to note that the action of the novel is set some forty years earlier, probably between 1800 and 1809.² Styles and tastes—indeed, the whole standard of female beauty—altered significantly in the first half of the century. One fashionable difference is the emphasis on the body during the Regency period (1800-1820), and the emphasis on dress in the Victorian period. The former's Classical shape is derived from Greek statuary, and employed thin, semi-transparent materials which stressed vertical lines, studied simplicity, the "natural" female

¹ A few of Gaskell's own novels warn women against the dangers of their own attractiveness. In *Mary Barton*, John Barton, describing his doomed sister-in-law's vanity, says "Not what beauty is a sad snare" and even Esther fears that her pretty niece will become a street-walker like herself (43). The eponymous young heroine of *Ruth* knows she is pretty ("I could not help knowing . . . for many people have told me so") but the motherless young woman doesn't find out that her beauty is a "sad snare" until she is seduced and abandoned. Bell Robson, the mother of the beautiful heroine of *Sylvia's Lovers*, is understandably anxious "on the subject of her daughter's increasing attractions. She apprehended the dangers consequent upon certain facts . . . She was uncomfortable . . . at the admiration Sylvia received from the other sex" (121). If Gaskell makes much of the fact that Margaret Hale is "an ugly little thing" as a child, but a wonderful beauty as a woman (*North and South*),

in her last novel, Cynthia's dangerous fascinations are contrasted with Molly Gibson's sweet disposition and naivete. "She looked at herself in the glass with some anxiety, for the first time in her life . . ." (*Wives and Daughters* 98). Any heroine who is not sure of herself for whatever reason would share the feeling of "anxiety" when confronting the mirror.

² The most overt clue to the years in which the narrative takes place is a reference to "a new publication" which St. John lays on the table for Jane. It is Scott's *Marmion*, first published in 1808. This happens one year before she leaves Moor House and marries Rochester, and at the time of writing the autobiography Jane has been married ten years. Thus we can calculate that Jane lived at Gateshead in 1800, left Lowood in 1808, and married in 1809. She is writing in 1819 or 1820.

form. The shape of the body was thus as conspicuous as the style of dress, and both were clues to class distinction. Political events shaped fashion tastes also; in 1804 Egyptian effects modified the Classical, and in 1808, Spanish ornaments and accessories were considered elegant status symbols. Brontë's narrator carefully notes such details in dress and in body size (it is likely that Charlotte made sketches from fashion plates as a child and young woman). They would be especially important to a woman who repeatedly describes herself as "Quakerish" and "elfish," simply because feminine allure was implicitly tied to social power: a woman's destiny was often determined by marriage, and gaining a man's favorable glance was the first step to gaining husband, home, and security. Attractive attire at the time of *Jane Eyre* depended very much on the wearer's physique, and although a governess could purchase muslin inexpensively, she would be set apart by her lack of truly stylish accoutrements, such as veils, headdresses, and the foreign touches I have named. A woman's body in the first decade of the century was therefore under considerable scrutiny, and the ideal against which she was measured was tall and statuesque, stately, elegant, refined. C. W. Cunningham cites a fashion journal from 1804 which virtually condemns Jane Eyre. "The light sylphoid forms are entirely exploded; nothing is considered so *outré* as a slender waist, while the *en bon point* is the *ne plus ultra* of feminine proportions" (43). Georgiana Reed, Blanche Ingram, Miss Temple, Rosamond Oliver—even Bertha Mason—are the socially desirable female figures. Little, delicate Jane is the unconventional exception to the rule.

Of course, in Brontë's novels an unconventional body is an index to an unconventional spirit, and this is one of the most obvious themes in *Jane Eyre*. But Jane lives in a society where fashion prioritizes the female shape, and consistently, openly evaluates female bodies. Jane's understanding of herself involves a perception of and a relationship to her own body which is an enormous element in her development, and a genuinely new worry for a Victorian heroine. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë conscientiously describes the experience of coming to terms with body image as an essential part of becoming a woman—and of becoming a heroine.

At Gateshead, Jane begins to realize that simply by being born female, her body will influence her destiny in ways she finds baffling and unjust. Brontë announces this theme in the second paragraph of the novel, when Jane refers to her "physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed." Is Jane physically handicapped, then? Is she consumptive? In what way is she physically inferior? Knowing that she does not live up to the Reeds' standard of beauty, Jane implicitly equates her subordinate social position with her "inferior" looks: "Her beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault" (12). Beauty is power, then, for it can bring a woman effortless achievement. Beginning at Gateshead, where she is called "a bad animal," "a rat," "a fiend," "a mad cat," "a little toad"; where she is told that "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness," and is

taught that "a beauty like Miss Reed would be more moving in the same condition" (21), Jane learns a lesson which anticipates her most difficult struggles, both in the outside world and within herself. Indeed, the reflection she sees in the great looking glass in the red room becomes deeply embedded in her concept of herself, and it is an image too often reinforced by the society she confronts beyond Gateshead: "the strange little figure . . . with a white face and arms specking the gloom . . . like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp. . ." (11). Throughout the novel, Jane's image of herself is not that she is ugly, but that she is strange—an anomaly, a "nobody," a "heterogeneous thing" (12). A vital aspect of Jane's development is the need to grow out of the idea of herself as "a noxious thing," a scarecrow, or a sprite, to either reject or see rightly a self-image perverted in the fragile ego of a dependent and sensitive girl.

