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Cover: On the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Dracula*, Vlad the Impaler

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Scandalous Topicality: *Silas Marner* and the Political Unconscious

Stewart Crehan

In her essay "The Natural History of German Life" George Eliot lays down the principles upon which realism in art is to be based:

Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life. It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions—about the manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men, should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of the true one. (*Essays* 271)

The injunction is touching in its evangelical seriousness, in the simplicity of its formula, "to paint the life of the People," and in its instruction to the artist who undertakes to do this to be truthful. It begs far more questions than it answers, and is of course impossible to follow, even by an enlightened, liberal, middle-class writer such as George Eliot. My aim in this essay is not simply to show how her practice works against her theory. The last sentence of the passage quoted is worth bearing in mind when we consider one of the novels where she does attempt to paint the life of "one of our more heavily-laden fellow-men": *Silas Marner*.

Frederic Jameson writes:

ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions. (79)

Since narrative fiction is "a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic" (77), history is always and necessarily repressed. The reduction of the historical to a sub-text reweven into the text as something else, perhaps as something allegorical, leaves a residue, a silence or half-silence that disturbs us, as Jameson puts it, with

that dry and intolerable chitinous murmur of footnotes reminding us of the implied references to long-dead contemporary events and political situations in Milton or Swift, in Spenser or Hawthorne; if the modern reader is bored or scandalized by the roots such texts send down into the contingent circumstances of their own historical time, this is surely testimony as to his resistance to his own political unconscious and to his denial . . . of the reading and the writing of the text of history within himself. (34)

The reader is scandalized not just because these "contingent circumstances" are extraneous, but because they connect with something unresolved in the text, a problematic that disturbs our own and the text's implicit quest for unity. The attempt to resolve social contradictions at the formal level produces gaps and dislocations in the text itself. This theory can, of course, if mishandled, lead to the indictment of certain texts for failing to narrate these social contradictions correctly. In the words of K. M. Newton, commenting on Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology*, which is heavily indebted to Jameson and Macherey, there is "a regressive 'vulgar' Marxist tendency to criticize . . . novels for their failure to recognize Marxist solutions" (17). Neither Macherey nor Jameson claims any correct or complete knowledge of anything, although Macherey does say that criticism is "a form of knowledge after the event" (8), since after the event of its production and dissemination, a literary text can be known as it could never have known itself. For Macherey the notion that a literary work can be a coherent and unified whole is an organicist fallacy, for in all literary works there is an "internal rupture" caused by the law of utterance, in which everything that is said is also a disavowal of what cannot be said: "it is the silence that is doing the speaking" (79). Gayatri Spivak's well-known question: "Can a Subaltern Speak?" relates to Macherey's problematic. The writer produces texts under determinate conditions; he "does not manufacture the materials with which he works" (41). The work is therefore not an organic creation but a decentered production that differs from itself; the contradictions of its production inhere in its structure. The job of criticism is not to smooth out the contradictions, to repair the gaps, or to give voice to what is silent in the text as if to complete it:

the silence of the book is not a lack to be remedied, an inadequacy to be made up for. It is not a temporary silence that could be finally abolished. We must distinguish the necessity of the silence. For example, it can be shown that it is the juxtaposition and conflict of several meanings which produces the radical otherness which shapes the work: this conflict is not resolved or absorbed, but simply displayed. (41)

A closer study of *Silas Marner* reveals a strong urge on the part of the writer to invent imaginary solutions not only to social but to *personal* contradictions. Mary Ann Evans's conflict with her father is, one could say, imaginatively resolved in the Silas-Eppie relationship, with its fairy-tale ending of domestic happiness: "'O, father,' said Eppie, 'what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are'" (244). In a feminist reading of *Silas Marner*, Sandra Gilbert sees evidence of father-daughter incest as the culturally-constructed paradigm of female desire (116). Silas's lost gold is transformed into the living treasure of a golden-haired daughter who, says Gilbert, is currency to be exchanged under patriarchy; Eppie shifts from nature (the body of the mother)

to culture and the Law of the Father (Silas's hearth). At the center of the novel there is "a strange disruption": "the history of Eppie's dead mother" (108), which bears the mark of "a 'specially inexorable repression': that of the daughter's pre-Oedipal attachment to her mother, which is more strongly repressed in a patriarchal culture than is the case with an incestuous desire for the father. Silas becomes both father and mother to Eppie, so repressing the mother's role. This, says Gilbert, fits George Eliot herself, since "the literary mother necessarily speaks both of and for the father" (101). Did George Eliot, as a patriarchal woman, repress the mother in herself? She and George Henry Lewes may have practiced birth control, yet there is ample evidence that she found fulfillment in mothering his three blonde-haired boys. Moreover, a large part of the story of *Silas Marner* concerns the implied consequences of the Cass brothers' lack of a mother, and of Nancy's lack of a child: "the Red House was without that presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and fear in parlour and kitchen" (72); it showed "signs of a domestic life destitute of any hallowing charm" (73). And there is a mother's influence in Silas's cottage: that of Dolly Winthrop. It is Nancy, not Silas, who thinks of Eppie as a treasure, saying: "you'll be a treasure to me" (233), while Eppie's promise to "cleave" to Silas "as long as he lives" (344), with its mixture of the marital and the filial, can also be read as a vindication of those "pure, natural human relations" whose "remedial influences" George Eliot refers to in her letter to Blackwood of February 1861. Natural human relations are based on "truth of feeling," not on law. In her long introduction to the 1967 Penguin edition of the novel, Q. D. Leavis roots these feelings in the old peasant economy and leaves it at that, but George Eliot, in the context of charges of immorality, was also vindicating her own non-legal role as wife and mother. The novel looks not only back to a rural past, but forward to a wished-for, better state of human relations. It is, then, difficult to find support for Gilbert's argument that the death of Eppie's mother indicates repression by the author of her own maternal feelings; if there is a disruptive silence here, it may stem from social contradictions rather than those in the author's personal life.

I have said that the novel looks not only back but forward. These formulae of "not only this . . . but that," "on the one hand . . . on the other" are, of course, the critic's way of tidying up awkward contradictions. As de Man has shown, the style of much literary criticism carries ideological assumptions to which many of its practitioners are blind. Finding unity means imposing hierarchy and repressing disruptions. In the narrative text of *Silas Marner* one finds a number of discrepancies or fault-lines: between Silas's spiritual and his social identity; between the novel's fairy-tale story and the realism of its discourse (Raymond Williams puts "story" and "discourse" the other way round); between what Martin Wiener in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* calls "the rural myth," and the objectivity of George Eliot's historical realism and social criticism; between a tendency to hark back to an "old-fashioned village life" of the kind eulogized by Q. D. Leavis, and a radical vision of a new society, and between a drive to domesticate the other (e.g. industrialism, nature, productive labor, animals, the wilderness) and a sense that domestication robs the other of its

energizing otherness.

By conveying the mental state of an alienated weaver to her readers, the narrator seeks to enlarge our sympathies: "Minds that have been unhinged from their old faith and love, have perhaps sought this Lethean influence of exile But even *their* experience may hardly enable them thoroughly to imagine what was the effect on a simple weaver like Silas Marner . . ." (63). The italicized pronoun "*their*" positions us at a distance from such minds, drawing us closer to the mental world of Silas. Yet how can this mental and spiritual distance between the reader and the weaver be narrowed? How can we, as middle-class readers, imaginatively experience what a humble weaver experiences? Marner heaps up guineas and crowns. How strange! But is it? "Do we [my italics] not wile away moments [by] repeating some trivial movement or sound. . . ?" Yes we do! That is how it is with us too! And so: "That will help us to understand . . ." (67). The middle-class reader nurtured on the poetry of Wordsworth is being conducted into the heart of a simple weaver. Suddenly the gap is closed, difference eliminated, presence revealed, unity found: "The *same sort of process* has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when they have been cut off from faith and love—only, instead of a loom and a heap of guineas, they have had some erudite research, some ingenious project, or some well-knit theory" (69, my italics). The weaving and the hoarding have been made allegorical, thus nullifying the social gulf implied in the previous: "even *their* experience may hardly enable them thoroughly to imagine." The third person pronoun has partly hidden what we begin to suspect is an author's confession. Just as Silas's work is stupefying, so for Mary Ann Evans the work of translating Strauss's *Des Leben Jesu* from 1844 to June 1846 was a "soul-stupefying labour" (*Letters* 185). A sentence in Chapter 2 of the novel reads: "This is the history of Silas Marner until the fifteenth year after he came to Raveloe" (69). The author changed "fifteenth" to "twelfth," reverted to "fifteenth," but left "twelfth" in the manuscript at the end of the chapter. Q. D. Leavis notes: "some problem of dating must have been in her mind" (252). My guess is that the author wanted to refer to those twelve tedious years of translation and editorial work she undertook between 1844 and September 1856. The latter date is referred to as "a new era in my life, for it was then I began to write Fiction" (*Letters* 159). With whom or with what, then, are we sympathizing? Can spiritual autobiography and social realism be so easily reconciled?

There is "a multiple typicality about the case of Silas Marner," says Q. D. Leavis. "In him the dire effects of the Industrial Revolution are examined" (16). George Eliot typifies him as one of those "pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race" (51); one of "those scattered linen-weavers—emigrants from the town into the country—who were to the last regarded as aliens by their rustic neighbors" (52). Yet Silas's exile is personal and self-imposed, not economic. Why, then, are his personal circumstances cast in the mold of a general social phenomenon? Unlike the handloom weavers who were forced to go to the towns after the rise of the factory system, Silas leaves the urban north for the rural Midlands. According to Edward Thompson, in a letter he wrote to me in 1977, "If emigrant linen weavers arrived in the

countryside, they were most likely to have come from Ireland (North and South), whose linen industry was in a bad state at the end of the 18th century. Many weavers moved to England, for example Barnsley: some could have found work in the countryside." Duncan Bythell thinks it likely that "the long tramp in heavy clogs with a bag of cloth on one's shoulder is really a piece of picturesque, pre-industrial folklore" (38). Perhaps the strangely burdened figure whom Mary Ann Evans saw in her childhood was not a weaver at all, but a cloth dealer. J. Pilkington remarks that cloth "was one of the trades in which traveling salesmen, disparaged as pedlars and hawkers, played a considerable role" (109). How far, then, are the displacement and subsequent alienation of Silas typical? The answer is that they are not typical at all. His alienation is greatest when, unlike most working men, he is economically secure. It is a spiritual rather than economic alienation. His disinheritance has no connection with that of the later handloom weavers whose grim struggle for survival is charted in the Reports of the Parliamentary Select Committees, documented in novels such as *Sybil*, or voiced in the broadside laments. Silas Marner becomes a "custom" weaver; that is, he weaves yarn from the flax that the women of the village spin. He is not an outworker and does not work for a master; he is entirely alone. This itself is untypical. His usefulness to the rural economy is explained by the death of "the old linen-weaver in the neighbouring parish of Tarley" (55), but there are some telling gaps and omissions. For example, there is no mention of the growing or cutting of flax or of its working up into yarn, or of how the linen Silas weaves manages to be bleached, dyed, finished, and cut before it reaches "the richer housewives of the district" such as Mrs. Osgood. When Silas, "having worked far on into the night" (64), gives Mrs. Osgood her table-linen, and she puts five bright guineas into his hand, we might be forgiven for thinking that this is the finished product. If so, the transformation of "the brownish web" (69) in Silas's loom into white table-linen is no less miraculous than the transformation of his gold into the child Eppie. This may sound like pedantic carping; after all, George Eliot is writing fiction, not sociology. Yet if we recall what she says about depicting the lives of working men, what the first paragraph of the novel establishes, and what Q. D. Leavis says about typicality, the more improbable the figure of Silas becomes. His special, even unique situation is what makes him truly displaced. He is less the product of an impulse to paint social reality than of a desire to reconcile social contradictions by finding in a working man a social metaphor for the soul's journey through spiritual abandonment to salvation; less the product of empirical observation than of literary tradition, particularly *Pilgrim's Progress* and Romantic poetry of wandering and alienation.

Yet this still does not explain why George Eliot should have chosen to write in a realistic manner about a handloom weaver. Can we, following Jameson, discover a political subtext here? What historical silence has fractured the intended unity of this famous novel about an alienated working man who eventually finds happiness in a little cottage with a garden? It is time to hear the dry, chitinous murmur of a historical footnote.

George Eliot's closest associations were with the town of Coventry, upon which Middlemarch is based. She went to

school there between 1832 and 1835, lived in Foleshill with her father between 1841 and 1851, and formed lifelong friendships with the Hennells and the Brays. The town relied almost exclusively on the silk ribbon trade, and in 1841, according to Sara Hennell, its inhabitants were up in arms against a threatened influx of French ribbons (80). Charles Bray was a ribbon manufacturer, but he was also an Owenite and sympathized with the aims of Chartism. As a young man he condemned the institution of private property and denounced in Painite and Godwinian fashion "our laws and institutions" as "modern corruption grafted upon ancient barbarism" (*Phases* 428), yet he believed that all combinations of workers were doomed to fail since the worker was compelled to take what the capitalist chose to give him or starve. In 1843 Bray formed the Coventry Labourers' and Artizans' Cooperative Society, whose aim, as he puts it in his autobiography, was "to furnish working men with gardens, as healthy occupations, and to help them to counteract in part the ill effects of confinement at the loom" (*Phases* 64). A year later Mary Hennell wrote that the necessities of life furnished by allotments would be "something to fall back upon during the fluctuations to which our trade is, and always must be, liable" (lxxxii), adding: "Spade husbandry soon turns a waste into a garden" (lxxxiii). Charles Bray won a fight to enclose the Lammas land for this purpose. In 1846 he bought the *Liberal Coventry Herald and Observer*. His cooperative schemes failed, and in 1856 he retired from business, about whose health Mary Ann Evans, in her letters to him, made regular enquiries.

In July 1860 there began a long and bitter strike by Coventry's 30,000 power-loom weavers against the piece system. In a letter to Sara Hennell on July 14 George Eliot remarks: "I have just been glancing at the account of the operatives' meeting in the Herald, and find it so interesting that I shall return to it by and bye. It is a melancholy sort of interest, though; especially in connection with what you say of its immediate effect on your speculations" (*Letters* 323). Her first concern, we may note, is with the fate of her friend's financial speculations. On September 18 she tells Cara Bray to stop sending copies of the *Coventry Herald and Observer* "now that the strike has ceased" (345). On September 26 the Leweses moved to 10 Harewood Square, and on September 30 George Eliot began writing *Silas Marner*. By November 26 she was at page sixty-two of her manuscript. The novel, she said, came across her other plans, coming "quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back" (*Letters* 258).

On July 20, 1860 the *Coventry Herald* reports that the ribbon weavers will rather starve than give in to the manufacturers, who are blaming French competition for the poor state of the industry. The fact that the operatives place particular blame on the free-trade policy of manufacturers such as Charles Bray is a bitter irony. Many businesses close. Charles Bray loses money, and Mary Ann Evans lends him £100 to fight a libel suit. A correspondent to *The Times* writes on November 30:

Out of 60,000 men, women, and children engaged in manufacturing at Coventry and the neighbouring hamlets, 40,000 are at the present moment unemployed, and thousands are positively starving.

During December and January the "Coventry Distress" becomes a national issue. The provisions of Poor Law relief are completely inadequate for disasters such as these, so a relief fund is set up. It is a harsh winter. *The Times* reports that "hundreds of men accustomed only to the delicate work of the loom" are turning out in the streets "with barrows to convey from the coal yards the fuel which their tickets entitled them to" (January 1, 1861). On January 4 the Rev. S. Widdington reports of a woman forced to eat garbage from the gutter, of families sleeping like pigs in straw, and several dying of starvation. The Coventry Distress, according to the Rev. Widdington, affected "a circle of country described with a radius of ten miles round that city, including Nuneaton, Foleshill and the neighbouring districts." Among the donors are the Queen (£105) and a Mrs. Evans (£5). Eventually £9000 is collected. Whether George Eliot donated any money is uncertain. In her journal for November 28, 1860 she writes: "I have invested £2000 in East Indies Stock, and expect shortly to invest another £2000, so that with my other money, we have enough in any case to keep us from beggary" (*Letters* 253). A correspondent to the *Coventry Herald* urges women to order "ribbons from Coventry and Nuneaton" at this "sociable season of the year" in order to relieve "the extreme depression of labour" (November 30). On December 10 Mr. Charles Bray tries to rise above such mundane concerns in a lecture given at St. Mary's Hall on "Mind in Connection with Organization" in which he says: "we could do without fashion and its votaries if we could keep in harmony with nature and nature's God" (December 14). By January over two thousand Coventry weavers have left for the cotton mills of Lancashire, in ironic counterpoint to the protagonist's move south in Chapter 2 of *Silas Marner*. On February 8 George Eliot writes Sara Hennell: "The reminders I am getting from time to time of Coventry distress have made me think very often, yearningly and painfully, of the friends who are immediately affected by it . . . Send me what word you can from time to time, that there may be some reality in my image of things round your hearth" (*Letters* 377). Again, her first concern is her friends. By March 11 *Silas Marner* is finished.

One "chitinous murmur" of the Coventry Distress is heard in the novel when the robbed weaver's entrance with motherless Eppie into the Red House on New Year's Eve is for Godfrey "an apparition from that hidden life which lies, like a dark by-street, behind the goodly ornamental facade" (171). The guilt for whatever lies hidden in dark by-streets is only ours to the extent that we sympathize with Godfrey's point of view, though this is one of the scenes where murmurs against class division in old-fashioned Raveloe are clearly heard. For Charles Bray, in his December lecture, fashion is false and nature is real. For George Eliot, in her essay on realism, fashion is false but the toil "of our more heavily-laden fellow-men" is real. Toil is to nature as idleness is to fashion. How, given these oppositions, can we say that it is "not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions" when the lives of thousands of honest toilers depend on these same fashions? Only, perhaps, by subscribing to a bourgeois-realist doctrine that views class in terms of ethics (idle, irresponsible Arthur Donnithorne and hard-working, honest Adam Bede; idle, irresponsible Duncan Cass and hard-working, honest Silas Marner). Bringing together the world of

fashion and the world of toil as an original dialectical unity instead of through ironic connections that morally instruct us makes for confusion; it goes against the laws of bourgeois realism. As fashion and its votaries are to duchesses, so useful things like linen and vegetables are to honest working men.

It is difficult to argue with Eagleton's view that "a potentially tragic collision between 'corporate' and 'individualist' ideologies is consistently defused and repressed by the forms of Eliot's fiction," and that the function of her use of pastoral or moral fable is "to recast the historical contradictions at the heart of [her] fiction into ideologically resolvable terms" (16). In *Silas Marner* a weaver's contented settlement on the last bit of common land in Raveloe, far from the "dark ugly place" that is "worse than the Workhouse" (239), gives symbolic support, after a decade of intensive trade-union activity, to all those failed schemes for industrial workers—Owenite cooperatives, Chartist land schemes, smallholder projects, schemes for enclosing common land—whose unconscious political aim, at any rate its result, was to defuse the conflict between capital and labor. Charles Bray, himself a manufacturer and a socialist, saw no conflict in roles. George Eliot sees none either: Silas may be a "poor mused creature" with a bent, treadmill attitude, but he hoards gold like a capitalist. "I like the working-folks" says Eppie (234), yet she feels stifled in the "great manufacturing town" (238) where, from a large factory, men and women stream for their mid-day meal (240). If the land-scheme policies of a leader such as Ernest Jones evinced a deep-seated belief that the industrial revolution was a ghastly mistake rather than a progressive historical stage in the development of human society, there is little point in indicting George Eliot for failing to achieve a level of political consciousness that not even the most revolutionary working-class leaders of the 1840s possessed. There is, however, one part of the novel where a strong disavowal does nothing to enlarge our sympathies. It is that "strange disruption" Sandra Gilbert refers to, namely "the history of Eppie's dead mother."

Molly, Godfrey's wife, has premeditated an act of vengeance on New Year's Eve by exposing her husband publicly. Her visit is anticipated as a victory of misery over happiness, darkness over brightness, the dingily hidden over the handsomely displayed:

There would be a great party at the Red House on New Year's Eve, she knew: her husband would be smiling and smiled upon, hiding her existence in the darkest corner of his heart. But she would mar his pleasure: she would go in her dingy rags, with her faded face, once as handsome as the best, with her little child that had its father's hair and eyes, and disclose herself to the Squire as his eldest son's wife. (164-65)

It is already clear why we cannot sympathize with such a mind. There is no obvious authorial nudging; we are presented with Molly's thoughts. Yet these thoughts are too calculating: "she would go in her dingy rags" gives a hint that she has better things to wear and anticipates the dramatic effect her clothes and face will have on those who see her. She is not simply a victim of poverty; she plans to "disclose" it, to *display* it. To have poverty display itself in this way will produce a conflict of meanings the novel must absorb. The

absorption process has, in fact, already begun, for the question arises: how can the hidden remain hidden, hence a proper cause for guilt and pity, by displaying itself? Poverty is pitiable when, in its simplicity, it remains innocent of its causes; when it stays in the dark. But a deliberate act of revenge, a will to rise into the light, alienates our sympathies. Molly has already negated herself: in the narrative, morally, and as a metaphor. The light of narrative knowledge exposes the futility of an attempt to reverse the logic of metaphor; the hidden and the dark can never triumph since the hidden has to reveal itself and the dark must become light. By acting, each cancels itself out. Molly, in her desire for self-disclosure, becomes the thing she loathes. As an agent of light the narrative is the only proper means to reveal those who languish in darkness. Molly—a mere character in the story, dark and hidden—wants to perform this act on her own, which neither the narrative nor the order of metaphor can allow. No sooner is she introduced than Molly annuls herself. Her death is not just a ruse to get Godfrey off the hook and leave him free to marry; in one sense it is absolutely logical.

But every character in a realist text is typical. Does Molly not typify the poor and the oppressed? To the logic so far established the narrator adds a special animus.

It is seldom that the miserable can help regarding their misery as wrong inflicted by those who are less miserable. Molly knew that the cause of her dingy rags was not her husband's neglect, but the demon Opium to whom she was enslaved, body and soul, except in the lingering mother's tenderness that refused to give him her hungry child. (164)

That relative clause, "to whom she was enslaved," and its appended phrase, "body and soul," are extra items of information, something the narrator was not duty-bound to tell us, yet it destroys whatever legitimacy Molly's mission might have had. It also softens in advance our indictment of Godfrey in the Red House scene in the following chapter. By a sleight of hand, our association of the word "enslaved" with "dingy rags" is stirred up *after* it has already been quashed in a metaphor that transfers the connection from poverty to opium. (Working against this, however, is a slight syntactic ambiguity created by the added clause itself and the "not . . . but" construction, in which "enslaved" momentarily refers *not* to Godfrey, but to *another* demon.) Molly may be a pauper, but she is a vindictive avenger, an irresponsible mother (despite some "lingering" tenderness), and a drug addict. She may be about to die in the snow, like those victims of the Coventry Distress, but the "poisoned chamber" of *her* mind is "inhabited by no higher memories than those of a barmaid's paradise of pink ribbons and gentlemen's jokes" (164). The reference to "pink ribbons" reminds us of the writer's attitude towards flirtatious, pretty women; in this context, it suggests a response to those events that provoked anxieties about her friends back home. George Eliot's own moral confusion over the fate of the ribbon weavers and their families is understandable, yet the animus behind that phrase, "a barmaid's paradise of pink ribbons," begins to look like the kind of psychological projection that comes from an intolerable sense of guilt. Did she project her own bad feelings onto a bad object? If so, and if we play the game her own repression was playing, we might end up

arguing that had the worthless Molly listened to Mr. Charles Bray's lecture on "Mind in Connection with Organization" she would have realized that we can do without "fashion and its votaries." Who needs pink ribbons when we can be in harmony "with nature and nature's God"? Charles Bray, a fierce opponent of private property, made money out of them. Not so the weavers, many of whom starved. An intolerable footnote, perhaps, yet it helps us to understand why a spiritually-redeemed handloom weaver and his adopted daughter reject the world of industrial alienation and fashion, find happiness in a cottage on the last bit of common land, and live happily ever after.

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The Poet and the Bible: Christina Rossetti's Feminist Hermeneutics

Lynda Palazzo

With the anniversary of Christina Rossetti's death in 1994, there has been renewed interest in her work, with an entire volume of *Victorian Poetry* devoted to her poetry and prose, revealing a perceptive and sometimes subversive intelligence at work. However, critical accounts of her theology are still very few, and even fewer those which examine the theology of her devotional prose. One of the more promising articles in the volume, Linda Petersen's "Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of the PRB," after an exciting introduction suggesting a reaction in Rossetti's theology against the "subtle yet insistent cultural exclusion of women as active readers of, and writers about, the sacred scriptures" (212) ultimately disappoints by neatly sidestepping the devotional prose and engaging with Rossetti's poetry instead. The reader is left without a confirmation of Rossetti active herself as reader and interpreter of the sacred text. Rossetti is indeed an active participant in the theological developments of the last century, and her approach, imaginative and intuitive rather than "scientific," is closely linked to the religious controversies of her time. She recognizes the potential of controversial developments in nineteenth-century Anglican theology, and although always careful to avoid overstepping the bounds of what she considers legitimate enquiry, develops a method of scriptural interpretation which satisfies both her intellectual need for an imaginative and transformative encounter with a living text, and her personal need as a woman to interpret and understand a "masculine" text.

An earlier article by Joel Westerholm comes nearer to showing Rossetti's active engagement with the scriptural text, especially in his discussion of her response to gender issues. However, he has not placed her satisfactorily within the context of Victorian Anglican theology and consequently is unable to determine the method of her operation. Her "authority" in fact comes from the knowledge that she is working within a rapidly expanding, although at times controversial, field. More credit must be given the SPCK than to assume that they were unaware of any "serious and scholarly biblical interpretation" (14) in her work. There is no evidence either that "in prefaces and editing the church tried to place her back in the contexts it found acceptable" (16). The editing of her work by the SPCK appears to have been minimal (see note 4). The Anglican Church in the nineteenth century was surprisingly open ended and Rossetti's close friendship with such figures as the fiery R. F. Littledale would have kept her up to date with the latest controversies. It is not, as Westerholm suggests, her courage we need to admire, although she certainly had that, but the razor sharp intellect and vision that

identified in contemporary theological developments the potential for feminine and feminist theology.

Rossetti's place, in terms of method, is amongst the post-Coleridgeans such as J. H. Newman, Isaac Williams, to whom she acknowledges a debt in the prefatory note of *Seek and Find*, and Benjamin Jowett, in his "On the Interpretation of Scripture." There is evidence in *Seek and Find* and *Letter and Spirit* of a lively interest in controversies such as those that followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews*.¹ Like Jowett, she was fascinated by metaphor and symbol, and the role of the imagination in relation to the scriptures. The methodology of both in fact foreshadows some of the most important developments in modern hermeneutical study, for example Paul Ricoeur in his use of metaphor.

Possibly her earliest attempts at biblical commentary, her unpublished notes on Genesis and Exodus,² show her moving away from the popular typological orientation, towards an evaluation of the figurative power of language. As does Coleridge in his "Statesman's Manual," Rossetti notes the potential of metaphor and symbol in the opening up of the text to a multiplicity of interpretations, reader-based interpretations, which make the Bible live in the contemporary mind, as "living educts of the imagination" (29).

She remarks on a marginal comment for Genesis 2:22:

Margin "buildd he a woman: opens the whole subject of the Church born & built from our Lord's side. Also consider His parallel with Adam casting in His lot with his lost bride. "Yet without sin." Also the female cast out of sin? Is it so?

Rossetti is aware of the standard typological association, Eve, type of the Church as bride of Christ, but her focus is on the metaphor "buildd," which highlights the tension between God's creation of Eve and the physical building of the church. She is allowing the metaphor to open up imaginative access to a whole series of possibilities, ending with a daring suggestion in her use of "cast out" that Eve's sin had its origin in the sinful flesh of Adam from which she was made.

Her comment on the use of the word "bow" found in Genesis 9:13 indicates again that she is exploring the way metaphor gives access to meaning through association with the familiar in the mind of the reader: "13. 'My bow'—would this suggest bow and arrows as an antediluvian mode of hunting, & thus familiar and intelligible?" (see note 2). The author's reference to "bow," Rossetti suggests, is chosen specifically because it would facilitate an imaginative connection

between the text and the vocabulary of the familiar, thus establishing meaning.

George Landow sees the "deformation" of the popular type into allegory, symbol or correspondence as characteristic of high church exegetes like Keble and Pusey (59), but Rossetti's agenda is different from that of the great Tractarians. She certainly learnt from Keble, and even in later years continued to use her copy of his *Christian Year*, but even her youthful illustrations to his poems in this volume show a very different sensibility from his. Diane D'Amico in a discussion of these illustrations draws our attention to, on the one hand, Rossetti's subjective reading of Keble, "responding to, if not looking for, what in the poetry of *The Christian Year* would serve to mirror her own hopes and fears," and on the other to her use of the feminine figure "when we would expect to see a male figure as the subject of an illustration" (37). More important in terms of her theology, we also see that her choice of emphasis does not correspond to Keble's own. In her illustration of Keble's "Fifth Sunday after Epiphany" she fixes upon a few words only from the epigraph from Isaiah 59: "your iniquities have separated between you and your God." She interprets these in a literal sense, cutting them off momentarily from their immediate referent, and then reproduces them in a figuration of her own: a medusa-like demon, reminiscent of her own "The World," obscures the figure of Christ on the cross. The resulting image, despite its childish characters, is unsettling and provoking. Her brother William Michael noted in his memoir to her *Poetical Works* the "very literal manner" with which she was wont to construe the biblical precepts" (liv), but this was not, as he perhaps thought, the consequence of a closed mind. Rather, it was her fascination with words, and the pictures they conjured up in her imagination. Her method here is as follows: focus on the surface meaning, once the word has been given symbolic or metaphorical status, allows it to be imaginatively transferred from its original context to become active in the individual mind, producing a corresponding metaphor. Benjamin Jowett describes a similar action in his comments on the use of symbol and imagination when he speaks of "the doubling of an object when seen through glasses placed at different angles" (381). In a bolder step than he himself would have dared, the correspondences of Keble's sacramental universe have been transferred to the words of scripture. Language itself has become sacrament. Rossetti follows Jowett (and Coleridge), as she "read[s] scripture like any other book" (338), with "an effort of thought and imagination requiring the sense of a poet as well as a critic . . . demanding much more than learning a degree of original power and intensity of mind" (384). It is an opening up of the mind to the text, an empathy which probes the "is" and "is not"³ of each metaphor.

Rossetti is aware of a tendency to devalue the text in biblical study and has harsh words to say in *Letter and Spirit* about those who denigrate the face value of scripture: "We protrude mental feelers in all directions above, beneath,

around it, grasping, clinging to every imaginable particular except the main point" (85). She is not, as her brother thought, falling into the trap of literalism, nor is she naively adhering to the idea of "common sense" linguistic transparency. We need to grasp the surface of the text, its literal value, in order to have access to meaning. Even so the mind is waylaid by the need to translate into fact, to prove physical truth or falsity: "What was the precise architecture of Noah's Ark?" Rossetti quotes, "Clear up the astronomy of Joshua's miracle.⁴ Fix the botany of Jonah's gourd. Must a pedestal be included within the measurement of Nebuchadnezzar's 'golden image'" (86-87).

Rossetti's final volume of devotional prose, *The Face of the Deep*, an exegetical commentary on Revelation, is particularly interesting in that we see Rossetti working directly on the scriptures. The title itself, taken from Genesis 1:2, proclaims its revaluation of the individual word as an access point to personal revelation. Her prefatory note proposes a search of the surface of the sacred text: "If thou canst dive, bring up pearls. If thou canst not dive, collect amber. Though I fail to identify Pardisiacal 'bdellium,' I still may hope to search out beauties of the 'onyx stone'" (7).

The metaphorical nature of the individual word allows her, through grasping its "surface," to glimpse the theological referent, and then as an interpreter, to substitute another "metaphor" taken from her own experience. She begins her commentary by opening her mind and imagination to the language of the text, appropriating words or phrases from which have called up echoes from her own experience—words which orthodox biblical commentaries may in the past have considered unimportant. Then in her text she restores, not the words themselves, but the figures they have produced in her own mind.

For example in Revelation 1:1 from the phrase "must shortly come to pass" she appropriates the word "shortly," which has a pivotal function, allowing her to include herself in an expanded text: "'Things which must shortly come to pass.'—At the end of 1800 years we are still repeating this 'shortly'" (9). It was this "shortly" for John, "the channel, not the fountain head" of Revelation, and it is still "shortly" for the present generation. But Rossetti doesn't attempt to define the word in her commentary, or explain its meaning; rather she explores the tension between the totally opposite poles it represents. The word has become metaphoric, the figurative sense pointing to a barely glimpsed divine meaning which in turn challenges the literal, forcing the reader to find ways in which such meanings can co-exist, realigning the self as the word becomes productive in the imagination.

Particularly important to Rossetti is the capacity of such a method to satisfy her own need as a woman working in a field almost exclusively dominated by men. *The Face of the Deep* is not addressed exclusively to women, but the frequent use of the address "we women" suggests that, especially in her description of the female figures, she has her female reader-

¹See for example my discussion of the two volumes in "The Prose Works of Christina Rossetti."

²They were probably written some time before *Seek and Find*. See Packer (330) and Palazzo (62). I am indebted to Mrs. Joan Rossetti for the notes on

Genesis, and to Professor Diane D'Amico for help in tracing their whereabouts. See also Palazzo 89, notes 17, 18, 20, and Appendix A, for a reproduction of the notes.

³Schneider (29). Sandra Schneider uses modern developments in the study of hermeneutics, especially in relation to the use of metaphor, to facilitate a feminist interpretation of the scriptures.

⁴Joshua's miracle in particular must have caught her imagination as she

ship in mind. Certainly some of the more prominent figures in Revelation are examined in terms of gender distinction, becoming patterns which Rossetti is able to trace in her own world. Her comment on the "woman clothed with the sun" of Revelation 12:1 is perhaps the best known of these, as it fits well with the "lowest place" theme of her poetry: "she has done all and stands; from the lowest place she has gone up higher . . . triumphantly erect, despite her own frailty" (310). But Rossetti's definition of this frailty gives us more than an echo of her poetry. It is physical weakness, certainly, the lot reserved for women, "unlike the corresponding heritage of man" (310), but is also Eve's punishment for intellectual daring. Rossetti's description of Eve's intellectual sin has the characteristics of her own objections to contemporary Biblical controversy, but the interpreter of the text is female: "Not till she became wise in her own conceit, disregarding the plain obvious meaning of words, and theorising on her own responsibility as to physical and intellectual results, did she bring death into the world" (310).

Protagonists who stand ranged on each side of the gender divide give Rossetti the opportunity to provide guidance in male-female relationships, and there are no doubts as to where her sympathies lie. The outcome on earth of the "war in heaven" of Revelation 12: 7 comes perilously close to a war between the sexes, the newly delivered woman fleeing from the pursuing flood of the (male) dragon. But she avoids the simplistic and uses such generalizations only to highlight important issues for her woman readers.

Rossetti's hermeneutic can be defined as a feminist one in the way she attempts to recover for the woman reader those hidden or suppressed realities of the text. She accepts with humility the feminine implications of even that most loathsome of creatures, the whore of Babylon, whom she admits as "illustrating the particular foulness, degradation, loathsomeness, to which a perverse rebellious woman because feminine not masculine is liable," but her scrutiny picks out the relationship between the whore and the (male) beast upon which she is seated. Since the sacred text is inspired⁵ and therefore active "to teach us somewhat we can learn, and in a way by which we are capable of learning" (23), a physical detail of this nature may be considered symbolically and interpreted within the personal circumstance of the reader: "If she removes he is the motor; she is lifted aloft to the extent of his height; her stability depends on his. In semblance he is her slave, in reality her master" (399). In the discussion which follows, on the misuse of physical force, there is an ill disguised bitterness:

As yet, I suppose, we women claim no more than equality with our brethren in head and heart; whilst as to physical force, we scout it as unworthy to arbitrate between the opposed camps. Men on their side do not scout physical force, but let it be. (410)

She thus is able to foreground sections of the text which

may have seemed irrelevant to earlier commentators, but which in her own discourse gain meaning. The "kings of the earth" for example, the seducers of Babylon, regret the fall of the whore, but as Rossetti points out, "Adam seems not to have found one word to plead for Eve in the terrible hour of judgement" (418). We are reminded here of her comment from the Genesis notes, "Also the *female* cast out of sin?" and her anguished "Is it so?" Cast from the flesh of Adam, Eve's sin is derived from his, but he shows no compassion for her in her suffering. As Rossetti moves her meditation to her own day, the corrupt seducers of Babylon assume contemporary identity:

Now they are the wicked who stand callous amid the fears, torments, miseries of others; not investigating human claims . . . not heeding the burning questions of their day, neighbourhood, nay sometimes their own hearths. (418)

But it will not always be so. "Society" Rossetti claims, "may be personified as a human figure whose right hand is man, whose left woman . . . Rules admit of and are proved by exceptions. There are left-handed people, and there may arise a left-handed society!" (409).

In what she perceives as a world blind in the main to the suffering of women, Rossetti derives comfort from the feminine identity of the Church and its relationship to Christ. In her response to Revelation 19:7 she illustrates the love between Christ and the Church by a revaluation of Christ's own relationship with women; his love, acceptance and consolation, defending her use of this literal interpretation of the feminine identity of the Church, "because it is so lovely a privilege to have stood really and truly in some direct relation to Christ that it may well take precedence of aught figurative" (434). Adding imaginative and emotional detail she fills in the feminine mindset, finally bringing her discourse into the present where womankind "comes forth from the thousand battlefields . . . beds of weariness, haunts of starvation, hospital wards, rescue homes, orphanages . . ." (436).

As Revelation draws to a close and St. John returns to address the Churches, as at the beginning, Rossetti allows the words of St. John to span the centuries and become directly meaningful to her own discourse. His warning in Revelation 22:18-19, "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life," elicits the response "O Lord, if I myself have fallen into either deadly error against which Thou here testifieth: 'I acknowledge my transgressions'" (548), and for the reader Rossetti adds, "if I have been overbold in attempting such a work as this, I beg pardon" (551).

Rossetti's method has enabled her to bridge the gap between a text increasingly under fire as inaccurate, irrelevant and incomprehensible⁶ and the average Victorian sensibility, bewildered in a world fast becoming "modern" at the end of the century. In this she is forward looking to Karl Barth, to

damentalism, ultimately tended to devalue the language of the text, for example Matthew Arnold's classification of the words of scripture in his *God and the Bible* as expendable "husks" (156).

Gadamer and to modern hermeneutical trends, but she looks past them also, in her exploration of feminist hermeneutics, which a hundred years later seeks to liberate the Biblical text from participation in the oppression of women, through, as Schneider terms it, an "integral interpretation . . . engaging it in such a way that it can function as locus and mediator of transformative encounter with the living God" (197).

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Flagellating Feminine Desire: Lesbians, Old Maids, and New Women in "Miss Coote's Confession," a Victorian Pornographic Narrative

Tamar Heller

Published between 1879 and 1880, *The Pearl*, subtitled "a journal of facetiae and voluptuous reading," is one of the most famous collections of Victorian pornography. One tale serialized in the first ten numbers of *The Pearl* is "Miss Coote's Confession; or the Voluptuous Experiences of an Old Maid"—the history of a wealthy spinster's "penchant for the rod," and thus an example of what Steven Marcus has called the "vast literature of flagellation produced during the Victorian period" (252). Although "Miss Coote's Confession" is the only prose narrative in *The Pearl* devoted to flagellation (there are several poems by Swinburne on the subject), almost every tale in the journal contains at least one scene of whipping, an incidence typical of Victorian pornography. This fetishistic emphasis on the "English vice" may provoke us to ask why a plot about domination and submission was so compelling to the largely elite male audience of Victorian pornography. In *The Other Victorians* Steven Marcus argues that the flagellation fantasy was a homoerotic one shaped by upper-class male experience in the public schools, and thus represents for its writers and readers a "last-ditch compromise with and defense against homosexuality" (260). In a dissenting view, however, Coral Lansbury claims that Marcus is too quick to assume that all women in flagellation narratives are

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really men in drag; pointing to the many works written after 1870 in which men beat unruly young girls, Lansbury argues that the flagellation narrative represents a kind of backlash, so to speak, that provided "an assertion of male authority directed against powerful women" in an era that witnessed the rise of the New Woman (122).

Yet Miss Coote, the ferocious martinet and eponymous anti-heroine of *The Pearl*'s flagellation narrative, is scarcely the image of woman as victim. If anything, this dominatrix who gleefully whips every woman in sight recalls Marcus's theory of the female sadist as a schoolmaster in drag. I would like to suggest, however, that we can read this particular example of Victorian pornography as representing both homosexuality and the New Woman, if we see the tale's focus as not male but *female* homoeroticism, and read the flagellant woman as an embodiment of ideological tensions regarding female sexuality during a period of gender role transition. My point is not that every Victorian flagellant fantasy has exactly the ideological meaning that I ascribe to this tale; indeed, I wish to contest readings of pornographic conventions such as flagellation that ascribe *only* one meaning to them. "Miss Coote's Confession" is an example of how pornographic conventions such as flagellation can, in differing eras, engage his-

⁵The nature of the inspiration itself was a controversial topic of the period. Rossetti is closest in her treatment of inspiration to the method of Isaac Williams and his *Apocalypse and Genesis*.

⁶Attacks on literalism, although useful in correcting the worst excesses of fun-

torically specific anxieties about changes in gender roles.

In her introduction to a recent collection of essays on the history of pornography, Lynn Hunt claims that "Early modern pornography reveals some of the most important nascent characteristics of modern culture" and is "especially revealing about the gender differentiations being developed within the culture of modernity" (11). Although Hunt focuses on works written before the nineteenth century, her claims apply equally to Victorian pornography, which, although a self-consciously transgressive sexual discourse, is both in continuum and dialogue with more mainstream genres of the period that address "gender differentiation." As such scholars as Elaine Showalter and Judith Walkowitz have shown, gender roles were particularly unstable and controversial during the last decades of the nineteenth century, although until recently most studies of *fin-de-siècle* homosexuality and its connection to this context have looked at the experience of men. Increasingly, however, attention has turned to the history of female homosexuality, and to how anxieties generated in the late nineteenth century by images of the lesbian hinged on a hostility to autonomous women. "Miss Coote's Confession" is of particular historical interest because, in showcasing an independent spinster sexually aroused by whipping women, it anticipates the figure of the lesbian as New Woman and man-nish androgyne in *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth-century texts (see Smith-Rosenberg 1995 246-96). In "Miss Coote's Confession" this version of the New Woman is tamed, not so much through flagellation—which becomes the way women derive pleasure from each other's bodies—but through a narrative telos that points to the superiority of heterosexuality. Thus, although Victorian pornography, unlike domestic ideology, asserts that women are sexual beings, pornographic plots like that of "Miss Coote's Confession" circumscribe the autonomy of the sexual woman.

"Never Under Proper Control": "Miss Coote's Confession" as a Narrative of Feminine Socialization

Julia Epstein and Randolph Trumbach have commented on the resemblance of eighteenth-century pornography to other genres of the period, including the domestic novel (Epstein 136, Trumbach 69). Certainly the permeability of genres prior to the emergence of a clear divide between high and low culture would overdetermine such similarities. By the time that *The Pearl* was published as an underground journal (its contributors were anonymous), the break between high and low culture had become more stratified; still, Victorian pornography, like the Gothic and other marginal genres, both imitates and (in its position as "low" fiction) parodically comments on more mainstream genres. An epistolary narrative composed of letters written by Miss Rosa Belinda Coote to a female friend, "Miss Coote's Confession" harks back to such eighteenth-century novels as *Clarissa* and (an obvious generic predecessor) *Fanny Hill*, both framed as epistolary accounts written by one woman to another. This mimicry of the female epistolary mode enables "Miss Coote's Confession" to satirize the genre of the female bildungsroman popular in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For all its grotesque excesses, indeed, the tale of feminine socialization that this pornographic narrative tells is remarkably close to that of

mainstream Victorian models.