In other Victorian novels, even if the unlikely problem of the heroine's beauty exists, a man usually arrives to "correct" her self-image, just as in *Bleak House* John Jarndyce tells Esther Summerson that she has been pretty all along, and Stephen Guest appreciates Maggie Tulliver's unconventional looks in *The Mill on the Floss*. *Jane Eyre's* story is different. Since she is without the masculine appraisal that confers approval and acceptance, Jane becomes herself an observer of women's bodies and clothing, implicitly associating their sexual attractiveness with their class rank. For example, at Lowood she soon senses that these subordinate females (Augusta Brocklehurst astutely notes that they look "almost like poor people's children!" [29]) are shaped to conform to a middle-class man's idea of lower-class femininity. They are stigmatized by their ugly uniforms and denied the clothing or grooming that would improve their appearance. It does not escape young Jane that Brocklehurst's first words are about her body. "Her size is small," he tells Mrs. Reed (26). Even more conspicuous is that this pillar of masculine authority lines up his female subordinates with their faces to the wall. They are interchangeable bodies that must be clothed in "shamefacedness and sobriety" (56)—the brown dresses and woolen stockings which to Jane, sensitized now to the powers of beauty, "gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest" (40). They must cut their hair and keep it close cropped, because to Brocklehurst natural curls and braids denote possibilities of male desire and thus female power, and the girls at Lowood must remain powerless—even, one presumes, after they leave the school. Jane rightly associates fashion with rank when she casually notes that the Brocklehurst women wear the "grey beaver hats, then in fashion" (56). Even Miss Temple impresses Jane with her fashionable attire, as much as her beauty:³

Seen now in broad daylight, she looked tall, fair, and shapely; brown eyes, with a benignant light in their irids, and a fine pencilling of the long lashes round, relieved the whiteness of her large front; on each of her temples her hair, of a very dark brown, was clustered round in curls, according to the fashion of the time, when neither smooth

³ In the character of Helen Burns, Brontë broadens the heroine's and the reader's perceptions of feminine beauty. Jane describes Helen as "a beauty

neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance" (63).

bands nor long ringlets were in vogue; her dress, also in the mode of the day, was of a purple cloth, relieved by a sort of Spanish trimming of black velvet; a gold watch (watches were not so common then as now) shone at her girdle. (40-41)

Brontë's conscious historicizing in this description confirms the significance of such details as Spanish trimming and a gold watch, which must have been understood by contemporary readers as emblems of Miss Temple's social standing. More importantly, Miss Temple's kind face, her beauty, her elegant costume, "her stately air and carriage," and (perhaps not surprisingly) her "destiny, in the shape of the Reverend Mr. Nasmyth" are qualifications for the conventional heroine. But Miss Temple is not the heroine (and she is as much the physical opposite of Jane as Bertha Mason is). She is another example to young Jane of the material advantages of being "tall, fair, and shapely" and represents a key phase in the heroine's increasingly acute and self-protective awareness of the politics of female attractiveness.

Jane's adjustment to her own body image is a combination of self pity, pride, and quiet bitterness. Brontë's tone is clearly derisive when Jane describes the Brocklehurst women, who "should have come a little sooner to have heard this lecture on dress" (56). But when Bessie tells Jane, "You were no beauty as a child," Jane is stung: "I was not quite indifferent to its import: at eighteen most people wish to please, and the conviction that they have not an exterior likely to second that desire brings anything but gratification" (80). The feeling of physical inferiority—of not being "pleasing"⁴—is part of Jane's social inferiority, too. By describing her heroine as "Quakerish," Brontë emphasizes both her classlessness and sexlessness—Jane never blossomed into the rosy, robust womanliness of Georgiana Reed, and her dependent situation is apparently connected with the impossibility of attracting a husband. Her perceived femaleness is limited to her small stature, her plain features, her simple black frock. Clearly, the heroine's psychological self is undermined by her impression that she is somehow less feminine than the world desires. It is therefore most natural—indeed, it is essential—that this heroine should be concerned about her appearance before she goes to her new job at Thornfield:

It was not my habit to be disregardful of appearance, or careless of the impression I made: on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer: I sometimes wished to have rosy

cheeks, a straight nose, and a small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately, and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. And why had I these aspirations and regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical and natural reason, too. (86)

Jane's catalog of feminine features is consistent with her observations so far of the ideal woman. If she doesn't quite understand why she wishes she were beautiful, she intuitively knows that the reason for her anxiety is "logical and natural." She is perfectly right. In her experience female beauty attracts male notice, and is rewarded by some approximation of independence (in her limited domestic sphere) and by financial security. The propaganda of fashion, and the implicit mental associations with female attractiveness and social power, have made Jane self-conscious and reserved, for as a female she knows there is something at stake in the physical image she projects, the mirror image which still haunts her: she is elf, fairy, shadow, imp. When Rochester⁵ sees her for the first time he unintentionally reinforces her feeling that she is strange-looking: ". . . you have rather the look of another world. I marvelled where you had got that sort of face" (107).

Brontë is able to emphasize the importance of body-image in her heroine's psychological development in the strangely surreal drawings Jane shows to Rochester. Each depicts parts of female anatomy, but not a full figure—an arm, a bust, a head, hands. These are the pieces and fragments of their creator's violent psychological response to her own body: drowned, or rising into the sky, or moving like a flame, Jane feels her potential for full femaleness, her capacity to be a complete woman—bodily and spiritually—is being threatened by some vague tyranny. Her drawings are "a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived," bits of the other female bodies she has studied, admired, and envied, inhabited by the wan, aerial form of a spirit yet unreleased.

What can release it? Jane looks and feels most womanly when she is in the first flush of love for Rochester, especially when she feels she has gained his trust and esteem. Like many heroines in love, she experiences the sensuousness and the luxury of feminine "blooming": "I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me: I had more color and more flesh; more life, more vivacity; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" (137).

Her mood affects her looks; but the social construction of femininity eventually undermines Jane's well-being. Like Georgiana Reed and Miss Temple, Blanche Ingram is a stately

⁴ Some fifty years before, of course, Mary Wollstonecraft attacked the whole ideology Brontë is challenging in the novel, and which has clearly penetrated the heroine's consciousness—the idea "that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point—to render them pleasing" (110).