A characteristically Victorian element of "Miss Coote's Confession" is its focus on the daughter's story in the family romance. Paula Marantz Cohen has identified the figure of the daughter as more central in the nineteenth-century domestic novel than that of the wife or mother. The daughter has such symbolic importance, Cohen argues, because she is particularly malleable to male control—her ideas can be shaped by her father or fatherly husband—and also (unlike a mature woman) she is reassuringly asexual (22-23). As a work of pornography, "Miss Coote's Confession" varies from this formula by depicting the daughter figure—here, a granddaughter—as having sexual appetites which her grandfather wishes to develop rather than eradicate. Yet the pornographic narrative is remarkably consistent with the type of narrative that Cohen describes in representing female appetite as problematic and requiring control to subordinate it to paternal authority. When the young and orphaned Miss Coote arrives at the home of her guardian, her grandfather Sir Eyre Coote, he will not allow her to pluck fruit in the garden, threatening her with a beating if she disobeys this allegorical injunction. Here, the domestic narrative of patriarchal control veers into the Gothic genre (never far absent from pornography) as Sir Eyre's house, where he beats both his female servants and granddaughter, becomes the site of kinky sexual servitude. Like castles in the female Gothic where heroines are in thrall to patriarchal tyrants, this claustrophobic enclosure with its own torture chamber—a room fitted with the paraphernalia of flagellation, including a "Berkeley horse" to which the female victims are bound—is yet another refracted version of the bourgeois household and the sexual logic by which it controls potentially rebellious young girls. For instance, before he beats her for the first time, Sir Eyre claims that his granddaughter's resistance—she fights the servants who try to restrain her—proves that she is "violently vicious" and "has never been under proper control all her life" (11). Thus, while she is not asexual like many Victorian heroines, Miss Coote is literally and figuratively bound to channel her erotic energies in order to please her grandfather's desires. The gory scenes in which he whips—and tames—her represent an incestuous rape that she learns not only to accept but to enjoy, as do his much-whipped servants, who claim that "we all rather like it after the first time or two" (13).

The parallel between the eroticized subjugation of servants and daughter turns the drama of feminine socialization into an entire theatre of power that reinforces the Law not only of the Father but of the upper classes and the colonizer. While the whipping of female servants suggests an analogy between women and the working classes, that Sir Eyre is a retired and "celebrated Indian General" (6) alludes to the imperial control of unruly natives as well. Not only does Miss Coote's grandfather recall the Sir Eyer Coote who was the British commander-in-chief in India in the eighteenth century, but the spelling of his name makes an even more pointed reference to the Governor Edward Eyre of Jamaica who, in 1865, was responsible for the massacre of hundreds of blacks following a native insurrection in Morant Bay, an incident that provoked a storm of controversy about British colonial authority. One act of Governor Eyre that particularly outraged his critics was his causing black women accused of complicity in the rebellion to

be stripped and flogged (we are told, indeed, that Miss Coote's grandfather was fond, when in colonial service, of the "use of the cat" [6]).

That the father is a grandfather here also has an allegorical significance: while it might seem strange to represent so ferocious a male power on the verge of decline—the general often gets worn out by whipping and has to hand over his rod to his housekeeper or granddaughter—such a characterization is crucial to the narrative's class politics, for Miss Coote is not only the colonized female subject but her grandfather's heir and next-in-command to control the lower classes. After he inscribes his authority on his granddaughter's body with his phallic rod, Sir Eyre, anticipating her inheritance of his money and class privilege, teaches her to use the rod to control those beneath her—on the bottom, as it were—of the body politic. It is not surprising that she has her first orgasm while whipping one of the servants:

The sight of her sufferings seemed to nerve my arm, and add to my excitement, the blood seemed delicious in my eyes, and I gradually worked myself up, so that I felt such gushing thrilling sensations as to quite overcome me. (85)

In sharing male class and gender privilege, Miss Coote emblemizes the figure that Lansbury identifies as the surrogate, the woman who has "assumed the role and function of man" and who exists "to subdue and persecute" other women, particularly those more disenfranchised than she, in the name of the father (121).

"The Sensuality of My Disposition: "Miss Coote's Confession" and the Paradox of Female Sexuality

"Miss Coote's Confession" is structured by a paradox. While the putative function of whipping is to control women's bodies—and thus, presumably, their sexuality—flagellation excites feminine desire and allows for its expression. While this exhibition of female lust is a carnivalesque attraction for the male reader, some anxiety about the open expression of female sexuality nonetheless escapes in a passage from a letter that Miss Coote quotes from a female flagellant who corresponded with her grandfather:

We live in an age so dissolute that if young girls are not kept under some sort of restraint and punished when they deserve it, we shall see bye-and-bye nothing but women of the streets, parading the streets and public places, and God knows, there are already but too many of them! (339)

Although according to the logic of the narrative this letter was written in the eighteenth century, its reference to prostitutes—"women of the streets"—strikes a note of peculiarly late nineteenth-century anxiety. Recent feminist criticism of the Victorian period has shown how the prostitute, despite her social marginality, was a central figure in the nineteenth-century discursive formations about class and gender (i.e. Walkowitz, Nord). As Judith Walkowitz says, the prostitute embodies "lower-class and sexual disorder" (21) in a period when the sign of both gender and class identity—the strict distinction between men's public sphere and women's virtuous enclosure in the home—was increasingly eroded. In the 1870s and 1880s—the period when "Miss Coote's Confession" was written—the prostitute was increasingly a symbol for the disturbing hybridization of formerly separate spheres, as more women (consumers, shopgirls, charity workers, and New Women) gained access to public space and were, indeed, associated with and sometimes mistaken for streetwalkers.

In contrast to the female boundary-crossing of these "women of the streets," Miss Coote's sexual excesses may seem reassuringly privatized, since her flagellation orgies are confined to her home. And yet in her craving for sexual pleasure Miss Coote strays outside the male control that flagellation had represented in her grandfather's realm. Here "Miss Coote's Confession" reflects the complex relation of Victorian pornography to the hegemonic (though by no means uncontested) gender discourse of domesticity. Written primarily for an upper-class audience, Victorian pornography is both subversive of the bourgeois paradigm of domesticity and reactionary in its nostalgia for aristocratic decadence. Unabashedly harking back to a feudal, aristocratic past and its disciplinary apparatus—as Foucault would call it, the spectacle of the scaffold—flagellation narratives satirize nineteenth-century liberal discourses such as penal reform and abolition.¹ (With its ferociously jocular celebration of feudal modes of discipline, for instance, "Miss Coote's Confession" takes the side of the Governor Eyre controversy that endorses extreme forms of colonial power.) Victorian liberal reform discourses—including feminism, in its nineteenth-century incarnation—were informed by the domestic ideal in which women's moral management was a corrective to harsh patriarchal discipline (see Brodhead, Bland). Such moral management rested on a definition of women as asexual spiritual guides—a definition that pornographers were of course eager to explode. According to Victorian pornography, every woman is at heart a rake; this resistance to the bourgeois definition of women, while usually entwined with the most reactionary of class and racial politics, nonetheless subverts hegemonic nineteenth-century gender ideology by asserting—far more fervently than most discourses of the peri-

¹Not all nineteenth-century pornography was reactionary; there was also a pornographic tradition linked to Jacobin and Romantic-era radical discourse (see MacCalman). In general, however, the pornography distributed in the late Victorian period represented an upper-class Tory sensibility. As might be expected, there is often open hostility in such pornography to such liberal dis-

courses as abolition; for example, *The Cremorne*—a short-lived underground successor to *The Pearl*, apparently edited by the same staff—contains a vicious parody of Linda Brent's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in which the protagonist, who in the original narrative resists rape, is subjected to whipping and sexual assault.

od—women's need for sexual gratification.²

Yet Victorian pornography's strange blend of subversive and reactionary resistance to the ideology of feminine passionlessness³ is, in its very complexity, fraught with ironies and tensions. For one thing, a narrative like "Miss Coote's Confession" proves that the discourses of liberal reform were right in their diagnosis of the underlying hypocrisy of feudal disciplinary practices. One of the criticisms of corporal punishment in the nineteenth century was that it was only a thin veil for the lust of power—and the lust of those in power; recalling a common critique of whipping in schools, protests of General Eyre's flogging of women during the Jamaican revolt attacked him for violating standards of sexual decorum, and, moreover, suggested the underlying prurience of the punishers.⁴ (Indeed, in "Miss Coote's Confession," we hear the General gloating over "what a fine figure" his granddaughter should make if "they ever had to strip me for punishment" [7].)

Yet, while charges of hypocrisy and sexual sadism would presumably not bother the devotees of flagellation narratives, the contradictory messages about female sexuality in these representations are potentially more disquieting to their male readers. To the extent that female sexuality in these tales services male pleasure, it is acceptable; yet the extent to which Victorian pornography unleashes an uncontrolled female libido threatens the male authority, and sexual primacy, that these narratives endorse as much as does the domestic ideology they parody. In "Miss Coote's Confession" female libido is unleashed when, in her efforts to deviate from normalizing sexual discourses, the protagonist chooses an alternative to domesticity. In a gleeful rejection of female passionlessness, Miss Coote—in public a "highly respectable old maid"—in private indulges what she calls "the sensuality of my disposition" (347) by pursuing the sexual behavior that Eve Sedgwick has claimed was a signifier in the nineteenth century for aristocratic decadence: homosexuality (Sedgwick, especially 174-75). Such an aristocratic resistance to domesticity, however, leads Miss Coote, after Sir Eyre's death, to dispense with sexual servitude to men and seek instead companionship with women.

Female Bonds and the Escape from Female Bondage: Flagellation, Homoeroticism, and the New Woman

Once she is sent, upon Sir Eyre's death, to a school run, unsurprisingly, by a Miss Flaybum, Miss Coote develops a "penchant for female bedfellows" and, encouraged by the (of

course) French governess Mademoiselle Fosse, discovers in homoeroticism the thrill previously excited for her only by flagellation:

"There, there," she whispered, "nip me, squeeze that little bit of flesh," as my hand wandered to the lips of her hairy retreat, "tickle me as I do you," putting me in great confusion by her touches, for I had never experienced anything like it before, except the melting, burning sensations of the same parts at the conclusion of my previous flagellations. (119)

The nineteenth century did not of course invent the pornographic convention of voyeuristically representing female homoeroticism in female communities—girls' schools and convents—in order to titillate the male reader, nor are such female-female encounters free from coded references to homoeroticism in boys' schools. Yet I would argue that, once again, specific late Victorian anxieties about female sexuality and relationships surface in these orgiastic girls' school scenes. At the very least, the spectacle of groups of young girls engaged in homoerotic sexual experimentation reveals a greater cynicism about the chastity of "the female world of love and ritual" than is acknowledged by such historians as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Lillian Faderman (Smith Rosenberg 1975, Faderman 1981). Yet, as Martha Vicinus declares in an article on the roots of modern lesbian identity, "we may have exaggerated the acceptability of romantic relationships" in the nineteenth century (Vicinus 1992, 483). For all their characteristically mocking and parodic representation of pubescent female sexuality, the school sections of "Miss Coote's Confession" reflect a growing climate of concern in the late nineteenth century about the erotic potential of close female friendships. Even before the clinical definition of lesbianism later in the century there were fears, even if only partially articulated, about sexual elements in these relationships, and there was the concern, moreover, that friendships of the type young girls might form at school could hinder their assimilation into the institution of heterosexuality (Putzell Korab, Vicinus 1990). In "Miss Coote's Confession," upon graduating from school the protagonist avoids marriage and instead installs her French teacher in her household as a companion in flagellation and lover: "Myself and Mademoiselle occupied separate bedrooms communicating with each other, so that we could, if we wished, enjoy each other's society by night as well as by day" (185).

²By referring to an ideology of feminine passionlessness, I do not mean to fall into the "Acton fallacy"—namely, the mistaken perception that Dr. Acton's famous comments on women's utter lack of sexual desire were hegemonic in the Victorian period. Yet, while in general women's passion was not wholly denied within domestic ideology, it was considered much less potent than men's. Moreover, even given the understanding that women had to engage in sexual activity in order to become wives and mothers, there was significant discomfort in Victorian discourses about the potentially uncontrollable nature of awakened feminine desire. For an excellent discussion of Victorian debates about the nature of female sexuality, see Bland 52-70.

³See, for example, the letter to the *Times* protesting Eyre's flogging of women that begins "the person of a woman flogged is publicly and indecently exposed in shameful nakedness," quoted in Gibson 169. James Kincaid also addresses Victorian debates over the erotic potential of whipping (255-61).

This image of independent women poses an implicit threat to male authority, making Miss Coote a figure not simply for an outmoded aristocratic decadence but for the New Woman, an allusion ironically underscored by her being an "old maid." The old maid, as Nina Auerbach argues, has a double meaning in Victorian narratives: while often a pathetic caricature of the woman who lacks a man, the spinster is also free from the economic and social limitations that defined the lives of married women (109-49). Recalling, in her phallic sexuality, such masculinized versions of the old maid as Dickens's Aunt Betsy Trotwood, Miss Coote rejoices in her sexual and economic independence. When a former schoolmate, hearing of Miss Coote's flagellant activities, remarks on what an "ogress" she has become, Miss Coote responds that

by judicious use of the rod a club of ladies could enjoy every sensual feeling of pleasure without the society of men. I mean to marry the birch (in fact I am already wedded to it) and retain my fortune as my independence.

(226)

Flagellation, then, is associated not only with female economic "independence" (as a spinster Miss Coote will "retain" her fortune) but with female sexual autonomy; on hearing the above speech one of Miss Coote's friends gushes "what a paragon of virtue . . . do I really understand you pander to your sensuality without intercourse with men?" (226). Being married to the rod—to the phallus, as it were—means in Miss Coote's case freedom from the man who usually comes along with it. At the end of the narrative, indeed, Miss Coote admits to her female correspondent that she never married because her "love of independence" gave her an aversion to being "subject to anyone" (348).

It is tempting, in fact, to read Miss Coote as a caricature of Angela Burdett-Coutts, a powerful Victorian woman who while not a feminist, was an image of the type of woman associated with the New Woman.⁵ Like Miss Coote, Burdett-Coutts was a wealthy heiress and philanthropist who attained the unheard-of honor for a woman of being granted a title because of her own achievements. Burdett-Coutts's association with numerous charitable endeavors to end cruelty to children and animals are, in the usual reaction against such liberal reforms, mocked in the pornographic narrative when the wealthy old maid is characterized as a closet sadist rather than a benign angel; but the nastiness of the satire may owe much to how activities like those in which Burdett-Coutts engaged—public campaigns like anti-vivisection—reflected emergent feminist discourses, since many of the women active in such campaigns were also Victorian feminists (see Lansbury).

Most importantly Miss Coote, like Burdett-Coutts a figure for women's economic autonomy, is also a figure for sexual autonomy, anticipating the *fin de siècle* figure of the "odd woman" that, as Elaine Showalter says, combines elements of

the "angular spinster" and "hysterical feminist" with those of the lesbian (23). In "Miss Coote's Confession" lesbianism signifies the ultimate independence for women, since it dispenses with men altogether. Moreover, like other late nineteenth-century New Women, these lesbians form a female association, as Miss Coote founds Lady Rodney's Club, where even the married members use their maiden names. The image of the women's club is a significant one in a period when women were increasingly banding together to improve their position in Victorian society and to form, as Martha Vicinus has shown, networks of independent women (Vicinus 1985, esp. 295-99). That the female group in "Miss Coote's Confession" is associated with homoeroticism ("a club of ladies could enjoy every sensual feeling of pleasure without the society of men") anticipates later stereotypes of feminists as sinister lesbians and of women's rights groups as lesbian gatherings. It is worth remembering that Henry James's *The Bostonians*, which metonymically associates lesbians and feminists, was written only half a decade after "Miss Coote's Confession."

Thus, as lesbian, old maid, and New Woman, Miss Coote is a titillating and a terrifying figure for a male audience. The threat that such a powerful woman poses to male authority is neutralized, however, by means of a traditional pornographic device: using the representation of lesbianism as a spectacle for a male audience. The intensely scopophilic nature of pornography reinforces male authority: although Miss Coote is the text's most obvious voyeur, gazing on scenes of whipping as much as she participates in them (as dominatrix she is able to watch the writhings of her victim), the female gaze is enclosed by the male gaze of the reader of the text, who is invited to view scenes of lesbian lovemaking, transforming them into a kind of autoerotic pleasure for men.

Thus lesbianism is subsumed within heterosexual desire by being portrayed as a prelude to heterosexuality for women—a telos which recuperates the threat of female independence in the maturation narrative of the female bildung. Miss Coote disbands Lady Rodney's Club once the male admirer of one of its members sneaks in dressed as a woman; once unmasked and stripped, he exposes his "formidable-looking weapon" (9: 307) to the view of the fascinated women, for whom, presumably, the rod seems like an inadequate dildo in comparison. Soon after the club disbands, on her way to enjoy a "luscious embrace" in the arms of her favorite female servant, Miss Coote is similarly entranced by the spectacle of heterosexuality when she finds her lover in bed with a male servant named Charlie. Seducing Miss Coote soon after this primal scene, Charlie refers to the penis in fervent purple prose as the "boy" that "gives such pleasure that Aaron's rod could not equal its magic power" (347). Not only does this passage reflect "the deification of the penis" in Victorian pornography (Webb 99), but Charlie also implies the inadequacy of the phallic substitute—the rod—that Miss Coote has been using to give women sexual satisfaction. By the story's end, the male reader, who has presumably been

⁵I am indebted to Sue Lonoff for first pointing out to me the possible allusion to Burdett-Coutts.

enjoying these scenes of deviance, can still be reassured that, despite any anxiety about male power that she has triggered, the powerful woman who claims she has an aversion to being "subject to anyone" has been tamed and the lesbian "cured." As if, indeed, to punish her for her previous independence, the narrative describes how Miss Coote, who has inflicted so much pain with her rod, experiences defloration, which she describes in the imagery of wounding ("tension and laceration") as painful. Interestingly, Miss Coote does not marry Charlie, thereby clinging to some extent to her freedom as an old maid. (Presumably, Charlie's class inferiority allows his male superiority to be somewhat superseded.) Yet Miss Coote ends her narrative with the account of her initiation into heterosexuality, implying that, once she has acknowledged the superiority of the phallus, the woman writer loses control not only over the rod but the pen.

This theme of taming the New Woman reflects what Bram Dijkstra calls the "late nineteenth-century war on women," a phrase he coins when discussing the exorcism of the predatory female vampire in Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novella "Carmilla" (341). Significantly, the female homoeroticism that critics have noted in this text is also coded as violence against women: in "Carmilla," vampirism performs the same metaphoric function as flagellation in "Miss Coote's Confession." Like flagellation, vampirism figures both homoerotic embrace and seduction: just as Miss Coote corrupts young girls by introducing them to the cruel delights of the rod, so Carmilla, Le Fanu's vampire, attempts to make her pure victim, Laura, reciprocate her sexual advances and thus be a willing accomplice in her own murder. Yet the increasingly intimate bonds between Carmilla and Laura are interrupted by a bevy of wrathful male authorities who, in a monstrous parody of heterosexual intercourse, pierce the lesbian's body with a gigantic stake and strike off her head. Like "Miss Coote's Confession," "Carmilla" associates the lesbian with aristocratic decadence—the vampire is a pampered invalid from a titled family—and also represents female friendship in a sinister light. The language with which Carmilla seduces her victim parodies that of female love and ritual, and romantic friendship between women is the target of the priests and doctors who are the story's professional men.⁶

Narratives of the 1870s like "Carmilla" and "Miss Coote's Confession" shed light on the ongoing debate among feminist critics and historians about when in the nineteenth century the existence of lesbianism was acknowledged and female friendships started to be, in Lillian Faderman's term, "morbidified" (see Faderman 1978). By depicting sexual acts between women before the clinical definition of lesbianism by Havelock Ellis and Kraft-Ebbing, Le Fanu's story and *The Pearl's* pornographic narrative suggest the need to revise what Terry Castle has called the "no lesbians before 1900" school of historiography (9).⁷ While, of course, such misogynistic male fantasies should not be mistaken for representations of women's actual sexual practices, images of female

homoeroticism in 1870s and 1880s texts suggest that, even prior to the *fin-de-siècle*, female companionship was associated with sexual and social autonomy. In their dissolution of female community, these narratives kill the autonomous woman and replace her with a more passive as well as a heterosexual one. Such fantasies of male revenge recall the many narratives that, in the 1880s, sprang up in the aftermath of the Jack the Ripper murders, and characterized women either as delinquents who courted annihilation or fearful victims—a reaction, Judith Walkowitz has argued, against the New Woman forays into the public sphere (see esp. 198-201, 218-220). In narratives like "Carmilla" and "Miss Coote's Confession," the erasure of female sexual autonomy even extends to the definition of lesbianism as sado-masochism; in a denial of any distinctive character to female homoeroticism, such representations imply that lesbianism is only a parody of phallic sexuality and the type of unequal power relationships that characterize Victorian heterosexuality. The ultimate sexist joke of "Miss Coote's Confession" is that the New Woman is really only another version of the Old Man—her grandfather—and that, moreover, her homosexuality (anticipating Freudian models of female maturation) is an infantile detour on the road to "normal" heterosexuality.

The representation of the lesbian in narratives like "Miss Coote's Confession," then, points to the ambivalence about feminine desire that animates Victorian pornography. Even as it is the pornographer's project to show that Victorian women are not sexless angels but sexual beings, narratives like this one, where women liberate their sexuality only to enslave themselves in sadistic sexual practices, attest to the desire of the authors and audience of Victorian pornography at once to represent feminine desire and to chastise the threat to male authority that it signifies. In this way, the gender politics of "Miss Coote's Confession" point to the inescapable link between sexuality and power in Victorian representations, demonstrating how pornography, though itself a marginalized discourse, can define others as marginal when it embodies the voice of an elite.

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Strange Attractors on the Yorkshire Moors: Chaos Theory and *Wuthering Heights*

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I

In her Introduction to *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* Katherine Hayles states that "[w]hen a new paradigm asserts itself, it is not only the present that is changed; the past is also reinterpreted," and she suggests that such new paradigms bring into focus "aspects of . . . texts that may have been neglected or obscured in other interpretive matrices" (Intro. 22-23). *Wuthering Heights* has proven notoriously resistant to the various "interpretive

matrices" which have been applied to it since its publication in 1847, and in particular the question of whether the novel is primarily metaphysical or materialist remains contentious. Recent developments in the study of nonlinear dynamical systems, however, provide formulations which may help in reconciling this apparent opposition. Specifically, chaos theory's concepts of sensitive dependence on initial conditions, strange attractors, and fractals can be used to

⁶See my reading of "Carmilla," esp. 79-80, 88-89, for a more in-depth discussion of this narrative and its relevance to late nineteenth-century representations of female sexuality and friendships.

⁷For another representation of lesbianism in *The Pearl* (right before the ninth installment of "Miss Coote's Confession") see "An Adventure with a Tribade" (296-99).

demonstrate that Brontë's vision of society is itself aperiodic and nonlinear. The eight months she spent in Belgium with her sister Charlotte exposed Emily to a German Romanticism which contained elements of both mysticism and empiricism. The resulting sophisticated perception of chaotic potential finds its fullest expression in her only novel. Until very recently Brontë's refusal to accept a Newtonian order of stable predictability could be described only in terms of metaphysics; it seems therefore appropriate that physics provide a new conceptual framework for this text.