⁵ Brontë has also conscientiously created an ugly hero, although because of his wealth and his sex, Rochester is less self-conscious about his looks than Jane is (and he seems to have no trouble attracting women; one wonders what Adele's mother looked like). After he is blind and maimed, however, the hero's situation parallels the heroine's. "Am I hideous, Jane?" he asks. Rochester is especially nervous about the contrast between himself ("brown, broad-shouldered . . . blind and lame . . .") and St. John ("tall, fair, blue-eyed,

and with a Grecian profile"), suggesting a growing awareness of the politics of beauty for both sexes (388-89). The fact that Jane is not "rewarded" with either a handsome prince or with the assurance that she is a beautiful princess proves Brontë's firm resistance to the fairy tale formula (beauty > man > happiness) and its later revision (man > happiness > beauty). See MacCannell 230-31. Jane ironically points out the inconvenience of this formula when she explains to Diana that she cannot marry St. John because he is handsome and she is plain. "We should never suit" (366). Earlier she tells Rochester that complete happiness for her is unlikely, that "to imagine such a lot as befalling me is a fairy-tale . . ." (227).

beauty, and Jane is positively dwarfed beside the "Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders, long, graceful neck" (139). Blanche displays all the features of the *ne plus ultra*: her "Grecian neck and bust" are in the Classical vogue; the "delicate hand" indicates the idle class; and Blanche is "attired in spotless white" (compared to Jane's unfashionable black smock), which was at the height of fashion during the time of Brontë's narrative. Interestingly enough, Jane seems to be opposite the type of woman Rochester finds attractive—he describes Bertha as "a fine woman, in the type of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic" (268). Also like his wife, Blanche is "dark as a Spaniard," described by Rochester as "big, brown, and buxom; with hair just as the ladies of Carthage must have had" (193). Just as Jane notes that Rosamond Oliver "knew her power" over St. John (323), her arch rhetoric in describing Blanche Ingram is that of the "cool observer": Blanche's "snowy robes" are spread "in queenly amplitude"; she is "the very type of majesty," "a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed" (162).

Despite her irony, Jane's view transcends bitterness, for she realizes that Blanche is also a victim, limited by her superficiality, her pride and vanity from realizing herself fully as a woman of heart and mind, as well as body. By the time Jane returns to Gateshead to visit her dying aunt, the politics of beauty have less influence on the heroine than on other women in the novel. It is a key scene when almost ten years after being locked in the red room, Jane can acknowledge her physical inferiority but firmly resist compromising her social and sexual autonomy. So although Georgiana is "blooming and luxuriant" and Eliza is "almost as tall as Miss Ingram," these ideal bodies have no power or appeal. Jane is studied by "sundry side-glances that measured [her] from head to foot—now traversing the folds of [her] drab merino pelisse, and now lingering on the plain trimming of [her] cottage bonnet" (201). But the gaze "had now no longer that power over me as it once possessed," Jane asserts. She resists being manipulated by arbitrary standards which subordinate strength of character in favor of a full bust. In fact, Georgiana's stylish beauty—"her languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair"—dictate a rather ordinary destiny: "an advantageous match with a wealthy worn-out man of fashion."

This is not to say that at this point in her life Jane is indifferent to the way others respond to her. When Blanche Ingram suggests that Jane looks "too stupid," it is a remark worth noting in her autobiography, just as when Georgiana thinks her "a quiz" it makes an impression. Jane's defensiveness at Mrs. Fairfax's skepticism regarding her engagement to Rochester is important. "Am I a monster?" (233). Jane is not monstrous, of course, but her angry response reveals the painful consciousness that she is not beautiful, either. When her lover calls her "delicate and aerial . . . a beauty in my eyes," Jane is not completely comfortable with the sudden transformation from "fiend" to "little sunny-faced girl": she rebels now against all labels that evaluate her appearance or threaten to objectify her body as a sexual thing to be put on display or

used to achieve certain ends. "Don't address me as if I were a beauty," she tells Rochester. "I am your plain, Quakerish governess . . . [p]uny and insignificant" (227). The symbols of prestige offered to her are viewed only as superficial adornments to make her "a jay in borrowed plumes" (228). They would also make the heroine complicitous in the arbitrary politics of female beauty, a construct the whole novel is intent on criticizing.

There is another important aspect in the development of Jane's body and body image: she is not only plain, but unfashionably small and physically vulnerable. The limitations of her particular situation become evident first in her relationship to Rochester. She feels the physical power and sexual force of her lover's grasp, who "seemed to devour me . . . physically. I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace . . ." (279). And the physical endurance test in the journey from Thornfield to Moor House proves further that, far from being ornamental, her body requires nourishment and rest. By the time Jane reaches Moor House, she is physically shattered, but psychologically she has grown from a pale little imp to an adult woman. St. John does not fail to remind Jane—and the reader—of her physical flaws. "Ill or well, she would always be plain. The grace and harmony of beauty are quite wanting in those features," he says (299). But his criticism seems irrelevant. At this point in the novel, to evaluate Jane Eyre on the basis of her looks is to prejudice the reader against the critic, not the heroine—so well has Brontë accomplished her task.

Rochester's blindness may epitomize the transcendence of mind and spirit over body and beauty, since he no longer has the power of the gaze. And Jane, as well as mentally accepting her small body and her lack of beauty, and firmly resisting any "beauty aids" which would subordinate her individuality to a socially approved type, has successfully passed through stressful female cycles—menarche,⁶ defloration, pregnancy, and childbirth. Given all that she has gone through to prove her strength and intelligence, and given, too, her advantageous situation at the end of the novel—a marriage that will sustain her psychological, emotional, and sexual needs—it is significant that Brontë would again remind her readers that all of this has been accomplished by a homely woman. After her wedding, Jane overhears an old servant remark, "If she ben't one of the handsomest, she's noan faal [no fool] and varry good-natured; and i' his een she's fair beautiful, onybody may see that" (395).