Emily and Charlotte Brontë travelled to the *Pensionnat Heger* in 1842 to develop the familiarity with French culture and language necessary for establishing an attractive girl's school in England. Stevie Davies, in her recent study *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, argues that, this focus notwithstanding, Emily "visited Brussels when the influence of the German school was in full flood in the French-speaking countries of Europe" (50), and that German Romanticism had a much greater influence on her than anything else she encountered in Belgium. Indeed, she would have been primed for such an influence by treatments of this German material in British journals. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, with its famous injunction "Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*" (146), appeared serially in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1833-34, and De Quincey wrote a series of articles on the German movement for *Blackwood's Magazine*. Since these journals were all but required reading in the Brontë household,¹ there is little doubt that Emily was well aware of the ferment of ideas centered on such figures as Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, and Hoffman.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the anti-Enlightenment aspects of German Romanticism did not always find their expression solely in either mysticism or metaphysics. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the controversy which developed around Goethe's counter-theory of color, which rejected Newton's "wave frequency" explanation. In defending his position Goethe and his advocates, both in England and on the Continent, emphasized that he too had engaged in experimental observation, and that his findings were as repeatable as Newton's. Alexander Rueger, in his discussion of this early nineteenth-century epistemological conflict, notes that "Goethe started out . . . in his optical studies as an ardent empiricist, and admirer of Bacon, who wanted to be more empirical than Newton" (217). What Goethe repudiated was not empiricism itself, but rather the Newtonian mechanistic method, which viewed natural phenomena as isolated occurrences to be selectively examined as evidence for specific hypotheses. Unlike Newton, who famously passed white light through a prism, Goethe held the prism up to his eye and looked through it. Rueger describes his conclusions by stating

Goethe claimed to have demonstrated that the most manifold experiments with a prism can be seen as manifestations of a single experience: Prismatic colors appear only if there is a contrast, a border between a bright and a dark area, viewed though a semi-transparent or turbid

medium. Colors are thus produced out of light though some modification; they are not, as Newton claimed, already contained in the white light that is nothing but a mixture of those original colors. For Goethe, white light is a pure phenomenon, not to be further analyzed. A prism, then, produces colors out of white light, not by separating light rays of diverse refrangibility out of the mixture. What the prism does, according to Goethe, is provide a semi-transparent medium through which a contrast of darkness and light is seen: along the borderline the prismatic colors appear. (217-18)

James Gleick summarizes this succinctly by asserting that for Goethe "color comes from boundary conditions and singularities. Where Newton was reductionist, Goethe was holistic" (165). Interestingly Gleick also notes it was Goethe's theory of color which helped start Mitchell Feigenbaum, one of the early exponents of chaos theory, thinking about the possibility of quantifying nonlinear experience (Gleick 163-66). What I want to suggest, therefore, is that Goethe and other German writers of the time provided Brontë with what at first might appear a paradoxical concept: the concept of Romantic empiricism. In my reading *Wuthering Heights* thus becomes not an exploration of the irrational or extra-rational versus the rational, but rather the presentation of a non-Newtonian rationality which sees societal evolutions as empirical without being predictable; in other words, as chaotic systems.

II

Stephen H. Kellert notes that "When scientists confine attention to a particular collection of objects or processes, they draw a figurative frame around the subject matter of their inquiry and label the contents of that frame a 'system'" (2). If there is one thing most analyses of *Wuthering Heights* agree upon it is that Brontë has drawn a "figurative frame" around the events of her novel. The Yorkshire location with its intense, not to say claustrophobic, concentration on two households and the connecting medium of the moors provides a controlled setting which the text invites the reader to observe. Almost the first entry Lockwood makes in his journal is "In all of England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (1), and although even this early statement exhibits a typically "Lockwoodian" wrongheadedness, it is significant. The Heights and the Grange are "completely removed" not because they are somehow "outside" of society, as Lockwood appears to think, but rather because they are constituted by Brontë as a representative microcosmic system. This does not mean that the situations of a Heathcliff, or a Catherine, or a Hareton are themselves representative, but rather that the process by which the system encompassing them develops is meant to be seen that way.

Despite the novel's obviously isolated setting, it does not present an isolated system. Such a system is surrounded by

boundaries so impermeable and rigid that nothing can penetrate them, and as A. B. Çambel notes in his study *Applied Chaos Theory: A Paradigm for Complexity*, "In real life there are no true isolated systems, because there is always some sort of leakage. Isolated systems cannot survive for long" (42). That characters such as Lockwood, Frances, and most importantly, Heathcliff, can enter what might be called the Heights / Grange system indicates it is dynamical rather than isolated; in other words, that it can be penetrated by external energy and information. But there is a further distinction to be made. Dynamical systems can be either conservative, that is, they experience no energy loss, and therefore require no new energy to maintain themselves, or they may be dissipative, which means the *do* lose energy, and therefore must receive energy and information in order to survive. I would suggest that at the beginning of Nelly's narrative the implied relationship between the Heights and the Grange is the social equivalent of a conservative system. The Earnshaw household appears stable and secure. It has produced a male heir to inherit the property, as well as a daughter to supplement the first-born son. Although we are not told so specifically at this point in the text, we later learn the Linton household has replicated this pattern. Each of the region's dominant families thus has a son and a daughter to be exchanged, and the hierarchical social system appears self-sustaining and self-sufficient.

With the appearance of Heathcliff, however, this stability is revealed to be an illusion. Specifically, the Heights / Grange system demonstrates a sensitive dependence on initial conditions characteristic of dissipative, chaotic systems. It cannot absorb a small alteration in its structure, and that alteration ramifies into increasingly unpredictable events. Heathcliff's introduction into the household produces immediate instability. Christened with the name of an earlier child who died, Heathcliff replaces Hindley as the favored son, a situation exacerbated by Catherine's unexplained and intense attachment to her foster brother. Nelly insists

from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house . . . the young master had learnt to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges, and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries. (36)

It is this bitterness which sends Hindley away from the Heights, surprisingly returning with his new wife Frances, thus thwarting the potential marriage with Isabella Linton which would have secured the link between the two estates. And of course Heathcliff's relationship with Catherine prevents her from forming any proper bond with Edgar Linton, although they do eventually marry. The result is Heathcliff's marriage to Isabella and eventual dominance and ownership of both households. A system which, in social and class terms, looked deterministic, ends up being anything but.

Having raised the issue of class, however, I should note that I am hardly the first person to view this text in terms of a "system." Terry Eagleton, in *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, talks of "the tightly dominative system of the Heights," and argues that "Heathcliff's mere presence fiercely intensifies that system's harshness, twisting all the Earnshaw relationships into bitter antagonism" (103).

Eagleton, given the dialectical emphasis his Marxist orientation demands, sees Heathcliff's impact on the system as negative. "The superfluity [Heathcliff] embodies . . . proves destructive rather than creative in effect, straining and overloading already taut relationships. Heathcliff catalyses an aggression intrinsic to Heights society . . . The effect of Heathcliff is to explode those conflicts into antagonisms which finally rip the place apart" (106). My difficulty with this reading is that it appears to accept that a system's movement into disorder is automatically "destructive," a metaphysical offshoot of Newtonian ideals here reinscribed in a materialist criticism.

That Heathcliff radically disrupts the Heights / Grange system is undeniable, but if we view that system in the way I am suggesting, Brontë's presentation of that disruption looks rather different. In presenting a dissipative system with sensitive dependence on initial conditions, the text describes a society which absolutely requires new energy and information, but at the same time that new energy and information will automatically and dramatically alter its progression. The resulting "chaos" necessarily destroys the parameters of the previous conditions, but also establishes a new set of parameters which generate development. Heathcliff is the force that drives both the novel's plot and the evolution of the microcosm the novel describes. That the other characters fail to perceive it this way is understandable given their investment in the earlier form of the system, and their situation is best explored through another concept provided by chaos theory, that of strange attractors.

III

Hayles gives perhaps the most basic definition of an attractor when she describes it as "any point of a system's cycle that seems to attract the system to it" (Intro. 8). Before chaos theory there were three known types of attractor: the fixed point, the limit cycle, and the torus. Each represents a specific state towards which particular systems tend to evolve, but the quality they all share is that, given the appropriate set of linear equations, they are deterministic. That is, the state of the system at any given moment can be analyzed and predicted. "Strange" attractors are characteristic in systems which do not possess this predictability. In other words, all an observer can know is that the system will be organized around the chaotic attractor, but he or she cannot know exactly where any specific point or state will occur. Kellert observes,

Part of the reason these objects are called strange is that they reconcile two seemingly contradictory effects: they are attractors, which means that nearby trajectories converge onto them, and they exhibit sensitive dependence on initial conditions, which means that trajectories initially close together on the attractor diverge rapidly. (13-14)

The key point about strange attractors is that they, paradoxically, combine "pattern with unpredictability, confinement with orbits that never repeat themselves" (Hayles, Intro. 9). Within Brontë's text Heathcliff, having revealed the Heights / Grange system's sensitive dependence on initial conditions, comes to act as the strange attractor around which this newly

¹For the influence of these journals on the Haworth parsonage see Gérin, Alexander, Fraser, and Barker.

chaotic system organizes itself.

Now of course a strange attractor is a mathematical, computer-generated abstraction, and it may seem more than a little perverse to equate this formulation with a character in a novel. Nonetheless, this cross-use of metaphor helps explore some of the more challenging aspects of the text. It is surely not difficult to see that once Heathcliff appears the "trajectories" of all the other characters are inescapably drawn towards him. Frank Kermode's still-provocative reading of *Wuthering Heights* in his *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* argues that "The names Catherine and Earnshaw begin and end the narrative . . . This is an account of the movement of the book: away from Earnshaw and back, like the movement of the house itself. And all the movement must be *through* Heathcliff" (122, emphasis in the original). Indeed, Catherine herself provides a perfect example of the strangeness of Heathcliff as an attractor. The Earnshaw children and Nelly are united in their reaction when he first appears. "They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow" (35). Nelly's punishment for treating the "it" that is Heathcliff in this way is to be dismissed for a few days, but when she returns something "strange" has happened: "Miss Cathy and he were now very thick; but Hindley hated him, and to say the truth I did the same; and we plagued and went on with him shamefully" (36). To paraphrase Kellert, these three characters' trajectories in relationship to Heathcliff are "initially close together," but one of them has "diverged rapidly," and unpredictably, into a completely different relationship with its attractor. This kind of transformation is irrational and unexplainable in a linear vision of social interaction, but if what is being presented is a nonlinear dynamical system, such deflections are not only understandable but even, to a certain extent, "predictable." The observer cannot foretell which character will diverge, or what direction that divergence will take, but that such a divergence will occur is inevitable with a strange attractor. What I want to emphasize at this point is that *every* character in the book is forced into an unpredictable, chaotic relationship with Heathcliff that shapes the resulting patterns of the text.

Thus, for Hindley, Heathcliff is at various times a hated foster brother/rival, a despised stable boy, a drinking and gambling companion, and finally this creditor and mortgagee. Isabella Linton passes through a similarly shifting and unpredictable set of trajectories, seeing Heathcliff first as the despised stable boy, then as the Byronic lover, and finally as the hated madman/husband. The most striking example of this occurs with Heathcliff's second mysterious "invasion" of the text, the one which reinitiates the chaotic elements of a system which appeared to have settled into equilibrium. Neither Edgar nor Nelly knows how to respond properly to the Heathcliff that appears before them.

I descended and found Heathcliff waiting under the porch, evidently anticipating an invitation to enter. He followed my guidance without waste of words, and I ushered him into the presence of the master and mistress . . . Now fully revealed by the fire and candlelight, I was amazed, more than ever, to behold the transformation of Heathcliff.

He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man, beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth-like. . . . His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton's; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. . . . My master's surprise equalled or exceeded my own: he remained for a minute at a loss how to address the ploughboy, as he had called him; Heathcliff dropped his slight hand, and stood looking at him coolly till he chose to speak. (95)

Although this passage suggests it is Heathcliff who has been "transformed," we are later told that "though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable, and unchanged" (100). It is the other characters who are forced into indeterminate relationships with the attractor that dominates the system they inhabit.

And these kinds of fluctuations make possible what is arguably the novel's most fascinating aspect: its recursive structure. Kermode observes, "it is remarkable that in a story whose principal characters all marry there are effectively only three surnames . . . [and f]urthermore, the Earnshaw family makes do with only three Christian names, Catherine, Hindley, and Hareton" (123). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, commenting on the same phenomena, declare that "Nelly Dean's story, with its baffling duplication of names, places, events seems endlessly to reenact itself, like some ritual that must be cyclically repeated" (256-57), and note that it is "as if Brontë were working out a series of alternative versions of the same plot" (287). But it is Davies who takes this kind of observation furthest, and couches it in language which I think best describes the novel's textual process.

The author of *Wuthering Heights* was in love with likeness which she bound into the narrative in terms of multiple repetition of plot, character and name. . . . Recapitulation is not only a device but a major theme: Hareton recapitulates Heathcliff; the love of the second generation recapitulates . . . the love of the first; the death of the first Cathy in childbirth recapitulates that of Frances A novelist's staple tools of the trade—parallelism, analogy, prolepsis, echo—are so extravagantly and systematically exploited by Emily Brontë as to collapse their normal function of elucidating . . . meaning into a kind of reproduction of anterior chaos. (190)

Readers familiar with chaos theory have no doubt already arrived at what this implies: Brontë's text might be described as fractal in nature.

IV

If Heathcliff functions as a strange attractor, he and the system he generates cannot be understood through standard methods of "measurement." As Çambel puts it, "Irregular shapes, such as strange attractors . . . are not easily measured because they are *fractal*. . . . They have non-integer dimensions, in contrast to the integer dimensions that we casually use each day" (161). The key characteristic of fractals is self-similarity; that is, the fractal image can be scaled up or down, but its basic shape remains the same. As the various couples

in the text arrange and re-arrange themselves, moving through their shifting configurations of shared names and lineages, they repeat aspects of previous interactions at different "frequencies," echoing but never quite reproducing the originating moment of the system, Heathcliff's appearance and bond with Catherine. Thus nonlinear dynamics provides a way of understanding the novel's "non-repetitive repetitions" without resorting to what has become the cliché of Brontë's "mystical" vision. It also helps explain what many readers have perceived as the decreased intensity of the novel's second generation. Although the interaction between Cathy, Linton, and Hareton occurs within the same narrative as that presenting Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff, it is a reduced, fractal version of their elders' relationships, and thus takes place on a smaller, more constricted scale. Thus the text refuses to present a strictly linear progression in terms of either individual character, inheritance of property, or even, at its most basic, genealogy. Instead *Wuthering Heights* suggests that the evolution of a social system cannot be understood by focusing on individual units and attempting linear predictions; rather it is necessary to concentrate on "correspondences across scales of different lengths . . . [and on] overall symmetries" (Hayles, *Chaos Bound* 169).

To observers such as Nelly Dean and Lockwood this kind of system can only be perceived as a threat to be tamed, "chaos" as unnatural destroyer of order. Each is bound up in a Newtonian, Enlightenment discourse which will impose linearity if it cannot find it "naturally." As Pamela Law has suggested, both Nelly and Lockwood are "caught in . . . [a] complacent eighteenth-century rationalism" (50). Even as a Newtonian analyst, however, Lockwood is quickly exposed as a failure. His ludicrous attempts to understand the complicated relationships he first encounters at the Heights are mocked both by the characters and the text itself, revealing the inadequacy of his social understanding when confronted with a nonlinear system. Having assumed that Cathy is Heathcliff's wife, Lockwood proceeds to stumble through as many incorrect possibilities as he can imagine.

"I'll venture to say, that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your home and heart—"

"My amiable lady!" [Heathcliff] interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face. "Where is she—my amiable lady?" . . .

Perceiving myself in a blunder, I attempted to correct it. I might have seen there was too great a disparity between the ages of the parties to make it likely that they were man and wife Then it flashed upon me—The clown at my elbow, who is drinking tea out of a basin and eating his bread with unwashed hands, may be her husband: Heathcliff junior, of course

"Mrs. Heathcliff is my daughter-in-law," said Heathcliff, corroborating my surmise

"Ah, certainly—I see now; you are the favoured possessor of the beneficent fairy," I remarked, turning to my neighbour.

This was worse than before: the youth grew crimson, and clenched his fist with every appearance of a meditated assault

"Unhappy in your conjectures, sir!" observed my host; "we neither of us have the privilege of owning your good fairy; her mate is dead. I said she was my daughter-in-law; therefore, she must have married my son."

And this young man is—

"Not my son, assuredly!"

Heathcliff smiled again, as if it were rather too bold a jest to attribute the paternity of that bear to him. (12-13)

Lockwood is, indeed, "unhappy in his conjectures." From the very beginning the text reveals the complete failure of his conventional efforts to understand the pattern of the Heights / Grange system. Utterly incapable of creating a new paradigm to assist his perception of this complicated household, he is completely dependent on some more proficient observer to explain it to him.

Nelly is more than happy to provide the required guidance, and appears to be a much more competent Newtonian observer in that her narrative retrospectively "arranges" the system in a way that makes it comprehensible for Lockwood. At his prodding she carefully explains the relationships that have baffled him.

"[Heathcliff] had a son, it seems?"

"Yes, he had one—he is dead."

"And that young lady, Mrs. Heathcliff, is his widow?"

"Yes."

"Where did she come from originally?"

"Why sir, she is my late master's daughter; Catherine Linton was her maiden name. I nursed her, poor thing! . . ."

"Then," I continued, "my predecessor's name was Linton?"

"It was."

"And who is that Earnshaw, Hareton Earnshaw, who lives with Mr. Heathcliff? Are they relations?"

"No; he is the late Mrs. Linton's nephew."

"The young lady's cousin, then?"

"Yes; and her husband was her cousin also—one, on the mother's—the other, on the father's side—Heathcliff married Mr. Linton's sister." (32)

On its own this may seem confusing enough, but it at least serves to place the relationships described in a linear framework both Lockwood and Nelly find reassuringly understandable. As Patricia Parker puts it,

It is only in the history provided by [Nelly], who presents herself as a "steady, reasonable kind of body" . . . that the names are given their proper place within a genealogical line. Her history—which Lockwood insists proceed "minutely" and which is accompanied by such emblems of chronos as the clock on the wall . . . moves in reassuring Enlightenment fashion in a single, irreversible direction from beginning to end, from the passionate Catherine and Heathcliff to the tamer, book-reading Cathy and Hareton, and imparts a sense of progress to the text as it moves to its ending. (104)

Unsurprisingly, then, Lockwood asks Nelly to "explain" the central enigma of Heathcliff himself, and she claims to

have the same authority of analysis concerning him as she does for the other characters. To Lockwood's query, "Do you know anything of his history?" she responds "It's a cuckoo's, sir—I know all about it; except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money, at first" (33). A close look at Nelly's statement reveals that, far from knowing "all about" Heathcliff, her knowledge of him is fragmented by large and extremely significant gaps in her knowledge of him, gaps which she elides in an attempt to insert him into the only kind of social system that she and Lockwood accept as legitimate. In this she is like a classical physicist, who, confronted with the existence of chaotic behavior, carefully arranges her recognitions so that anything that cannot be explained by her model is dismissed as insignificant and meaningless "noise." And in this way, of course, she makes it possible to avoid confronting the central issue at all. The inadequacy of Brontë's narrators' understanding has been well documented on several levels, and the fact that the text undercuts their objectivity and reliability suggests that Brontë does not share their position.²

V

I began my argument by connecting Brontë to certain aspects of German Romanticism, and I would like to conclude in the same way. Joyce S. Walker, in her suggestive article "Romantic Chaos: The Dynamic Paradigm in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Contemporary Science," states, "In [the] context [of Novalis's novel] chaos is creative potential. It provides the necessary conditions for the advent of the Golden Age [*goldenen Zeit*] because it breaks up the static and stultifying order of history, and its flux gives rise to a new and dynamic order" (44). I would suggest that something very similar is going on in *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë, unlike later Victorian commentators such as Matthew Arnold, perceives chaos as a force for social diversity and regeneration, and thus as an empirical, historically representable quality. Thus it is too simplistic to see Heathcliff as the barrier which must be overcome in order to achieve the story's successful resolution. Rather he is the influence which generates that resolution. Because, however, the chaotic force that Heathcliff embodies is nonlinear, unpredictable, and recursive, its actions appear "mystical" to those unwilling or unable to recognize a non-Newtonian model of order and development.

Therefore the metaphysical/materialist dichotomy which has divided many interpretive approaches to the novel is an artificial polarity. Contemporary theories of chaos provide us with a vocabulary for discussing how Brontë could combine a discourse of Romanticism with a discourse of empiricism at an especially charged cultural moment: the moment in which the Newtonian vision of order had not yet achieved complete hegemonic dominance, but was on the verge of doing so. The result is a novel that demonstrates a conception of societal

development which is "complex" in both literary and scientific terms.

One of Hayles's central purposes in writing about chaos is to "arrive at a deeper understanding of the connections between literature and science (and hence implicitly of the underlying cultural dynamics)" (Intro. 20). Using chaos theory to analyze *Wuthering Heights* clarifies the particular nineteenth-century dynamic with which Brontë was engaged, as through her text she attempts to negotiate two ways of envisioning society which had not yet, or at least not quite yet, become mutually exclusive. Critical approaches which are unwilling to acknowledge that attempted negotiation inadvertently, and more than a little unfortunately, reproduce the very ideological split the novel seeks to avoid.

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Victorian Things, Victorian Words: Representation and Redemption in Gaskell's *North and South*

Bonnie Gerard

Why, they took nouns that were signs of things which gave evidence of wealth,—housekeepers, undergardeners, extent of glass, valuable lace, diamonds, and all such things; and each one formed her speech so as to bring them all in, in the prettiest manner possible. (*North and South*)

This Narrative, my Friend, hath chiefly told
Of intellectual power, fostering love,
Dispensing truth, and over men and things,
Where reason yet might hesitate, diffusing
Prophetic sympathies of genial faith.
(William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII)

The resolution of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* has been called one of the "most comprehensive of Victorian happy endings" (Delaney 4). This is because the marriage of John Thornton and Margaret Hale resolves all the novel's thematic oppositions: northern and southern culture, economic progress and social tradition, masculine and feminine, even masters and men. Traditionally, readers of the novel have attributed the comprehensiveness of its ending to Margaret's incipient and effusive spiritual, sexual, and social power.¹ Often overlooked, though, is the conspicuous role of materiality in endowing her with the economic power to save Thornton from financial ruin, and thus to become not only his "spiritual guide, beloved, and mentor," but his business partner, as well (Pikoulis 180). When a newly monied Margaret tells a penniless Thornton in the climactic moment that she can "redeem" him, it is her wealth, no less than her love, that enables her to make that pledge.