The novel's tremendous sensitivity and commitment to the way body image and the arbitrary standards of feminine beauty influence the heroine's self-perception and women's social position is surely far more sophisticated and thorough than other Victorian novels incorporating the moral that beauty is only skin deep. Brontë dispenses with the tomboy heroine who blossoms into womanhood, with the beauty who is punished for vanity and coquetry, with the less attractive woman whose sweet virtue endears her to all. *Jane Eyre* takes

⁶ Showalter interprets the episode in the red room (Ch. 2) as symbolic of menstrual trauma (114-15).

seriously from start to finish the fact that the genetic lottery is as risky as the social lottery, and in her view neither heroines nor women should be limited by the luck of the draw.

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James Madison University

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In Defense of Biography: Versions of Marguerite and Why She Really Does Matter

Bill Bell

To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses . . . of a genuine classic, to acquaint oneself with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary diletantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end.

Arnold—*The Study of Poetry*

In his article on "The Lure of Biography: Who Was Marguerite and to Whom Does It Matter," Wendell Harris admirably exposes some of the assumptions that underlie the use of historical evidence in readings of Arnold's poetry, particularly as they relate to the tendentious figure of Marguerite as she appears in / is absent from what are often called the *Switzerland* poems. The uncritical yoking of historic and textual considerations does of course cause a great deal of concern and, as Harris quite ably shows, is often fraught with all kinds of hermeneutic difficulty. Harris's own approach is not without its problems, however, particularly insofar as it avoids many of the issues surrounding the importance of biography to textual meaning as it has manifest itself in readings of the Marguerite poems over the years.

As a way out of the complex historic-textual problems with which reading authors like Arnold presents us Harris resorts, in a revealing act of self-deprecation, to riding what he calls a "hobby-horse" derived from "the hermeneutic stables of E. D. Hirsch" (30). Whether or not we are to take this confession seriously, we cannot fail to recognize that his overall aim is similar to Hirsch's in its regard for the preservation of fixed textual meaning at all costs. As a result, Harris's attempt to define meaning as something essential and existent apart from the hermeneutic play of shifting readerships is equally as unsettling as the position that he is intent upon correcting. Ultimately, the validity of his perspective rests on a claim for "the propositional, rhetorical, emotional amalgam which is the author's meaning," a mysterious entity any further definition of which he unfortunately fails to provide. Consequently, we are left with a treatise that does little more than Honan or Allott to convince us of its validity as a privileged perspective from which to establish the unified presence of the text.

The means by which fixity of meaning is to be achieved, we are told, lies in seeing literary texts in two ways: 1. "texts meant to be read and understood as wholes together with the public context these could evoke for readers of the time" (31); 2. "everything we can draw out of the 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" (30). Both are misleading insofar as they suggest two mutually exclusive and static moments: one of which neglects the author's own ambiguous attitudes towards his readership; the other neglecting the importance of changing horizons of expectations, effected not only by the gradual release of extra-textual data ("knowledge") over the years but also by the changing ideological perspectives from which various read-

ings have taken place.

If Harris's aim is, in one sense, to reconstitute the implied readership for which Arnold's poems were first written then it might be useful to consider the statements made by the author himself on the readerly environment in which he lived. Arnold's relationship with the readership of his poems is a difficult one to say the least, and one that mitigates against the simple (re)formulation that Harris calls "interpretation of meaning" (30). How can such an ideal apply for example to a canon for whose public reception the author continually expresses a blatant disregard: "You—Froude—Shairp," he writes at one stage, "I believe the list of those whose reading of me I anticipate with any pleasure stops there or thereabouts" (*Unpublished Letters* 20-21). There is in Arnold's poetry therefore always a latent tension between *audience* on the one hand, and *readership* on the other: the first consisting of the few individuals for whom the poems were written—close friends and family members, those most intimately acquainted with the biographical "facts" behind the poetry—as distinct from a defined readership, those who consumed the poems in their published form, and to whom an intimate knowledge of the historic author was impossible. In the early letters to Clough there is a clear lack of regard for the "intended reader" in the outright rejection of any concessions to a reading public. He has, he tells his friend, such "a bitter feeling" towards his contemporaries that he feels he can, "if need be, dispense with them" (65). If these letters are anything to go by, there is, in the early Arnold, an outright dismissal of *zeitgeist* in favor of a type of aesthetic solipsism: "better that," he writes, "than be sucked into the Time Stream in which they . . . plunge and bellow" (95).

The problem of reconstructing an authorial intention which takes into account the proclivities of an assumed readership is further compounded in Arnold's case by an often ambivalent attitude towards the nature of poetry as personal revelation. The voice in the poems themselves often places itself uneasily between the spheres of the public and private. It is an effort to avoid the contamination of a sick age that attracts Arnold to the mind of Senancour, a writer he links inextricably with his experiences in Switzerland. In "Obermann" Arnold praises the poet for his "profound inwardness." He, of all writers, "is the most perfectly isolated" since "the world is with him far less" than with others. As a result, we read: "Some secrets may the poet tell, / For the world loves new ways; / To tell too deep ones is not well— / It knows not what he says" (137). Thus, even if poetry were calculated to reveal the most personal details of the poet, the reading public, whose chief motivation is its lust for novelty, would find it impossible to understand. Even to his sister, his closest of critics, Arnold did not expect all of his poetic thought to reveal itself. In his view, a crucial part of the poet's task is to keep hidden the most important items of all: Lucretius's great weakness is that he "has so much reflected"

but "retained so little in [his] careless depths" (248). Beside Wordsworth, others pale because even "The clearest, the best, who have read / Most in themselves—have beheld / Less than they left unrevealed" (264).

There is, of course, a great irony here. Most famous literary seclusionists engage in public life through the publication of their work, and Arnold is no exception. In the nineteenth century especially, appearance in print was regarded as an invitation for public response. To truly immerse oneself in what Arnold calls "the buried life" he would have had to reject any such opportunity. This ambivalent stance between the public and private, and an accompanying tension between the integrity of the poetic self and the need for concession to readerly environment, causes him to write: "two desires toss about / The poet's feverish blood. / One drives him to the world without, / And one to solitude" (140).