In *North and South*, Gaskell addresses an emerging Victorian concern: the awesome power of material things in an increasingly industrial and urban world. Asa Briggs explains that "the Victorians' own consciousness of things . . . —and it was not lacking in semiological awareness—was expressed in

different ways, reflecting not only different degrees of understanding and appreciation, but different, sometimes ambivalent or contradictory reactions" (32). Gaskell depicts Victorian ambivalence toward materialist culture in *Cranford*, whose narrator tells us that none of the Cranford ladies "spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic" (41). Yet in practice, the Cranford ladies seem unable to help themselves in partaking of the good things produced by industry. Miss Matty will have her sea-green turban, and while the Honorable Mrs. Jamieson would have fainted had she heard Miss Jessie Brown's "unguarded admission (*à propos* of Shetland wool) that she had an uncle . . . who was a shopkeeper in Edinburgh," Miss Jessie Brown and Miss Pole nonetheless, on the sly, will persist in "setting up a kind of intimacy, on the strength of the Shetland wool" (46). Indeed, Victorians often associated materialism, not only with a decline in social status, but with moral decline, as well. Briggs describes Victorian moral reactions to materialism as ranging "from wonder to alarm," accompanied by "a growing sense . . . of the moral perils" of the emerging "gorgeous plutocracy" (33). Catherine Gallagher agrees, suggesting that "the expansion of material production in early and mid-nineteenth-century England was accompanied by a set of controversies about English social, material, and spiritual well-being" (xi).

Victorian materialism presented a challenge for Gaskell, a provincial as well as industrial novelist.² Believing in the novel's rhetorical power to effect sociohistoric change, and determined to confront what she perceived as the threat to traditional morality posed by a materialistic culture, Gaskell fictionalized the industrial province of Manchester in *North and South*'s Milton-Northern, boldly envisioning the city of industry as "the heart of a new society" (Lansbury 98). This choice of an industrial center as the site of a utopia captures

¹See Pikoulis 180. For a contrasting interpretation of Margaret's symbolic role in the novel, see Gallagher 178-83.

²See W. A. Craik ix. Craik names Gaskell among the "provincial novelists," including the Brontës, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. For Catherine Gallagher, however, *North and South* should be distinguished

as one of several novels "we now call the 'industrial novels': *Mary Barton*, Disraeli's *Sybil*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Dickens's *Hard Times*, and Eliot's *Felix Holt* (xi). That *North and South* is simultaneously industrial and provincial suggests the peculiarity of Gaskell's utopian vision, as well as the radical nature of her rhetorical project.

²For arguments calling into question Nelly and Lockwood's adequacy as narrators see Hafley 199-215, Shunami 449-68, and McCarthy 48-64.

the essence of Gaskell's reformative vision: the reconciliation of a materialistic culture she saw as a social inevitability with a traditional morality she saw as an ethical imperative. Even as early as 1848, following the publication of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell wrote to a friend that "we must all acknowledge that there are duties connected with the manufacturing system not fully understood as yet, and evils existing in relation to it which may be remedied in some degree although we as yet do not see how" (*Letters* 67). Her response to this dilemma in North and South would be to embrace a rhetoric of redemption in an effort to spiritualize a materialist culture she saw as in many respects "the most profitable investment" for the future of England (Lansbury 98). In *North and South* the spiritualization of materialism emerges from a negotiation between the objects of the present and the ideals of the past—that is, between Victorianism and Romanticism.

To suggest that a good Victorian like Gaskell was a Romantic at heart is perhaps a commonplace. But to find the Victorian novelist turning to the Romantic tradition as a means of coping with a new culture is to see Romanticism appropriated as a rhetorical tool in a complex process of Victorian self-interrogation and self-justification. The Victorian Gaskell brushed shoulders with Romanticism's aging patriarch, William Wordsworth, just before his death, and her personal copy of *The Prelude* arrived by post from her friend Charlotte Brontë shortly thereafter (Hopkins 87, 96). Published in 1850, *The Prelude* retailed Romantic ideas of spirituality long out of currency in Gaskell's mid-Victorian England. *The Prelude* appealed to Gaskell's Victorian sensibility because its neoplatonic philosophy provided a familiar avenue of redemption for a material world wrought with multiplicity, differentiation and change.

The neoplatonists, from Plotinus to Hegel to Wordsworth, held that objects in the material world, including human beings, manifest increasing division and multiplicity according to their distance from the Undifferentiated Good, the source of Love (Abrams 146). Love performs a "cohesive and sustaining" function, encouraging fallen souls to long for a "return to an undivided state." But "moral evil" results in souls that are "immured in the matter of the body," or materialists. Therefore the struggle for Wordsworth is to "sustain and propagate connectedness," to unite that which has become divided in the material world (Abrams 148-52). In *The Prelude*, this struggle relies upon the power, not of things, but of the Word—that is, of poetry:

... and I would give,
While yet we may, as far as words can give,
A substance and a life to what I feel:
I would enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration. (XII, 282-86)

Wordsworth believed in the spiritual power of the Word to signify ideality, and therefore to offer a transcendence that would redeem souls trapped in a imperfect material world. Throughout *The Prelude* he complains of his own enslavement to the tyranny of the eye, the "most despotic of our senses" (XII 129). To transcend this enslavement, Wordsworth looked to the imagination, to the poetic Word, to provide a realm in which "our minds / Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (XII 214-15). But imagination alone is not enough. Wordsworth

calls, not for a rejection of the material in favor of the spiritual, but for a reunification of the material with its Platonic spiritual ideal. Wordsworth's poetic vision in *The Prelude* comes from

A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and the eye that sees.

(XII 375-78)

North and South, serialized just four years after the publication of *The Prelude*, can be read as a Victorian social novelist's reception of Wordsworth's Romantic neoplatonism as a powerful rhetorical tool in shaping the narrative history of an emerging industrial England. The neoplatonic movement from division and multiplicity toward unity through the cohesive spiritual power of love lends itself well to the Victorian marriage-plot novel, in which the primary narrative movement is toward the wedding at the end that unites the hero and heroine. And with a novel based on thematic polarity on just about every level—social, economic, sexual—it is no wonder that Romantic neoplatonism seemed an apt tool for achieving Gaskell's utopian vision.

But *North and South* is more than Wordsworth in prose. Gaskell's neoplatonism differs from Wordsworth's in several ways that suggest what Anne Mellor describes as the difference between "male Romanticism," most of what we generally consider the Romantic tradition, and "female Romanticism," a tradition that developed alongside of, if in the shadow of, the male tradition (3-4). While Wordsworthian "male Romanticism" promotes the development of the individual, autonomous self, particularly through the creative poetic imagination, Romantic women writers often focused, not on the autonomous individual, but on the cooperative community, not on imaginative transcendence, but on gradual social change. But while many of the women Romantic writers Mellor discusses rejected their male literary counterparts, often parodying their eccentricities, Gaskell received and then adapted male Romanticism to suit the needs of her Victorian social project. Like Wordsworth, Gaskell looks to spirituality, not to displace material things, but rather to redeem them. Although Gaskell's characters empower themselves with material wealth, they redeem themselves in Wordsworthian fashion, finding a "redemption of [the] mind" from "submission and a slavish world" through the power of words. Unlike Wordsworth, though, Gaskell locates the power of the Word, not in the transcendent, autonomous imagination, but within the social discourse of community. Much of the tension in the novel between John Thornton and Margaret Hale can be understood as the conflict between materialism and idealism. While Thornton suggests materiality, devoting his eminent powers of speech to the amassing of material wealth and the garnering of material power, Margaret suggests spirituality, struggling to make her idealistic words matter to Thornton, despite her material impoverishment. The novel's resolution can come about only through compromise, in which Margaret's idealism is brought to bear on Thornton's materialism in the form of a powerful socioethical project.

The emergence of this socioethical project can be traced

through Gaskell's depiction of the dynamics of discourse between Margaret and Thornton. On the one side, Margaret seems to lose all her natural facility with words upon entering the challenging verbal arena of Milton-Northern. Economically and socially displaced in this bustling commercial environment, Margaret "would rather have remained silent" than talk to Thornton, a powerful Milton manufacturer. She adopts a "quiet maiden freedom" and "quiet coldness of demeanor" (100), clinging to a social order—that of Harley Street and Helstone—in which the value of speech is not dependent on her cash value (Lansbury 107). Across the tea-table from Thornton in her new suburban home, she shows little of the verbal facility she displayed in the South, where she was adept at "mastering her voice" (61). Here she "looked as if she was not attending to the conversation," as she prepares tea with "noiseless daintiness" and hands her father his cup in a "bit of a pantomime" (120). Gaskell insists on our perceiving Margaret initially as a silenced figure in this industrial setting, her silence betokening both her social disempowerment and her ethical disdain for the materialist practice of "testing . . . everything by the standard of wealth" (129). If "one need learn a different language" to say anything of value "up here in Milton," it is no wonder that Margaret so often remains silent (212).

Thornton, on the other hand, has Margaret "compelled to listen" to his speeches about self-sufficiency, social mobility, and the raw power of industrial machinery. He considers Margaret's and her father's idealistic hopes for ameliorating class oppression in Milton as "humbug or philanthropic feeling" (167), but when it comes to "really useful knowledge," he is quite loquacious. Called upon to settle a dispute regarding "the trades and manufactures of the place," he "gave an opinion, the grounds of which were so clearly stated that even the opponents yielded" (216). Even Margaret admires the ways in which Thornton displays his power over his fellow manufacturers with words:

He was regarded by them as a man of great force of character; of power in many ways. There was no need to struggle for their respect. He had it, and he knew it; and the security of this gave a fine grand quietness to his voice and ways, which Margaret had missed before. (216)

But the raw realism of Thornton's "straightforward honesty" makes his speech seem to Margaret "steady and firm as the boom of a distant, minute gun" (218). His rigidity foreshadows the inevitable clash of wills between masters and men that Margaret feels helpless to prevent, marginalized as she is in her own silent realm of economic and social obscurity.

Clearly, when Margaret does manage to speak, and her powers of speech increase as the novel develops, her words signify an ideality that despairs of an audience among the harsh realists of a materialistic society. She can tell Thornton over and over that the "lives" and "welfare" of himself and his men are "constantly and intimately interwoven" (169), but he insists only upon difference and division, on "laws and decisions which work for [his] own good in the first instance—for theirs in the second" (167). It is realism, again, that prevents factory hand Nicholas Higgins from giving credence to Margaret's words. Faced with the Higgins's poverty, Margaret speaks of hope for spiritual, not economic, redemp-

tion. Bessy seems to crave Margaret's words as "a breath of country air, somehow" (187), and she longs for her words that have the power to evoke an ideal place she herself will never see: "Tell me about it . . . I like to hear speak of the country, and trees, and such like things." She leant back and shut her eyes, and crossed her hands over her breast, lying at perfect rest as if to receive all the ideas Margaret could suggest" (144). But unlike his daughter, Higgins insists on the real, rejecting the ideal: that he will "believe what I see, and no more" (133). He insists that he "will not have [his] wench preached to" (187).

Margaret's idealism, then, leaves her not only often unheeded by Milton materialists; it leaves her vulnerable to their condescension. And John Thornton is her harshest critic. When his mother asks for a report on "these Hales," Thornton describes Margaret as one whose words seem inflated considering her present station in Milton society: "she seems to have a great notion of giving herself airs; I can't make out why. I could almost fancy she thinks herself too good for her company at times. And yet they're not rich; from all I can hear they never have been" (192). According to Thornton's "standard of wealth," Margaret does not measure up, so that when she does speak, her lofty words suggest to him, not value, but vain hypocrisy and empty notions. He finds no substance in her word "gentleman," for instance, preferring the "full simplicity of the noun 'man,' and the adjective 'manly'" to what he regards as her "cant of the day" (218).

Thornton little respects ideals that do not seem grounded in the material world of everyday business. Although he takes lessons from Margaret's father, he patronizes Mr. Hale's modes of speech. He attends to Mr. Hale's lessons, but he clearly considers what his tutor has to say superfluous to his own "really useful knowledge" (126). Following an argument with Margaret, he explains to Mr. Hale:

"My theory is, that my interests are identical with those of my workpeople, and vice-versa. Miss Hale, I know, does not like to hear men called 'hands,' so I won't use that word, though it comes most readily to my lips as the technical term, whose origin, whatever it was, dates before my time. On some future day—in some millenium—in Utopia, this unity may be brought into practice—just as I can fancy a republic the most perfect form of government. . . . but give me a constitutional monarchy in our present state of morals and intelligence. In our infancy we require a wise despotism to govern us . . . I will use my best discretion—from no humbug or philanthropic feeling . . ."

(167)

Thornton rejects Margaret's vision of a Platonic utopia as impractical in the real world of labor and capital. He regards talk like Margaret's of a Romantic republic as "humbug." When Margaret goes on to champion her ideals, Thornton dismisses her words as ungrounded in reality, saying, "I must just take the facts as I find them tonight" (169).

Because this opposition between ideality and materiality must be resolved if, in fact, Gaskell is to achieve the novel's comprehensively happy ending, we must expect a crisis and a reversal that will make a compromise between these two diametrically opposed positions possible. It is only fitting that in both the crisis and the reversal, Gaskell suggests that the

potential for change emerges from the right words chosen at the right time. The evening of Thornton's dinnerparty, Margaret is at first "busy listening" rather than talking (221). Attending to the various conversations around her, she hears the manufacturers' wives bandy about nouns as "signs of things which gave evidence of wealth,—housekeepers, under-gardeners, extent of glass, valuable lace, diamonds, and all such things (221). While she finds such words games "oh, so dull!" she is by contrast entranced by the talk of the businessmen. She "silently took a very decided part in the question they were discussing," as her early repugnance toward Milton materialists is overcome by her admiration of the "exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men had. It might be rather rampant in its display, and savour of boasting; but still they seemed to defy the old limits of possibility" (217). That words can operate rhetorically to open up new social possibilities is of great interest to Margaret, for her sense of "propriety" is "best expressed as a consciousness of social responsibility" (Lansbury 107). In the men's speech, where materiality joins with the power of words to effect social change, Margaret's socially conscious imagination is captivated.

Margaret's opportunity to exercise the new rhetorical power she has found comes with the pivotal mob crisis in chapter 22, in which she attempts to shock Thornton into action by issuing him a verbal challenge:

"Mr Thornton . . . go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. . . . Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. . . . If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!" (232)

Margaret's exhortation is rhetorically strategic. She appropriates the term "man," previously one of those "straightforward" terms claimed by Thornton as a better word than Margaret's "gentleman" and invests it with all the Romantic, genteel qualities suggestive of her Southern, aristocratic culture (218). For not only does she insist that Thornton demonstrate forthrightness and integrity, but he must also display chivalric courage, leadership and generosity. More importantly, she insists that resolution is to be found only in speech, for the only act she requires of him is that he speak to the angry men. When Thornton finally turns to unbar the door and face the mob, Gaskell is clear about his motivation: "he set his teeth as he heard her words" (232).

As is appropriate in a neoplatonic world, it is only through Thornton's love for Margaret that he begins to be reconciled to her vision of a new social unity in Milton. His resulting reversal is twofold. First, Thornton champions Margaret despite her lie on behalf of her brother—arguably her most deliberately anti-realist act in the novel. In refusing to turn Margaret in to the authorities, Thornton claims to be obeying a higher, transcendent law of chivalric loyalty as opposed to the temporal law made manifest by his civic role as town magistrate. Second, when his business fails, leaving him materially disempowered, he feels too old to begin again with the same heart" the materialistic climb from rags to riches. Instead, he pleads with his mother to "say the old good words," the "brave, noble, trustful words" with which she used to comfort him as a child (517). When he learns that his

brother-in-law succeeded in the speculation he himself refused to risk for the sake of his men's financial security, Thornton has only a spiritual consolation: that, to "honest men," he kept his word (516).

But the most ideologically critical reversal in the novel is Margaret's. Thornton's economic disempowerment corresponds with Margaret's economic empowerment, as she, in timely fashion, inherits a substantial fortune in property from her godfather, Mr. Bell. Now the idealist embodies materialism, as well. Significantly, the fortune she inherits has been amassed from rent on Mr. Bell's property in none other than Milton-Northern. This nice piece of irony enables Margaret to enact a symbolic redemption of industrial materialism, since with her new money, she saves Thornton from ruin, redeeming him financially and enabling him to set up a new business with practical reforms for "bring[ing] the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact" (525). "Such intercourse," he is finally able to proclaim, "is the very breath of life" (525). Intercourse involving the right words, of course, for as Nicholas Higgins reminds us, in a place like Milton-Northern, often "good words is scarce, and bad words is plentiful" (364). His observation italicizes Gaskell's neoplatonic theme: that it is not the power of things alone that will transform an industrial England into a Victorian utopia, but the power of words. Her depiction of the spiritual union of John Thornton and Margaret Hale suggests, finally, that the "good words" are not those that merely represent material power, but those that redeem power from mere materialism.

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Lewes's General Mind and the Judgment of St. Ogg's: *The Mill on the Floss* as Scientific Text*

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George Henry Lewes's concept of the General Mind discussed in *Problems of Life and Mind* provides a Victorian scientific perspective for understanding how environment shapes behavior in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Looked at from the twentieth century, Lewes helped develop the notion of "social conditioning" (Dale 70). In *The Mill on the Floss*, the General Mind of Maggie Tulliver's community is internalized as a part of Maggie's mental structure. This accounts for the way that she submits to the negative judgment about her actions with Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest by her brother and St. Ogg's society.

For much of his life Lewes sought to formulate a science based upon physiology for understanding how social conditions create mental states in humans. "Man is not simply an Animal Organism," Lewes declared in *Foundations of a Creed* (1870); "he is also a unit in a social organism" (101). If we want to comprehend human behavior, psychologically, we must weigh the social factor. Two observational subjects are described. The psychologist must examine what Lewes called "the sentient life" as well as the social medium in which the organism lived. The "functions of the organism will be determined not only by his individual structure, but also by the structure of the collective Organism" (*Foundations* 147). A careful analysis of the sociological data, Lewes contended, would reveal an individual's complete psychological make-up. Applied to *The Mill on the Floss*, such an analysis would see life at St. Ogg's—the customs, the traditions, the ways of thinking and doing and even saying things—as establishing the environment for Maggie. Her "sentient mind" has a larger capacity for experience and thought. But this the mind of St. Ogg's derides, because it is beyond the residents' social evolution. Through the General Mind, however, Maggie internalizes pernicious aspects of the St. Ogg's way of thinking, what Lewes in *The Study of Psychology* calls "the *bric a brac* of prejudice" (167). Maggie suffers greatly when the narrowness of the General Mind conflicts with her expansive nature.

Rosemary Ashton in her biography suggests that Lewes thought his account of the social element in the psychological life of humans an original contribution to psychological research. Peter Allan Dale rates Lewes ahead of Matthew Arnold in understanding how culture affects individual lives. Gillian Beer and Sally Shuttleworth emphasize how Lewes's grasp of Darwinian evolution and social organic theory crucially affected the nature of nineteenth-century fictional narrative. And if, as many now contend, culture plays a decisive role in forming human consciousness, Lewes's work about the dynamics and operation of the General Mind (or the social element) forms an instructive example of how social psychology works. He thought it was science. As William Myers points

out, Lewes agreed with Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte that "species and even identity derive part of their essential nature from the environment" (39). Yet Lewes also argued that societies, like individual organisms, evolve in ways that leave traces or residues of behavior and modes of thinking upon succeeding generations in important ways.

In *The Foundations of a Creed*, the manifesto of *Problems of Life and Mind*, Lewes asserts that "the Social instincts, which are the analogue of the individual instincts, tend more and more to make society dominate animality, and thus subordinate Personality to humanity" (147). Mind, or mental structure, in other words, is more social than it is individual. In *The Study of Psychology*, Lewes considered how the influence of society, or the General Mind, could be gauged. He defined his search as looking for the human mind, or to "the experience of the race in its influence on the experience of the individual" (159).

The General Mind is not an individual product. It is both the thought and experience of a people of a particular social and historical period. It is both the thought and experience of a people in a particular social and historical period. Lewes identified language as the great instrument by which an individual learned and participated in the General Mind of his time. "The words spoken are not [an individual's] creation . . . what his tribe speaks, he repeats" (*The Study of Psychology* 160). Yet the individual "does not simply echo their words, he rethinks them" (160). In the process of rethinking, Lewes seems to follow what Frederick Karl in his biography says of George Eliot's use of words. Eliot, Karl contends, "experienced language as profoundly linked to a whole range of feelings which carry us back into our personal histories" (76). Key words in a human history brought up by the writer of fiction "reach deeply . . . into those areas where language and experience become inextricable" (76). Lewes argued further that the process of taking the impersonal nature of language and adapting it to his own use paralleled the way an individual "adopt[ed] the experiences of others" and "assimilated them to his own" (*The Study of Psychology* 160). "He only feels their emotions, when his soul is moved, like theirs; he cannot think their thoughts so long as his experiences refuse to be condensed in their symbols" (160). Since "he has similar vocal function, and a similar vocal store, he can reproduce and understand their novel combinations of speech; and because he has similar experience [he can comprehend] the novel combinations of thought, adapting both into his own and getting his range of fellowship enlarged" (*The Study of Psychology* 160, 161). Individual experiences "correct, enlarge and destroy one another" producing "a certain residual store [that] direct[s] and modif[ies] all future experiences"

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(*The Study of Psychology* 161).

The General Mind constitutes the residual store of experiences common to all. Language enables the individual to share in the General Mind, "which . . . becomes . . . an impersonal objective influence" (161). The impersonality of the General Mind results from social evolution and forms "a means of symbolical expression" that reflects collective needs (*The Study of Psychology* 80). In the *Foundations of a Creed* Lewes contended that "the organism is an evolution, bringing with it, in its structure, evolved modes of action and inherited Experience [that] . . . necessarily determine the results of Individual experience" (149). "There is thus what may be called an *a priori* condition in all Sensation and Ideation" (150). Lewes maintained that this process was "historical, not transcendental" and was "the product of Experience" (150).

As one might expect, the General Mind exerts rigorous and compelling force. "Society," Lewes says, "though constituted by individuals has a powerful reaction on every individual" (*The Study of Psychology* 165). The collective experience of the race fashions "the experience of the individual. It makes a man accept what he cannot understand and obey what he does not believe" (165). Thoughts and actions "are guided by the will of others [and] even in rebellion he has them in his mind" (165). "*Consensus gentium*" is Lewes's phrase for this aspect of the General Mind, and he suggests that "if a man cannot see this truth, he is pronounced to be an anomaly or a madman" (165).