While it would obviously be unwise to take Arnold's own statements as the final word on the way that his poetry should be approached, such clearly stated tensions must surely bring into question bold claims made by both the biographical critic and those who adhere to the Hirschian view which is at least theoretically committed to the identification of a unified audience. (Interestingly, each of these perspectives is also in different ways reliant on the possibility of a reconstructed historic author.) In Arnold's case in particular it should be recognized that internal textual and historical complications challenge a too simple definition of either a unified author or that hypothetical entity called the "general reader." In its need to avoid the recognition of plural meaning the Hirschian model finds itself emphasizing two historic moments in literary reception—the public original and the private present—a strategy that serves ultimately to defer any consideration of the ongoing debate between readers of the *Switzerland* poems that has constituted one important aspect of their reception history. In other words, this lack of concern with historic (dis)continuities of reading, betrayed by Harris's treatment of the Honan-Allott debate as "an odd chapter in Arnold studies" (28), suggests a disregard for the longstanding importance of Marguerite as a device for the mediation of meaning by Arnold's readers over the years.

On closer examination, it soon becomes clear that Marguerite has not always been merely a curiosity for the literary gossip mongers but has played a fundamental part in perceptions of the Arnold canon as an outworking of that author's psychological and aesthetic development. The first significant treatment of Marguerite appeared in Hugh Kingsmill's 1928 biography of Arnold. While it has been occasionally dismissed by subsequent commentators, Kingsmill's approach is revealing as the first of many readings that shed light on the place of biography in the way that texts are interpreted. From the first Kingsmill identifies in Arnold's life and works a conflict between the belief in a received moral code and a radical aestheticism grounded in a keen sense of free individuality. His account of Arnold's travels in Switzerland reveals the importance of biography to his perception of this conflict. Whether or not the historical Marguerite was in actuality a French waitress is inconsequential to Kingsmill's method: it suits his purposes to make her one, imbuing her with allegorical significance in order to give unity to the narrative that is the author's life. "One's whole view of

Matt would be altered," he writes, "if it could be proved that at any time in his life he had felt strongly enough to escape the social prejudices which condition the emotional experiences of most men; had, for example, fallen passionately in love with a waitress" (63). Whether or not we agree with his version of history, Kingsmill's approach is a useful example of the way in which readers concretize texts so as to reveal their own moral and ideological biases. By offering a method of biographical criticism that self-consciously celebrates the projection of the reader in the work, Kingsmill goes out of his way to demonstrate the subjective nature of the act of interpretation, writing in his introduction that "every biography ought to be preceded by a sketch of the writer's own life," in order to illustrate the ways in which the personal concerns of the biographer inform his interpretations of others (xiii). Such a candid disavowal of objectivity might be said to have anticipated, in obvious ways, more recent developments in reception theory. Certainly Kingsmill's use of supplementary historical data in order to arrive at a unified idea of literary canon satisfies what Wolfgang Iser recognizes as a impulse in readers to organize texts into coherent narrative patterns. This being the case, "life" and "work" cease to become mutually exclusive categories, the extra-literary data becoming as much a part of the overall reading experience as the poems themselves. The dismissal of literary biography as a means of unlocking interpretation becomes, under these circumstances, linked with the more fundamental issue of "meaning" itself. To claim, as Harris does, that "not a bit of [biographical data] . . . is relevant to the meaning . . . of the poems themselves" (30) presumes much about the talismanic ability of literature to purge readers of their own (un)conscious assumptions, and the relevance of those assumptions to the formulation of meaning itself. If the act of interpretation is seen in terms of a dialectical relationship between text and reader, and not simply the interrogation of the addressee by the authoritarian work, then the concept of "meaning" becomes inseparable from the readerly perspective, biographical obsessions and all. Under such circumstances, "meaning" ceases to be a quantity that has to be figured out and preserved against wrong thinking opponents but becomes a metaphor for what transpires when we read.

To those who recognize the potential plurality of the work, the anti-biographical critic demonstrates not only a suspect desire to privilege his own "objective" reading experience but also his failure to recognize that no reading of a literary work is ever innocent. Even those who most vehemently advocate sanitized contact with the autonomous literary icon are subject to the shaping influence of their own ideological and imaginative impulses. One interesting case in point is Lionel Trilling, who in his 1939 study of Arnold sets out consciously to avoid biography, claiming that "whatever biographical matter I have used is incidental to my critical purpose" (9). And yet because the "obsessive theme" of the early Arnold is, for Trilling, "integration" not even he can ignore the symbolic importance of Marguerite to an understanding of Arnold's intellectual development (32-33). The desire to find unity in the work of a poet who calls his craft "a criticism of life" is a natural one, especially when that unity works itself out by means of integrating the categories of "art" and "life." Trilling sees as clearly as Kingsmill that the

Marguerite episode, if accepted as part of the Arnoldian mythopoeia, lends that much more credibility to the notion of a powerful imagination acting impulsively against the moral imperatives of the age.

Clearly, the Marguerite issue is no mere curiosity having no real significance to poetic meaning but fundamental to many readers' understanding of the Arnold canon. As similar attempts to describe Arnoldian development in terms of an overall unity, more recent efforts to rescue the historical Marguerite might be seen as much an outworking of ideological preconceptions as those of Kingsmill and Trilling. In this respect, Harris's recognition of Honan's identification of Marguerite with "the respectable Mary Claude" as a defense of "a certain conception of Arnold's morality" (29) is useful. Similarly, Miriam Allott's much maligned efforts might be seen as an attempt to legitimize Arnold at a time when he has increasingly been characterized as the bloodless prophet of "high seriousness"; the notion of an illicit exotic encounter lends weight to the dandified youth image and in so doing counterbalances the sometimes too cold surface of an impersonal Arnold, poetry professor and school inspector. While our initial tendency might be to dismiss the biographical salvage operations of Honan and Allott out of hand, then, a closer examination of them in the broader context of critical discourse can provide an antidote to the limitations of seeing reception only in terms of two exclusive moments. Instead, it might be more helpful to see the history of Arnold reception as a series of such moments—at turns ambiguously poised between the public and the private, the past and the present. To regard biographical data as a mere dilettantist adjunct to the literary text, incapable of significantly informing the reading experience, is to ignore the important role that biography has assumed in defining complex oeuvres such as Arnold's for readers over the years. In short, the sort of isolation of the text that Harris is proposing not only cuts poetry adrift from the historical moment of creation but also from its reception history.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Harris's treatise, however, is its implicit call for censorship in the classroom. In what amounts to little more than a caricature of the biographical critic, he writes: "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" (30). Whatever "short-circuit" means here, one thing is certain: by insisting on the teaching of literature apart from historical determinants, the anti-biographer is in far more danger of synthetically restricting the number of ways in which that literature is read. In practice, what purports to be a challenge to creeping dilettantism in the academy comes dangerously close to a prescriptive pedagogy which, if universally practiced, would ultimately close off to students certain kinds of interpretation that have been available to their predecessors.

As an absolute principle the dismissal of biography can be irresponsible as well as censorious. At very least, the responsibility of the teacher of literature towards students is to demonstrate how the Hirschian model is one way of reading,

as is the biographical, but neither is the only way. The stress that Harris lays on the future consumers of literature is nevertheless important, not least because no textual meaning can transpire without reception. It is because of this that recent developments in reader-response theory can teach us much about the ways in which readers bring meaning into being. What is perhaps missing in both text-centered and biographical approaches, however, is a sense of the combined historical and personal moment out of which these readings emerge. Whether unified readings are found in the autonomous text or through the use of biographical narratives, a close examination of these readings can reveal much about their ideological biases as products of historically determined preoccupations. It is in this respect that the concept of the historical Marguerite is ultimately important. Whether or not we see her as present or absent, significant or insignificant in regard to the poems, what is certain is that the Marguerite debate reveals much about the indeterminacies in Arnold and his work and the shifting (and temporal) perspective of his readers over the years, of whom Harris and myself are only two.

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Biography, the Interpretation of Meaning, and the Seeking of Significances

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William Bell's thoughtful response to my essay provides an opportunity to try to clarify not only the question of the appropriate use of biographical information about an author but an issue of wider importance, authorial intention. At first reading, I had difficulty understanding what so troubled Bell, especially since I can endorse a number of his points. However, I came to realize that the crux of the problem lies in the many meanings of the word "meaning"; as Ogden and Richards pointed out long ago in *The Meaning of Meaning*, there are more kinds of meaning than our language easily distinguishes.

The essential point to grasp about E. D. Hirsch's salient distinction between "meaning" and "significance" is that Hirsch uses "meaning" (as he does "significance") in a stipulated sense. As he employs the term, "meaning" designates neither more nor less than that which the author intended to convey to the extent that the text is able to convey this meaning.¹ Unfortunately, while attentive readers of Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* recognize that "meaning" is there employed in this special way, after one has put the book back on the shelf it is easy to begin to confuse the sense that Hirsch has stipulated with the manifold other senses that "meaning" carries. It is similarly easy to forget that Hirschean "significance" designates (in my own phraseology) any pattern of thought or set of relationships that the author did not intend, that, given the total internal and external contexts, the author indeed could not have intended.² To avoid the confusion that ensues as soon as one begins to conflate Hirsch's special senses with any of the other senses of the two words, I will hereafter write "Meaning" and "Significance" (that is, with initial capitals) when I am using them in a Hirschean manner. Continuing the rehearsal of Hirschean definitions, one "understands" or "interprets" Meaning while the discovery of Significance is the work of "criticism."³

In the essay Bell critiques, I am attempting to hold as firmly as possible to the contrast between Meaning and Significance; if one keeps this in mind I believe a number of the difficulties Bell finds will dissolve. Thus it is perfectly legitimate for Bell to argue that from one point of view "the concept of 'meaning' becomes inseparable from the readerly perspective"; of course meaning can be defined as, in Bell's words, "a metaphor for what transpires when we read," but one must realize that Bell is here conflating "Meaning" and "Significance."

In order to explain my position on the specific question of the role of biographical knowledge, I am obliged to sketch the general critical system I have attempted to build on the

foundation of Hirsch's basic distinction. In *Interpretive Acts*, where I present a version of Hirsch's position modified by speech-act theory, I argue that in any communicative use of language—that is, in all discourse including that to which we give the distinction "literary," what is spoken or written is constructed on the basis of the speaker or writer's assumptions about the intended audience's access to six external dimensions of context existing at the time of utterance (whether through speech or text): the experience of brute reality, knowledge of a particular language, knowledge about the author, a sense of genre, general cultural knowledge, and the specific situation of utterance. Writers necessarily construct their texts so that the internal context produced will interact with the six dimensions of external context to convey the authorial intention. Readers reconstruct the intended communication, the Meaning, in terms of their assumptions about the author's assumptions about the audience's knowledge and experience of the six dimensions.

Insofar as knowledge of the author's life is related to the interpretation of Meaning, my qualifier "at the time of utterance" is particularly important; authors are unlikely to base their constructional strategies on what they presume may become known about their private lives at a later date. Obviously they cannot possibly base them on what readers at some later date may discover about events in their lives yet to occur.

Now Bell is alarmed by my objection to linking Arnold's Marguerite poems too closely to a love affair with whomever one believes Arnold may have been entangled in Switzerland; he fears that I am advocating "a prescriptive pedagogy which, if universally practiced, would ultimately close off to students certain kinds of interpretation that have been available to their predecessors." Since Bell has used "meaning" so broadly, I presume that he includes in "interpretation" both the reconstruction of Meaning and the pursuit of Significances. From my point of view, biographical knowledge that an author cannot have assumed readers to possess ought indeed to be excluded from the process of interpreting Meaning, but such knowledge is not at all excluded from the pursuit of Significances. I would simply claim that since in human discourse generally the interpretation of Meaning is temporally and logically prior to the consideration of Significance, students ought to be taught to interpret accurately before being encouraged to follow after Significances.