To summarize, Lewes's conception of the General Mind emphasizes evolved social custom and long standing traditions communicated through language and enforced by consensus. Deviation from the pattern usually produces outrage in the social body. The ensuing prohibition becomes part of the individual's mental structure. Lewes described this process as learning "what Nature is and does, . . . [because] . . . unless we learn aright and act in conformity, we are inexorably punished" (162).

Maggie certainly suffers punishment because of her dissent from the dictates of the General Mind. As well as anyone, the Dodson aunts and uncles represent St. Ogg's society, and they support the kind of thinking that attaches great value to tradition and doing things in a particular way. Enjoined by example and thought, Maggie internalizes the Dodson ideas that women shall not be educated nor show their intelligence, thereby crushing her individuality and producing much unhappiness.

The Dodson's "particular" ways highlight rigidity. They bleach linen, make cowslip wine, cure hams and bury people in their own way. To vary the practice calls down condemnation. Tradition rules "household management and social demeanour" (Eliot 38). Tradition compels a member of the Dodson family to let other people know how they fall short, and tradition in St. Ogg's disapproves of liberal education. As noted above, women who are intelligent (or "cute" as Mr. Tulliver calls his daughter) are considered doomed to spinsterhood or an unhappy marriage.

Characteristic of the mind of St. Ogg's is the inheritance of "a long past without thinking [about] it" and an exhibition of "ignorance [that is] received with . . . honour in very good society" (101). Country surgeons assume women prefer gossip to reading books—Maggie's fondness for books forebodes

catastrophe in the eyes of St. Ogg's. St. Ogg's religion favors "vigorous superstition" and pagan ideas of the Unseen constitute their ideas of the Deity. "Their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom" (Eliot 222).

Eliot's account of social factors and their effects on individuals matches Lewes's view of the General Mind. In pleading with the reader to understand why she has presented the "narrow, groveling existence" of the Dodsons and Tullivers and "the sense of oppressive narrowness" that their lives communicate, George Eliot makes a clear reference to the substance of the General Mind (222). She remarks that "it is necessary that we should feel the crush of social custom if we are to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie" (222). The oppressiveness of the Mind of St. Ogg's, Eliot continues, "has acted on young natures in many generations" (222). Those (such as Maggie) who rise above the small-minded concerns characteristic of St. Ogg's society find themselves "nevertheless tied [to the society of their upbringing] by the strongest fibers of their hearts" (222). Without understanding the social environment we cannot understand the mind of the individual.

The internalization of social ideas into individual mental function occurs because of language. Language is the means by which the General Mind enters human consciousness. The physiological basis for the social factor that Lewes argued played a large role in human psychology in *The Physiology of Common Life* in 1859 depends finally upon the emotional qualities of language. Yet, as Peter Allan Dale argues, it is the affective quality of language, communicated through words and symbols, Lewes eventually concluded was the way that the General Mind became a part of the organic structure of the organism. So did George Eliot,

Words affect Maggie keenly. She suffers intensely when Tom or her mother speaks harshly to her and she exults when her father praises her quickness to visitors. Maggie's desire to learn and her intellectual ability find no appreciative audience, however, in the Mind of St. Ogg's. He father fears that her intelligence will drive suitors away and Mr. Riley chides her for reading books about the Devil. Women cannot go into intellectual matters very deeply, the Reverend Mr. Stelling declares. Though Tom gains an idea that Latin was actually spoken by real people after Maggie's lively questions elicit answers from his tutor, Stelling's dismissal of women's intellectual powers echoes the denigration of curiosity that Maggie has heard since she first opened the leaves of a book. In Peggy Johnstone's phrase Maggie suffers "from her family's ongoing devaluation of her" (45). Her encounter with the words of Thomas á Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* confirms that the negative assessment of her talents has finally penetrated Maggie's mental structure and determines how she feels and acts.

The words of the monk—"I have often said unto thee, and now again I say the same, Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace"—thrill Maggie (237). But the solace they bring to a troubled soul, like the consolation Frederick Karl notes that George Eliot gained from *The Imitation of Christ* while tending her dying father in the last two years of his life, does not last (Karl 100). Giving

up "the gratification of her own desires"—desires always frustrated by the General Mind of St. Ogg's—lasts only as long as it is abstract. While she explains to Philip Wakem that "Our life is determined for us [making] the mind very free when we give up wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us" (246), the narrative voice doubts Maggie's understanding of the old monk's message, suggesting it is the novelty of renunciation that attracts Maggie to sacrifice. Suzanne Graver describes "the solace [Maggie] finds in á Kempis . . . at best a negative peace" (197). Philip's offer of Scott's novel *The Pirate* tempts Maggie and, when he criticizes her scorning of books as "narrow asceticism" that will starve her mind, we see that adoption of a self-less intellectual life will not satisfy Maggie's needs. There is no room for Maggie to grow in an atmosphere where what she wants receives little consideration. Philip laments: "the pity of it, that a mind like [Maggie's] should be withering in its very youth, like a young forest-tree, for want of the light and space it was formed to flourish in" (250). Maggie's determination to renounce personal growth reveals a false and embittered self following the line established by the General Mind during her particular historical and social situation: a woman who dares to use her mind suffers.

Suffering and renunciation required by social custom dominate the scene where Tom compels Maggie to give up Philip Wakem and play a large part in Maggie's decision to renounce Stephen Guest. In both scenes the General Mind of St. Ogg's devoted to social custom operates strongly in subduing Maggie's spirit. Out of concern for her father, Maggie promises Tom that she will no longer meet Philip in the Red Deeps, and while her choice exhibits affection and sensitivity to Mr. Tulliver's passions, Tom's insistence that she give up Philip is an unwarranted infringement of her independence and liberty that she accepts bitterly. Her words to Tom measure both the narrowness of the Mind of St. Ogg's and her anger: "you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims" (282).

Maggie's decision to return to St. Ogg's after rejecting Stephen Guest's marriage proposal also contains themes of renunciation and punishment sanctioned by the General Mind of St. Ogg's. Aware of the pain that she has caused her cousin Lucy and Philip, Maggie tells Stephen that she has never consented to marriage with him—"not with my whole soul." Pursuing her own interests, she says, has always created trouble and she chooses now "to live without the joy of love" (386). "Obeying the divine voice within us," which denies fulfillment, Maggie chooses to return to St. Ogg's where she is considered a fallen woman. In Rosemarie Bodenheimer's apt description of the consequences of Maggie's choice, she "is accused both of rational coldheartedness and unwomanly sexual license" (10).

The Mind of St. Ogg's thus shapes Maggie's choices. As the waters of the Floss sweep Maggie and Tom to oblivion, the reader is left with the conviction that people who cannot negotiate the social environment experience tragedy. Lewes felt that the General Mind could eventually be expanded to allow for more life and greater experience, especially for women, but in *The Mill on the Floss* that time was not at hand.

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Dante, Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* and *Gaston de Latour*

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Although the modern narrator of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) is careful to acknowledge the presence of Dante's *Commedia* several times in the course of the narrative, with the exception of Gerald Monsman, readers have not acknowledged the depth and significance of this presence.¹ Indeed Dante's *Commedia*, as the archetypal Christian narrative of the soul's journey from sin to salvation, provided Pater with a model for Marius's journey from his ancestral pagan gods, through the Roman philosophies of Cyrenaicism and Stoicism, to his tentative entrance into the Christian community of hope. It is the spirit of the *Purgatorio* that particularly pervades *Marius*. In his "Introduction" to his friend Shadwell's translation of the *Purgatorio* (1892), Pater writes of the especial relevance and modernity of the *Purgatorio*:

And there is another reason why for the modern student the *Purgatorio* should be the favourite section of the *Divina Commedia*. An age of faith, if such there ever were, our age is certainly not: an age of love, all its pity and self-pity notwithstanding, who shall say?—in its religious scepticism, however, especially as compared with the last century in its religious scepticism, an age of hope, we may safely call it, of a development of religious hope or hopefulness, similar in tendency to the development of the doctrine of Purgatory in the church of the Middle Age:—

quel secondo regno
ove l'umano spirito si purga:—

a world of merciful second thoughts on one side, of fresh opportunities on the other, useful, serviceable, endurable, in contrast with that *mar se crudele* of the *Inferno*, and the blinding radiance of Paradise. (xx)

Like the doctrine of Purgatory and Dante's second canticle, the nineteenth century was for Pater "an age of hope" and therefore, "a world of mournful second thoughts" (xx), (the chapter in which Marius questions the Cyrenaicism of his youth is significantly entitled "Second Thoughts"). Thus the figure of Cornelius and the Roman Christian community of which he is a member are relevant to Pater's nineteenth-century readers, as they raise "second thoughts," possibilities and hopes that question and subvert a hard, indifferent, and callous skepticism.² In *Marius*, it is this "religious hope or hopefulness" that is repeatedly identified with the Christian centurion Cornelius, for whom Marius will sacrifice his life; "For with all the severity of Cornelius, there was such a breeze of hopefulness—freshness and hopefulness, as of new morn-

ing, about him" (165). In contrast is "the desolate face" of the mourning Marcus Aurelius (204), whose Stoic discourse, in the chapter "The Divinity That Doth Hedge A King," ends "almost in darkness" with the advent of winter, "the hardest that had been known for a lifetime," the hastily buried bodies of the plague-infected dead attracting the mountain wolves "led by the carrion scent" (153).

It is from the world of death, of denial of the immortality of the soul, the sin of Farinata and Cavalcante in Canto 10 of the *Inferno*, that Cornelius will lead Marius:

Suo cimitero da questa parte hanno
con Epicuro tutti suoi sequaci,
che l'anima col corpo morta fanno.

Within this region is the cemetery
of Epicurus and his followers,
all those who say the soul dies with the body.

(10:13-15)³

In what cannot have been coincidental, both the figures of the patriotic Ghibbine whose attachment to Florence is so obsessively intense and of the helpless grieving father, Cavalcante, are found in Pater's portrayal of the philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius, whose devotion to Rome is as steadfast as Farinata's to Florence, and whose helpless grief in the face of the incurable infection of his son, Annius Verus, reminds the reader of Cavalcante, believing his son dead, asking Dante, "mio figlio ov'è?" "where is my son?" (*Inferno* 10: 60). "Marius was forced into the privacy of a grief, the desolate face of which went deep into his memory, as he saw the emperor carry the child away—quite conscious at last, but with a touching expression upon it of weakness and defeat—pressed close to his bosom, as if he yearned then for one thing only, to be united, to be absolutely one with it, in its obscure distress" (204).

Marius was written to correct the controversial and sensational impact of the 1873 "Conclusion" to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Monsman, 1995, xl). To William Sharp, an early favorable reviewer of *Marius*, Pater had written "I did mean it to be more anti-Epicurean than it has struck you as being" (qtd. by Levy 12). Pater came to view his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* as comparable to the old French romance of *Lancelot* that inspired Paolo and Francesca to their adulterous kiss in *Inferno* 5. In *Plato and Platonism*, Pater refers to "a certain book [that] discoursed of love to Paolo and Francesca, till they found themselves—well in the *Inferno*, so potent it was" (120). And in *Gaston de*

Latour, the narrator speculates on "how would Paolo and Francesca have read this lesson?" (82) of Giordano Bruno's antinomian "amoralist" Pentecost sermon at the University of Paris. Pater, even before the publication of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1891, came to see an analogy between his earliest book and the *Book of Lancelot in Inferno* 5, texts of overwhelming seductive power. Thus *Marius* is written, like Dante's *Commedia*, to supersede and correct a previous text; in Pater's case his own *History of the Renaissance* with its subtle and powerful celebration of homoerotic attraction (see Dellamora 110-116, 130-146).

As the physical aspects of courtly love, so irresistible to Paolo and Francesca, are spiritualized by Dante's apotheosis of Beatrice, so the homoerotic suggestiveness of *The Renaissance* is spiritualized in Marius's relation to Cornelius, who may be seen as a homosocial Beatrice for Marius (Monsman, 196, xlv). Unlike the thief Arcangeli, who leads Winkelmann to a cruel and violent death (*The Renaissance* 126), Cornelius leads Marius to a vision of life beyond death, to his deathbed matutinal vision of "heavy sunlight" as he turns "to think once more of the beloved" (286) for whose advent, like that of Cupid to Psyche, Cornelius has prepared him.⁴

Pater's first and most subtle evocation of Dante occurs in "A Change of Air," a chapter dealing with the youthful Marius's stay at the Eturian temple of Aesculapius "for the cure of some boyish sickness" (51). On the last morning of the visit, a priest opens "a cunningly contrived panel which formed the back of one of the carved seats" and "bade him look through." He sees "a long drawn valley of cheerful aspect" in which the temple novices are taking their exercise.

The softly sloping sides of the vale lay alike in full sunlight; and its distant opening was closed by a beautifully formed mountain, from which the last wreaths of morning mist were rising under the heat. It might have seemed the very presentment of a land of hope, its hollows brimful of a shadow of the blue flowers; and lo! on the one level space of the horizon, in a long dark line, were towers and a dome; and that was Pisa—Or Rome, was it? asked Marius, ready to believe the utmost, in his excitement. (58)

The image of the beautifully formed mountain that "seemed the very presentment of a land of hope" corresponds to Dante's conception of Purgatory as a beautifully formed mountain, the gradual ascent of which leads Dante, in the company of Virgil, to the Earthly Paradise. Marius will discover that neither the Cyrenaic Pisa nor Stoic Rome is "the land of hope" but instead the Purgatorial world of the Christian community of Cecilia and Cornelius "quel secondo regno / dove l'umano spirito si purga," to cite the lines quoted by Pater in his "Introduction" to Shadwell's translation of the *Purgatorio*.

A telling narrative device from the *Purgatorio* that Pater incorporates into *Marius* involves the narration of three episodes of the protagonist's awakening. In the *Purgatorio*,

the spiral journey up the mountain occurs over a period of three days and is punctuated by three nights of dream-filled sleep, followed by a narrative of matutinal awakening. Unlike Dante, who stresses both the nocturnal dreams, all significantly allegorical, and the moments of awakening (Cantos 9, 19, 27), Pater stresses, with one significant exception, the moments of awakening themselves.

In the first purgatorial awakening, Dante, suddenly awakening from a dream of an eagle with golden pinions wheeling above him, likens himself to Achilles, abducted in his sleep by his mother, Thetis, to the island of Skyros, awakening to a strange habitat. Dante's emphasis here is on the comforting presence of Virgil:

such was my starting up, as soon as sleep
had left my eyes, and I went pale, as will
a man who, terrified, turns cold as ice.

The only one beside me was my comfort.

(9: 40-43)

In *Marius* Marius awakens from an unspecified feverish dream and is comforted by "the youthful figure" of the priest of Aesculapius, whose "gracious countenance" (53) would later return in other forms to comfort him. Not only does the priest anticipate both Cornelius and Marius's "fantasy of a self not himself, beside him in his coming and going," "a living and companionable spirit at work in all things" (210), he recalls the comforting, companionable spirit, "il mio conforto," of Dante's Virgil, who will guide Dante to Beatrice and the Earthly Paradise.

The second awakening in the *Purgatorio* is from the terrifying dream of the Siren, in which Virgil tears off her clothes and Dante is awakened by the vividly dreamed stench that comes from her exposed belly. Marius's second awakening is very different. It is like "one of those old joyful wakings of childhood now becoming rarer and rarer with him." The serenity of the dream in which "he overheard those he loved best pronouncing his name very pleasantly, as they passed through the rich light and shadow of summer morning, along the pavement of a city" (208), follows upon the night of Marius's witnessing "the desolate face" of Marcus Aurelius in mourning (204). The city of his dream "fairer far than Rome," the dying city of Marcus Aurelius, leaves him invigorated and serene. Marius's dream indicates to him and to the reader that he is journeying, spiritually, beyond the confines of the Stoic Rome of Marcus Aurelius, as the angel of zeal assures Dante that those like himself "*Qui lugent*," who mourn, will be finally blessed "esser beati" (19: 50).

The third awakening in the *Purgatorio* occurs at the summit of the mountain on the morning of the day that Virgil will lead Dante to the presence of Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise. Dante awakens to see that his great teachers, Virgil and Statius, have already risen; "veggendo i gran maestri già levati" (27: 114). Fully empowered by his sleep and his dream of Leah, a figure of the active life (Mandelbaum 387),

¹Monsman sees the proposed trilogy of which *Marius* would be the first volume as suggesting "a secularized or classicized version of Dante" (1995, xiii-xiv). Inman identifies 28 references to Dante and his work in Pater's writing between 1858 and 1873.

²Higgins argues that "Pater eschews the truth claims of any one religion—an

established church's system of worship—and promotes instead the social, spiritual, and aesthetic possibility of *religiousness*" (287).

³All quotations both in Italian and English translation are taken from the Mandelbaum translations of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

⁴See Monsman's discussion of the allegorical significance of Pater's inclusion of a translation of Apuleius's version of the Cupid-Psyche story from the *Golden Ass* (1967, 70-71).

Dante is now prepared to encounter Beatrice and ascend with her to Paradise: "at each step I took I felt the force / within my wings was growing for the flight" (27: 122-123). It is at this point that Virgil tells him that his will is "free, erect, and whole" (27: 140) and in no need of further instruction.

The corresponding awakening in *Marius* comes at the very end of the narrative, at the moment of Marius's death. He dies, awakening at morning amid "the murmuring voices of the people who had kept and tended him through his sickness" (296). Awakened to the "perfect clearness of his soul," he perceives "the heavy sunlight" of his last morning and turns "to think once more of his beloved," as he is addressed by the rural Christians who surround him as a Christian soul, *Anima Christiana*. For Marius, the earthly paradise that he reaches at the end of his purgatorial journey is his identification by the simple people of the countryside as a Christian and his passive, unresisting reception of both the Christian Eucharist, which descends upon him "like a snow-flake from the sky," and the Christian anointment of the dying (296). What awaits him beyond this final awakening is not specified. Pater brings his lonely pilgrim to an earthly paradise of community, love, and comely ritual, to which he has been led by a curious conflation of Beatrice and Virgil in the figures of the Aesculapian priest and Cornelius.

The similarity between the figure of Statius in the *Purgatorio* and Marius is also significant. The author of the *Thebiad* is presented to Dante as a "chiuso cristian," "secret Christian" (22: 90), who was converted to Christianity during the reign of Domitian, eighty years before Marcus Aurelius, by his reading of Virgil's mysteriously prophetic fourth Eclogue. Pater underlines this similarity between Marius and Dante's Statius by introducing an earthquake into the last chapter of *Marius*, "Anima Naturaliter Christiana," an earthquake that corresponds to the trembling of the mountain in Purgatory (20: 127-132) prior to Dante's meeting with Statius. This earthquake symbolizes the cleansing of Statius's sin of prodigality for which he had been in expiation for over 500 years (21: 68). In *Marius*, the earthquake that augurs symbolically the passage of Marius to the threshold of Christian conversion, incites literally the Pagan villagers to slaughter many of the Christians and to take some, including Marius and Cornelius, prisoner.

The Christian people of the town, hardly less terrified and overwrought by the haunting sickness about them than their pagan neighbours, were at prayer before the tomb of the martyr; and even as Marius pressed among them to a place beside Cornelius, on a sudden the hills seemed to roll like a sea in motion, around the whole compass of the horizon. For a moment Marius supposed himself attacked with some sudden sickness of brain, till the fall of a great mass of building convinced him that not himself but the earth under his feet was giddy. A few moments later the little marketplace was alive with the rush of the distracted inhabitants from their tottering houses; and as they waited anxiously for the second shock of earthquake, a long-smouldering suspicion leapt precipitately into well defined purpose, and the whole body of people was carried forward towards the band of worshippers below. (289-290)

Like Marius, Dante's Statius is drawn during a period of the Roman persecution of Christians to the frequenting of their rituals and to a recognition of their sanctity.

Disseminated by the messengers
of the eternal kingdom, the true faith
by then had penetrated all the world,
and the new preachers preached in such accord
with what you'd said (and I have just repeated),
that I was drawn into frequenting them.
Then they appeared to me to be so saintly
that, when Domitian persecuted them,
my own laments accompanied their grief;
and while I could—as long as I had life—
I helped them, and their honest practices
made me disdainful of all other sects. (22: 76-87)

For a long time, both, however, showed themselves to the world as pagans "lungamente mostrando paganesmo" (22: 91). The difference between them lies in the character of their "conversion." According to Dante, Statius's conversion was formal and explicit, whereas Marius's is an unexplicit aesthetic assent to the compelling beauty, sanity, and hopefulness of Christianity. Marius, as he dies, comes "under the power of that new hope among men" (295) and is "secretly" buried as a Christian martyr (297).

Thus, Marius's journey can be seen to represent a historical transition from the highest philosophical achievements of Roman antiquity to the more hopeful spirituality of early Christianity as it occurs within the consciousness of a single individual. This historical transition is presented as a series of awakenings to "the serenity, the durable cheerfulness of those who have been indeed delivered from death" (202). Experienced as a personal spiritual journey, Marius's story can also be read as a paradigmatic cultural narrative of humanity's invention of new possibilities of joy, interiority, and beauty—perhaps irrecoverable—which would later find full expression in the poetry of Dante and the art of Giotto (235). Pater narrates the first awakenings or "inklings" (44) of these new possibilities of consciousness by evoking the "gray, but clear light" (Pater, 1892, xx) of the *Purgatorio*, the text that would later give full expression to the vision that Marius beholds, as an augur, a privilege granted to his race, of "inward, mystic intimation" (44). Pater in the nineteenth century, evokes Dante to narrate the story of a young pilgrim of the second century, a paradigmatic story to which Dante will give, in the fourteenth century, full expression.

In Pater's incomplete *Gaston de Latour*, which was conceived of as the second volume of a fictional triptych of which *Marius the Epicurean* would be the first volume, the underlying Dantesque patterns seem less evident than in *Marius*. *Gaston* is certainly a darker text than *Marius*, its tone defined by the violent excesses of the St. Bartholomew's day massacre and the "erotic pride" and "carnal, consuming, and essentially wolfish love" (101) represented by Queen Marguerite of Navarre. The plague and barbarian invasions that darken Marius's Rome are external threats rather than internal moral excesses. In the incomplete manuscript for Chapter 13 at Brasenose College (edited in the Monsman edition of the revised text) entitled "Micarême," Gaston visits the old

cemetery of the Innocents, a burial ground of young children, "slain or lost," haunted at night by thieves and courtesans (129). As he reads the epitaphs, he comes upon Jean Goujon's graceful fountain, carved with images of nymphs amid reeds and water-lilies. The narrator comments that the presence of the graceful fountain in the cemetery emphasizes by contrast the cemetery's gloom. He then cites from *Inferno* 30 the words of Adam of Brescia, damned for counterfeiting coins and punished by the perpetual thirst of dropsy / edema, as he imagines the unattainable pure waters of "the green hills of the Casentino."

Chè l'immagine lor vie più m'asiuga
Che il male ond'io nel volto mi discarmo.
(130 in *Gaston*)⁵

the image of their flow parches me more
than the disease that robs my face of flesh.
(*Inferno* 30: 69-69)

As Gaston reads the epitaphs, he accidentally comes upon the fountain and unlike the narrator, "feels those drops of water welcome in this Inferno, or Purgatorio, say, of Paris" (130). Pater planned to include here a tercet from the *Purgatorio* to describe the effect of the fountain on Gaston as distinct from its melancholy effect on the narrator. For Gaston the water seems, in this realm of the dead, like the waters of Lethe in the Earthly Paradise as first perceived by Dante.

Ed ecco più andar mi tose un rio,
Che in ver sinistra con sue picciol'onde
Piegava l'erba che in sua ripa uscio.
(130 in *Gaston*)

and there I came upon a stream that blocked
the path of my advance; its little waves
beat to the left along its banks.
(*Purgatorio* 28: 25-27)

In the Brasenose manuscript Pater appears uncertain as to whether the cemetery of the Innocents is an infernal *locus*, as perceived by the narrator, or a purgatorial *locus* as perceived by Gaston. Since this is the last surviving chapter of Pater's incomplete novel, this contrast in response may express an uncertainty in Pater as to the future direction of the narrative. In light of *Marius the Epicurean* the "contradictory" Dantesque responses to the fountain, one expressive of futile yearning, the other of solace or renewal, may be understood in terms of the contrast between the "desolate face" of Marcus Aurelius as he carries the dying child Annius Verus close to his bosom (204) and the joyful awakening of Marius the following morning when he is filled with a sense of a divine companion, "a friendly hand, laid upon him amid the shadows of the world" (212). The narrator in *Gaston* perceives the cemetery of the Innocents as Marcus Aurelius expe-

riences the death of the child, but Gaston experiences amid the desolation and "shadows" of Paris, the first reawakenings of the spiritual consciousness of his adolescence at Chartres. The Dantesque allusions suggest that the Purgatorial pattern, so strongly articulated in *Marius* would have been adumbrated further in *Gaston* to define the process of Gaston's spiritual regeneration after witnessing the infernal violence and lust of Paris of the last of the Valois.

The allusions to Dante's *Commedia*, particularly the *Purgatorio*, are a source both for elements of the plot and tone of Pater's *Marius*. Pater's narrative of "conversion" parallels Dante's narrative of purgation, and Marius is presented as a figure analogous to Dante's conception of Statius in the *Purgatorio*. Furthermore, Pater's Marius is led from the cruel, diseased, and death-haunted city of Rome (his *Inferno*) to the earthly paradise of the Christian community in which he dies. The allusions to Dante in key points of *Gaston de Latour* suggest that Dante's great poem continued to provide Pater with the outlines of a spiritual topography, inspiring his own attempts to imagine, in a belated age of "second thoughts," the inner landscape of the soul.

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⁵Pater indicated with reference dots and the parenthetical phrase "(quote it words)" that he intended to quote the lines from Dante that Monsman includes in his edited text (301).

Saint Teresa and Dorothea Brooke: The Absent Road to Perfection in *Middlemarch*

Sherry L. Mitchell

You may try—but you can never imagine what it
is to have a man's force of genius in you,
and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl.

George Eliot *Daniel Deronda*

Eliot's use of Saint Teresa as an analog for Dorothea Brooke has generally been studied as a strategy to magnify various aspects of her heroine's character. Critics such as Robert Damm and Franklin Court, for example, have suggested that this comparison is used ironically to highlight Dorothea's initially insincere and impractical conception of ascetic mysticism, while others, including Hilary Fraser, have argued that Eliot employs the image of Saint Teresa to underscore the passionate nature of Dorothea's personality and emergent sexuality. Still others, such as Jill Matus, have argued that this image is one of sterile hysteria, which precedes Dorothea's ultimate fulfillment in motherhood. Arguably, however, Eliot's use of Saint Teresa, an image which frames *Middlemarch*, is much more intrinsic to the discursive strategies she employs throughout the novel than such arguments imply. By utilizing Saint Teresa as a figure who represents vistas of accomplishment that are no longer available to even the most talented of Victorian women, Eliot achieves a two-fold purpose: she foregrounds the problematic position of Dorothea's relation to contemporary discourses of normative femininity, while implicitly illuminating her own assumption of a subtly subversive speaking position analogous to that held by Teresa of Avila.

While critics of *Middlemarch* have often addressed the image of Saint Teresa in the text as an icon of religious reform or mystic passion, many of the actual details of the nun's life and subsequent canonization have generally been overlooked in relation to the novel. Although the nun is certainly remembered for her reforms among the Carmelites, she is also an emblem of the effective subversion of discourses of femininity. As both Alison Weber and Gillian Ahlgren have demonstrated, despite rigorous contemporary adherence to Pauline doctrine, which prohibited women from engaging in theological discourse, Teresa directed the spiritual development of her Carmelite nuns, established a number of convents and, over the course of her lifetime, used multiple rhetorical strategies to defend herself in writing from the increasing misogyny of the Inquisition. Moreover, as Weber notes, the procedures which led to Teresa's canonization celebrated not only her religious reforms, but also her eloquence as a writer. For example,

On an October evening in 1614 Spanish "galleons" and fiery "serpents" burst into flame in the skies above Madrid. Tolling church bells contributed to the din of exploding fireworks as the entire city celebrated the beatification of Teresa de Jesus, the nun from Avila. Grandees, noblemen, ambassadors, and the king himself attended a mass in her honor. In the cathedral the nun's image was depicted with thousands of silk flowers: in one hand she held the palm leaf representing her virginity, in her other hand, a golden pen that symbolized her eloquence. (3, my emphasis)

Celebrated throughout the process of her canonization as a "virile woman" and a "manly soul," Teresa is representative of a small number of Medieval and early Renaissance women who were able to subvert discourses which posited the weakness and spiritual inferiority of femininity by positioning themselves as speakers within the field of patriarchal church power (Weber 17).

Many of the details of Teresa's life that George Eliot includes in *Middlemarch* allude to the saint's autobiography or *Vida*, a text she claimed to be required to write in order to defend her spiritual practices to church authorities. Despite the Inquisition's persecution of female mystics, Teresa was able to engage in rhetorical strategies in this text, including repeated apologies for her own inferiority and her ignorance of theological doctrine, which allowed her to present her practices, particularly that of mental prayer,¹ in a manner which satisfied the demands of her confessors while still allowing her to continue the same activities. Furthermore, by writing the autobiography Teresa established a precedent which allowed her to write other texts, including *The Road to Perfection* and *The Book of Foundations*, one of which gave direct spiritual instruction to the nuns of her convents and the other of which detailed the history of her own reforms among the Carmelites.

In her effort to present Dorothea Brooke as an analog for Saint Teresa, Eliot endows her heroine with a number of characteristics which echo details from the nun's life. Like Teresa, who speaks in the *Vida* of her "natural graces" (25), Dorothea is extremely attractive but seeks to downplay her looks by wearing puritanical dress. Her interest in creating plans for cottages parallels Teresa's interest in establishing convents, and her habit of "sitting up at night to read old theological books" (3)² parallels the nun's interest in religious studies. Likewise, her ardor and her yearning "towards the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her, and rule her errant will" (544) is reminiscent of Teresa's account in the

Vida of her efforts to feel worthy of the favors she had been granted by God. Nonetheless, where Teresa despite the seemingly insurmountable barrier of Counter-Reformation misogyny, had been allowed to write and initiate reforms among the Carmelites, Dorothea is presented as being hopelessly contained by a combination of Victorian social practices and discourses of normative femininity.

As Mary Poovey has argued, the representation of woman in the nineteenth century was "a site of cultural contestation" (9), with discourses that contradicted one another circulating simultaneously. As Linda Hunt has observed, one of the dominant constructions of normative femininity was that of a spiritual vision of womanhood "which reached its apex in the Victorian image of the 'angel in the house'" (1). According to this discursive construction, women were expected to be "meek, submissive, chaste, modest, reserved, gentle, and physically frail" and were supposed to "possess great delicacy" while being "religious, self-denying, emotional, sympathetic and capable of tremendous feats of self-discipline" (1-2). In addition to this internally contradictory image of womanhood as simultaneously both weak and strong, images of women as hysterics whose mental capabilities were limited by their bodies³ as well as other images of them as rational beings who were capable of directing their own lives, or as individuals who needed extensive conduct books to tell them how to manage all aspects of their identities were also circulated as part of Victorian discourse.⁴ These differing images of womanhood contributed to a climate in which variable constructions of normative femininity could be mobilized to operate by means of logical contradictions. Thus, women who subversively attempted to use elements of one particular set of discourses to widen their range of social opportunities could generally be contained by calling attention to their deficiencies in relation to another, often contradictory, set of discourses.⁵

Eliot theatricalizes Dorothea's relationship to these constructed discourses throughout the novel, thus emphasizing their artificiality. Not surprisingly, given the tone of her review of the works of Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft, Eliot most frequently depicts instances where Dorothea's reason and desire for useful action are undermined or trivialized. Mr. Brooke reacts to Dorothea's desire for learning in order to improve her exercise of reason by dwelling on the "lightness" of the "feminine mind" and by encouraging Casaubon to teach her to "take things more quietly" (43). In contrast, Lydgate initially reacts to Dorothea's company as being "about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form" and compares her unfavorably with his vision of the proper feminine aim of providing "a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven" (64). Likewise, Casaubon expects his wife to admire him "with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary bird" (139) and after Dorothea's widowhood, even Celia tells her

that she should be satisfied without any kind of useful activity and should unquestioningly follow the direction of her brother-in-law:

"Now Dodo, do listen to what James says . . . else you will be getting into a scrape. You always did and you always will, when you set about doing as you please. And I think it is a mercy now after all that you have got James to think for you. He lets you have your plans, only he hinders you from being taken in." (508)

Here, even Dorothea's sister, who as a "matron" feels "naturally" that she is able to provide direction to her "childless sister" (565), has internalized the discourses of normative femininity to an extent that prevents her from expecting that women should be allowed to think for themselves. Instead, she presents Dorothea's desire to do what she wants (which in this case entails the rational and humanitarian aim of finding out the truth about Lydgate's role in the death of Raffles) as a social transgression which equals "getting into a scrape." Instead of being presented as a spiritual angel who can inspire others, Dorothea is here figured as a woman who requires protection from herself.

Throughout the novel, Eliot engages in strategies which magnify the loss of the speaking position that had been available to Saint Teresa. Rather than lamenting this loss as one which undermines the practice of religion, however, Eliot focuses on the wasted practical potential of talented women like Dorothea. As Gillian Ahlgren proposes, despite her difficulties with the Inquisition, Saint Teresa had been able to use her speaking position as both a writer and a reformer within the church to effect the disruption of Counter-Reformation discourses of femininity which represented women as what Mary Poovey has called "the site of willful sexuality and bodily appetite" (9). As Ahlgren argues:

Teresa's encounters with the Inquisition make it clear that her drive to found new convents was spurred by the wish to create havens of sorts for women who were striving for spiritual perfection, a goal that many theologians and inquisitors alike doubted that women could achieve. Her writings were her efforts to overcome the effects of the Valdes Index and provide the guidance these women needed. Her activities on both fronts, then, should be seen as acts of resistance to an increasingly clerical, patriarchal, and authoritarian Counter-Reformation church. (34)

Unlike Saint Teresa, who was able to assume a privileged speaking position by dedicating her life to the Carmelites, Dorothea lives at a time where the only approved vocation for young women is marriage. Where Teresa could use her energy to run away from her father's home to become a nun, Dorothea must obey social conventions which prevent her

¹During the Spanish Counter-Reformation, the practice of mental, or silent, prayer by women, especially by those like Teresa who claimed to have spiritual visions, was considered suspect at best and heretical at worst. Since Pauline doctrine held that women were necessarily unclean, the sort of direct communication with God that such a practice suggested, especially combined with Teresa's problematic position as a female mystic who taught others, was a source of extreme concern to the Inquisition. Teresa is remarkable because

she, unlike other female mystics such as Magdalena de la Cruz, was able to successfully defend the practice.

²As Gillian Ahlgren notes, although Teresa could not read Latin, a circumstance which kept her from reading most official theological treatises, she was an avid reader of theological works which had been translated into the vernacular, at least until such texts were banned by the Valdes Index of prohibited books.

³See, for example, Foucault's account of the hystericization of women's bodies in *The History of Sexuality Volume I*.

⁴My thinking here is an extremely condensed account of the extensive arguments of critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Mary Poovey, Linda Hunt, Jill Matus, Hazel Mews and Kathleen Blake.

⁵My argument here is obviously Foucauldian in nature. My thinking is

inspired in part by David Halperin's *Saint Foucault*, which analyzes the paradoxical nature of the discourses of homosexuality. Although my interest is in representations of gender rather than those of homosexuality, the interlocking hierarchies which operate within the field of power relations indicate similarities between the operation of discourses of both gender and homosexuality.

from putting any kind of plan into action and turn her energetic desire for useful activity into "indefiniteness which hung in her mind like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective" (17).

Nonetheless, Dorothea is presented throughout the novel as an image of generous yet thwarted female ambition which is expressed early in the novel in the form of her desire for learning. Aware that "the toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education" (58) is an inadequate substitute for the kind of knowledge preserved for men, Dorothea assumes that her sense of uselessness would be cured, or at least explained, if only she had the proper kind of learning:

All her eagerness for acquirement lay within that full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were habitually swept along. She did not want to deck herself in knowledge—to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it *as Saint Theresa did*, under the command of a spiritual authority that constrained her conscience. But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? (58, my emphasis)

Recognizing that she is without opportunities to be useful herself, Dorothea hopes to at least gain a sense of accomplishment through association by marrying Casaubon, whose *Key to All Mythologies* is a project she believes will serve mankind as well as allowing her to "live continually in the light of a mind she could reverence" (28). Although she is presented by Eliot as having a nature that is "altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent," before her marriage, Dorothea is "hemmed in" by social expectations which seem "nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led to no whither" (17). Consequently, she views her marriage to Casaubon as an opportunity that will "deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path" (17). As such, Dorothea's belief that her engagement means that "a fuller life" which will consist of "large yet definite duties" is "opening before her" (28) is a source of extreme relief which causes her to tremble with joy upon receiving Casaubon's letter of proposal.

Not surprisingly, although Mrs. Cadwallader says that her marriage to Casaubon "is as good as going to a nunnery" (38), Dorothea's wifehood hardly results in the sorts of accomplishments that followed upon Saint Teresa's taking of orders. Her hopes of attaining "masculine knowledge" (42) from her husband are sorely disappointed and although there are certainly ascetic qualities to her marriage, as Dorothea stands in her boudoir after her honeymoon, her desire for usefulness is as thwarted as ever:

Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness. Her

blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment, which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight. (189)

After discovering in Rome that her husband is not the brilliant and generous scholar she had imagined, but an insecure man who resents her efforts to be useful, Dorothea recognizes that her marriage, which she had "contemplated as so great beforehand" (189) is merely an extension of the discursive prison in which he had lived before. Rather than offering her "clear heights where she expected to walk in full communion" (189), her new union leaves her more restricted than before and in a state of "moral imprisonment" that denies her the learning she longs for, while requiring her constantly to subdue her own energetic desires to those of her resentful and jealous husband.

One of Eliot's strategies for illuminating the restrictions dictated by discourses of normative femininity is her use of Dorothea's response to art. Where Saint Teresa wrote in Chapter Nine of her *Vida* of an instance where seeing a statue of Christ had given her a sense of deep spiritual awakening, Dorothea's response to the art she encounters in Rome is one of painful confusion which is caused by her sense of disjunction between "the stupendous fragmentariness" of the "[r]uins, basilicas, palaces, and colossi" and the "sordid present" in which they stand (134). Prevented from occupying a religious speaking position like Teresa's, which might have allowed her to resolve these contradictions by using such images as the impetus for substantive political acts analogous to the nun's reforms, Dorothea is left with a sense of absolute exclusion from even "the vastness of St. Peter's" where "the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaic above" affect her more like "a disease of the retina" (135) than a source of inspiration. Where Teresa lived at a time when she could view such religious representations as being connected to a God who she argued in *The Road to Perfection* had favored women "always with much pity and found in them as much love and more faith than in men" (qtd. in Weber 41), Dorothea lives at a time when such images serve as merely a reminder of the extent to which she is excluded from the realms of substantive action and knowledge which are preserved solely for men.

Despite the claustrophobia which attends her first marriage and her widowhood, Dorothea's noble nature and vast thwarted potential are glimpsed in episodes throughout the novel. Notably, after learning of the codicil attached to Casaubon's will, Dorothea feels a brief moment of independence and secretly expresses a subversive refusal to continue compiling the results of his scholarship. Recognizing the selfishness of her husband's desire for the posthumous publication of his work, combined with the unfairness of his treatment of her, Dorothea justifiably refuses, in writing, to continue to serve him in what she had come to perceive as a useless endeavor which would be a waste of her substantial energy and would amount to the extension of the imprisonment of her marriage: "Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?" (372).

Dorothea's interaction with various characters throughout the novel is a constant reminder of the special nobility and generosity of her nature. Despite his initial reaction to her divergence from his conception of proper womanhood, Lydgate comes to benefit from Dorothea's intervention on his behalf after the death of Raffles and, as a result, views her as an emblem of a transcendent form of female sanctity:

"This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her. She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her." (530)

Likewise, even Rosamond, who is initially determined to dislike Dorothea, is moved by the other woman's generosity of spirit to an extent which forces her to admit that Will Ladislaw is not in love with her. Endowed with an innate ability to provide spiritual direction and hope to others when given the opportunity, Dorothea mediates between Rosamond and Lydgate to provide healing reconciliation, which the other woman looks back to later in life with "religious remembrance" as the most extreme encounter with generosity of her lifetime (575).

Despite her nobility and talented character, however, Dorothea remains imprisoned within the field of power relations dictated by the discourses of femininity. Even after her widowhood, although she manages to mediate between Rosamond and Lydgate, award a living to Farebrother and supply a loan to Lydgate to replace the one given by Bulstrode, Dorothea is prevented from engaging in any kind of sustained useful activity which would give her sense of purpose and direct accomplishment. After her visit to Rosamond, with her plan of draining land to establish a utopian colony overturned by Sir James's caution of the excessive expense of such a project and with all the well-fed residents of Lowick self-sufficient, Dorothea is left feeling restless, with her efforts focused on nothing more substantive than containing her own restless and unchanneled energy.

Dorothea's need to feel some measure of fulfillment is the impetus which drives her to marry Will Ladislaw. Faced with the prospect of a future burdened with excess wealth and lived out within the tomblike walls of Lowick, she is understandably attracted to the possibility of becoming the wife of the one person who has expressed interest in actually listening to and being influenced by her. Where her personality and desires have habitually been trivialized by the other men she has encountered, Will has always held her above other women and listened intently to her descriptions of her principles. His perception of her "divineness" (151) is even sparked by the sound of her voice, which reminds him of the Aeolian harp. With the knowledge that she has "never

found much room in the minds of others for what she cared most to say" as well as "the ardent woman's need to rule beneficently by making the joy of another's soul" (249), Dorothea is understandably attracted by Will's passion and desire to listen to her, as well by her sympathy for the disadvantages which have accompanied his upbringing and the subsequent revelation that he is grandson of a dishonest pawnbroker. Although she is unable to attain the speaking position occupied by Saint Teresa, Dorothea is at least able to speak directly to Will and to exercise a kind of spiritual influence upon him:

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration; they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. . . . Dorothea's nature was of that kind. . . . And it had from the first acted strongly on Will Ladislaw. (532)

No mere "angel in the house," Dorothea possesses a charismatic nature, similar to that reported by those who encountered Saint Teresa,⁶ which transcends the discourses of femininity. Accordingly, Will perceives his "preference" for her as something which is as essential to his existence as his "preference for breathing" (537). In effect, Dorothea's decision to marry for a second time is the result of her recognition that, since all of her plans are destined to remain unexecuted, the only prospect of real fulfillment lies in the sense of communion she feels with Will.

Although Dorothea is ultimately judged by those who know her as being "absorbed into the life of another" (576), there is a slight grain of subversion in her choice of Will as her husband. Aside from the obvious impediment of Casaubon's will, Ladislaw's background, particularly after the disclosure of his grandfather's profession, is a formidable social impediment. By his own admission, he comes from rebellious stock on both sides of his family. His connections are also of a class decidedly lower than Dorothea's, a fact which is magnified by Sir James's sense of revulsion at her second marriage, which is never fully overcome, even after the Chettams are reconciled to the Ladislaws.

Dorothea's similarity to Saint Teresa is also further magnified by her relationship with Ladislaw, which is remarkably similar (with the obvious exception of sexual passion) to the one the nun shared with Garcia de Toledo, the confessor she claimed to be obeying when she wrote the *Vida*. As Alison Weber argues, Teresa's relationship with Garcia, who had been willing to become her confessor at a time when her activities among the Carmelites had warranted an extreme amount of negative attention, was one which enabled her to view him as "not only her confessional father but a spiritual son" (68). As such, she undertook the *Vida* with the sense that she was not only defending herself, but also instructing a disciple. As Weber observes,

⁶Throughout her study, Alison Weber, like most of Teresa's biographers, speaks of the extreme charm of the nun's personality as one of the factors which may have preserved her from the threats of the Inquisition.

When Garcia ordered her to give a complete account of her spiritual life, as penitent her obligation was to remember and confess all her transgressions; but as *his* spiritual teacher she felt she had the right to demand his devotion and *his* humility in accepting her spiritual guidance. Hierarchy is confused and diminished by the oxymoronic role he is given in the text; he is made to share the injunction to prove his humility. (68)

This same sense of confused hierarchical relations is duplicated in Dorothea's marriage to Will, where his assumption of the superior position of husband is undermined by his already established sense of Dorothea's nature as mythic and superior to his own. Although Dorothea is still constrained by the discourses of femininity, her marriage to Will at least allows her to exercise a measure of informal power, which is demonstrated by her obvious influence upon Ladislaw's metamorphosis into "an ardent public man . . . in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good" (576). Like the other admirable women of the novel, such as Mary Garth and Harriet Bulstrode, Dorothea, despite her uniqueness, must finally recognize that she is incapable of sustained useful and satisfying activity outside of the domestic sphere assigned to women. As she says in response to Celia's argument that the marriage to Will is wrong and will prevent her from the freedom of doing what she likes, "I never could do anything I like. I have never carried out any plan yet" (566). Her own recognition of the limiting potency of the discourses of femininity is echoed by her later acquaintances who regard it as "a pity that so rare and substantive a creature" should be absorbed into marriage but are at a loss as to "exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done" (576).