It is easier yet to respond to other of Bell's concerns. He is troubled by the notion of a "fixed textual meaning." But "Meaning" must in fact be fixed in that what the author

¹Hirsch's definition is as follows: "Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs" (31).

²Hirsch defines Significance as "any perceived relationship between construed

verbal meaning and something else" (140).

³"Understanding" for Hirsch is the process of grasping the Meaning while "interpretation" is the explanation of one's understanding of the Meaning; I prefer to use "interpretation" for the former and "explication" for the latter.

intended to convey can hardly be thought to change with a changing readership. However, that it is "fixed" in this sense does *not* imply any of the three following positions.

A) It does not imply that a reader can ever be certain that he / she has fully discovered that Meaning. One's preconceptions may get in the way; one may not know enough about the dimensions of context; one may fail to see connections that the author assumed (and that another reader may indeed see); the author may have constructed a text in such a way that his / her intentions are obscured (cannot be conveyed by the text as it is interpreted in light of the total external context). On the other hand, that one can never be certain that one's interpretation is wholly correct does not invalidate the attempt to come as close as possible to that intention, nor does it exclude the possibility that one's interpretation may come very close indeed.⁴

B) It does not imply that an author may not have had the kind of "ambivalent feelings" about either the envisioned audience or indeed his / her actual intentions that Bell finds in Arnold. The text the author produces is intended either to convey that ambivalence or to conceal it. Authors may often enough not be quite sure what they think or believe: all of us find ourselves in such a situation from time to time. Wishing to make point X while committing ourselves neither to related positions Y or Z, we contrive to convey our view of X in such a way that our hearers can understand at least that much, whether or not they notice that Y and Z are being kept in the background. An author may indeed consciously or unconsciously make use of an ambiguity—as Bell does in the paragraph beginning "The problem of reconstructing," which conflates the argument that a poet may not choose to reveal all he / she thinks with the argument that a poet may convey that which readers may not understand. The second of these in fact offers its own ambiguity—if one is saying that no reader can understand the poet's thought, then the poet hasn't conveyed it, but if one is saying that some readers will not be able to understand the poet's thought, one is simply stating the obvious.

C) It does not imply that nothing but Meaning is important, or indeed that Meaning is the most important thing about the text. Significance—including Bell's "changing ideological perspectives"—may well be the primary source of interest.

I must also challenge Bell's statement that "those who adhere to the Hirschean view" are "at least theoretically committed to the identification of a unified audience." The fact is that authors writing for the public can never assume that even their absolute contemporaries constitute a single audience—it is up to each author to decide whether to write in such a way as to reach a diversity of readers or to choose to write for a fairly narrow community, knowing in the latter case that other groups of readers will either misunderstand or fail to be able to understand at all. It is necessary to recognize in any case that although authors know that interpretive and critical contexts necessarily change over time, it is impossible to write for *future* audiences. If Meaning depends on assumptions about

the dimensions of context available to readers, no author can predict how much of each of these dimensions will be accessible after twenty years, not to mention one or more centuries. If Significance depends on the system of thought readers bring to the text, no author can predict what as yet unheard of philosophical, political, economic, psychological, or other system may be brought to bear on the text in the future.

The history of the reception of the Marguerite poems (like all histories of responses to literature, or to any art) is fascinating—my original essay is the result of my fascination with a portion of that history. But my final point here, a corollary of the central argument I have been attempting to make, is that the exploration of changing responses simply pursues one of many possible Significances and is to be clearly distinguished from the interpretation of Meaning.

I have moved a long way from the Marguerite poems, but perhaps not so far from Arnold. The Arnold who defined the function of criticism as the propagation of "the best that is known and thought in the world" was pretty clearly concerned with both the Meaning and Significance of what is known and thought. Today we are less certain of what is the "best" although I know of no one who ultimately argues that everything that finds expression is of equal value. Whatever among all that has been thought and said seems worthy of comment will have both Meaning and Significance, will deserve both interpretation and criticism—but the two activities need not, should not, be confused.

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⁴Hirsch cogently summarizes this point: "It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding" (17).