Embedded within the narrator's caution that "we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice" (577-78) is the voice of George Eliot, whose skillfully applied analogy between Dorothea and Saint Teresa functions within the novel to highlight the loss of one privileged speaking position while calling attention to the growth of another. As critics such as Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong have proposed, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novel became an increasingly potent site of ideological formation. Functioning as a nexus where the different objectives of writers affiliated with a variety of political agendas, including those of the different discourses of femininity, could dramatize their interests in the form of fiction, the novel became one of the many aspects of Victorian discourse. Although constrained themselves by the logical paradoxes embodied in the wide range of discursive constructions of femininity, women writers were often able to use the novel as a site of resistance within the field of power relations from which they could endorse one or more constructions of femininity, while downplaying others. Consequently, a writer like Eliot could use the novel to create truth-effects which would magnify the rational and moral aspects of a character like Dorothea, while presenting criticism of the perception of women as hysterical beings whose bodies limited their mental capacities and arguing implicitly for the improved education of women.

By using the image of Saint Teresa, Eliot magnifies not only the discursive limitations placed upon Dorothea within the novel, but also those which were placed upon her as a novelist. Yet, another layer of analogy can be added to the novel if the relative power of Teresa's position within the church is compared to Eliot's relative power as a writer whose work had to gain acceptance of the Victorian literary establishment. Despite Eliot's success as both a novelist and a woman who was able to rebel against elements of social convention, she was still, despite her ongoing relationship with George Lewes, constrained by the expectations of a male-dominated literary establishment which exercised a certain degree of control over the publication and reception of her novels. As Elsie Michie has argued, "Eliot's position as a woman writer and a liberal intellectual" was "virtually contradictory" (145) in the context of the literary milieu in which she published her novels. Even George Lewes, in a review of the work of Charlotte Brontë, had, as a member of the literary establishment, indicted the ability of female writers to reach the achievement of "high art," given the confines of the social expectations dictated by discourses of femininity, especially those which endorsed motherhood as the "natural" function of all women:

The grand function of woman, it must always be recollected, is, and ever must be, Maternity. . . . [C]onsequently for twenty years of the best years of their lives—those very years in which men either rear the grand fabric or lay the solid foundations of their fame and fortune—women are mainly occupied by the cares, the duties, the enjoyments and the sufferings of maternity. During large parts of these years, too, their bodily health is generally so broken and precarious as to incapacitate them for any strenuous exertion [H]ow could such occupations consort with the intense and unremitting studies which seared the eyeballs of Milton. . . ? High art and science always require the whole man. (qtd in Michie 145)

Given this construction of the relation of women, as physically weak individuals whose destiny is that of maternity, to the masculine dominated realm of literature, as Michie has argued, in order to "enter the realm of literary scholarship where fame and fortune are built, Eliot had to construct a full-fledged masculine persona for herself" (145).

Not coincidentally, Eliot's use of the image of Saint Teresa in *Middlemarch* is a device which calls attention to her own self-initiated reassignment of gender. As Alison Weber has observed, Teresa's accomplishments as a woman in Counter-Reformation Spain were so extraordinary that they could only be explained in the proceedings related to her canonization by a process of gender reassignment which recognized her, not as a woman whose sanctity defied images of contaminated femininity, but as a "manly soul" who "endured all conflicts with manly courage" (17). As Fray Francisco de Jesus suggested in a celebratory speech upon the occasion of her being named as co-patron saint of Spain, Teresa "ceased to be a woman, restoring herself to the virile state of her greater glory than if she had been a man from the beginning, for she rectified nature's error with virtue, transforming herself through virtue into the bone from which she

sprang" (qtd. in Weber 18).

Like this reassignment of Teresa's gender to explain her accomplishments, George Eliot's reassignment of her own gender allowed her, at least until her pseudonym was revealed, to publish and be read as a man who was capable of reaching the heights of literary achievement. Nonetheless, once Eliot's actual gender was revealed, despite her alliance with Lewes and her already established reputation, she was necessarily subjected to elements of the expectations placed upon women's writing. Consequently, as Gaye Tuchman has noted, a consistent feature of reviews of Eliot's writing in the literary journals of her day became the evaluation of her work in relation to an aesthetic which dictated that women's writing should be "wholesome and instructive" (186). As such, many of the reviews of *Middlemarch*, such as the one written by R. Monckton Milnes for the *Edinburgh Review*, recognized elements of Eliot's writing which conformed to these expectations:

In *Middlemarch* another volume is added to the noble series of British works of fiction which is at once acceptable to "girls and men" and which is so peculiarly our own. . . . George Eliot's new enterprise is to be hailed with gratitude for its healthy tone and honest purpose, as well as for the admirable interior action, which makes it almost independent of incident and moulds the outward circumstances to its own spiritual ends. (qtd. in Tuchman 186)

Rather than dwelling upon Eliot's obvious political intent in *Middlemarch*, such reviews attempted to submerge her efforts to subvert the discourses of normative femininity within the confines of expectations of the instructive nature of feminine writing. Although such reviews attempted to dilute the politically-oriented nature of texts such as *Middlemarch*, by obtaining the approval of literary reviewers who could trace elements which were expected to be features of feminine writing, Eliot engaged in rhetorical strategies similar to those employed by Saint Teresa, whose dominant defensive strategy as a writer was, as Alison Weber has demonstrated, "to embrace stereotypes of female ignorance, timidity, or physical weakness" (36). Nevertheless, once Eliot's writings were in circulation, like Saint Teresa's texts, which attempted to replace images of female contamination with an alternate figuration of female piety, novels such as *Middlemarch* were sure to find an audience among those who believed that the options of women such as Dorothea, not to mention Eliot herself, were excessively limited by social opportunities which were dictated by the various discourses of normative femininity.

Rather than merely being a strategy which she employs to amplify aspects of her heroine's character, Eliot's use of the figure of Saint Teresa is intrinsic to the strategies she uses in the novel to demonstrate the discursive limitations placed on Dorothea, as well as to her own implicit assumption of a speaking position which, combined with rhetorical strategies which made her writing appealing to the Victorian literary establishment, enabled her to create effective subversion from within the field of gendered power relations. While her literary efforts might not have resulted in the immediate removal of restrictions which she arguably saw as particularly

unfair to talented women, Eliot's participation in the discursive activities of the Victorian novel contributed to the ongoing contestation related to the position of women within her society.

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Books Received

Christensen, Allan Conrad. *A European Version of Victorian Fiction: The Novels of Giovanni Ruffini*. Studies in Comparative Literature 7. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Twayne, 1996. Pp. 177. \$37.50. "Besides their European dimension, the [seven] novels [written in Paris in English] belong, as I wish to argue, to the context of Victorian fiction. Ruffini has modelled his technique on those of Dickens, Thackeray and other British writers that he has admired. In this context his stories are less important for their political overtones than for their treatment of the psychological intricacies of individual men and women. . . . In observing his post-Romantic impression of human frailty, we may find him a more appealingly complex figure than the Romantic idealist and straightforward patriot that Italian criticism has continued to propose even after the celebrations [at the 50th anniversary of his death] in 1931" (8).

Clayton, Cherry. *Olive Schreiner*. Twayne's World Authors Series No. 865. New York: Twayne, 1997. Pp. xix + 140. \$26.95. "In the following analysis, Schreiner's fiction and nonfiction are regarded as complementary aspects of the same developing mind and art. Her formative experiences are presented within the context of white colonial English-speaking womanhood, a condition experienced as marginality and deferral, in which life and writing, South Africa and Europe, creativity and despair, alternated and often competed. Yet these conditions created the terms for Schreiner's responses—within the modes of fantasy, polemic, and narrative—to forms of powerlessness that she understood because she experienced many of them from the inside" (xii).

Crosby, Travis L. *The Two Mr. Gladstones: A Study in Psychology and History*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1997. Pp. x + 287. \$35.00. "The theme of duality in Gladstone's private and public life is a primary focus of this book. My first object is to see Gladstone as his contemporaries saw him and to penetrate the mysteries of his personality insofar as they affected his life and work. There is little doubt that in his own time, Gladstone's behavior, both public and private, was a matter of wide speculation. His fits of temper and aggressive verbal attacks were well known.

Yet Gladstone also manifested a discipline of an unusual order. Many events in his life—coming to terms with the death of his baby daughter, coping with the loss of office, preparing his famous budgets, negotiating the terms of Irish legislation—demonstrated a high degree of self-control. It would seem that Gladstone, fearing a loss of control and knowing its potential for harm in his political life, sought to gain a strict mastery over the circumstances of his life" (4).

My second major objective . . . is to suggest a psychological approach to the past that is less reductionist and more genuinely attuned to historical studies than has heretofore been the case. The approach that follows is based on a loosely knit group of ideas known as stress and coping theory. These will be supplemented by

life-course and life-cycle theories, the psychology of control, and cognitive dissonance theories" (5).

Fasick, Laura. *Vessels of Meaning: Women's Bodies, Gender Norms, and Class Bias from Richardson to Lawrence*. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1997. Pp. x + 231. \$32.00. ". . . [T]he first chapter of this book examines the novels of Samuel Richardson from three distinct though overlapping perspectives, provided by contemporary theories of sensibility, maternity, and what we now call anorexia. This chapter is concerned with exploring the tension between Richardson's exaltation of his compelling heroines and his overt allegiance to gender hierarchy. . ." (11).

"The second chapter, the only other devoted to a single author, examines Frances Burney's novels as a response to and corrective of conduct-book ideas about feminine delicacy. . ." (12).

"The third and fourth chapters move into the Victorian period with an examination of women's relations to food first in novels of . . . Dickens and . . . Thackeray and then in . . . Gaskell's *Cranford* and . . . Brontë's *Villette*. . ." (12).

"As chapters 3 and 4 question the current critical notion that the Victorians admired female anorexia, chapter 5 opposes the accompanying belief that the Victorians idealized female debility generally by examining the issue of strength and service in women's domestic work. . ." (13).

"Richardson's first novel, *Pamela*, . . . reappears in the final chapter, where it is paired with D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, the only twentieth-century novel discussed here. . . . Here we see an interesting historical shift from Richardson to Lawrence in their parallel cross-class romances. It is far more important for Richardson to prove that his servant heroine Pamela is a 'lady' than to establish that she is a 'woman.' . . . By the time of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly* these priorities, as well as the sex of the servant figure, have been reversed; it is insignificant whether Constance is a lady (or Lady), but it is vital that she be a woman. . ." (13).

"The conclusion to this book suggests that the emergence of a new idea of feminine 'virtue' as essentially maternal is intertwined with the evolving form of the novel" (14).

Gillespie, Michael Patrick. *Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1996. Pp. xi + 204. \$39.95. "As I hope to show in the following chapters, one can find legitimacy for a range of critical approaches to any of Wilde's major works, but the validity of a particular view does not convey even a temporary or provisional exclusivity upon a single reading. Even if one privileges a specific method, that gesture cannot eradicate the presence of elements within the work that validate a range of other, sometimes radically different views. The assumption that a single reading can, even for a limited time, satisfactorily represent a full response to a work ignores the impact of the range of

features of the discourse not accommodated by that particular method. I am asserting here that, while one needs to take note of the attitudes that influence the constitution of a work of art by the author and the evocation of a text by ourselves as individual readers, one must also attend to the factors that exist hypostatically, remaining part of the preceptive experience but not achieving incorporation into the fully formed imaginative creation or response" (14-15).

Guy, Josephine M. *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, the Individual and Communal Life*. London: Macmillan, 1996. Pp. ix + 238. \$45.00 cloth, \$14.99 paper. "The critical history of the social-problem novels provides a case in point, for the various accounts of them map in miniature many of the changes in the practices of literary history which have taken place in English Studies over the past four decades. In Part One, I examine these accounts in some detail, drawing out the historiographical assumptions which underwrite them in order to show how a particular view of history produces a particular evaluation of the novels in question. My account, though, is critical as well as descriptive, for I also highlight what I see as the limitations of these ways of doing history, and I offer to the reader an alternative historical method which attempts to overcome these limitations. In this respect one aim of this book is to use the example of the social-problem novel to provide the student with a practical illustration of some of the general problems involved in 'doing' literary history. More particularly, I attempt to provide some suggestions about how the familiar (but deeply contested) concepts which literary historians now use—such as 'discourse,' 'ideology' and 'authority'—might be more accurately and fruitfully deployed.

"The second and more specialist ambition of my book is contained in Part Two where I use the historical method sketched in Part One to offer some new insights into the literary history of the mid-Victorian period. More specifically, I attempt to provide the grounds for a re-evaluation of the social-problem novel" (vii-viii).

Hares-Stryker, Carolyn, ed. *An Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings*. New York: New York UP, 1997. Pp. 391. \$55.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper. Divided into decades, the work includes materials from "Letters, Diaries and Reflections," from "Literature" (*The Germ* and elsewhere), and from "Reactions" to the Pre-Raphaelites. Included are Georgiana MacDonald Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, Millais, Christina Rossetti, Dante Rossetti, John Tupper, Thomas Woolner, Morris, Patmore, Eliz. Siddal, Wm. Bell Scott, Richard Watson Dixon, Sebastian Evans, Thomas Gordon Hake, Meredith, Swinburne, Oliver Madox Brown, Philip Bourke Marston, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, John Payne, Hall Caine, Wm. Allingham, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Watts-Dunton. Reactions from Dickens, Ruskin, Buchanan, John Morley, Henry James, W. J. Courthope, Walter Hamilton, Pater, Max Beerbohm, Lily Hall Caine, Frederick William Henry Myers, Arthur Clement Hilton, Robert Ross. There are 17 plates, 42 illustrations and a 19 pp. intro.

Lundie, Catherine A., ed. *Restless Spirits: Ghost Stories by American Women, 1872-1926*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1996. \$55.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper. Includes: an intro., Edith Wharton, "The Lady's Maid's Bell" (1902); Mary Austin, "The Readjustment" (1908); Olivia Howard Dunbar, "The Shell of Sense" (1908); Zora Neale Hurston, "Spunk" (1925); Hildegard Hawthorne, "A Legend of Sonora" (1891); Josephine Daskam Bacon, "The Children" (1913); Georgia Wood Pangborn, "Broken Glass" (1911); Cornelia A. P. Comer, "The Little Gray Ghost" (1912); Katherine Holland Brown, "Hunger" (1907); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Giant Wisteria" (1891); M. E. M. Davis, "At La Glorieuse" (1898); Ellen Glasgow, "The Past" (1920); Mrs. Wilson Woodrow, "Secret Chambers" (1909); Kate Chopin, "Her Letters" (1895); Mary Heaton Vorse, "The Second Wife" (1912); Harriett Prescott Spofford, "Her Story" (1872); Josephine Daskam Bacon, "The Gospel" (1913); Helen R. Hull, "Clay-Shuttered Doors" (1926); Anne Page, "Lois Benson's Love Story" (1890); Annie Trumbull Slosson, "A Dissatisfied Soul" (1904); Gertrude Morton, "Mistress Marian's Light" (1889); Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "Luella Miller" (1902).

Macleod, Dianne Sachko. *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. Pp. xx + 530. \$95.00. "My book examines . . . changes in Victorian culture from the perspective of the middle-class businessmen who felt it imperative to spend some of their wealth on the acquisition of art collections. Why was art so important to textile manufacturers, iron founders, and armament kings? Assumed by generations of scholars to have been motivated by a desire to emulate their betters, many of these men, I argue, had an even more ambitious agenda. My research reveals that art was a key element in the affirmation of a middle-class identity that was distinct from the leisured existence of the aristocracy. Rejecting high art and the time-consuming practice of connoisseurship, the new Maecenases supported representations by living artists which embellished, morally reinforced, or sometimes even parodied the prevailing concept of daily life. Compositions crowded with telling narrative detail were prized by the early Victorians for their ability to entertain and to instruct, by the mid-Victorians for their talent for celebrating bourgeois virtues and social relations, and by the late Victorians for their skill at communicating to a dispirited public the illusion that all was still well. In other words, the motivations of middle-class art collectors lay at the very heart of the Victorian enterprise" (1-2).

Nelson, Carolyn Christensen. *British Women Fiction Writers of the 1890s*. Twayne's English Authors Series 533. New York: Twayne, 1996. Pp. 115. \$24.95. "The writing of fiction by women became an essential part of the struggle for women's emancipation during the 1890s, before the movement took a more specific, political direction in the following century with agitation for women's suffrage. Excluded from the obvious sources of power in political and religious life and denied the

educational and economic opportunities given to men, women used their novels and short stories to expose the limitations from which they suffered and to demonstrate the necessity for change" (1). Treats Mona Caird, Mary Cholmondeley, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Mabel Emily Wotton, Sarah Grand, Iota (Kathleen [Hunt] Mannington Caffyn), Menie Muriel Dowie, Emma Frances Brooke, Adeline Sergeant, John Oliver Hobbes (Pearl Mary-Theresa Richards Craigie), Vernon Lee, fiction in the *Yellow Book*. There is a chapter on twentieth-century critics of these women.

Roberts, Adam. *Robert Browning Revisited*. Twayne's English Authors Series No. 530. New York: Twayne, 1996. Pp. xi + 177. \$24.95. "The thesis of the book . . . sees Browning the poet as the product of a dialectical engagement between Romantic subjectivity and Victorian objectivity. . . . In the latter portion of the study . . . I explore the ways this shaping dialectic informs the mature Browning with a deep-rooted binarism, a tendency to articulate poetic vision via oppositional pairs. Of special importance is the aesthetic that the mature Browning elaborates, which is one of spontaneity and energy as opposed to aridity and legalism.

"Another central contention of this study is that the neglect of the later Browning (which is to say, the material published after *The Ring and the Book*) of which virtually all critical studies of Browning are guilty, is not only unjustified but fatally distorting" (vii-viii).

Roston, Murray. *Victorian Contexts: Literature and the Visual Arts*. New York: New York UP, 1996. Pp. ix + 246. \$45.00. "Such synchronic, cross-media exploration forms the coordinating theme of this present study, locating aspects of Victorian literature within the changing contexts of the painting, architecture, and decorative arts of the time, in order, by such comparison, to identify the contemporary impulses to which these media were reacting. In analysing the insights which the approach can offer for a study of nineteenth-century literature, I have attempted to offer a representative cross-section from the period, focusing upon three major novelists [Dickens, Eliot, Henry James], two leading poets [Browning and Hopkins], an influential prose-writer [Carlyle], and an instance of thematic convergence. The latter, a gender theme constituting the symbolic projection of male concerns upon the female image, was a topic which emerged simultaneously in mid-century paintings and novels, indicating by that simultaneity the intimate relationship of the media in their response to the urgent, shared problems of their time" (5-6).

Selected Letters of William Makepeace Thackeray. Ed. Edgar F. Harden. New York: New York UP, 1996. Pp. xxxv + 416. \$60.00. 277 letters from 1818 to 1862-63 to more than 100 correspondents, including Surtees, Edward Fitzgerald, John Forster, Clough, Leigh Hunt, George Henry Lewes, Monckton Milnes, Alexander Kinglake, James Fraser, Kemble, Millais.

The Brontës: Interviews and Recollections. Ed. Harold Orel. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1997. Pp. xviii + 221. \$24.95. 40 entries, from such figures as Thackeray, Arthur

Benson, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Harriet Martineau Elizabeth Gaskell. Intro. and notes on each entry.

West, Shearer, ed. *The Victorians and Race*. Aldershot, Hants: Scolar P, 1997. (Order through Ashgate Publishing Co., Old Post Road, Brookfield, VT 05036-9704.) Pp. [xv] + 249. \$76.95. Includes an intro. by the editor plus Douglas A. Lorimer, "Race, Science and Culture: Historical Continuities and Discontinuities, 1850-1914"; Tim Barringer, "Images of Otherness and the Visual Production of Difference: Race and Labour in Illustrated Texts, 1850-1865"; Mary Hamer, "Black and White? Viewing Cleopatra in 1862"; Simeran Man Singh Gell, "The Inner and the Outer: Dalip Singh as an Eastern Stereotype in Victorian England"; Tim Dolin, "Race and the Social Plot in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*"; H. L. Malchow, "The Half-breed as Gothic Unnatural"; Joseph A. Kestner, "The Colonized in the Colonies: Representation of Celts in Victorian Battle Painting"; Donald M. MacRaild, "'Principle, Party, Protest': The Language of Victorian Orangeism in the North of England"; Inga Bryden, "Reinventing Origins: The Victorian Arthur and Racial Myth"; Deborah Cherry, "Shuttling and Soul Making: Tracing the Links between Algeria and Egalitarian Feminism in the 1850s"; Anita Levy, "Other Women and New Women: Writing Race and Gender in *The Story of an African Farm*"; Reina Lewis, "Women and Orientalism: Gendering the Racialized Gaze"; Helen M. Cooper, "'Tracing the Route to England': Nineteenth-Century Caribbean Interventions into English Debates on Race and Slavery." Includes a bibliography and index.

Winnifrieth, Thomas John, ed. *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*. Critical Essays on British Literature. New York: G. K. Hall, 1997. Pp. xiii + 272. \$47.00. The editor wrote introductions for four of the five divisions of the text—"Biography," "Poetry," "*Wuthering Heights*: The First Hundred Years," "Criticism 1950-1975," "Criticism 1975-1995." Essays include: Thomas John Winnifrieth, "Brontë's Religion"; John Hewish, "Brontë's Reading and Education"; Edward Chitham, "The Themes of *Wuthering Heights*"; Juliet Baker, "Brontë in 1845"; Winifred Gerin, "The Hidden Ghost"; Kathleen Frank, "The Shattered Prison"; Fanny Ratchford, "A Reconstruction of Gondal"; Mary Visik, "The Gondal Saga"; Denis Donoghue, "The Lyricism of Emily Brontë"; Stevie Davis, "Brontë as Heretic"; Mary Ward, "*Wuthering Heights*"; Virginia Woolf, "*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*"; C. P. Sanger, "The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*"; David Cecil, "Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*"; Melvin Watson, "Tempest in the Soul: The Theme and Structure of *Wuthering Heights*"; Arnold Kettle, "Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*"; John Mathison, "Nelly Dean and the Power of *Wuthering Heights*"; Miriam Allott, "The Rejection of Heathcliff?"; Queenie Leavis, "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*"; Frank Kermode, "*Wuthering Heights*"; Terry Eagleton, "*Wuthering Heights*"; Gillian Frith, "Decoding *Wuthering Heights*." Includes a select bibliography and an index.

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