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- Fletcher, Ian. *Rediscovering Herbert Horne: Poet, Architect, Typographer, Art Historian*. Intro. Peter Stansky. Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1990. Pp. xv + 188. \$25.00. "I must concede that this little book is but a beginning, a rediscovery . . . my purpose here is . . . to sketch Horne's various achievements and thus offer a groundwork for others to build on" (xv).
- Garrigan, Kristine Ottesen. *Victorian Art Reproductions in Modern Sources: A Bibliography*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities vol. 1225. New York & London: Garland, 1991. Pp. xxxix + 575. \$75.00. The compilation "indexes 84 sources and lists nearly 5000 works by over 950 artists" (viii).
- Jaffe, Audrey. *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991. Pp. ix + 180. \$32.50. Includes chapters on *Sketches by Boz*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, *Our Mutual Friend*.
- Morgan, Thais E., ed. *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*. New Brunswick & London: Rutgers UP, 1990. Pp. vii + 330. \$38.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper. Includes: Thais E. Morgan, "Victorian Sage Discourse and the Feminine: An Introduction," Carol T. Christ, "'The Hero as Man of Letters': Masculinity and Victorian Nonfiction Prose," George P. Landow, "Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage: Florence Nightingale's Cassandra," Linda M. Shires, "Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics," Janet L. Larson, "'Who Is Speaking?': Charlotte Brontë's Voices of Prophecy," Antony H. Harrison, "Christina Rossetti and the Sage Discourse of Feminist High Anglicanism," Mary Wilson Carpenter, "The Trouble with Romola," Paul Sawyer, "Ruskin and the Matriarchal Logos," Susan P. Casteras "Malleus Malificarum or The Witches' Hammer: Victorian Visions of Female Sages and Sorceresses," Linda H. Peterson, "Harriet Martineau: Masculine Discourse, Female Sage," Florence S. Boos, "An (Almost) Egalitarian Sage: William Morris and Nineteenth-Century Socialist Feminism," Susan Morgan, "Victorian Women, Wisdom, and Southeast Asia," Lori Hope Lefkowitz, "Her Father's Eyes, Staff, and Support: The Sage Author as Phallic Sister in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," Richard Dellamora, "Traversing the Feminine in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*."
- Paxton, Nancy L. *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991. Pp. x + 280. \$32.50. "The primary objective of this study is to disclose Eliot's ongoing dialogue with Spencer throughout her career, and to demonstrate her resolute feminist resistance to many aspects of Spencer's biological determinism, especially as it found expression in his developing analysis of female sexuality and motherhood. Moreover, by understanding Eliot's acceptance of some tenets of Spencerian—as opposed to Darwinian—evolutionism, we can begin to understand the conservative force that Victorian science and evolutionary theory exerted in containing the debate on . . . the Woman Question . . . I do not propose to argue that Spencer influenced Eliot more profoundly than Darwin did. Instead, I wish to trace those parallels in their lives and in their ideas about evolution, nature, women, sex, and gender that have not been recognized sufficiently by critics of Eliot's work" (5). The text includes nicely written chapters on each of the 6 novels.
- Snider, Clifton. *The Stuff that Dreams Are Made On: A Jungian Interpretation of Literature*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron, 1991. Pp. xv + 159. \$13.95 paper. Includes Chapters on "The Archetypal Wise Old Man: Merlin in Nineteenth-Century British Literature," "The Archetypal Self in Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*," "A Jungian Analysis of Schizophrenia in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*."
- Storey, Graham. *David Copperfield: Interweaving Truth and Fiction*. Twayne's Masterwork Studies No. 68. Boston: Twayne, 1991. Pp. 111. \$20.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. Chapters include: "Historical Background," "The Importance of *David Copperfield*," "Critical Reception," "The Child's Eye View," "Structure," "Voices," "Marriage," "Parents, Children, and Orphans," "Rosa Dartle: The History of a 'Self-Tormenter,'" "Social Criticism," "The Use of Fairy Tale," "A Note on the Pathetic Fallacy."
- Thackeray, William Makepeace. *Flore et Zéphyr; The Yellowplush Correspondence; The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan: A Critical Edition*. The Works of W. M. Thackeray. Ed. Peter L. Shillingsburg, with commentary by S. A. Muresianu and Nicholas Pickwood. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities vol. 1324. New York & London: Garland, 1991. Pp. 17, 191, 90. \$43.00. "The goals of this edition are three-fold: (1) to present a clear reading text free of matter not written or intended by the author, (2) to present a historical record of other versions of the text, first as the author shaped and changed it, and second as persons involved in production affected it substantively, and (3) to present a historical narrative of the circumstances attending the inception, composition, revision, and transmission of the text."
- Vanden Bossche, Chris R. *Carlyle and the Search for Authority*. Studies in Victorian Life and Literature. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1991. Pp. x + 234. \$35.00. "I will begin with a discussion, in chapter 1, of the historical development of what Carlyle and his contemporaries regarded as a crisis of authority. I will then proceed, in chapter 2, to examine how Carlyle constructed his literary career as an attempt to establish a new mode of authority that would replace the religious vocation prescribed by his father. The following chapters . . . will investigate the history of his struggles to discover authority in the succeeding phases of his career; his exploration of the dialectic of revolution and authority, his failed attempt to author a new social order, the return of the theme of paternal authority, and, finally, the end of writing that brought him no closer to solving the dilemma of literature" (ix).
- Wheeler, Michael. *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Pp. xv + 456. \$54.50. Includes chapters on Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell, and on Tennyson: *In Memoriam*, Dickens: *Our Mutual Friend*, Newman: *Dream of Gerontius*, and Hopkins: *Wreck of the Deutschland*.

Victorian Group News

Announcements

The International Journalism History Interest Group of the American Historians Association invites inquiries. Contact: James D. Startt, History Department, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383.

England in the 1890s will be the topic of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Midwest Victorian Studies Association, to be held in South Bend, IN, 24-25 April 1992. The Association welcomes proposals on any aspect of the 1890s or the *fin de siècle*. Please send an abstract of 2 or 3 pages (7 copies) no later than 15 November 1991 to Micael Clarke, English Department, Loyola University of Chicago, 6525 N. Sheridan Rd., Chicago, IL 60626.

The Walter L. Arnstein Fund for Dissertation Research in Victorian Studies

The Midwest Victorian Studies Association announces an annual grant-in-aid of \$300 for dissertation research in Victorian studies undertaken by students currently enrolled in doctoral programs in U. S. universities (preference will be given to students working in midwestern universities). Proposals may be submitted in literature, history, art history, or musicology, and should have a significant interdisciplinary component. The Association reserves the right not to make the award in any year if, in the opinion of its reviewers, submissions do not justify it. Applications and forms may be requested from Lawrence Poston, English Department, University of Illinois at Chicago (m/c 162), Box 4348, Chicago, IL 60680. The deadline for applications is 1 February 1992; the award will be announced at the Association's annual meeting in April.

The Northeast Victorian Studies Association will hold its Eighteenth Annual Meeting at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ on 24-26 April 1992. The topic is *Victorian Places and Spaces*. Ten copies of a 2-page abstract should be sent to Dr. Carolyn Williams CCACC, 8 Bishop Place, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903 by 15 October 1991.

Adrienne Munich (English Dept., SUNY / Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY 11794) and John Maynard (English Dept., NYU, 19 University Place, Room 235, New York, NY 10003) are the co-editors of a new Journal—*Victorian Literature and Culture*—(formerly *Browning Institute Studies*) devoted to areas of Victorian literature and all subjects in Victorian cultural history, including relations among the arts—literature, fine arts, architecture, music—and studies of the intersections of cultural or social issues with the arts. The journal will be an annual of up to 450 pages and will include reviews, especially omnibus reviews of authors and entire areas of scholarship and criticism. Book review editor is Winifred Hughes, English Dept., Princeton University, 22 McCosh Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544.

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